

Peer-led Professional Development for Equity and Diversity:
*A report for teachers and administrators based on findings from
the SEED Project (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity)*



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An Introduction to the National SEED Project on Inclusive Curriculum (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) *By Peggy McIntosh, Founder and Co-Director*

A Filipina-American teacher arrives at a SEED New Leaders' Workshop wearing subdued clothes and calling herself by the Anglicized name she made her parents use when she was a teenager. She experiences seven days of living with a multicultural and multiracial group of 40 other teachers, each day delving into exclusion and inclusion, equity and diversity, in schooling of all kinds. On returning to her school in California she leads a nine-month SEED seminar for interested colleagues, replicating in each three-hour gathering some of the processes and exercises she learned in the summer. She reclaims her Filipina name, begins to wear the bright colors of her cultural past, and within a few years becomes a trusted and beloved school principal. She continues to say, "SEED turned it all around for me."

A strongly feminist White woman sits in a small group with nine other teachers for part of every day at the SEED New Leaders' Workshop. She has worked for gender equity at her school, feels that she is a veteran in matters of diversity, and isn't sure that the SEED Project has anything new to teach her. After seven days of immersion in the most diverse group of people she has ever spent time with, she is bowled over by how much she still has to learn about others and about herself. She comes to understand Emily Style's words on "curriculum as window and mirror," giving windows out onto others' lives, while also providing mirrors of one's own reality and validity. She writes in a SEED newsletter, "SEED has changed my life. It has changed my teaching, my interactions, and my purpose for being."

An African-American school administrator attends the training, leads a SEED seminar for other administrators in his district, and then supports three interested teachers to attend the summer SEED New Leaders' Workshop and carry the work further. Each one returns saying that SEED has changed their life. For each one, the transformation has been different. A few feel they have a clearer vision and better tools for closing the achievement gap. A few feel the validity of the teaching styles they had doubted in themselves. One understands homophobia for the first time. Others have discussed ethnicity, race, class, gender, and nationality in depth as never before. They all say they realize anew the ways they themselves, unknowingly, have contributed to the inequitable treatment of students, perpetuating the systemic oppression that they themselves experienced in school. They return prepared to be different kinds of teachers. The administrator calls the SEED office to say he would like still more SEED seminars started in his district so more teachers can participate. He tells me, "I've been to all kinds of diversity workshops and retreats and conferences . . . you name it. Nobody puts it all together like SEED."

What these three vignettes have in common is that they describe typical responses to SEED, both to the seven-day training of facilitators each summer (*SEED New Leaders' Workshop*) and the subsequent year-long, monthly seminars that these new leaders facilitate with peers in their schools.

I founded the SEED Project because I believed, "There's got to be a better way to do professional development of teachers than to talk down to them and bore them to death." I identified with the teacher who

SEED is co-directed by Peggy McIntosh of the Wellesley Centers for Women, Emily Style of Westfield High School in New Jersey, and Brenda Flyswithhawks of Santa Rosa Junior College in California. The three co-directors make policy decisions and choose among applicants for SEED leadership training based on a number of factors, including the strength of administrators' support for SEED applicants.

Over 30,000 teacher-years have been voluntarily spent by educators in year-long, monthly SEED seminars in 33 U.S. states and 13 other nations. In recent years, more and more parents and college teachers have joined K-12 educators at the New Leaders' Workshops to prepare to facilitate seminars for their peers.

What is the place of the SEED Project among other U.S. educational reforms of the late twentieth century?

Three Ph.D. dissertations have been written on the Project. They have used the term “transformational professional development” to categorize SEED within various types of reform. Transformative professional development differs from informative or skills-based professional development in that it assumes that teachers must change in deep ways if schools are to change in deep ways. Transformative professional development does not separate personal development from professional development; it seeks to change people and schools from the inside.

