

# **Practicum Issues in Theology Education and Learning Directed Toward Competencies for Institutional Development that Communicate and Witness to the Gospel**

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# Practicum Issues in Theology Education and Learning Directed Toward Competencies for Institutional Development that Communicate and Witness to the Gospel

*Teaching and Learning Theology must also engage the recognition and practicum skills necessary for transitioning/cultural-engagement competencies that serve effective communication and witness that bring Christ-encounters, that forms disciples, and that forms communities of faith.*



# Introducing the brief: Practicum Issues in Theological Education and Learning

- The overarching context for our Practicum Issues in Theological Education and Learning is Assessment and Competence as applied to SCD.
- But the specific context of our Practicum Issues is Assessment and Theological Competencies as applied to Institutional Development.
- And the last context is application in Secondary Schooling Institutional Development.
- A premise that undergirds our Practicum perspective is that Assessment and Competence during theological education and learning that can be applied to Institutional Development must encompass education and assessment in multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary competencies.



# Understanding Assessment and Competencies in Cross-Disciplinary and Multi-Disciplinary perspectives

- Properly understood, education and learning in Theology is necessarily multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary. This is so because it encompasses a wide range of learnings, such as: biblical studies across NT and OT; languages of Scripture and tradition; church history; systematic theology; prayer and liturgy and arts (to name just a few).
- Nowadays, however, theological practice requires an even larger remit. For example: understanding and interpreting Scripture requires appreciation of the culture or cultures in which the sacred texts were formed; and carrying forward this appreciation requires competencies to situate those cultural readings in contemporary cultural contexts, and to do so with criticality.
- All cultures have complexity, but more so with contemporary cultures, where we need to be conversant with the worldviews of physical sciences and social sciences, and literary and cultural studies. Some such competencies need more focus than others. Such as appreciations across the range of psychological sciences (motivational or cognitive psychology, personality psychology, organisational or institutional psychology, to name just some examples).
- This perspective deals more holistically with the essentially epistemological character of education, which deals with a wide span across liberal arts, natural sciences, social sciences, and theological studies to build competencies across complex contexts and to integrate critical intentionality analysis across the range of cognitive and affective processes that are both personal and social (and thus are institutional).



Expressing our intentions:

***We are a people of faith,  
of discipline, and of compassion.***

The above is taken from a secondary school motto. It expresses the “target” of that domain: to build a teaching and learning environment that is ecclesial.

- In closing the last paragraph in the previous slide with the term Institutional, we should immediately clarify that, even while operating in civil or secular institutional settings, our mentality should first be ecclesial. In a modern sense of “institutions”, Our Lord did not establish an “institution”, but a Church, the chief image of which is the Body of Christ. We take that as fundamental. Nevertheless, both overall and at local levels and in more specified ministries (such as Secondary Education), implementation requires the social construction and maintenance of institutions. But of institutions whose foundation is Christ and the Gospel of Christ.



**Communicating intention:** The epistemological and psychological fact is that we do not see unless we have a target, an aim, a purpose, a complex and overarching purpose. This is aim highlighted in the illustrative school insignia, the coat of arms or shield, that is over every entrance and on all school uniforms. It is THIS that is the focus of every act of the School Director of Identity and Missions.

This brings us back to intentionality: What are our intentions in our Practicum implementations? What is the foundation of our intentions? Christ the Lord is our foundation. What are the assessed competencies that undergird our practical applications that remain true to our Foundation?

This first requires clarity of our complex foundation: it has to be profound, otherwise the depth and the mystery of faith in the Holy Trinity is not entered.

The illustrative coat of arms provides an example: the monogram of the NT name of Jesus, IHS, has to be explained; as set in the centre of the ecclesial universe; as set in the rays of a sun that signifies both the morning of the Resurrection and the Light of the World and (at least in English) the Son of the Father. The motto: *Per ipsum, et cum ipso, et in ipso* provides the key to the mystery of Christ among us: for the *ipsum* is the *him* of JESUS in words addressed to God the Father: *through him, with him, and in him*: a prayer that is the action of the Holy Spirit. Simply inducting staff and students to such a complex representation grounds the whole life of the school as an ecclesial institution.





