Critical Friendship in Self-Study

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to clarify the concept of the critical friend. It is practically used in self-study research, which is a kind of qualitative study. Self-study as a systematic inquiry helps teachers and teacher candidates to explore and analyze their practices. Self-study as a qualitative research methodology is largely recognized in western countries yet considered relatively new in Turkey. In this article, the history of self-study research methodology is briefly introduced and how it differs from other qualitative research methods is explained. Then, the concept and importance of critical friendship, which is one of the key characteristics of self-study methodology because of its collaborative nature, is explicated. Critical friends are reliable colleagues who systematically provide data to the researcher and at the same time are those who help increase the validity and reliability of the research. Since it is hard for the researchers to reframe their experiences and verify assumptions objectively, critical friends provide pivotal support by asking challenging questions and presenting constructive criticism. For this reason, choosing a critical friend considerably affects the whole research. This article attempts to specify attributes and qualities of a critical friend and answer the question "What kind of a critical friend is needed in a self-study?"

Keywords: Self-study methodology, critical friend, qualitative research

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Introduction

Self-study, emerging as a brand-new research area in the early 1990s and considered rather recent and developing type of qualitative research and methodology, has its roots in three main paradigms: teacher research, reflective practice, and action research (Loughran, 2004.) The first endeavors for the advancement and development of the self-study methodology was carried out in 1992 during the first session of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), which included joint studies of teacher educators and experts in the field of self-study research. The conference attracted the attention of the experts and scholars from teacher research, reflective practice and action research, as well. In 1993, AERA Special Interest Group (SIG) established the Self-study of teacher education practices (S-STEP), and it was an important foundation for furthering the research area (Hamilton and Pinnegar, 1998). Similarly, the first international Castle Conference held in England in 1996 gathering eighty participants from four continents, was considered as a significant contribution to the development of the self-study research. The Castle Conferences are held every two years and the last one was the 12th meeting in 2018 at Herstmonceux Castle near Hailsham in East Sussex, England. Furthermore, the international peer-reviewed journal named Studying Teacher Education, starting publication in 2005, contributes to the development of self-study research by publishing papers on self-study of teacher education practices. In addition, journals such as Teaching and Teacher Education and Journal of Curriculum Studies publish the papers and follow the advancements related to the field of self-study research.

Self-study research, basically, is a "hermeneutic study of self" (Samaras and Freese, 2006, p.12), or to put it in plain English study of the self by the self (Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009). Likewise, self-study uncovers individual understandings of the practice since the researcher conducting an analysis of self as a research subject studies one's self and actions. Loughran and Northfeld (1998, p.7), argue that self-study is for "genuine reframing of a situation" that includes the critical and systematic analysis of the "texts read, people known, and ideas considered" (Samaras and Freese, 2006, p.12) by the teacher educators and the researchers. Self-study, in that sense, leads to teacher competency since the research enables the subjects (teachers, teacher educators, and researchers) to broadly analyze and comprehensively understand their own practices from an alternative perspective, ultimately contributing to personal and professional development and transformation.

Reflective practice is the most prominent approach that has affected the self-study research. Although self-study is not just a "reflective practice" (LaBoskey, 2004), historically, on the grounds of the reflective practice, teachers have come to realize that they are able to examine and problematize their teaching by reflecting on their practice and by becoming reflective practitioners (Schön, 1987). Thus, the roles of the researcher and the educator are intertwined in the self-study research and become inseparable (Alan, 2016).

Analyzing the papers of the First Castle Conference, Barnes (1998) identified the three main characteristics of the self-study research, namely openness, collaboration, and reframing; and thus, clarified the features that distinguish the field from other types of qualitative research. LaBoskey (2004) expanded the three characteristics of the individual research identified by Barnes and listed five characteristics of the self-study research. Accordingly, self-study is self- initiated and focused, interactive, improvement-aimed, utilizes multiple methods for data collection, and finally provides exemplar-based validation. Exemplar-based validation in this context means the rigor of the research and thus the transparency, the "visibility of the data, methods for transforming data into findings, and the linkages between data, findings, and interpretations" provided by the researcher since "it is the 'reader' who determines the validity of the research" (Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009, p.99).

