

EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY

VOLUME 15 P. 1

Volume 15 • Number 1 • January 1991

Evangelical Review of Theology

*Articles and book reviews original and selected from
publications worldwide for an international
readership for the purpose of discerning the
obedience of faith*



Published by
THE PATERNOSTER PRESS

Issues in Evaluating Theological Education by Extension

Patricia J. Harrison

Reprinted with permission from Ministerial Formation, October 1990

The author, a pioneer in TEE, writes from wide experience in Distance Education in the Pacific area and in other regions of the developing world. She gives a very clear and comprehensive summary of that area of Distance Education that seeks to combine home study (with adequate materials), practical field experience in the church and in the community and regular seminars for interaction between tutors and students. She discusses the difference between formative and summative evaluation, and qualitative and quantitative factors in evaluation. The author raises issues concerning degrees of success in the transfer of learning to life and in involving the whole church in continuing education. For pastors and theological educators, this is a helpful and an insightful article.

DEFINITION OF TEE

It has long been my practice to define narrowly rather than broadly what I mean by Theological Education by Extension. We already have a considerable stock of general cover terms in the area of Distance Education; it is thus more helpful to add precise terms to our working vocabulary rather than more general ones. This is not to devalue other forms of Distance Education or the right of others to define TEE differently.

I use TEE to indicate that type of distance theological education which combines home study materials and practical ministry experience with regular seminars in which tutors and students can interact. In TEE proper, the weight of the cognitive input is carried by the home study materials; it is not given in lectures. The seminars provide opportunity for interaction and for learning experiences which cannot readily be obtained through home study, e.g. drama, videos, group study and discussion. The three strands of TEE—home study, seminar learning and practical ministry—should be integrated as far as possible. p. 85

The present discussion considers only TEE programmes of serious intent, whether focussed on lay or ministerial formation.

DIFFICULTIES IN EVALUATION

Since I have turned over my role as a tutor in the Australian Anglican programme known as New England TEE to local tutors, I no longer have in-depth contact with that programme. So I must evaluate it according to the best information I have been able to obtain. This was difficult since the programme director moved to another position several weeks ago and I have been unable to contact him.

As a theological college teacher who works part-time as a consultant and seminar leader in ministerial formation in many parts of the world, I have helped initiate or further develop a number of TEE programmes, so it is easier for me to discern broad needs and trends than to analyze one particular programme. Consequently, I have used this opportunity to think and work through various approaches to the evaluation of TEE and some of the questions one might ask in such an evaluation. I have based this material on general practical usage in my own work, and have in some cases, given examples from programmes in the Pacific region.

Only a few formal programme evaluations of TEE appear to have been attempted. One, done for the Anglican General Board of Religious Education in Australia, assessed their imported Education for Ministry programme, a lay training course based on one from the University of the South (USA). This evaluation was undertaken by Archdeacon Ray Smith, former director of a separate Anglican programme, as part of an M.A. thesis.

TEE is not always easy to evaluate, since it varies enormously from place to place in goals, methods and ethos—more so than institutional theological education. This is as it should be, and reflects the flexibility which is a special strength of extension education.

SOME POSSIBLE APPROACHES TO EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION TODAY

There is a vast literature on educational evaluation. So one must be quite selective. It is useful first to mention that TEE needs both *formative* and *summative* evaluation. It should consider courses and programmes as they develop (formative evaluation) and assess their strengths and weaknesses on completion of certain phases (summative evaluation); e.g. evaluating a new TEE workbook after it has been **P.86** written and given a basic trial. These two forms of evaluation will often overlap.

Values are at the core of any evaluation, and some subjectivity is therefore inevitable. One may, for example opt for a basically *quantitative* approach, such as is popular in much educational research today and in sociology. This assumes that much which is important in education can be quantified. Many accreditation bodies make substantial quantitative evaluations—how many books are in the library?—How many teachers hold a Ph.D?—and so on. Counting—and probably even some of the complexities of educational statistics—may be easier than undertaking the *qualitative* evaluation, preferred in more avant-garde educational circles and journals (e.g. *discourse*, from the Department of Education, University of Queensland, Australia). I believe there is a place for both qualitative and quantitative research and evaluation, but lean towards the former, despite its difficulty.

