

# **Mission Action Evaluation Tool**

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### **Introduction to the Tool and Bronfenbrenner.**

The Mission Action Evaluation Tool (MAET) has been created to help chaplains and others involved in the Christian mission of schools to make decisions about how best to design and implement processes to develop young people's faith. It is based on Urie Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems model and seeks to enhance developmental processes through the consideration of personal and contextual factors. While the tool does not measure student outcomes, these can be evaluated as part of its use.

Knowledge of Bronfenbrenner's model is not necessary to use the tool but a brief introduction is provided below along with commentary throughout to help you understand the purpose of each section. In the MAET the word 'process' is central and simply refers to the actions taken to help students develop faith. These processes could be complex activities containing multiple elements such as chapel or religious education or simpler ones of a single element like prayer.

### ***Bioecological Systems Model.***

- How do people develop in the various aspects of their life?
- What are the processes that enable growth?
- What factors positively or negatively influence development in any particular domain?
- Are there processes that can shape and enhance development?

Urie Bronfenbrenner provided a mechanism to answer these questions by creating a unique way of understanding and investigating human development. His bioecological systems model demonstrates how people's development is shaped by many factors, including their environment. While Bronfenbrenner did not discuss the spiritual domain, his model and ideas are applicable to the exploration of faith development as it is developed in a social context.

In Bronfenbrenner's model there are four key elements that influence development. They are:

- the characteristics of the person,

- the process driving development,
- the context the development occurs within, and,
- time factors.

It is helpful to consider each of these so that a full picture of the young person's environment can be drawn.

### ***Process.***

For Bronfenbrenner development is driven by processes. These are interactions that occur between people and the objects in their environment. A process may be anything that a person does that leads to their growth in a particular domain. For instance reading is a process that leads to intellectual development. Processes can be designed to have an optimal beneficial impact. In this tool processes are central and refer to the things we do to help young people grow in faith.

### ***Characteristics of the person.***

While every person is different, many students will have things in common with one another such as their level of physical and cognitive development. These characteristics influence the way that a person responds to a particular process. Practitioners can use their understanding of these characteristics to create, shape and choose more effective processes. For example reading picture books might be an effective process for a preparatory age student but not for a Year 11 student.

### ***Context.***

The environment a person is embedded in also influences the nature of development. Bronfenbrenner divided the environment into a number of systems. These systems include those the person acts within such as home and school, as well as those that are distant yet still influential, such as a parent's work or government. Being aware of how these contexts influence people aids in the shaping of developmental processes. For example students who are habituated to being autonomous at home will have a greater ability to be so at school.

***Time.***

Time is also an important element in development. The frequency, duration and repetition of a process will influence its effectiveness in a number of ways. Frequency and repetition will contribute to reinforcing the effect the process has on the individual. They will also allow for the process to become more complex as the person grows. The duration of an activity will signify its importance and will enable the person to become proficient more quickly.

The model below outlines the steps the MAET takes. It begins by exploring the outcomes you are hoping for in the school. These are your mission goals. From these goals it progresses through each of the elements in Bronfenbrenner’s model to choose, shape and refine the process you intend to implement.

