



EFFECTIVE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY COHORT CURRICULUM REVIEW

Prepared for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

Submitted by Kevin Rose, Ed.D.
kevin.jimmy.rose@gmail.com

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Summary | 2 |
| Background | 3 |
| Overview | 3 |
| About the Author | 3 |
| Key Strengths | 4 |
| Use of Experiential Learning | 4 |
| Clarity of Materials | 4 |
| Incorporating Principles of Andragogy | 5 |
| Building in Social Constructivism | 6 |
| Incorporating Culturally Relevant Pedagogy | 6 |
| Key Improvements | 7 |
| Develop Learning Objectives | 7 |
| Include Learning Assessments | 8 |
| Increase Experiential Learning | 10 |
| Utilize Scaffolding | 11 |
| Consider Universal Design | 11 |
| Recognize Power Dynamics | 12 |
| References | 13 |
| Appendix A | 14 |
| Appendix B | 15 |

Summary

Dear Dr. Kostakis and Mr. Christoforou:

Thank you for the opportunity to review your curriculum for the Effective Christian Ministry Cohort program. I enjoyed learning about your goals, process, and intended outcomes of this program. I reviewed all the materials that were provided to me, paying special attention to materials and information connected to learning. I utilized well-accepted theories of adult learning and development to guide my review. In the following document, I start with what I see are the key curricular strengths of the program:

- use of experiential learning
- clarity of materials
- incorporating principles of andragogy
- building in social constructivism
- incorporating culturally relevant pedagogy

I then provide several recommendations that you might consider building into your program to strengthen it moving forward. Those include:

- develop learning objectives
- include learning assessments
- increase experiential learning
- utilize scaffolding
- consider universal design
- recognize power dynamics

Throughout the report, I provide citations to various empirical bodies of evidence that support the ideas presented. These may also prove to be useful sources of information for you as you continue to develop your program. In addition, I attempt to provide models and examples in my recommendations. Many more are available, of course, but these represent some of the most common and well-accepted in designing effective learning programs. Above all, I hope this report provides you with actionable steps you can take that are founded in solid scientific evidence. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions.



Kevin Rose, Ed.D.

Background

Overview

I was asked to review the curricular and other materials of the Effective Christian Ministry Cohort program offered by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. The program launched in September of 2021 and is scheduled to be completed in May 2022. The stated goal of the program is: “Orthodox Christians sustain lifelong participation and engagement in the Church and their faith after aging out of youth and young adult ministry programs.” As part of my review, I was provided with the following documents:

1. Marketing materials including social media and print ads
2. The syllabus for the cohort program
3. The coach training agendas
4. ECM parish health assessment
5. ECM cohort logic model
6. First summit agenda
7. Coach training video

In reviewing the materials provided, I utilized theories and concepts of effective learning and curriculum design. All of the concepts utilized are evidence-based and empirically sound in their approaches. I should note that curriculum and learning design, however, is often both science and art. Individual facilitators may choose to emphasize certain theories more or less, or even other theories altogether.

About the Author

Kevin Rose, Ed.D. is an Assistant Professor of Organizational Leadership at Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis. In his current role, he teaches courses on designing managerial training and development, workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion, and global leadership. For over 17 years, Dr. Rose has both designed and deployed effective training and developmental interventions for adult learners. His work has been utilized in corporate, non-profit, and higher education environments. His research focuses on effective learning for adults as well as dysfunctional leadership and other workplace issues.



Key Strengths

Use of Experiential Learning

One of the most impactful educational interventions is learning by experience (Kolb, 2014). Experiential learning is so impactful because it allows the brain to encode information into memory and understanding much more richly. That is, many more neural connections can be made between the concepts to be learned and, for example, the physical place of experience, the emotions tied to the experience, and the metacognitive processes (Richmond et al., 2017) happening in the brain. Your curriculum abounds with experiential learning and exercises. In fact, it is not a stretch to categorize the entire program as an “experiential intervention.” Particularly for adult learners, the experiential nature of a learning program can be extraordinarily beneficial.

Another important aspect of experiential learning is reflection. For learning from an experience to “sink in,” participants must be allowed, and even prompted, to engage in reflection about their learning. In your program, this is done monthly and is thematic. This is an excellent way to engage in deeper learning that will lead to behavior change.

