Eku Journal of Contextual Christian Studies (EJOCCS)
Baptist Theological Seminary
88 Old Eku-Abraka Road
Eku, Delta State, Nigeria
Vol. 1, No. 2, 2023, 1-13
joccs.btse@gmail.com

Contextualized Methodologies for Formative Theological Education Curriculum

Marilyn Naidoo

Abstract

The holistic 'formation' of theological students is focused on cultivating the whole person to learn and live more consciously. It is the commitment to living a Christ-like life in relationships, behaviours and possession central to the calling and vocation of the Christian leader. Formation invites students to study theology which can serve as a lifetime tool for ongoing conversion and transformation. For formative education to become a reality it must first have an educational strategy that is significantly related to African context. When there is no intention or telos for holistic leadership development, formative education is attended to on an ad-hoc basis, which is the current reality on the African continent. This paper will highlight how formative education can take place within curriculum integration across disciplines, by using a praxis methodology that brings together being and doing, and innovative pedagogical methods that engage the student in learning, thereby forming the individual holistically.

Introduction

Theological education is different from other sciences where students are given knowledge for their careers. Theological education begins with a "calling" to service in the Church which becomes our "vocation." Thus, theological education is different from other forms of professional education because students' knowing is about the embodied and embedded self-in-knowing. Compared to other professions, the training of clergy is particularly concerned is about

meaning, purpose and identity. For professional development of church ministers, the two big issues according to Heitink (1999) are identity and competence – who am I? And what am I to do?

We also know that Christian leadership in general is full of temptations and gives ample opportunity for various kinds of abuse. Self-deception, as well as the deception of others, misuse of time and resources, manipulation of others by means of one's professional knowledge and power and other forms of depravity are possible. When we think about dysfunction in ministry and clergy misconduct on the rise, the tendency to hide parts of true self is real and has implications for public ministry. Student must know themselves and work through their own personal concerns and inner coherence from which they act out. Thus, student needs to be shaped and formed into being a particular kind of person.

Because a certain type of person is needed to be trained for church leadership; linked to calling, competence and identity, this would require a particular *holistic* way of training. Theological institutions must become more intentional and take responsibility, as this tri-part composite is fundamental to good ministry. We need a new kind of Christian leadership, the demand here is not just for competent leaders, but leaders with integrity who can "struggle to do the right thing according to a sense of values and what it means to be a human being" (Sergiovanni, 2005, p.115). It is described as "education that focuses on the training of the whole person – mind, heart and body- for greater social impact and for individual and collective well-being" (Miller, 2019, p.7). Theologically it is about "being transformed in the likeness of Christ" (2 Cor. 3:18) – this has always been the goal of theological education, transforming the Christian self and transforming society. It is the commitment to living a Christ-like life in relationships, behaviours and possession central to the calling and vocation of the Christian leader.

Formation is both a goal and involves a process (Cahalan, 2011a) that unfolds over time and moves at different paces for different individuals. Methods used through classroom, practical exposures and field work and extends to community life with a corporate dimension and is the task of the whole faculty, thus the learning environment, the

hidden curriculum and interactions with students and teachers influence the integration of learning and the formation of the student.

Challenges within Theological Education

The challenge for theological education is to cultivate Christian leaders who can mobilize communities to be adaptive, however the curriculum mostly follows the "clerical paradigm" and prepares students to enter traditional church leadership roles. As John Jusu, part of the Africa Leadership Study (2015), states:

> The disconnect between the leadership training paradigms, especially the clerical paradigm, adopted by theological institutions and the contextual leadership realities facing the church in Africa continues to be the Achilles' heel of theological education. The clerical paradigm plagued by the clericalism, professionalism, and elitism has struggled to produce the types of leaders required (p. 201).

Within Africa a serious oversight is the insufficient attention to leadership development due to many competing agendas (Hendricks, 2004). When there is no intention or *telos* for holistic leadership development, this work is attended to on an ad-hoc basis. Hendriks suggests that "training congregational leadership is not the core business of seminaries and, given the struggle to survive financially, Africa's seminaries may never be in a position to address this aspect adequately" (2004, p.120). This area is challenged by a lack of resources and naturally the overwhelming focus of sustaining the economic viability. In this time of increasing responsibilities and growing requirements, it is common-place to fall back on the tried-and-tested.

