



Leading Theological Education by Extension (TEE) Seminars¹

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The Extension Seminary requires a rather different form of instruction. In the first place the instructor does not have daily contact with the student. Consequently the instructor should not make the student dependent upon him or her as a primary source of information. Instructors are important in the Extension Seminary, but they are important and have value for some reasons that are rather different from those in classical sorts of educational experience. Students in a TEE program must necessarily rely on the self-teaching texts and their own experiences as their primary sources of information and knowledge. They must also learn to use each other as sources of information, and certainly as points of reference in the understanding of their own experiences.

A. The Role of Professor in the Seminar

What then exactly is the role of professors or instructors? If in their weekly or bi-weekly contact with students they see themselves as lecturers giving out the same sort of cognitive material which the students have been assigned to read and to study, then surely they are going to disappoint and frustrate their students. Their role must be different. Professors in the Extension seminar should see themselves more as leaders in a seminar and less as lecturers. The Extension Seminary requires some sort of experience where students will put together and connect what they have read with what they have experienced. Now who is going to help students make these connections between the cognitive learning and the practical application of the knowledge? This is the big question for leadership of the seminar.

We are all aware that conducting a seminar, or as we commonly call it, a discussion, is not easy. We are much more secure, and it is much easier, just to conduct a lecture. The reason for this is that in a lecture we have complete control of the situation. We have the students. We have the lecture. We have the notes, and the objective is achieved when we have kept the students there for the hour and controlled it completely. But the seminar is a different type of learning experience. It is possible to feel less secure in a seminar situation. So we will deal with the strategies which help to deal with types of problems that we commonly encounter in the less structured types of learning experiences which occur in the seminar.

B. Guidelines for Leading the Seminar

The leader of an effective seminar observes several guidelines:

1. One sees oneself more as a participant in a group than as a director of a group. The leader is more interested in finding out what people have done with ideas than in telling what he or she would do with ideas.

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2. The style of the seminar is that of integration, tying things together, rather than presentation, introducing new material.
3. The emphasis in a seminar is more on relating cognitive learning to experience than it is just discussing and dealing with the cognitive information alone.

C. Characteristics of the Effective Leader of a Seminar

The effective leader of a seminar has several characteristics as a person:

1. The leader is accepting. In this sense, acceptance does not mean agreeing with every idea, or even allowing every idea that is spoken. Acceptance has to do with recognizing that there are many ideas and many viewpoints. Acceptance recognizes that the students in the seminar may wish to express ideas that are different from one's own, and that in expressing ideas that contrast with one's own there is no particular threat. There is no particular harm to be done by at least listening. Acceptance recognizes and expects difference. Acceptance provides the basis upon which we can examine differences that exist among several positions on the same issue.

Acceptance does not mean indifference when a student espouses error, or treating any view as equally valid. It means dealing with the person holding the view as one worthy of respect. It means recognizing that students are thinking through issues and need time and "room to maneuver" as they form their own position.

The effective leader of an effective seminar is a good listener; listening not just to pass judgment but to find things in what people are saying with which he or she can connect and relate to one's own thinking. The leader listens then, not in a judgmental way but in a curious way, wondering what it is that students have been able to do with ideas.

2. The leader is concerned to develop the interpretive skills of the students. Therefore, in a seminar the teacher must be particularly concerned for the sorts of interpretive skills that the students are developing on their own. The professor in the seminar enquires systematically into the points of view, and the techniques for developing a point of view, that each of the students exhibits. The professor is less concerned about the "right position" and more concerned about the process students are using—processes that will, in the long run, move toward a self-supporting, self-sustaining and correcting set of learning habits. In other words, the seminar instructor takes the long view rather than the short view. The seminar leader, while examining how well students are learning specific information, seeks to discover the techniques of understanding and interpreting that students are applying to the information they are learning.
3. The effective leader creates an informal learning environment in the seminar. To the extent that it is reasonable and possible, the seminar instructor associates with students in an informal way. Some of the finest seminars occur around a dinner table, or perhaps eating together in an open field or under the trees. The environment is reminiscent of the teaching environment that was created by our Lord. We should remember that Jesus used the seminar technique. He presented information on certain occasions. But on other occasions he asked for information and he examined the kind of processes his disciples were using to interpret and to come to understanding. He asked them to review information, and he asked them for

their opinion. Many of these interactions between Jesus and his disciples occurred in an informal setting—in boats at the shore, sitting on the hillside, and on occasion, sitting around a table spread with food.

For many people, school has become a most unlikely place to learn. It seems appropriate that the movement toward Theological Education by Extension should give us an occasion to remind ourselves that much that is important in life, much that is effective in teaching, can take place and should take place in less threatening and more informal and joyful sorts of environments.

