

Joseph Schwab as Teacher

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Background

Although Schwab's written contributions to curriculum are well known and widely referenced, the contributions made through his teaching are less familiar. Yet teaching and discussion are an essential component of his understanding of the practical. Schwab insisted that those who engage in collective practical activity must learn to listen and speak to each other as well as to a wide variety of specialists. At the same time, he was well aware that our natural human tendencies often undermine our efforts to hear others in their own terms. Discussion was the vehicle he proposed for promoting dialogue amongst individuals, each of whom may be locked within his or her own set of terms.

Those who have been students of Schwab have always known that the experience of his teaching significantly added to their understanding of his writings. Moreover, since he usually aimed to convince his readers to adopt a practice, to see him engage in the practice became an important part of his message as well as of his method. But how is it possible to make Schwab's teaching more accessible to those who were not his students? We have struggled with this question for a number of years. We would like to use existing records of his teaching to make his practice more visible to those who have not had the opportunity to experience it directly. Yet this is surprisingly difficult. His teaching cannot be summarized into a set of statements. It is a cumulative educational experience where understandings are jointly won during an extended process of inquiry.

For someone who regarded teaching as central to communication and scholarship in the field of education, records of Schwab's teaching are surprisingly hard to find. For the most part, his teaching lives on only in the memories, notes, and writings of his students. He relied on the impact, the model, and the residue of understanding to produce the desired long-term effects. The only sustained record of Schwab's teaching which remains are two extended seminars which he taught in the autumns of 1976 and 1977 at Michigan State University. These seminars were given for graduate students and faculty of the Institute for Research on Teaching who represented different disciplines and who were engaged in various modes of research. All sessions were recorded on cassette tape. After Schwab's death in 1988, these were bequeathed to Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago where they can be found, along with some of his papers, in the Department of Special Collections. Another complete set is archived at Michigan State University in East Lansing. Perhaps participants in the seminars also have copies.

Both seminars invited participants to analyze the way the terms of an inquiry serve to organize and limit discussion. In the first seminar—consisting of 12 sessions of about two hours each spread over a period of six weeks—participants were asked to examine a variety of texts, ostensibly from a wide variety of subject matters, in order to uncover the terms which the authors implicitly or explicitly used to organize their inquiries. In the second

seminar—consisting of 9 sessions of about two hours each spread over a period of three weeks—he chose topics related to the research interests of the participants. The focus was on the terms which the participants themselves brought to the table as clarified through terminology introduced by Schwab.

At the most general level the problem the transcripts represent is how to make available teaching traditions from one generation to the next, given the subjective, momentary, and often idiosyncratic character of classroom interactions. On a previous occasion, we presented a transcript of the first 1976 session on the Book of Genesis. We now have completed the transcription of the entire set of tapes from 1976. We have begun by analyzing them in Schwab-like fashion, using the same techniques that he did. We propose to continue doing this. At the same time we are preparing the transcripts for scholarly study by others. We intend to archive these their transcripts wherever appropriate in order that future generations of scholars can engage and further develop the Practical by confronting something of the scholarly and humanistic presence of someone who holds his place in that tradition. We hope that a discussion of this material, supplemented with some excerpts from it, can help educators to see the importance of dialogue and discussion for those who want to engage in practical activity.

Description of the 1976 Michigan State Seminar

Subject Matter

The first seminar, in 1976, was a reprise of parts of various courses Schwab had taught at the University of Chicago, such courses as *Education as a Field of Study* and *Philosophical Aspects of Biology*. The texts that were examined included: the first seven verses of the *Book of Genesis*; Faulkner's *A Rose for Emily*, in itself of interest since Schwab knew Faulkner personally; two pages from Aristotle's *Physics, Book II*; eight pages from William Harvey; a more recent scientific paper called *Social Control of Sex Reversal in a Coral Reef Fish*; a page from Plato coupled with an additional selection from Aristotle and several pages from Freud; a more extended selection from Freud; and a final selection from Aristotle. The list as reconstructed from the tapes follow in order:

