

From: E. Christopher Mare, M.A.
To: Annabelle Nelson, Ph.D.
Subj: Self-evaluation for KA*708 Study
Date: 11 April 2005

Dear Annabelle,

I'm very happy that you agreed to evaluate my doctoral study of "KA-708: Human Learning and Motivation." This was a very important study for me. After some ten years of being a full-time student, I finally got around to a disciplined, deliberate, and formal investigation of pedagogy, curriculum development, and learning styles.

I had been invited by the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) to participate in the inception of a global educational initiative. This seemed to me the perfect opportunity to create a self-designed study that could make a real contribution to this initiative. The initial contract we agreed upon was fairly modest: For the "Overview Phase" I would read a series of books and then write a paper outlining the ideas or approaches of a theorist or two. For the "Applied Phase" I would go to the GEN meeting in Scotland and, based on my discoveries in the Overview Phase, offer some recommendations for the new education. Finally, for the "In-depth Phase," I would write a scholarly paper on some aspect of the education that needed more research. All of this was pretty straightforward: As an experienced practitioner of self-designed education, I thought the contract provided a useful framework for a challenging yet manageable study. I gave myself four months to finish it all.

As my actual experiences unfolded, however, this little study assumed a scale and proportion – with far ranging implications – that I could not have anticipated.

For starters, the meeting turned out to be a big success. I was able to present the innovative work I had been doing in ecovillage design and ecovillage education to an international cast, many of whom had been my heroes. That was kind of a 'pinnacle of achievement' for me. Following on encouraging and supportive feedback – and no doubt a consequence of my being a Ph.D. student without an established professional agenda – I was eventually asked to be the "Curriculum Coordinator." This meant that, instead of simply offering recommendations, I was given the task of synthesizing the curriculum into a coherent whole.

I eagerly accepted this responsibility because I had long been wanting to work with these folks. That had been the essence of my work up till that time: generating accredited self-designed degrees at the B.A. and M.A. levels that were acts of comprehensive curriculum development for a field without academic precedent; so I was a natural choice.

Soon after I returned home I was asked to write a report of the meeting that was to be posted on the Gaia Trust website and distributed to those interested or involved parties who could not attend. I have included that here in this Documentation Report, labeled as "Report of the Proceedings." Gaia Trust, by the way, is the source of the 5 million dollars that got GEN up and running, and the people who paid to have the meeting a Findhorn (see www.gaia.org).

Then, over the next few months, I received drafts of curriculum from all over the world. The education was organized into four “Dimensions” of five “Modules” each. Some of the drafts I received were module-size while others were dimension-size. Soon into this process, I realized that some kind of standardized format would be needed, so I sent out a “Guidelines for Module Format” (also included in this Documentation Report). Even with this pre-emptive attempt at organization, drafts were received in all sorts of styles and variations. Some were like lists or outlines of essential features; others looked like someone had brainstormed all the possibilities without organizing them coherently. Several drafts were written by people for whom English is a second language, so these had to be interpreted in their own special way. I read through each of the drafts, made comments, critiques, and suggestions, and then sent them back to their originator. For some, this became a dialogue back and forth for awhile. Slowly but surely a rough curriculum began to take shape.

Of course, all the while, I was reading as much as I could the sources listed in our contract, and this was helping me to guide the curriculum down “well-trodden corridors.” I eventually read in full Kolb’s *Experiential Learning*, Orr’s *Ecological Literacy*, Friere’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Mezirow’s *Transformative Learning*, and a little book by Maria Montessori. I also found it useful to break out a lengthy reader from a “Transformative Learning Experience” class that I took in my Master’s degree days, which was full of useful articles and chapters.

I also think it is relevant to mention that I attended an HOD*708 Seminar in September 2004, in Oakland, hosted by Linda Lewis. Feedback on my project from these Ph.D. students and Dr. Lewis was very helpful in gaining perspective.

