The Ecumenical Institute: Chicago Spring, 1971

SEMINAR METHODOLOGY
LESSON PLANNING

The depth address of RS-I is in the seminars. To prepare for a seminar you need not only to chart thoroughly the paper and pull it through your life experience but also to plan the drama so that every detail will enable that depth address.

Many of us have found helpful a planning sheet such as on the next page. Included on it are the various preliminary considerations as well as the parts of the introduction, main body, and conclusion of the seminar.

PRELIMINARY INTENTIONALIZATION

Let's begin with the rational objective. What is the one thing that you want th want them have memorized when they leave the seminar? What is the one thing they will never forget? For example, what is the one thing in Bonhoeffer that you want them to be able to pull out of their back pocket any time and use? "The decision-making process," could be the rational aim. They would go away with those first seven sentences in paragraph 3 indelibly marked in their mind. They would have the decision-making process written down on their paper, drawn on their chart, laid out in 1 through 7 step by step by step.

The existential aim is what they internally experience when you teach paragraph 3 like it ought to be taught. Perhaps nausea at the point of ambiguity-if they don't get sick to their stomach the seminar has not come off. But you don't want to make people sick. The point is that they have to internally feel the crisis that you are articulating. There has to be a release. They have to experience the release of freedom, but not without the burden, and that tension is what you are out to have happen to them in that seminar.

When you come into that seminar on Saturday afternoon, the first question is the mood you have to deal with before you get there. You have to take that into consideration as well as thinking about the mood you want to create. When you get into the course, what mood needs to be created in terms of where they have been so far in the course? Were they so giddy in Tillich that you couldn't get them off the rafters so you have to bring them down? Did the priest conversation put them under the table? Do you have to dance on the table to get the mood up? What is necessary to get them in the mood to study so that the overall drama can come off?

Then there is the detailed reflection on the persons in the group both as individuals and as a group. What are their chief struggles? Where do they need to be pushed? And where do you need to ease off and just let them stew? All this goes into the brooding you do in the last thirty minutes.

Overall drama. You have now to look at the pace within your seminar, so you have an initial drama, an overall drama and a final drama. It has to do with deciding ahead of time which movements you want to go through rather quickly and where you want the heavy beat to fall. You want to be able to feel that picture before you begin. The time-line is key, of course, and you work it out on that basis. Then later on you will have to spell out very very carefully your most powerful illustrations, your impact, and your address.

# LESSON PLAN

COURSE: SEM/WORKSHOP: DATE:

## PRELIMINARY INTENTIONALIZATION

| RATIONAL OBJECTIVE | EXISTENTIAL OBJECTIVE | MOOD | PERSONS | OVERALL DRAMA |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

## I. INTRODUCTION

| ENTRANCE | OPENING WORDS | CENTER PIECE | RITUAL | GAMES |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

## II. SYMPHONY

| PRELUDE | MOVEMENTS | | | POSTLUDE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | FIRST | SECOND | THIRD | |
| (PLOT) | (DEVELOPMENT) | (CLIMAX) | (RESOLUTION) | (DENOUEMENT) |

## III. CONCLUSION

| TEACHING IMAGE | PERSONAL WITNESS | BODY | RITUAL | EXIT |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |

## I. INTRODUCTION

The entrance -how do you get on stage? You have to come into that situation. How do you want to come in? Do you want to start the seminar from the back of the room? Do you want to start it sitting down? Do you want to start it standing up? Do you want to begin with a song? Do you ask somebody to go ahead and put the chart up while the rest are still studying? Do you want to have somebody put the chart up while you do a game? Or do you want to illustrate points in charting while that is being done? Do you want to go through it very quickly and give them the chart?

The opening words the first ten words that come out of your mouth, determine the mood of the seminar as much as anything else you do. Say the group has finished their study early and are out there fussing around, and a character comes in talking so fast that no one can hear, but he finally gets their attention. Have you seen that gimmick? Or he begins talking very softly, so that when he really begins he has their attention.

