



Effectively Teaching Truth: *Concerns for the Effective Teaching of Theological Subjects in Evangelical Higher Education*¹

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The Overt Curriculum (Explicit)

The overt curriculum is what an institution claims to be accomplishing. Reasonable basis for the claims can be seen in the intentional educational offerings:

- 0-1. Intensive emphasis on pre-service education:
 - a. Reduces attention and resources for in-service education;
 - b. Tends to restrict theological education curriculum to entry-level information;
 - c. Promises more than is realistic in terms of initial competencies;
 - d. Prolongs adolescence.
- 0-2. Preoccupation with span of coverage (a prevalent school teacher's ailment) restricts the level of cognitive processing. (See Bloom's *Taxonomy of Cognitive Objectives*.)
- 0-3. The goals of academic learning in biblical studies and theology focus extensively on categories of intellectual propositions. The main skills less developed are recognition and classification.
- 0-4. Convergent teaching, closed-end reasoning, and emphasis on predetermined propositions are apt to lead to mechanistic and traditional ministry with little evidence of creativity.
- 0-5. Limited academic models of teaching transfer into limited modes of preaching.
- 0-6. Emulating a one-way communication model (as exemplified in academic lecturing) reduces the normal tendency to use interactive communication processes.
- 0-7. Tool skills (especially biblical languages) are often taught in isolation from the realistic application of their use.

¹ Ted Ward. Effectively Teaching Truth: Concerns for the Effective Teaching of Theological Subjects in Evangelical Higher Education. Seminar document, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1990s.

The Hidden Curriculum (Implicit)

The hidden curriculum is a sort of shadow curriculum that lurks beneath the surface of what an institution professes to want to achieve. The hidden curriculum consists of those educational outcomes which are plain to see in the implications but less likely to be evident in the statements of intention:

- H-1. The presumed priority of convergence on truth suppresses valuable mental processes of divergent (exploratory) reasoning.
- H-2. Good answers are held in greater respect than good questions. Students are educated more toward “Jesus is the answer” than toward a grasp of the human condition and the questions for which biologically responsible answers are needed.
- H-3. Compartmentalization of the academic institution tends toward interdisciplinary competitiveness, dissonance, and fractional incoherence. Integrated reasoning and spiritual wholeness suffer.
- H-4. The devotion to a specific body of academic knowledge can become the professor’s castle of withdrawal from larger contexts of ministry and especially from the emotional, social, and spiritual realities of the students.
- H-5. Antipathy for falsehood, error, and heresy elevates the priority of judging the truth of an idea above the task of understanding the idea.
- H-6. Reinforcements of culturally based socio-political closures of Christian theology inadvertently or occurs whenever the challenging cultural (political and social) presumptions are omitted. In other words, when professors allude to common cultural presumptions and biases held by Christians without exemplifying the Christian task of cultural critique, theological information is added by the learner in terms of unreasonable biases.

The Null Curriculum

The null curriculum exerts a strong influence on learners. Whatever is omitted from the curriculum for whatever reason, or is given a subordinated emphasis or intention is apt to be perceived by the learner as being of less importance or as unimportant:

- N-1. Overlooked values are a Null curriculum. For example, competency and commitment to service, if excluded from attention as in academic outcome, causes the student to see it is having less value.
- N-2. Insufficient emphasis on personal qualities and social interactions of ministry reduces the spiritual value of education.
- N-3. Theological subjects are reduced to informational rationalization, the “personal pathologies” and “life stories” of students find little place and space within the instructional context. Thus theological knowledge remains extraneous to more dominant concerns. Dualism is sure to result.

- N-4. The social consequences of the Gospel are too commonly sidestepped. Thus the church becomes the legitimizer of the State's injustice rather than a conscience of the State's power.
- N-5. Theology in general and biblical knowledge in particular are held to be informational contents. Their value as ways of encountering life and reflecting on experience tends to be of less interest.