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# Developing and Disseminating a Life-Changing Curriculum

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We gathered under one of the Ifugao homes for our bi-weekly evangelistic Bible studies from the book of Genesis. After the lesson, Daniel commented: 'If our ancestors had known how to write, our stories (myths) would probably be very similar to those you are telling us. But because they could not write, the stories changed over the years and we no longer know what it true.'

Visitors frequently attended the sessions for evangelism and Bible study, often requesting study materials to take home. The same request came from Ifugao living in close proximity. (Many Ifugao feel that written materials lend legitimacy to the spoken word.) Although we had produced a number of lessons, they really required further testing. In fact, we desperately needed an overall strategy to facilitate the development and dissemination of our materials.

At the same time, we asked ourselves a number of questions: How does one involve the target people in the curriculum process? What layouts should be used? How should the publications be distributed? How do curriculum developers know the lessons are accomplishing the stated goals? Can the lessons be designed to facilitate phase-out? I will now set forth fourteen guidelines that emerged from my efforts to develop and distribute both written and taped curriculum among the Antipolo/Amduntug Ifugao.

## DEVELOPING LIFE-CHANGING CURRICULA

Since Christianity is a way of life, the curriculum should address all areas of life. For our purposes here I define curriculum as including all written or taped materials (videos and cassettes) that are developed to encourage people to experience God—that is, to grow in their love for him, themselves, others and for his creation.

How the curriculum is produced and disseminated will impact the [p. 274](#) team's goal of phase-out in several significant ways. First, it helps to preserve the message of the gospel and other fundamental teachings. It also helps to develop astute national teachers who can discover the meaning of a passage and know to apply it. Third, it encourages ongoing evangelism and church planting. Finally, it can also play a major role in enabling national leaders to look to the Word and the Holy Spirit as their authority, rather than to the church planters.

### Its Focus is on the Whole of God's Word

Just as a good picture frame enhances a painting, so a life-changing curriculum should elevate and intensify the entire Word of God. Such a curriculum leads its readers to and through the Bible to find the answers to life's suggestions.

A curriculum that suggests finding answers within its own text, or from expatriate authorities, rather than from God's Word, fails to give credence to the authority of Scripture. It also fails to encourage the spiritual development of national believers, and limits (or inhibits) the disengagement of expatriates. On the other hand, a curriculum that

has been well designed will challenge both readers and listeners by focusing their attention on the source of all wisdom.

Prior to his ascension, Jesus reminded his followers to 'obey everything I have commanded you' ([Mt. 28:20](#), NIV). Paul, in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, declared: 'I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God' ([Acts 20:27](#), NIV). Thus, both Paul and Jesus emphasized the importance of studying all of Scripture. Wise Christian workers will do likewise by teaching the 'whole will of God', which in turn will facilitate the development of curricula with the same emphasis.

### **It is Appropriate to Specific People Groups**

No one single Bible curriculum can address significantly all people groups of the world. Cognitive learning styles differ, to say nothing of all the different political and religious backgrounds, felt needs, and even successive generations within a people group. Beyond that, the materials that aid in the spiritual development of the Christian workers will most likely not have the same impact upon the target people. Every people group, therefore, requires and deserves its own curriculum.

Western curriculum developers who write cross-cultural materials tend to receive two major criticisms: 1) the content is too heavy, and/or 2) it lacks cultural relevancy. Use of western lessons, tapes and textbooks with verbatim translations into the specified language is one reason given for such criticisms. Although this approach may save time initially, in the long run the recipients suffer.

Ward suggests six levels of complexity when adapting a curriculum from one people group to another. These included:

Level 1: Translation (language).

Level 2: Adjusting the vocabulary (to match the reading level of the adapted material match the original). [p. 275](#)

Level 3: Changing the illustrations to refer to local experiences.

Level 4: Restructuring the instructional procedures implied and/or specified to accommodate pedagogical expectations of the learners.

Level 5: Recasting the content to reflect local world and life views.

Level 6: Accommodating the learning styles ('cognitive styles') of the learners.