Clarity of Materials

Contrary to the way in which many learning materials for adults are presented, a best practice is to provide materials that are designed simply and clearly. This seems intuitive, yet course materials, textbooks, guides, and models are often designed without this in mind. The principle of parsimony from research and philosophy has been utilized in the learning sciences to advocate for the need to present information in as simple way as possible without diluting the intended meaning (Feldman, 2003). Your materials follow this principle well by including infographics, clear timelines, and beautifully designed videos and materials. While I did not have access to specific presentations or lesson materials, I encourage this practice to be continued throughout the designing of all materials. However, there are three specific examples I would like to highlight that, although simple, speak to the usefulness of parsimony in learning.

1. In the cohort syllabus, often used terminology is defined in the very beginning. This is a useful way to ensure that participants understand what exactly is meant by terms. It is also a simple way to convey information that could otherwise be obscured (e.g. in-text definitions).

Likewise, putting this information at the beginning is a readily accessible guide for participants. This also connects to the pedagogical practice of *previewing* which enhances cognitive processes for learners (Lang, 2016).

2. In the document titled “Final Sales Brochure,” the target audience is clearly described as “clergy and lay ministry workers who have completed the online course and want to take the next step in developing more effective ministry in their communities.” Similarly, the brochure goes on to describe the various roles that would benefit from this program. It is important that participants “see” themselves as part of the learning experience in order to feel comfortable and learn as much as possible. These statements implicitly communicate to learners that they “belong” in this program.
3. The syllabus is well organized and clearly communicates the types of activities that participants will engage in throughout the course. It includes key milestones, activity due dates, and important meetings. Importantly, several reviewed materials (including the syllabus, the *Final Sales Brochure*, and the video entitled *Join Our Learning Community*), reiterate and reinforce the rhythm and structure of the program from month to month. Structure and predictability can be effectively used in these ways to reduce or eliminate barriers to learning.

Incorporating Principles of Andragogy

As the field of learning sciences has matured over the past century, an important focus on different learning audiences emerged. One of the most important steps forward in the field is the recognition that adults and children have different needs as learners. This notion led to the development of the learning theory known as andragogy (Knowles, 1980). Contrasted with traditional *pedagogy* (from the Greek παιδός meaning boy and ἄγω meaning to lead), which has its historic roots in teaching children, *andragogy* (from the Greek ἀνδρ meaning man and ἀγωγός meaning to lead) centers the focus of learning needs on adults. Given the ECM cohort program’s focus on adults as learners, it is vital that principles of andragogy are utilized. Several examples of this are present:

- A focus on learning in an applied (real-world) setting
- Reliance on participants’ experiences to inform their learning and the learning of others
- Utilizing lessons and reflections that enhance the participants’ roles or jobs

In short, this curriculum is well-designed for an adult learner audience because it incorporates several aspects of an andragogical approach. In particular, one of the most important drivers of adult learning

success is seeing connections between the curriculum and their real-world experiences. That is, you focus on relevance rather than theory.

Building in Social Constructivism

A long-established educational paradigm called social constructivism suggests that individuals learn through social-cognitive processes. That is, there is an aspect of learning that does not come from instructor-led practices nor does it come from learning from materials (e.g. books, videos, etc.). Instead, learning happens within and between multiple individuals learning together. Educators and facilitators now routinely take advantage of this idea through group projects, active learning strategies, and peer-assisted and peer-led activities. In the ECM program, social constructivism is utilized by including multiple individuals from a parish in a program-long group. Additionally, cohorts are encouraged to share information and strategies with each other throughout the program. This strategy is helpful for building trust in small groups, encouraging diversity of thought, and accomplishing more overall work. In addition, participants may also be able to learn more and better from and with each other rather than from the use of materials or coaching alone.

Incorporating Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

In secular and general education contexts, it is important to help learners see themselves and their cultures in the learning environment. This includes lessons, experiences, assignments, and objectives, and even the instructor. This is known as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Obviously, for your ECM program, culture is a critical aspect of the curriculum. In short, the ECM program would not be what it is without a focus on the religious and cultural language, meanings, artifacts, and rituals. Research supports the idea that learners learn better when their culture is reflected in pedagogy because they can better make connections between their experiences and the lessons. Again, your curriculum does that beautifully by incorporating multiple and meaningful connections to the cultural environment (the Church) in which they will be engaging in their work.