4. Seek for informality and acceptance in the seminar; but keep your eyes on the goal, or objectives. It is important that the informality and the warmth and the acceptance be within a framework of goal achievement. The effective leader of the seminar shares the goals with the students so that they goals are also the goals of the learners. Remember, a seminar is an engagement with people in the pursuit of understanding; particularly, the understanding of the relationship between the learning of information and the sort of learning that takes place through experience.

D. Conclusion

You may have noticed that there are difficulties related to conducting a seminar which are different from the lecture. Which do you find easier, the lecture or the seminar?

The Peace Corps has been concerned about the effectiveness of their orientation programme for Peace Corps volunteers. They have committed themselves to extensive research. They identify their old method of training as “the information transmission” model, which is basically a cognitive input model—lecture, reading, films, and so forth. They are exploring an “experiential laboratory model” for training their volunteers. While convinced that the experiential laboratory model is the more effective way of learning for volunteers, they found that the trainers, that is, the teachers, had great difficulty in adjusting. They reverted to the information transmission model any time they felt threatened or unable to control the situation.

Based on this experience, the Peace Corps identified and listed the qualities, characteristics, and skills that a teacher should have in order to function efficiently in the experiential laboratory model. Their objectives for the Peace Corps Teacher Training Program could be adapted as to the TEE Teacher Training Program. The purpose of Teacher Training is to help each teacher achieve the following objectives:

1. A thorough understanding of experiential training philosophy and methodology (achieved through experienced learning).
2. An understanding of the objectives of theological education in relation to the growth of the church.
3. An understanding of the role of the students and role of teachers in achieving these objectives.
4. Familiarity with the various learning strategies available for use in the Theological Training Program.
5. A sound rationale for selecting learning strategies to achieve the desired objectives in the Program.

6. Skill in helping students learn how to learn from experience.
7. Skill and confidence in conducting the Extension Center meetings.
8. Skill in turning (constructively) student confrontation and hostility, conflict, anxiety and frustration, and other problems in the program to learning experiences.
9. Skill in helping students learn how to work together in effective, problem-solving groups (i.e., solving problems with the church and not apart from the church.)
10. Skill in developing the student community into a learning community, with active student involvement and participation—helping students to assume responsibility for their own learning and to take advantage of all available resources in a supportive climate.
11. Skill in developing open communication, among teachers, among students, and between teachers and students—based on trust, common objectives, and genuine concern for the learning development, and growth of each person in the program.
12. Skill in helping students to assess and evaluate their own progress and performance in the program, identifying their needs and objectives.
13. Skill in supporting students as they carries out their program plan.
13. Skill in team building, working effectively with other teachers in planning, designing, conducting and evaluating the Extension Seminary Program and in working together to solve problems that develop in the training program.

Working Rules for a Seminar (Tutorial)

General

1. Everyone should participate.
2. Students share learning—not ignorance.
3. The teacher must *also* be a learner—all sharing.
4. A main objective is to learn how to apply.

Preparation: The Teacher Must:

1. Know the subject.
2. Be prepared on possible corollary subjects.
3. Set objectives:
 - a. How does one want to develop the material?
 - b. How will non-verbal objectives be accomplished (i.e., in the affective and volitional domains)?
 - c. How will one evaluate materials?
 - d. How will one apply materials to the learning experiences?
4. Spend at least two hours with current newspapers. This brings the real, current world into the seminar (relevance).
5. Prepare quizzes
6. Keep accurate records and evaluation of students (including personal growth).

Principles: The Teacher Must:

1. Give no information that the student can possibly give. Don't lecture!

2. Bring everybody into the discussion.
3. Control while keeping a sensitivity and openness to the students' creative activity.
4. Keep an eye open for the passive learner (the sleeper.) Keep everyone on the alert, but don't make anyone lose face.
5. End the seminar with a summary, assignment, or other means to encourage continued thought.
6. Accept opposition. Do not force your views on anyone. Confront differing viewpoints with as little bias as possible so that students can think, reason, reflect, and arrive at their own conclusions.
7. Be more interested in the person, than in the subject.

Format: The Teacher Should:

1. Begin with a devotional and prayer.
2. Then give a quiz over the week's lesson (keeps them prepared.)
3. Discuss the questions you marked for discussion before class:

Teacher's Function

- To clarify
- To make personal (get the student's own response)
- To challenge
- To amplify when necessary
- To apply
- To encourage expression
- To stimulate interest

Ways

- Ask why the student answered that way
- Ask others if they agree
- Ask the student to put ideas in his or her own words, to illustrate
- Ask what this means in one's personal life

Be sure to cover the main questions of the lesson.

4. Go over the next assignment.
5. Collect the homework and mark it. Use a colored pen to note any corrections or information they left out.