SEED is:
 Interactive
 Experiential
 Theory-based
 Intellectually rigorous

SEED spans:
 All school subjects
 All grade levels
 All teaching methods
 All school climates

SEED fosters:
 Critical thinking
 Equity leadership
 Diversity leadership
 Social justice

SEED leads to:
 Teacher renewal
 Systemic understanding
 Adult development
 Student achievement

had leaned over to a colleague during a required faculty development session and said, “I hope I die during a professional development day. The transition will be so imperceptible.”

Yet I did believe in adult growth and development, and I still do, especially around matters of exploring how the structures we were educated in got embedded in ourselves. I started The National SEED Project in 1986 as an experiment. Could classroom teachers be the leaders of their own professional development? And was exploration of their own experience key to a better understanding of their students’ experience of education? I imagined a reflective summer week for teachers to learn from and with each other and then to convene groups in their own schools to learn from and with each other. I thought that teachers would be the best judges of how to shape seminars to fit their own school settings and that they should be the ones to make the decisions about which books, resource materials, films, discussion topics, and interactive exercises they would use with their colleagues. I knew that the support of the school or district’s administration was necessary for SEED seminars to be welcomed and protected, and so I asked principals or school heads to fund and support the training of peer facilitators for their schools.

What began as an experiment 21 years ago has evolved into a solid working model of peer-led professional development. Year after year, a diverse group of veteran SEED staff members, currently nine people of color and five white people, design and lead the training in the summer. The basic

structure of SEED remains a week-long residential *SEED New Leaders’ Workshop* for 45 educators or parents, after which they convene and facilitate nine monthly, three-hour, voluntary school-based seminars for between 10 and 20 of their peers. Often SEED seminars continue for many years.

I feel that teachers should be treated with great respect as carriers of deep knowledge about their own past experiences of schooling and of life. Given support for their own knowledge to re-emerge, they can teach in such a way that all students are included and empowered. My vision of faculty development is that it gives adults back to themselves in such a way that they can make good on their ideals. Such faculty development balances inner-directed and outer-focused discussion. In the words of co-director Emily Style, it “balances the scholarship on the shelves with the scholarship in the selves.”

SEED leaders come to understand that people and schools develop at their own speeds. The process must accommodate many kinds of learners with many degrees of openness, as schooling itself should do, while holding out the belief that all people and institutions have some capacity to grow if they will make efforts against racism, sexism, and other systems of oppression. Supportive, peer-led SEED seminars extending over time are long-term interventions that help teachers to make their schools places where all students know they belong, are valued, and can learn.

Introduction

In 2003, The Schott Foundation for Public Education funded the National SEED Project on Inclusive Curriculum to undertake intensive implementation of the SEED model in two Boston-area schools, a middle school and a high school. This initiative used the SEED model to train teachers in equity and diversity with a special emphasis on gender. Teachers from the two chosen “model” schools were sent for facilitator training at the SEED New Leaders’ Workshop. These newly trained SEED leaders in turn returned to their school communities to facilitate monthly SEED seminars in their schools and to recruit colleagues to attend the SEED New Leaders’ Workshop with the hope of spreading the work of SEED throughout their schools. The long-term goal of the SEED seminars in these two schools was consistent with SEED’s overall mission: to create school climates, curricula, and teaching methods that are gender-equitable, multiculturally sensitive, and respectful of all students.

About the evaluation

Data Sources

High School

- 35 semi-structured interviews with 15 SEED leaders and seminar participants, over three years
- 80 teacher surveys over three years

Middle School

- 20 semi-structured interviews with eight SEED leaders and seminar participants, over three years
- 63 teacher surveys over three years

Beginning in Fall 2003 and ending in Fall 2006, researchers from the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development at Tufts University undertook an evaluation of this intensive pilot application of the SEED model. Drawing on findings from interviews and surveys, this report summarizes the lessons learned about how peer-led professional development can focus on matters of student empowerment, oppression, privilege, discrimination, teasing, bullying, the achievement gap, and climates of respect or exclusion in schools and in society. The report describes various opportunities and challenges teachers face in seeking to make changes related to inequities in their schools. Finally, it presents recommendations based on findings from the evaluation about how a peer-led process for professional development can heighten educators’ awareness of, and response to, bias and inequities in the schools.