Experimentation and lateral thinking in curriculum design involve risk-taking (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). With the lack of time and resources and the courage to focus on learning, it has been easier to use a curriculum "from elsewhere." Generally, there is little attention to methodological or curriculum issues (LeMarquand & Galgalo, 2004, p. 15), mostly only in the case of an accreditation exercise. This was also evidenced in a recent study on integrative curricula in African institutions (Naidoo, 2021) which could not show to what extent an integrative curriculum was delivered, with not much

academic capacity to do so, or sometimes the "holistic' focus used as a mere marketing tool in institutional mission-statements.

To develop this new kind of leaders, we need a new culture of learning to maximize its potential. Even though Africa has thrown-off alien dominance and asserted its own energetic perspectives, it appears that still the "inherited frameworks, theological methods and metaphors are increasingly seen as inadequate if not expired" (Maluleke, 2002, p. 154). The European university model still pervades theological education, foisted onto the rest of the world as part of the legacy of colonialism (Kombo, 2013). Much has been said on holistic preparation, but many theological educators have not been enabled to implement this because we are so strongly embedded in the traditional Western education. The banking model of education still dominates the teaching-learning process where teacher-centred education dominates without looking at the real needs of learners. This model creates problems in theological education because it is hierarchical where the teachers exercise power and authority over the students. It is also focused on cognitive or intellectual learning rather than developing the whole person. Learning in most cases is sequential, where students learn different 'packages' of disciplinary knowledge and are expected to complete assignments to show mastery of the knowledge and a complete summative exam or test. The emphasis is more on accumulation of facts and information, passing examinations and getting degrees with little attention to the values of Christian service and growing in personal spirituality.

Generally, theological faculties have become so diversified that theological disciplines are no longer able to converse meaningfully with one another. Each discipline has its own methodology and, hence, its own language. Students do not presume that these various sources interact in ways that mutually inform each other. They are generally not asked to reflect on ministry challenges or what they learn in internships, the latter are mostly unsupervised. Students are also not asked to reflect on their spirituality and their challenges of keeping faith central. It is assumed that students are nurturing their spiritual life yet the overwhelming nature and volume of work in the classroom forces them to 'pretend' that they are spiritually active, and the area of spirituality is most neglected. Students are often not able

to see the connection between the key elements in the curriculum, and this disconnection is what drives concern to create the integration.

Unfortunately, the current academic theological education prepares theologians-theoreticians and such an education "creates a critical mind in students, making criticism the virtue that is being rewarded" (Wolterstorff 2004, p. 62). As a result, the study of theology has become disassociated from formation. This academic focus also continues in denominational seminaries; teaching theology mostly focuses on an academic study with textual interpretation and doctrinal exposition rather than on the situations, needs and skill development of students. Or worse, students are being indoctrinated into becoming good Baptists, Methodists, etc. There is no motivation or structural arrangement to connect around the common goal of ministerial training, in spite of the fact that the goal is preparation for ministry. For example, courses on pastoral actions are taught in isolation instead of having greater connection with other sub-disciplines to show the overlap and the inter-connectedness of ministry. Wanak (2000) concludes that,

> Our theology and teaching had not adequately entered the lives of people, their worldviews, their fears, the oppressive elements in their lives and their poverty. Ours was a proclamation-oriented school that had little to do with sociocultural concerns (p. 11).

Standardized theological education using the four-fold paradigm, has run its course and is a thing of the past – this is where the end-product is a person who resembles everyone else subjected to the same process. With the dissatisfaction with traditional models of theological education, and given the significant advances in educational practice, the idea of formative education is more relevant than ever.

Methodologies in Creating a Formative Curriculum

Curriculum design for African theological education has to do with a shared vision representing the contextual needs of training, that are intentionally and holistically designed to practical outcomes, to advance the Kingdom of God. Good design in curriculum should bring together the "knowing, acting and being" that form what

Barnett and Coates characterise as the desired "triple engagement" in education (2005, p. 3). It is here in rethinking aspects of the design and methodology that it makes sense to place the learning of theology into conversation with the actual doing of ministry even while the theology is being assimilated. Ministerial training involves more than teaching students a particular way of thinking, it requires that those ways of thinking be linked constructively with ways of being and doing. Knowledge is important, but holistic development must extend to integrated human development.

