

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 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

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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

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

Imaginably, 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 plods 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 revolved. 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 word, 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 put Paragraph 8, for example, as a model of “responsible action” in which you are getting clear on the difference between obedience,

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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.