In the spirit of the SEED program’s efforts to make teachers’ voices central to teacher education, this report presents teachers’ experiences in the program through their own words, highlighting their work to address inequities in their schools, and exploring the challenges that continue to persist in moving teachers and schools forward in their work to foster equity in schools.

About the Schools

High School

- Located in a diverse urban suburb of Boston
- ~1800 students, grades 9-12
- Student body:
 - ~41% Black or African-American, 34% White, 15% Hispanic, ~9% Asian, ~1% Multiracial, <1% Native American
- Total staff: ~175
- ~60 SEED participants over three years

Middle School

- Located in the city of Boston
- ~250 students, grades 6-8
- Student body:
 - ~72% Black or African-American, ~13% Hispanic, ~11% White, ~4% Asian
- Total staff: ~35
- 100% participation in SEED

Lessons learned from the evaluation of SEED

“I think the SEED program is a tremendous program. I think that it really brings a lot to the school community and atmosphere and it just forces a great deal of reflection and that’s the greatest education that you can really have. Because anytime you’re forced to ask questions and challenge a belief then that’s what education is supposed to do and that’s what SEED does.”

—High School History teacher

SEED provides teachers the time they need for self-reflection and self-exploration. SEED also offers teachers safe spaces with their colleagues and peers in which to develop a shared commitment to social change.

Many of the teachers participating in the SEED initiative particularly benefited from being given opportunities for self-reflection and identity exploration. SEED seminar participants reported experiencing a raised awareness around their own biases, an increased sense of belonging to a community of teachers who offer each other support, and a shared desire for an equitable and safe school environment.

One of the most commonly reported contributions teachers felt SEED made was that of community building. Teachers spoke of SEED as a “consortium of people of like minds,” a “community of allies,” and a “refuge from the storm.” They credited SEED with allowing teachers the time and space to get to know each other, hear each others’ stories, learn from each other, support each other, and challenge and inspire each other. Teachers at the high school, in particular, noted that teachers often feel isolated from each other in such a large school and that SEED helped them to come together and discover that they were dealing with similar issues.

Teachers feel that SEED deepens their understanding of themselves and their roles in both perpetuating and combating inequities in their schools.

Several teachers credited SEED with changes in their thinking and in their teaching practices in relation to issues of

diversity and equity. Participants said SEED has deepened their understanding of themselves and their students and helped to increase their confidence and courage in engaging in difficult conversations about topics such as racism, sexism, and homophobia.

Teachers also reported changes in their sensitivity toward certain groups of students (e.g., LGBT students, biracial students) and still others spoke of interrupting bias among their students using vocabulary gained in SEED.

Teachers believe that individual growth can lead to school-wide change. Further, teachers believe that SEED can help facilitate this change.

Teachers primarily credited SEED with effecting individual-level change and growth, yet many said they saw the potential for SEED to precipitate school-wide change. Reflecting on SEED philosophy, they saw individual teacher-level change as the necessary first step to building a community of allies and effecting change among students and within the school culture. Some teachers said they saw a direct connection between what they were learning in SEED and how they taught their students; others said SEED motivated them to bring activities they learned in SEED into their classroom teaching.

SEED leaders and seminar participants alike said the program had influenced their teaching practices—from being more aware of whom they call on in class to not tolerating homophobic name-calling to bringing seminar activities and language into their

classrooms. At the middle school, teachers said SEED gave them the opportunity to analyze patterns of inequity in their school. Teachers at both schools noted the influence SEED has had on their relationships with students—from challenging their own assumptions about students' identities and experiences in school to serving as someone students can go to confidentially about problems that arise.

Administrators play a key role in facilitating teachers' participation in programs that highlight the importance of understanding the various ways teachers can act to confront and challenge bias and inequities in schools.

The administrations at both the middle school and the high school played a key role in introducing and sustaining the SEED program at their schools over the three years of this initiative. Administrators demonstrated their support for teachers' participation in the program in various ways, from participating in the seminars themselves to instituting policies to provide professional development credits or stipends to teachers involved in the program. Teachers at both schools noted the importance of having the backing of their school administration and expressed how critical this continued support from administrators is to the program's long-term impact.

