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A central theme of this book is the application of Critical Friendship (CF) theory to the adoption of innovative approaches to the (re)design of scholarly practitioner doctoral programs, teacher leadership programs, and principalship programs.

A “Critical Friend” is usually a person who provides constructive critique through a mix of both support and challenge and has been in use since the late 1970s (Heller, 1988). Early publications (1990s) focused on developing the CF model by identifying roles, protocols, and reactions (Costa & Kallick, 1993; Cushman, 1998; Handal, 1999). Once these had been established scholars focused on implementation of the CF model and observed outcomes (Bambino, 2002). While papers and articles have been published in a variety of disciplines (Swaffield, 2005) and the concept applied on various continents, for example, The Annenberg Institute for School Reform, United States; Schools Innovation in Science, Technology and Mathematics (ASISTM) Project, Australia; School evaluation, United Kingdom, Australia, and South Africa; Supporting teachers professional learning, United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, there has been an absence of higher education literature centered on the concept. This book addresses the gap through its description and analysis of CF’s theory in the change process.

In the foreword Fayneese Miller, dean of the College of Education and Social Services at the University of Vermont (UVM), since 2005, and professor of human development, discusses the importance of
becoming part of a national conversation on the education doctorate (EdD) through the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) initiative. She highlights the significant role of Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) as they enabled faculty to benefit from supportive yet challenging dialogue about professional practice doctoral planning and program (re)design as part of a national team ensuring that (re)designed programs are of high quality and meet the needs of professionals in education.

As a conceptual framework, this book draws from seminal and contemporary literature on CFGs, mentoring, institutional change, diffusion of innovation theory, complexity theory, and social learning theory; exploring the antecedents, moderating and mediating factors, and outcomes of implementing CF theory at institutions of higher education across the United States. Furthermore, the book seeks to enumerate and categorize the benefits of the application of CFGs, and the challenges encountered in implementation. Finally several chapters are focused on examining and comparing specific instances where CFGs were applied. These cases incorporate feedback from a variety of stakeholders involved in the CFGs process, including, but not limited to superintendents, nonprofit and community-based leaders, executive leaders, and district leaders such as directors, coordinators, and mentors. From these case studies we are able to present recommendations for improving the application of CFGs going forward.

This book is organized around three major sections. In part I, “Theory and Action Framework, Opportunities and Threats to the Developing Role of Critical Friendship Groups,” the chapters examine the underlying structure and development of CF theory, the inherent benefits of using CFGs, the potential of CFGs as a method of diffusing innovation, and the threats to successfully implementing CFGs at institutions of higher education.

In chapter 1, “Critical Friends: Moving beyond Mentoring,” Storey and Richard provide an overview of extant literature on CFs with specific focus on its foundations in peer mentoring and the developments that led to its current configuration and protocols. The overview begins with a description of theory and context, providing a review of the mentoring literature, before moving onto the CF protocols, and a framework for action in educational leadership. The framework is influenced by and is targeted toward CPED, and its member institutions, as they are collectively at the forefront of the effort to (re)design and implement an innovative professional practice education doctorate. This chapter sets the stage for the remaining chapters in the book.
In chapter 2, “Critical Friends and the Education Community’s Role in Program Development,” Taylor and Marsh provide an overview of the role of CFs in the (re)design of two EdD programs—one in a large public university and one in a small independent university (Taylor & Storey, 2013; Storey & Taylor, 2011), both being phase-one institutional members of the CPED. The overview addresses the role of CFs as they provide a lens for objective feedback and reflection. Extending the role of CFs beyond colleagues in CPED institutions to the broader education community is also discussed. Results of the three-year implementation are provided as support for the potential of CFGs and engagement of the education community to be strategies for innovation in development and implementation of doctoral programs. In chapter 3, “Critical Friends Groups from Afar: Can Long Distance Relationships Work?,” Belzer describes the sound foundation developed by CPED for CF encounters—CPED website, FIPSE visits, mentoring structure of Wave 2 institutions, prework, and CFs convening activities. She then explores the obstacles that impede true enactment of the CFG model and offers solutions to these barriers from an institutional context by identifying structures to facilitate CFGs, potentially increasing the rate of diffusion of CPED’s EdD design.

In part II, “Role of Critical Friend Groups on EdD Program (Re)design,” the chapters provide examples of research institutions that are engaged in research in the field to enhance the (re)design of their EdD and chronicle each institution’s experiences in these endeavors. The collection of chapters provides insights into the role of CFs in both academia and clinical practice as drivers of systemic change in PK-12 educational renewal.

