

An Abstract of the Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies Thesis of:

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Enhancing Organizational Development Practice and Learning Through Critical Reflection

Every organization faces a unique set of challenges and circumstances as it strives to fulfill its mission. The charge of organizational development practitioners is to assist organizations in reaching their potential and as such, to work to accurately assess organizations and develop appropriate and timely processes to enhance organizational performance (Burke, 1999; Grievess, 2000; Marsh & Merkle, 1973; Sherwood, 1972). Given the rapid rate of change and diminishing resources in most organizations, developing and implementing effective and affordable organizational development processes is more difficult than ever. How can organizational development practitioners achieve their stated purpose in the face of such challenges?

The purpose of this thesis is to explore what role, if any, critical reflection (the examination of underlying beliefs and assumptions that drive behavior and action) plays in enacting positive organizational change. Answering this inquiry involves the examination of adult learning, how the learning process can be incorporated into organizational development efforts, barriers to achieving long-term success in organizational development processes, conditions conducive to organizational learning, and individual and organizational qualities associated with implementing positive organizational change.

Based on the literature reviewed, the author has concluded that embedding, or deepening learning in the workplace through continual reflective practice (used interchangeably with critical reflection throughout this thesis) may result in a greater ability to identify, assess, and resolve organizational challenges. Further, its successful practice rests on the existence of a supportive learning environment, the active participation and commitment of leadership, and guidance of skilled organizational development practitioners. Specifically, the research question is how embedding learning through reflective practice in organizational development processes can contribute to positive organizational change?