Teachers need support from their colleagues in order to sustain and encourage individual growth and school-wide change.

SEED seminars are peer-led monthly discussion groups aimed at self-exploration of teachers' own identities and the personal biases they bring to their interaction with one another and with their students.

Leading these seminars can be very time-consuming and requires a great deal of energy on the part of these peer leaders; further, the teachers who lead these seminars often play many leadership roles in their schools, in addition to being SEED leaders. One major difficulty for leaders is the challenge of recruiting new teachers to take over leadership roles in the program. In order to not only facilitate, but also sustain change, schools need to encourage all teachers in their school communities to take on leadership roles with regard to confronting everyday bias and inequities in their schools.

In addition, school administrators and SEED leaders need to help prepare teachers, and be prepared themselves, to confront difficult and emotional issues through the seminars. SEED leaders and participants reported seminar topics and discussions at times delved into deeply personal questions of self-identity, including examinations of painful experiences related to racism, sexism, and/or homophobia.

Teachers need to be prepared to explore these types of issues, and both leaders and participating teachers need to have support and resources from their schools and administrators for engaging in difficult conversations.

“I have pushed myself and my White colleagues through conversations to really look at and work on institutional and societal racism and how we proactively combat racial aspects of our society. I have done this more publicly and even courageously because of SEED.”

—Middle School principal

“I just noticed today that the girls were a little shy on presenting. So I just [called on them]... Would I have done that without SEED? Probably not. Definitely not. I would've just said, ‘Okay, next.’”

—Middle School Technology teacher

Recommendations for K-12 educators, administrators, and policymakers

“...[SEED] is a good reminder. I think it is good to check in and remind yourself to pay attention to all of the issues, because it is easy to just [keep] doing what you are doing...[and] think you are being fair to everybody... [but forget to ask] do I call on more boys than girls? Do I call on more White kids than Puerto Rican kids? Or what do I do?”

—High School History teacher

Professional development around issues of equity should be consistent, stable, and comprehensive. Moreover, professional development for teachers is particularly effective when conducted in collegial, non-threatening environments.

Conversations with program participants indicated that most teachers prefer the peer-led SEED approach to prior diversity trainings they have participated in that use outside trainers. Teachers reported that the peer-led model promotes trust and relationship building and that monthly seminars throughout the year are much more effective and helpful than one-time presentations.

Teachers’ self-exploration can and should be connected to their classroom practice.

The SEED program is based on a framework that connects teachers’ personal understandings of gender, race, class, and sexual identity (and their related systems of privilege and oppression), to changes in teaching practices. Though most teachers said that they enjoyed and found meaning in the sharing of personal stories, they did not always see how these stories connected to changes in classroom practice. Some teachers are less comfortable with an introspective approach and prefer practical guidance such as how to intervene in name-calling or how to help close the Black/White achievement gap. Thus, professional development around equity and diversity issues should provide a balance of self-exploration and practical applications in order to meet the varying needs of participants.

School communities and programs need to make explicit efforts to recruit all teachers to engage in the project of promoting equity in their schools.

At the middle school where all teachers were required to participate in the program, recruitment of SEED participants was not a problem for the school. However, at the high school, participation in the program was largely voluntary. Thus, the responsibility for recruitment, which occurred mainly by word-of-mouth, fell to SEED leaders and the school’s SEED site coordinator, a SEED-trained teacher who oversaw all aspects of the program. In fact, most teachers at the high school attributed their initial participation in the program to the site coordinator.

While SEED leaders were effective at recruiting many of their colleagues, most of these colleagues were already committed to “diversity work” prior to their involvement with SEED; reaching those teachers who are resistant to doing this type of work and skeptical that it will make any difference remained a challenge. For example, SEED leaders explained that White men were especially hard to recruit, in part because they were uncomfortable with discussions about race and gender, in which they often felt framed as “oppressors.” Schools, along with programs like SEED, should generate ideas for discussing race and privilege so that all teachers can enter into these conversations.