Collaborative interactions in the self-study, are crucial for the research process since the research validity is based on rigor, transparency, and reliability. In order to ensure reliability, the researcher should provide evidence and detailed explanations of data collection process and analysis of the findings. Additionally, researcher must be able to describe in detail in what ways the changes and transformation have been experienced (Feldman, 2003). Self-study as transparent and systematic research process requires researchers sharing the activities carried out, findings obtained, and experiences encountered throughout the study. (Brandenburg, 2008; Samaras, 2011). To display transparency, researcher should consider using triangulation for systematic collection and analysis of the data. Moreover, to provide rigor and trustworthiness in research process and thus strengthen the study in general, using an external examiner called critical friend is a must (Mishler, 1990).

Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015) argue that since the focus of the self-study is the researcher's own practice, qualitative research methods are used in the first place. Moreover, according to Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009), the self-study research is "situated within the terrain of qualitative research" (p.68); and thus, postmodern experience is rather interpreted using post-positivist approaches and methodologies. On the other hand, Mena and Russel (2017, p.109) argue that multiple methods, including positivists methods, such as "observations, interviews, surveys, document analysis, journaling, field notes, blogs, posts or tweets, and e-mails" can be adopted for the self-study since the self-study embraces and acknowledges "multiple" approaches in the context of theory, method, and purpose.

Evaluating the theoretical and practical dimensions of the individual research process, Hawley and Hostetler (2017) summarized five core characteristics of the self-study outlining the implications for the method in Table 1.

Table 1.

Five Aspects of Self-Study with Implications for Methods (Hawley and Hostetler, 2017, p.85).

Key Aspects of Self-Study	Methods Implications
1. Self-study focuses on one's own practice and relies on personal situated theory, it is self initiated and improvement aimed (Samaras, 2011; Vanassche **and** Klechterman, 2015).	Research focus and questions ought to put your practice at the center.
2. Self-study privileges the use of qualitative research methods (Vanassche and Klechterman, 2015).	Because your practice is the focus, qualitative descriptions and accounts are important data to collect and analyze.
3. Critical friends and collaborative interactions are central to self-study (Samaras, 2011; Vanassche and Klechterman, 2015).	To mediate the effects of nepotism and build rigor, critical friends should be used to help reframe experiences and push learning deeper.
4. Self-study involves a transparent and systematic research process with concrete relevant examples of actual practice to build trustworthiness and establish validity (Samaras, 2011; Vanassche and Klechterman, 2015).	Data collection, analysis, dissemination and critical friend meetings should occur systematically and be well documented. Rich descriptions of these and accounts of actual practices are needed to develop learning outcomes from the study.
5. Self-study generates knowledge and ought to be presented or shared with colleagues for mutual and reciprocal learning (Samaras, 2011).	Because you have developed rich learning outcomes and because taking the time to put words into verbal or written form requires a higher cognitive demand (answering "what did you learn?"), it is important to share your work with colleagues both for the benefit of your learning and for your colleagues who it might resonate with.

The Significance of a Critical Friend in Self-Study

Self-study is an effective method for teachers and teacher educators to develop their own practices and analyze their experiences. Moreover, self-study aims to place one's own practices in a theoretical framework. The main goal of the self-study is to create professional awareness on how teacher educators could transform teacher education; and thus, enhance quality training of the pre-service teachers and teacher candidates (Loughran and Northfield, 1998; Kosnik, Beck, Freese and Samaras, 2006; Samaras, 2011). The notion of a "critical friend" was first suggested by Stenhouse in 1975 (Kember et al., 1997) and then has been described as a "partner", a colleague who provides suggestions to the teacher-researcher in educational action research.

Nevertheless, rather than perceiving themselves as advisors or consultants, critical friends in action research perceives themselves as "friends" of teacher-researchers (Kember et al., 1997, p.464).

Self-study is deep-rooted in methods of reflective thinking, action research, and teacher inquiry (Loughran, 2004). For this reason, the concept of critical friend is also a fundamental feature of the self-study research. Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) argue that the two main differences that distinguish the self-study methodology from other qualitative methods are the researcher's ontological stance and dialogue. Although the concepts of "individual" and "self" are important in self-study, it is the dialogue that takes place between the researcher and the critical friend differentiating it from other qualitative methods (Alan, 2016; Craig, 2009; Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009). That is, self-study contrary to the suggestions and connotations that particular designation might specify, is not a process done in isolation, but a process that requires collaboration so that the new understandings of the self could be built through the dialogue and the findings are strengthened and validated (Samaras and Freese, 2009).

