
***Cultivating Professional Development Through Critical Friendship and Reflective Practice: Cases from Japan.* Adrienne Verla Uchida and Jennie Roloff Rothmann (Editors). Candlin and Mynard, 2023, 344 pp.**

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In the foreword of *Cultivating Professional Development Through Critical Friendship and Reflective Practice*, Thomas S. C. Farrell, a pioneer in the field of reflective inquiry, provides insight into the potentially transformative impact of critical friendships on reflective inquiry and professional development. This is further pursued by Verla Uchida and Roloff Rothman, who interweave its definition, origin, and transformative potential into their own narrative. Their inclusion of underrepresented scholarly perspectives in the field of reflective inquiry, such as Stenhouse, Hatton & Smith, and Samaras, adds credibility to the book's theme of fostering an inclusive environment in exploring critical friendships within the Japanese educational context. Contributors from Canada, Malaysia, Ireland, Japan, India, and Hong Kong explore the significance of critical friendships in different aspects of English language education, covering teacher development, reflective practice, language learner motivation, curriculum design, and program evaluation.

By dividing the book into three sections, the editors carefully blend contributors' theoretical concepts with personal narratives and practical considerations. This organisational structure sets a clear roadmap for understanding the different types of critical friendship with which readers may reflect and relate their own experiences. The first, *Intra-Institutional Friendships*, provides a platform for educators working within the same institution. The first chapter (Gill & Hooper) explores the impact of past work experience on the (mis)alignments between teaching principles and real-time classroom behaviours, employing a nuanced approach that combines conversational analysis with data-led dialogic reflection. The second examines the integration of personal and professional identities in the context of the challenges faced by educators who are also mothers, employing a comprehensive methodology that encompasses narrative analysis of the literature and subsequent critical self-reflection (Shiraishi & Verla Uchida). Arguably, the main motivating factor of this section is that—while different in terms of critical relationships and research focus—both chapters shine a light on the sheer practicality and immediacy potential of cultivating critical friendships between peers working within the same institution when, all too often, institutionally based professional development initiatives are lacking.

In contrast, the five chapters in *Inter-Institutional Friendships* in the second section contribute to a broader understanding of the transformative impact of critical friendships. Collectively, these chapters adopt a reassuringly structured approach to critical friendships but are nuanced enough

in their methodologies, challenges, and insights for readers to consider them in relation to their own contexts. Chapter 3, penned by the editors, segues between sections 1 and 2 as it compares and examines the evolution of a personal friendship between two colleagues working at the same university in similar roles to a critical one where they are working at separate institutions and inhabit different roles. Indicative of the academic rigour of the entire publication, the most noteworthy aspect of this chapter is the depth of the analyses, where the authors outline a five-step process of their critical friendship, encompassing rounds of discussion, literature review, narrative analysis for emergent themes, dialogic-then-self-reflection practice on personal and professional growth in response to the identification of these themes. Chapter 4 (Ueno & Yoshida) adds contemporary relevancy to the editorial by employing a qualitative narrative methodology, offering a nuanced exploration of educators' critical reflections as they navigate the uncertainties and aftermath of the global pandemic, providing insights into challenges and adaptations in teaching principles, practices, and professional development within this unique context.

Chapter 5 (Lee & Choong), employing duo ethnographic critical evaluation, adds authenticity to the overall narrative by exploring educators' personal background biases and their influence on professional aims. It examines the importance of crafting inspiring lessons and the impact of pivotal life moments on educators' teaching principles and professional identities. Emphasizing the transformative impact of critical friendships on multiple levels, Chapter 6 demonstrates its practicality by encouraging the cultivation of a broader community of regular reflective practitioners across multiple institutions (Bereton & Ellis). Underscoring the structured approach as crucial, this chapter highlights the fostering of deeper connections and a sense of community among educators. Chapter 7 particularly stands out for showcasing the transformative dynamics of critical friendships. Integrating personal reflections, theoretical underpinnings, and practical experiences, it examines the evolution of mentor-mentee relationships. This reciprocal process, where the mentored individual becomes the mentor, illustrates the mutual benefits of critical friendships in navigating the challenges of job hunting within the Japanese higher education sector (Rathore & Donnery).

The final section, *Extra-Institutional Friendships*, really shifts the perspective and context of critical friendships understood thus far. Chapter 8 introduces a collaborative community for educators working at tertiary and secondary levels, showcasing how critical friendships aid professional development across educational levels (Asaoka & Fujii). Over six months, the authors employ qualitative interviews to examine attempts to create a reflective critical community of peers. However, challenges such as time constraints and inherent hierarchies among educators emerge, impacting the development of genuine critical friendships and raising concerns about equity and

sustainability in reflective practices. Moreover, the study prompts inquiry into the influence of cultural norms, like the embedded hierarchy in Japanese culture, on the perceived success of establishing critical friendships. In Chapter 9 (Schaefer & Lowe), the narrative shift continues with the introduction of critical co-presenter-ships in podcasting as an alternative approach to examining critical friendships. Arguably adopting an 'informal-to-be-informative' approach, this chapter emphasizes candid and engaging dialogue, intentionally avoiding contrived conventions in reflective practice in order to foster genuine critical friendships. In addition, it emphasises the role of audience awareness in shaping the podcast's creation, how its public nature likely influences the classroom practice of both presenters and subscribers, and that critical friendships are not limited to traditional forms of academic collaboration.

Chapter 10 extends the narrative shift by examining the significance of authentic leadership within organizational contexts (Lucovich & Malcolm). Employing a phenomenological approach, the authors conduct multiple rounds of asynchronous semi-structured interviews on their experiences in educational leadership. Through reflexive thematic analysis, they identify themes in each other's narratives, shedding light on how these aspects shape their leadership style and identity within organizations. The study's main contribution lies in seamlessly combining theoretical insights with practical applications, exemplifying authentic leadership and the role of critical friendship in organizational contexts.

In sum, spanning academic, broadcasting, and organizational contexts in English language education, this book is an insightful and pragmatic guide for educators seeking to establish their own critical friendships or collaborative communities for informed principles, improved practice and professional development.

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