In chapter 4, “Critical Friends’ Perspectives on Problems of Practice and Inquiry in a EdD Program,” Dr. Sands and her team from the University of Colorado Denver: Blunck, Davis, Fulmer, Leech, Ruiz-Primo, Shanklin, Tzur, and Zion, report on the efforts of faculty from an EdD program that looked to their partners to better understand the nature of their work and how inquiry at a professional practice doctoral level, can, and should support their work. As a result of their research, interviews were conducted which incorporated CF protocols to ascertain the views of superintendents, leaders from nonprofit and community-based organizations, executive leaders from higher education contexts, and district-based leaders such as directors, coordinators, and mentors on those questions. Those data were then used to modify the nature of their dissertation in practice as well as the courses required to develop students’ knowledge and
skills to carry out the respective inquiry. In chapter 5, “CPED as an Incubator for a Clinical Practice Approach to Professional Teacher Preparation at Washington State University: Finding and Promoting Mutual Contexts of Change,” Sawyer presents a case examination of the relationship between Washington State University (WSU) and CPED as WSU planned and adopted a clinical practice approach to professional teacher and practitioner education grounded by research increasingly recognizing the necessity of intertwining theory and practice in the preparation and professional development of teachers. This approach holds exceptional promise as a way that colleges of education can meet the challenges of the twenty-first century facing K-16 education. Research questions in the study included the following: (a) What was the change process? (b) What supported it? And, (c) what hindered it. Framed by CF theory, diffusion of innovation theory, and complexity theory, the study presents both description and analysis of the change process. The chapter’s discussion considers how the CF’s approach may be useful in a conceptual framework as a catalyst for further change, both at WSU as well as other institutions. In chapter 6, “Growing Organically: Building on Strengths to Modernize the University of Vermont’s Doctoral Education Program,” MacKinnon discusses how University of Vermont’s (UVM) Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program have proved to be an incubator of innovation in problem solving where leaders from pre-K-12 schooling, human service agencies, business, higher education, and nonprofit agencies could come together in a program to tackle the state’s problems in a spirit of shared inquiry. This chapter explores the role of CPED CFGs in the evolution of UVM’s EdD program, providing insights into the enriching role of supportive and challenging dialogue. The final chapter in the second section of the book comes from Browne-Ferrigno (University of Kentucky). In the chapter “Redesigning Preparation Programs for Teacher Leaders and Principals,” Browne-Ferrigno discusses recent changes in programs leading to teacher leader endorsement or principal certification in the state of Kentucky. She highlights significant policy changes that include the elimination of all master’s degrees in school administration and specified prerequisites for admission to redesigned principal preparation programs. The Department of Educational Leadership Studies at the University of Kentucky responded to these changes by developing a new Teacher Leadership Program and a new Principalship Program. Throughout the design process for both programs, University of Kentucky faculty engaged with P12 educators who served as critical friends.
In part III, the final section, “Applying the Critical Friend Group Model to the EdD Program,” the chapters focus on program (re)design. Universities utilize the CPED framework, and the application of CFGs, to improve various aspects of their programs such as online education, the cohort model, and curriculum.

In chapter 8, “Critical Friends Groups and their Roles in the Redefinition of the Online EdD in Higher Education Administration at Texas Tech University,” Jones explores how one major research university (Texas Tech University, College of Education) applied CF theory to the redesign of its EdD based on the CPED framework. She explores the strategies and challenges of implementing CF theory in an online environment. In chapter 9, “Using a Cohort Approach to Convert EdD Students into Critical Friends,” Hamann and Wunder explore the dynamics of an EdD program’s cohort model and the utilization of practitioner’s sense of belonging and familiarity to become each other’s CFs with specific reference to Lord’s (1994) account of critical colleagueship. The authors consider the action steps pursued and the formative evaluative processes that compel minor redirections of courses that have helped convert a collection of advanced graduate students into enduring CFGs. Data include program design elements, and syllabi, but the main source of information are the accounts of the practicing professionals who are pursuing their EdD, that have been collected at regular stages in their journey. In chapter 10, “Criterion-inspired, Emergent Design in Doctoral Education: A Critical Friends Perspective,” Reardon and Shakeshaft discuss the applied learnings from CPED’s first wave institutions by second wave institutions, and the role of CFs in the knowledge transition, specifically, focusing on embedded field experiences and active learning aspects that are the two signature pedagogies of programs in both CPED waves.

In the epilogue, Perry and Hoffman draw together the various lessons learned throughout the book. Furthermore, they provide an outline for how the application of the CPED framework and CFGs model can be generalized and applied to other fields. In sum, the book focuses on the role of CFs as they support and challenge seven professional graduate programs (re)designed in partnership with the CPED to constantly reflect and reappraise their work. By providing a new viewing lens the CF can provide alternative perspectives by asking questions rather than accepting answers. The chapters illustrate the varying roles of CFs and the importance of context in shaping the relevance of the CF relationship.
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