Approaches taken to educational evaluation have often included the following:

- (a) 'Greenwich' Evaluation (my term);
- (b) Evaluation by experts;
- (c) Evaluation by objectives;
- (d) Responsive, or values-sensitive evaluation (often done informally, but recently recognized as a type of evaluation).

(a) '*Greenwich*' Evaluation is the attempt to set up external standards, just as, in Greenwich, standards are set for world time and for British weights and measures. Robert Ferris alludes to 'accreditation by the metre' in his booklet 'Accrediting TEE' (Asian Perspectives 34, A.T.A., Taiwan) with reference to the platinum—iridium metre rod kept in France until 1960 to define the length of a metre. (This length is now redefined in terms of wave-lengths from the light of the isotope krypton-86.) Greenwich-type evaluation certainly has its value, but it would be dangerous to assume that everything which is

important in TEE can be weighed, measured or counted. Such a materialist approach would do violence to the essence of theological education.

(b) *Evaluation by experts* is often favoured in theological education, and may be allied to Greenwich approaches. The idea is to call in the experts to examine our teaching, our course books, our curriculum—or, by external examination, our students.

This again is very useful, but is not the whole answer. ‘Those who p. 87 assume all experts agree have encountered very few experts.’ And all too often, experts allow little room for innovation.

(c) *Evaluation by objectives* has been a widely-used and valuable technique in TEE. The need to spell out clear goals and a programme can then be assessed in terms of what it is actually trying to achieve—indeed it can scarcely be assessed any other way! But there is more to evaluation—how, for example, is the set of objectives itself to be evaluated?

Objectives have been important in the preparation of TEE materials, dating from the time when programmed instruction was their primary instructional medium (in the sixties and early seventies). Without clear and specific objectives it is virtually impossible to programme instruction. From the outset, however, these trainers of course designers shared with others certain misgivings about too rigid or mechanical a use of objectives, valuable though they have proved to be. Other means of evaluation were needed and added, often informally.

(d) *Responsive, or Values-Sensitive Evaluation* Much attention in recent years has focused on this more ‘global’ form of educational evaluation in which emphasis on objectives has moved to emphasis on how well a programme responds to the values of those who participate in it, and to the context. Capacities and outcomes including unintended outcomes are noted.

Ferris cites three distinguishing factors in this approach: (1) Responsive evaluation is aimed at programme improvement rather than at conformity to external expectations; (2) it is done by insiders rather than outsiders, and it stresses values; (3) this means the values of ‘stakeholders’ in the programme are allowed to give it shape. Human concerns are at the core of this type of evaluation.

I would recommend a mix of the above approaches as fits a given situation, but with some emphasis on responsive evaluation. The approaches are not mutually exclusive. Objectives are still useful, and some external ‘standards’ may be necessary for accreditation purposes. Experts have a useful role to play, but this must not exclude the role of the ‘stakeholders’.

WHAT DO WE EVALUATE IN TEE?

Traditionally, students were assessed. Little other educational evaluation was often undertaken. Today, in TEE, we may well wish also to P.88 evaluate an overall programme, tutors, materials, administration, financial management, venues, curriculum, seminars and so on. I shall confine my comments to non-administrative areas—the areas which primarily impact the educational process and the resultant lives and ministries of students (though all aspects of a programme ultimately influence these areas, of course).

The remainder of this paper will suggest questions which it may be useful to ask with reference to various aspects of a TEE programme. These questions combine several of the approaches to evaluation noted above, and include evaluation of various aspects of the programme. They represent only a few of the many questions which could be asked, and not all will be relevant to all programmes. This list is suggestive, not exhaustive. In some

instances, I have recorded my own answers to a question with reference to programmes in the South Pacific with which I am acquainted.

