

Fostering Gender Equity in Schools Through Reflective Professional Development: A Critical Analysis of Teacher Perspectives

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Abstract

The continued persistence of sexism and institutional gender bias in schools is well documented. The empirical research in this area has uncovered a host of negative outcomes associated with gender inequity for all children. Research suggests that schools provide an excellent forum in which issues of gender inequities may be examined and challenged. The literature further suggests that teachers can be critical allies in schools' struggle to achieve gender equity. Drawing on three years of data from an evaluation of an in-service professional development program aimed at raising teachers' awareness of and responses to gender inequities in their schools, this paper explores teachers' perceptions of school climate with regard to gender inequity and teachers' perceptions of their own efforts to challenge these inequities. Findings suggest that teachers who participated in the program made significant inroads in their thinking related to gender equity. Findings also suggest that considerable challenges, especially around personal growth, awareness, and change persist and that teachers continue to grapple with gender bias, both within themselves and in their schools.

Introduction

The continued persistence of sexism and gender bias in schools is well documented (see, for example, American Association of University Women (AAUW), 1992; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006). In recent years, scholars have turned their attention to the myriad psychosocial outcomes associated with sexism and gender inequity in schools. Much of the empirical research in this area has uncovered a host of negative outcomes (e.g., low self-esteem for girls, suicidal ideation for GLBT youth) associated with gender inequity for all children – boys, girls, and GLBT youth (AAUW, 1992; Grossman & Grossman, 1994; Jones, Evans, Byrd & Campbell, 2000; Kenway & Willis, 1998; MacKay, Fingerhut & Duran, 2000; Massachusetts Department of Education, 1995; National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), 2000; Ryan & Futterman, 1998; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 2002).

Research suggests that schools provide an excellent forum in which issues of gender inequity and the continued presence of institutionalized sexism and homophobia¹ may be examined and challenged. The literature further suggests that teachers can be critical allies in schools' struggle to achieve gender equity. The continued presence of gender inequity along with the negative psycho-social outcomes associated with gender inequity make it all the more important for researchers to examine not only the sources of inequity in schools, but to also examine the role that schools and teachers can play in addressing these inequities (AAUW, 1992; Owens, Smothers & Love, 2003; Sadker, 2000; Sadker & Sadker, 1994).

This study draws on three years of data from an evaluation of an in-service professional development program, Gender Equity in Model Sites (GEMS), aimed at raising teachers' awareness of and responses to gender and race inequities in their schools, as well as other dimensions of inequity. Funded as a three-year initiative by

the Schott Foundation for Public Education, the GEMS initiative was conceived as a gender-intensive outgrowth of the National SEED Project on Inclusive Curriculum, directed by Dr. Peggy McIntosh, Emily Style, and Brenda Flywithhaws. In this study, I explore teachers' perceptions of school climate with regard to gender inequity as well as their perceptions of their own efforts to challenge gender inequities in their classroom practices and school communities within the context of their participation in the SEED/GEMS² initiative. Specifically, I address the following questions:

1. How do teachers who participated in SEED/GEMS describe or explain their awareness of, and practices in response to, gender inequities? From their perspectives, what role did SEED/GEMS play in facilitating their work to address gender inequities both in themselves and in their schools?
2. In what ways do teachers who participated in SEED/GEMS continue to grapple with issues of gender bias and inequity? What challenges exist in forwarding the project of gender equity in schools?

This paper will first provide a brief overview of the related literature. It will address research on teacher education and professional development as it relates to issues of gender equity in schools, and will provide an in-depth description of the SEED Project's theory of change. Following the literature review, it will describe the sample and methods used to analyze the interviews that provide the basis of this study. Next, it will present findings from the study to address the aforementioned research questions. Finally, it will contextualize these findings in the available literature, identifying where findings support existing literature, and reframing existing concepts for further analysis.

Review of Related Literature

Why focus on teacher training in addressing gender inequities in schools?

Much of the attention in educational reform and educational equity has focused on high-stakes testing and the "achievement gap" rather than the social milieu of school cultures (Fox & Gay, 1995). However, the attitudes, behaviors, and practices that comprise a "hidden" curriculum (Anyon, 1980; Apple, 1979; Owens et al., 2003), continue to serve as powerful reinforcers of inequities in schools. This "hidden" curriculum reaches beyond pedagogical and teaching practices – the formal curriculum – to the informal curriculum, made up of both subtle and overt messages of gender inequity ranging from name-calling to sexual harassment to silencing and exclusion, that continues to exist in many school cultures (Friend, 1993; Klein et al, 1994; Owens et al, 2003; Sadker, 2000).