Reframing of the beliefs and practices as well as reconceptualizing the role of the teacher is done in an atmosphere where the mutual benefit, support, and trust is established; and thus, making sense of information is achieved through collaborative inquiry, reflection, and dialogue with a critical friend (Fuentealba and Russell, 2016; Samaras and Freese, 2009). Although the knowledge generated or the learning derived from the self-study might be quite individual, the self-study process definitely requires collaboration, and for this reason Loughran and Northfield (1998) call the self-study research a "joint venture". In this joint venture, the participants - critical friends – frame and reframe the interpretations, problems and situations, reveal the biases; and thus, proceeding together throughout the research process, ultimately gain shared experiences and new knowledge.

It is not an easy task for an individual to provide self-criticism objectively. For this reason, researchers may have difficulty in objectively examining, evaluating, and reframing their own practices in self-study research (Loughran and Northfield, 1998.) That is why, researchers always need critical friends who can provide objective perspective considering the problem and situation. Since the teachers and researchers find themselves too concentrated and focused on the process of self-study, missing important points and accepting crucial situations at face value are common; leading to overlooking the actual reasons underlying these situations and thus critical experiences to become neglected. Loughran and Northfield (1998) consider the willingness to present individual practices and the commitment of the researcher to the study including individual assertions and overall research findings for the public criticism and comment as the basic criterion that determines the quality of the self-study research.

Collaborating with others, independent analysis and interpretation of the data, and consequent reflection on the findings clearly increase the reliability and validity of the study. One of the most effective ways to achieve this is to collaborate with critical friends. For this reason, devoted critical friends also contribute to the researcher's professional development by providing decent, honest, and constructive feedback on teaching practices (Alan, 2016). Sometimes, researchers or teachers may find it difficult to realize whether to make the changes and transform their practices or whether the changes would produce effective results. The systematic feedback provided by the critical friend truly provides the researcher with an opportunity to examine the data from a different perspective and through a different lens and thus the researcher critically approaches their own practices. Here, the critical friend is an "advocate for the success of the study" (Costa and Kallick, 1993, p.50).

Since self-study research is based on dialogue, the process of coming to know, respect, and valuing the differences are crucial along with being tolerant of people by "withholding judgment, allowing all participants to express ideas" (Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009, p.89). That is, the researcher in the self-study must be driven to "seek critique and analysis, the expression of unconventional ways of thinking about ideas, multiple interpretations of evidence, as well as alternative voices." (Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009, p.89). For this reason, it is crucial to involve the critical friend in the process for the tacit knowledge to be revealed, and the study itself to be critical, productive and constructive. The critical friend leading to reflection, reviewing, and reframing existing practices provides a quite constructivist approach for the study. Given that, the researcher addresses critical friend to question and justify claims about the data, analysis, interpretation, and practice. Thus, the critical friend in a self-study is a valuable authority of data and analysis, as well as a fundamental base, a significant source for the researcher that demonstrates whether his/her personal understanding, thoughts, assertions, and justifications regarding the practices are valid. As a fundamental element of self-study, the critical friend providing a constructivist approach, contributes to the realization of "the process of coming to know" through the dialogue (Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009).

Dialogue by nature is open to criticism since it includes critique. Moreover, critique is the most fundamental factor that distinguishes dialogue from mere talk (Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009). Dialogue in a self-study forms the basis for ideas and claims revealing the ontological stance of the researcher; and thus, advancing the examination of practice. (Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009; Samaras and Freese, 2009). In this context, Samaras and Freese (2009, p.13) argue that through self-study, most teachers become aware of a disparity in what they believe and what they actually do in practice, and the self-study actually enables them to review their practices in their own setting. Coia and Taylor (2008) state that identities are shaped by those, whom we communicate with and establish the dialogues. Thus, to evolve and transform, to better understand the "self" and all related identities, one should engage in quality dialogues, critical dialogues, and be able to reflect on and reconstruct the past experience.

Dialogue takes place in an open environment where both individuals and their ideas/ opinions are respected and valued. For this reason, Watling, Hopkins, Harris and Beresford (1998) described the critical friend's role as balancing, questioning (inquiry) and supporting. Likewise, Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009, p.90) argue that "fruitful dialogue is always characterized by thoughtful responses that both interrogate and support the ideas expressed". Cardetti and Orgnero (2013) argue that recorded and documented dialogue in the process of the self-study is an effective tool for the professional development and transformation of teachers and teacher educators. For this reason, it is essential to distinguish the dialogue within the scope of self-study research from the meaningless talk or idealess conversations that take place in daily life. Determining a topic or agenda for discussion in advance might make a dialogue more effective since parties would have time to reflect, prepare questions and complete required readings. East, Fitzgerald and Heston (2009) state that the conversation should be systematized to separate it from simple, daily conversations. Likewise, Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009, p.90) argue that dialogue can be characterized as a conversation that includes "inquiry, critique, evidence, reflection and response".