Curriculum developers who desire to produce life-changing materials should: 1) maintain a learner role themselves, and 2) include nationals in the developing process from the beginning. This attitudinal and participatory approach will make it much easier to design culturally relevant materials (e.g., calendars, a soccer rule book, a daily newspaper, maps, an accounting book, baptismal certificates, Bible studies). This two-dimensional approach will also contribute to ownership by the nationals and help to develop indigenous writers to replace the team members or work in partnership with them.

To change lives, a curriculum must touch lives. People respond to a curriculum that relates to current experience. Sadly, most imported curricula fail to do this because they were prepared with another audience in mind.

To be life changing, the curriculum should be geared to the needs and learning styles of a specific people. It must wed theology to life and life to theology. It must tie content to context and focus on an in-culture theology rather than an unknown theology of a culture strange to them. It must utilize the familiar learning styles of the people rather than those of team members. Readers and listeners of the curriculum should begin to feel that God walks in their garden and lives among them. An effective curriculum calls for adapting, not reprinting.

### **It Challenges Individual People Groups**

Because the Bible calls for transformed behaviour individually and corporately, the curriculum must do likewise. In fact, it should challenge the status quo by urging that God's way be followed in every area of life.

### **It Derives From Tested Teaching**

Published materials that result from time-tested teaching will have taken into account the issues that surface during the preparation of the materials. Cultural, theological, sequential, and applicational weaknesses that inevitably surface over a period of time can be eliminated or altered. Moreover, it allows time for revising so that a finely honed, targeted curriculum results. For instance, after a lesson about the Flood, an Ifugao observed that perhaps a more effective way to evangelize would be to begin with the flood (since that is where Ifugao history begins) and then ask them about their origin. When the Ifugao respond that they do not know, present the genealogy from Noah to Adam. (Genealogy demonstrates validity for the Ifugao.) His suggestion now finds itself in print. To be life-changing, the curriculum should be based on extensive input from [p. 276](#) both listeners and teachers, for no one knows the needs of a people better than those who participate in its daily activities.

### **It Retains a Narrow Focus Yet Broad Application**

Bulky libraries have little place among the majority of the world's peoples. As someone has stated: 'The church on the march needs a compact theology.' The same holds true for a church's curriculum. Curriculum developers must become skilled in the fine art of omission.

Life-changing curricula should be narrow in scope yet broad in application. A narrow focus is intended to assure that basic truths can be reproduced readily by its listeners and readers. Consider, for example, the two basic commandments that tie the entire Bible together: 1) Love God with all one's heart and 2) love others as oneself ([Mt. 23:37-38](#)). These two basic themes definitely narrow the focus of the Bible, yet make its root message easy to grasp in any community.

On the other hand, by incorporating a narrow focus, a wide range of application is possible. Just how one loves God, one's neighbour, and others, will differ greatly from one people group to another. Narrowness in content and breadth in application allow for quick grasp of the heart of the message and cultural specific application.

### **It Integrates All Aspects of Life**

Since many people view life holistically, it is imperative that a prepared curriculum does the same, particularly if it is to achieve maximum impact. Subject matter of the spirit world, health, agriculture, economics, politics, history, theology, should be interwoven all through the curriculum lest the areas neglected cause the readers and listeners to look to other sources to fill the voids. Insiders usually know far better than outsiders what should be included. Therefore, they should be included in the decision-making process from the very beginning. The problem of syncretism can be minimized by integrating all aspects of life into the curriculum.

### **It is Graded**

Many curriculum developers include every detail possible in a lesson rather than limiting the inclusions to that which an audience can assimilate readily at one sitting. Jesus recognized the problem of overload when he commented: 'I have much more to say to

you, more than you can now bear' ([Jn. 16:12](#), NIV). The writer of Hebrews did the same when he differentiated between the type of instruction required for the immature and the mature ([Heb. 5:11-14](#)).

