MARK A. LAMPORT

The Most Indispensable Habits of Effective Theological Educators: Recalibrating Educational Philosophy, Psychology, and Practice

Abstract

In this article, the author provocatively claims that "theological education is neither"; it is not theological unless it considers the nature of its mission to be ultimately Ministerial; and it is not education unless it takes seriously the learner as focal point of the process.

Armed with "best practices" research on effective teaching in higher education, this rather personal, sometimes feisty, essay challenges the fundamental assumptions of theological education professors' most strongly held beliefs regarding their educational philosophies (advocating critical thinking over accumulation of content), educational psychologies (promoting learning outcomes and the characteristics of the adult learner over teaching), and educational practices (supporting a view for the nature of theological discourse for Ministerial education over Academic in theological education).

Based on a quarter-century as a professor in theological education, the author brings both an educational theory and practical theology academic background. The objective of this essay is to describe the most effective practices for teaching and suggest correlation with the teaching task of the theological educator. The ultimate goal of this exercise is to coax professors in theological institutions to reconsider their innate and explicit conceptions of educational philosophy, psychology, and practice.

Key Words: Effective theological education, teaching and learning in theological education, theological education professors, educational philosophy in theological education, theology and education, theological education best practices

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Introduction: Conceiving the Craft of Professor in Theological Education

The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative.

John Dewey

Any reflective professor wonders about their effectiveness as an educator: “Why do I do certain kinds of things and not others? What evidence about how people learn drives my teaching choices? How often do I do something because my professors did it?” I certainly do. Teaching is a serious and important intellectual and creative work, an endeavor that benefits from careful observation and close analysis, from revision and refinement, as well as from dialogue with colleagues and the critique of peers.

How is teaching excellence to be defined? Ken Bain, director of the Center for Teaching Excellence at New York University, asserts outstanding teachers are those professors that achieve remarkable success in helping most of their students learn in ways that make a sustained, substantial, and positive influence on how those students think, act, and feel.

In What the Best College Teachers Do (2004), Bain identifies six recurring themes that describe the most effective higher education professors. The results emerge from a fifteen-year study of nearly one hundred college professors in a wide variety of fields and universities, and offers valuable answers for all tertiary educators, including theological educators.

The short synopsis is — it is not what professors do, it is what they understand. Lesson plans and lecture notes matter less than the special way teachers comprehend the subject and value human learning. The bottom line is instructors are successful only to the extent that they enable their students to learn.

The objective of this essay is to describe the most effective practices for teaching and suggest correlation with the teaching task of the theological educator. The ultimate goal of this exercise is to coax professors in theological institutions to reconsider their innate and explicit conceptions of educational philosophy, psychology, and practice.

Six Best Practices for Teaching in Higher Education

“The teacher has not taught until the learner has learned.”

Anonymous

Try this exercise over the next few courses: ask students to name and describe the habits of the best teachers they have encountered in their higher education learning environments. As you listen to the students recall with fondness and appreciation, compare those observations with these best practices from Bain’s important study.
Best Practice Number One: The best professors know their subject extremely well. They use their knowledge to develop techniques for grasping fundamental principles and organizing concepts that others can use to begin building their own understanding and abilities. The best teachers are active and accomplished scholars, artists, or scientists. They read, think, and write. They follow the important intellectual developments in their field. They sometimes explore related fields outside their own. They enable learners to construct not only understanding but also meaning and application. In other words, the most effective professors can do intellectually, physically, or emotionally what they expect from their students. They think metacognitively about their discipline—analyzing its nature and evaluating its quality.

Best Practice Number Two: The best professors create critical learning environments. These are learning cultures where people confronting intriguing, beautiful, or important problems. The routine quest is exploring authentic tasks that challenge students to grapple with ideas, rethink their assumptions, and examine their mental models of reality. While teaching methods vary, these conditions are best fostered to the degree that learners feel a sense of control over their education; work collaboratively with others; believe that their work will be considered fairly and honestly; and try, fail, and receive feedback from expert learners in advance of and separate from any summative judgment of their effort.

