COMPETENCY BASED THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR INTERCULTURAL CONTEXTS: A COOPERATIVE MODEL BETWEEN ACADEMY, ASSEMBLY, AND AGENCY

By Mark Naylor, DTh, Ken Jolley, MTS, and Andrés Rincón, MTh, MDiv

Abstract

Northwest Baptist Seminary has pioneered a model of Competency Based Theological Education (CBTE) that emerged from the integration of church ministry (assembly) and theological education (academy) resulting in an innovative and ATS fully accredited MDiv program for pastoral training. Following this model, MABL and MDiv CBTE programs have been developed for intercultural settings. One program focuses on the preparation of cross-cultural change agents for effective disciple making within missions agencies (agency-academy partnership), while the other focuses on the training of church leadership in a Spanish speaking context in Colombia and Peru (assembly-academy partnership).

Introduction

This paper reviews the history and motives for developing competency-based programs and presents research and evaluation on the strengths, weaknesses, and effectiveness of Northwest's CBTE approach as it relates to missions training and intercultural leadership development.

The research focuses on those CBTE aspects that differ significantly from traditional degree programs in higher education. These aspects include the following.

1. Competence- versus course-based assessments
2. Holistic application of knowledge, skills and character in ministry setting
3. Practices and habits conducive to longevity and effectiveness in ministry
4. Collaborative partnership between agency, assembly, and academy
5. Value of team-based mentoring
6. Direct relevance of assignments to ministry with flexibility based on developmental needs of the student
7. Priority on context-based learning as opposed to classroom experience
8. Flexibility in content, scheduling, and methodology

In the early 1980s my wife, Karen, and I explored the possibility of missions with the director of Fellowship International (FI), Paul Kerr. He advised me to get an MDiv and then apply. I earned my MDiv at Northwest Baptist Theological College and Seminary – an MDiv designed to train pastors for western Canadian churches – and my wife and I were sent as missionaries to Pakistan. In 1999 we returned with a sense of disquiet that we had not been as prepared for cross-cultural ministry as we could have been. In 2002 I was invited to join the faculty at Northwest Baptist Seminary as Coordinator of International Leadership Development (CILD) to explore how candidates for cross-cultural missions could best be trained and how such training could be extended to a variety of cultural contexts. The CILD position was in partnership with Fellowship International focusing on the training and development of FI personnel.

During the early 2000s it was clear that traditional seminary training for missions practitioners was struggling.[1] Students were not investing in missions preparation as they had in the past and, rather than encouraging candidates towards seminary education, mission agencies were increasing their efforts to provide "in house" training for applicants who did not have the qualifications needed for successful intercultural ministry. Several innovations were birthed during the 1990s and 2000 by both agency and academy to deal with this need, while other organizations, such as YWAM, which already had a strong focus on entry level training for missions, were able to attract young people who wanted involvement in missions without a prior academic requirement.

While many traditional models of theological education do a good job of developing the knowledge (head) and even, to a limited extent, the skills (hands) of individuals, agencies and academies tend to leave character (heart) to be worked out between God and the individual alone. However, when leadership and others sometimes fail, it is not generally because of a failure in knowledge and skills, but rather an issue of character and heart. A competency-based theological education seeks to address this issue. When the focus is upon the "competencies" of a servant of the Lord, character is given significant importance, alongside the development of knowledge and skills.

Decades ago, it was common that community living was part of theological formation. Professors and their families lived in a communal atmosphere with students. Meals were eaten together in the dining hall, staff and students worked and played together in diverse activities on the campus. Spiritual disciplines and discipleship were incorporated into daily living and opportunities for ministry in the community were conducted together. Doing life and ministry together beyond the classroom was intentional, because developing the heart and character of those who

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[1] The "missions or inter-cultural programs at Canadian Christian higher education institutions [are] being scaled back or discontinued altogether because of a lack of student interest" (Evangelical Fellowship of Canada 2017, 29).

would enter ministry was recognized as being of primary importance, more than just knowledge and skills.

