

Self-directed Learning



Supporting learning circles as spaces for an engagement with the input and concerns of direct care workers means that as an organizational sponsor, you release ownership of the learning circles to those who are directly involved. In this way, the learning circles are very different from more traditional approaches to workplace education where a clear curriculum is delivered. The way in which the learning circles are structured means that staff are engaging in reflective practice which involves sharing stories of their everyday practice with the aim of making improvements. The content or 'curriculum' of the learning circle begins with the prior practice experience of staff. In this way, the use of learning circles by an organization means having an understanding of adult education as 'self-directed learning' which requires a trusting of the learning involved as an emergent process that proceeds at its own pace. As educational theorist Stephen Brookfield (1993, p. 234) clarifies "[e]mphasizing people's right to self-direction also invests a certain trust in their wisdom, in their capacity to make wise choices and take wise action." He further explains:

"Advocating that people should be in control of their own learning is based on the belief that if people had a chance to give voice to what moves and hurts them, they would soon show that they were well aware of the real nature of their problems and of the ways to deal with these."

Because the learning process is emergent within learning circles, so are the outcomes. Unlike traditional forms of education, with learning circles the outcomes are created through the process itself and cannot be predicted at the outset. As an organizational sponsor, you will need to trust the process and support the changes to practice which are proposed by those involved at the learning circle. The implementation of these practice changes within the organization will require that you grant permission and provide any necessary support to the learning circle to implement what they have proposed. As outlined, though the use of learning circles involves a certain risk-taking on the part of the organization, a genuine engagement with learning as self-directed through the use of learning circles means staff involved are able to critically reflect on their everyday practice and map out improvements, and this process has the potential to shift practice for the better.



Reference:

Brookfield, S.D. (1993). Self-directed learning, political clarity, and the critical practice of adult education. *Adult Education Quarterly*. 43(4): 227-242.