

## Developing Resources for

# Discipleship

Peter Bentley

*A report outlining the range of resources presently in use in church circles and effective methodologies and learning aids.*

### Methodologies

In church circles the method of education is still centred on the teacher. Teacher-authoritarian models or teacher-directed models are still in wide usage. Generally though, most denominations are realising that these models are inadequate for contemporary ministry. There has been a marked move towards learner-centred methodologies. Inductive techniques, self-directed learning, experiential learning models, facilitation models, the Action-Reflection model. These are all terms which are becoming common usage in religious education circles.

Interestingly, learner-centred education seems to be coupled with the emergence of small groups. The dominance of small groups in church circles today reinforces changes in educational methods. The very use of small groups necessitates change.

Question: Have people understood the dynamics of this change? Why do we work in small groups? Are inappropriate techniques being used in small groups?

### Educational trends in secular environments

There seems to be a dispute concerning the direction of learning today. Generally it appears that there are still many teacher-centred models in operation. The moves to experiential learning have been centred in the newer or smaller colleges or institutes. The introduction of a variety of courses has facilitated change eg, communications courses have extensive field work. The increase in the number of mature age students has brought to educational institutions a wide range of experience and different attitudes to the learning process.

Many educationalists still wonder if there will be a 'turning point' which will have a major impact on the more conservative institutions. Others believe that there has been a turning point and now educational methods are swinging back towards the provision of content.

Experiential methodology encouraged excess, and standards of objectivity were strained during the 70s and 80s. Content was sacrificed in favour of experience. Though this was not the experience of all institutions, nor were all experiences negative, still conservative elements tend to highlight excess.

To a large extent, the debate can be reduced to the level of direction. Arthur Pearce notes this aspect in his thesis in the context of Knowles' examination of the role of the facilitator. If a facilitator provides too much facilitation, then they are really being a teacher-authority. If they do not provide any direction, then they are not entering into the facilitation process. Facilitators provide the content which may be needed for a wider objectivity.

This debate has implications for adult education in Christian circles. We want Christians to grow in holistic faith without being dominated by teacher-directed methodology, but we also do not want Christians who do not have any standards of objectivity or reference. Trained facilitators may be able to co-ordinate the experiences of members of small groups. They can provide support as people move away from a dependency model and direction to autonomous learning within a framework of content. It would seem necessary that a Christian framework be centred in biblical principles. Of course, there may be a number of important factors, techniques and Christian traditions which can be integrated into a biblical framework. Experiential learning based in small groups, with a trained facilitator and integrated resources provides the key to move people to a responsible faith.

### Resources

Rather than using set courses and programs many groups and denominations are moving to people resources. This is termed consultancy. Examples abound, including the Uniting Church Queensland Synod's Mission Audit, the Victorian Department of Field Services (several areas) and the Anglican Church, Sydney Diocese's Ministry Development and Adult Education Departments.

The value of consultancy lies in its recognition of individual circumstances (in groups and individuals). Programs may develop from consultancy, but if so they will reflect each situation,

rather than following set patterns. Some programs do have consultancy methods built in, eg Discipleship Training - Queensland UCA, South Moreton Presbytery. The outside leaders of the course liaise with the parish and mould the structures of the program to the individual circumstances.

Consultancy needs to be developed in the areas of Family Ministries, Women's Issues and social justice issues.

The family area is very much under-resourced and in need of more personnel (both consultants and administrators), considering that this is the major entry point for the gospel in our culture and a major problem area for discipleship! Needless to say it would be useful to employ women in these three areas mentioned.

### **Courses/Programs**

There are thousands of courses and programs which fit into the area of discipleship education. These range from formal theological study to short courses on specialised topics like marriage sexuality. Apart from retreats and individualised programs, most courses/programs use the small group structure. This usually means that the stages of faith and autonomy in learning are not able to be individualised. People are taught at the one level, whether this is the lowest or highest denominator.

### **Discipleship Training**

This is quite an integrated course. There is a mixing of teaching methods and aspects of personal formation, evangelism, social justice, biblical and 'theological' content are all covered (though the course really provides an overview).

Experiential learning is used through practising within the group structure and outside in real situations. A field work placement provides the basis for continuing ministry focus. The course is divided into two parts of three months each. It is hoped that the course continues in the church, led in the future by local people. (A part of Project Eagle, Queensland Uniting Church -

South Moreton Presbytery).