For multiple reasons, which are not hard to identify, the focus on character has been lost in many academic and institutional models of theological education today. A competency-based theological education seeks to rescue this element of intentional development of the heart and character of God's servants.

One such innovation is the competency- and context-based, mentored and ATS accredited Intercultural Ministry Master of Arts in Biblical Leadership (IM MABL) from Northwest Baptist Seminary. It seeks to merge theological and academic rigour with practical application. The goal is to integrate in-context intercultural ministry with theological and sociological reflection so that competencies for effective ministry are developed. This program is a part of Northwest's Competency-Based Theological Education (CBTE) initiative.

Overview of Northwest's CBTE Program

Ruth McGillivray's 2020 article, *Competency-Based Theological Education: Origins of the Immerse MDiv at Northwest Baptist Seminary*, describes the genesis and development of CBTE to address perceived weaknesses in the traditional model of pastoral training resulting in the establishment of a CBTE MDiv program in 2013 called *Immerse.*[2] McGillivray outlines key training emphases in CBTE that contrast those of traditional models. These emphases underscore the holistic nature of CBTE that includes academics/knowledge (head) common to traditional programs while providing for the development of skills (hands) and character (heart) well beyond the scope of traditional models. As McGillivray states, "One of the strongest successes of the CBTE educational model has been its ability to extend and center learning in the [ministry] context of the learner, regardless of where that learner is located." McGillivray's article provides examples of the paradigm shift from traditional seminary education to CBTE.

- Outcomes are shaped by the competencies identified by academy, agency and assembly as required for effective ministry within the student's context.
- Each outcome includes development in knowledge (head), skills (hands), and character formation (heart).
- Students work in a ministry role similar to internship or residency programs.

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[2] Other competency-based training programs established earlier include the missions training program at Bethany Global University established from Kayser's notable 1994 PhD thesis. However, Northwest lays claim to constructing the first CBTE MDiv program accredited by the Associated Theological Schools (ATS) as well as creating the description "Competency-Based Theological Education."

- Students are guided by a three-person mentor team: an academic mentor, an agency or denominational mentor and a ministry mentor.
- The mentors represent a three-way partnership between the academy, the agency or denomination and the assembly.
- Assignments are used to demonstrate the development or demonstration of competency relating holistically to head, heart, and hands.
- Assignments are not graded but used by the mentors as indicators of the student's ministry competency.
- Competencies are assessed over multiple years, instead of teaching and grading students in a classroom on a single subject for a semester.
- Students do not self-select to be in the program. Rather, they are recommended by the agency or denomination as people worth investing in.
- Because the focus is on student competence, rather than the completion of assignments and courses, CBTE allows for competencies already developed by the student before entering the program to be quickly demonstrated. Thus, a greater focus is given to the competencies lacking and the length of the program will depend on the student's developmental needs. "[D]irect assessment models that decouple the concept of mastery from the credit hour enable some students to complete their degree requirements sooner" (Ford 2014).

Northwest's CBTE initiative has had positive impact both quantitatively and qualitatively. In the same article, McGillivray (2020) records that "[i]n September 2009, Northwest had two students enrolled in its conventional MDiv program. Ten years later, in September 2019, it had 79 Immerse MDiv students, learning in-context throughout North America and beyond." Furthermore, "Northwest faculty, staff and leadership have unanimously expressed higher confidence in the preparedness of Immerse graduates for ministry, more so than if they had been trained in a traditional MDiv program."

The Vision of CBTE intercultural training

The Intercultural Ministry MABL for training cross-cultural disciple makers
Being part of Northwest faculty during the development of the CBTE program allowed me, in my role as CILD, to take advantage of Northwest CBTE resources for the development of an intercultural ministry training program for the benefit of Fellowship International personnel. Initially, the developers designed an intercultural MDiv program called *Contextualized Ministry Leadership Training* using the framework and outcomes of the established *Immerse* MDiv described above, but with competencies and assignments adjusted to fit the requirements of a

cross-cultural ministry worker. An FI Immerse committee was formed from both Northwest and Fellowship International leadership to determine what the requirements should be. The first MDiv student, Andrés Rincón, graduated from the program in 2017.