In the same way, general quantitative questions evaluating various aspects of theological education are available in any accreditation manual and a number are applicable to TEE. There is no point in repeating such questions (about size of library, student/faculty ratios, faculty qualifications and soon) in this paper. The questions I have asked will inevitably betray my own value system in education, but this is inevitable.

Structural Aspects of the TEE Programme (as these relate directly to the education given)

1. Does the TEE programme have clearly-stated overall goals?
2. Is the programme geared to a well-defined target group (or more than one such group)? New England TEE (Australia) aims at developing Christian knowledge for living and service among lay Anglicans (and others), mainly in rural areas. It operates at 2 academic levels, ordinary and advanced, but both of these are of high school level, which is about right for the majority of participants.
3. Is the programme denominational? If so, what steps are being taken to incorporate a degree of ecumenicity and to broaden perspectives and prevent parochialism? NE-TEE welcomes participants from other denominations but has done little else actively to promote ecumenicity.
4. Do the structures of the programme reinforce and communicate the same value system as is overtly taught? That is, does the para-message of the administrative structures agree with the message of materials and classroom?

For example: If we believe in and teach mutual (rather than solely p. 89 clerical) ministry, do we model this? If we encourage the priesthood of all believers and the use of various gifts, do we give students the chance to participate in all levels of planning? Do we identify, acknowledge and use their gifts? If we teach a preferential option for the poor, are they catered for and present in our programme? Is it genuinely accessible to the poor? If we teach equality of races and the sexes, does our staffing and student intake reflect this? If we teach a servant orientation (rather than an authoritarian approach to leadership) and humility in service, do we model this? In some countries, churches and/or theological training programmes may be the only model students ever see of non-authoritarian, humble, servant leadership and of participation in decision-making.

5. How does our programme relate to local churches? While cooperation is most desirable, too close an identification is not always desirable. Some people are 'over-churched' at the local level, and have narrow tunnel-vision as a result. TEE needs to help them expand their horizons. It may also need to help the church constructively to criticize itself.
6. How much community input is there in our TEE programme? Are we listening to the fears, hopes, struggles and needs of those we seek to serve? How? (It is not enough to consider the *church* only). Most programmes I know do not very consciously acquire community input.

Biblical/Theological Considerations

1. Does the programme provide ample biblical and theological material at an appropriate depth for its target group(s)? NE-TEE provides this at a very basic level, but probably not at sufficient depth to provide much challenge, CLCTC-TEE (New Guinea) provides somewhat greater depth, and Education for Ministry (Australia) somewhat more again than either.
2. Is material provided in a form which will facilitate the *doing* of theology in interaction with real-life situations in the student's contexts? This occurs in NE-TEE and CLCTC-TEE,

at this stage, only as the material relates to personal spiritual life or to church ministries, generally speaking; not at a communal level.

3. Does the theological stance generally reflect that of the sponsoring churches, but with ample room for ecumenical understanding, prophetic challenge and creative new insights? Does it stand in reasonably close relation to the *consensus fidei* today and through history and avoid eccentric or cultic interpretations or doctrines? p. 90

4. Is academic integrity maintained, with respect to hermeneutics, exegesis and scholarly work?

5. Is indoctrination avoided? Where Christians sincerely differ, are students given opportunity to hear some views other than those of the course sponsors, and to hear these presented with integrity? This is particularly important with regard to students who have little general education, or who are isolated from other Christians and access to wider sources of information.

General Educational Considerations

1. How far does the TEE programme meet its own overall goals?

2. What happens to graduates five or ten years later? Does this represent in general a desired outcome?

3. What kind of comments and testimonies do graduating students give? How do they perceive and evaluate the programme?

4. What ongoing plans for formative and summative evaluation are in place? How will future improvements be made in response to the finding?

5. What role do 'stakeholders' have in determining the future shape of the programme?

6. Does the programme consciously utilize the best available insights of modern adult education, including research in the areas of moral development and (if relevant) cross-cultural education? Are these insights adapted to local learning styles as needed?