### **Education for Ministry (EFM) - from General Board of Religious Education**

This is an Anglican course (from U.S.A.) which has some similarities to Bethel and Kerygma. EFM is designed to provide students with a theological background based on reflection. It is specifically geared to the relating of faith and life. There are two parts (1) Reading Strand - takes people through the Bible in the first two years, Church History in the third year and a thematic account in the fourth year. During the four years current issues are brought to bear upon the biblical/historical passages. (2) The reading aspect is discussed at the seminar group. This group is mentor based. The mentor requires training and updated training. As well as the reading, people take the time to tell their spiritual autobiography (about an hour). This is not done every week, but throughout the first year. A process of theological reflection is used to enable people to relate their feelings from an experience to culture and tradition (including the biblical tradition). The times of sharing stories and the reflective framework are powerful elements. The course requires a long-term commitment which may be difficult to sustain, but the foundations would be certainly laid for maturity.

### **Masterlife - Baptist program, run mainly in Victoria, NSW and Queensland**

Masterlife is the approved program of the Southern Baptist Convention. It has been adopted for use in Australia without alteration. It seems to be reasonably free of Americanisms. Masterlife focuses on discipleship through biblical teaching, practical exercises (including practice in the group and outside) and building spiritual discipline in prayer, bible reading etc. Though the program is conservative in orientation and heavily evangelistic (perhaps seeing discipleship as evangelism) there are positive features in its community-based emphasis on group help - members helping each other through the material (there is no individ-

ual merit if individuals are left to flounder). There has also been the development of manuals for less literate people. Thus they may work through the course, with the same subjects, but with less writing and more simply written course material.

These three programs all help people become disciples, but would not be appropriate for Uniting Church congregations. The group focus is the key to their success. In particular, the emphasis on the group working together and not in competition highlights the importance of corporate discipleship in individual discipleship.

### **Factors which stand out as important in small group work**

#### **1) For leaders/facilitators:**

- a) trained in small group dynamics and communication skills
- b) trained in experiential learning techniques
- c) able to diagnose, know when to intervene and provide direction
- d) able to direct people to self learning/autonomy
- e) role models "discipleship as demonstrating"; mentor models - provide trusted direction; peer models - ordinary people see that they can try too and not leave things to the minister/professional.

#### **2) For parishes/local churches:**

- a) Courses based in the local parish eg., Sower UCA, O'Connor Parish ACT.
- b) The parish owing the group doing the course. The provision of support, both financially and climate. Perhaps commissioning, public recognition.
- c) An awareness on the part of group/course members and the local church that they are learning to serve their local church, the wider church and not just to receive personal benefits. See Catholic Parish 2000, Lay Ministry.

3) For people attending courses/ programs:

- a) Short courses 5 - 12 weeks
- b) If longer courses develop flexible approaches, module-based and recognise with a certificate/statement
- c) Contracts - commitment to the group and the learning
- d) Covenants - long or short term, stressing group accountability
- e) The discussion and setting down of objectives and goals
- f) Being released from normal church activities/ministries
- g) Focus on gifts - discovery and encouragement
- h) Teaching of communication skills - also need to indicate why these skills are important and complementary to biblical content etc. The WHY behind the skills to ensure that their relation to faith and life is noted.
- i) Social dimension - recognition there is a need for relaxation, fun
- j) Reasonable facilities to learn together in - Home? or Church?
- k) Journalling - written reflections on our journey in the course
- l) Telling our story - our spiritual autobiography
- m) Prayer - eg, the use of prayer triplets in Discipleship Training
- n) Role playing and practising of various skills, ministries, activities
- o) Field Practice - like in Discipleship Training, Catholic Lay Ministry Course and the out-of-the context experiences eg, Mission Exposure
- p) Time out for reflection/meditation and silence eg., Nexus (UCA, Vic. Field Services)

Getting people motivated to join learning programs which may lead them to a fuller understanding of discipleship.

We may develop integrated programs, but how do you motivate people to take advantage of them? Arthur Pearce in his thesis *Motivation within Adult Religious Education* (1982 QGU) discussed this question in the context of growth v deficiency motivations. It seems that people may be more likely to continue learning if they are growth motivated. Both aspects may be operating in peoples' lives at the one time. It is necessary to overcome (or at least move people away from) the dependency model. Educators and group leaders should note the following:

- 1) Learning may have been a painful experience for many people. Gentleness and sensitivity can build the trust which is important for group members.
- 2) Fear of ignorance - people should be led into heavier studies/systems. Serendipity has been sighted as a useful introduction technique for people unfamiliar with the Bible and group meetings.
- 3) The hardest part - breaking down the resistance to change. This forms the initial challenge. To start people along the road it is necessary to look at the factors of ongoing motivation. Many of the important factors in small groups foster moving on.
- 4) Awareness of recruiting strategies: see the Catholic Adult booklet 'Mustard Seed'. ( a) Personal invitation; ( b) Identification with leaders/group members and changes which they have undergone; ( c) the building of a church atmosphere conducive to learning - openness, warmth, support, experiential focus.