Promoting school-wide equity and facilitating change must extend beyond the world of adults and involve students in the work of fostering equitable environments.

As part of the evaluation of SEED, focus groups and surveys were conducted with students in order to gauge students' perceptions of school climate at each school. The evaluation team partnered with teachers at each school to conduct the focus groups, and at teachers' request, explicit efforts were made to disseminate the lessons learned from these focus groups and surveys to the school community.

Teachers benefited from hearing firsthand about students' experiences in school in

order to get a better sense of how their SEED work could support the needs of their students. Though students are their ultimate beneficiaries, professional development programs such as SEED often do not directly impact students. Explicit student involvement in facilitating school-wide change, through the use of student focus groups and student action research, would not only enhance teachers' important work for change, but would also give students the opportunity to communicate their concerns to teachers and to forge alliances with teachers toward improving the school climate for all.

“I would love students to be trained as SEED leaders, and for them to lead SEED groups with maybe some kind of coaching and support from a teacher. I just think that the more we can empower our students the better.”
—High School English teacher

Conclusion

Educators have long recognized that, in many ways, schools reflect the communities that they serve. Members of the school community bring the attitudes, values, and behaviors of the broader community with them to school—even when these are oppressive to particular groups of the school community. However, schools can also be a place where oppressive attitudes, values, and behaviors can be challenged and, in some cases, changed. Teachers play the essential role in bringing about school change. They, more than any other members of the school community, have the power to challenge racism, sexism,

and homophobia both in their students and in the broader school community.

This report highlights some of the possibilities that SEED holds for individuals committed to building equity in schools. SEED provides a safe, collegial space in which teachers can come together to reflect on themselves, their teaching, and their school community. In doing so, SEED gives teachers a sense of confidence in their ability to create more equitable school climates. This may be one of SEED's greatest contributions—empowering teachers to effect change in their school communities.

Resources for Educators

The following list of films, readings, and websites are examples of resources for teachers and educators to start conversations about equity and diversity in their schools.

Selected readings used by SEED seminar leaders

Anonymous. (1982, September). **“A mother to a teacher: Respect my child: He has a right to be himself.”** *Saskatchewan Indian*, 12(7), 45.

An open letter written by an Indian mother to her child’s teacher, highlighting the importance of understanding and respect for her child’s culture and upbringing.

Fleischman, P. (1997). **Seedfolks**. New York, NY: HarperCollins. A children’s story about a multi-ethnic urban gardening community.

Hemphill, E. (1991). **Brother to brother: New writings by Black gay men**. Boston, MA: Alyson Publications. An anthology of essays, poems, and stories by Black gay males about Black gay male experiences.

hooks, b. (1994). **Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom**. New York, NY: Routledge. An educator’s call to arms, stressing widespread student disenfranchisement and the reproduction of patterns of subjugation and domination as a critical root of the United States’ educational crisis.

Lorde, A. (1984). **Sister outsider: Essays and speeches by Audre Lorde**. Berkeley, CA: The Crossing Press. A collection of prose written in the late 1970s and early 1980s, from the author’s perspective as a Black lesbian feminist activist.

Mansbach, A. (2005). **Angry Black White boy, or the miscegenation of Macon Detornay**. New York, NY: Crown Publishing. A satirical novel about a White boy growing up immersed in and obsessed by Black culture.

McIntosh, P. (1988). **White privilege: Unpacking the invisible knapsack**. Reprinted in E. Lee, D. Menkart, & M. Okazawa-Rey (eds.), *Beyond heroes and holidays* (pp. 79-83).

Washington, DC: NECA. An essay describing the existence and impact of White privilege in the author’s experience.

Nam, V. (2001). **YELL-Oh girls! Emerging voices explore culture, identity and growing up Asian American**. New York, NY: HarperCollins. An anthology on growing up Asian American, featuring works by young women ages 15-22.

Nelson, C. L. & Wilson, K. A. (1998). **Seeding the process of multicultural education: An anthology**. Minneapolis, MN: The Minnesota Inclusiveness Program. An anthology of essays by educators, scholars, and activists about working toward inclusiveness in schools.