While the program was considered a successful application of the CBTE philosophy and incorporated all the paradigm shifts indicated in the previous section, the intercultural program was changed in two major ways.

First, a graduated or "laddered" approach was adopted so that a student could move from a certificate of 4 outcomes to a MABL of 12 outcomes and on to an MDiv of 27 outcomes. This provided greater structure and guidance for the students ensuring completion of assignments with a clear sense of progress.

Second, Fellowship International's mission focus of sending intercultural *disciple makers* required the MABL to be created from the ground up. The leadership of Fellowship International described the ideal disciple maker practitioner who is competent in head (vision and knowledge), heart (character and commitment), and hands (skills and methodology) and is therefore capable of effective ministry in a cross-cultural setting. A series of 12 outcomes with 4 to 6 competencies for each outcome were described and can be found in the Northwest document, *Master of Arts In Biblical Leadership – Intercultural Ministry.*[3]

The 12 outcomes are divided into 4 themes, as follows[4]

THEMES	OUTCOMES
Strategy and Implementation	1. Prayer, Vision, planning, and evaluation 2. Engaging a community 3. Empowering, multiplication and reproduction
Bible and Theology	4. Ministry Praxis[5]
Cross-cultural Change Agent	5. Cross-cultural Sensitivity 6. Communication and Language 7. Contextualization
Lifestyle and Ministry	8. Faith and Spirituality 9. Lifestyle and ministry balance 10. Resilient Character 11. Team and Partnership 12. Relational Skills

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[3] Available upon request: IM MABL 2023: 7-10.

[4] IM MABL 2023:6.

[5] Because theological themes are integrated into other assignments, Bible and Theology has only one specific outcome.

The **IM MABL**, equivalent to 12 courses or 36 credit hours, is designed to be completed in three years, four outcomes per year. The assumption is that the student is in part- or full-time ministry and the assignments are integrated with their ministry responsibilities. This sequence is equivalent to a part-time student studying four courses a year. The first theme, *Strategy and Implementation*, provides practical guidance for the student in disciple making, one outcome each year. Three other outcomes from the other themes are designated per year.

Spanish CBTE MDiv Program

The dream for Northwest's CBTE program in Spanish primarily for Latin Americans began in the minds of Dr Kent Anderson (Former Northwest President) and Diego Cardona (Missionary Fellowship and former Northwest student) shortly after the 2014 initiation of the CBTE program in Canada. In 2017, after Andrés completed his studies in the Contextualized CBTE MDiv program, he returned to Colombia and joined the team, led by Rob Brynjolfson, which translated and contextualized the Canadian based CBTE MDiv outcomes and assignments for the Latin American context.

In 2018, the Spanish CBTE Master of Divinity for church leadership officially began with a group of 10 students, eight from Colombia, one from Peru and one from Guatemala. Because of the pandemic, Northwest did not open new places for students until 2022. There currently are 14 students in the program. In addition to the MDiv, Northwest now offers a Master of Arts in Biblical Leadership (MABL) and is designing a one-year diploma program in Christian leadership. These programs ladder towards the MDiv.

The Perceived Need for CBTE Intercultural Training

The authors of this paper believe that CBTE ought to be the preferred way of training people for intercultural ministry for reasons not limited to the following.

Agency/Assembly partnership with the academy
In traditional educational models, seminary-based programs were established with limited input from the agency or assembly. As a result, there were often gaps in areas such as language and culture learning, partner raising and interpersonal skills. Candidates encountered steep learning curves when completing their degree and being immersed in their ministry context. CBTE addresses the gaps by including the agency as a *partner* in the program.

