STUDYDADDY

Get Homework Help From Expert Tutor

Get Help

Encyclopedia of Distributed Learning

Scholar Practitioner Model

The term *scholar practitioner* expresses an ideal of professional excellence grounded in theory and research, informed by experiential knowledge, and motivated by personal values, political commitments, and ethical conduct. Scholar practitioners are committed to the well-being of clients and colleagues, to learning new ways of being effective, and to conceptualizing their work in relation to broader organizational, community, political, and cultural contexts. Scholar practitioners explicitly reflect on and assess the impact of their work. Their professional activities and the knowledge they develop are based on collaborative and relational learning through active exchange within communities of practice and scholarship.

The scholar practitioner ideal has been analyzed from various perspectives as to the nature of skilled and principled action ranging from adult development and higher education to epistemology and social systems. Professional fields such as education, medicine, clinical psychology, social work, program evaluation, management, engineering, architecture, and law all have addressed this role. Each of these areas has a distinct practice track—as teacher, scholar, health care professional, psychotherapist, social worker, evaluator, manager, business consultant, engineer, architect, and lawyer. Experts in these fields possess a deep understanding of subject matter and practice knowledge and, compared to novices, demonstrate effective, efficient, and creative problem solving.

Debate across professional fields has not settled on a single specification for what a scholar practitioner should be able to do at a practical level. Areas of competence are diverse and include depth in a discipline and its methods for creating knowledge, educational expertise (whether as a teacher, change agent, or leader), capacity for teamwork across fields and public and private sectors, and skilled commitment to ethical conduct, diversity, and a global perspective. The variety of perspectives on the topic is reflected in several related terms and emphases such as reflective practitioner, scientist practitioner, citizen scholar, public intellectual, and practitioner scholar. Four cross-cutting perspectives help illuminate the ideal of the scholar practitioner and the varied issues that influence its evolution.

Educating the Scholar Practitioner

Accredited schooling and formal licensing or codes of conduct are hallmarks of a profession and guide educational practices for the scholar practitioner. Currently there is a resurgent interest in reforming and broadening the practice of graduate and professional education, both within disciplines and across types such as doctoral, medical, legal, and other helping professions. One of the forces driving this examination is the emergence of distributed forms of education and lifelong learning that allow flexibility of time, place, format, individual definition of goals, and social grouping. Virtual learning environments increase the possibilities for collaborative educational relationships that are especially suitable for adult and mid-career students whose commitments and ways of learning may not be compatible with traditional settings.

Notwithstanding these developments and the fact that effective practitioners require an experiential knowledge base, their formal education is composed largely of didactic learning, whether in the physical or virtual classroom, grounded in theory and in research that presumably 'underlies' practice expertise. Even professionally oriented programs, such as those in business, nursing, and social work, typically employ didactic methods to present basic concepts and analytic techniques prior to field-based learning of practitioner skills.

This Platonic ideal, which emphasizes underlying theory and analytic technique, exists for several reasons. It affirms a norm of humility in Western science that knowledge evolves and requires conceptual and empirical challenge in a continual analysis of truth. This premise reinforces the idea that practitioner work, whether as healer, teacher, or leader, should be based on more than personal prejudice, power, or the influence of authority figures and fads. The ability to interpret client and societal needs based on the most reliable knowledge is critically important to being a competent and ethically responsible practitioner, especially in high-stakes helping professions such as medicine.

The emphasis on theory and research has a political rationale as well. Within the broad context of modernity

and the rise of science and technology, establishing theoretical and empirical knowledge is essential to achieving status as a profession. The more determinate and prominent the knowledge base—as in the physical and life sciences—the greater the prestige and power of the field. For example, Ph.D. clinical psychologists vie for privilege against M.D. practitioners within a health care system that distributes enormous resources. The caliber of research training in Ph.D. programs becomes one lever in that contest. Practitioner degrees such as the Psy.D. and Ed.D. in psychology and education emphasize empirical inquiry that is more closely tied to practice settings than to theoretical questions. These and similar programs are aimed more at the practitioner scholar than at the scholar practitioner, thereby highlighting the status and resource competition issues.