An important point to consider for both parties is to prevent conversation to turn into a fight since as Haigh (2005) denotes, discussions often turn into verbal fights due to participants' resistance to change and endeavors to persuade each other that ultimately lead to moving away from rationality than rather providing constructive feedback and contributing to professional development. On the other hand, critical friendship in the self-study is based on mutual trust and respect, common understanding, and goal that aims to contribute and maintain the professional development of both researchers and their colleagues. Thus, critical friends in a research are ideal colleagues since they do not hesitate to criticize and express constructive opinions and different ideas honestly between and in conversations and discussion. Gibbs and Angelides (2008) attempting to clarify the notion of a critical friendship outline the similarities and differences between the critical friendship and other types of friendships in Table 2 below.

Gibbs and Angelides (2008, p.221) argue that a critical friend's responsibility is not restricted to feedback; and thus, they define the notion of critical friend as a participant whose "actual engagement for critique is situated within acceptance of the duties and obligation of 'perfect' friendship as moral agency, seeking a just and fair engagement". That is, since the critical friend is the friend; and thus, cannot be considered neither a companion nor an acquaintance, this relationship of the "humanist nature" should enjoy the shared understanding of the goals and the values in the context of the self-study process as well as being aware of essential features, implied responsibilities, and expectations behind the friendship during the process. Above all, the critical friend in the self-study is more than just a "tool", the critical friend is a friend at the first place who is truly engaged and strives for the success and the self-betterment of the close friend. In the following section, essential features and

certain qualities of a critical friend to be considered for the self-study research are presented in detail.

Table 2.

Critical Friends and Friendship. A Comparison. Gibbs and Angelides (2008, p.218).

	Based on Swaffield (2004)	Based on Aristotle, the Ethics (chapters 9 & 10) and the Rhetoric (chapter 2.4).
Roles	Facilitator, supporter, critic, Challenger.	Sharer, mentor, benefactor
Behaviour	Listening, questioning, providing feedback.	Praising, revealing characteristic in the friend, 'neither critical of failure nor flattering', balancing, mutual returns.
Knowledge and Experience	Experience and status.	Utility, pleasantness, humor, ability to satisfy the needs of theother in proportion their ability
Skills	Data analysis, interpretation, related to the specific objectives.	Restraint, able to mock and be mocked. Neither inquisitive norquarrelsome.
Qualities	Trustworthy, communicative, having shared values.	Shared values, ability to obtain the utility required, loyal duringthe period of the friendship
Form of relationship	Customer–provider, doctor–patient or process consultant	Mutual respect, a form of care and love

What "Kind" of a Critical Friend?

Since the self-study process is a complex and delicate matter, the selection of a critical friend to participate in the research is of great importance. Choosing a critical friend means deciding on the context of "coming to know" process along with the overall effect of the synergy and thus quality of the process in whole, not to mention the research climate. There are some basic points that should be taken into consideration for the selection of a critical friend since the friend to be chosen should have certain competencies and characteristics that can dramatically facilitate the research process. In this sense, the critical friend affects the research just like a catalyst, speeding up and triggering the transformation, ultimately contributing to the improvement of the practice and the researcher's professional development. As a matter of fact, just as specific substances need certain catalysts to stimulate the reaction, the researcher also needs a particular critical friend who would trigger and facilitate the self-study process. That is, critical friend possessing certain characteristics further the changes and facilitate the process of professional transformation.

Critique is fundamental in the process of quality development (Costa and Kallick,1993); and therefore, is an integral part of the self-study that drives the process towards the main goal of the study-the improvement of the practice. Thus, the critique taking place in dialogues between the researcher and the critical friend in the process of the self-study is provided for the analysis and interpretation of practice (Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009). Therefore, the criticism provided here is a constructive criticism; and thus, should not be confused with or regarded as mere judgement or a (destructive) criticism, that is, defined as mere expressions of disapproval. Hence, the critical friend sharing the role of a harsh critique and a kind friend, is just like "the caring mother and the normative father" acting equally for the sake of evolving individual, i.e., in the interest of researcher's improvement and development. In this context, unlike peer assessment, the critical friend not only points out the weaknesses of the research, but also offers praises for the good practices and encourage effective strategies and ideas of the researcher. Thus, the criticism presented by the colleague is literally positive and enlightening (Gibbs and Angelides, 2008).