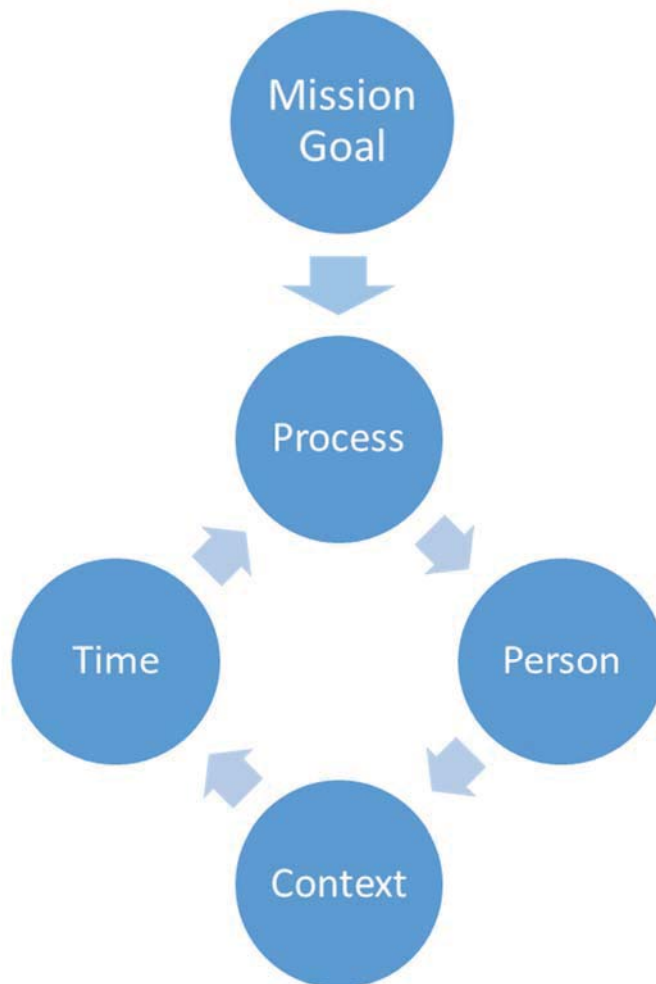


Figure 9. Framework for Evaluating Christian Mission in ASIA

## **Phase One: Mission Goals**

### **Describing your school.**

Begin by reflecting on your school and the things that give it a unique identity. This task may help you identify aspects of school life you hadn't previously noticed and will start you thinking about context. If you are working as group it may reveal the different ways members perceive the school. This is helpful when you start thinking about your mission goals.

- Describe the important features of your school as:
  - An educational institution. (Where is your school in its life cycle? What image does it wish to project to the wider community? What are its strengths and weaknesses?)
  - A community that includes students, teachers, parents and staff. (What do they like or value about your school? What do they struggle with? How do they respond to the religious aspects of the school?)
  - An Anglican Church institution in relationship with Diocesan structures.

### **Spiritual SWOT analysis.**

Next you will focus more specifically on the spiritual or religious nature of your school community. A SWOT Analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) is a useful tool for doing this. Your analysis can include all kinds of information including student opinions, parental actions, and thoughts on the structural aspects of the school. It might be helpful to ponder: What are the things in your school that help or hinder your students developing faith?

- Perform a spiritual SWOT on your school community. Thinking about student faith development, what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the development of faith in your school?

### **The development of faith.**

Your conception of how faith develops can influence the actions you take to implement mission. For instance if you think that faith develops through understanding religious ideas the process you use may revolve around religious education. At this point it is useful to investigate these ideas before moving on to consider how mission might be implemented.

- What is your understanding of how people develop faith? (How do people become Christians?)
- What processes or experiences do you think help people to develop faith? (What processes help people become Christians?)
- What supports your thinking in the area? (Research others have done, experiences you have had)

### **Barriers to faith development.**

Later on you will spend time focusing specifically on the students and their context. It is helpful before doing so, and prior to the next step of creating a mission goal, to think about the big personal or contextual issues that might get in the way of students engaging with or developing faith. These big issues could be at the societal level, such as social views on religion, or could be more personal, such as family attitudes.

- What do you think are the top three barriers to students engaging with or developing faith?

### **Creating a mission goal.**

Having explored how people develop faith it is time to make some decisions and set a goal. Taking into account all you have discussed so far:

- What do you wish to achieve through your mission actions?
- What do you hope will happen as a result of what you do?

Your initial goal may be further refined as you progress. Make the goal more specific than “help students become Christians”, try to think of the changes or experiences that might help them to move towards the Christian faith. Some examples of this are: (1) help students understand faith, (2) provide students with experiences of awe and wonder, (3) help student practice elements (...choose one...) of the Christian faith.

The following questions are all focused on helping you sharpen your mission goal and implementation.

- Reflecting on your community and your ideas about how people develop faith decide on a specific mission goal that your community wishes to address.
- List your ideas for activities or processes that might help achieve this goal?
- How might the person be changed through these processes?
- What evidence might show that this goal has been achieved?

## **Phase Two: Process**

Having explored your school, thought about how people come to faith, and proposed a mission goal, it is time to consider what processes you might use to implement your goal. This section focuses on the details of the process but before you begin it is helpful to consider some of the things Bronfenbrenner discovered about effective developmental processes.

### **Tips for Process Design.**

Bronfenbrenner identified certain elements that may enhance the effectiveness of any process. It is useful to keep these in mind as you develop your own processes.

#### ***Tip 1: Put the process in the context of the most effective microsystem.***

Microsystems are the small settings that students participate in such as family, school and church. Generally the family is the most influential microsystem. This means that a process that occurs in the family environment is likely to have a more significant effect than those occurring in others such as school or church. Research on the social influences acting on young people of the type you are working with can help to identify which microsystem might be the most significant for any particular process.

#### ***Tip 2: Use as many microsystems as possible.***

Processes don't need to be placed in only one microsystem. It might be possible to have a particular process occur in multiple settings such as school and family. When this occurs the effectiveness is likely to be increased. For instance research indicates that if

reading to children is done both at home and school, rather than in only one of these contexts development is enhanced.

***Tip 3: Address the impacting issues from the macrosystem.***

The macrosystem is the overarching system that contains elements such as a person's culture or religion. In its broadest conception it is the society the person lives in. This system provides instructions for the lower systems such as family and school. It may be beneficial to think of the influences coming from these larger systems and consider how to identify and address them through your chosen process. For instance consumerism may be a particularly dominant influence on young people's thinking and worldview. It may undermine elements of their emerging spirituality. Actions might be taken to help them reflect on the nature of these influences in order to allow them make more conscious decisions.

