E. Christopher Mare

Fielding Graduate University

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Comprehensive Assessment 1

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<u>Situating Myself as a Scholar-Practitioner</u>

Before jumping right in to the purpose at hand, and situating myself in particular as a "scholar-practitioner," I wish to step back a bit and appreciate more generally this concept: What exactly *is* a "scholar-practitioner?"

The in-house Fielding literature is a great place to begin exploring this question, for apparently "scholar-practitioner" has been a guiding ideal from the institution's earliest days. Don D. Bushnell, founding Dean and Faculty Emeritus for the School of Human & Organization Development, reflects of these days: "The accent of our program inevitably moved toward focus on the scholar-practitioner. Learning gained relevance to the degree it enhanced a student's ability to synthesize new knowledge, empowering them to work effectively toward change" (Fielding Graduate University, 2011, p. 21). Dean Bushnell, then, regards the "scholar-practitioner" as a "synthesizer" working toward – and I believe he reveals some value bias here – change. Of course, we could assert that "change" is going to happen anyway; nevertheless, in the mid 1970s this notion of synthesizing knowledge and action into one momentum must have been revolutionary, a cutting-edge tool in the hands of change-agents.

As we look further, we find that, as an ideal, the "scholar-practitioner" model is subject to diverse interpretations; for, it has an appealing ring to it and so may be adopted to support a

variety of interests. In this light, Barnett Pearce (2003), in an article that he describes as "somewhat of an autobiography" and in which he declares himself to be "an accidental scholar-practitioner," makes the following observation:

> I've subsequently learned that the term [scholar-practitioner] does not suffer from an overly-precise definition among faculty and students at FGI [Fielding Graduate Institute, the original name of the school]. Or, better said, we have a rich stew comprised of a number of fairly vague definitions that can be stretched to fit most situations and some very precise definitions that don't quite match each other and, I fear, fit some situations better than others.

Is this something to base the epistemology of a school on, a concept that can be so varyingly interpreted? Perhaps, in order to appeal to a wide audience, it's best to forego a "precise definition" and accept "scholar-practitioner" more as a direction or momentum, or once again an "ideal" to strive toward.

As an example of supporting a particular interest, HOD faculty member Helen R. Weingarten (2002, p. 1) speaks directly to her audience when she states: "Scholar-practitioners engage in the critical study of human activity within diverse settings…Applied social science is a term often applied to what scholar-practitioners "DO."" Somehow, this sounds a bit limiting to me, the assumption that all scholar-practitioners are, quid pro quo, applied social scientists. Could I self-identify in another way and still consider myself a "scholar-practitioner?"

HOD faculty member Valerie Malhotra Bentz (no date, p. 7) supports *her* particular interest by aligning the scholar-practitioner with "mindful practice:" "Mindful scholarly practice is based on the four cornerstones of phenomenology (conscious experience); hermeneutics (understanding of meaning); critical theory (power dynamics) and Buddhism (thoughtfulness,

alleviation of suffering)...The global challenges of the twenty-first century require a mindful scholar-practitioner who connects knowledge, values and action." We see here that whereas for Dean Bushnell values were implied, Professor Bentz prefers to make them explicit. Are we then to infer that all scholar-practitioners will share a similar set of values?

Still another example of interest-serving, this time from outside the Fielding community, appears in the *Journal of Transformative Education* (Duerr, Zajonc & Dana, 2003, p. 188), where University of Toronto faculty member Edmund O'Sullivan is described as "a leading scholar/practitioner in the transformative learning movement," in which he is "just beginning to use meditation and contemplative practice in the classroom." And finally, Christy McGee from the University of Arkansas states with some authority, "Scholar-Practitioners are *teachers* who value theory and research, comprehend theory and practice as being complementary and mutually reinforcing, and are committed to the enhancement of teaching, learning, and professional practice" (McGee, et al., 2001, p. 5, added emphasis).

I'm beginning to like the idea that "scholar-practitioner" can be polyvalent, a principle or ideal that can project in numerous directions while serving multiple interests. In such a conceptual milieu it may be possible for me to find my own unique spice to add to Barnett's stew. Yet, if it is to be a solid principle that can support such overlapping diversity, I would argue that "scholar-practitioner" ought to come with a readily identifiable symbol, something more than a mutable definition, something almost archetypal that could register in each scholar-practitioner's subconscious so we may all concur (at least subliminally) that we're coming from the same place. It's obvious that "scholar-practitioner" is referring to a condition in which both scholarship *and* practice is being valued, yet what is their relationship?

