

as well as educational ones. My hope is that the work on using and claiming authority makes for a more competent pastoral/spiritual care provider and that SCT can be used effectively in the variety of settings where education for ministry takes place. Perhaps we can assist our students in sustaining their outrage.

#### NOTES

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## Reviewing Our Goals in Theological Field Education

Neil Sims

In 2008 I visited Andover-Newton Theological School near Boston. My purpose was to get an inside look at the school's field education program as a way of evaluating our own program at Trinity Theological College. When Sarah Drummond came to Andover-Newton as the new director of Field Education, she established the goal of providing "transformational, experiential education for ministry" and the objectives of "meaningful ministry experiences in settings that support learning, theological reflection opportunities that foster spiritual formation and vocational discernment, and courses that integrate theory and practice."<sup>1</sup>

It is noteworthy that classroom courses were the place to foster integration. This mission statement provided a starting point for evaluating the existing program. The following questions were asked before assessing the current practices at Andover-Newton: "What outcomes do I want from the field education program at Andover-Newton? What goals are critical to me? What is at the heart of effective field education?" The assessment at Andover-Newton included a survey of the on-campus experience in field education at sixteen Protestant denominational seminaries. A report of this process appeared in volume 29 of *Reflective Practice*.<sup>2</sup>

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Students are regularly asked to set goals for their learning in ministry practice. However, field education programs often fail to set goals for themselves. My goals for field education at Trinity Theological College in Brisbane were hidden in the description of all the processes, but they were not intentionally presented in the Field Education Handbook. The focus of this essay is on goals in theological field education. I begin by looking at a sample of field education handbooks and then compare that sample with a number of essays in *Preparing for Ministry* edited by George M. Hillman Jr.<sup>3</sup>

A SAMPLING OF GOALS OF FIELD EDUCATION PROGRAMS

My survey of about twenty seminaries or theological colleges in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia elicited some of the following goals.<sup>4</sup>

The primary goal in one field education program is to give students an experience of working with “an effective role model.” Students “experience the inner workings of outstanding ministries” and “interact personally with an effective Christian leader” as mentor.<sup>5</sup> What is distinctive about this goal is its strong and almost exclusive emphasis on the power and influence of one individual. Most other programs depend on a number of partnerships for the formation of the student minister.

The Field Education Handbook of Princeton Theological Seminary gives five goals with associated intended outcomes. The five goals are self-awareness, relationship development, skills acquisition, testing of vocational call, and integration of academic learning with the practice of ministry.<sup>6</sup> Relational competency and other skills are important here, but there is no explicit focus on spiritual formation and theological reflection.

At Malyon, the Baptist College in Brisbane, field education is seen as a partnership between the college (seminary), the student, the pastor-mentor and the congregational support team. There are goals then for each of these teaching or mentoring roles. The specific goals for students are to:

Acquire skills in ministry functions; determine purpose in ministry, becoming intentional rather than reactive; learn to evaluate experiences and to gain from the evaluation; learn to think theologically about the practical tasks of ministry and reflect theologically on everyday ministry experiences; and use the experiences gained as a basis for examining one’s call and vocation.<sup>7</sup>

There is a strong emphasis here on action-reflection learning—learning to monitor one’s ministry experiences as a resource for one’s ministry devel-

opment. In addition, personal devotions and relationship-building are two of the ten key competencies required as outcomes of their program.

The Supervisor’s Handbook of the Bible College of Queensland in Brisbane includes the following “aims of Field Education. Field Education begins with students’ experience in ministry, and by fostering reflection and learning, in an atmosphere of grace and trust, aims to:

Encourage growth in spiritual and personal maturity; help develop gifts and skills for effective ministry; nurture the ability to reflect theologically; assist in the integration of theological education with life and ministry experience; encourage continued professional development in ministry<sup>8</sup>

This is a broad statement where relational skills could be included under the skills for effective ministry, and the testing of one’s vocation could be part of one’s continuing professional development.

How field education programs are defined and valued by the educational institution differ widely. The scope of the field education program in relation to the rest of formation that takes place within a theological seminary also varies greatly. For example, some schools may incorporate spiritual formation, theological reflection, and the development of relationship skills within field education, while others may locate any one or all of these goals elsewhere within their total curriculum. Although Drummond and Aiello’s research is limited to schools in the United States, the goals for integrative seminars that emerged for them<sup>9</sup> corresponded to many of the overall goals for field education programs I found stated in field education handbooks (see table 1).

