



Theological Education by Extension: *Much More Than a Fad*¹

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Theological Education by Extension is both an idea and a movement. Whatever else may be true of TEE as a movement, it is not all of one piece. It is variously a reform, a desperate reach, and a fad. While it may be uncharitable to question the motives of people involved in a popular cause, Christians must always be wary of pragmatism. On the one hand, TEE has demonstrably increased the availability of help for isolated and previously undertrained pastors; on the other hand, it has even further extended the influence of the Western culture-church. TEE has enabled many underemployed missionary educators to find a more meaningful life; yet it has given a new validity to externally controlled institutions at the very moment that nationalism is making its most substantial gains toward localizing the church. TEE has given the technologizing of missions and church growth a substantial boost in the very face of a sweeping awareness of the theological validity of Christian liberation. How ironic that TEE, with its attendant emphasis on educational technology, arises at the very moment when all sectors of the church (yes, evangelicals included) are becoming aware of the need to attach dehumanizing influences and technocratic tyranny within the secular society!

The High Hope

TEE is much more than an attempt to make the best of a bad situation. It is part of a world-wide trend based, in part, on improved understanding of how people learn. The early advocates and participants in extension programs did not always see the relationships between the extension approach and effective learning. But the fact that the essence of the TEE concept respects the necessary conditions for effective learning has attracted the attention of many professional educators—including some who are not directly interested in theological education.

There are four valid arguments for the development of a field-based approach to theological education. The first argument is *historical* deriving from the example of the training ministry of Jesus Christ and from the recurrences of his procedures as exemplified, for example, in Martin Luther and John Wesley. It is no accident that Jesus used a non-formal approach to the development of his disciples. He lived with them, and experienced life along with them. Their problems became his problems; their needs were the focus of his teaching. Historically, Jesus could have chosen to use a schooling-type approach, but he didn't. Since the original leadership for the church was trained through a discipleship approach, it is reasonable to hold that discipleship methods are historically valid. The second argument is *demographical*. In most societies of the world, only the rich and the highly subsidized can break away from their work, their families, and their communal roles in order to go off to school. Thus, the people who avail themselves of campus-based education tend not to be the same as those who pastor churches. In fact, the major reason that the costs of operating theological educational establishments tend to be so very high (in light of their very small output) is

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not because there are so few people to train, but because those who most need the training are not able to get to the institution. There are three demographic factors that must be worked into the formula for cost-effective pastoral education: *geographical*, in the sense of where the pastors are versus where the theological school is; *economic*, in the sense of support for pastors-in-training and their family; and *sociological*, in the matter of what sort of persons are attracted, how much of what sorts of previous education and experience, and what sort of cultural background a person must have in order to fit into the life of the school. With reference to this last factor, it has been noted that one of the most conspicuous consequences of shifting to an extension approach is that the average age of students is much older. The residence approach caters to the younger and less “attached”. The extension approach accommodates those whose family and community ties cannot be broken or suspended.

The third argument for the extension approach is *theological*. It is necessary to consider not only who *does* come into a training program, but who *should* come. If the purpose of theological education is to assist the church through the training of pastors, that is one thing; but if the purpose is to train people so that they might *become* pastors, that is quite different. The extension approach appeals primarily to those who see the church, in its congregations and assemblies, as having the prerogatives of identifying and calling those who will serve as pastors. Their view of the educational service function of a seminary does not include the authority of an institution to qualify someone as a pastor on educational grounds. Because of the distinct difference between theological schools and other professional schools, the question of authority vested in the educational institution is of special importance. A medical school, for example, is a servant of society and is responsible for the imposing of professional standards; on the other hand, a theological seminary is a servant of the church and is responsible to the Lordship of Christ in his church; thus, the design of an effective and efficient screening and training program for medical practitioners may, or may not, be acceptable as a model for the training of pastors. The extension approach to theological education is focused primarily on the people who are, in fact, serving the church. Extension programs are much more in the business of serving people who have been called by the church rather than those who *claim* to be called, or those who *hope* to be called, once they “make the grade.” Thus, there is a theological validity and, specifically, a biblical precedent for returning to the hands of the church in assembly the responsibility for identifying, recruiting, and employing the pastor.