The range of material treated by the texts that Schwab selected may be surprising. They appear at first to be a grab bag of texts from a variety of subject matters and disciplines, but this was no mere parade of the old war-horses. Although the common threads only become evident in the discussions; they were deliberately chosen to challenge participants' accepted notions. "We often look at texts," Schwab said, "under the tyranny of one of the most tyrannical principles of the academic, the principle called 'subject matter'". We tend to automatically assume that two texts are relevant to one another only if their subject matters are the same or similar. But common subject matter was not the principle Schwab used to select these texts. Instead, each was selected as an exercise through which participants could gain the experience of discovering the terms that

organize an author's thoughts and direct the differentiation of what is important from what is not. The texts he chose were of two kinds. Some were attempts to promote or assert a set of terms for other people to use to interpret the world or some part of it. Such was the first selection, the first seven verses of *Genesis*. Here the terms implicit in the text—'form', 'space', 'time', 'light', 'life', etc.—are brought out by comparing two translations of *Genesis*. Though the terms may seem commonplace, Schwab deliberately put a fresh spin on them in order to highlight the terms themselves and reflect upon how they were being used. Other texts were under the control of a set of terms but were written by an author who clearly understood what the terms were. The selection from Aristotle on the four causes, the two pieces of biological research, and the Faulkner short story were examples of this kind. Both kinds of papers were used as exercises to learn how to uncover an author's terms and to see what terms inevitably do to any treatment of a subject matter.

Tradition and Milieux

Because the materials he used were those that he often used while at the University of Chicago, the seminar might be viewed simply as the transmission of this historically oriented liberal arts tradition to a new audience. For most of his life Schwab was immersed in the Chicago milieu, and he certainly used it as the matrix for his teaching. But as one listens to the tapes, it becomes clear that the seminar was more than a reprise of what had been done before. Moreover, if one reflects on what Schwab has told us about curriculum, especially about the commonplaces of education, it **ought** to be different. The milieu at Michigan State was different from Chicago; the IRT carried out a program in education with different suppositions than those that informed the Department of Education in Chicago. The classroom milieu was not the same as that found in Judd Hall. Most important of all perhaps, the participants in the seminar were not University of Chicago graduate or undergraduate students but researchers engaged in a wide variety of research, embodying differing principles and methods. It is not surprising, then, to find that Schwab deliberately displayed a different teaching style and elicited different patterns of response.

Schwab engaged the students by discussion method. He began with open ended questions, entertained a variety of responses, and developed a cumulative, collective understanding of basic educational problems. This revealed the IRT participants' unique sources of knowledge, as well as of their ignorance, and enabled him to challenge them to begin to use their experience of diverse modes of inquiry and problemation in their educational practice. Such discussion transformed the classroom milieu into a community of inquiry. This process of inquiry created a new, but related, tradition, one internal to the participants and therefore, perhaps, still alive and well in their experience.

Method

Schwab had a complex personality that included a combative side and a supportive side. He cultivated a public persona—often exhibited at AERA meetings—which included strong, sometimes unfamiliar, and often provocative language. He had a teaching persona which, though irascible at times, also exhibited surprising patience. Both of these persona, combined with his depth of scholarship, were an essential part of his teaching. He

challenged us to drop ingrained habits and adopt new modes of inquiry. Though the supportive side is less evident to those who have not experienced his teaching (and even to some who did), it becomes clear to listeners of these tapes.

Schwab's method, as exemplified on the IRT tapes, was to engage the participants in problematical discussions. He presented them with familiar problems of reading texts and pursuing research, but he deliberately used unfamiliar modes of thinking and pushed them towards provocative conclusions. He encouraged alternative, sometimes contradictory, readings. He tolerated explorations which were apparent diversions in the discussion but somehow became pertinent branches leading back to the main line of inquiry. The discussion usually involved: puzzling questions by Schwab (sometimes with extraordinarily long wait times for responses); probing questions by puzzled participants; collegial exchanges often involving how the discussions bear on the specialty researches of the participants; and "lecturettes" (his term) by Schwab that summarize a prior episode, convey necessary information, or set up and select part of a problematic situation. At the center of this kind of discussion is the leader, Joe Schwab, applying his extensive experience and learning while also utilizing that of the participants. He cajoles, criticizes, and encourages, the two parts of his name emblematic of his approaches: Joe, the user friendly companion for inquiry; Schwab, the demanding mentor always looking for the group and its members to do more.