Best Practice Number Three: The best professors prepare to teach as a serious intellectual endeavor. Lectures, discussion sections, problem-based sessions, etc., are treated as intellectually demanding and important as their research and scholarship. The best teachers begin with questions about student learning objectives rather than about what the teacher will do. In short, methods are used as a means to the end: student learning.

Best Practice Number Four: The best professors have high expectations for their students. Simply put, the best teachers expect “more.” And more often than not high expectations yield high learning results. They favor learning objectives that embody the kind of thinking and acting expected for life. They expect but also stimulate high achievement.

Best Practice Number Five: The best professors value their students. With what can only be called simple decency, the best professors display openness, reflect a strong trust in students, believe that students want to learn, and they assume, until proven otherwise, that they can.

Best Practice Number Six: The best professors evaluate their efforts. All the studied professors have some systematic program (some more elaborate than others do) to assess their own professional growth and to make appropriate changes. Like most practice-oriented endeavors, those who are most effective for the long haul seem to be able to flex their approaches and orientations for maximum result.
A unity of theology and education is a necessity, not a luxury. What can theological educators learn from these best practices? In addition, what obstacles may exist in theological education that prevent professors from being as effective in teaching as they might be?

**Prevailing Misperceptions of Educational Philosophy, Psychology, and Practice in Theological Education**

*What we need more than anything else is not textbooks but text-people.*

*It is the personality of the teacher which is the text that the students read; the text they will never forget.*

*Abraham Joshua Heschel*

Educational philosophy is the foundation from which one's educational psychology springs. In other words, one's most robustly held beliefs about the nature and purpose of education manifests itself in how teaching and learning is fashioned. Furthermore, one's most strongly held assertions about educational psychology invariably display themselves in educational practice. Educational practices are more observable, whereas educational psychology and educational philosophy must often be inferred. While practice is vital, it is determined by more fundamental suppositions, therefore making these even weightier. (See Graph 1.) An imperative obligation is for theological educators to plumb the depths of our most vigorously held beliefs about our inimitable brand of education.

**Graph 1. Foundational elements of developing intentional educational design.**

![Diagram](image)

Three prevailing and fundamental misperceptions beleaguer the landscape of theological education, and theological educators may be conspicuously culpable. These obstacles, it is posited (perhaps controversially we admit), are a flawed grasp of *educational philosophy* that caters more to knowledge than thinking; a confused notion of *educational psychology* that promotes teaching
over learning; and a rickety impulse of educational practice that promotes the nature of theology more as academic rather than ministerial.

Educational Philosophy: The Role of Knowledge and Thinking in Theological Education

Every educational process has explicit and implicit assumptions about its purposes, methods, and intended outcomes for teaching and learning. Given the content and ultimate concerns of the theological disciplines, what are the most appropriate assumptions for those who are professors in the realm of theological education? Obviously, how a particular theological school and/or any particular professor answers this question then reveals an inherent educational philosophy, which in turn drives methods and outcomes.

Five "families" of educational philosophy inform educational practice. Whether formal or informal education, whether education with children, adolescents or adults, whether public or private education, one of these five following families is at the heart of any educational mission:\textsuperscript{12}

1. Academic rationalism has as its major goals acquiring knowledge and preserving heritage. The basic concept at the heart of this educational philosophy is knowing. Obtaining knowledge is the highest value.

2. The development of cognitive processes has as it major goals processing knowledge and applying information. The basic concept at the heart of this educational philosophy is thinking. Critique and analysis are the highest values.

3. Curriculum as technology has as its major goals mastering skills and training for tasks. The basic concept is doing. Proficiency at physical or social or moral or technical skills is the highest value.

4. Personal relevance has as its major goals seeking one's greatest interests and satisfying one's internal motivations. The basic concept is being. Realizing one's potential through the pursuit of self-selected learning is the highest value.

5. Social reconstruction and social adaptation has as its major goals addressing societal ills and meeting societal needs. The basic concept is becoming. Changing and adapting to society are the highest values.