The fourth argument is *pedagogical*. To the extent that an educationally valid procedure is consistent with the revelational base of the church and the Scriptural model of the pastor, it should be considered for use in theological education. Two significant trends in educational development underlie many of the current improvements in pastoral education overseas and in North America. *Emphasis on clinical field experience* is the first and perhaps the most basic trend. It has been underway since early in the century. The trend toward a clinical and field-based emphasis in the education of professional workers can be traced to the study of medical education that Abraham Flexner conducted under support of the Carnegie Foundation. His study of the education of physicians, reported in 1910, revealed that in most medical schools of the United States, it was possible to gain the medical doctorate without so much as diagnostically or therapeutically touching a live, warm, human body. The Flexner report caused a shockwave that closed almost half of the medical schools and pushed the rest rapidly into increased use of clinical experiences as a regular part of the curriculum, not just as an add-on or a thing to do over summer vacation. Today, virtually every reputable program for the training of professional workers involves clinical field experience.

Emphasis on continuing education, the second trend, reflects the growing recognition that professional training is a lifelong endeavor. It is no longer assumed that once people finish formal schooling they are fully trained. Every professional field recognizes the need of its practitioners to keep abreast of recent developments. This accelerative thrust of new knowledge and new procedures renders the practitioners incompetent if they do not keep in touch with the developments in their field. Attendance at seminars, workshops, and evening courses has become an occupational requirement. Theological education has been no exception. Many theological schools hold continuing education workshops and institutes not only to capitalize on a fad, but to help meet the continuing educational needs of the parish minister.

Snags

Nothing in creation is more stubborn than an institution. How amazing that rational people, able and willing to adapt themselves to the shifting circumstances of social and physical reality, are so everlastingly stubborn when welded into institutional forms. Well-schooled, intelligent people in unchangeable clusters called “faculties” are perhaps the epitome of institutionalism. Anybody who seeks to bring about changes in schools and schooling needs faith and extraordinary patience!

Thus, the past decade of change in theological education overseas is a phenomenon of amazing proportions. It is not enough to say that change was overdue or that a sense of futility created a peculiar readiness. While these observations are irrefutable, the fact that most of theological education overseas had been slavishly copied from American and European models, established a *follower* mentality rather than any predisposition to lead and innovate. And even the sense of futility and the awareness of need for change hardly seem to be adequate explanations for the changes that have occurred.

The coincidence of worldwide challenging of the worth of formal education has surely been important. It is perhaps indicative of the isolation of certain sectors of “Christian education” that most of the early writings on TEE do not identify the pressures for change as being part of a larger movement toward radical reform in all of education. Though quite conservative in contrast with the cries of Illich and Reimer, for example, the changes that are taking place in theological education overseas are among the most substantial in the current educational scene.

Over-promotion. The magic words of Western civilization have lost some of their potency as symbols of superiority. *Research*, *science*, and *evaluation* are examples of formerly powerful words that have lost much of their charm. As advertisers and politicians have learned the hard way, certain technical terms of the new era of social engineering have not gained the potency among laity that was expected. *Computers*, *systems*, *programming*, and *flowcharts* are more apt to turn people off than to entice. As the whole world gains contact with television and computers, they are recognized as bittersweet realities. Anyone who has tried to communicate with a magazine subscription department, a book club, or a department store’s electronic accountant gets slightly livid when a television commercial uses a computer as a “credibility” backdrop.

So when TEE is promoted through symbols of the new scientism, the reaction is predictably negative. Perhaps the North Americans and Europeans who conceived the elaborate publication schemes for production of the much-needed textbooks never expected their flowcharts and linear plans to become advertising symbols. But very early in the movement, these flowcharts and complex systems maps were under the very noses of people who were unprepared to be convinced that technologizing the church could possibly solve any of the basic problems.