Style, E. (1996). **Curriculum as window and mirror**. www.wcwonline.org/seed/curriculum.html. An essay on the need for inclusive curriculum to function as both “window” and “mirror,” both introducing students to others’ experience and providing mirrors of the students’ own realities and validity.

Yamato, J. (1988). **Racism: Something about the subject makes it hard to name**. In J. W. Cochran, D. Langston, & C. Woodward (eds.), *Changing our power: An introduction to women’s studies* (pp. 3-6). Dubuque, IA: Kendall-Hunt. An essay exploring the construction of racism in the United States.

Selected films chosen by SEED seminar leaders for their SEED seminars

Killing us softly 3: Advertising’s image of women. Directed by Sut Jhally with Jean Kilbourne. Analyzes the impact of media images of beauty and femininity on young women.

Slim hopes: Advertising & the obsession with thinness. Directed by Sut Jhally with Jean Kilbourne. Offers a new way of thinking about life-threatening eating disorders.

The color of fear. Directed by Lee Mun Wah. A groundbreaking film about race relations in America, featuring nine men from different racial backgrounds engaging in dialogue about race and racism.

The way home. Directed by Shakti Butler. Sixty-four women representing a cross-section of cultures in the United States come together to share their experiences of oppression through the lenses of race, gender, and religion.

Tough guise: Violence, media & the crisis in masculinity. Directed by Sut Jhally with Jackson Katz. Analyzes the shaping of masculinity in the United States.

Trembling before g-d. Directed by Sandi Simcha Dubowski. A documentary about the hidden lives of gay and lesbian Orthodox and Hasidic Jews.

Wrestling with manhood: Boys, bullying, and battering. Directed by Sut Jhally with Jackson Katz. Explores the problem of violence and bullying among boys in schools.

Selected online resources for educators

Facing History and Ourselves.

www.facing.org/campus/reslib.nsf/

Provides lesson plans and strategies for teachers to explore social justice issues through an historical lens.

Race: Are We So Different? A Project of the American Anthropological Association

www.understandingrace.org/home.html

The RACE project looks at race and racism through an anthropological lens, exploring questions of similarity and difference through history, human variation, and lived experience. The site provides resources for teachers including lesson plans and teacher guides.

The National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME)

www.nameorg.org/

The official website of the National Association for Multicultural Education. This site provides information about resources, upcoming events, and important news in multicultural education. The resource center provides resources for teachers, including lesson plans as well as interactive educational tools.

For more information about the evaluation or for a copy of the full evaluation report, please contact Ila Deshmukh Towery at ila.deshmukh@tufts.edu or Rachel Oliveri at rachel.oliveri@tufts.edu.

For more information about SEED, visit: www.wcwonline.org/seed

Vision Statement

The Schott Foundation for Public Education's vision is that all children—especially children that school systems have historically failed, such as poor children and children of color—graduate from excellent and well-resourced public schools capable of college success and full participation in a democratic society.

Mission Statement

The Schott Foundation's mission is to develop and strengthen a broad-based and representative movement to achieve fully funded quality preK-12 public education. Specifically, The Schott Foundation seeks:

- Fully funded quality public schools for all children regardless of their residence
- Universal and accessible high quality and culturally appropriate early care and education
- Representative public policy leadership, with a focus on cultivating more women and people of color to become decision-makers
- Black boys as the litmus test for schools educating all children well

Examples of other publications by The Schott Foundation include:

Public Education and Black Male Students: The 2006 State Report Card
June 2006 by Michael Holzman, Ph.D.

Making It Work for Early Education and Out of School Time Professionals
January 2006 The Schott Foundation for Public Education and the United Way of Massachusetts Bay.

Ensuring High Quality Early Education for All Children in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
June 2005. A report of the 2005 Schott Fellows in Early Care and Education.

Black Boys: The Litmus Test for Public School Education
The Schott Foundation for Public Education 2004.

Achieving Gender Equity in Public Education
October 2003. A Schott Foundation Report.

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