Since the word critique and related connotations are perceived negatively by people in general, responsibilities and expectations of a critical friend should be determined before the research. Moreover, as the process of critique is perceived merely as providing negative comments in oriental societies, for critique is directly associated with judgment, explicitly stating and clarifying the role of the critical friend could ease the possible tensions during the research process in general. Although Bloom "refers to critique as a part of evaluation, highest order of thinking" (Costa and Kallick, 1993, p.50), using the term "friend" that has a positive connotation in our culture with the term "criticism" that has a negative connotation, instinctively evokes a contradiction. That is, the concept of "critical friend" is somewhat oxymoron. The contradiction behind the connotation of the terms creates a confusion. That said, the term critique actually means "as defined by Immanuel Kant, describes a method for reflective judgement; a critical perspective on a matter as opposed to a dogmatic one" (Gibbs and Angelides, 2008, p.217). In this sense, the critique in self-study is a factor that transforms the process from static to dynamic state.

Committed critical friend supports and encourages the researcher, and as the name itself suggests, also provides provocative questions and comments alongside critical feedback, thus constantly challenging researcher's assumptions and beliefs, presenting essential critique for the researcher regarding the individual practices, assertions, and beliefs. Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) in this context argue that engagement with critical friends whether they are skeptics or consultants help researcher think thoroughly; and thus, make the study more robust. Critical friend, also defined as a reliable colleague (Samaras, 2011), is a person asking provocative questions, providing data for the researcher for further analysis through different perspectives, and offering constructive critiques about the practices of the researcher as a friend (Costa and Kallick, 1993; La Boskey, 2004). In this sense, the critical friend represents a true friend or a "solid friend" who asks challenging questions, supports, and enables

the reframing of the understandings and practices and thus takes part in the professional development experience. Hence, the critical friend allocates time and effort to explore the understandings and rationales behind the practices alongside the researcher.

Since the "self" of the researcher is the focus in self-study research, the researcher is expected to be open to all kinds of criticism since the critical friend is a truly committed partner, a reliable consultant, and a loyal colleague. That is, since the researcher is the learner at the same time, considering Dewey's (1933) notion of the learner, the researcher as a leaner, in context of self-study "is an open-minded, wholehearted, and responsible individual" focused on self-improvement. The focused "self" studied in self-study is the researcher's pure "self", free of identities. Identity has a complex structure, and diverse identities shape the one's "self". In self-study, the researcher aims to reveal the identities that shape the "self", reveal the tacit knowledge, social and cultural factors affecting the self-understandings and the practices; and thus, strives to make the unconscious conscious and invisible visible (Alan, 2016; Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009). Identities and beliefs have a great effect on one's "self" and one's practices.

In this regard, Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) state that teachers conducting self-study research actually self-evaluate the ontology of their practice and by collecting and analyzing the data, researchers reveal their self and their practices in their actual context; and thus, discover the unconscious, obscured, and implicit knowledge that once was hidden behind and between school walls, classroom practices, and their environment. Moreover, by collecting and analyzing data, teachers are transforming and changing their pedagogical practices, developing brand-new personal and professional insights. To realize the "transformation" and thus be able to demonstrate these findings, the researcher needs to collaborate with a colleague, the critical friend, who would challenge the assumptions and beliefs and consequently serve as a trigger of the changes. The collaboration in the self-study, i.e., critical friendship begins with building trust.

Swaffield (2007) emphasizes that though critique might affect the friendship negatively, "trust" is a precondition, a fundamental feature of collaboration, effective relationship, and critical friendship in particular. Gibbs (2004) argues that trust of the critical friendship is based on the competence of a critical friend; and therefore, is considered as "contractual" transaction. That is, critical friendship rather falls more into a category of "critical acquaintance" (Gibbs and Angelides, 2008, p.222) since the critical "relationship is transactional" and friends for the study are selected considering "the maximum potential to create value". On the other hand, since "critical acquaintance" according to Gibbs and Angelides (2008) is so sensitive and in this kind of relationship "trust" is neither developed nor sustained, in the context of the self-study, using the particular term critical friend, suggesting more humane relationship, conveys and embodies the required impression of a balance between trust and critique, since the critical friendship relies on mutual trust and respect. Trusting others means being open

to learning and changes. Though trust make us vulnerable, trust teaches us to believe in ourselves and the others. In order to learn, reframe our understandings and practices, create a new knowledge, trust is the key that open the researcher new rooms full of opportunities and experiences, teaches us to embrace the critique and the differences; and thus, brings completely new "selves".