1. Student selection. In the CBTE program the investment by the agency/assembly through mentoring the students and shaping the program on

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the assignment and ministry context levels means that the agency/assembly has an important say into who is chosen for training. Rather than assessing candidates according to their previous training and experience, the agency/assembly can focus on the potential of candidates they are already committed to, with the option to have those candidates engage in training within the parameters of the agency.

2. Mentoring. The agency/assembly has at least one mentor representing their concerns and ensuring that the student is being evaluated according to character, values, skills, and practices the agency/assembly knows are essential for impact and perseverance in ministry.

3. Shaping assignments to fit agency/assembly priorities. Within the CBTE programs such as the IM MABL and the Spanish CBTE MDiv, the outcomes and competencies are pre-determined. However, there is significant flexibility in the assignments and ministry context that is determined by the agency/assembly and the mentors.

Flexibility of assignments

The CBTE programs evaluated in this paper as case studies illustrate the many assignment options open to the agency in training their personnel.

1. Cohort options. Fellowship International has a professional development program called Competent as Intercultural Change Agents (CICA) during which FI personnel interact together as they engage a key ministry topic. Each member of FI is required to take one module a year. For the IM MABL program, Fellowship International students are required to do four CICA modules a year which provides them interaction with missionaries located in a variety of ministry contexts.

2. Input options. To take advantage of the variety of opportunities available to learners today, mentors and students may substitute lectures, seminars and workshops that would enhance the student's development.

3. Output options: There is flexibility in how students describe their development and competency. Videos, blogs, audio recording or papers are optional ways for the student to demonstrate competency. These indicators are in addition to the observation of the student in their ministry setting.

The research question

CBTE claims to be an effective and successful way to educate and train people for intercultural ministry, therefore leaders are equipped according to the needs of the agency or assembly.[6] Does the evidence from both students and

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[6] Competency-Based 2023.

mentors demonstrate that this claim is valid? Does CBTE provide accredited degrees in an accessible and effective manner for those serving in ministry?

Addressing these questions, the authors conducted interviews with six mentors and 14 students for their evaluation of the strengths, weaknesses, and effectiveness of the following aspects of the CBTE approach which represent major paradigm shifts from traditional seminary education models.

1. Competence versus course-based assessments. In CBTE students "demonstrate whether they have mastered the stated competencies"[7] (Ford, 2014), rather than relying on the quality of papers submitted and personal exam results.
2. Holistic application of knowledge, skills and character in ministry setting. In CBTE the focus is on competency in ministry activity, more than merely on the ability to communicate the theory that guides the activity.
3. Practices and habits conducive to longevity and effectiveness in ministry. In CBTE character competencies such as conflict management and overcoming failure in a ministry setting are tested and assessed, as opposed to mere theoretical comprehension.
4. Collaborative partnership between agency, assembly, and academy. In CBTE the high level of investment per student requires a partnership to address all areas required for success in ministry. In traditional education, the bulk of responsibility is with the academy.
5. Value of team-based mentoring. In CBTE "Students are assisted, rather than taught, by coaches and mentors, who may also be responsible for curating content that the students may need to help master a given competency," as opposed to prioritizing instruction via lectures.
6. Direct relevance of assignments with flexibility based on developmental needs. In CBTE the concern for competence coupled with integration between inputs and ministry practice means that enhanced learning opportunities outside of assigned tasks are considered. Traditional education requires strict adherence to the requirements outlined in a syllabus.
7. Priority on context-based learning as opposed to classroom experience. In CBTE students are required to reflect on their ministry experience in light of insights gained through their reading or other inputs. In traditional education, often the ability to explain the insights discussed in the classroom is sufficient.
8. Flexibility in content, scheduling, and methodology. In CBTE the focus is on developing the student to an appropriate level of competence, which depends on each person. "Time is variable for each student."[8] In traditional education

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[7] Ford, 2014.
[8] Ibid.

papers are marked in a way that reveals which students have demonstrated greater understanding within a particular timeframe.