7. Are there various strands of training to cater for different needs, living styles, backgrounds, etc.?

8. Has the curriculum been designed with an understanding of curriculum theory? As an integrated whole rather than as a 'smorgasbord'; offering ample choice to cater for different needs? Does this integration preserve the integrity of *theologia* (cf. Edward Farley), yet avoid an ivory tower elitism divorced from life? Are there ample 'open elements' (choices and flexibility) in the curriculum?

9. If the poor and less educated are catered for in the programme, is that programme educationally suited to their needs? Is it understood that excellence in ministerial formation can be pursued at any academic level (not just at the highest level)? At CLTC New Guinea, the Pidgin TEE will pursue this goal. Nungalinya College has developed an excellent, well-contextualized programme for Australian Aborigines.)

10. Is this programme basically liberating—or domesticating?

11. Is there an emphasis on lifelong learning and on learning how to p. 91 continue learning? Does the programme provide ongoing assistance for its graduates?

12. Are all three elements of TEE presented and well integrated—home study, classes and real-life ministry in church and community?

13. Are spiritual, practical and academic aspects all stressed and integrated, without any suggestions that to stress one means neglecting the others? Most TEE programmes I visit are weak in the practical area which should be their strength, and/or very weak in integrating practical ministry with home and class learnings.

14. Is a problem-posing approach used in preference to 'banking education' models (cf. Paulo Freire)?

15. Is the extension programme (and, if applicable, its sponsoring college) genuinely a part of and engaged in the communities where it operates? Are students working and serving in ministries which move beyond the church itself? (China's 'open-door' policy in education calls for two-way learning and interaction between schools and community).

16. Does the programme explicitly work for transfer: from what is learned in study and discussion to life; from life to doing theology, from generalizations to specific applications; from specific cases to analogous cases; from the trade language of the TEE course to vernacular (where applicable)? Relatively few programmes work for transfer as much as they need to. Most just assume it will happen—research indicates this is unlikely to any great degree. In part the problem lies in approaches which always begin with theory and then try vaguely to 'apply it', or to semi-magical views of what 'Bible knowledge' will achieve.

Home Study Materials: Technical Aspects

1. Has the sponsoring body realised that TEE does not equal programmed instruction materials (PIM)? That is, that PIM are no longer considered an essential component of TEE and are in fact seriously questioned in certain kinds of training? Well-written PIM still have a place, but after teaching scores of TEE personnel to write it, this trainer is convinced that only a few will do it well enough to make it worthwhile. She now teaches other methods most of the time. Some TEE is still back in the early seventies where PIM was considered obligatory.

2. Has a variety of potential home study materials been considered—e.g. workbooks, cassettes, and study guides, or in cities where high technology is readily available, videos, computer-assisted instruction p. 92 (CAI) and the like? Has a choice been made which best fits needs and budget?

3. If cassettes are used, is there an adequate back-up system for repairs, battery provision, and so on, if necessary?

4. If books are used, are they adequately bound, especially if intended for village or inner-urban usage? Do they open flat for writing?

5. Are print style and size in workbooks appropriate to the educational level of the students? Do these factors allow for areas where a majority of people over 40 have poor eyesight?

6. Is the paper used obtainable at an affordable price, yet strong enough to last?

7. Do printed materials contain a good amount of visual variety, achieved through appropriate and educative use of illustrations, diagrams, maps, charts, different type styles and the like? The more basic the educational level, the more essential it becomes to break up pages of unrelieved print. Are my pictures culturally understandable? NE-TEE has made fair use of illustrations, but needs to be careful to avoid figures which some see as reminiscent of children's Sunday School books. CLTC-TEE has some excellent photographs in the small booklets which students can use to re-teach the courses in local New Guinean churches, but the courses themselves have too few 'print breaks' for their intended level.

8. Are home study lessons set out in the most 'user-friendly' way possible?

9. Do the home study materials carry the weight of the teaching? They should not simply consist of 'homework'.

10. Do they actually teach?

11. Do lessons have objectives, and are they developed in logical and interesting ways?

12. Has a readability test been applied? This is standard procedure in some programmes. Readability involves a good matching of readers and materials, and includes gearing material to the appropriate reading grade level and to cultural and language background.