Also you need to think about the center piece. That is crucial, for it symbolizes that the power is in the center of the table. Their attention is not on you. It is on the blackboard and on that centerpiece. People will remember that center piece more than what you wore. That center piece needs to be an art form, a symbol of the seminar.

The beginning ritual is a signal for their participation to begin. "All right, let's start," might be the ritual, or some other.

The initiating game is usually a conversation. It enables them to make the decision to be in this class with you as the teacher, by slowly getting them involved in what the paper is about. A conversation as the initiating game usually takes you away from the paper and gives you a chance to talk about what the paper is about but with a light mood. In the Niebuhr seminar, the lowest mood for the entire weekend is after the Church lecture. You plot the mood, they are on the floor. If they aren't, the Church lecture hasn't been given. After they have studied those six paragraphs of Niebuhr, they are about six feet deeper. Therefore you have to get them away from that paper for 20 minutes before they can come back to it. Otherwise, it will not dance, it will not move. You have to get that mood up. Sometimes we draw an image of what Niebuhr is saying in that paper and talk about how the Church invented symbols. I think you almost always have to do something like that to get the mood up so that they can have permission to dialogue in depth with what he is saying.

## II. SYMPHONY

The art of seminar orchestration is not synonymous with the art of the document. It is dramatic movement of the entire symphony. It is the art of high drama which the pedagogue brings or creates in any paragraph. The climax (Movement II) is the high point of involvement, address, and rapport between the teacher and the participants. This is where the depth of human existence is enacted. The teacher must command total involvement either through a masterpiece of dialogue, bodily animation, or direct encounter. The symphony conductor must master the score even to memory but the art of conduction is never tied to the score or that's what we mean when we say a symphony can only be played once. The same applies to

a seminar. Only on the other side of the mastery of the content can creative seminar orchestration be released.

Imaginally, the symphony is built on the structure of an Elizabethan drama. It has a prelude, three acts, and a postlude. The prelude is just the introduction, getting the actors on stage, and getting the subject matter out. Movement I is the development of the plot. Movement II goes through the final entanglement that plops the problem right down in your lap. It is the climax in the sense that it is the height of the intensity of the dramatic involvement. It is when the deeps of life are revealed. Movement III is the resolution-but not in the sense of "they lived happily ever after." Rather it has taken the life situation and pushed the bottom out of it and related it to all men. The postlude is where you stand back and reflect on what has happened-the denouement, simply the unraveling, the finale. It is where you sit back and reflect.

## III. CONCLUSION

In the Conclusion, in the last five minutes or so, the teacher needs to be able to dramatize something like this. "I was in charge, I am going to have the last work, and I am going to send you out of here with something to think about. I am going to be sure your mind is on the relevant issue at the end." That is the inside story that the teacher needs to tell himself so that when the curtain comes down, they have been given the possibility of appropriating that whole experience.

The teaching image reaches back across the paper and tries to present a picture of that paper for them to remember. The personal witness is where you go to preaching. That is your own stance. Up to that point you have been nothing but a midwife. "OK, class look at the paper. OK, paper speak to the class. OK, class look at the paper." In the conclusion, and to some extent in the introduction, you put yourself out on stage and say, "My personal experience with all of this is-" You set yourself in history as a human being. Then you have the closing ritual and leave.

The weaker you grasp yourself as a teacher, the more important a well-prepared introduction and a well-prepared conclusion are. You have to show the group in the introduction that you are a strong teacher. In the conclusion, you have to definitely bring that curtain down and signal them that they can look at that whole experience from that point of view.

You are now ready to work out your specific symphony plan. You want to first decide where is the most likely point of depth human involvement of your participants. This could come at any point in the seminar when a participant might suddenly break it open but you need to plan it for a specific paragraph. For example, in the Bonhoeffer paper you might plan it for paragraph 7 when you get the group really struggling with responsibility in an ambiguous situation. So you would need to plan your seminar drama around paragraphs 5, 6 and 7 as Movement II. What would be the entanglements that would lead up to this? Perhaps paragraph 9 would be Movement I. The third Movement needs to be paragraph 3. Then the prelude would be paragraphs 1 and 3 and the postlude as paragraph 4.

