





**“Work Friends!” Professional Friendships as Communities of Support for Early Childhood Educators**

Dr Diane Kashin  
November 9th, 2022

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## Welcome Friends!

Let's be friends and befriend! Why?

To demonstrate the power of professional friends as a part of reflective practice and collaborative inquiry.

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### Begin with Self!

- Friendships are part of our self-identity, which is who we believe ourselves to be.
- Making friends is a vital part of a child's development. Friendships help them to learn about themselves.
- Think back to your own childhood. How did you learn about yourself when you were a child?
- Self-awareness is foundational to forming effective professional friendships.
- No matter how much you share with your friend, whether it be power, common interests, or a work context, you are still a separate being. You need to notice how your background, culture, knowledge, and experiences affect your thoughts and actions as you build relationships.

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### Pleased to Meet You!

Bubbie, Wife, Mother, Daughter	Friend	RECE
Cancer Survivor	Senior Citizen	How would you describe you ...?

How would you introduce yourself to a potential professional friend that would describe your background, culture, knowledge, and experiences?

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### What is a Friend?

A friend is someone that you share experiences and values with and that you have mutual affection for.

A friend is someone you trust and enjoy being around.

A friend will ...

- o Always be there for you.
- o Listen to you.
- o Be very empathetic towards you.
- o Forgive you if needed.

When we have a friend who is always there for us and emphatically listens and forgives, we have a significant and impactful friendship. I want that for myself, for my friends, and for all children.




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### Professional Friends

- Support flows both ways as the need arises for either friend (give-and-take).
- Regardless of the inconvenience or challenges that they may face, can be counted on to offer help.
- Flourish when there is mutual respect and trust.
- Act as sounding boards and supports you to be the best version of yourself.
- The topic of my new book with Redleaf Press which is based on research about critical friendship but the concept is different!

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 A critical friend asks provocative questions, providing different lenses to view and examine practice. A critical friend offers critique. A critical friend challenges thinking and practice.

 The theory of critical friendship was introduced by Costa and Kallick in 1993. It has been examined in many educational contexts but not so much from the perspective of ECE.

 ECE represents a unique context that can be misunderstood by researchers. We need something that focuses more on support and less on critique.

 Professional friends love each other, and from a place of kindness, they work to create a culture based on love and kindness rather than criticism and critique.

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**Professional Friendships are not the same as Mentor/Mentee Relationships**

- **Mentor:** An individual who shares and uses their knowledge, skills and experiences to support and guide a mentee to improve their practice and acquire new skills
- **Mentee:** An individual who is supported and guided by a mentor in order to learn, improve their professional practice or acquire new skills A mentor is more powerful than a mentee. A mentor is the one sharing and using their knowledge. A mentee is there to receive.

With professional friends one will be like a mentor while the other acts as a mentee depending on the circumstances. There is a constant passing of power.

The relationship is equal in nature. Sometimes you can be a mentee, sometimes you can be a mentor.

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**Visualize**

A professional friend that fits the bill for you – mutual trust, respect, affection – a source of love and kindness. Your sounding board and champion. Who do you see? Are you smiling?

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# Who comes to Mind? Take the Poll!

- Your first work friend?
- A current work friend?
- A friend who shares your context but not your work environment?
- Your mentor?
- Someone who is part of your circle?

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## ARE YOU READY TO GROW PROFESSIONAL FRIENDSHIPS?




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## Children and their Friendships

- ECEs are there to watch children form their first (proto) friendships!
- This offers us the gift of a potential parallel process of reflection.
- Reflecting on children's peer to peer friendships at the same time as reflecting on our professional friendships deepens the reflection and learning.




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### Cultivating Children's Friendship

- Friendships formed need to be maintained.
- Give time and space to support and encourage these relationships amongst adults and children.
- Demonstrate that you value friendship.
- Be knowledgeable and aware of friendships.
- As a toddler Reese already knows something about friends.
- She can be supported as she navigates these complex and sometimes difficult relationships.




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If you have a professional friend, you have a champion for life, someone who will advocate for your success.

