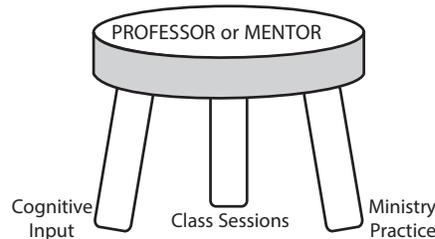




The Key Components of “In Context” Theological Education



The three legs of the stool represent three of the four key components in our learning model.> These first three are:

Cognitive Input

The learner must be exposed to content (the facts, data, ideas, stories, analysis, and concepts). Biblical and theological truth is presented to the learner at home through books and self-study materials and in class through “live” and/or video teaching.

Ministry Practice

The learner must be engaged in lay or pastoral ministry through the local church. The learner generates questions that emerge from these “Field Experiences” and uses the truths learned to form new strategies that are applied and tested in the ministry environment.

Class Sessions >

The seminar classes serve three primary purposes: First, to introduce new content and allow learners to interact with a professor or mentor who can help clarify that content. Second, to allow learners to raise questions and dialogue about the implications and applications of the content in their ministry situation. (Professors or mentors should consider the peer learning that takes place through dialogue among the learning group to be a key part of the educational process.) Third, to monitor the learner’s progress and evaluate their understanding of the material.



> Adapted from Stewart G. Snook, *Developing Leaders Through Theological Education by Extension: Case Studies from Africa*, Wheaton, IL: Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College, 1992, p. 107.

> Although weekly seminar classes are the norm, student needs may require more flexible scheduling (either a more compact or a more extended meeting schedule). The key is that there are regular classes held to present and discuss the materials for each lesson.

The Fourth Component

These three [components] connect to the most important, the seat, which represents the teacher. The legs are inserted into the seat and completed by it. When you have the seat into which the legs fit, you have a useful stoolIf teachers are not faithful in all their duties, students will get discouraged and quit. If they lecture and are boring, students will get discouraged and quit. Teachers not only have to provide an interesting class - above all else they must model the truths being taught. The program will only be as strong as those who teach. >

A Professor or Mentor >

The professor or mentor must not only present and clarify content but also facilitate discussion so that the group raises and grapples with actual questions from the local context. It is essential that the professor or mentor be trained in discussion methods and be able to develop a learning environment where students interact with each other (as well as with the teacher) to find answers. Whether an academic theologian or a pastor, the professor or mentor must have a praxis orientation toward theology which considers actual implementation of the learning to be the real goal of theological education.

Conclusion

These components allow for considerable freedom, innovation, and adaptation in the practice of theological education, but they are each vital elements which must be present in some form for maximum effectiveness.



> Snook, pp. 106-7.

> For our purposes, a professor is someone who both develops and implements a curriculum, while a mentor is someone who implements a pre-existing curriculum in which the class teaching is delivered through video and pre-written class and home study materials.

> Praxis is the intentionally willed action by which a theory becomes a practical social activity.