#### **Some factors in ongoing motivation**

- 1) Inductive learning - engaging people in the learning process. helping them to own their learning. Building on their experiences.
- 2) Providing feedback during the course and evaluation at the end.
- 3) Have a followup strategy

based on the individual as well as the group.

4) Continue small group work and develop and deepen courses and programs as people move further down the path of autonomous learning.

5) The provision of a supportive structure throughout the church.

- a) Departments which produce resources eg, SDA Church Ministries Dept. Catholic Education (Adult), JBCE
- b) Departments which can provide consultancy services, specialist advice and liaison with presbyteries and parishes.
- c) Regional learning centres based in presbyteries (or shared). The use of facilities and the involvement of people who can liaise with the church departments and parishes. This local contact encourages networking, the co-ordination of resources and a monitoring of their impact.
- d) At state levels, the provision of a Yearly Directory, with quarterly updates. This may be in magazine form. Ideally it should be free to all members.

#### **Changes in theological education and the implications for adult education or lay ministries**

- 1) There is a move away from formal lecturing to discussion-based seminars and lectures. Case studies often form the basis for discussion.
- 2) There is a growing practical orientation and a wider recognition of field placements. Management skills and leadership development are key areas.
- 3) Students are encouraged in spiritual techniques eg, journaling, meditation and reflective retreats. There is an awareness of the importance of spiritual formation.
- 4) There is a growing variety of courses and changes in format and length. Some of these changes reflect the entry of lay

non-ordinands, in particular women, into the theological system.

5) Move to Theological Education by Extension (TEE) - because of increased technology it is possible that more people will study away from the actual theological centre. Audio, video and satellite technology allows for more interactive mediums than the printed page. It appears that TEE will have to be co-ordinated on a national scale and will be supported by regional learning centres. There will be a network of tutors and liaison staff to ensure personal contact and work within groups (at centres or via technology). Computers will also

have a major part to play in TEE development.

### Changes in Continuing Education

- 1) Ministers are beginning to learn the significance of continuing education.
- 2) There is an increase in formal educational study.
- 3) Greater recognition of spirituality and formation. Use of retreats to renew ministries and allow for reflective time.
- 4) Continuing education allows self-directed choice (with consul-

tation) and encourages networking. More opportunity to share common problems.

Changes in theological education and continuing education will lead to changes in education in the local churches. Ministers who see the benefits in individualised learning, experiential techniques etc., will introduce or support the broadening of educational methodology and its practice. Lay ministry will develop along team lines and gifts. The preaching patterns will probably become more interactive. People will move from passive roles to active living - hopefully in a wholistic context.

## From the Archives

Barrie Brennan



### The Presidents

When the AAAE was founded in 1960 there was originally no office of President, but an Executive headed by a Chairman. There was, however, a concern that the Association should seek to increase public awareness of the field. To assist with this objective a position of President was created, separate from the Executive. The purpose was to have a leading figure, not necessarily involved heavily in the field but with strong sympathies for the field, in an essentially symbolic, figurehead position.

In the period 1961 - 1975, five persons, all male, held the position of non-Executive President of the Association.

The first was Robert (later Sir Robert) Madgwick. He had been in charge of that great Australian experiment, the Australian Army Education Service, during the second world war. Subsequent positions held by Madgwick were as the Vice Chancellor of the University of New England (where he also supported adult

education) and as chief of the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

Madgwick was followed by Walter Duncan. Duncan had strong associations with the university of Sydney where he was Director of Tutorial Classes. Duncan is remembered for the report reprinted in *The Vision Splendid: Adult Education in Australia* (1944, 1973). The Report, which advocated the setting up of a national adult education service, strongly influenced by the experience of the army experiment, was overlooked by Government because of problems of post-war reconstruction and Federal/State rivalries.

From 1967 - 69 the position of President was held by Zelman Cowen. A leading jurist and participant in adult education in Melbourne, Professor Cowen became Vice Chancellor of the University of New England, and then Queensland University and subsequently he became Governor General. He is now Provost of Oriel College Oxford University.

In the early seventies Hermann (later Sir Hermann) Black was President. He was heavily involved in education within and outside the university system. For many years his confident and reassuring voice was heard on the ABC as a commentator for adults and children on current affairs. He then became Chancellor of Sydney University.

The last of those to hold the position of non-Executive President was Ian Sharp. He was closely associated with the world of work and industrial relations. His selection as President marked a conscious decision by the Executive to seek to broaden the impact of the Association.

The position of President in this form was continued until 1975 when the Executive felt that other methods should be used to achieve the desired objective. In 1984 the elected head of the Association, previously called Chairman, was given the title of President. John Wellings became the first of the new-style Presidents in this year.