Associate Provost for Research, Dan Sewell Ph.D., in a presentation to the Pan-American Advanced Studies Institute in 2005, prepared an image to help explain the scholar-practitioner model at Fielding. Here is Slide 6 from his Power-Point Presentation:

We see that Sewell is attempting to zero-in on what he terms the "Scholar Practitioner Space." This space is the result of the overlap between three active domains: Research, Practice, and Education. Yet, if Sewell is defining the Fielding Model as the interface between *three* domains, then why are there not two hyphens in the title? That is, why don't we call it the "scholar-practitioner-educator" model? Sewell's image may have served the contingencies of presenting as an administrator to the PASI, yet as an archetypal symbol to unite all the various potentials of, specifically, the "scholar-practitioner" approach, I find it ambiguous. Like Barnett

revealed in his "somewhat of an autobiography:" "I'm finding that my energies are moving *back and forth across the hyphen* again…" (2003, added emphasis). What he's describing here is obviously a *bi*lateral movement (not trilateral) across or between two poles; thus, I would submit that the symbol for the Fielding Model ought to correspond.

In an excellent collaboration between HOD faculty members Rich Appelbaum, Dottie Agger-Gupta, and (once again) Barnett Pearce – a paper entitled "The Work of a Scholar Practitioner" – this bilateral movement is given wonderfully vivid expression:

> The scholar-practitioner is concerned with acting knowledgeably, drawing on – and contributing to – the very best knowledge bases as guides to action and understanding the scholarship that underlies and justifies the kinds of practice that are being pursued. The *scholar-practitioner* is engaged in a constant dialogue between scholarship and practice, in which each informs the other. Knowledge is constantly changing, in light of practical experience; and practice is constantly being modified, as a result of scholarly learnings…Being a scholar-practitioner is thus a two-way relationship: it involves using professional practice and scholarly knowledge as resources for one another – producing both scholarly knowledge and informed practice (2003, p. 1, original emphasis).

I like this imagery very much for it is dynamic, animated, circular, full of purposeful intention. We can understand that both sides of the "dialogue" feed off each other: The more knowledge integrated through scholarship, the more informed practice becomes; as practice becomes more sophisticated, in turn, so does the scholarship gain profundity while directions for further research are made perspicuous. There is one continuous flow alternating between two poles, a dialectic, like the alternating motion of night and day, one transforming into the other yet

both together comprising one essential whole. With this kind of imagery, a more appropriate symbol for the Fielding "scholar-practitioner" model might be the archetypal *Tai Chi*:
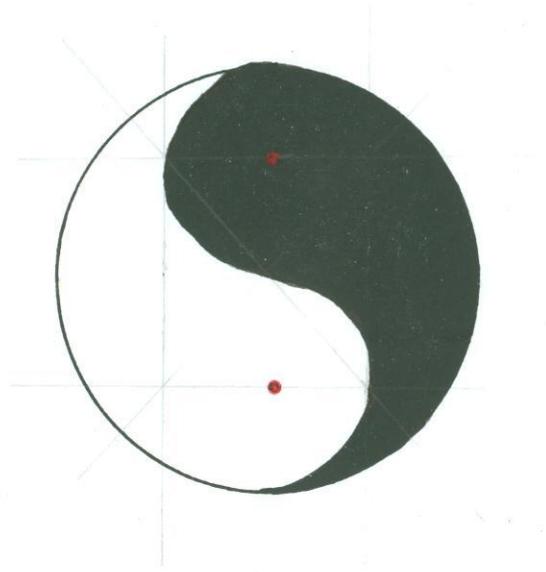
Practice is Yang, the white hemisphere, the active outward movement corresponding with the time of year when daylight is on the ascendency, culminating at the Summer Solstice. As the Yang of Practice peaks, the need for further scholarship arises, and so begins the withdrawing, circumspect involution of the Yin phase, the time of year corresponding with the ascendancy of the Night Force culminating at the Winter Solstice. Neither dynamic hemisphere could subsist in isolation without the other; both phases are required in any evolutionary growth cycle. For example, if we had endless Summer, Nature would not have the chance to compost previous growth (experience) and return shag to elemental forms. Similarly, if we are always in the practitioner mode, always actively projecting outward, we will never have time to reflect on our activity and situate it within the ruminations of others. At the other pole, if we are always at our desks studying and researching, we will never know how our ideas and theories adapt or relate to the "real world," the "life-world" of everyday lived experience. On a personal note, I know that

the long, grey, wet Winters of my Pacific Northwest home certainly facilitate the desire to withdraw and engage in deep, extensive, protracted study – yet when those first few rays of Sun appear in mid-Spring, I need to be out and active, moving and practicing!

And the scholar-practitioner model seems so natural to me – as natural as night and day – that I was quite surprised when researching for this paper to discover that there are actually traditions out there that prefer to align *exclusively* with one pole or the other; that is, there are academic traditions that remain lodged in research while there are professional traditions that disdain theorists.

