



Is there a doctor in the circle? Yes! Announcing A PeerSpirit Dissertation!

This month's circle tale is written by one of our teaching colleagues, Sarah MacDougall, PhD, who tells the story of circling her way through academia. We are delighted to see the circle being researched and brought to higher education. We know of a number of master's level theses, but this is the first doctorate we are aware of. Congratulations, Sarah.

Circle Tale #57: March 2005

Circle in Academia

I have a passionate belief in the transformative power of PeerSpirit circling based on my own experience. In 1993, in a PeerSpirit circle, I was invited to open my whole self, my emotions, my body, my intellect, and my spirit. It was scary to allow my intellect to reduce its grip and to feel safe enough to trust that the circle would hold me as parts of myself I had neglected re-emerged, but I felt at home and whole. In retrospect, I see that I was being prepared to enter the academic world and investigate PeerSpirit circling, engaging mind, heart, and spirit in the pursuit of knowledge that would further understanding of the transformative potential of PeerSpirit circling.

Twelve years later, on February 18, 2005, surrounded by a number of PeerSpirit colleagues who had supported and participated in my doctoral research, I presented my dissertation to the faculty of the School of Educational Leadership and Change within Fielding Graduate University in Santa Barbara, CA. What a joyous occasion. We set the context for my presentation by showing the inspirational PeerSpirit DVD (a gift from FireHawk Hulin, www.resonance.to), using music and images to engage people's hearts. We called the circle with drumming and rattling to invoke sacred space. Within this sphere, I spoke about my research journey including my struggle to translate the intuitive experience of circle into an academic discourse. Of course, this research was destined to be successful because my Peers were an integral part of the entire process and Spirit surrounded us and was in charge of outcome!!

Calling on Spirit: An Interpretive Ethnography of PeerSpirit Circles as Transformative Process is the title of this dissertation. For three years I interviewed people from a variety of circle traditions, observed in circles, relied on the insight and backing of my PeerSpirit focus group, and searched existing literature for evidence of circle as a universal process and symbol in human history and for evidence of its re-emergence in contemporary settings. The research findings, which I presented in the context of the sacred Medicine Wheel to honor the indigenous cultures from which circle emanated, support the idea that PeerSpirit circles foster personal and collective transformation leading to social action designed to create a more just and equitable world. This research also confirms that circle process requires structure in order to create a container strong enough to hold and witness individual transformative experiences. The underlying structure of PeerSpirit circles (principles, practices, agreements, guardian) provide a way for us to come together that counteracts the dominant social patterns of hierarchy and individualism and therefore offers a means to create a new way of being in community based on ancient values.

I am grateful for the opportunity to be of service to PeerSpirit and to the world. As PeerSpirit circles continue to spread, our chances for transforming the world to one in which peace and harmony prevail are increased. There is hope for a bright future!! And when we are in circle, that future is already residing with us.

If you have a tale to tell, contact the PeerSpirit office and we'll help you share it.

For more information on many applications of circle, visit our web site at www.peerspirit.com and subscribe to our monthly Circle Tale newsletter using the subscription mechanism at the top right of the page. Your e-mail address will not be shared or used by anyone other than PeerSpirit, and you can unsubscribe yourself at any time.