In some minds, TEE is virtually inseparable from programmed instruction (PI). In the zeal to create a highly competent alternative to the campus-based forms of theological education, educational technology was enlisted. PI was assumed to be a valuable tool because of the following three propositions: (1) Programmed instruction provides a means for highly structured and well-reinforced independent study for motivated learners; (2) Programmed instruction allows for a longer spacing between the times of teacher/student contact; and (3) Programmed instruction frees the teacher to give more time to applications of content to the problem-world of the students. Especially for those who are concerned that in TEE the students will suffer from the absence of the daily prodding by the teacher and from the inaccessibility of library resources, these propositions about PI are very appealing.

Miscalculations regarding the costs and availability of PI have led to disappointments and frustrations. A fundamental misunderstanding was responsible for some of the over-promotion. The assumption was made—despite explicit warnings to the contrary—that PI can be translated without losing its effectiveness. It cannot. Even more than textbooks, PI is language-specific and culture-specific. It was promised that once a good programmed textbook would be developed in, for example, Colombia, it would be translated from the original Spanish into Portuguese for use in Brazil. Similarly, a Brazilian Portuguese text could be taken to Kenya for translation into British English. Over and over, the planners were reminded that the essence of PI is the capturing of the style and flow of thought of the target learners. Such style and flow is not only language-dependent but also indigenous to sub-groups within the same language. It would seem unlikely, for example, that a PI text that is very effective in a São Paulo seminary would be similarly useful in rural Piauí.

Even less promising were the elaborate schemes for translating all the “really good” PI texts for TEE into a common language (English, of course) to “facilitate” their re-translation into various other languages. Anyone who understands the basis of PI knows very well that you don’t make translations, you make re-programming, and you do it in close partnership with native speakers, preferably with co-authors from the target learner group. Happily, this is happening in many situations, especially where missionaries and national educators have trained themselves as re-programming teams. But it is much slower than the earlier promotions suggested.

While, at first, it may have seemed reasonable to feature the PI aspects of TEE, certainly it is clear by now that this is but one facet of the technology of TEE and, indeed, the technological facets are not the heart of the innovation.

Over-commitment. As we began working with missionary and national educators in the writing and development of particular volumes of PI, it became pathetically clear how few of the volunteers had adequate background in their respective disciplines. In some few cases, especially in reference to biblical languages, there was evidence of strong scholarship; but especially in the more role-rated studies such as homiletics, pastoral counseling, and Christian education, the writings of the volunteers showed, more often than not, an important inability to distinguish between culture and Scripture. Virtually every proposition in many of those texts was drawn from North American or European precedents, bolstered by proof-texts dragged in kicking and screaming.

The crucial need in TEE is for the re-training of educators to conduct seminars competently. Now that the initial push to get new instructional materials into print is coming to a close and it has been found that some people can learn to write and others can’t (or don’t), and that even poor but locally

relevant materials are better than imported museum-pieces, we can look deeper into the vital relationship between teacher and student. And now we see how difficult any fundamental change may be.

The images from an educator's own educational experience control how he or she relates to educational innovation. The firm grip of the Greek approach to formal education, so dominant in secular education of the West and in the industrialized façade of the emerging nations, is everywhere apparent. The teacher who has been trained through lectures will use lectures to train others. Teachers whose education consisted mostly of memorizing long lists that were pre-memorized by someone else will expect their students to learn their long lists. The traveling "seminar leader" who is more at home behind a lectern facing passive students will find a way to lecture to every one or two students while propping lecture notes on the hood of a Land Rover. Early in the use of PI in Central American TEE, it was noted that many traveling teachers used their seminar time to "re-teach" what the students had already been asked to learn on their own through the programmed textbooks. What waste!

Historical perversion of the institutions of pastoral training comes home to roost during times of transition. In many situations, the particular institution, though chartered for the purpose of pastoral training, has never served this purpose very well. Instead, it has been a general-purpose American-style Bible college whose graduates are able to get good jobs with the airlines, travel agencies, and banks. While we may have no quarrel with this sort of education for Christian laity, it is easy to see why an emphasis on TEE would become a serious threat, representing a reduction of emphasis on the general educational services of such a school. In many cases, TEE confronts the local church with a dilemma: will the school realize its original purpose and devote itself more essentially to the training of church leadership, or will it continue to serve as an escape ladder into the more privileged classes?