The research process and questions

For each of the eight CBTE aspects listed above the following questions were asked.

1. From your perspective, what is the difference between the CBTE aspect and traditional education?
2. From your perspective, what is the strength of these unique aspects of the CBTE aspect?
3. From your perspective, what is the weakness of these unique aspects of the CBTE aspect?
4. How would you rate the effectiveness of the CBTE aspect in terms of preparing people for ministry?

Each interviewee was also asked: What recommendations would you make to improve the CBTE experience?

Research Results

Each of the authors held interviews and summaries of the transcripts are available on request. Two of the authors, Jolley and Rincón, each interviewed five students involved in the Spanish CBTE MDiv program located in Colombia and Peru. Naylor interviewed five mentors and four students involved in either the *Contextualized Ministry Leadership Training* MDiv or the IM MABL.

In the interest of brevity and to avoid redundancy with the description above, the interviewee's perceived "difference" between traditional education and CBTE is not included. Also, due to the need for brevity, the suggested recommendations are not provided. However, these are available on request.

The following is a summary of comments made in the interviews.

Competence versus course-based assessments

1. Strengths

- CBTE emphasizes the competent and practical application of theological knowledge, which develops critical thought.

- It promotes reflection with application and is therefore a more robust evaluation that ensures the student understands the concepts and can continue to develop their skills long-term.
- Engaging with the context means that the student is not just dealing with abstract ideas; the experience is more like a residency or co-op program within their ministry context.
- The CBTE process reveals if a person is a good candidate for the ministry rather than if the person can rightly answer the questions. It reveals the real needs of the student within their context of ministry.
- For a few cases, the amount of study doesn't need to be extensive because the student already has the competencies.
- The focus on the student's particular ministry context allows for a variety of expressions and emphases. There is freedom for the student to experiment, try new things and even make mistakes without losing the benefit of the learning experience because of the mentor evaluations and engagement.

2. Weaknesses

- The metrics used in CBTE to evaluate students are different than those of traditional education programs. Evaluating competencies can take longer than marking papers and exams, and milestones showing progress are not as obvious.
- Because CBTE is a paradigm shift, it takes students and mentors time to adjust and can be frustrating, confusing, or overwhelming at first.
- Transference from CBTE to traditional programs can be difficult. It is not easy to measure and transfer credits when competencies rather than grades are the ultimate criteria.
- CBTE has the limitation of requiring a lot of resources – mentors, instructors and coaches focused on one student, in contrast to the possibility of large classes in traditional education.
- Sometimes the one academic mentor can't speak to everything experienced by the student in the ministry context. In traditional education focused on class teaching, the professor is the expert and there are several professors, each with a distinct expertise.
- CBTE program completion requires highly motivated and disciplined persons, and even these students may take longer to complete than with a traditional program.

3. Effectiveness

- All responses were positive in terms of the effectiveness of the model, stating that "it is the best way," "excellent," and "very effective."
- One person interviewed expressed it this way: "CBTE is definitely more effective than course based, if field readiness is the goal, because the student is already doing ministry and this process maximizes the effectiveness of training. CBTE fits both those who have experience and those who do not, because it looks at competence. The student uses and builds on their experience during the program. The student is dealing with relationships (mentors as well as ministry activities) and so develops character and ministry skills. The study program 'feels' like ministry and is an integrated process of inputs, ministry and reflection that has been observed by the mentors."

Holistic application of knowledge, skills and character in ministry setting

1. Strengths

- Because knowledge is immediately applied in real life situations, it is more memorable, and even more knowledge is gained out of those real-life experiences.
- The student experiences a more robust development and is conscious of areas in which they need to be transformed; things like piety and devotion, values, character, and motivations, which are beyond just knowledge.
- Students look at other topics like relationships, vulnerability, and family so that they see the educational process from a holistic point of view, making a priority of creating good groups, growing in fellowship and doing theology in community.
- There is a greater opportunity for contextualization.
- The true strengths of a person as well as their weaknesses are identified. The possibility of developing skills is higher because the student is receiving constant feedback.
- One student emphasized that "we go deep. I have a good relationship with mentors and coach."