Purpose

Schwab frequently pointed out that researchers from different specialties need to learn to listen and speak to one another. He insisted that in any serious dialogue, or when reading any serious material, we must pay attention to the terms the other person—an author, a colleague, an adversary—uses. And by 'term' he did not mean 'word' (as one might think if one were to consult a dictionary). As he often said, "Terms can be represented by words just as d-o-g can stand for a dog, but d-o-g is not a dog, and a word is not a term." Words stand for terms, but the terms themselves are central parts of conceptual structures that refer to people, places, and things in a real world. We all use terms, whether we know it or not, because we all operate from a conceptual structure, generally limiting ourselves unnecessarily to our favorite one. Schwab always demanded that we pay close attention to the two critically important functions of terms. First, they determine which facts are important to our problems; that is, terms determine what we select as the relevant facts. Second, they control the meanings the selected facts have; that is, terms control the meanings we assign to the facts. What our terms do (Schwab's emphasis) is to dictate the techniques we use to select facts and assign meanings.

Consequently, attention to terms is the key to promoting dialogue amongst specialists, each of whom may be locked within his or her own set of terms. It allows us to see what makes one specialty different from another, to uncover the strengths of each, and, equally important, to understand their inevitable weaknesses. Sometimes it can tie one specialty to another or forge links between a number of specialties. Similarly, attention to terms is the key to promoting dialogue in deliberation and practical activity where people can become imprisoned within interpretations of experience which are no longer useful. It can also build bridges between a

practical problem situation and various specialties. So the overall aim of both the seminars at Michigan State was for participants to learn to hear the other person **in his own terms**. This meant that participants were asked to discover the terms of a discourse and then to examine how the terms functioned to organize and interpret experience.

Curriculum Making: What Was Schwab Doing?

This general description of the IRT seminars leads us to a question similar to one that Schwab himself often employed: viz., what was Schwab doing in these seminars? The answers lie in the relationship of the seminars to Schwab's writings on curriculum. In the first place, the seminars provide us with an example of curriculum-making, one of the five bodies of disciplines and experience needed to translate scholarly materials into curriculum that Schwab listed in *Practical 3*. Secondly, they concern problems of theory and its relationship to the practical.

As we have already pointed out, Schwab's curriculum problem at the IRT was to engage these particular IRT participants, embedded as they were in a specific milieu and convinced as they were of the value of their own specific educational orientations. Taken together, these two seminars were his attempt to address the educational problems faced by the IRT as a whole, as well as the problems inherent in the choices made by its members (e.g., about the importance of ethnography or the value of an information processing approach). As the tapes demonstrate, Schwab was engaged in deliberately eclectic curriculum-making, in a fresh sequence, designed for new students and their teachers, at the IRT, some of whom Schwab was working with during his visits. Thus viewed, the seminars raise questions not so much about history, about "what actually happened," but about the transmission of a tradition of inquiry from one educational milieu to another. These are questions as to how one tradition might be moved, modified, and carried out in other contexts; i.e., they are questions *about* curriculum-making. The *how* of these questions involves the practical arts of curriculum-making and teaching, our ability to adapt what is learned in one context to different (often much different) contexts.

It is well known that Schwab made a clear distinction between theoretical and practical inquiry. He asserted that education as a field of study, and curriculum as its major instrument, had come to rely too heavily on theory, and he insisted that any attempt to "put theory into practice" inevitably must simplify situations by forcing them to conform to abstract generalizations. In many circles this critique was taken as a criticism of all use of theory. Nothing could be further from his meaning. Schwab saw theory, rightly understood, as indispensable to practical inquiry; but the relationship between the two is not so simple as is sometimes assumed. Conventional paradigms postulate a movement from conceptualizing theory to practical application. Other paradigms argue for a dialectic between theory and practice out of which some improved formulation of knowledge emerges. Schwab offered us a different possibility. He argued that theory is connected to practice by bridging disciplines called the eclectic arts.