For formative education to become a reality it must first have an educational strategy that is significantly related to context, including the cultural, social, economic and the political. Integrated learning acknowledges that learning objectives are from the *real world* which is not universal but localised hence a high degree of critical thinking must be instilled as a part of the education process to prepare students for that context. If curriculum and the social context are at odds, the curriculum and thus its product is a suspect. There are many competencies that are needed and this section highlights three areas of how we could engage contextually.

Curriculum Integration

In forming theological students, the curriculum needs to support a holistic focus, and this is done through curriculum integration (Naidoo, 2021a). When one considers how integration could look like, there are various ways despite the compartmentalisation and market-driven nature of curriculums. Grundy (1994, p. 26) outlines "six different approaches; the integration of content, organisational practices, teaching practices, skills and competencies, assessment practices, and inclusive curriculum practices." Fogarty (1991, p. 62) suggests "a continuum of integration" where on one end a fragmented model exists while at the other extreme a connected model exists between disciplines in terms of planning and teaching. Within theological education, various theologians (Banks, 1999, Chow 1981, Cahalan *et al*, 2017, Klimoski, 2005) over the years, have made reference to the need of integration. They have provided signposts in rethinking aspects of design and methodology to identify

requirements, expectations and content clusters to plan for connections.

Interdisciplinary integration applies methodology and language from more than one discipline to examine a central theme, issue, problem, topic, or experience. In this way learning is meaningful and learning is deeper than separate-subject approaches or learning packages of fragmented knowledge that may not interlink. Institutions may also support integrative learning through courses that invite students to take different perspectives on an issue, capstone projects that ask students to draw on learning from earlier courses to explore a new topic or solve a problem. There are experiences that combine academic and community-based work, or systems of journaling and reflection like those known as "learning portfolios."

Integration is also usually found in seminaries focused on biblical-based scholarship known as "faith-learning integration" (Holmes, 1987; Marsden 1996; Wolterstorff, 2004). This type of integration involves the compatibility between a Christian worldview and faith principles in an academic discipline. It seeks "to overcome compartmentalized thinking and living that separate the spiritual from the intellectual or keeps Christian beliefs from interacting with secular views" (Holmes, 1987, p. 56). With the establishment of Christian universities, curricula are designed with a Christian worldview rather than a secular worldview to avoid "syncretism" which is seen as major problem (Motsi & Heaton, 2018, pp. 75-81). In this missionary paradigm, this clash of worldviews and cultures raise issues. Yet, as Akrong reminds us that educational efforts must be a conscious effort to dialogue with traditional culture, which becomes a vehicle for diffusing Christian values expressed in African spiritual and moral categories (2007, p. 26).

Cahalan (2011a) mentions the integration of theological disciplines with each other (above); the integration between theory and praxis; and the dynamic interplay of knowledge, practice, and context – knowing, doing and being (Cahalan, 2011b). It starts with an appropriate educational philosophy, a cluster of philosophical assumptions about the nature of teaching and learning, the church and theology. An educational philosophy needs to be relevant to the institution's cultural context which speak to the purpose and goals,

the 'how' and the 'why' of an educational system. Having clarity of purpose gives direction to the curriculum and educational practices, as each institution defines its core business clearly and works strategically to that end. Hence in curriculum design, the idea that "one-size-fits-all" can never make sense. When all parties are involved in the education process, including church stakeholders, and are committed to a *known* educational philosophy, the climate of the institution will infuse the learning experience and avoid fragmentation and unintended contradictions. In Ghana, an example of an integrative curriculum is the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture (ACI), that has a clear interpretative framework to curriculum development embracing the three areas of theology, mission and culture (Bediako, 2020, p. 1).

Student-Centred Pedagogies

Africa does not need only innovations or better methods, but a radical change in the concept of education from a teacher or content focus to student or learner-centred education (Naidoo, 2021b). This student-centred model places the student at the centre of the learning experience where knowledge is socially constructed *together*, educators with students are "co-creators" of knowledge. For adult learners this supports self-directed learning with the immediate application of new knowledge rather than delayed application or learning in a vacuum. With higher levels of engagement where connects are made to the real world and to other disciplines, students thrive become emotionally involved and trust grows. Learning happens when new knowledge and experiences are integrated with previous learning (Beane, 1997), allowing the student to broaden his/her understanding of the world and personal place in it. Knowledge is not some abstract concept but is highly embodied, thoroughly contextual and is therefore always a subjective activity, as opposed to knowing that is completely objective.