2. Weaknesses

- Students need to be engaged in an appropriate ministry context.
- There is significantly more complexity in CBTE than just head knowledge and it can be hard to integrate all the dimensions.

- CBTE requires more work from the student for the same academic degree and can take longer to finish than traditional methods of study.
- CBTE depends significantly upon the quality of the mentors who understand and are committed to the holistic development of the students.
- Pressure to have students fulfill the requirements within a limited time frame could possibly lead to completion without adequate competency development.

3. Effectiveness

- CBTE does not isolate the student from their ministry context, but rather develops them within it.
- Skills and character are developed in conjunction with knowledge acquisition, rather than waiting until after their education.
- The strengths of CBTE are more important than the weaknesses for establishing the habits and focus of successful ministry.
- Experience is a key part of the CBTE model and the relevance of learning for the student in context is evident.

Practices and habits conducive to longevity and effectiveness in ministry

1. Strengths

- CBTE enables the identification of passions and clarifies call.
- Good practices and habits are encouraged in and through real life situations including how to make contextualized ministry plans and fulfill them.
- Immediate applications help develop disciplines that will go on being used leading to effectiveness and fruit.
- The student implements resources related to self and ministry awareness. These are practices that encourage longevity in terms of protecting the practitioner from burnout.
- CBTE promotes longevity in ministry because weaknesses of character cannot be hidden and so can be dealt with.
- There is a high correlation between those who succeed in this program and having the discipline needed for successful ministry.

2. Weaknesses

- A student could conceivably avoid areas difficult for them and so not develop a competency.
- The effectiveness can be hampered with character flaws that take years to deal with if they are not picked up.
- The program does not evaluate long term ability to deal with the pressures of ministry because it is only for 2-4 years. Although if they can handle the pressures of the program, that is an important indication for effectiveness and longevity in ministry.

3. Effectiveness

- The program develops good habits and skills that promote lifelong learning, particularly because the student is serving while studying.
- A feedback loop to correct and guide produces evidence of the student's development: both in learning and habits.
- Tools are not just learned cognitively but put into practice so that they become useful skills.

Collaborative partnership between agency, assembly, and academy

1. Strengths

- The student has multiple partners actively assisting them achieve their goals.
- There are huge advantages with mentors from each partner that are involved throughout the program: The student's progress can be tracked with their end goal in mind, their learning outcomes and skill building is observed, the student feels supported and cared for, they feel encouraged, they feel invested in and not isolated.
- No two students have the exact same level of understanding of cultural sensitivity, contextualization, etc., so the collaborative efforts of all the mentors for that student can create a learning environment and pace unique for each student in their context.
- The student develops a greater sense of being part of a team.

2. Weaknesses

- The model requires good communication between the institutions/mentors. Different eyes may not be evaluating the same things or even have the same

metrics. Unfulfilled expectations between the partners could lead to a clash and confusion.

- Requires a willing collaboration of two and sometimes three institutions to make a significant investment. Can be a good filter of candidates with potential.

3. Effectiveness

- Being pushed and assisted by all three partners in one direction provides strong affirmation. Having the collaboration and broader interaction of the institutions as an integral part of the program is very effective and great for field readiness.

Value of team-based mentoring

1. Strengths

- It is a relational model that promotes the value of team so that we should never walk alone which can bring a wealth of experience to the relationship.
- Mentors focus on character and worldview and not only knowledge. They correct errors teaching the student to accept rebuke and correction. They affirm what is good; "they cheer you on." They are familiar with the life situation/ field experience of the student and can offer real time critique.
- Mentors speak deeply into people's lives and provide the metamessage that the student is important, valued and has potential.
- A mentor relationship is a relationship that the student can maintain beyond just the program.
- The mentoring model becomes a model for discipleship ministry with a pastoral focus on personal issues, a ministry focus on skills, and an academic focus on the Bible.
- Mentors evaluate as one voice, but from different perspectives.