The Eclectic Arts

The eclectic arts are the means by which we can bring a theory together with its use in practical activity. Schwab distinguished three kinds of eclectic arts: those that identify the disparities between real things and their theoretic representations; those that take account of these disparities to modify theories while they are being used in particular situations; and those that devise ways to take account of the many aspects of the real thing which the theory has glossed over or obscured. The 1976 seminar is particularly concerned with the first and third set of arts. More specifically, Schwab wanted to help the participants to understand the basic terms of an inquiry and their relationships to one another; and he wanted to help them to discover new terms of inquiry that others might use in equally effective ways.

Thus Schwab begins the discussion on Aristotle:

We started out with a paper that was prescriptive on *Genesis*. Then we moved over to a paper that was the product of the use of a set of principles with the question of what was defining them to see how they generated the object we had before us, *A Rose For Emily*. We're now going through another pair that follows the same rhythm: we're back to a prescriptive paper to be followed by a couple of pieces of biological research É one uses the prescription and the other uses another prescription that seems to be different and thus forms a very interesting, really a very amusing contrast.

This reminds us of the procedure of *Practical 2*, where Schwab describes ways to develop a "polyfocal conspectus:"

The pattern of instruction proceeds in cycles, the number of cycles depending on the number of alternative perspectives that one wishes to impart, but preferably not less than three. Each cycle has two phases. The first phase of a first cycle is concerned with imparting a theory as a doctrine. The second phase of a first cycle is concerned with transforming the doctrine into a view, moving it from the status of "knowledge" toward being one mode of discriminating certain kinds of problems and materials appropriate to their solution in educational situations. This phase confronts the students with real, simulated, or recalled situations so that they can begin to discriminate a plurality of ways to understand it.

In the second and third sessions, where the text was *A Rose for Emily*, Schwab underscores the multiple dimensions of the work and the extent to which it was written by an author well aware of his contrasting terms. Later (in *Practical 5*), a series of essays in practical criticism that self-consciously develops single-minded readings utilizing eight critical theories, the process is explained further.

This illustration constitutes one set of interpretations of the story, while leaving room for enrichment by yet other readings. It raises the basic questions in any pluralistic endeavor: "What else might be here?" and "What approach

that we have not yet used will help us search for it?" This effort at systematic rereading involves two kinds of polyfocal comparisons. The first concerns the movement from reading to reading as the inadequacies of one interpretation are remedied by the reorientation of the next, and each new reading throws new light on the work. The second comparative activity is undertaken only after the plurality of clear and distinct readings has been established. Here some interpretations provide materials which paradoxically strengthen others. Each can throw new light on the others.

Clearly Schwab did not envision only one way of reading a text. That is why he encouraged us to make polyfocal comparisons. Taken as a whole, these three examples help to illustrate what happens to the eclectic arts when they are applied to intellectual and practical needs. They no longer can be contained within neat segments (as in Practical 2) because they are used within the milieu and the understandings of others.

The Practical Arts

The purpose of the seminar stemmed from Schwab's concern for the practical and its relationship to the theoretical. Just as researchers must learn to listen and speak to each other each other, so must those who are engaged in collective practical activity. Not only must they learn to collaborate with each other, they also must learn to hear and honor a wide variety of specialists. Yet people do not do this naturally. When they engage in a discourse with others from different specialties or with different expertise, they assimilate the other's words to their own interpretations of experience. Though they may appear to listen, they translate what is said into their own terms instead of discovering that there are a variety of possible interpretations of experience that might be useful to them. As he said, "They usually manage to avoid letting the ideas of others disturb the comfort of their ways." This human tendency can undermine practical activity and subvert theoretical inquiry. Any observer inevitably, either overtly or covertly, imposes his or her terms on a situation or a problem to make a series of selections of what is important and what is not; and in doing so has begun to make interpretations, even though they may not be apparent.