The most pressing question is, of course, which one of these is the most appropriate educational philosophy for professors who teach theological education? Should it primarily be knowing theological information, or knowing how to think theologically, or developing theological skills, or developing theological interests, or changing society based on theological principles?\textsuperscript{13}

My view is that the development of cognitive processes is the most appropriate educational philosophy for theological education.\textsuperscript{14} To be sure, there may be two or more other of these families that concurrently make a
necessary contribution; no educational philosophy exists in isolation. And admittedly, all of these have some significance in theological education, but, in our view, one’s ability to think, to analyze, to critique, and then adapt to contextual practice is critical.¹⁵

Consider, for example, Jesus’ educational intentions in so-called “the sermon on the mount” as a template for guiding how Christians should live as a faithful sojourner. It is important that believers would learn information how about the kingdom of God; develop life skills for living in the kingdom; pursue motivating interests in the kingdom; and to alter society toward kingdom values. Nevertheless, it is perhaps more consequential to teach the faithful to learn principles that can be applied to changing societal conditions, i.e., learning to think critically, to think theologically. The most desired educational result might be a changed society, but the most effective means to achieve that is fostered by an educational philosophy that nurtures theological thinking and application.¹⁶

As a theological education consultant, I am asked to evaluate courses, degree programs, and overall educational philosophy statements of theological schools in the United States and Europe. One of the most persistent imbalances is the degree to which learning objectives, delivery systems, teaching methods, and learning assessments promote the knowledge-content without enough emphasis on critical thinking or cultural adaptation or ministry practice of that knowledge. Granted, the evaluation of cognitive knowledge is easiest to test through written examinations and essays, but the accumulation of knowledge is not the most desired product of theological education.

Professors who teach Biblical studies know that such knowledge of academic vocabulary and textual languages is to be ultimately utilized in hermeneutical applications in preaching and teaching the principles of scripture for Christian living. Professors who teach theological studies know that they lay a foundation of historical decisions and theoretical constructs that ultimately aims at informing the practical life of the Church. Neither of these pursuits – Biblical or theological studies – is in and of itself the ultimate end, but serves as a valuable but ultimately subservient means to another end, the faithful proclamation of the orthodox faith with contextual effectiveness in our modern circumstance.

How do these sentiments coalesce with the previously identified best practices of professors? (See Table 1.) My contention that the educational philosophy of development of cognitive processes (emphasizing thinking) is to be preferred over academic rationalism (emphasizing knowing) confirms Bain’s best practice number two, the idea of creating critical learning environments. While it is vitally important the best professors know their subject extremely well (best practice number one), they also understand this content-knowledge is best used as a means to an end, and not the end.
In sum, a flawed grasp of educational philosophy exists wherein professors of theological education cater more to the passive acquisition of content-knowledge over the more critical ability of teaching students to think theologically with an eye to applying the Christian faith and mission to the changing conditions of the world.17

Table 1. Proposed stance for theological education correlated with “best practices”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational category</th>
<th>Proposed theological educational stance</th>
<th>Best practices for teaching theological education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational philosophy</td>
<td>Critical thinking outlasts knowledge</td>
<td>Nurtures critical learning environment&lt;br&gt;Knows subject well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational psychology</td>
<td>Learning trumps teaching</td>
<td>Values students&lt;br&gt;Expects much from students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational practice</td>
<td>Theology must ultimately be practical</td>
<td>Prepares rigorously&lt;br&gt;Conducts self-assessment</td>
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Educational Psychology: The Role of Teaching and Learning in Theological Education

What is the role of teaching and learning in theological education? How do professors best evoke learning? Barr and Tagg speak of the differing perspectives of an “instructional” model and a “learning” model.18 The former is a fairly passive lecture-discussion format where faculty talk and most students listen. This is a common scenario by many professors of theological education, but is contrary to almost all research study on optimal settings and methods for student learning. The aim in the learning model is not so much to improve the quality of instruction – although that is not irrelevant – as it is to improve continuously the quality of learning for students. The learning model ends the lecture’s privileged position, honoring in its place whatever approaches serve best to prompt learning of particular knowledge by particular students. We submit that the mission of neither theological schools nor their professors is merely instruction but rather that of producing learning with every student by whatever means work best.19