2. Weaknesses

- The quality of the program depends upon the quality and character of the mentors as well as their understanding of and commitment to the student to the program.
- There must be a good relationship between the student and mentors.
- The mentor must be 1) available and 2) provide feedback.

- Mentors must be willing to face conflict over practices and habits. The student must accept conflict and criticism.
- If the mentors are not in agreement, there could be a problem.
- It can be difficult for the student to challenge mentors. There is a power dynamic at play. The student will sometimes feel that they are being judged by too many, so the team of mentors need to be disciplined to speak with one voice.

3. Effectiveness

- Highly effective, but low in efficiency. There are a lot less students, but more well-rounded and the student is very happy.
- A mentoring team is one the best things about the program. Personal character growth has occurred, beyond just education. The student is observed from different perspectives, ensuring a more holistic development.

Direct relevance of assignments with flexibility based on developmental needs

1. Strengths

- This is a major strength of the program. Each competency is fixed, but the outworking is adjusted to the student's needs who develops that competency according to a wide variety of possible activities, incorporating any training that helps the student reach the objective.
- All the activities and assignments are practical and geared towards specific personal and ministry development allowing for the contextualization of principles into the student's context.
- The evaluation process is dependent on the competency development needs of the student and so is different for each student.

2. Weaknesses

- Requires self-discipline to manage and too much flexibility can be overwhelming.
- Assignments can take longer if the student struggles to apply the assignment to the context. If the mentors are not satisfied with the student's work, they may have to redo the work or demonstrate competency another way.

- Students can potentially manipulate the flexibility based on their fears or weaknesses. It is important for mentors to be able to perceive if this is happening.

3. Effectiveness

- The student gets the chance to think deeper and gets a better grasp of concepts and skills in real life contexts.
- A mentor can more accurately gauge the student's ability for ministry and provide early correction when student gets "off course."
- Having flexibility is comparable to ministry realities which helps develop field readiness. As one student expressed it: "I am learning to replicate this aspect of flexibility within my ministry as I get used to adaptive space and experimentation. If my education had been more structured, I would be less adaptive."

Priority on context-based learning as opposed to classroom experience

1. Strengths

- What is learned is applied immediately and the student can see the benefits. This helps retention as well as motivates and encourages the student since they are always considering how an assignment relates to their ministry context, theology, service, people, etc.
- The student is being "polished" in ministry as they adapt the teaching to their reality, resulting in growth and improvement as well as clearly demonstrating their level of competence.
- The student learns to develop relationships in ministry, not just with classmates. A priority of context-based learning is to make the student field-ready by utilizing each student's ministry context as a facet of the education and training experience.

2. Weaknesses

- The path of study is individualistic. This is both a strength and weakness, developing self-motivation but lacking a strong cohort experience.
- Studying in CBTE can be a "lonely path" which can be a challenge for some, especially if overwhelmed by the accumulation of work. There is benefit to communal and collaborative learning with other students.

- There is not a clearcut standard of marking like in the classroom setting, but this different philosophy fits better with the goal of equipping for ministry.
- Limitation if a student doesn't have adequate activity or ministry to live out the requirements and really develop the skills and character.

3. Effectiveness

- Students rated CBTE very effective for their development and ministry preparation, mainly because of a greater focus on experiencing ministry context.
- Because assignments are applied, and the student gets direct feedback, CBTE puts the student in the right 'world.'