Key Improvements

Develop Learning Objectives

A critical practice of designing effective learning interventions is to utilize learning objectives to drive all aspects of the curriculum. Unfortunately, the use of objectives to guide learning can be complicated and confusing. For example, there are no standard definitions of learning objectives versus learning outcomes versus learning goals. Additionally, many experts also debate the use of certain goals in various contexts. In other words, we ask what kinds of goals are appropriate for what kinds of audiences and learning purposes. Nevertheless, I recommend utilizing learning objectives (and/or outcomes) to guide your continued work and curriculum development. First, a couple of definitions:

1. Learning objectives: What the participant should be able to do or know as a result of the training
2. Learning outcomes: A tangible product or end result of successfully engaging in the learning objective

The overall goal of your program is that “Orthodox Christians [will] sustain lifelong participation and engagement in the Church and their faith after aging out of youth and young adult ministry program.” From there, I recommend creating guiding objectives for the program. An example of how you might craft these is to finish the statement “By the end of this program, participants should be able to...” You should then utilize verbs that reflect your desired level of learning. A useful framework for doing this is Bloom’s taxonomy of learning objectives. The taxonomy is displayed in Figure 1. Additionally, I have included a list of verbs for each level in [Appendix B](#).

For example, an objective of your overall program might look something like this:

- *By the end of the ECM program, participants should be able to design engaging youth programming for their parish.*

The verb *design* is related to the highest level of Bloom’s Taxonomy (create). I encourage facilitators of applied programs like yours to focus on the higher levels of the Taxonomy so that there is meaningful engagement and resulting products.

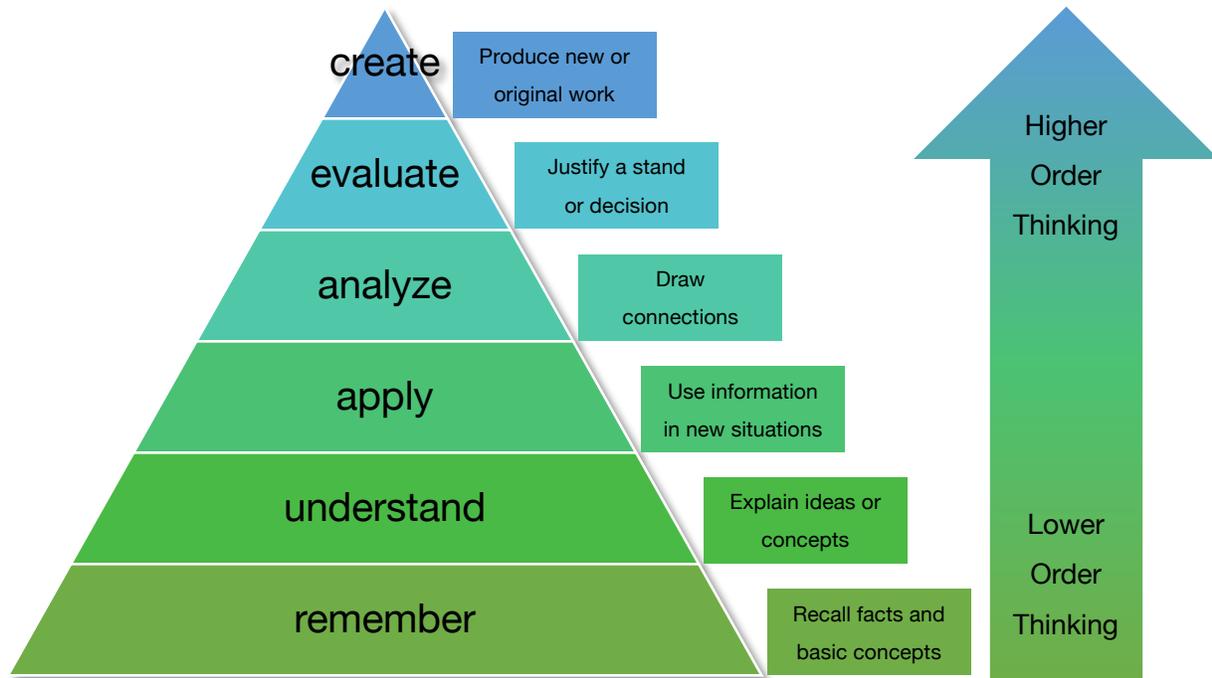


Figure 1.

Additionally, I offer a few more suggestions regarding learning objectives. First, overall program goals should be connected to your stated outcomes in some way. That is, your logic model will help to craft these objectives. Second, you should aim for only four to six learning objectives for the whole program. Having more than this means that a program is likely trying to accomplish too much. Third, learning objectives can be nested. That is, each month could have its own learning objectives that relate to the overall objectives. If you choose to write monthly objectives, I recommend ensuring that they are clearly aligned with the overall program objectives.