The critical friendship is a two-way process. The critical friend does not just criticize but values the researcher's ideas and understandings as a true friend. Just as we love those who support us and share similar opinions and ideas, it is imperative for the self-study researcher to value all those colleagues, who criticize. As a matter of fact, the word "friend" comes from the word "to love" and the word "critique" rooted in critical art, refers to careful judgement where care precedes the judgment. That is, critique in art is provided for improvement, for the ideas to be reflected once again, for the product and process to be reframed and find perfection, so the critique provided by critical friend in the self-study process should be regarded as having the same purpose.

Both parties engaged in self-study should share particular responsibilities. In this context, not only the researcher but also the critical friend learns and develops during the process. Besides being reliable, the critical friend is expected to be responsible. Responsibility here means being committed and engaged in the process together with the researcher. Since the research process takes time, the critical friend should be ready to allocate personal time in order to systematically observe the practices, participate in the discussions, attend interviews, and keep a diary whenever required.

Moreover, for the critical friendship to be effective, critical friend should have abilities to thoroughly observe, analyze, collect the information whenever necessary, paying attention to details; and thus, acting like a detective, prosecutor in the "trial" process, noticing all kinds of evidence, valuable data regarding the researcher's practices, consequently presenting these records for the analysis, and as a feedback. Accordingly, considering all these efforts, critical friend should be ready to spend a quality time and energy on the research process. At times, all these endeavors spent by the critical friend might result in misunderstanding. To avoid such a situation, Swaffield (2004) argues that the critical friendship should not be deemed as fake and fragile friendship but rather it should be sustained throughout the research process on the basis of mutual benefits.

To trust and be able to "put trust" in someone is easier said than done, so considering the challenge, it is expected that both parties are aware of the nature of "critical" connection; and thus, act carefully and avoid evaluating or judging the situations and experiences without providing any ground or evidence. In order to avoid baseless judgements, the critical friend is expected to be a very good listener, who provides counterarguments and alternative explanations, clarifies ideas in a dialogue; and thus,

helps the researcher to discover the implicit aspects of the practices. That is, since reframing of experience is achieved through the process of discovery, revealing of the tacit knowledge through collaboration and dialogue, listening is a basic requirement that enables the questioning (Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009). So, in this process, every idea should be valued and listened carefully.

A critical friend in the self-study is expected to be honest. Honesty grants critical friend the authority to engage in constructive criticism, express and challenge the ideas discussed in a dialogue in an open manner. Honesty is built on the basis of trust and ensures that the knowledge or analyzed information has reached its target; and thus, the experiences and situations are interpreted correctly. Costa and Kallick (1993, p.50) argue that the critical friend should avoid value judgments and "offer the value judgments only upon request". That is, since some issues might be considered as sensitive and as a result appear as a source of tension, considering the value system of the particular culture, context of the study, and providing feedback accordingly would be a wise practice.

Swaffield (2007) emphasizes that critical friendship should not be perceived as merely providing positive feedback and support but the relation between the parties should be based on trust and honesty so that the parties are able to negotiate, confront, interrogate the challenging ideas, present alternative interpretations, provide arguments, and resolve all kinds of disagreements. Hence, once trust is established, constructive criticism is developed and encouraged throughout the research process. As a matter of fact, the critics are the best friends; and thus, the true friendship embodies critique and encouragement at the same time. True friends help each other to realize practical goals striving for a better life. Considering the premise, it is important to consider the critical friend who above all can be trusted and who will be committed and truly engaged before the research process initiates.

In fact, in self-study, the critical friend means more than a casual friend or acquaintance, but a true fellow and companion. That is, in real life context, a casual friend is the one who just looks at things, but the true version of a friend is the one who literally sees. In other words, true friend (critical friend) willingly and intentionally provides care and pays attention to every detail whereas the other would only glance. In this context, critical friendship in the self-study holds the true friendship identity. Moreover, there is a proverb in our culture related to true friendship that states friends "have to be cruel to be kind". Though the cruelty here, means the "bitter truth" or critique, the true friend indeed is an honest person who has a courage to be able to tell the truth, even if it hurts, since the true friend is aware that in the long run "the truth" (constructive critique) is good for the other party. This is what the concept of the critical friendship means in the self-study.