What should be done in the face of diverse interpretations? Once again, attention to terms is the key to promoting dialogue. Schwab's orientation to discussion (as described, for instance, in quasi-theoretical terms in *Eros and Education*) was central to his teaching. It is the most effective way for researchers, educators, and students to consider, acknowledge, and use the variety of terms which constitute the various academic disciplines and subject matters. Equally important, discussion is at the core of Schwab's concept of the practical, since discussion enables those engaged in deliberation to confront and sort out the differing meanings of the terms which they bring to the table.

The crucial difference between the various prescriptions for making use of theory in the Practical articles and the recorded seminars is the presence in the latter of the students, their needs, interests, and contributions, both predictable and unexpected, and Schwab's sensitivity to them. For instance, he makes a comment at the opening of the third session.

JJS: There's something called "over learning" that the psychologists think is all right and something called "overreaching" which I know damned well is pretty terrible and can become an overdose. But I am terribly tempted to ask you if you'd sit still for a day for a reading of a short text so right, so detailed the it will make what we did to *Emily* kid stuff. Are you willing to sit still for it? If you do, I'll use the most rigid and wooden techniques. I'll just start with the first and go to the second, go to the third, just go around, just go around so everybody can get a peek.

Sir?

Student: R. says that's effective. [laughter]

Thus Schwab peppers the seminar with comments on process and questions about the students' and his own participation in the discussion, about the diversity of competencies of research and experience they bring to it, about the need to engage misunderstandings based on this, and the effort to gage the progress of their learning. The cycles move in terms of this participation, and therefore the lack the linearity of the summary narratives about the theoretical students postulated in the practical articles. For instance, during a long reflexive episode after Aristotle, Schwab says:

One of the necessary and even desirable aspects of this very process of discussion that I'm engaging in, namely nobody gets everything of everything. That, then, sets on me the obligation to bring up a sufficient variety of things so that there's one of them for everybody.

During this episode Schwab refers to a Schubert Quartet from a concert the previous evening. As we said earlier, there are digressions which prove not to be digressions after all. Other digressions are just that, but digressions which relieve the tension by providing mini-breaks from the efforts to master difficult and unfamiliar materials. Such is the nature of classroom discussion, at least with Joe Schwab in charge.

The Living Milieu: What Can We Learn?

This brings us to the question, what are we doing with the seminars? We believe that the ideas embedded in Schwab's teaching are not just part of the historical record. As we work with the transcripts—most certainly incomplete since they do not capture everything, but nonetheless characteristic—we find Joe Schwab not so much as the occupant of an historical place (suggesting perhaps a tombstone festooned with footnotes) but as a presence in a living tradition, a tradition partly created for him by his predecessors, partly created by him, and now bequeathed by him to us.

There are, of course, some obvious reasons for Schwab's contemporary relevance that have already been mentioned: his stress on the importance of terms to locate the boundaries and the emphases of subject matters; his exemplification of the eclectic arts, since his treatment of them in the practical papers is hard to follow and easy to misunderstand; his cogent way of expressing ideas and his spins and riffs which still seem fresh and penetrating; and his

adaptation of ideas from the University of Chicago milieu to a new context. But there are further reasons why they are still relevant, perhaps even especially timely, today.

First, one always has to struggle against reductionism. Today is no exception. Though the doctrines and dogmas that afflict us may not be those that Schwab discussed, we have our own varieties. Whether it is on the political "right" or on the "far left", whether it is "modernist" or "post-modernist", whether it is "not critical" or "critical", whether it is "technical" or "reconceptualist", we often seem to assume that one view is right and all the others wrong. And then, in an attempt to show that the right view is indeed superior, we claim that it is broad while the others are narrow or that it is inter-disciplinary while the others are caught within traditional boundaries. But breadth is not simply a matter of looking at the whole world from a single perspective. Nor is something inter-disciplinary just because it has cast doubt on the assumptions underlying existing inquiries. To be broad, we must learn to look at the world through several lenses, lenses chosen deliberately to compete with one another. To be inter-disciplinary, we must be able to understand the principles and terms that bound and analyze the inquiries of various disciplines, choosing sometimes one and sometimes the other depending on the problem chosen and the data sought.