Finally, educating for interpersonal nuances and situational uncertainties of practitioner work, as well as related ideas about ethics and values, is generally done through experiential methods such as case teaching, mentoring, practicums, and field internships. These are more expensive forms of education than a sequenced classroom curriculum. Practice knowledge often is tacit and therefore difficult to codify for educational purposes in comparison to theory and research methods. Hence, experiential learning often conflicts with mass-production institutional imperatives for most educational organizations. The resulting bias toward didactically taught content knowledge becomes self-perpetuating because the majority of teachers who educate scholar practitioners were themselves trained through the same method. The lack of attention to and expertise in experiential learning leads to wide variation in the degree to which it is used systematically to enhance and assess the acquisition of practice knowledge. For John Dewey, whose work provides a foundational rationale for experiential learning, it is not just the experience but the quality of and reflection on experience that lead to important learning.

Given that practitioners work on human affairs, it can be argued that postbaccalaureate professional training for the scholar practitioner should be grounded in a broad liberal arts undergraduate education as a means of strengthening general analytic capacities as well as historical, aesthetic, and spiritual ways of knowing. Cost notwithstanding, the same argument applies to professional graduate education where knowledge of the humanities offers balance to the more technocratic scholarly approaches of the social and natural sciences.

Knowledge Forms and Methods

Knowledge takes many forms—personal, practical, artistic, scholarly, political, and spiritual—each of which plays a role in the work of the scholar practitioner, who often contends with uncertainty about problem definition and intervention impact. This uncertainty, in turn, exists within the normal context of practitioner work in which novel patterns of information, situational constraint, and value conflict are common. Professional education programs, however, emphasize only a few forms of knowledge and historically have embodied a hierarchical relationship in which scholarly knowledge derived from theory and research is passed on for practical application in particular situations. The terms *theory* and *research*, which are used somewhat interchangeably here, encompass a wide range of epistemological and methodological approaches. Constructivist epistemology, experiential pedagogy, and many applied research strategies including action and evaluation research attempt to equalize this relationship. However, they often eschew general theory for an emphasis on situational knowledge, thereby substituting one hierarchy for another.

Methods for creating and testing new knowledge are also circumscribed. In the social sciences, these scholarship skills typically include using research designs and methods of sampling to make comparisons and render judgments of cause and effect, employing empirical methods for gathering data, measuring and making representations of reality, and using statistical, simulation, and qualitative methods for analyzing data and substantiating interpretations or conclusions. Postmodern understanding from the humanities has widened the methodological choices in the social sciences in which subjective voice, situational nuance, and societal perspective highlight how knowledge is socially and psychologically constructed and used. Qualitative and expressive/artistic methods are added to the traditional tools of experiments and surveys. Criteria for sound

evidence have evolved from the traditional reliability and validity standards to include considerations such as authenticity, trustworthiness, utility, and praxis.

These developments help foster a more integrated basis for the dual facets of the scholar practitioner role. They strengthen the status of tacit knowledge in comparison to formal knowledge and create opportunities to explore how practitioner knowledge derived from experience can strengthen research-based findings and inquiry. For example, traditional research methods attempt to control or isolate what are considered confounding factors, such as the background characteristics of clients who seek treatment, from the pure effects of the treatment. This research design practice is used so that one can judge the efficacy of a treatment in order to make important decisions about investing in it for the general good of others. The practitioner, however, must accommodate, not control, a wide variety of background characteristics in working with clients. Reliable research results that indicate increased risks for hormone therapy for menopause symptoms, for example, do not dictate the choices that might be made in the context of an individual's life situation. Understanding this choice process can identify additional outcomes as well as illuminate the ever-present interaction of generic treatments with individual and social factors. Thus, control and accommodation as well as research and practice knowledge together provide a more complete understanding and basis for action.

Also, practitioner work occurs within institutional settings that provide continual economic, societal, and ethical challenges that research knowledge can guide only at a very general level. For instance, the research findings on school choice and learning outcomes must be interpreted by educational practitioners within the historical context of racial and economic segregation, democratic ideals, and the needs of particular communities and their constituents.

An important value of scholarly skills is that they have a significant degree of cross-disciplinary application, whereas practice skills are more linked to particular professions. It is possible for scholars from diverse disciplines to have reasoned exchange about research evidence and criteria for judging its merit. The social invention of scholarly content and methods thus makes possible disciplinary and social boundary crossing for the benefit of all. On the other hand, the historical emphasis on theoretical knowledge and research skills results in neglect of practice capacities such as teaching, consulting, colleagueship in a workplace, and the moral dimensions of one's work, as well as the forms and sources of knowledge that are associated with these skills.

