

SEMINAR METHODS:  
CREATING A GREAT SYMPHONY

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CREATING THE FLEXIBLE DRAMA	PRELIMINARY INTENTIONALIZATION	MOVEMENTS OF THE SEMINAR				ADDRESSING LIFE ISSUES
		Intro	Symph	Concl	Plan	
I.	II.	III.				IV.

1. The depth address of RS-I is in the seminars. To prepare for a seminar one needs not only to chart the paper thoroughly and pull it through his life experience, but also he must plan the drama so that every detail will enable that depth address.

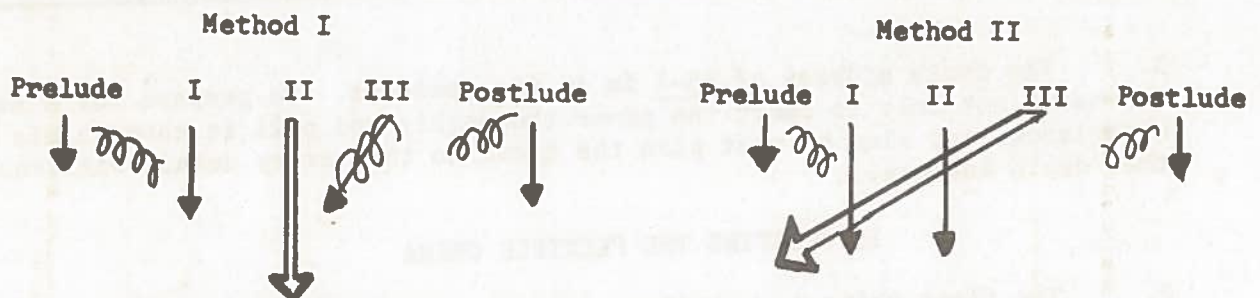
I. CREATING THE FLEXIBLE DRAMA

2. The first thing in building a seminar lesson plan is creating a dramatic picture of what will happen. A lesson plan has three movements and there are two basic ways these three movements can be related. The first is getting out the problem area; the second is really driving the main push of the paper to the center of the earth; and the third is clarifying that main push. For example, consider the Ortega paper we use called The Structure of Life. In the first push, or Movement I, paragraph 5 lays out the polarity between pure problem and building a model. It shows how that is the structure of the first half of the paper. Movement I, therefore, is where the subject gets nailed down. Next, in Movement II paragraph 4 goes through that sentence by sentence until people's lives become unglued. Movement III takes the rest of the paper and clarifies what has happened by spinning it out into a clarification of that picture.

3. Another way to do the movements is to 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--a cut back through the other two running through the center of the earth. Participants are then spun loose and sent out. The Tillich paper is like that. The Introduction is the games and short courses; the Prelude is about getting a chart of the paper so that participants 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 these are preliminary types of action, although very important. Another approach would be to use the first part of the paper as a Prelude and Movement I as paragraphs 7, 8, and 9; Movement II would then be paragraphs 10 and 11, and that is where the drive would come. When the participants get clear on paragraphs 7, 8, and 9, the pedagogue says, "Now let's get clear on the center of sin in 10 and 11." At any rate, it is clear that the hammer blow is coming up in paragraph 12, and all that is happening in the first two movements is stirring up the territory. When the study reaches paragraph 12, look out for the freight train. "Here comes the hammer--KA-WHAM!" After the last part of paragraph 12, it should be impossible to teach anything else in the paper because people's eyes are all fixed on stars and they could not even hear some other section of the paper. The Postlude is simply a reading of the concluding paragraph of the paper: something like, "Sin and grace are strange words, but they are not strange things," give a little lecturette and then a send-out.

4. Unless there is a dramatic picture of how that paper is going to POW a given group over a seminar time-period, it will not be possible for any kind of happening to take place.



5. These diagrams ground possible images of what a dramatic picture might look like, but everyone needs to plan his own dramatic picture for every seminar.

6. Another important thing in performing a good lesson plan, especially in the central movement, is to have previously asked the preparation questions: "What is the one thing that the participants 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?" In Tillich, the answers to these questions are pretty clear. Participants 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 and have the possibility of experiencing the grace-happening during the seminar by pointing to it as a possibility in their own lives. In Tillich that is the one thing that needs to happen.

7. An overall dramatic image gives great flexibility. It gives a way of seeing the seminar plan as greatly flexible. If, when plowing through Movement I, paragraph 7 gets bogged down and the time is up for Movement I in the lesson plan, then shoot paragraphs 8 and 9. Just say, "There are two 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."

the participants respond to the paper with something wild about rabbits jumping through the left side of Australia. The pedagogue would ask, "Well, is that what he is talking about here in this paper?" And the participant would say, "No." "Okay, let's go back to the paper. Now, what is the paper saying?"