Goals from Handbooks	Goals for Integrative Seminars
Theological reflection	Theological reflection (a significant teaching strategy more than a goal in the context of the integrative seminar)
Integration of theology and ministry practice	Integration of theory and practice
Vocation	Ministerial identity development
Education	Consolidating learning
Skills for ministry	Performance of ministry tasks

**Table 1. Comparison of goals found in field education handbooks and goals for integrative seminars from research conducted by Drummond and Aiello.**

## GOAL AREAS EMERGING FROM FIELD EDUCATION HANDBOOKS

As a result of my survey of current manuals and handbooks, I have identified seven goal areas that frequently appear. I have summarized these goals with the mnemonic STRIVES. Ideally, each college or seminary strives to achieve many of these goals:

- S Spiritual formation
- T Theological reflection
- R Relationship skills
- I Integration of theology and ministry practice
- V Vocation
- E Education
- S Skills for ministry

My reflections after each goal area are drawn largely from Hillman's edited collection, *Preparing for Ministry: A Practical Guide to Theological Field Education*. The authors of particular essays in that volume are noted in the footnotes but not in the text.

**Spiritual formation.** Goals in the area of spiritual formation appear in roughly half the programs I studied although the focus varies widely. A Roman Catholic perspective will encourage developing "a personal practice of prayer," gaining "an understanding of the spiritual life of a parish community," and finding "balance between their prayer and their work."<sup>40</sup> The Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City lists one competency that is an outcome of field education as the "ability to take responsibility for his or her own continuing spiritual development."<sup>41</sup> One objective of the ministry formation program at McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Canada, is "to provide a context for spiritual formation through small-group reflection, accountability, prayer, feedback and support."<sup>42</sup> In one field education program, international students reported that their field education helped them to learn "utter dependency upon the Lord."<sup>43</sup>

*Comment:* The spiritual or Christian formation of students is a primary goal of theological field education. Mentors or supervisors are tour guides who keep pointing to where God is at work and where God still needs to work. The aim of formation is to be reshaped to the image of the Creator for the sake of others.<sup>14</sup>

**Theological reflection.** Theological reflection is a key skill to be exercised at the intersection of faith and practice. Many programs regard theological reflection as reflection on ministry experiences following an action-reflection model. Some programs seem to assume that all reflection on ministry

is theological. Queen's Theological College, Kingston, Canada, describes one of its general learning outcomes as seeking to develop "a habit/skill of interpreting, analysing and reflecting theologically on local and global contexts."<sup>45</sup> Unification Theological Seminary in New York seeks this learning outcome: "Students will reflect theologically on their interfaith encounters in order to arrive at new insight and understanding about themselves and about the divine."<sup>46</sup> St. Meinrad School of Theology in Indiana has its own way of expressing this: "Seminarians will learn how to interpret the life of God's people through the wisdom of the Gospel."<sup>47</sup>

*Comment:* Field education affords unique opportunities for learning to integrate theology with the practice of ministry. Through the disciplined practice of theological reflection, field educators can facilitate a symbiosis between the faith that we confess and the faith that we practice.<sup>18</sup> "The difference between 'fifty years of wisdom' and 'one year's wisdom fifty times over' is theological reflection."<sup>19</sup>

**Relationship skills.** Although some colleges or seminaries do not separate out relationship skills from other ministry skills or competencies, there is no doubt about the centrality of this goal in field education programs. At Avondale College, Cooranbong, Australia, "each student will be expected to become progressively involved in six key areas of ministry formation," of which one is "building relationships."<sup>20</sup> One of the aims at St Francis' College in Brisbane has a relational dimension: "to determine how you (the student) either facilitate or inhibit ministry by your attitude and/or actions."<sup>21</sup> Princeton Seminary affirms, "The rapidly changing global context demands that ministers relate to others with sensitivity, integrity and understanding, in and beyond the church."<sup>22</sup>

*Comment:* "Ultimately, field education and ministry is about knowing God, knowing one's self and knowing others at an intimate level." Ministry is not just about being competent in pastoral skills but about "how effectively [ministers] relate to people."<sup>23</sup> From another perspective, being able to foster relationships is also a competence or skill. Kenneth Pohly has questioned the individualistic focus of many field education processes and instead highlighted the importance of the church as covenant community. A student in placement enters into the covenant relationships of the church:<sup>24</sup>

**Integration.** It is not surprising that the integration of a student's theology and ministry practice receives major attention at a time when theological seminaries are sensitive to the criticism that they are too far removed from the congregational context. While the matters to be integrated may differ, generally the desire is to integrate theory and practice, or "learning with serving."<sup>25</sup>

The mission of field education at Unification Theological Seminary includes the integration of one's "theological heritage with classroom learning and practical experience through a process of action-reflection in order to arrive at new insight."<sup>26</sup> St. Meinrad School of Theology aims to "integrate the human, intellectual, spiritual and pastoral formations for service in the Church."<sup>27</sup> Some programs suggest that theological reflection is the means by which the desired integration is achieved.<sup>28</sup>