# COMMUNICATION OF THE IDENTITY AND MISSION OF THE SCHOOL ACROSS THE EDUCATION RANGE (CONTINUED) AS ESSENTIAL ASPECTS OF ASSESSMENT AND THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCIES REQUIRED OF A DIRECTOR OF SCHOOL IDENTITY AND MISSIONS

- 2. Religious Education. Staff with these position responsibilities also require induction. An example would be: the first words of the Christ in the Markan gospel are: “Repent, the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15). It is mostly the case in contemporary settings that the preconditions for hearing and responding to that word have to be built: they are not readily present. The more invitational words from the Johannine gospel are a more ready starting point: “That they may have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10).
- Induction to a focus on “reading the Scriptures” is essential, as unfamiliarity with their literary types and idioms is pervasive. Interesting, informed, and inviting readings require cultivation and appreciation of literary forms and of idiom. Induction in “holistic” or “canonical” reading is also essential.
- 3. Science Education. Mathematics and Natural Sciences offer great opportunities for understanding the natural order and the lawfulness of creation, and thus of the divine providence in creation and in sustaining our world. Such education also offers powerful potential for induction of students to understand complex and multiple causality, and thus to counter ideological and mono-causal understandings of the world.
- 4. Social Sciences. Again there is a congruency between the orderliness in the creation and sustaining of the physical universe and orderliness or lawfulness in personal human life and in social human life. Learnings of this kind is challenging, but is the best guard against simplistic and ideological views of human persons and society, and is a necessary part of authentic Christian education toward building a truly human ecology.



The further examples of the complex range of assessed competencies and communication skills that need to be integrated into the theological education and learning of disciples who aspire to lead the formation and sustaining of identity and missions in secondary schooling.

Focus on school pedagogy is crucial, but even before assessing and influencing communication with students, communication and induction of staff is the first task of the Director of Identity and Missions.

### ▪ Understanding Institutional Identity

- The jargon of “high culture” and “low culture” comes from the literatures on Organisational Behaviour.
- A “low culture” institution is one lacking in shared values and where the Protocol Manual is the first point of reference and where the institution runs by the “rule book”.
- A “high culture” institution is one where institutional implicit *shared values* more characterise organisational behaviour and performance. This may be seen in the earlier four examples of manners of business and curriculum and teaching practices.
- The foundations for institutional *credibility* are laid where staff implicitly convey a shared sense of identity and mission. Students will notice where credibility is evident. They need to encounter staff who “walk the walk” and not just “talk the talk”: it is they who are credible witnesses.

Institutional credibility is something that has to be *built and maintained*. Credibility in student witness to the school identity and mission depends of staff credibility to the school identity and mission.

### ▪ Leadership and Credibility

- There are various models of leadership, and modes of leadership develop over time, as they become more shared and participatory.
- But at crucial stages, the leadership demonstrated by the Director of Identity and Missions needs to be in the forefront. And it needs first to be demonstrated leadership.
- That demonstration needs first to be in the evident life witness of a the disciplined discipleship of the person holding that job description. “Actions speak louder than words.” The leadership demonstration should never be of the kind “Do what I say”, but “What you have seen and heard in me” (Philippians 4:9).
- The kinds of mentoring instanced in the four examples given earlier needs to be “step wise” and “ongoing”: inducting staff “beginning where they *are*” and with a forward-looking perspective: “That they may have fulfilment in their participation in taking forward the school identity and missions.



ASSESSMENT AND THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE forms the header for this Conference. Our first address is not the basics of theological competence in a restrictive “Body of Knowledge” sense, but Assessment and Theological Competence” in a Practicum sense. That Practicum sense is focused on theological education and learning directed toward competencies for Institutional Development that communicate and witness to the Gospel.

**Basic Theological Competence.** The above focused being recognised, it nevertheless is necessary to underscore certain “basic requirements” apart from our particular Practicum focus. These include:

Assessed competencies in theological precision, such as is evidenced in precise understanding of the Christology wrought across the early Ecumenical Councils.

Assessed competencies in appreciation of varieties of literary genre across the biblical literatures. This should include appreciation that some endeavours at “demythologisation” in fact are acts of “re-mythologisation”: and what is needed is assessed competencies with interpretative integrity to identify and to read across the varieties of literary kinds in the sacred texts. (Desirably with basic-level literacy in the original languages, especially Greek).

Assessed competencies in enculturated readings (that indeed comes with Scripture) but that is crucial for competent enculturated interpretative readings across church history and extending to contemporary cultural interpretative readings.