The work of exchanging drafts back and forth could have gone on indefinitely, were it not for that one of our team arranged to present our education to UNITAR (United Nations Institute of Training and Research). There was to be a meeting in Paris on November 8th – I found out in the middle of October! This was a new development that hadn’t been planned, yet the potential was very exciting indeed, so a core group of us got together (as much as that is possible over the Internet) and hammered out a workable (i.e. understandable) draft. As Curriculum Coordinator, I concentrated on filling in the missing pieces and creating an organized introduction out of the scattered bits of visions and proclamations that had been assembled. This evolved into the “Preamble” and “Purpose” sections that are part of Draft 2 of the curriculum, included in this Documentation Report (although in Draft 1 the Introduction was in three parts that were in total some five times larger). I also wrote four “Overviews,” one for each of the Dimensions. As time ran out, we had pulled together a rather cumbersome and unwieldy collection of writings that had a vague resemblance to a curriculum. Somehow, probably because of the pioneering spirit of the venture – but also because it fits in with their long-term plans – UNITAR liked it enough to schedule a follow-up meeting for 10 January 2005.

After that mad rush, I took a breath from curriculum coordinating for awhile and concentrated on writing my paper for the Overview Phase of this KA*708 study. I had read enough by then to make a good start but in order to complete the paper I had to get into the

library and consult many more sources. I produced a piece I am happy with called “Theoretical Framework for the Ecovillage Design Education,” in which I referenced Experiential Learning, Transformative Learning, and Action Learning. I thought each of these to be valuable approaches, in their own way and time, to the education we were envisioning. In that sense, the paper was meant to serve as a background reference source for those wishing to understand the format or, like it says, the theoretical framework of our education.

It felt good to get that paper out of the way, because a new round of concentrated curriculum coordinating was just on the horizon: this occurred in a ten day stretch from about December 27th to January 7th. The core group convened again, over the Internet, and since we had some experience with each other, our process was much smoother and more fruitful. The core group consisted of: Hildur Jackson from Gaia Trust in Denmark; May East from Findhorn, the person who arranged the UN meetings; Maddy Harland, editor of *Permaculture* magazine in the UK; Giovanni Ciarlo, an educator and musician from a little ecovillage in Mexico called Huehucocoyotl; and myself. I had the good sense to arrange for a conference call ahead of time: during that call we were able to come together conceptually and agree upon reachable goals for the 10 January meeting. The whole process was a commendable commentary on the wonders of the Electronic Age.

One of our goals was to get the curriculum down to a fit, manageable, streamlined size of about 60 pages (down from @ 130), so much of my work became ‘slash and burn’ editing (hoping not to bump into anyone’s ego!). As I settled into this new round as Curriculum Coordinator, I adopted the posture of writing my revisions – one Module at a time – and then sending them out to the four others on the team, who would consequently make comments, critiques, or suggestions and then post them to the group. I would take this feedback into consideration, revise the revisions, and then send them back out again, repeating the process till everyone seemed satisfied. This was a group writing exercise.

We started off rather slowly and spottily but picked up momentum as the 10-day period wore on, until the final few days were, for me, an intense continuous writing day and night, taking time to meditate or nap right there by the computer. (Thank you Kamalla for providing a rent-free attic space in which to do this work!). I even did a seven-day juice fast during the front end of this writing intensive so as to be as clear and receptive as possible. A UNITAR meeting in Paris on Monday, January 10th, and a UNESCO meeting in Geneva on Wednesday, January 12th, meant that we had a deadline (lifeline) of about 4pm Friday, January 7th Scotland time, since we would need to get our curriculum into the print shop for binding before the close of business. Four o’clock Scotland time is 9am here on the West Coast of North America. I remember getting up early that morning and going through some final touch-ups before finally sending off the last Social module around ten till nine – right on time. I turned off the computer and just stared out the window for the longest time at the crisp and serene, quiet and still, freshly fallen snow scene before me.

My rest period was short-lived, however, since early that Monday morning, while May East was gracing the halls of UN headquarters in Paris, I was flying to SoCal for the Winter Session of Fielding.¹ A couple days after that, I would meet you, Annabelle, for the first time.