Issues

Many questions are being asked about TEE. The lack of evaluative data makes it difficult to answer these questions on any other than a highly subjective basis. And since TEE is so different from place to place, we compile various critiques that sound like the "five blind men describing an elephant". While it seems unfair to ask educational innovations to pass more rigorous inspection than is demanded of the traditional institutional forms, some carefully managed evaluative research would be of great value. If and when comprehensive evaluation is undertaken, it is fervently hoped that it will not be addressed primarily to the question, "Is extension education better than campus-based education?" Instead, evaluation should be focused on the economic, demographic, theological, and pedagogical issues that make TEE distinctive—or, at least, potentially distinctive. The crux of the evaluative issue is how well the particular extension approach or program takes advantage of the unique opportunities that are open to TEE. To what extent and in what ways are churches benefitting from the TEE experiences in which their pastors are involved? What are the effects in terms of short-term and long-term changes in the roles, behavior, and self-perceptions of these pastors?

The entrenchment of classical education is deep. Reaching even into the creative mental processes of intelligent people, the stereotypic and carefully nurtured view of education as schooling has been not too well confronted by TEE. The early apologists were deeply committed to proving that TEE could be "as good as" the campus-based approaches. Debates over educational innovations are rarely settled by convincing the partisans. Instead, the third parties—those who are the ultimate beneficiaries of the educational institution—usually become the determiners of educational change.

Their views, whether or not wisely informed, usually serve to break the deadlocks; their votes are rather powerful—they either will or won't use the products of the institution. We may, therefore, expect that after all the debates, the charges, counter-charges, evidences, and proofs are hashed and re-hashed, there will still be campuses and there will still be extension programs. And what changes there are will occur in the direction of the particular programs whose "products" are the most acceptable to the ultimate beneficiaries.

And at this point, the particular issues of human pride and colonial legacy must be considered. Ironically, political and religious colonialism has left its imprint on the aspirations of so-called independent nations. European-style educational systems have embedded meritocracy and access rights to higher social status in certain African and Asian value systems. Schooling means gaining prestige. Survival in the competitive winnowing process of formal education entitles one to adulation and privilege. The educational access ladders to symbolic and economic rewards are not only accepted without challenge, but they are eagerly sought after and preserved with idolatrous reverence—even by the people of God. So when the most pointed questions are asked about the relative worth of popular approaches to education in contrast with elitist approaches, it is quite often an Asian or an African asking; and, tragically, the answers from Asian and African leaders are so often in the direction of elitism.

An adage in the folklore of education says, "Few people teach better than they were taught; and no one teaches differently from *how* he or she has been taught." Extending this saying, we add, and how few are able to see the value of educational procedures that are different from those through which they gained their own credentials! The church has borrowed so heavily from secular models, that in many places, it has trapped itself in institutionalism.

American ways. The prevailing extreme in American educational innovation for the decade of TEE's lifetime has been "individualization of instruction." Since educational technology makes it possible to create highly individualized instructional deliveries, it has become stylish to try to do so—or, at least, to pretend to do so. Even in America, where individualism is a rampant cultural value, it seems absurd to deprive learners of one of the most important dynamics of learning: transactions with other learners.

Effective learning is a social experience. Rather than to model on any of the faddish pendulum swings, whether America's individualization or England's "open university," programs of TEE should take account of the characteristics of the learners to whom the program is intended to relate. In many situations, these are people whose cultural heritage places great value on collaboration and sharing. In a study carried out with support from the Michigan State University Institute for International Studies in Education and funds from the Ford Foundation, Lois McKinney (Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society, Brazil) discovered that even PI was more effective when designed for use in group-transactional modes of learning. Studies of this sort are not new, nor are their findings much of a surprise. The literature in cross-cultural research on teaching and learning is rich with indicators and warnings about the hazards of carrying American ways unthoughtfully and unchallenged into the "help" we give people in other nations.

