

Alternative models of Curriculum Design

The curriculum will depend on our TARGET GROUP, their NEEDS, and our PROGRAM OBJECTIVES. Think of the curriculum as a pie that can be cut in many different ways.

Here are some types of curricula you could develop:

1. A traditional western curriculum

Hundreds of Bible schools and TEE programs use this type of curriculum. You can readily think of some of the subjects that commonly fit into each section.

- Bible courses
- Discipleship courses
- Theology courses (including ethics),
- Church history courses
- Practical ministry courses

2. A contextual thematic curriculum

This innovative approach to meeting needs and learning outcomes creates subjects that are often quite different than those in a traditional curriculum. It is a strongly contextual approach, which builds the curriculum around a group of important themes in the society where the college is located. A lot of topics from traditional curricula are covered but they may be organised in new and different ways. And a lot of material that does not appear in a traditional curriculum is also included. Themes may be identified and developed in many different ways. There might also be an internship year or semester.

(E.g. One college which has used a thematic curriculum a bit like this is the United Church Rarongo Theological College, Papua New Guinea.)

Here is an example of a formal 3-year course using a contextual thematic curriculum.

Abbreviated example of a contextual thematic curriculum:

YEAR 1 - INTRODUCTORY YEAR

- PREPARATION FOR STUDIES: Introduction to theology and theological education; English for Academic Purposes; Study and Research Methods;
- PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY: Developing a strong personal devotional life.
- Principles of Christian Living in our country and culture; building a strong Christian family.
- INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW COURSES: E.g. Overview of the Bible; Overview of Key Christian Doctrines;

YEAR 2 - CHRISTIANS AND THE CHURCH

- FOUNDATIONS: Ecclesiology (=Theology of the Church and study of Bible passages related to the Church); Theology of mission and the missionary calling of the Church; Theology and practice of worship; Music in the church; History of the World Church; History of the Church in our country; Different denominations in our country - their particular teachings and practices; Study of the students' own denomination/s;
- THE BIBLE IN THE CHURCH: How to study and interpret the Bible; Bible History, Further study of Biblical content.
- PRACTICAL MINISTRY: For those training to be pastors OR for church members.

YEAR 3 – CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP IN OUR CULTURAL CONTEXT

- RELATING CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY TO OUR PEOPLE AND CULTURE: (These topics will be studied with constant reference to the Scriptures.) Theological and biblical topics which are important in our social and cultural context.
- IMPORTANT NOTE: In many contexts this should look somewhat different from a Western course in Theology. Celebrating and affirming our culture, while also evaluating it from a Biblical perspective
- EVANGELISING our people – what is the best way to explain the Christian faith in our culture?
- COMBATTING SYNCRETISM in our churches
- RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP:

3. A contextual spiral curriculum

A spiral curriculum is one which begins with a broad overview of all the most important Christian teachings, and then gradually develops each one more fully every year. So students study in the same areas each year, but keep reviewing and building on what they have learned before. A good spiral curriculum should also be contextual, like the contextual Thematic curriculum.

Note that there are various ways to develop a spiral curriculum. The following example is one of the easier ways to do so.

Abbreviated example of a contextual spiral curriculum:

YEAR 1: Introductory Studies (Some topics are similar to those in the first year of the Contextual Thematic Curriculum);

- PREPARATION FOR STUDIES: Introduction to theology and theological education; English for Academic Purposes; Study and Research Methods;
- PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY: Developing a strong personal devotional life; Christian family life
- INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW COURSES:

YEAR 2: Digging Deeper

YEAR 3: Developing some Areas in More Depth

4. A case study curriculum

This type of curriculum is sometimes used in teaching Medicine, Business and Law. It can also be used to train pastors and Christian leaders. It is a highly contextualised and practical approach, and can produce excellent results if done well, but it requires a lot of work to develop. It normally needs some general overview subjects as well as the Case Studies.

A Case Study approach teaches most of the important topics in the curriculum by developing true or true-to-life case studies of practical situations that can arise in ministry.

Although it is fairly difficult to build a full curriculum in this way, it is easier to teach only certain subjects with case studies. Ethics, for instance, lends itself well to this approach.

5. A modular curriculum

(E.g. the Conservative Baptist TEE program in Honduras). Brief courses produced as the need arises. Built around.

6. A CONTRACTUAL CURRICULUM (E.g. the program used at one time in a Lutheran seminary in East Asia)

7. AN 'ONION' CURRICULUM WITH VARIOUS LAYERS

(E.g. a curriculum developed some years ago at the Christian Leaders' Training College in Papua New Guinea, though implemented due to staff changes.)

Major theme areas for students not training for ordination:

Much biblical and theological teaching is built into each area.

Each individual subject would have both cognitive content and practical aspects.

- Personal Devotional Life
- Christian Family Life
- Church Life
- Christian Life in the Workplace
- The Christian in the Local Community
- The Christian as a Citizen of his/her Nation
- Evaluating and Enjoying our Culture in a Christian Framework
- Becoming a "World Christian"

8. A multi-dimensional, holistic curriculum

(E.g. Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, Beirut)

"A holistic approach to theological education seeks a healthy balance between the affective, behavioural, and cognitive dimensions of learning."

Most curriculum design considers all three domains, but ABTS stresses the balance and seeks to move away from the heavy emphasis on the cognitive, at the expense of other domains. Why is transfer from theory to practice so difficult?

Suggestions to develop a more balanced curriculum

Some of Perry Shaw's Suggestions (Adapted from article "Multi-dimensional Learning in Ministerial Training". (Publication details N/A)

- Mentoring
- Accountability Groups
- Journaling
- Require a practical component in every course; integrate theory and practice;
- Provide more electives and contracts where possible [open elements in the curriculum]
- Recognise valid learning experiences in real life ministry
- De-emphasise grades; not necessary in every course.
- Develop an integrated curriculum from your Statement of Purpose
- Challenge students to live in obedience to the theology they study
- Respond to different learning styles
- Involve students in the development of the curriculum, course content and/or assignments.
- Train tutors in creative ways to conduct group sessions
- Develop cooperative assignments
- Use student enquiry teams to research key issues and present these to the class
- Develop self-assessment strategies to encourage students to be honest with themselves, and connect theory and practice in the service of their own Christian growth.
- Use learning contracts
- Give rationale for assignments. Adults hate busy work and hurdle-jumping