The methods used are an engaged mode of student-centred learning is a praxis methodology as it involves an action-reflection dimension (Cullen *et al*, 2012). In addition, various other methodologies include the experiential, dialogical, cooperative, contextual and discovery learning, in addition to partnerships for meaningful work-integrated

learning with churches, ministry supervisors and other settings of ministry. For example, "conscientization" is a problem-based approach that motivates students to look for unique solutions to the problems that they face. This also enables the students to experience the process of theology as a communal enterprise. Working in groups, students engage in consensus building, debate, reflection, and personal sharing. In this way grassroots theology is developed, where the student and teacher are alert to happenings in the community and a transformative impact is realised for the students and community.

Formative Praxis

Viewing the goal of theological education as ministerial training involves a formative vision, in that it integrates beliefs (orthodoxy), affections (orthopathy) and actions (orthopraxis) engaging in theologia (Farley, 1983). "There must be a functional integration between learning by precepts and learning by experience, between being and doing" (Chow, 1981, p. 10).

The discipline of practical theology provides various ways to translate "academic (theory) into the practical" (Farley, 1983, p.30) through praxis. The methodology of praxis views theological education as a "reflection on the practice of ministry while one is involved in that ministry" (Miller-McLemore 2008, p. 182). Praxis is a cyclic process of acting and reflecting. It is the process whereby a theory, lesson, skill is enacted, embodied or realised. Theological education is thus a process of living, learning and asking theological questions – while engaged in activity, stepping back, reflecting and asking questions of the action and the tradition and to seek to apply solutions and reflect and begin the cycle again. Osmer (2008, p. 4) presents the four tasks of practical theology – from the progression of description, interpretation, discernment and strategic action. These tasks are helpful processes in conversational practice from describing a particular problem to its interpretation and analysis to pragmatically intervening in the situation.

When students try to establish the theology enacted in practice, this is not a simple task. "How to think theologically" (Duke & Stone, 1996), employing the knowledge received and detecting the theology already operative in practice is not so easy. Practical theologians have

a view of a living theology that holds theory and praxis together. The best way to teach theology "is to invite students to 'do' theology" (Trokan, 1997, p. 146) by appropriating their faith, participating in the theologising process. As Trokan (1997, p. 148) states, although this theology may be embryonic, unconscious, or dormant, the task of theological educators is to midwife this theological truth into existence. In this way, educators help students theologise, by assisting them in naming their theology. Theology describes the process and mode of reflection, its aptitudes and dispositions and not so much the views or beliefs that are held. Integration is pronounced because of the personal appropriation of theology; the habitus of doing theology is best understood not as the knowledge of God, but as knowing God, intimately and personally (Farley, 1983).

Conclusion

The work of formation involves an active re-examination of assumptions about theology, educational practice, Christian ministry and a flexibility between knowledge, practice and identity as Christian professionals. This deconstructive-reconstructive model is inherently transformative, as students recreate their worldview and theology which leads to an expansion of consciousness (Mezirow, 1991) and a movement towards self-actualisation and self-transcendence. Here it is hoped that the learner moves from "mechanical acquisition to reflexive response" (Klimoski, 2005, p. 51) so that there is a fluidity which at the same time brings transformation to the individual. The student emerges as one who is always 'becoming', always a 'work in progress' destined to change and grow. Critical reflection is a necessary component in all of transformation, as the student analyses his/her identity and creates a new sense of self and role in the world. It involves a conscientization process allowing students to reflect on their social location and identity construction, "from confrontation of the system to self-awareness" to rearticulation. (Hill *et al*, 2009, p. 13). Consequently, the humanising power of education is given its proper place.

References

Akrong, A. (2007). "The Challenges of Theological Education in Ghana." *Journal of African Christian Thought* 10 (2), 24-30.

Banks, R. (1999). *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Beane, J. A. (1997). *Curriculum Integration: Designing the Core of Democratic Education*. New York: Teachers' College Press.

