

# Faculty-centered Faculty Development

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In all the attention being paid to the need for the school curriculum to have more multicultural accuracy, integrity, and balance, thoughtful teachers are often made to feel deeply inadequate, aware of all we don't know and were never taught about "others." Yet teachers are not villains. Teachers are part of systems we are asked to change. As educator Deborah Meier of New York City's Central Park East puts it, teachers are expected to continue to drive the school bus while fixing its flat tires.

In the National SEED (Seeking Educational Equity & Diversity) Project on Inclusive Curriculum, now in its [twenty-seventh] year, we create seminars for respectful faculty development, over time, planned and coordinated by teachers themselves. If staff development efforts on culture and gender do not take teachers themselves seriously, it is incongruous and unrealistic to think that teachers will, in turn, create more inclusive, respectful environments and curricula for their students. Faculty-centered faculty development is analogous to student-centered learning.

Emily Style suggested in a 1988 essay entitled "[Curriculum as Window & Mirror](#)" that the curriculum can be seen as an architectural structure that schools build around students. Often it provides windows out to the experiences of others but few mirrors of the students' own reality and validity. Given better balance, it can provide both mirrors, which reflect and validate students' various identities and multiple ways of making meaning, and windows out into experiences of "others" and into ways of making meaning and being that are not part of a student's own cultural repertoire. A curricular balance of windows and mirrors helps the young to participate in society with both assertiveness and respectfulness.

It is increasingly clear to us in the National SEED Project that what works for teachers is a staff development process that mirrors teachers' own lives and offers windows into new areas that have not, up until now, been part of their schooling or life experience. It is our belief that unless teachers experience themselves at the center of new learning (which draws upon both university scholarship and what Emily Style calls "the textbooks of their lives" as scholarship), they cannot provide curricula for students which, in turn, puts students' balanced growth and development as cultural beings at the center.

Emily Style found that the standard curriculum offered no windows into her mother's life or mirrors for her as a young girl who might be a mother some day. One of the reasons that Style became a teacher was to "do something" with her life, and be unlike her mother who "never worked." Her mother "just" gave birth to and cared for seven children. As a young person in a culture and in school, Style was not in a position to question the silence covering up mothers in the curriculum. She simply received it as a given, oblivious to the damage that it did to her intellectual relation to her mother and to the aspect of herself that would play a caretaking role in culture.

SEED seminar process put Style at the center and took her lifetext seriously. Over time, through reading in women's studies and engaging in monthly conversation with other teachers, Style noticed that school silence had taught her to dismiss her mother intellectually. Eventually, Style interviewed her mother, treating her belatedly the way that school taught her to treat "important people," and subsequently compiling Mom's History Book to honor her mother and to balance the record in her own head and for her own daughters.

That document, which makes a textbook of her mother's life, created a respectful window and a validating mirror unlike any other text. The SEED process gave Style permission to take her mother and herself seriously, discovering in the process that (family) life and her own existence were far more complex, multiple, problematic, and profound than she had been led to believe.

Fashioning a more inclusive curriculum is inner and outer work, hard work, and heart work and makes rigorous demands on memory and intellect. Experienced teachers need professional space to engage with their own life-texts as a fundamental resource. Some teachers have been engaged in just such thinking all along but in isolation. Most school reform efforts completely ignore teacher and staff (auto)biographies. Becoming part of a community of learners that values autobiographical reflection is a key SEED experience. As Minnesota SEED leader teacher Cathy Nelson explained in an article which appeared in the December 1991/January 1992 issue of *Educational Leadership*:

[At the SEED Summer Workshop] I became part of a SEED community of 35 learners who teach. Looking at the textbooks of our lives was essential before imagining school climate and curriculums that would more accurately reflect our diverse world. During our first moments together as a community of scholars/learners, we read aloud our personal versions of Caribbean writer Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl," drawing upon the gendered and remembered voices from our own pasts. The first voices we heard were our own. Immediately, we recognized the authenticity and power of our own lived experience.

SEED seminars are led by teachers for their colleagues. They meet monthly throughout a school year for three hours at a time. They offer both window-views out into areas that have not, until now, been part of teachers' formal schooling or their life-texts, and mirrors of their own lives' complexity. They include numerous, brief narratives by participants, told as we go around what becomes "a talking circle." In the conversational nature of this practice, a story told by one participant might become for one listener a window of revelation and for another, a mirror recognition of a once-known landscape, the dim memory of which brightens in the course of the circle conversation.