Include Learning Assessments

The most robust learning interventions include some form of learning assessment. Assessment comes in many forms: formal assignments, short quizzes, and even group discussions. Your program includes some of these already. Assessment in your context can be multi-faceted. First, assessment of learning can be used to help you understand if participants are “picking up” the information you wish them to. Second, learning assessment can help students refocus their own learning (e.g. when quizzed on information, participants then know what is critical information and, as a result, how to regulate their own learning activities). Third, assessment can help you with continuous improvement and reporting success to funders and stakeholders.

Assessment activities should not exist in a vacuum. Each *formal* assessment (that is, an assessment that you utilize to indicate a learner’s proficiency or learning level) should be explicitly connected to one of your program’s learning objectives. Shy away from the temptation to include assessments or assignments because they might seem robust or impactful. Instead, make sure that any assessment you have can be traced back to one or more of your objectives. An example of a formal assessment could be if you “graded” and, more importantly, provided feedback on reflection essays. Informal assessments, on the other hand, do not explicitly need to be connected to an overall objective, but simply exist to support students in their learning. An example of an informal assessment might be a simple quiz to check understanding (i.e. knowledge check). For a resource on designing and deploying assessments for learning, please see the resources in [Appendix A](#).

One way to help with structuring and aligning assessments with objectives is called backwards course design. This is often used in formal educational settings, but applies to non-formal settings as well. Figure X displays a portion of backwards course design that you might consider for your own program. Notice that you should begin with the overall goal from your logic model. Then, your final outcome (in this case the One Year Ministry Plan) is developed. Based on the final product, you should design your four to six overall program objectives. In step 4, design your monthly objectives. Note that overall program objectives in Step 3 can drive multiple monthly objectives. Lastly, in Step 5, you should design assessments and activities that tie directly to the monthly objectives you are trying to achieve.

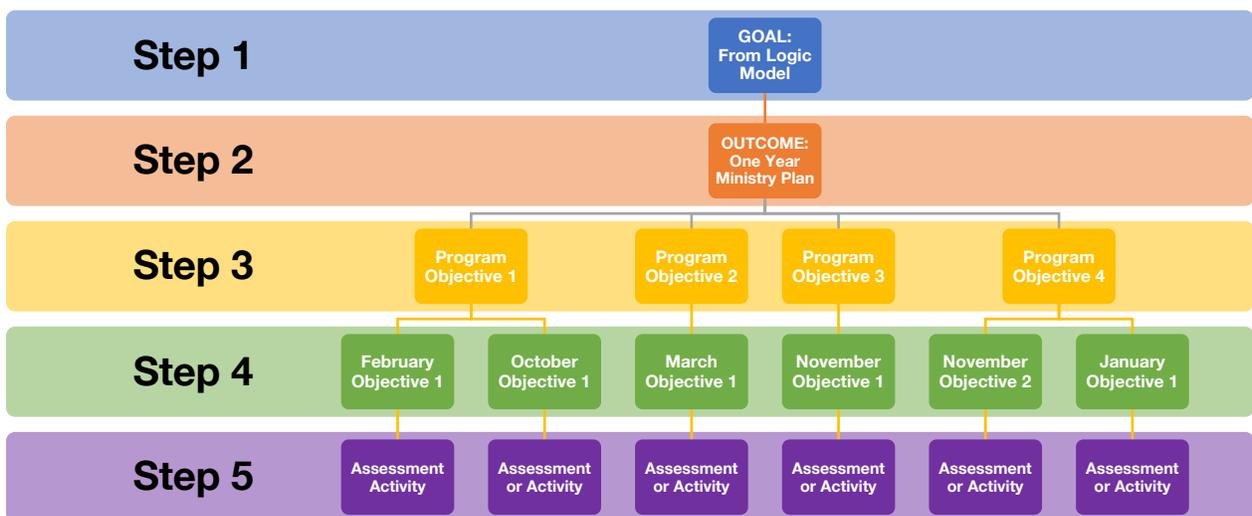


Figure 2.

Increase Experiential Learning

As stated previously, one of the hallmark strengths of your program is the use of experiential learning. The experiential learning model, however, provides for additional learning activities that I recommend incorporating more purposefully into your curriculum. The experiential learning model is presented in Figure 3.