As an example of how bad it can get, Ernest J. Wilson III (2004, p. 147), dean of the Annenberg School for Communications and Journalism at the University of Southern California, analyzing in particular the "policy community," has this to say:

> The relationship between scholars and practitioners is a continuing source of concern to both communities. Each side complains about the insularity of the other and routinely points to gaps that separate them. Alexander George and other scholars found weak interest and lackluster capacity on the part of academy-based social scientists to contribute knowledge deemed useful to the policy community (George 1993; Nincic & Lepgold 2000). For their part, leading policy practitioners have bitterly complained about what they see as the growing irrelevance of scholarly work to the design and conduct of statecraft (Newsom 1996).

No wonder our Foreign Policy is in such a mess! It sounds like everybody involved is using only one hemisphere of their brain – either right or left – when whole-brain awareness would be much more effective. Yet, even if this be true, Wilson goes on to explain that there are actually professional incentives to *support* the limited thinking: "Scholars are rewarded by their

peers for abstract technical writing aimed at limited audiences of other scholars, and punished for

seeking too much breadth, especially early in their careers" (2004, p. 248). This would be a case

where 'social convention' (and the need to pay a mortgage!) overrides what could be considered

'social responsibility;' that is, producing knowledge to solve real-life problems.

In the same article – and I include this so that my Fielding friends may remain vigilant –

former ambassador David Newsom (1996, p. 62) is quoted as excoriating the "social science

community:"

Much of the process of modern scholarship seems incestuous. Academicians often appear

caught up in an elite culture in which labels, categories, and even humor have meaning

for 'members only.' Their writings are filled with references to other scholars' writing;

they speak to each other rather than to a wider public.

Unfortunately, this is not a new and novel phenomenon. Fielding's own Dr. Bentz (no

date, p. 11), referencing one of the purposes for Edmund Husserl writing his influential *The*

Crisis of European Sciences (1954/1970), alerts us to a consequence of such myopia: "The split

between academic researchers and their objects of study, along with the rabbit-like breeding of

disciplines, meant that intellectual work was continuing outside of responsible community

dialogue about the value and benefit of this work to society." In a similar vein, HOD faculty

members Keith Melville and Barbara Mink, in a handout for a "Workshop on Scholarship and

Practice" held at the April 2004 RaP Session, bemoan: "the promise of an applied social science

that would solve real-life problems has proven to be elusive. All too often, research intended to

be useful turns out to be nearly useless to practitioners."

It's starting to become apparent now why Dean Bushnell and the founders of Fielding

emphasized their innovative "scholar-practitioner" approach: they obviously wanted to graduate

students who could indeed "solve real-life problems" and thus initiate purposeful change. This positions the Fielding scholar-practitioner model as *socially responsible* as well as *socially accountable* – and *that* makes me feel like I'm in good company.

I do believe I was a scholar-practitioner even before I knew there was a name for it – "it" being that habit of moving my energy back and forth across the hyphen.

In 1993, amidst what I have called previously a "spiritual awakening," I discovered a Permaculture Design Course that revolutionized my life. Permaculture is a comprehensive design system for creating "sustainable human habitat." It emphasizes working *with* Nature rather than against Her. It is broadly multi-disciplinary and inherently *application*-based – so much so that many Permaculturists prefer to learn by studying the outcomes of their own designs rather than by studying from books or any established academic programs. In that sense, Permaculture *could* be exclusively for practitioners; scholarship is optional.

I, however, chose to synthesize and approach – in the language of this essay – both sides of the hyphen. I did this by entering college as a returning student in a self-designed B.A. program just a year after that incipient Permaculture Design Course. I thought that going back to school could be a tremendous opportunity to explore, inform, and substantiate the fundamentals of Permaculture Design by taking college-level courses. In effect, I would provide a well-conceived scholarly basis for the practice of Permaculture.

As destiny would have it, during my first year in this new venture the Global Ecovillage Network was established providing the emerging field of *Ecovillage* Design with a nexus for global inter-communication and an international standard for praxis. For many people, Ecovillage Design could be considered an advanced form of Permaculture Design, and so I

suddenly found my ambitions expanded: I would use my self-designed B.A. degree to provide a scholarly basis for the practice of *Ecovillage* Design, where Permaculture Design could be considered a subset. As it turned out, I ended up designing and completing the world's first effort at organizing and defining this emerging field as a formal degree, a piece I entitled "Village Design: Ekistics for the 21st Century."

Relevant to this essay, the schematic for my proto-curriculum included both theoretical and applied components. I chose the academic discipline of Human Ecology as the umbrella. Human Ecology was then divided into Physical Human Ecology, Social Human Ecology, and Applied Human Ecology – or Permaculture! Physical Human Ecology was further subdivided into "Natural Sciences" and "Natural Processes" while Social Human Ecology was subdivided into "Psychology," "Anthropology," "The Arts," "Spirituality & Religion," and "Human Relationships." Each of these subdivisions contained the titles of several or more individual college courses – either courses at the university or self-designed courses of my own initiative.