There are significant dimensions of the personality and the past that are never invited into "professional" conversation in staff development. Due to private reflection, some teachers are aware of the "windows" and "mirrors" of their own learning and teaching process, but most staff development efforts build in no process for either recovering or sharing life-forming knowledge with one's colleagues. SEED seminars are the richer for tapping onto this vein of insight and cultural information which is contained within all people and in all school staffs.

At the same time, the SEED process offers avenues into the last 20 years of university-based scholarship on gender, race, class, culture, and many other diversities of experience. This scholarship illuminates many aspects of cultural power relations. Those of us teaching today are "products" of schooling which embedded in us deep imbalances or obliviousness in regard to matters of cultural positioning and power. Teachers today face a daunting task in dealing with all sorts of matters surfacing in schools which our own schooling evaded. Many explosive and political matters assert themselves in today's schools regardless of whether teachers are dealing with a student population primarily composed of "their own kind" or not.

The American Association of University Women report entitled "[How Schools Shortchange Girls](#)" (1992) uses the term "evaded curriculum" to label the subjects covered only by powerful silences which, in turn, perpetuate particular positions of gender dominance or mask huge matters of cultural change. In the National SEED Project, we have found that breaking silence about evaded subjects is best done with eminent respect for what is already embedded in the texts of teachers' lives and trusting teachers' ability to talk about these matters as adult learners who are also, in the process, equipping themselves to handle students' life experiences as a central text in schooling. Participating

in such a “modeling” experience (in a year-long SEED seminar) enables teachers to do less evading and more educating for real life in their own classrooms than was done for them in their K-12 schooling time.

In a SEED seminar that Emily Style facilitated at Madison High School in New Jersey, where she was on the staff for a decade, a European-American teacher revealed that a significant dimension of his identity was being a parent of four children including his 13-year-old son who was autistic. Up until then, in his teaching career of over twenty years, no one had ever asked him to speak about his own life-text as the white, male parent of an autistic child. In his own experience of schooling, there had been no windows regarding such a life, nor were there any mirrors in the faculty in-services that he had experienced before the SEED seminar. Isolation and invention characterized his existence.

After this teacher talked from the textbook of his life in the SEED seminar, Style invited him, the following fall, to speak to her American literature classes during their reading of Steinbeck’s novel *Of Mice and Men* whose character Lennie could be labeled autistic. This teacher broke more than one silence in Style’s classroom in speaking out of the authority of his experience in handling his son’s condition and his own experience of parenting. This added (multicultural) dimensions to the curriculum that cost nothing in terms of dollars and cents and benefited all. In the National SEED Project, we have found that the development of teachers as “interior resources” for others in their school buildings (as SEED leader Verdelle Freeman of Piscataway, New Jersey, phrases it) is a critical first step in creating a multicultural curriculum that provides integrity and balance for all staff and all students.

In the SEED Project, we try to model respect for teachers’ complexities with the hope that teachers will then show the same kinds of respect for their students’ complexities. Teachers are not empty vessels any more than students are. Faculty development that ignores a teacher’s own complexities and life-contexts repeats the same old errors of “banking model” (Freire) education which has failed so many students. If we aspire to student-centered learning, we need also to be thinking in terms of faculty-centered learning by teachers. The SEED Project promotes faculty-centered faculty development.

In light of her theory of “Interactive Phases of Personal and Curricular Re-Vision,” (1983 and 1990) Peggy McIntosh describes five interactive phases of professional development of teachers, which she has come to see through work on gender and culture in the curriculum. They range from the most obviously authoritative to the most respectful and inclusive. They also constitute a repertoire of ways of working with faculty which have different degrees of appropriateness depending on the task at hand. Phase theory is adapted here to describe a variety of ways of doing faculty development.

### ***Phase One. Teacherless Faculty Development.***

“Outside” presenters, “expert” in their subject matter, neither notice teachers nor notice that they haven’t.