One approach to equalizing the treatment of theory and practice knowledge forms is to identify practitioner *principles* that occupy a middle ground between general theoretical orientations and profession-specific techniques. Practice principles of this kind, whether aimed at individuals, groups, organizations, or communities, would have in common such concerns as establishing trusting and respectful relationships, effective communications, diagnostics, and facility with negotiation, motivation, and change dynamics. Along with research methods (i.e., design, measurement, analysis) these practice principles constitute an epistemology of scholarly practice that illuminate how professionals can think and act reflectively and strategically.

The Scholar Practitioner as an Adult Learner

As an adult learner with professional practice, personal growth, and intellectual development goals, the ideal scholar practitioner interrelates concepts, understandings, and methods from varied theoretical and practice perspectives. In addition, scholar practitioners employ research and practice principles in complementary ways such as using their experiential knowledge to enrich theoretical concepts and using structured empirical inquiry to examine the effectiveness of professional interventions. They draw upon knowledge from multiple sources including theorybased propositions, case-based best practices, and values-based maxims and morals. These varied forms of knowledge are continuously acquired through didactic, experiential, and cultural means. Scholar practitioners seek continuing education that adds to their skills and offers new insight into knowledge previously acquired. The ideal of the scholar practitioner defines this effort in terms of lifelong learning that expands the individual's capacity for insight, reflection, and effective action.

The term *andragogy* represents an approach to adult learning based on both formal and tacit knowledge, as well as the personal and professional values that individuals bring to their learning. Andragogy emphasizes an active and defining role for individuals in what and how they learn and may include goals of personal and professional transformation. Transformational andragogy, as applied to the scholar practitioner, seeks to nurture flexible interpretive and emotional capacities in the learner that support examination of tacit assumptions, exploration of cultural diversity, integration of varied intellectual perspectives, and incorporation of unifying aspirations for humanity.

Attributes of the Scholar Practitioner

The ideal of the scholar practitioner also can be examined in relation to an individual's cognitive, personal, and behavioral attributes in the context of adult development. Theory and research on individuals who excel in their professions as innovators and problemsolvers identify several intellectual capacities. For example, comparisons of novices and experts show the latter as having well-defined hierarchical knowledge structures with many lateral connections among concepts that allow them to abstractly, efficiently, and creatively interpret information from their everyday work. Experts are able to frame situations from multiple perspectives, pose competing hypotheses, and identify evidence that would test alternative explanations.

In addition to these cognitive attributes, the fully developed adult professional shows the capacity for emotional intelligence and use of self that is both unified and differentiated across settings and roles. Tolerance of difference and ambiguity is linked with compassion for life and a commitment to improving the human condition. Development of these affective and behavioral dimensions is a challenging but critical aspect of the scholar practitioner as an agent of change for individuals, organizations, and communities.

The concept of *wisdom* captures the essence of much of the foregoing discussion, in that it represents an integration of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. The work of wisdom for a scholar practitioner requires alternating between the abstract and the observable, questioning what is taken for granted and overlooked, complicating with unexpected findings, and simplifying with new interpretations. These intellectual and social skills require multiple forms of intelligence and are manifested through principled and ethical action. Nurturing the capacity for wisdom is the goal of education and lies at the heart of the scholar practitioner ideal.

- experientialism
- andragogy
- adult learning
- theory and research
- experiential learning
- graduate and professional education
- professional education

Charles McClintock
http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412950596.n134
See also

- Adult Education Learning Model
- Experiential Learning
- Graduate Study

Bibliography

Boyer, Ernest L.(1990). Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate. Princeton, NJ: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Curry, Lawrence, Wergin, Jon, & Associates.(1993). Educating professionals: Responding to new expectations for competence and accountability. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kitchener, Karen, & King, Patricia.(1991). A reflective judgment model: Transforming assumptions about knowing. In JackMezirow (Ed.), Fostering critical reflection in adulthood. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Knowles, Malcolm S., Holton III, Elwood F., & Swanson, Richard A.(1998). The adult learner. 5th Edition. Woburn, MA: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Nyquist, Jody D.The Ph.D.: A tapestry of change for the 21st century. Change34(6)12–20(2002).http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00091380209605564

Schön, Donald A.(1983). The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action. New York: Basic Books.

Shulman, Lee S.Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. Harvard Educational Review571–22(1987).

Sternberg, Robert J., & Horvath, James A. (Eds.). (1999). Tacit knowledge in professional practice. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.