If professors of theological education acknowledge that learning must have preeminence in the educational arena, then specific knowledge of how theological education students learn is an important endeavor.20 In fact, one might argue that professors’ awareness of adult learning theory ranks
alongside one's academic discipline for maximal effect. The case remains that whereas most professors of theological education are well qualified in their Biblical or theological disciplines, yet many have not undertaken any formal study in adult learning theory. Unfortunately, some highly educated academics are at a loss to communicate that knowledge effectively to their clientele.

What principles can be gleaned from adult learning theory to engender greater learning in theological education? Most adult learning theory over the last quarter-century quickly encounters the concept of andragogy (andr- meaning "man" and agogos meaning "leading") which is contrasted with pedagogy (paid- meaning "child"). In the minds of many around the adult education field, andragogy and Malcolm Knowles have become inextricably linked.

For Knowles, andragogy is based on five crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners different from the assumptions about child learners on which traditional pedagogy is premised:

1. **Self-concept:** As a person matures one's self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being. (It should be noted however, this concept is culturally-bound and arises out of a particular discourse about the self which is largely Western civilization in its expression.)

2. **Experience:** As a person matures, one accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning. The next step is the belief that adults learn more effectively through experiential techniques of education, such as discussion or problem solving.

3. **Readiness to learn:** As a person matures one's readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of one's social roles. The relevance of study becomes clearer as it is needed to carry out a particular task. Adults tend to learn things that are useful or interesting or because something fills us with awe, but educators should not underestimate just how much adults learn for the pleasure it brings.

4. **Orientation to learning:** As a person matures one's time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly one's orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem centeredness. However, as Brookfield acknowledges: "Much of adults' most joyful and personally meaningful learning is undertaken with no specific goal in mind. It is unrelated to life tasks and instead represents a means by which adults can define themselves."
5. **Motivation to learn:** As a person matures one’s motivation to learn is internal. This assumption, as Tennent purports, views adults’ readiness to learn as “the result of the need to perform (externally imposed) social roles and that adults have a problem-centered (utilitarian) approach to learning” 25

My contention is two-fold: the most appropriate educational psychology tenets for theological education are (1) those that advocate learning, and learning for ministry knowledge and practice as the centerpiece of why professors and theological institutions exist, which is to be contrasted to the traditional default position of the dominance of teaching 26; and (2) those which consider as vital to the educational process the unique needs of adult learners, which is to be preferred over the top-down, passivity-inclined, learner-dependent models.27

How do these sentiments coalesce with the previously identified best practices of professors? Our contention that educational psychology stance based on learner outcomes is to be preferred over teaching outcomes confirms Bain’s best practices number five, the emphasis on valuing students and their life circumstance. While it is vitally important the best professors expect much from their students (best practice number four), they also understand that theological learning is relevant for effective ministry preparation, experiential for enhancing ministry skills, and missional for creative participation in the ongoing restorative story of God.

Simply put, the most effective professors of theological education consider the motivations, life experiences, vocational urgency, and practical applications not only of the content taught, but the assignments given, and nature of the classroom environment as well.

In sum, a confused notion of educational psychology exists to the degree that teaching takes precedence over learning for professors of theological education. Adult learners wish to take ownership of their theological education and learn in relevant, practice-oriented, yet deeply grounded ways, ways that rhyme with the principles of adult learning theory. These forms of democratic and participatory experience are more likely to translate into both present and future meaning.28

It is, therefore, no wonder – in view of my conviction some theological education professors and institutions execute ill-advised educational philosophies and educational psychologies – that likewise some educational practices are askew.

**Educational Practice: The Nature of Theological Discourse in Theological Education**

Many Christians today not only are uninformed about basic theology but even seem hostile to it. How has the notion of “theology” and “theologians”
gotten a reputation of being boring, irrelevant, impractical or ethereal? So, what is purpose of theology in theological education and the mission of the Church?

