



pact's

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The newsletter for adoptive families with children of color

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SEED Project on Inclusion Curriculum

(Seeking Educational Equity & Diversity)

By Peggy McIntosh and Emily Style

Parents who wonder whether their children are fairly treated in school may take heart from a program which helps teachers to welcome and respond to all children in class and to deal with them sensitively with regard to complex identity matters such as race and gender. The National SEED Project on Inclusive Curriculum (Seeking Educational Equity & Diversity) prepares teachers to lead year-long seminars in their own schools, reflecting on their practices. Are they there, in an astute and informed way, for students of all races and both sexes?

In seminar meetings held throughout a school year, teachers create a space to reflect on what they are doing, or can do better, to deal fairly and openly with students in all their diversity.

This is far easier said than done. Teachers require a stretch of adult development themselves in order to deal with the complexity of diversity. Before we became co-directors of the SEED Project, we taught in Grades 6-12, as well as in college and university. We ourselves had very debilitating schooling in matters of gender, race, culture, manners, money, power, and belonging and not-belonging. To see what we learned, or didn't learn, we, with other teachers, have needed to do serious self-searching and discussion. One of the key ideas in the SEED Project is that unless we as teachers re-open our own backgrounds to look anew at how we were schooled to deal with diversity and connection, we will be unable to create school climates and curriculum which more adequately prepare students to do so.

For this reason, teachers bring their own lives into the SEED Project. During the summer week in which we prepare teachers to lead seminars in their own school settings, we model over 50 "interactivities" which make teachers' stories one of the key frameworks for their own adult development.

Our process of eliciting teachers' own stories is designed to help teachers take seriously the "textbooks" of all lives, most particularly their own and those of their students. This process takes time. A SEED Seminar lasts for nine months. One meeting may seed a new recognition or connection; by the next month, that recognition or connection may be joined by others. By the third month, a too-easy formulation may be challenged, and a more nuanced way of thinking be urged into being. By the fourth month, the teacher may find that she or he is seeing many children in the class differently. By the fifth month the teacher may have new stories to tell, and new recognition of how seldom students or teachers are enabled, engaged, and deeply encouraged in the educational setting of the school. New questions arise. What can be done differently to address, engage, and elicit the core learning centers of each teacher and each student? These questions challenge the mind and heart, and require balanced attention to one's own experience and the experience of others.

Therefore, we have stated as the second key idea of the SEED Project: Intellectual and personal faculty development, supported over time, is needed if today's schools are to enable students and teachers to develop a balance of self-esteem and respect for the cultural realities of others.

Our seminars are school-based and led by teachers themselves (with some exceptions) because we think that too often the teacher is treated as passive, in need of being acted upon by outside forces, in professional development programs. If teachers are to take students seriously (for example, the children of each parent-reader of this sentence), then the teachers themselves need to experience and learn what it feels like to be taken seriously. And for many, strange as it may

seem, this has seldom happened. Despite educators' quoting of Socrates' phrase "Know thyself," most schooling does not encourage deep self-knowledge. At best, Socrates' phrase translates into "Develop some personal opinions," or "Realize that you are a citizen of the United States," not "Develop awareness of your place in the worlds of power, knowledge-making, agency, possibility, creativity, resources, people, places, and things."

We observe that both teachers and students have a lot of unarticulated knowledge which they do not know as "knowledge." And though teachers can sometimes enable competence which they themselves do not have, it is good to confirm their sense of personal authority before asking that they do this for students. So a third key idea of the SEED Project is: Teachers and other school personnel are the authorities on their own experience. Only if teachers are put at the center of the process of growth and development can they, in turn, put students' growth and development at the center of their classrooms. What we call "faculty-centered faculty development" parallels student-centered learning. And the development of either requires discipline of kinds that most of us were never taught, such as understanding what is "playing out" in the power divisions of classrooms, and in learning to exercise a degree of constructive control which fosters and insists that there be a learning environment for all.

During the monthly meetings of a SEED seminar, a variety of readings are selected. Though we give all leaders a small library of resources, we leave it up to each leader to match the year's discussions to the school's context and the group of teachers who enroll. No two seminars are alike in the readings, activities, videos, meals, and discussions. But some conceptual frameworks are needed to help participants see systematically. We offer some of our own writings and many by others for seminar leaders to consider using. Some key questions are: What would curriculum and pedagogy look like if all the diverse lives of women and girls were seen as co-central with all the diverse lives of men and boys? And how can curriculum and teaching methods provide, in the metaphors of Emily Style, both windows into others' experiences and mirrors of each student's own reality and validity?

A fourth key SEED idea is: Group discussion of Interactive Phase Theory, invisible systems of privilege,

and research on "separated knowing" and "connected knowing" can support teachers and administrators in shaping the school curriculum to be more gender-fair and multicultural.

The use of some conceptual frames which address power inequities in the society is necessary to compensate for the scattered and incoherent state of much teacher education today. Within the disconnected rhetoric of "best practice," there is nothing to recognize that most teachers are themselves trained NOT to see most patterns of inequity in their own schooling, their own school practices, and in larger society. Faced with mountains of new, more inclusive, scholarship, many teachers can be overwhelmed by the question of how to accommodate it or use it in class on a daily basis.

Therefore our fifth key idea is: Without systemic understanding of gender, race and class relations, educators who try to transform the curriculum will lack creative flexibility and coherence when dealing with the scholarship of the last twenty-five years in specific disciplines and across disciplines.

The SEED Project transforms teachers and classrooms through adult development of teachers. The "ah ha's" are many and frequent. The seminar process makes teachers more coherent, sensitive, aware of their own "politics of location" (Rich), and able to carry on steady enabling work for children of all backgrounds.

Often, parents who have adopted children are in a good position to recognize and appreciate the transformation when formerly insensitive teachers, perfectly "nice" but mostly oblivious to systemic "stuff," take on a new, smarter, better-informed way of being. When educators have done some homework on themselves and on the society, this shows in their behavior.

Across a decade of SEED seminar work in schools of many diverse shapes and sizes, we have seen the seeding and strengthening of teaching. Because of SEED work, instructors learn better how to become students again and how to help students become instructors, in a process of mutual development and reciprocity, which engages, encourages, and respects all. When such a climate of reciprocity exists, both teachers and students welcome the daily encounters of schooling.

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