What do you do with paragraph 8? Where you put a paragraph depends on how you want to use it. If you use Paragraph 8, for example, as a model of "responsible action" in which you are getting clear on the difference between obedience,

freedom and responsibility, then you teach it right after 9. If you want to use it as a climatic illustration of the complexity of decision-making, then you teach it somewhere after or around paragraph 7. It is a paragraph that can be used either way, and your use of it depends upon how you decide to orchestrate the seminar.

Once you have decided on the movements, you will probably next go back to the lesson planning sheet and write down your thesis, your restatement-those things that you will teach. Some people also write their questions in these columns. Some people write them on the document, some have a separate sheet. Both of those are wise, but you could have the crucial questions here on the lesson plan. Illustrations might also go here. You might list ten illustrations, so that you have ten answers for every question you ask in order to prime the pump a little bit if there is reticence.

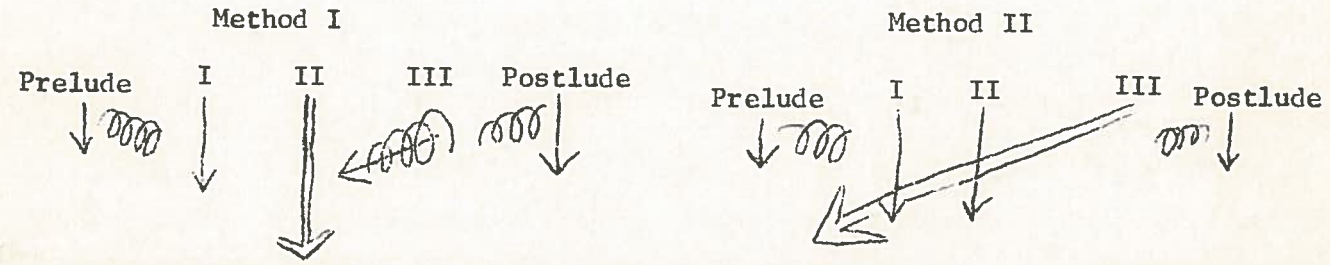
Another thing I would put on the lesson planning sheet is timing. You usually have 90 minutes in a seminar but in RS-I you can sometimes have about 100 minutes. In order to place the emphasis on Movements II and III, you need to limit the total time spent in the Introduction, Prelude, and Movement I to no more than one-third of the total. Thus your time blocks might look like 5 minutes for the Introduction, 5 to 10 minutes on the corporate chart, 5 minutes on the Prelude, 10 minutes on Movement I, 20 minutes for Movement II, 35 minutes for Movement III, and 5 to 10 minutes for your Postlude and Conclusion.

SEMINAR METHODOLOGY:
INCREASING THE IMPACT OF A SEMINAR
THROUGH FLEXIBLE DRAMA AND DRILL

The first thing in building a lesson plan is to get in your mind a dramatic picture of what is going to happen in the seminar. As I have watched our lesson plans develop, it seems to me there are two basic ways the three movements have been related. One way, the first push gets out the problem area and then the second push is the main push of the paper, where you really drive to the center of the earth. Then the third push is a clarification of that second push. I think of teaching the Ortega paper. For the first push, Movement I, you take Paragraph 5 that lays out the polarity between pure problem and building a model, and show how that is the structure of the first half of the paper. That is Movement I. That gets the subject nailed down. Then in Movement II you take Paragraph 4 and go sentence by sentence by sentence by bloody sentence until people's lives become unglued. Then Movement III takes the rest of the paper and clarifies what has happened. You spin it out into a clarification of that picture.