What we are talking about, then, is a particular attitude towards the way in which we must work in the world, an attitude Booth (1979) has called "methodological pluralism." There are several typical attitudes which people take when faced with intellectual variety and conflict. Some people believe that the truth will ultimately emerge from the warfare between competing ideas; some are more skeptical and enjoy exposing the defects in all the competing ideas; others believe that there is a little truth in many positions and so try to gather together the best pieces from each; and there are people who proclaim their ideas as the truth and then retreat from the battlefield. Booth suggests another possibility: two, or more, apparently contradictory positions may both be perfectly acceptable. Both can be shown to be valid, neither is better than the other, and, what is most important, one cannot combine bits of each to arrive at a better position. This is methodological pluralism: the belief that we must live with conflicting positions and come to understand each in its own terms without trying either to reduce them to one or to multiply them unnecessarily. Although many people find this stance both unfamiliar and uncomfortable, Schwab demands that we embrace it.

Wayne Booth quotes a useful analogy from Paul Ushenko to make this point.

Imagine a fixed cone place among observers who are not allowed to change their angle of vision. One person observes from directly below the cone and describes a circle. Another observes from directly to one side and sees an isosceles triangle. Others at other angles describe highly irregular shapes.

Each observer sees something different. Each sees everything there is to see from the perspective where he or she stands. Moreover, each is right from this perspective. No view point is inherently

better than the others. Yet to fully apprehend the cone, each needs to understand the viewpoint of the other even if it is not possible to move to the other's point of view. All must be able to see the object from the perspective of the others.

Second, Schwab's emphasis on a polyfocal conspectus is especially relevant to those engaged in practical activity. Although it might be possible, though misguided, to conduct research from a single perspective, you cannot act responsibly in the world by staying within the boundaries of a fixed point of view. To get things done, in education or in any other sphere of practical action, one has to work with others. This means we have to talk with them, to listen and hear as well as to speak with understanding, in order to create some common understandings. A platform, some common ground, even a common language are necessary for a group to get things done. All stakeholders have a right to be at the table, and all at the table need to be able to understand the others.

Deliberation, as Schwab describes it, is a systematic weighing and choosing amongst alternatives. It requires us to formulate and genuinely entertain an adequate variety of alternatives: alternative descriptions of situations, alternative formulations of problems, alternative courses of action which could be pursued, and alternative conceptions of the consequences of the proposed actions. It is not enough to view the situation from one perspective, or to locate only one problem, or to devise only one resolution, or to anticipate only one set of consequences. Educational environments are complex settings, and all relevant factors need to be considered in order to grasp them adequately and to take effective action. Schwab insisted that those who participate in deliberation learn not only to understand the other but also to cherish the diversity it implies.

Third, in our experience there appears to be a resurgence of contentious and ad hominem debate. No doubt it has always been with us, and no doubt it will remain. But are we the only ones who feel they are experiencing it more frequently? Schwab warned us about the dangers of this kind of debate several times during the seminars. For example:

I want to speak to this in affective terms. . . . You can completely destroy any kind of human communication on the premise that the communicator is lying. You have to take the text at what we can, by doing our best, assert to be its face value. . . . And I mean this, by the way, very heartfelly. . . . [and] you don't to have to call a person a liar. . . . Instead of talking, speaking to what he says, you think about his motives for having said that rather than something else. This is the affective corruption of the text.

Wayne Booth, in arguing for the practical benefits of methodological pluralism, said much the same thing: "Only if my opponent's survival is possible without my defeat am I likely to treat his arguments with as much respect as I spontaneously accord my own." What we have found remarkable in listening to the tapes is the power of Schwab's teaching to overcome our natural tendency to

triumph over the other. Even the transcriber, who had no previous experience of Schwab's teaching, was moved by his generosity of spirit.

I was impressed by Joe Schwab's tact, by his sensitivity to his students, and by the gentleness with which he elicited the answers he wanted to hear from them. He always credited what was given and then used persuasive persistence to take the student further; and he was unfailingly enthusiastic and complimentary when the student got where he or she was being led.

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