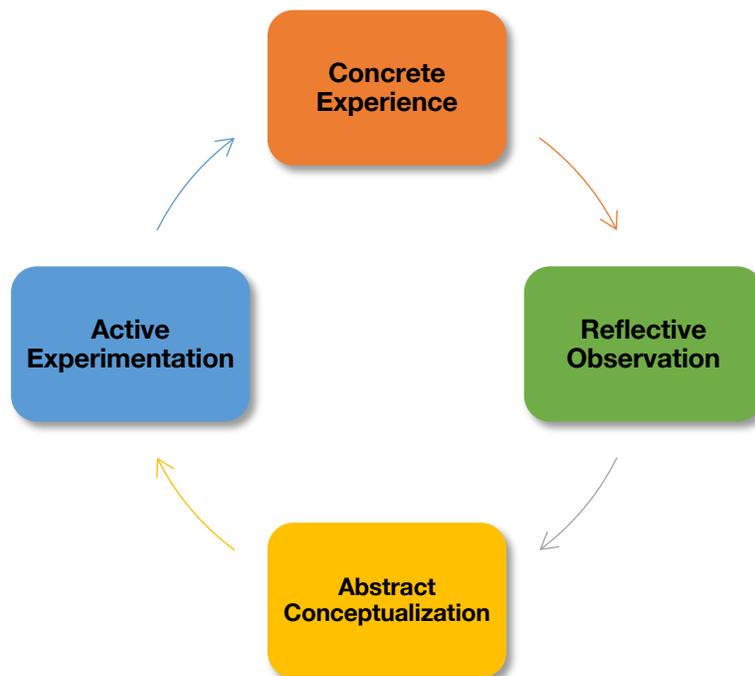


Figure 3.

Your program does a great job of providing concrete experiences as learning activities and does include some reflective observation. These linkages could be enhanced. Additionally, I encourage you to consider providing participants opportunities to engage in abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. Abstract conceptualization is the idea that, after we have reflected on our experience, we distill those reflections into “lessons learned” that can be applied to other situations and settings. Then, in the active experimentation phase, we put those lessons learned to the test to see what holds up in new, applied settings. An outline of how this might be incorporated is:

1. Concrete experience: This step of the process is already woven into your curriculum.
2. Reflective observation: Some of the “personal reflection” assignments have participants reflect on their experiences in that particular month. Consider connecting the

- assignments more explicitly to the experiences by having students keep reflective journals that ask the following about their experiences:
- a. What happened in the experience?
 - b. How did you feel during the experience?
 - c. How does this experience relate to what I already know or my past experiences?
3. Abstract conceptualization: Now that participants have reflected on their experiences and described them, have students complete a journaling or video assignment where they distill their reflections into lessons they can take away from the experience. Have them think critically about coming up with generalizable lessons (e.g. Orthodox Christian youth enjoy social events).
4. Active experimentation: In this phase of the model, you could consider either having participants write about or plan another experience to test the lessons they learned in step 3. You also might consider having them engage in further experiences to test out their lessons learned, but this might be time prohibitive.

Utilize Scaffolding

In programs and courses that include a culminating project or assessment, an effective strategy to support this is called scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978; Wood et al., 1976). Scaffolding can take many forms, but it essentially means supporting learning by increasing the complexity of tasks slowly and with support. In your program, one way to do this would be to “chunk” the end project (i.e. One Year Ministry Plan) into smaller pieces. You do this in some ways by asking participants to reflect on their learning from previous months. However, a more thorough way to do this would be to have participants construct pieces of the Ministry Plan as they go through the program. For example, the focus of February 2022 is on fellowship. Consider having the participants draft a portion of their One Year Ministry Plan that focuses on different types of fellowship events. This would allow participants to build this product as they move through the year-long program. It would also allow you or the coaches to do “spot checks” along the way to make sure participants are able to apply their learning in meaningful ways.

Consider Universal Design

Universal design is the explicit use of materials and activities that are suitable for all participants, regardless of ability status. In learning materials, this can include actions as simple as designing

materials to be read by screen readers, making sure text is clear and suitable for the visually impaired, including closed captioning during online meetings, or allowing participants to submit recorded assignments over written assignments. A useful guide on universal design is included in [Appendix A](#).