With the delivery of the EDE curriculum to the UN for a second time (who decided to endorse it as part of their “Decade of Education for Sustainable Development: 2005-2014,” which is primarily a project of UNESCO), I considered my “Applied Phase” of this HOD*708 study complete. Ironically, during Winter Session I received an email sent to our core group from Gaia Trust stating that the curriculum still needed polishing at several locations. Well, yeah – *duh* – the polishing could go on for years yet we had reached a temporary climax. I ignored the first message. When the second one came a couple weeks later I responded firmly that my curriculum development work was finished for awhile. With the new energy set in motion at Winter Session, I was off on a whole new round of activity, in whole new directions with fresh studies initiated at the Session. I don’t think the GEN group understood that all the curriculum development work I did for the EDE was part of *just one study* among many in my doctoral career – and, more accurately, just one *third* of one study at that. I set boundaries by making it clear that returning to the curriculum development work will be an act of professional practice, with commensurate pay, since it will no longer be part of my schoolwork.

With the Overview and the Applied out of the way, there was left only the In-depth Phase of this study. I chose to write a scholarly paper to assist the Ecovillage Design Education from yet another perspective: The group wanted to graphically portray the four dimensions of the curriculum – Social, Spiritual, Ecological, Economic – around a “wheel,” but there was some uncertainty as to the best way to arrange them. Sometimes this type of discussion can be quite arbitrary, based on vague feelings or impressions, and it’s always interesting to see how people arrive at their decisions. Unfortunately, the loudest voice often gets their way.

Since my voice is not loud, I need to rely on firm principles and sound reasoning when entering a discussion. In this case, I had written a short paper back in 1994 – one of the first papers I wrote in my college career, in fact – in which I looked at the four-part circle from an archetypal Jungian perspective. I thought that revisiting this old material and updating it to Ph.D. student standards would help to influence the discussion of the wheel in a principled way. The result was the final section of this Documentation Report – a piece I called “The Quadripartite Circle: An Inquiry into Archetypal Structural Organization.” Your book *The Learning Wheel* coincided very nicely with this writing and helped me to perceive ways to apply the principles. I really hope you like this paper because it is, in many ways, a contribution to your Chapter 1.

And so we reach the conclusion of this exhilarating, influential, precedent-setting – if not extremely protracted – HOD*708 study. As you can see, it more or less assumed a life of its own, and were it not for me delineating a boundary at some point, it would still be going on. In this way, the study highlights the position I’m in of being on that tangential interface between

¹ Fielding Graduate University, based in Santa Barbara, California, uses a “networked learning” format for doctoral level education. Students live all over the country and gather together from time to time for seminars held at various locations. The “Winter Session” is held every January at a hotel on the beach in Santa Barbara.

schoolwork and professional work, where there's really no sharp distinction between the two, where my schoolwork can be interpreted more and more as professional work, where getting paid for this work is right around the corner yet hasn't quite materialized.

There is going to be another meeting of the Ecovillage Design Education group this June at an ecovillage in Hungary called Galgafarm, and I've been invited to attend. Gaia Trust has completed their cycle of funding for the Global Ecovillage Network in general and now, we hear, is going to put all their funding energy into education, which is intended to culminate with the manifestation of a "Gaia University." This EDE is designed to be an important step along the way. At the meeting in Hungary, we've been informed, Gaia Trust will earmark hundreds of thousands of Danish kroner to set up an organizational structure for the new education. Perhaps all the curriculum development and curriculum coordinating work that I did as the Applied Phase of my study into "Human Learning and Motivation" as a Ph.D. student of the Fielding Graduate University will have opened up a niche for me in this new organization? If that becomes the case, my HOD*708 project will have had truly long-term implications.

Like I said at the beginning, I'm really happy that you could be the evaluator for this process, Annabelle, for you were a perfect match.

Much Respect and Best Wishes,

E. Chris Mare
11 April 2005