Christian theology is reflecting on and articulating the beliefs about God and the world that Christians share as followers of Jesus. By reflecting, Grenz and Olson claim,

"we use our minds to organize our thoughts and beliefs, bring them into coherence with one another by attempting to identify and expunge blatant contradictions, and make sure that there are good reasons for interpreting Christian faith in the way we do. Reflection, then, involves a certain amount of critical thinking – questioning the ways we think and why we believe and behave the way we do." 29

So, theological reflection is an essential element of ministry and therefore extremely valued by laity and leaders in our church, right? Apparently not. Morgan reports a poll funded by Murdock Charitable Trust set out to discover United States churchgoers’ priorities when seeking a pastor. Both pastors and laypeople rated “theological knowledge” last out of five qualifications “most important for a good pastor”; whereas seminary professors rank it first.30

The article further contends theological education faces a crisis of confidence by churches.31 It is a familiar tension between ivory-tower theory and leading-edge practicality not necessarily serving the church with the dexterity expected. While theological schools persist in graduating students conversant in Greek, Hebrew, and classical theology, they do not seem acculturated to ministry in a post-Christian world.32

Moreover, while churches may have lost a measure of confidence in theological schools, in recent years, these same schools have whispered concern over the higher percentage than expected of their alumni who seem not to be involved in ministerial roles within a very short time of launching into the profession, and wonder why. Many reasons are possible, but what is the nature of discourse in theological education, and what should it be?, and how do our educational practices affect theological learning for ministry preparation?

Grenz and Olson (1994) describe five types of theology: (See Graph 2.)

1. **Folk theology** is unreflective believing based on blind faith. It rejects reflection because deep spiritual piety and intellectual reflection are considered antithetical to one another. Various Christian bumper stickers, choruses, clichés, and legends epitomize it. The chief characteristic of folk theology is its attachment of unquestioning belief to informal, unsubstantiated oral traditions and subjective
feelings, and refuses to measure them by any kind of grounds for believing. Folk theology is inadequate for most Christians; it encourages gullibility and simplistic answers to difficult dilemmas that arise from being followers in a secular world. This brand of thinking confuses “simple, childlike faith” with “simplistic and childish faith”.

2. **Lay theology** appears when ordinary Christians begin to question folk theology with its childish, simplistic clichés and legends. It arises when Christians dig into the resources of their faith, putting mind and heart together in a serious attempt to examine that faith. Lay theology may lack sophisticated tools of biblical languages, logic, and historical consciousness, but it seeks to bring Christian beliefs into a coherent whole by questioning unfounded traditions and expunging blatant contradictions.

**Graph 2. Grenz and Olson’s five types of theology**

3. **Ministerial theology** at its best uses tools ordinarily available only through some kind of formal course work – a working knowledge of biblical languages or at least an ability to use concordances, commentaries, and other printed helps; a historical perspective on the developments in theology through the ages; and keen systematic thinking that involves recognizing inconsistencies among beliefs and bringing beliefs into coherence with one another. But the ultimate purpose is to raise up those who are called to use their spiritual gifts to nurture congregations and parachurch organizations to continue the story and mission of God.

4. **Professional theology** attempts to raise their students above Folk and Lay theology to Ministerial theology by inculcating in them a critical consciousness that questions unfounded assumptions and beliefs. Professional theologians’ main contribution lies in serving lay theologians and ministers, in teaching pastors in theological institutions, and writing books and articles to aid lay and ministerial theologians in their journeys of reflection.

5. **Academic theology** is a highly speculative, virtually philosophical theology aimed primarily at other theologians. It is often
disconnected from the church and has little to do with concrete Christian living. While it is extremely reflective, it may cut off reflection from faith and merely seek understanding for its own sake.