14. There are two ways to deal with second and third level questions: Shoving participants back into the paper or shoving them into the context of what they themselves are saying. Whether the pedagogue has all the millions of questions written down or not, he still needs to have a million of them up his sleeve for the drama and flexibility they add to the paper.

15. To put it another way, thoroughness of preparation and flexibility of operation need to be united. Excellence and flexibility--those are the interwoven themes. Also, the paragraph charts and questions need to be written out. There are some thirteen pages of models which lay out in detail the building and back-up of lesson plans. Anyone can see how it would be done. Each of the movements could have its own page, including a chart as well as a page with the sentences of the charts. There could be a whole page of questions and a whole page of lecturettes. Although this is a valuable course to follow, it needs to be thought of more in terms of a battery of tactics in a strategic design.

16. As mentioned earlier, there are many models which are helpful in lesson planning. One such planning sheet is the one included. It deals with various preliminary considerations as well as the introduction, main body and conclusion of the seminar.

## II. PRELIMINARY INTENTIONALIZATION

17. First of all decide the rational objective: What is the one thing the participants need to have memorized when they leave the seminar? What is the one thing they will never forget? For example, what would be the one thing from Bonhoeffer's Freedom paper that participants will be able to pull out of their back pockets any time for use? "The decision-making process" could be the rational aim. The students would leave with those first seven sentences in paragraph 3 branded indelibly on their minds. They would have the decision-making process written down on paper, drawn into a chart and laid out step by step from 1 through 7.

18. The existential aim is what is experienced internally when paragraph 3 is properly taught. Perhaps it is nausea at the point of ambiguity. If, during Bonhoeffer, no one gets sick to his stomach, then the seminar has not come off. Of course, the point is not to make the participants sick but rather, to have them feel internally the crisis that the paper articulates. Along with this "sickness" there has to be a release. Participants have to experience the release of freedom along with the burden. The experience of tension must happen to everyone during that seminar.

19. Before entering into the seminar on Saturday afternoon, the pedagogue must deal with the question of mood. What is the mood that needs to be created?

8. Sometimes lesson plans are like a long list of beads on a string, or like a rosary. One bead is pulled, then the next, and so on until bead 97. Bead 63 could not possibly be pulled before bead 47. They are pulled one at a time, in consecutive order. Then, if the lesson plan gets bogged down on bead 32--when bead 96 is really the hammer blow--paralysis sets in because of all the beads that must be pulled between 32 and 96! That is not the way to conduct a seminar.

9. There is nothing permanent about a lesson plan. If someone gets bogged on some new idea like hidden suicide, do not punt, rejoice. The Lord has given the seminar something new to deal with. If the whole group is leveled by experiencing hidden suicide, what else could be wished for? If it is clear that the rest of the seminar could be spent on that new idea, then do not--time is up for Movement II and move on to Movement III. It does not matter whether the movement has been finished. What does "finished" mean, anyway? One never gets "finished" with any of these movements. They are infinite universes. Thus, in Tillich, for instance, forty-five minutes should be left for paragraph 12, no matter what. In this way, only the pedagogue is killed in the method. The participants never notice if forty-three jewels are left out; only the pedagogue bears that pain. The participants are probably glad to get on to something else.

10. This method gives the whole seminar a dynamic feel. No two seminars should ever be alike, for although they are the same drama, they have different participants. The pedagogue always has the possibility of altering and moving on. One way is through Lectureting. If time is running out, he always has a lecturette up his sleeve. A whole paragraph can be given in one lecturette. Of course, a lecturette is not so helpful as having the group struggle to the bottom of a given paragraph; but under a time limit, it is better to give a quick image than to get lost in a movement. For the next thirty minutes, the group is freed to stew around somewhere else.

11. Another edge issue for great teaching is second and third level questions. If the group is on the hook with a great question that someone has bitten and responded to, have several flexible ways of playing that particular arena further. Depending on how a person answers, have further appropriate questions--up to three varying sets. These second and third level back-up questions are even more important than the basic questions.

12. One helpful image for second and third level questions is that the paper is over against the self or the participant. When it is between the paper and the self, there are really only two types of basic questions. One question is, "What did the paper say?" The other question is, "What did you mean?" It is the dialogue between the student and the paper that the pedagogue must intensify. The paper asks a question of the participant and he responds to it.