A key word in Jesus' statement in [John 16:12](#) is 'now'. His audience required 'much more' instruction, *but* at a later time. The same was true for some of the Hebrews. This illustrates the need to design the materials in spiral fashion so that the readers progress from the simple to the more complex. In other words, a life-changing curriculum begins with an audience's ability to assimilate, and builds upon it. This approach not only facilitates learning for the mature, but it also enable more effective communication of the [p. 277](#) materials to those having less understanding.

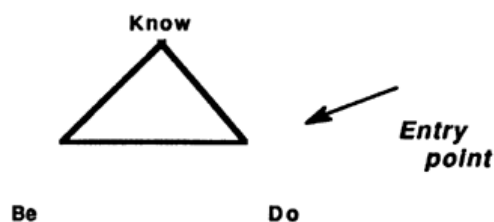


Figure 1. The interrelationship of knowing, being and doing.

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### It Builds Solid Relationships

Many people groups prefer group activities. Life-changing curricula apply this value by specifying in the application sections that groups of people teach, study, and apply the materials together, rather than singling out individuals to take such risks alone. Curricula that encourage team teaching should result in the development of teams of teachers since the responsibility for a lesson is shared by several people.

On an individual lesson level, group studies should be designed to encourage group action. As participants complete a lesson they should be challenged to apply its meaning collectively. Applications questions should promote group discussion and require group action. For example, 'How can we help Mary while she is recuperating?' 'What should the Tayaban family do?' Life-changing curricula build community by bringing people together to teach, study, discuss, and make application. Relationships between God and his people are strengthened, and the development of indigenous teachers increases.

### It Calls for Immediate Action

The team's education background, influenced heavily by the Enlightenment, tends to result in an overemphasis on cognitive knowledge. This explains perhaps their desire for facts, and why they tend to require the same from cross-cultural audiences. This problem becomes acutely apparent when ministry is conducted among people who usually learn through active participation rather than from internalizing isolated facts.

Determining how learning takes place among a particular people group, whether by an emphasis on knowing, doing, or being, is a key factor in curriculum development strategy. Although each of these three influences the others, different people groups tend to prefer one over the others. The curriculum should reflect this reality. For instance, because the Ifugao prefer to learn by doing, reflective action became central in the design. It also provided tangible benchmarks by which to measure the stated objectives. Figure 1 depicts the inter-relatedness [p. 278](#) of the three aspects and identifies the appropriate entry point for people who learn customarily through active involvement.

It is interesting to note the emphasis on 'doing' in both Old and New Testaments: 'give thanks', 'sing', 'remember', 'say', 'sell what you have', 'give', 'come and see', 'go and tell',

‘watch’, ‘love one another’, ‘pray’, ‘preach’, ‘come down’, ‘follow me’, ‘turn the other cheek’, ‘sin no more’, ‘encourage one another’, ‘forgive’, ‘praise the Lord’. Just as Christianity calls for putting one’s faith into action, so a life-changing curriculum goes beyond ‘mind-training’ to emphasize immediate, doable tasks. It goes beyond asking, ‘Who are you, Lord?’, to ask, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’ ([Acts 22:8](#); [10](#), NIV). Christian maturity is produced most readily by practising one’s faith.

### **It Builds Hermeneutic Skills**

Basic hermeneutic skills are necessary to understand God’s Word accurately. To accomplish this, some suggest courses in hermeneutics. But there may be an easier and more natural way to execute this, at least initially.

How Christian workers design a Bible study curriculum is at least as important as the content of the lessons. Use of the same format for each lesson, and each series, helps readers and listeners to learn intuitively how to study the Bible. Continual repetition of the same forms will cement basic hermeneutic principles into the reader’s and listener’s minds. For example, if those designing a commentary on Philippians include background information about the author, its intended audience and the setting, such inclusions indicate to the readers the importance that background information plays in grasping the author’s central message.

Lesson design also underscores hermeneutic principles. For example, the lesson may ask for a passage of Scripture to be read and for prayer that the Holy Spirit will help their understanding. The exercise points to the primacy of the Word, and its Author. This could be followed by a short series of culturally relevant questions (when culturally appropriate) to encourage audience discussion of the main thrust of the passage. Such questions will cause participants to think through the passage to discover the writer’s intent.