13. Does the material maintain human interest? A human interest formula may be used as a rough guide.

14. Do assignments require thought and application, not just repetition of the facts of 'right' answers? Do they often take students into the community as well as 'into the library'? (Many programmes confine most assignments to book work, and often to the use of the Bible and—for practical reasons—one textbook. Ways need to be found around this). p. 93

THE T.E.E. SEMINARS

1. Are these held weekly or fortnightly so far as possible? Experience in NE-TEE indicated that seminars each month are about as infrequent as one can schedule them without losing group cohesion. Less frequent seminars required more time per session. We generally held monthly 'major seminars' in distant centres and encouraged students to meet together themselves more often for 'minor seminars' with materials we had prepared for them. This worked well.

2. Does a visiting tutor take time to get to know her students in their own environment—visiting or staying in homes, taking extra time to build relationships etc.? This proved a valuable part of my work in NE-TEE in rural Australia. I am also convinced that in societies where primary relationships are crucial, the success of TEE will depend much more on the relationships developed than on the content of the materials.

3. Are seminars real times of interaction, not lectures? Tutors must be well trained for this—I have observed many tutors around the world who either lecture, or woodenly go through workbooks giving the 'right' answers during seminars.

4. Do the seminars include more than just discussion, yet always retain it as a component? Do they utilize varied and appropriate methods of learning such as drama, excursions, case studies, simulation games, audio-visuals and study groups?

Pastoral and Ministerial Factors (In addition to those already covered in previous sections)

1. Does the student participate in a well-organized and integrative Field Education programme which consciously utilizes the best modern insights in this area, as part of the TEE programme? This is particularly vital for ordination candidates, but is important for effective lay ministry as well. In TEE, artificially contrived 'field work' should not often be required: training can be built around real ministry situations. However, many students will benefit from new kinds of ministry experience, within and outside the church. Most South Pacific TEE programmes—and many others I know—lack this dimension almost entirely, although many students are involved in ministry and discuss this in seminary, there is no conscious integration, and a great opportunity is lost.

2. Is there an adequate system of advising (sometimes called supervision) available for pastoral and other field ministry? p. 94

3. What proportion of student ministries are inward-looking (serving church members) and outward-looking (evangelism, community work, etc.) respectively? Few programmes I have seen maintain a good balance. Most concentrate on serving the Church as such.

4. Has someone surveyed actual church and community needs and examined what people need to be able to do and be in various ministries, so that practical work and class study can be built around these needs?

Contextual/Global Factors

1. Are these two dimensions well balanced in the programme?

2. Is there a strong, continuing concern to relate the whole programme to:

- the cultural milieu;
- the religious milieu;
- the socio-economic environment;
- the political-economic environment;
- the political history and present situation;
- geographic and historical realities?

3. Is contextualization related to:

- structure of programme;
- content of curriculum;
- methods of learning?

4. Are the limits of contextualization defined so that:

- a. parochialism may not result and a broad world view develop: and
- b. the integrity of the gospel message may be maintained? (Some cultures are racist, sexist, elitist or authoritarian.)

Patricia J. Harrison formerly Secretary of Theological Education for the WEF Theological Commission, lives in Australia where she lectures in several colleges. This article was a paper given at the Latin America Theological Seminary in Costa Rica at a consultation sponsored by the PTE of the WCC on the Evaluation of Extension Programmes. **p. 95**

Coming Issues

(Subject to change)

The Holy Spirit, Creation and the New Creation—April 1991

Symbols and Realities: Towards a Theology of Communication—July 1991

Women in Church and Mission—October 1991

Christ and Cosmic Warfare—January 1992

The Gospel in a Multi-Faith Society—April 1992

The Church: God's Agent for Peace and Justice—July 1992

God and the World: History and Myth—October 1992

The Editor invites readers to suggest themes, articles and book review for these issues.

Journal and Book Information

Christianity and Other Faiths