13. 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 it is just pushing the participants over against the paper. Maybe

What mood needs to be created in terms of where participants are in the course? Has Tillich made them so giddy that the task is now to get them down from the rafters? Did the priest conversation put them under the table? Do the pedagogues need to dance on the table to get the mood up? What is necessary to get participants into the mood for studying so that the overall drama of the entire course can come off?

20. Then there is detailed reflection on the persons in the group both as individuals and as a group. What are their chief struggles? Where do participants need to be pushed? Where do they just need to stew? This brooding is all done in the last thirty minutes before the seminar starts.

### III. MOVEMENTS OF THE SEMINAR

21. It is now time to look at the pace of the initial drama, the overall drama and the final drama within the seminar. This has to do with deciding ahead of time which movements to go through quickly and on which to place heavy emphasis. The pedagogue needs to see the total picture before he begins. The timeline is key, and should be created out of the necessary pace. Later, the most powerful illustrations, the impact and the address need to be spelled out very, very carefully.

#### A. Introduction

22. Consider the entrance: How does the pedagogue get on stage? He has to get into the situation; how does he come in? Does he start the seminar from the back of the room or the front? Does he start it sitting down or standing up? Does he start it with a song, or not? Does he ask someone to go ahead and put the chart up while the rest are still studying or does someone put a chart up while the rest play a game? Does the pedagogue illustrate points in charting while the chart is being put up or does he rush through it quickly and give the students his own chart?

23. The pedagogue's opening ten words determine the mood of the seminar as much as anything else. Suppose the group has finished the study early and is fussing around, and a character comes in speaking so fast that no one can understand him. Finally, he gets their attention. That is one gimmick. Or, he may begin by speaking very softly so that when he really starts, he has their undivided attention.

24. The pedagogue also needs to think carefully about the centerpiece. It is crucial because it symbolizes that the power is in the center of the table. The group's attention should never focus on the pedagogue. Their attention goes to the blackboard and the centerpiece. People will remember the centerpiece long after they forget what the pedagogue wore. The centerpiece needs to be an art form, a symbol of the seminar.

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

26. The initiating game is usually a conversation. It enables the participants to make the decision to be in the seminar with a given pedagogue. It slowly involves them in what the paper is about. A conversation such as the initiating game objectifies the paper and gives the group a chance to talk about the paper in a lighter vein. The weekend mood hits its lowest point in the Niebuhr seminar which is after the Church Lecture. If the group is not on the floor at that point, then the Church Lecture has not been given. After studying the six paragraphs of Niebuhr, the mood drops six feet deeper. At this point it is imperative to get the participants away from the paper for about 20 minutes before they begin studying it again. Otherwise, the seminar will not dance, it will not move. The pedagogue needs to get the mood up. Sometimes this is done by drawing an image of what Niebuhr is saying in that paper and then talking about how the Church invented symbols. Something like that needs to be done to get the mood back up so the group has permission to dialogue in depth with what Niebuhr is saying rather than getting swallowed up in mood.

### B. Symphony

27. The art of seminar orchestration is not synonymous with the art of the document. The seminar is a dramatic movement of the entire symphony. It is the art of high drama which the pedagogue brings about or creates in any paragraph. The climax (Movement II) is the high point of involvement, address and rapport between the pedagogue and the participants. It is where depth 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 conducting is never tied to the score--that is what it means to say that a symphony can be played only once. The same applies to a seminar. Only on the other side of the mastery of the content can creative seminar orchestration be released.

28. Imaginally, the symphony is built on the structure of an Elizabethan drama. It has a prelude, three acts and a postlude. The prelude is 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 drops the problem directly into each individual's lap. It is the climax in that it is the most intense point of the dramatic involvement. It is when the depths of life are revealed. Movement III is the resolution--which does not mean "they lived happily ever after." Rather, it means the life situation has been raised, the bottom has been pushed out of it and it has been related to all men. The postlude, then, is a standing back, a reflection on what has happened. It is the denouement, simply the unraveling, the finale.

### C. Conclusion

29. In the conclusion, the last five minutes or so, the pedagogue needs to be able to dramatize something like this: "I have been in charge, I am going to have the last word, and I am going to send you out of here with something to think about. And I am going to be sure your mind is on the relevant issue

at the end." That is the story the pedagogue needs to tell himself internally so that when the curtain comes down, the participants have been given the possibility of appropriating the entire experience.

30. The teaching image reaches back across the paper and tries to present a picture of that paper for the group to remember. In personal witness, the pedagogue moves to preaching. In the personal witness, he takes a stand. Up to that point he is nothing but a midwife: "Okay, class, look at the paper. Okay, paper, speak to the class. Okay, class, look at the paper." In the conclusion, and to some extent in the introduction, he puts himself on the stage and says, "My personal experience with all of this is ----." The pedagogue sets himself in history as a human being. Then he has the closing ritual and leaves.