**Vocation.** A number of seminaries see field education as an important context for testing or clarifying one's vocational call. Princeton Seminary affirms, "While every Christian has a call to discipleship with a resultant ministry by virtue of his/her baptism, few are called to ordained pastoral ministry. Field education exposes students to different facets of ministry to determine which, if any, are suited for them."<sup>29</sup> Some schools speak more of ministerial or pastoral or professional identity. For instance, Acadia Divinity School in Nova Scotia looks for "growth in confidence in ministry based on an emerging clarity in pastoral identity and call to ministry."<sup>30</sup>

**Education.** All programs of field education presume to be educational. However, some are more intentionally focused on the learning of the student. Knox College, Dunedin, New Zealand (seminary) declares that, "Theological Field Education is NOT field work. Field work is any experience in ministry that focuses on completing tasks for financial remuneration. Theological Field Education is the experience of ministry for educational purposes through completing learning goals."<sup>31</sup> One of McMaster's objectives is "To develop as self-directed, collaborative learners through engagement in a learning network of field supervisors, seminar advisors, ministry support persons, peer group members, the Director of Ministry Formation, and other MDC faculty."<sup>32</sup> Often there is a team of people assisting the learning of the student, both on campus and in the field. Malyon College affirms that "learning strategies in the Field Education program (both at the College and in ministry settings) should give due cognisance to the unique character of adult learning styles."<sup>33</sup> Later, Malyon endorses the action-reflection model of learning: "Placing a candidate in a local church is not sufficient in itself: it must be accompanied by reflection and feedback in such a way that the candidate learns from his/her experience."<sup>34</sup>

*Comment:* Adult learning is at the heart of field education. "Each student is to be a truly proactive learner."<sup>35</sup> Holistic learning for potential shepherds of God's people includes developing their minds, strengthening their hearts and disciplining their wills. There are six types of behavioural outcomes that

come from holistic learning: knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, values, and interests.<sup>36</sup>

**Skills for ministry.** Most students approach field education wanting to attain some specific ministry skills or competencies. Knox College School of Ministry has an objective "to stimulate a life-long goal of increasing competencies for ministry."<sup>37</sup> The list of competencies that are the desired outcomes of their field education programs are usually grouped. One grouping is care, worship, outreach, management and personal.<sup>38</sup> Another grouping includes preaching/worship, discipleship, pastoral care, administration/leadership, evangelism, and service.<sup>39</sup> Malyon is at pains to demonstrate that good professional or confessional practice as a minister involves much more than the performance of skills: "Developing a 'competency' in Field Education is not just a matter of learning 'how' to perform some aspect of ministry. It also includes knowledge, understanding, the ability to reflect on and assess what you did from both practical and theological viewpoints, and proactively to devise ways and means of improving what you did. The development of competency in Christian ministry requires an intentional balance between a 'hearts-on' Christian commitment on the one hand, and 'hands-on' understanding and 'hands-on' skills on the other."<sup>40</sup> Those who work with a competency-based approach would have a better idea of the experiential truth of this statement.

*Comment:* Of the seven goal areas we have looked at, the one that gets the most attention is that of ministry skills or competencies. "In an effort to get specific about what to evaluate, theological field educators have developed numerous lists of competencies...Likewise, certain denominations and judicatories have developed similar lists."<sup>41</sup> In *Preparing for Ministry*, Thomas Fuller provides a list of seventy-two items in the categories of leadership, pastoral care, personal and spiritual issues, and proclamation and relational skills. He acknowledges that the list, on one hand, it is not exhaustive and, on the other, may contain items others would delete.<sup>42</sup>

#### GOALS IN FIELD EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF MINISTERIAL EDUCATION

I have organized the goals for theological field education into seven areas. However, they need to be seen as interconnected. Let me apply here a quote from the Association of Theological Schools Web site about the goals of the theological curriculum: "These goals, and the processes and practices leading to their attainment, are normally intimately interwoven and should not be separated from one another."<sup>43</sup> Thirty years ago, Doran McCarty de-

clared that field education programs needed clear goals consistent with the goals and history of their theological schools.<sup>44</sup> Denominational colleges or seminaries also need to take into account the ministry formation goals of their denomination. For example, the last two of six goals of the Uniting Church in Australia are to form ministers who “have skills for the practice of day-to-day Ministry, and the quality of being and awareness which gives integrity to the exercise of such skills; and are able to engage the tasks of Ministry with critical imagination, courage, theological judgement and self-reflection.”<sup>45</sup> A major North American report on educating clergy asserts that field education directors “structure programs to equip students to negotiate the huge shift between the culture of the seminary and the culture of the local congregation or ministry site.”<sup>46</sup>