Barnett, R. & Coate, K. (2005). *Engaging the Curriculum in Higher Education*. McGraw-Hill Education. Berkshire.

Bediako G. M. (2020). "ACI and Curriculum Development – Our Story." Paper presented at Nagel African Theological Advance Conference, Kigali, Rwanda, 1-6 March 2020.

Chow, W. W. (1981). "An Integrated Approach to Theological Education." *Theological Education Today* 1, 1-16.

Cullen, R., Harris, M. & Hill, R. R. (2012). *The Learner-Centred Curriculum: Design and Implementation*. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey Bass.

Duke, J. O. & Stone, H. W. (1996). *How to Think Theologically*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Farley, E. (1983). *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press.

Cahalan, K. A. (2011a). "Integration in Theological Education." In B.J. Miller-McLemore (ed.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 386-395.

Cahalan, K. A. 2011b. "Reframing Knowing, Being, and Doing in the Seminary Classroom." *Teaching Theology and Religion* 14(4), 343-353.

Cahalan, KA. 2017. "Integrating Dynamics in the Seminary Curriculum." In K.A. Cahalan, E. Foley & G.M. Mikoski (eds), *Integrating Work in Theological Education*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 75-89.

Fogarty, R. (1991). "Ten Ways to Integrate the Curriculum." *Educational Leadership*, 49(2), 61-65.

Grundy, S. (1994). *Reconstructing the Curriculum of Australia's Schools: Cross Curricular Issues and Practices.* Belconnen, A.C.T.: Australian Curriculum Studies Association.

Hill, J. A., Harris, M. L. & Martinez-Vazquez, H. A., 2009, "Fighting the Elephant in the Room: Ethical Reflections on White Privilege and Other Systems of Advantage in the Teaching of Religion." *Teaching Theology & Religion* 12(1), 3-23.

Hendricks, J. (2004). *Studying Congregations in Africa.* Wellington, South Africa: Lux Verbi.

Holmes, A. (1987). *The Idea of a Christian College*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing.

Jusu, J. (2015). "Developing Transformational Leaders – Curricula Implications from the Africa Leadership Study." In Priest, RJ. & Barine, K. (eds.) *African Leadership Study*, New York: Orbis, 199-214.

Klimoski, V. J. (2005). "See Things Whole: A Reflection on Integration." In V. J. K., O'Neil, K. & K. Schuth, *Educating Leaders for Ministry: Issues and Responses*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 49-74.

Kombo, J. (2013). "The Past and Presence of Christian Theology in African Universities." In *Handbook of Theological Education in Africa*, I. S. Phiri and D. Werner (eds.), Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 100-107.

LeMarquand, G & Galgalo, J. (2004). *Theological Education in Contemporary Africa*. Eldoret, Kenya: Zapf Chancery.

Marsden, G. (1996). *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship.* New York: Oxford.

Miller, J. P. (2019). *Holistic Curriculum*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Miller-McLemore, B. (2008). Practical Theology and Pedagogy: Embodying Theological

Know-how. In: D.C. Bass & C. Dykstra (eds), *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans), 170-190.

Motsi, R & Heaton, R. (2018). A Zimbabwean Experience: Journey to Maturity in Brooking, S. (ed.) *Is It Working? Researching Context to Improve Curriculum*. Cumbria, UK, 75-81.

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. New York: Jossey Bass.

Naidoo, M. ed. (2021a). *Making Connections: Integrative Theological Education in Africa*. Cape Town: Sun Media Press.

_____ (2021b). "Exploring Integrative Ministerial Education in African Theological Institutions." *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 1-11, 1-10.

Osmer, R. (2008). *Practical Theology: An Introduction.* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans.

Sergiovanni, T.J. (2005). "The Virtues of Leadership.", *The Educational Forum* 69(2), 112–23.

Trokan, J. (1997). Models of theological reflection: Theory and praxis." *Journal of Catholic Education* 1(2), 144-158.

Wanak, L.C. (2000). "Theological Education and the Role of Teachers in the 21st Century A Look at the Asia Pacific Region." *Journal of Asian Mission* 2(1), 3-27.

Wolterstorff, N. (2004). *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education*, (eds.), C. Joldersma and G. Stronks. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by Design. 2nd Expanded Edition*. New York: Pearson.