In the other way that the movements go, we get on stage and spin around. Movement I is a drive off in one direction. Movement II is a second drive at the same subject-maybe from a different angle. Then Movement III is the hammer blow. It cuts back through the other two and runs through the center of the earth. Then you spin the participants loose and send them out. The Tillich paper is like that. The Introduction is the games and short courses, and in the Prelude you fiddle around getting a chart of the paper, to get a broad feel of what the paper is about; then Paragraphs 1 through 6 are usually Movement I, and Paragraphs 7 through 11 are Movement II. Both of those are preliminary types of action, although very important. Or maybe you fiddle around in the first part of the paper as a Prelude, and let Movement I be Paragraphs 7, 8, and 9 and Movement II be Paragraphs 10 and 11, and that's where you put your drive. You get them clear on 7, 8, and 9 and then you say, ''Now let's get clear on the center of sin, 10 and 11.'' At any rate, what you know is that the hammer blow is coming up. The hammer blow is going to be done in Paragraph 12, and all that you are going to be doing in the first two movements is stirring up the territory. Then when you get to Paragraph 12, look out for the freight train. ''Here comes the hammer-KA-WHAM!'' When you get down to the bottom of the last part of Paragraph 12, you couldn't go back and teach anything else in the paper if you wanted to, because people's eyes are all fixed on stars, and they couldn't even hear some other section of the paper. All you can do in your Postlude is just sort of read the concluding paragraph of the paper, something like, ''Sin and grace are strange words, but they are not strange things,'' give them a little lecturette and send them out.

Unless you have decided upon a dramatic picture of how that paper is going to POW that group over a seminar time-period, then it isn't possible for any kind of happening to take place.




These diagrams are just my own gyrations to ground what a dramatic picture is, but you need to plan a dramatic picture for every seminar.

Lesson Planning
Seminar Methodology - 2

Another thing that is important for performing a good lesson plan, especially in the central movement, is asking yourself this question: ''What is the one thing that they need to see? What is the one dialogue that they need to have with each other? What is the one happening that needs to occur?'' When you are doing Tillich, that is pretty clear. They have to see a model of what the salvation occurrence looks like. They have to find a way to pull their lives through that picture of the grace-happening. They have to have the possibility of having a grace-happening right now by pointing to it as a possibility in their own lives. That is the one thing that you want to happen.

An overall dramatic image also gives you great flexibility. Sometimes I have run across lesson plans that were like a long list of beads on a string, like a rosary. You pull one bead, then you pull the next bead, then you pull the next bead, until you get down to bead 97. I mean, you couldn't possibly pull bead 63 before you pulled bead 47. You pull them one at a time, in order. And if you bog down on bead 32 with that kind of lesson plan, and you know that bead 96 is really the thing, you become paralyzed because of all those beads you have to pull before you can get there. That's not the way to do it.

The dramatic image gives you a way of seeing the seminar plan as greatly flexible. Here you are plowing in Movement I and get bogged in Paragraph 7, and the time is up for Movement I in your lesson plan. Well, shoot Paragraphs 8 and 9. Just say, ''There are two more paragraphs here, 8 and 9. One of them is about —— and the other is about —. Now let's go on and look at Paragraph 10,'' and you fiddle around in the next movement.

There is nothing permanent about a lesson plan. If you get bogged on some new idea like hidden suicide, don't punt, rejoice. The Lord has given you something new to deal with. If the whole class is leveled by experiencing hidden suicide, why should you wish for something else? And if it's clear that they could spend the rest of six hours there, you don't have to spend the rest of six hours there. Time's up for Movement II-go on to Movement III. It doesn't matter whether you are finished or not. What does finished mean? You never get finished with any of these movements. They're infinite universes. So you leave 45 minutes for Paragraph 12 if it kills you. And you're the one that gets killed. The class never notices that you left out forty-three jewels. It's only you who are bearing that pain. The class is probably glad to get on to something else.

This gives a dynamic feel to your whole seminar. No two seminars should ever be alike, because you are having this drama with different people. The teacher always has the possibility of altering and moving on. Lecturetting is one way. If you see that your time is out, you have a lecturette up your sleeve. You can give them that whole paragraph in one lecturette. It is not as good as having them struggle to the botton, but your time press says that it is better to give them a quick image than to stew around there. For the next thirty minutes you stew around somewhere else and spend your time that way.