The Applied Human Ecology component of my Village Design degree – Permaculture – was special. Realizing that Permaculture is inherently *application*-based, I began setting up a Permaculture Demonstration Site, first on an urban farm where I lived and later transferring to an Outdoor Experiential Learning Site on university property. This was an opportunity to literally 'ground' my studies in real life practice. Additionally, taking advantage of the flexibility offered by my self-designed degree, I flew off on five separate occasions to various parts of the globe to take residential courses and learn from the people that were actually making it happen; that is, from internationally renowned practitioners of Permaculture and Ecovillage Design.

I cannot over-emphasize how important was this traveling component to my evolving degree. Witnessing seasoned practitioners in action and being physically present in their designs

provided me with a palpable, *body*-based sense of knowing. Indeed, we could read books and study theories all our lives but until we actually see – better yet *experience* – the ideas in action we are forever navigating on a strictly *mental* plane. There was another benefit to this travel in that each time I would go out to learn from established sites I would gain more insight into the courses I could take back at the university *to further inform the practice*. This dynamic set up what could be described as a "hermeneutic circle," a profound revelation that may be noticeably significant wherever the scholar-practitioner model is being instituted.

I continued this practice of curriculum building upon arriving at Fielding Graduate University. I speak here in particular of a project that I translated into my KA*708 – Human Learning and Motivation study. In 2004, the Global Ecovillage Network was ready to establish their educational arm, a consortium that came to be called Gaia Education. I was invited to participate in their envisioning and incorporation stages, and later – probably because I was a doctoral student – was asked to take on the role of Curriculum Coordinator. In this role, I fielded module submissions from many parts of the globe and molded these submissions into a coherent curriculum based on the structure that was agreed upon at the visioning meetings. The curriculum was entitled Ecovillage Design Education (EDE), and was organized into four "dimensions" comprised of five modules each – thus twenty modules total.

What's very relevant for the purposes of this essay is to note that each module contained four sections: "Goals," "Content," "Resource and Reference Materials," and "*Experiential Learning Activities*." I highlight this last section because it demonstrates the inherent scholar-practitioner approach to this field: people learn stuff *so that they can apply it to real world solutions*. It says so right in a sentence I wrote in the Preamble to the curriculum: this is "an education where investigating theory is followed by practical application" (Gaia Education,

2005, p. 3). It would be very difficult to imagine an EDE course where some of the participants identify themselves exclusively as "theorizers" while other participants identify themselves as "appliers" – which is the quandary in the social sciences that Ernest Wilson mentioned above. And while it may be a bit of a stretch to regard the learners in a 4-week EDE course as "scholars," nevertheless the principle is the same: what Barnett Pearce illumined as "my energies are moving back and forth across the hyphen again."

And so now, as I prepare for the dissertation stage of my doctoral degree, and in partial completion of the same by finishing this first Comprehensive Assessment, "Situate Yourself as a Scholar Practitioner," I can assert that I have *always* approached my work in this way. I am authentically living the hermeneutic circle of Village Design, nimbly moving back and forth across the hyphen, transforming in succession the advance of Yang and the withdrawal of Yin, integrating the left cerebral hemisphere of rationalizing with the right cerebral hemisphere of patterning, studying intensively as a scholar and then finding opportunities to practice what I have learned in real world applications.

I think it would be fair to say that my coming Dissertation Project will be an *embodiment* of these principles: I have proposed to design and present a Village Design Course that will converge upon a multi-dimensional Design Studio. We will be emphasizing 'whole body awareness' as a pre-requisite to good, keen ecological design. As such, yoga and other somatic practices will be integrated right into the proceedings. Participants will be provided with an epistemology of design and then will enter the Design Studio to demonstrate and apply their learnings. Phenomenology will be practiced while surveying the site so that subtle nuances may be perceived. Once again, the hermeneutic circle will be accessed as people move back and forth between seeking and acquiring information and then applying that information onto their

evolving site designs, starting with the whole and then gradually working down into ever-finer detail. Finally, participants will be interviewed according to a Phenomenography protocol in order to discover the qualitatively different ways they experienced the event.

Moving into the future, after graduation and entering life as a Ph.D., I wish to expand upon my dissertation project and begin to reify the notion of Village Design as a *yogic* practice. By this I mean that yoga refers to 'union,' beginning with the union of body and mind and then ultimately progressing to union with the Divine. Union with the Divine may be sensed while moving about in the villages we design, sure, yet in order to accomplish that we would want to have the designer's mind making union with the Divine *as they practice*. What would this imply for the scholar-practitioner model? People who do yoga are called "practitioners." What sort of scholarship would prepare one for the practice of being an instrument of the Divine?

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