Assessed competencies in identifying and interpreting philosophical underpinnings of the varieties of theological literatures encountered in basic “body of knowledge” theological education and learning. This should include not simply formal Philosophy, and the philosophical viewpoints of particular ecclesial confessional positions; but include assessed competencies in identifying and interpreting implicit philosophies; implicit precepts; implicit evidentiary presuppositions; and the implicit philosophies and evidentiary presuppositions across contemporary societies and across the varieties of contemporary media.



# ASSESSMENT AND THEOLOGICAL COMPETENCE DIRECTED TO PRACTICUM SENSE OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND LEARNING.

Having underscored “Body of Knowledge” sense that is foundational to Practical and Applied Theology, we now turn to identifying some education and learning assessments and competencies that form our particular Practicum focus on secondary schooling Institutional Development.

The extent and range of these implies the need for a dedicated Graduate Diploma in Applied Theology.

## **Assessment and Competencies in Practical and Applied Theology for Christian Schooling Institutional Development**

The Basic Theological Competencies of a “body of knowledge” kind as adumbrated in the previous slide are extensive, and it is difficult to expand these to include Practicum education and learning. It should nevertheless be taken as “given” that the earlier Learning and Assessment should not be simply of an “information” kind. It must include education and learning and assessment of competencies in interpretation; in critical skills; in abilities to articulate; in demonstrations of competencies in collaboration; and an overall enculturation toward life-long-learning and on-going self-learning.

**1. On-going Self-Learning.** Any ministry to others, whether person-to-person or “institutionally” first requires *self-learning*. This is analogous to the foundation of CPE (Clinical Pastoral Education) where the precept is “listen to where the person is ‘coming from’”, and answer to *that* before proceeding to other agendas. That is, a school Director of Identity and Missions has first to have a detached attachment to his or her own person, and have assessed competencies for constructively bringing about personal and institutional development in Identity and Missions. The plural is used in respect of “mission”, because across the range of staff, there will be differing aptitudes for advancing institutional mission, and these differences need to be affirmed and supported. This “wide-sweep” take on “self-learning” implies some wide-sweep conversance and assessed competencies across the range of the Psychology of Human Development that should include understandings of personality differences and paths of personality development and the fostering of complementarity across that field.



## Assessment and Competencies in Practical and Applied Theology for Christian Schooling Institutional Development (Continued)

- **2. Ascetical Theology and Practice.** The crucial role of credibility in leadership has already been called. Some people seem to be gifted with dispositions of virtue and sincerity more than others. More typically, sincerity and virtue are *learned*, and learnings that are not necessarily in formal education and learning environments. But preparation for Practicum work requires integration with education and learning competency assessments that profile critical appreciations and applications of what is entailed in the discipline of Christian discipleship. This is not easily formulated, because different persons will differently profile their discipleship and the undergirding self-knowledge and self-learning in social contexts. The curricula and assessment in this area calls for keen and sensitive discernment. But where this is lacking, those with whom a Director of Identity and Mission deal will notice whether he/she encounters: a person of deep faith conviction; a person of deep prayer; a persons with deep convictions for just treatment of persons; a person who understands the conjunctions between justice and mercy; a person who is trustworthy; a person who may be respected as a mentor; etcetera.
- **3. Institutional Understanding and Development.** It is not uncommon to notice persons in leadership positions who think firstly or even only of *their* leadership, rather than of shared leadership, *institutional leadership*. That is, persons who do not really understand institutions, and what is involved in institutional development. This also is a large remit that calls upon basic acquaintance with the sociology of organisations and the psychology of organisational behaviour, and the processes of within-institutional personal and social skills development; and this both in its “business” aspects, in its “educational and educator” aspects; and in its Christian identity and missions aspects.
- **4. Consensus-building Competencies.** Simply taking across the range of Business, Religious Education, Science Education, and Social Sciences Education requires a breadth of domain perspectives. Without this, building an appreciation within the school Business area (whether management or education) will be difficult. Without a paradigmatic understanding of the Physical Sciences, consensus conversations will be difficult; and likewise with Social Sciences paradigms; and, of course, the paradigms of Theological Studies.
- For ourselves, this was helped in that Hunter became a qualified Tradesman before Theology, and thus brings appreciation of differing learning styles and performances among those who are less academically inclined; while McGavin became a qualified Accountant before Theology; and both Hunter and McGavin brought competencies gained through BA(Hons) degrees before Theology. Such breadth is reflected in early-career advancement as Leader of Learning for Hunter, and previously accelerated advance to university Head of School for McGavin. A graduate Diploma in Applied Theology should necessarily allow for Specialisation, but with at least 4 suggested core-units.