In Guatemala, where TEE began, almost all instructional contact has passed into the hands of Guatemalans, even though much of the writing of instructional materials and textbooks is done by missionaries. Almost the reverse is true in parts of Africa, for example, where mission boards have even sent in extra missionaries to respond to sharply increasing demands for itinerant teachers.

Some of the more thoughtful reservations about transferring control of educational institutions from missionary to national leadership are based on the fear that many of the current leaders of the emerging Church are thoroughly Americanized. Anthropologists for many years have noted that an objective outsider is often more sensitive and more accommodating of cultural integrity than is an insider whose perspectives are subjectively narrow. In recent years, the point has been made that the Black people in American ghettos receive no more devastating disdain than that heaped in scorn by other Blacks who have “made good.”

Experiences in helping educational institutions make the transition to national leadership have convinced me that the value of transferring the responsibility to local persons is usually worth the risk. For example, to install a national person as president is likely a constructive step, even if he is more “American” than the Americans, even if the mark of narrow American culture-church pietism is more clearly on his forehead than on his White predecessors; and even if his view of education is more clearly confined to dictatorial models he learned during his exposure to Ed Smith University in the U.S., God is still on his throne. When people in his church see concrete evidence that the responsibilities are truly theirs, they arise and speak—often deposing the transitional “American-style” national leader and replacing him with a person more responsive to the real needs in their situation.

If TEE is embraced with real commitment, it becomes more untenable to maintain foreign control. Those who support “indigenization” of the church should consider the intimate relationship between the locality and functionality of the curriculum and the locus of leadership. A problem-centered, local-focused institution requires leadership by people whose linkage with the served community is vital and above suspicion.

Thus, in the long run, at least, the effect of TEE should be to increase substantially the demand for local control of educational institutions. Toward this end, we should be reluctant to impose elaborate and costly schemes for transporting itinerant teachers or for publishing vast amounts of new materials in a hurry. Overly costly schemes tend to retard the willingness of the national church to accept responsibility. Instead, it tends to abandon such institutions and programs as soon as outside resources begin to phase down.

Responses to Reality

No other area of contemporary church growth has given rise to more substantial co-operation across denominational lines. In training workshops for educational planners, Lutherans and Baptists have beheld each other at close range—often rejoicing in their new awareness that Jesus Christ is Lord in all his church! Wesleyans have discovered that Anglicans can also be concerned about evangelization; liberals have discovered that some conservatives also have hearts of compassion, and liturgical traditionalists have discovered that Pentecostals can think rationally. The pooling of insights and resources to enable new and imaginative discovery of more consequential education for church leadership has resulted from shared purpose. And it is just this sort of real and practical purpose that so often is lacking in the more artificial and organizational attempts to bring ecumenical identity. Many can doubt the wisdom of national or international political structures of church governance, but no one seriously doubts the value of pastoral and lay leadership competencies.

The size and determination of the movement toward TEE is impressive. My first substantial contact with the leaders of the movement was in 1968. Having agreed to bring to a conference some

information on the potential relevancy of the technology of PI, I approached the event skeptically. After a presentation that bleakly described the high costs and author-training problems that would accompany any serious attempt to create PI material on a large scale, the discussion revealed that no one was dissuaded by these facts. These were people quite accustomed to doing the impossible.

Always eager to observe miracles, I agreed to participate in what was already happening in Latin America and to conduct a series of training workshops for missionaries and national church educators who were involved in the movement. (My research specialization is concerned with cross-cultural adaptation of instructional procedures and materials, so there was a tie-in adequate to assure the university's willingness to allow the time.) Participants in these workshops demonstrated the eagerness and commitment of missionaries and educators from the six nations represented; they were eager to become able to write and develop the sort of instructional material that would allow the Guatemala model of TEE to become a reality. These were motivated people, committed to becoming instruments of the new government; their only observable handicap was that they had already read too many contradictory books about PI and were unable to reconcile the "scientific" basis of PI with the divergent viewpoint about what makes it work effectively.