Flexibility in content, scheduling, and methodology

1. Strengths

- CBTE provides a structure and paradigm for study to develop skills in ministry without taking formal courses. The CBTE program runs according to student needs and schedule; students have control of setting goals focusing for what they want to do long term. This freedom is helpful for some who prefer to process the readings and assignments at a slower pace; harsher and quicker deadlines means that some of the content and material may not be as impactful or meaningful and the student would not have time to integrate them into their ministry.
- Because the mentors know the students well, they can sensitively push students to complete requirements, guide them around barriers, and understand why a flexible deadline may be required.
- The online platform provides orientation to the program with the ability to interact with mentors and assignments. Students may pursue further training and learning in a particular area if it has potential to develop their competencies further. Alternatively, if a competency is evident, the student can move on to other competencies and avoid redundancy.
- Developing a posture of flexibility helps when dealing with people in ministry.

2. Weaknesses

- In a traditional model, a structure is provided through class schedules and due dates. In CBTE, the student is free from this (which may be seen as a

blessing), but discipline, dedication and self-initiative is required. For people who prefer direction and deadlines, this freedom can be difficult since, unlike traditional programs, the students must find their own rhythm and progress. Some students get overwhelmed by decision fatigue or underperform because they don't feel pressure to complete; others seem to thrive.

- Because the focus is competency and not only information intake, the program takes longer. In a ministry context, managing between ministry and studies is a struggle. Those being ministered to need time, which interferes with studies.
- Some students were not able to combine the demands of the program with full time employment and reduced their studies to 8-10 hours per week.
- Too much flexibility can make the structure seem weak.
- Standardization and evaluation of progress is harder.

3. Effectiveness

- It promotes field readiness and even more so for people who are already in ministry, resulting in faster fruit in the ministry.
- Effectiveness comes from the flexibility. Rather than follow a set schedule, the student learns to build their own schedule.
- The methodology and the input from the mentors allow for development of competencies, not only completion of assignments.
- The relationship model maintains academic rigour.

Conclusions and Opportunities

It was very beneficial and gratifying to conduct these interviews. They allowed us to evaluate and corroborate many of the model's premises. We were encouraged that the CBTE model will edify the church with competent and confident leaders.

CBTE seeks to break the mold of traditional theological education of students as mere learners and teachers as information givers. CBTE addresses students as holistic human beings trained *for* ministry as they serve *in* ministry. The integration of faith and action results in a life of integrity. Traditional training has generated many leaders and pastors with great abilities in both academic and ministerial fields, but with significant educational shortcomings. CBTE education may not be the only way forward to a new reality, nor necessarily the best, but it is a hopeful path towards the formation of leaders and pastors who have a holistic and integrated ministry that is lived out with integrity.

The interviews confirm the significance of CBTE for missions training. Our research team has high expectations for CBTE collaborations between many other mission agencies and the academy for the training and development of cross-cultural disciple makers. Although the use of mentors requires a significant investment on the part of the agency, the fruit of the investment develops the competencies needed for cross-cultural disciple making and the experience of being mentored that will continue to have impact and be reproduced within the agency for years to come.

Mark Naylor served among a Muslim people group for fourteen years and continues a Bible translation project begun in 1989. He has a DTh in missiology from UNISA with a focus on Intercultural Communication. He has been on the faculty of Northwest Baptist Seminary in Langley BC since 2001 and is the Coordinator of International Leadership Development for Fellowship International.

Ken Jolley serves with Fellowship International and has a MTS from Heritage Theological Seminary. From 1990-2015 he served in Caracas Venezuela as a church planter amongst the professional class and in leadership development (professor of Bible and Hermeneutics with the Caracas Evangelical Seminary). Today Ken serves as an academic mentor with Spanish Inmerse, a trainer with Simply Mobilizing in Spanish North America and the Caribbean, and as a mentor to many servants of the Lord (latino diaspora) living in different countries.

Andrés Rincón has a MTh from the Biblical Seminary of Colombia and an MDIV from Northwest Baptist Seminary in Canada. Network Manager of Spanish Inmerse, he is passionate about leadership development in Latin America, empowering new leaders and creating opportunities of connecting people to God's Mission.

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