The other edge issue for great teaching is second and third level questions. When you get a class on the hook with a great question and somebody bites the hook and responds, you need to have ways of playing that particular arena further. Those can be very flexible ways. If a person comes at it one way, you have one kind of question; if he comes at it another way, you have another kind of question;

if he comes at it a third way, you have a third kind of question. These second and third level back-up questions that are behind your basic questions are even more important than your basic questions. You could not possibly put all that on paper because it can go many different kinds of ways.

One helpful operating image for those second and third level questions is that the paper is over against the self or the student. When it is between the paper and the self or the student, there are really just two kinds of basic questions. One question is, ''What did the paper say?'' and the other question is, ''What did you mean?'' It's this kind of dialogue between the student and the paper that you are intensifying. You ask a question to the student about the paper and he comes out with an answer.

Examples of second and third level questions would be, ''Now that third word in that sentence-what did you mean by that word?'' ''Well, say some more about that word.'' ''Now if you didn't mean —, —, —, what did you mean?'' Or maybe you'd be pushing them over against the paper. Maybe they'd come out with something wild about rabbits jumping through the left side of Australia, and you would say, ''Well, is that what he is talking about here in this paper?'' And he would say, ''No.'' ''Okay, now let's go back to the paper. Now what is the paper saying?''

There are two ways of doing those second and third level questions-shoving them back down into the paper or shoving them into the content of what they are saying. Very likely you have a million second and third level questions in your memory and practice, even if you can't write them all down. But you need to have them, for they add drama and flexibility to your paper.

Another way to put this whole point is that we need to unite thoroughness of preparation with flexibility as you operate, just excellence and flexibility-we need both themes together. And you need those paragraph charts and the questions written out. You may have seen some of the models of the thirteen pages that you can do for building the lesson plan and backing it up. Anybody can see how that would be done. On any one of these movements you could have a whole page that had the chart on it. And a whole page with the sentences of the charts. You could have a whole page of questions, and a whole page of lecturettes. It's not that that kind of depth preparation is not a valuable thing to do through the years, but we need to think of it as a battery of tactics in a strategic design.

To conclude the final point on lesson planning, the whole purpose of the seminar is to help people to sweat through particular issues about their own life, particular addresses that that paper has for them. You always are using your own sweating, weak, despairing life as your sensitivity point for knowing what needs to be pushed, for knowing what needs to be asked for, for knowing what can be done. The flexibility of the dramatic image gives you more room for your own sensitivity to keep operating to call forth the best kinds of struggles in the class, and to say very profoundly to yourself that you have decided to help something happen to the lives of these people through their dialogue with this paper, and to keep at that commitment until it happens. That is the key point, however old and fundamental and simple it may be.

Where all of us bug out on being great teachers is backing away from asking that third level question, backing away from insisting that more creativity be demanded on the part of this student or that student, or backing away from holding their inadequate pictures up against the more comprehensive way of looking at it, because that means that you know that that life is being put in a sweat, that life is being put in a struggle, that life is being put in a crisis where he can see his destiny more clearly and decide about it more often. That puts you in a sweat, that puts you in a crisis. That reminds you of your sweats, and unless you go into a class willing to sweat the spirit sweat with them, then you're not going to bring off a good seminar. You almost have to be expecting to have God smite you again when you go in to do a seminar. You have to be expecting a religious experience yourself and be open to it, in order to allow them to be open to it and give them permission to have a great thing happen to them.

That's why I think a period of brooding just before you go into a seminar is utterly critical. You need thirty minutes before you go into the seminar to brood on what's happening to you now in history, what's happening to you in relation to this paper, what's happening to that class out there right now, and what's going to happen to them in relation to this paper. You need this brooding in order to anticipate as much as possible the spirit war that you are going to have when you get in there-the spirit war that will take place inside your own being and inside their own being-and so that you can make a decision to relate creatively to that. If that kind of depth spirit brooding doesn't take place, then all of this careful and flexible preparation may go for naught. It's the courage of standing in the role of calling forth that kind of new livingness that makes all these tactics and tools and work worth it.