What, then, should be the nature of discourse, given these categories of theology, for professors in theological education? I contend Folk and Academic theology are of little consequence to the Church. These brands of God-talk do nothing to advance faith, but pervert the import of both faith and reason. Further, I vigorously protest that to the degree professors of theology intentionally or unintentionally promote shoddy or simplistic theological thinking on one hand, or purely philosophical speculation removed from the mission of God on the other hand, it makes illegitimate the raison d’être for theological education.

Perhaps the real question to pursue as a guiding compass for theological education is: “what is the deep need of the Church?” The answer is expertly-informed leaders who know scripture and can correctly interpret and adeptly apply it; culturally-aware leaders who understand the mission of God and entreat the Church to join in with the spirit of God in the present world; and personally-grounded leaders who handle troubled people and organizational difficulties that build communities of faith.

I, therefore, contend that the most important task of theological education is to single-mindedly advance Ministerial theology.34 What the Church – and those who prepare for ministry in it – really needs is a grounded theological understanding of faith (the opposite of Folk theology), while acknowledging this is not its ultimate purpose (the goal of Academic theology).35 The ultimate purpose of grounded theology promotes maturity in faith, a kingdom perspective on life in the world, and motivation for continuing the mission of God to alienated people. These are the real needs of the Church – to love, obey, and serve God faithfully with the mind as well as the heart.

My contention is that the most appropriate educational practice for theological education should be to inculcate people in our churches with an inquisitive faith that is not afraid to explore the world of ideas (Lay theology); to develop the knowledge, perspectives, and competencies necessary to lead churches in faith and mission (Ministerial theology); and to promote a vigorous and scholarly defense of the Christian faith to unbelievers and resources for reflection for nurturing faith of believers (Professional theology).

How do these sentiments coalesce with the previously identified best practices of professors? My contention that is the most important educational practices of theological education must be focused on the intentional and rigorous preparation of ministry students as a serious and intellectually stimulating endeavor, which corresponds with Bain’s best practice number three. Moreover, I submit the most effective theological education professors
will routinely and conscientiously conduct self-assessments of their roles as catalysts for student learning, that is to say, the preparation of ministry leaders, which attends to the proper purposes of their task.

In sum, a rickety impulse of educational practice exists to the degree it promotes the nature of theology more as folk or academic over ministerial theology. In cases where the former sort of theological education subsists, churches have every right to protest: “Forget formal theological education as it is practiced without regard to authentic service to the Church; we will teach candidates for ministry what they need to know.” This motivating concern then continually pushes theological education to be constantly re-engineering their practices where theology education and church practice are in sync.

Conclusion: Recalibrating Educational Philosophy, Psychology, and Practices for Teaching in Theological Education

Theology, to be Christian, is by definition practical. Either it serves the formation of the church or it is trivial and inconsequential.
Stanley Hauerwas & Will Willimon

The theological educators’ three main tools are the biblical message, the theological heritage of the Church, and contemporary culture. And a subset of contemporary culture is empirical research and the critical theory from various academic domains that inform professors of theological education in the most effective habits of their task. For sake of excellence in theological education, an educational philosophy that promotes critical thinking over acquisition of knowledge is required. For the sake of quality in theological education, an educational psychology in which student learning and ministry competency trumps teaching is indispensable. For the sake of rightly prioritized theological education, educational practices that engage in ministerial theology is urgently needed for a Church that will produce effective leaders for mission in the contemporary context.

Although its origins are dubious, Ted Ward37 is famously credited with quipping the provocative aphorism: “Christian education is neither” I suppose a précis of the major argument of this essay could be similarly stated: “Theological education is neither”; it is not “theological” unless it is considers the nature of its mission to be ultimately Ministerial; and it is not “education” unless it takes seriously the learner as focal point of the process.