These people grasped at anything offered to them. Through these experiences and other workshops followed by various publication ventures, their commitment, determination, and capacity for follow-through came to be recognized as the basic miracle. One illustration of the scope and communicative articulation of the movement comes from the publication history of the training book on rudimentary PI developed as an outgrowth of the PI workshops in South America. The Committee to Assist Missionary Education Overseas (CAMEO) had commissioned the book and made a press order for 1,000 copies. Previous experience with the publication of specialized technical materials and anxiety about publishers' tendencies to boost sales by using "bait" titles caused me to argue that only 500 should be printed and that the title should be full and explicit. I lost the argument about quantity, but the title subsequently filled the entire front cover of the book: *Programmed Instruction for Theological Education by Extension*. Thus assured that no one would buy the book on false expectations, I was startled to see the first thousand sold within four months. Two subsequent printings of 1,000 each have been sold, mostly on single copy orders, without mass advertising or systematic marketing. There are lots of dedicated people out there!

Summary

The motive to *extend* leads to three kinds of fulfillment:

1. *Freedom*. Breaking free from the cloistered constraints of an introverted community; rejoicing over the re-discovery of involvement and relevancy to the needs of outer communities; willingness to break with tradition in order to fulfill more adequately the role and destiny of the teaching gifts.
2. *Locality*. Accepting the role of servant in order to lead more effectively; moving resources toward or into areas of need rather than drawing seekers toward a "sacred grove"; becoming sensitive to the needs of people who are not served by a place-bound ministry; broadening the vision of the potential contributions of the institution.
3. *Functionality*. Alteration of curricular concepts and re-ordering of priorities toward the meeting of substantial and actual needs; becoming burdened for the realities of people and mobilizing scholarly resources to relate God and man in more fulfilling ways.

These three kinds of fulfillment are not predictably sequential. For one institution, the drive toward *locality*, perhaps in response to a shrinking campus enrollment, may then lead to *functionality*, and in turn, to *freedom*. In another institution, the motive to extend may find first fulfillment in the *functionality* of a revitalized curriculum in which the focus on applications of theological analysis to real problems of development involves faculty and students in intensive field experiences. This might then lead to *locality* and, in turn, to *freedom*.

Whether or not it “works,” and the matter of how many people are being reached by TEE in comparison with the number reached by former modes of theological education cannot become the major criteria for determining that TEE is good for the church. The larger issue is what is being done for the people of God. If TEE facilitates a wide recognition and development of the gifts of the Spirit, it seems appropriate for continued support and encouragement. But it would be well to safeguard that generalization with a few carefully chosen indicators. Evaluation of the effectiveness of TEE should include careful measurement and assessment of indicators of development of the church within the given region or nation:

1. Is the institution’s rate of transition from missionary to national church leadership and control accelerated or retarded?
2. Is the proportion of foreign faculty reduced or increased?
3. Is the curriculum being altered and steadily de-Westernized?
4. Is the curricular emphasis becoming more problem-focused (focused on real problems, issues, and needs of the local church situation?)
5. Is the extension merely a transplanting of the classroom and its attendant tyrannies, or is it a departure from formalism to return to more biblical models of development through discipleship?
6. Is the emphasis on new forms of instructional materials being seized upon as an occasion for reducing the dependency on warmed-over translations and adaptations of North American and Western European source books?
7. Are the itinerant teachers being re-trained to conduct themselves in more effective ways than those that have been modeled for them in their own formal education?

Observation and participation in conferences, workshops, and planning sessions with missionary and national leaders of theological education have pushed these seven questions forward. No longer is it adequate to be preoccupied with quantitative and demographic arguments for TEE.

TEE is much more than a fad. The more substantial and significant changes that it is stimulating are clearly destined to reform much of theological education overseas. And listening closely on a clear night, we can hear the faint but rising murmur of voices asking the basic questions of functionality, locality, and freedom in reference to theological education in North America, as well.²

² Portions of this article are based on ‘The Significance of the Extension Seminary, by Ted Ward and Samuel F. Rowen. *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*. Vol. 9, No. 1 (Fall 1972): 17-27