While I have named seven seemingly discrete goal areas, others go beyond a ministry focus to the whole of the student’s life. Some insist that personal growth goals need to include family relationships and ministry,<sup>47</sup> though I think most of us would give much greater priority to ministry growth goals and some of us would barely touch on family relationship goals. They see field education as a good time to practise setting boundaries around the family and to learn to negotiate the tensions among family, personal, and ministry expectations.<sup>48</sup>

One holistic framework that appears frequently is “knowing, doing, and being”: ministry knowledge, ministry skills, and ministry character.<sup>49</sup> William M. Sullivan, in *Educating Clergy*, writes about professional education this way: “Professional education is a cognitive or intellectual apprenticeship, a practical apprenticeship of skill, and an apprenticeship of identity formation.”<sup>50</sup> He goes on to say that the reintegration of these three dimensions of professional life is a huge challenge. To accomplish that challenge, Queens Theological College has set these goals: “the development of capacities for leadership in church and world (doing); the formation of a habit of theological reflection on life and ministry (thinking); personal, spiritual and professional awareness and growth (being).”<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, Walter M. Jackson suggests that the mission of theological field education is to function as a partner with other theological disciplines in the task of preparing ministers for service. Theological field education has three overall goals:

- to encourage a maturing spirituality in each student
- to help students integrate educational and experiential fragments into a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the Christian faith

- to help students integrate spirituality with intellect in order to produce continued growth in ministry skill, theological learning, and overall competence in the practice of ministry<sup>52</sup>

This description repeats the tripartite focus: spirituality is about being, understanding is about knowing, and competence is about doing.

## CONCLUSIONS

Good goals for field education programs will take account of:

- the goals of the stakeholders, such as denominations, congregations, college boards, and potential students
- the place of the field education program within the theological education offered by the college as a whole
- the resources available, personnel and other
- the seven goal areas I have described and how the college’s whole ministerial training curriculum provides for these
- the three dimensions of human knowing, doing, and being

I agree with Ann M. Garrido when she insists “there is no single way to do field education at the present moment in the Church’s history, and this is not bad.”<sup>53</sup>

My hunch is that the more a theological college (seminary) prescribes the outcomes desired through field education, the more it will tell students what their goals need to be and the less the student is engaged in a process of adult learning. Many of our ministry students are of a mature age. As such, they expect that prior learning will be recognized, and they value the opportunity for significant input into the learning process. If they develop their own learning goals in consultation with their supervisors and the director of Field Education, they are more motivated to work toward those goals. There are risks here, especially if the students’ goals are vague or too ambitious or not focused on core ministerial functions and meanings. However, these may be reduced if the processes are well articulated, if the student is held to account by the learning goals, if there is opportunity for later revision of the learning goals, and if there is good supervision.

My experience in my context is that students typically have about five goals for their field education year. They are often in worship, preaching, conducting special services (weddings, funerals, and sacraments), attending to their own spirituality/devotional life, pastoral care, teaching, mission, church councils, and time management. Their sub-goals often reflect the differences among the students. While they mostly begin with a focus on developing

ministry skills, by the end of the year, they are reflecting on what it means to be a minister and/or on developing a theology of ministry.

What are the risks of a competency-based program? There may be too many competencies to do justice to each of them in the time available. I realize that students may be working on more than one competency at the same time, but I sometimes work out how many hours are available per competency and estimate what level of competency can be expected in that time. Another risk is that the student becomes focused on the doing at the expense of the knowing and the being. Good supervision, theological reflection, and an integrative, holistic approach will help ground their competencies in their faith and being. For the less mature students, a set of prescribed ministry skills may be just what they need when they are unsure what will provide a foundation for their future ministry.

I have described two frameworks for goals in field education:

- A simple, holistic one
  - Knowing or cognition
  - Doing or skills
  - Being or character and/or pastoral identity
- A seven-point framework drawn from existing goals in a range of field education handbooks
  - S Spiritual formation
  - T Theological reflection
  - R Relationship skills
  - I Integration of theology and ministry practice
  - V Vocation
  - E Education
  - S Skills for ministry

How are the two related? Spiritual formation and vocation are centred on the being of the person. Theological reflection begins in the knowing of the person but will hopefully impact being and doing. While relationship skills are also part of the doing of the student, they give expression to the being of the student as well. It is hoped that education and integration will take place across all three: the knowing, doing, and being of the student. Skills for ministry belong in the doing of the student.

When students set clear goals for their learning in their learning covenants, recognizing where they are in their formation and where they need to be and taking into account their ministry context, better learning results. The

students have a clear focus for their ministry and learning. I dare to believe that the same will be true for us. Sharpening the overall goals for our programs will lead to better learning. Then, when we take time to evaluate how we are going, we will know where we want to be and if we have made it.

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