Acknowledgements

My life has been inexorably entangled with and immensely enriched by formal education uninterrupted for five decades – since I was four. Professors, books, and colleagues have pushed me, sometimes unwillingly, in exploring the world of ideas. I owe much to them for causing to me think new thoughts, have vicarious experiences, and even feel great emotion. Thanks specifically to
John Dewey, Peter Kreeft, Larry Richards, John Stott, and Ted Ward. As a professor of theological education, these and others have shaped my educational philosophy, educational psychology, and educational practice, for which I am extremely grateful. In addition, it is a great pleasure to modestly assist in the mission of theological education in my present European adventure: Belfast Bible College (Northern Ireland), London School of Theology (England), Instituto Biblico Portugues (Portugal), and Evangelische Theologische Faculteit (Belgium). Finally, I am deeply appreciative to the wonderfully insightful, profoundly inquisitive, and multi-talented students it has been my pleasure to encounter in and out of the classroom in the United States, Europe, Asia, and Australia. I am well aware they have taught me much more than I have taught them. A profound debt I owe.

Appendix A: Self-Assessment Categories For Faculty Growth Plans

Following are categories from which faculty members should conduct a self-assessment as a starting place to develop a professional growth plan. These are categories which entail the work of a faculty member: (1) performance as a teacher, (2) scholarly and professional activity, and (3) institutional usefulness, with relevant subcategories of each major division.

I. Performance as a Teacher
   A. Stimulates reflective thinking, an inquisitive attitude, and motivates learning through modeling.
   B. Communicates an enthusiasm for the subject matter and teaching which encourages students.
   C. Exhibits an unusual ability to relate the Christian faith to one’s discipline and the learning process, providing institutional leadership in this regard.
   D. Demonstrates unusual willingness to enhance the learning process beyond traditionally structured classes.

II. Scholarly and Professional Activity and Attainment
   A. Engages in extensive formal training in one’s discipline.
   B. Publishes scholarly works.
   C. Presents papers at professional meetings.
   D. Completes professional consultations and speaking assignments.
   E. Fulfills leadership positions in professional organizations.
   F. Receives special honors or recognition in one’s disciplinary areas.

III. Institutional Usefulness
   A. Serves willingly as chair of committee, department and division when called upon to do so by colleagues and the dean of faculty.
   B. Shows unusual involvement with students outside the normal advising relationship.
C. Contributes to institutional development through the proposal of new programs and procedures.
D. Participates significantly in other institutional activities.
E. Sustains service in the larger community and/or church by completing special assignments.

Footnotes

1 This essay evolves from two addresses given in October and November 2009 at the invitation of the Centre for Theological Education by Dr. Graham Cheesman, held on the campus of Belfast Bible College (Dunmurry, Northern Ireland). Thanks to the participants for their gracious feedback and vigorous engagement.


3 I must confess (and perhaps apologize) from the outset that this is a rather personal essay. I have spent my twenty-five year career as a professor of theological education and many of the statements advanced herein come because of modest failure (and a modicum of success) in thinking and practice.


5 The insightful and provocative writings of Neil Postman are relevant here, most notably in Teaching as a Subversive Activity (Delta, 1971) and The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School (Vintage, 1996).


8 The results of my doctoral dissertation research have served me well in and out of the classroom in this regard, see Mark A. Lamport, “Student-Faculty Informal Interaction and the Effect on College Student Outcomes: A Review of the Literature”, Adolescence, Winter 1993, 971-990; and Mark A. Lamport, “Student-Faculty Informal Interaction and Its Relation to Christian College Settings: Research and Implications”, Research on Christian Higher Education, Fall 1994, 66-78.

9 See Appendix A, a fine tool of self-assessment for professors, which assists in faculty growth plans. This was originally developed under the leadership of Richard F. Gross and R. Judson Carlberg, both academic deans and then presidents of Gordon College (Massachusetts), where I benefitted from this tool for nine years of my career.


13 Some will undoubtedly want to answer this five-pronged question: “yes”, that all five educational philosophies are necessary for theological education. But that response avoids an intentionally-focused educational philosophy which drives practice above all other choices.

14 Jesus asked over one hundred questions (as recorded in the Gospels) not because he did not know the answers!

15 For more on creating a classroom environment and teaching methods conducive to critical thinking, see Stephen Brookfield, Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting, Jossey-Bass, 1999.