Recognize Power Dynamics

In working groups, power dynamics can influence the way the work gets done and the ideas that get shared. This is particularly acute when a group is comprised of individuals with differing formal and informal power bases. In your parish groups, you include priests, others in ministry, volunteers, and adult youth. In this configuration, priests and others in formal positions will have a type of power called legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959). Legitimate power is derived from hierarchical structures, social structures, beliefs, and culture. Thus, in your parish teams, priests will ostensibly hold the most power in the team. This is not necessarily a negative. However, research indicates that teams that include power differentials succeed when those in power also have task expertise, and teams perform more poorly when those with power have less task expertise (Tarakci et al., 2016). Additionally, some of my own research indicates that power differences derived from cultural values can prevent those with less perceived power from fully engaging in some behaviors (e.g. challenging assumptions, offering alternative viewpoints, respectfully disagreeing, etc.) (Ghosh et al., 2020).

What is important here is that those in power are coached and encouraged to both recognize the power they hold in the team settings and to actively encourage others on the team to offer disagreements, alternative ideas, and the like. This should be reinforced, verbally and behaviorally, on a consistent basis. It would also be important to encourage those in power to relinquish some of their power and authority when they have less task expertise. For example, if a priest has little or no experience and expertise in organizing successful events (online or in person), they should be encouraged to relinquish power in those scenarios and more power should be given to those with more expertise. These kinds of power sharing strategies can help improve the overall functioning and performance of a team.

References

- Feldman, J. (2003). The simplicity principle in human concept learning. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 12(6), 227-232. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.0963-7214.2003.01267.x>
- French, J. R. P., & Raven, B. (1959). The bases of social power. In D. Cartwright (Ed.), *Studies in Social Power* (pp. 150-167). Institute for Social Research.
- Ghosh, R., Hutchins, H. M., Rose, K. J., & Manongsong, A. M. (2020). Exploring the lived experiences of mutuality in diverse formal faculty mentoring partnerships through the lens of mentoring schemas. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 31(3), 319-340.
- Knowles, M. S. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy* (2nd ed.). Cambridge Books.
- Kolb, D. A. (2014). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. FT Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: aka the remix. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 74-84.
- Lang, J. M. (2016). *Small teaching: Everyday lessons from the science of learning*. Jossey-Bass.
- Richmond, A. S., Bacca, A. M., Becknell, J. S., & Coyle, R. P. (2017). Teaching metacognition experientially: A focus on higher versus lower level learning. *Teaching of Psychology*, 44(4), 298-305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0098628317727633>
- Tarakci, M., Greer, L. L., & Groenen, P. J. F. (2016). When does power disparity help or hurt group performance? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 101(3), 415-429. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000056>
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Harvard University Press.
- Wood, D. J., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17(2), 89-100.

Appendix A

Additional Useful Resources

Learning Assessment Techniques by Elizabeth Barkley and Claire Howell Major

This book provides a great list of activities that can be used to assess and increase learning. There is also a good deal of information about writing objectives and measuring outcomes.

Small Teaching by James Lang

A popular resource used in many educational settings, this book describes many ways to increase learning through small changes to curriculum.

[Universal Design](#)

This website describes universal design and gives recommendations for specific changes to make.

[Backwards Course Design](#)

This website is a useful resource for understanding and utilizing backwards course design in curriculum development.

[Bloom's Taxonomy](#)

Vanderbilt University's resource on Bloom's taxonomy is often used and cited by many educational professionals. Tools and guidelines are included and very useful.

Appendix B

Bloom's Taxonomy Verbs

When crafting learning objectives, consider using the following verbs to match the written objective to the level of learning you wish to have the learner obtain. For example, if you wish to have learners **remember** certain facts, figures, or information, you might craft a learning objective like this:

By the end of this [module/lesson/course/program], you will be able to [list/name] the five practices of the ECM.

On the other hand, if you wish to have learners engage more deeply in critical thinking and higher order thinking skills, consider an objective that has participants **create** something:

By the end of this [module/lesson/course/program], you will be able to [design/develop/create] an event for young adults that exemplifies the practices of discipleship.

| Remember | Understand | Apply | Analyze | Evaluate | Create |
|-----------------|-------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|
| list | compare | apply | differentiate | appraise | design |
| name | describe | complete | relate | argue | assemble |
| recall | discuss | construct | categorize | defend | construct |
| record | explain | demonstrate | compare | judge | conjecture |
| relate | identify | employ | contrast | select | develop |
| repeat | recognize | practice | examine | support | formulate |
| tell | tell | use | inspect | critique | investigate |

Note that this is not an exhaustive or comprehensive list of verbs you could use. They can provide a starting point for your work on writing objectives.