Transformed behaviour, of course, is the final goal of the hermeneutical exercise. A number of pertinent questions to conclude the lesson could bring discussion on how the meaning of the passage could be applied immediately to family members, peers, and others.

Curriculum developers should be concerned particularly with whether the study format presents a simple, reproducible, life-changing, yet comprehensive approach to the study of Scripture. If it does, the lessons will teach basic hermeneutic skills implicitly, assist nationals in analyzing and applying the Scriptures (transformed behaviour), and expedite the phase-out process.

In relation to Bible studies, curriculum developers should be particularly concerned with whether the study format presents a simple, reproducible, life-changing, yet comprehensive [p. 279](#) way of studying Scripture. If it does, the lessons will teach implicitly basic hermeneutic skills. Nationals will become proficient in analyzing Scripture and applying the message, bringing about transformed behaviour.

### **Its Layout Considers the Reader’s Needs**

The physical design, together with the format design of the curriculum, both affect its acceptance. What size of publication do the people prefer? What colours do they prefer for the cover? Although one of the favourite colours of the Antipolo/Amduntug Ifugao is red, they seem to prefer a darker colour for the cover. They reason that the smoke in their houses will soon darken the covers anyway. The team’s research should assure that all publications will be produced in the appropriate size and colour.

Another factor is use of space in a layout. Empty space often enhances comprehension because it minimizes the content load of a page while maximizing key points. Blank space is not necessarily wasted space.

There are also other ways to ease comprehension within the lesson text: Some find it helpful to have key statements underlined. Others prefer boxes that outline specific sections, e.g., in the application section of a lesson. The 'Easy Readers Series' produced by the Bible Society indents sentences on the left margin slightly further than the previous one. This breaks the straight line look usually found, and makes it easier to pick up the next line when the eyes return to the left side of the page. (Right margins remain staggered as well.)

Symbols can be utilized to convey information economically. For example, rather than writing out instructions to 'discuss the following sections', a question mark (?) could be placed before the section. Another symbol that could be used is an outline of an open Bible that contains a reference. The symbol will alert readers to note the text indicated within the outlined Bible.

### **It Becomes the Property of National Churches**

Expatriates too often consider the curriculum as 'our' product 'for' the target people. This view can certainly impede the development of national writers. The development of the curriculum must become integral to, and owned by the national community of faith. It is therefore imperative that a multinational team of curriculum developers be formed from the start.

While flow charts have certain limitations, e.g., they fail to reflect either the dynamics of interpersonal relationships or potential creativity, they can serve as effective guides. Figure 2 provides a flow chart that focuses on a participatory model for curriculum development. The chart considers: preliminary definitions, identification of needs and interests, objectives, content, resources and methodology, implementation, and evaluation.

Before launching a writing project, outsiders and insiders alike should recognize the potential influence of their worldviews, basic assumptions, and personal/collective agendas on an overall curriculum [p. 280](#) Team members should also be aware of their agency's agenda, as well as the agenda of the national government. There should be open dialogue between all parties so that a needs consensus may be reached.