16 I would argue more fully that the most effective educational philosophy for theological education, as stated above, is the Development of Cognitive Processes; and the most effective methods to implement this philosophy are Academic Rationalism and Curriculum as Technology; and the most effective motivation for these methods is Personal Relevance”; and the most desirable educational outcome from this educational philosophy is Social Adaptation and Social Reconstruction.

17 And because of the inevitability of the changing nature of culture(s), it is continually surprising to me how the curriculum of theological education is so loaded toward biblical and theological studies in contrast to minimal or nonexistent content in social and cultural analysis, especially of one’s own culture. Why is cultural analysis necessary? In order to better speak, live, and conduct the mission of the gospel into the world. One (confidently) presumes those who are members of a given culture will therefore certainly know their culture. However, it is largely true those in a culture often do not objectively analyze or understand how one is influenced by one’s own culture. While Christians wish to be culture changers, sociologists uniformly report that cultures ultimately make us in their compelling image, including Christian institutions. For one of the freshest insights on this topic, see Andy Crouch, Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling, InterVarsity Press, 2008.


It is supposed that many professors and institutions would agree with these propositions in theory, that learning is the goal, but the plain reality is that in theological education practice – as syllabi are designed, learning objectives are written, and learning activities are conceived – merely transmitting blocks of cognitively-based information composed of various theological subdisciplines is most conspicuous. There is a gap then between what we say we want in theological education and what its structures engender. Or, to use a distinction made by Chris Argyris and Donald Schön in Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974), the difference between our espoused theory and our theory-in-use is distressingly noticeable. An “espoused theory,” is the set of principles people offer to explain their desired behavior; whereas, the principles we can infer from how people or organizations actually behave is their “theory-in-use.” At this moment, and perhaps contrary to many loud protestations, the Instruction Paradigm is theological education’s theory-in-use, while the espoused theories of many more closely resemble the Learning Paradigm.


My designated title is “lecturer” at two of the theological schools I serve in Europe, a title I resist employing and sometimes, where appropriate, clarify my disinclination based on my views of teaching and learning.

It is a remarkable phenomenon to observe the correlation of how prevailing societal customs and educational philosophies in a given region of the world mimic the same stances in theological schools in those same geographic regions. It is not surprising then, and I have observed it first-hand in Africa, Asia, and much of Eastern Europe, that a teacher-dominated, content-centered, student-dependent, pedagogical model is more common than not in theological education; much like the more rigid political environments in these regions. Conversely, in many cases, theological education, at least in theory, in North American and Western Europe...
more often leans toward a more egalitarian-based, learner-focused style; much like the democratic political arenas in these regions.


31 It is a curious anomaly that there is a continual glut of those who desire careers as professors in theological education and simultaneously a continual dearth of those who desire careers in ministry leadership.

32 Somewhat surprising is the degree to which the curriculum for ministerial preparation has not appreciably changed over the course of the last half century, especially in comparison with other professions and realms of knowledge.

33 Yet this characterization is not intended to wantonly besmirch good-hearted but relatively uninformed people who have some degree of faith. On the other hand, this best seems to depict those more likely to be taken in by some theologically naïve or unscrupulous television evangelists.

34 Lay theology is important but is most conveniently nurtured by ministry leaders through the life, nature, and mission of the Church. While Professional theologians rightly continue dialogue with their academically-inclined peers, their first-order calling is to educate and train called and gifted men and women for ministry.

35 Some theological professors seem to harbor an academic recruiting agenda that seeks to convince ministry students that the more prestigious path to take is following their lead into the world of theological education. This may partially account for the “glut” and the “dearth” opined in footnote 30. On the other hand, my much more common observation is the passion and heart theological education professors have for those who are called to serve to church-based and parachurch ministries. Indeed, some of the finest, most godly men and women I have ever had the privilege to know have been my colleagues (and role models and friends!) in theological education.


37 My Ph.D. advisor and mentor to a generation of theological educations, who unambiguously modeled the integration of education and theology spending his career first in the School of Education at Michigan State University and then in the department of Christian Education at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Illinois.)