Block (1999, as cited in Swaffield, 2004) argues that a good critical friend should possess three sets of skills, namely, technical skills, consulting skills, and interpersonal skills. The technical skills refer to knowledge and competency regarding the particular issue, consulting skills refer to expertise in negotiation or reaching an agreement while the quality to adapt to a particular environment and provide interpersonal communication refer to interpersonal skills. On the other hand, Swaffield (2004) argues that the critical friend does not have to be an expert in the focus area since being a novice or non-expert assure to ask naïve questions. Naivete here, is somewhat the quality of innocence rather than deliberate ignorance. Thus, the naivete and innocence in this context is related to honesty and genuineness of an individual. In other words, as a true friend, the critical friend does not fake but acts honestly in the process of the friendship. However, a critical friend needs to have advanced counseling and interpersonal communication skills.

Apart from being honest, reliable and responsible, a critical friend needs to have the knowledge of the context of the research environment since qualitative data is used primarily in the self-study process. Moreover, it is important for critical friend to be informed with the research process (Costa and Kallick, 1993); and thus, researcher should clarify the basic expectations from the friendship process as well as introduce critical friend the methodology of self-study itself. That way, critical friendship can be beneficial for both parties since the process can be used reciprocatively. Moreover, to avoid instances of patronizing or condescending during the self-study, the questions related to power and the status should be neutralized and trust along with respect should be maintained ahead of the research so that the voice of the others in dialogues could be heard. Likewise, self-interest and individual benefit can jeopardize the reliability of the research. What is more, critical friend is ought to possess the competencies of interpersonal and group work skills including listening, observing, asking provocative questions, managing conflict, and team building, along with qualities such as respect, empathy, and genuineness (Swaffield, 2002). That is, though the critical friendship looks like a simple relationship, in reality it is a complicated process that requires consideration of specific skills and qualities.

Asking provocative questions in the process of self-study is another responsibility of the critical friend. Provocative questions are asked for clarity, disclosure and discovery of the tacit knowledge. Thus, curiosity of the critical friend and the ability to provide constructive questions in and between the dialogues reveal new ideas, understandings, and interpretations for the process and bring the clarity and intended reframing of the practices. The dialogue in the self-study process is therefore considered as a kind of scientific method for generating knowledge or revealing what is not seen in practices (Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009). Thus, the dialogue conducted with the critical friend should slightly shake and pull the researcher out of the comfort zone, encouraging researcher to analyze, interpret and evaluate practices from a different perspective and through a different lens.

The critical friend in the self-study is the researcher's best friend who strives for the success of the study and is considered as the right-hand of the researcher. In this sense, as Schuck and Russell (2005) cite "When the right hand washes the left, the right hand comes clean too" (Nigerian proverb), so the friends in the self-study through opposition and resistance eventually reach the "clearness". That is, critical friend in the self-study is a fundamental "guide", a second hand who challenges the researcher for the sake of professional progress yet cares and respects him/her as a true friend.

The skills and attributes of critical friends described and exemplified above are shown in Figure 1 below.

As seen in Figure 1, the basic skills and attributes of critical friends include reliability and honesty, ability to provide constructive criticism, commitment and responsibility towards the study and colleague, awareness of the context, ability to observe and analyze, effective listening skills, ability to notice details, and asking thought-provoking questions. Considering the criteria, collaborative by characteristic, self-study should be carefully planned and one of most the important aspects is to choose qualified critical friends. Neglecting the abovementioned criteria, or strictly speaking, fakeness of the critical friend alongside the misleading dialogues, might yield undesired outcomes, and the process of "coming to know" itself might just be an imitation. Thus, to be true to "self", the researcher in the self-study should consider choosing true critical friend rather than "just" a friend since self-study is about ontological commitment, a "focus on what is real" and researcher's integrity (Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009, p.5).
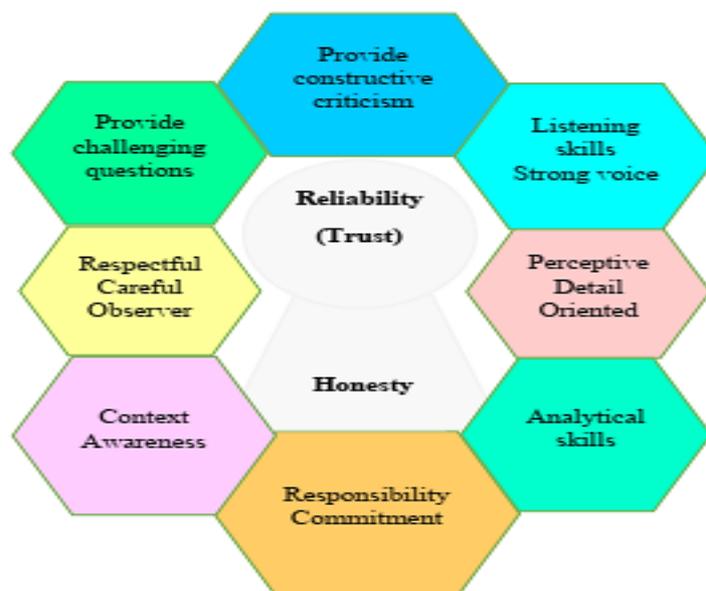
Figure 1. Basic attributes and skills of critical friends