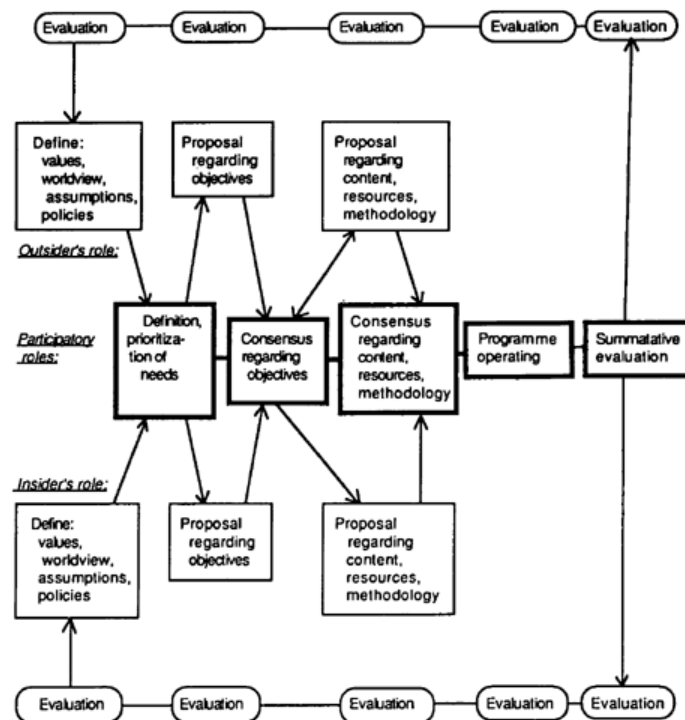


Figure 2. A participatory model for curriculum development.

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Once the needs are identified and prioritized, the group can determine the objectives collectively. The objectives will include at least the materials to be produced and the strategy—the latter having four parts: ongoing evaluation, distribution, funding, and turnover.

After the multi-national team reaches a consensus on the objectives, discussion will turn to decisions regarding content design, resources, and methodology. Content design decisions include: relevant [p. 281](#) issues and needs, pedagogical expectations, content overload, pictures and illustrations, layout, and application. Resource decisions refer to the choice of size, colour, shape, and lay out. Methodology deals with the 'haws' by taking into consideration the values of outsiders and insiders relative to the stated objectives. After these decisions are made, the multinational team is ready for implementation.

Evaluation is another step in the participatory model, that is, checking the value outcomes of the curriculum. Effective evaluation takes place on a continual basis (formative) and again at the completion of the project (summative). Such evaluation allows for mid-course correction and gained insights for future projects.

A participatory model for developing a curricula takes time and flexibility. Moreover, it should be regarded as a service rendered 'among' or 'with' people, not 'to' or 'for'. The advantage is that in the long run it produces ownership, accountability, and relevant evangelists and teachers—all of which facilitate the phase-out process.

### It Calls For Marketing Visibility

Many cults select highly effective ways to package and disseminate their philosophy. Expatriates and national believers must become more effective.

In that one goal of the national churches is to reach all their community with the gospel, the distribution of literature, videos, and tapes is one way to expedite this. The Ifugao believers, for example, make periodic trips to every village to sell literature. As the residents ask questions about Christianity, it becomes culturally appropriate to



evangelize. Listed below are a number of ways in which the Ifugao provide high visibility for the curriculum. How should these differ in your community?

The Ifugao:

- (1) make literature, videos, and tapes available for browsing and buying during social and public activities,
- (2) give selected materials as a gift to grade school and high school graduates.
- (3) encourage storekeepers to sell the materials,
- (4) carry literature, videos, and tapes when travelling,
- (5) appoint responsible believers to stock and sell the productions,
- (6) send out teams annually to advertise the curriculum in the surrounding areas,
- (7) give complimentary copies of materials to school teachers and government officials, and
- (8) give materials along with wages to those working for them.

### **It includes Bible Examples of Phase-out**

Lessons that include biblical examples of those who left ministries in order to share the gospel with others will undoubtedly help local believers understand, and anticipate the phase-out of team members. For example, Jesus moved continually from city to city so that his message could be heard more widely. Jesus' disciples followed his example. The ministries of Paul's teams provide a later example. The book of Acts capture the idea of the apostles' **p. 282** mobility for Christ, and introduces readers to the problems and successes of those left behind. Thus, the New Testament examples of departure can help nationals understand that the disengagement of team members can result in the spread of the gospel as well as maximize opportunities for the development of the spiritual maturity, gifts, and skills, of the entire body of Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

A life-changing curriculum takes its readers to and through the Bible in ways that are culturally appropriate while at the same time issuing a strong challenge to follow God's universal demands. A curriculum that follows the fourteen guidelines, and is modelled by respected teachers, should produce skilled indigenous writers and perceptive evangelists and Bible teachers. A life-changing curriculum will draw the target audience to the Bible and the Holy Spirit, rather than to the transient team members. It will prepare maturing nationals for the departure of team members.

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