### ***Phase Two. Exceptional Teachers.***

Exceptional teachers are featured in faculty development, seen as unusual for their kind (teacher), capable, for example, of “doing multiculturalism” for/in their institution and therefore, worth drawing attention to, rewarding and spotlighting. Such exceptional teachers are set apart as examples (of what most teachers are not).

### ***Phase Three. Teachers as a Problem, Anomaly, Absence or Victim.***

The administrators let the faculty air their “issues”, permitting them to rebel/gripe against school norms and/or “fads” such as multiculturalism. Teachers are expected to attend faculty development events, oblivious of how they are being positioned as problems and/or victims. Faculty development in-service seem to be aimed at “fixing” defective or recalcitrant teachers.

### ***Phase Four. Faculty Lives as Faculty Development.***

All teachers are seen as having complex lives, encouraged to resort to memory to “make textbooks of their lives” (Style) by narrating their own experiences. Faculty development provides both “windows and mirrors” (Style) for all participants: windows out to the realities of others, and mirrors of one’s own reality and validity. Faculty development processes respect memory and a range of emotions in teachers; tap into deep knowledge of inner and outer schooling; enable the recovery of lost worlds. (See McIntosh’s [1990 phase theory paper](#), for development of her concept of the multicultural interior worlds within each person). Faculty development work filled with intellectual and emotional respect leads to individual healing and institutional vigor. Phase Four is the first phase in which teachers’ own stories count as curriculum for faculty development and are not seen “simply” as opinion, complaint, or mere anecdote.

### ***Phase Five. Faculty Development Redefined and Reconstructed to Include all of Our Complexities of Self.***

Phase Five recognizes and uses all of our human modes of development, both the vertically-oriented ones identified with “improvement” and the laterally-oriented one identified with connection and (re)construction of self and society. (McIntosh’s phase theory essays of 1983 and 1990, which are Working Papers #124 and 219 of the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, Wellesley, MA 02481.)

With regard to faculty development in multicultural and gender study, phase one is obviously identified with with authority and its functions. In phase two, the lines are clearly drawn between the aspiring soloistic self (a possible “winner”) and the great undifferentiated mass of “losers.” Phase three, though “issues-oriented” and systemic in its awareness, is not conducive to nurturing deep reflection or the memory of the self- in-construction (McIntosh, 1990); phase four recognizes the self-in-relation to others (Jean Baker Miller, 1976), and the self in relation to systems of power, respecting each teacher’s response-ability. In phase four, the self becomes re-known as a microcosm of a complex world, with the promise of more perceived connection and coherence than at present. As McIntosh has written elsewhere:

The multicultural worlds are in us as well as around us; the multicultural globe is interior as well as exterior. Early cultural conditioning trained many of us as children to shut off connection with certain groups, voices, abilities, and inclinations, including the inclination to be with many kinds of children. Continents we might have known were closed off or subordinated within us. The domains of personality that remain can fill the conceptual space like colonizing powers. But a potential for more plural understanding remains in us; the moves toward reflective consciousness come in part from almost-silenced continents within ourselves. (Working Paper #219)

[SEED Summer Leaders’ Workshops](#) prepare leaders of SEED seminars to travel, emotionally and intellectually, between phases two, three and four of the consciousness, providing an exhilarating sense of development and reconstitution in teachers. Respectful faculty development is deeply rewarding. Re-construing and re-situating the self as complex transforms thinking and allows for authentic multicultural connections which formal education and society have discouraged in both

students and teachers. These interactive processes result in a powerful, grounded impulse toward curriculum re-vision.

Please note that we are not claiming that all cultural differences are contained in any of us, only that we have been, since early childhood, more complex than we have been taken to be, and shaped to be. Since it is impossible to “cover” all types of diversity in the curriculum, it makes sense to start with the inner and outer complexities that the learners in any situation carry within them. For when deep learning, unlearning and relearning occur with one’s own life-texts, they yield powerful illumination and educational energy. Such energy gets passed on to students whose life texts are respected as well.

In the National SEED Project, we have found that studying ourselves yields rich multicultural material, lending an exciting contemporary meaning to Socrates’ dictum “know thyself.” In SEED seminar processes, educators respectfully assert, to use McIntosh’s phrasing, that “we are all part of what we are trying to change.” Such centering is as refreshing and life-enhancing as it is demanding for those committed to multicultural staff and curriculum development, and student engagement in education.

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