Since critical friendship can be reciprocal, teachers and teacher candidates interested in self-study, can consider each other as a potential candidate. However, before becoming a true critical friend, individuals need to assess themselves, involve in self-criticism, and find answers to whether they possess the qualities and abilities of a quality critical friend, and if not, strive to develop these attributes and skills.

Discussion

Contrary to connotation and suggestion brought by specific designation, self-study is an interactive research methodology that involves collaboration. The collaboration in the self-study research is between researchers and critical friends. Although the term self-study is derived from the concept of individual, the research process takes place between the researcher and the critical friend, the researcher and the practices (Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009). Thus, it is essential to include critical friends in the process in order to be able to review, reframe, and criticize existing practices (Loughran and Northfield, 1996).

In the self-study research, every idea, every experience can be subjected to discussion, questioning, and thus being accepted or rejected. By subjecting ideas and experiences to critique, researchers are able to reveal their tacit knowledge through the dialogue. The dialogue that takes place between the researcher and the critical friend, is the "process of coming to know" that strengthens, supports, transforms, and ultimately validates the findings of the study (Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009).

In this study, the notion of "critical friend", considered as a fundamental element of the self-study research, has been reviewed and brought to further clarification. Although critical friendship might seem to be easy at first sight, in reality it is a versatile and complicated relationship and a friendship process. In this process, the critical friend supports and provides constructive feedback to the researcher in order for the research study to yield intended results. So, the critical friend has a power to determine the general flow of the research study. With the constructive feedback of the critical friend, the researcher can examine his/her practices from different perspectives and gain insights for change and transformation.

Considering the potential, the researcher planning to conduct self-study should consider the characteristics, attributes, and skills of the critical friend in advance since the process of critical friendship itself, dramatically facilitates the self-study process. The critical friend is a reliable friend at first, then a critic. Therefore, critical friendship is basically a form of relationship, the true friendship. The critical friend to be involved in the research process should be honest, reliable, and most importantly, trustworthy. In addition to this, the fact that the critical friend possesses the required skills, this can be the assurance of achieving the intended outcomes at the end of the self-study. That is, the abilities of the critical friend to listen carefully, notice important details, examine

and interpret data will further the study and produce the required effect, namely, the improvement of the practice.

Every kind of comment of a critical friend actually contributes to the development and transformation of the researcher. Based on this, being aware of the nature of critical friendship allows the researcher and the critical friend to be open-minded towards the critique and each other, furthering constructive, yet respectful critical comments. These comments, in turn facilitate and enable the change and transformation, which are the main purposes of the self-study research. Being aware of the responsibilities of the critical friend and the researcher helps and facilitates the research progress; and thus, somewhat guarantees the study to serve its purpose. One of the most important responsibilities of the critical friend is the commitment to the process. Being engaged and truly committed to the study means allocating time to systematically help the researcher by making observations, attending interviews and meetings, keeping a diary, and analyzing details.

The art of criticism is often ignored in education, but a good critic has a power to enhance and sustain the success in literature, drama, and dance. Including critical friends into the research studies in education field contributes to developing self-evaluation skills and open-minded outlook towards constructive feedback (Costa and Kallick, 1993). Determining a critical friend for a self-study research broadly means predetermining the success and outcomes of a study. Therefore, before embarking for a self-study journey, carefully consider your goals, design, and the crew. In order for your self-study research to reach its goals, that is, to gain new perspectives and to discover a new self, consider finding critical friends who have the characteristics mentioned above.

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