***Tip 4: Increase complexity over time.***

Processes should become more complex over time if development is to continue. Once an individual has mastered a particular process further development may not occur unless it is changed to make it more difficult or challenging. This could include increasing the complexity of the content or changing the type of interaction.

***Tip 5: Leverage close relationships.***

Close relationships can enhance development. Those people who have the most significant relationship with the developing person in any setting should be involved. For example it is more likely that a classroom teacher who spends many hours with students will be more influential than a chaplain who may only see them once a week.

**Choosing a mission action.**

- Choose a process (mission action) you will use to implement your chosen goal.
  - Outline your initial ideas of how the mission action might be implemented.
  - Describe how it will achieve the mission goal referencing each of the 5 tips above.



- Discuss any research about the process or mission action being used.

### **Phase Three: Person**

#### **Describe your students.**

Having described the process you wish to implement it is now important to think about who it will be targeted at. Thought needs to be given as to how the personal characteristics of the students will shape what you do. Of course all students are different but they also have much in common. If you have a wide range of ages to engage with some thought needs to be given to how the process might be adapted for their different developmental levels.

- Describe the people the mission action is directed towards in terms of their personal and developmental characteristics. Include your own observations as well as those from formal research. The following aspects may be relevant:
  - Cognitive stage of development.
  - Social stage of development.
  - Physiological stage of development.

#### **Personal characteristics and process design.**

Now think about how the characteristics of the person(s) you wish to be influenced by the process might in turn impact the power, direction, form and content of the process.

The power of the process relates to how significant the influence of the process might be. The direction of the process determines whether the process moves the person in the intended developmental direction or not. The form of the process relates to how the process is implemented. This includes elements such as where it is located, who leads it and how long it takes. The content of the process relates to the nature of the interaction that occurs.

The direction and power of the process may be more effective if done in ways that take into account the personal characteristics of those being ministered to. In other words the form and content of a process can be shaped to enhance its power and direction.

- How might the characteristics of the developing person impact the:
  - power of the process, and
  - direction of the process.
- Thinking of the characteristics of the developing person you have identified, how might the form and content of the process be shaped to have:
  - optimal power, and
  - positive direction.

## **Phase Four: Context**

### **Describe your students' context**

In this section consideration is given to the student's context. Context might be thought of as the environment surrounding the students and the different settings that they participate in. These contexts may also be called systems. The context can have a significant influence on how students engage with processes and develop.

You have already begun thinking about the context in Phase One when you reflected on your school. As you reflect on the students' context try to think of the way that it might influence their engagement with the Christian mission of the school. For example how might parental thoughts about Christianity impact the way students think about it.

- Describe the context of those the mission action is directed towards, focussing on aspects that might influence student's spiritual or religious ideas and experience.

Reflect on the following systems:

- Family.
- Friends and Peers.
- Church.
- Culture and Society.
- Religion.
- Generational information.
- Media and Technology.

### **The context and process design.**

Now think about how the context might impact the power, direction, form and content of the process.

The power of the process relates to how significant the influence of the process might be. The direction of the process determines whether the process moves the person in the intended developmental direction or not. The form of the process relates to how the process is implemented such as where it is set, who leads it, how long it takes. The content of the process relates to the nature of the interaction occurring.

Because of contextual factors the direction and power of the process might be more effective if done in particular way. In other words the form and content can be shaped to enhance the power and direction.

- How might the context described impact the:
  - power of the process, and
  - direction of the process.
- Thinking of the characteristics of the context how might the form and content of the process be shaped to have:
  - optimal power, and
  - a positive direction.

### **Phase Five: Time**

#### **Time and process design.**

In this section the way time is used in the process will be considered. The duration and frequency of a process can influence its effectiveness. Something done every day, if it is enjoyed, might have a powerful enhancing effect over time. Conversely, if it is not enjoyed a daily activity may have a powerfully negative effect. Something done only once a year may be less influential, depending on the intensity of the experience. For example a week long camp held once a year may have more impact than some activities held on a weekly basis because of the opportunity for intense experience. In general processes performed over a long period of time, such as a number of years, are more likely to be influential than those done over a short period.

- What will be the duration and frequency of the activity?
- Over what time span will it be continued?
- How will the process become more complex over time?
- What is the intensity of the time usage? (e.g. is it a half an hour of excitement opposed to a day of boredom?)
- Reflecting on these elements how might time be used to shape the process so it has:
  - optimal power, and
  - a positive direction.

### **Phase Six: Process Review**

In this final section it is time to step back and do a final review of the process you have developed.

- Describe in detail the form of content of the process.
- What personal, contextual and time factors have been taken into consideration in shaping this process?
- Are there any personal, contextual or time issues that may still impinge on the effectiveness of the process? How might these be addressed?