All you need is one other person to form a professional friendship with.

What would happen if you had a group of friends? Would the benefits increase exponentially?

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Would a Circle of Friends be the same as a Community of Practice?

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A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of professionals who share a concern or passion about a topic and who wish to learn how to improve this area of practice by communicating and collaborating with each other regularly over time.

A CoP is example of reflective practice and collaborative inquiry.

The voices and perspectives of all members should be reflected in the work of a community of practice.



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### My Experiences with CoPs

1. Co-facilitator of a face-to-face CoP
2. Member of an on-line CoP
3. Guest member of an on-line CoP
4. Co-facilitator of a CoP that meets face to face, virtually through Zoom and on Storypark
5. Member of a Circle of Support (CoS)
6. Launching a new CoS with Storypark!

What is your experience – take the poll, please 😊



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# What is Your Experience with CoPs Take the Poll!

I have heard about CoPs but haven't had any experience with a CoP

Before this webinar, I had not heard much about CoPs

I have had limited experience with CoPs

I have been involved in more than one CoP

I have facilitated one or more CoP

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## Communities of Practice

 Community

 Practice

 Knowledge Domain

- **Community** - members share experiences and build relationships in order to learn from, and with each other.
  - **Practice** members from the community share a common practice.
  - **Knowledge domain** defines the community – the subject at hand.
- These three factors continually influence each other.

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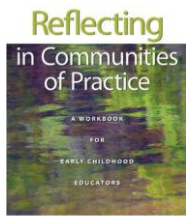
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- *Reflecting in Communities of Practice* suggests that each CoP should have a critical friend. The role can be taken by a facilitator but can also be taken by any member.
- The role involves bringing out the knowledge of the participants or thoughtfully encouraging members to explore their knowledge of theory, research, and best practice in order to deepen the understanding of the topic at hand.
- The critical friend is always listening for new knowledge that can be gained from a participant's contribution.
- The role is to question, provoke, and bring forth different perspectives, to help others consider opportunities for improving practice.
- A critical friend scaffolds new learning that the person couldn't quite get to without a boost.
- This is a powerful role! Is it possible that everyone around the circle could act as a friend (be a friend and befriend?)



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Since Vygotskian-influenced social cultural theory is foundational to CoP research let's consider whether, *is it possible to have a balance of power within a CoP?*



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CoPs often use stated or unstated protocols that define the experience for members.

The Reflecting in Communities of Practice workbook uses The Thinking Lens<sup>SM</sup> a trademarked protocol designed to provoke thinking about practice with children.

An Indigenous inspired Sharing Circle represents a protocol where a talking piece is passed to each participant. When they hold it, they say who they are, where they are from and what is in their heart.

Who usually decides which protocols are used in a CoP? Who should decide which protocols are used in a CoP?

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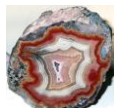
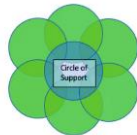
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### The Story of a Circle of Support (CoS)



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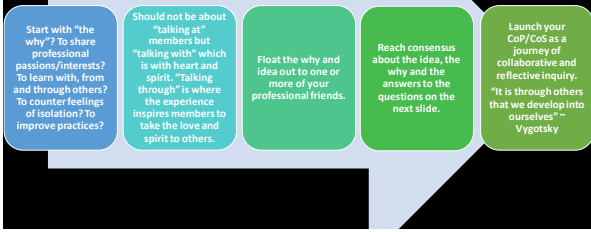
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### Five Steps for Setting up a CoP



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### Questions to Think About



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### Gratitude!



- Gratitude is a thankful appreciation for something received that acknowledges the goodness in your life in a way that helps you to make connections.
- It can make us happy!
- The benefit of gratitude applies to all from early childhood to old age. It has physical, psychological, and social benefits.
- How might you bring gratitude into your practice?
- How might you express gratitude to your professional friends?

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I am grateful  
to and for  
my friend,  
Peter Dixon!



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**Be a Friend, Befriend, Be Kind ☺**

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