31. The weaker the pedagogue, the more important are a well-prepared introduction and well-prepared conclusion. Through the introduction the pedagogue has to show the group that he is a strong teacher. In the conclusion he has to definitely bring the curtain down and signal the participants that they can look at the whole experience from the point of view which has been presented.

#### D. Specific Symphony Plan

32. The pedagogue is now ready to work out his specific symphony plan. He must first decide where the most likely point of depth human involvement will be for a given group. This could come at any point in the seminar when someone suddenly breaks it open. However, the pedagogue needs to plan it for a specific paragraph. For example, in the Bonhoeffer paper, it might be paragraph 7 where the group really struggles with responsibility in an ambiguous situation. Thus, the seminar drama would have paragraphs 5, 6, and 7 as Movement II. What entanglements would lead up to this? Perhaps paragraph 9 would be Movement I and then paragraph 3 would be Movement III. That would leave the prelude with paragraphs 1 and 2 and finally the postlude as paragraph 4.

33. This format leaves the question of what to do with paragraph 8. Where a paragraph is put depends on how it is to be used. If, for example, it is being used as a model of "responsible action" in which to gain clarity on the difference between obedience, freedom and responsibility, it would be taught right after paragraph 9. If, instead, it is to be used as a climactic illustration of the complexity of decision-making, then it would be taught somewhere after or around paragraph 7. It is a paragraph that can be used either way and the use of it depends upon the orchestration of the seminar.

34. Once the movements have been decided, the pedagogue goes back to the lesson planning sheet. He writes down the thesis--a restatement of those things which will be taught. Some pedagogues also write their questions in these columns; others write them on the document or a separate sheet. All of these are wise. However, it is best to have the most crucial questions on the lesson plan. Illustrations could also be written on the lesson plan. There could be a list of ten illustrations and ten answers for every question

asked in order to prime the pump a little if participants are reticent to respond.

35. Another important thing about the lesson planning sheet is timing. A seminar usually goes 90 minutes, though in RS-I one sometimes has 100 minutes. In order to place the emphasis on Movements II and III, the total time spent on the Introduction, Prelude and Movement I needs to be limited to no more than one-third of the total time allotted. Thus, the time blocks might look like: Introduction - 5 minutes, Corporate Chart - 5 to 10 minutes, Prelude - 5 minutes, Movement I - 10 minutes, Movement II - 20 minutes, Movement III - 35 minutes, and 5 to 10 minutes for both the Postlude and Conclusion.

#### IV. ADDRESSING LIFE ISSUES

36. In conclusion, the whole purpose of the seminar is to help participants struggle through particular issues about their own lives and the particular addresses the paper has for them. The sensitivity point for knowing what needs to be pushed is always the pedagogue's own sweating, weak and despairing life. The flexibility of the dramatic image gives more room for this sensitivity to keep operating in calling forth the most crucial struggles in the seminar so that it has a profound effect on participants' lives as they dialogue with the paper. The image allows the pedagogue to stay committed to occasioning that profundity until it takes place. That is the key point however old, fundamental or simple it may be.

37. Most pedagogues fall away from greatness by backing away from asking third level questions, backing away from demanding more from the participants, or backing away from holding a participant's inadequate pictures up against a more comprehensive one. It is in the third-level questions that life is put into a sweat, that life is put into a struggle, that life is put into a crisis that allows the individual to see his destiny more clearly and decide about it more often. Third level questions also put the pedagogue into sweat and crisis. They remind him of his own sweat. Unless he is willing to go into a seminar and sweat the spirit sweat with every participant, then he is not going to bring off a good seminar. He has to expect and be open to a religious experience himself in order to allow the others to be open to it. That is how he gives permission for everyone to experience a great, life-altering event.

38. That is why a period of brooding before going into a seminar is utterly critical. A pedagogue needs thirty minutes before going into the seminar to brood on what is happening today in history, what is happening to him in relation to the seminar paper, what is happening to the participants at that moment, and what is going to happen to them in the upcoming paper. He needs to brood in order to anticipate as much as possible the spirit war the seminar will spark--both inside him and inside each participant. Through brooding, he can make a decision to relate to that war creatively. If depth spirit brooding does not take place, then all of the pedagogue's careful and flexible preparation may go for naught. It is having the courage to stand as the one who calls forth new life that makes all of this preparation, all of these tools and all of these tactics worthwhile.