Teachers' roles in both contributing to as well as challenging these messages are critical to their students' experiences in schools. As Owens, Smothers & Love (2003) note in their analysis of gender bias in schools, "[w]hat teachers say or do not say, their body language, what they do and who they call upon form a hidden curriculum that is more powerful than any textbook lesson" (Owens et al, 2003, p. 133). While inroads have been made in training teachers to effectively address gender bias in their schools, research suggests that significant gaps in teachers' awareness of and response to gender inequities continue to persist, and that teachers are ill-prepared

to think and have discussions about gender, race, and diversity. As Rusch (2004) notes:

Boys and girls, from a variety of neighborhoods, come to the schoolhouse seeking the gateway to the democratic promise. All too often, these young citizens are met by gatekeepers who have few skills, little understanding, and a tenuous commitment to multiculturalism, diversity, or equity in education (p. 19).

The following section provides an overview of the current state of teacher education research related to gender inequity and identifies the areas where work remains to be done in teacher training and in schools.

Teacher training and gender equity: How far it has come, how far it still has to go

A review of the literature on teacher training reveals that in the 1990s, concurrent with the broader social interest in gender equity, gender reform (Kenway & Willis, 1998) was also an explicit focus of teacher training and teacher education. Much of this research focused on pedagogical strategies, curriculum reform, and observations of teachers' behavior (e.g., teachers paying more attention to and calling on boys more than girls) (AAUW, 1998; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). In recent years, however, much of the research on teacher education considers gender as one facet of training or preparing teachers for a diverse world and subsumes it under the category of diversity or multicultural education.

Despite empirical evidence that boys and girls continue to suffer as a result of gender biases and inequities in schools and that teachers both knowingly and unknowingly play a role in reinforcing gender biases and inequities, little attention is paid specifically to gender as a critical factor in education reform, particularly with regard to funding and programmatic efforts (Ginsberg, 2005). Echoing what some consider a larger social "backlash" against a focus on gender (Wheeler, Oliveri, Deshmukh Towery & Mead, 2005), Sadker (2000) notes that the dialogue about gender bias in teacher education programs is particularly difficult, pointing out that the very assertion of continued gender inequity in schools is a contested one, thereby creating the illusion that gender bias is no longer a problem. In describing his own experiences in training teachers to "detect and eliminate bias" (p. 80), Sadker (2000) relates that many teachers he works with experience what he calls 'gender block,' or an inability to acknowledge the various subtle ways they play out gender bias in their daily practice. Sadker (2000) explains this phenomenon by asserting that not only has "a false sense of accomplishment ... taken root" (p. 80) as a result of perceived advances towards gender equity, but also that teachers are unprepared by teacher education programs to: "...see' the subtle, unintentional, but damaging gender bias that characterizes classrooms" (p. 80).

In addition to Sadker's describing teachers' experiencing of gender block in the context of analyzing their own practices, other research also suggests that teachers' struggles with their personal biases pose a great challenge for teacher-educators. For example, Robinson & Ferfolja (2001) describe confronting significant resistance from their students in grappling with gay and lesbian issues in their pre-service teacher education program in Australia. The authors cite encountering in their student teachers the belief that discussions about homosexuality, and consequently homophobia, are "irrelevant" to their work (p. 121). Further, they describe how, in

their experiences with student teachers, this belief is accompanied by a presumption of their own students' heterosexuality. Finally, the authors find that teachers' pathologizing of students' homosexuality, that is, the notion "that students who are perceived to be sexual 'others' are ultimately at fault for any harassment endured and have the ability, if not the desire, to change themselves to fit into the majority culture" (p. 128), serves to further reinforce homophobia and discrimination in schools.

Given the above mentioned concerns about many teachers' lack of awareness of, knowledge about, and preparation for dealing with gender inequities, gender-focused teacher education efforts continue to be imperative to making further progress towards equity in schools.

Strategies for training teachers to foster gender equity: Refining practice, raising awareness, and facilitating transformative adult learning

Research specifically describing best practices in teacher education with regard to gender is sparse. Therefore, in this section, I review research related to general teacher education efforts aimed at fostering teacher growth and learning with regard to their identities and their personal ways of knowing as they have been shaped by institutionalized racism, sexism, and homophobia, noting, when applicable, where scholars have specifically addressed gender.

While many acknowledge the growing need to prepare teachers for the diverse needs of their students, recommendations for how to go about doing so vary. Some scholars focus on raising teachers' awareness of their teaching practices and of the content of their curriculum as the primary vehicle for incorporating equity into teacher education programs (Sadker, 2000). These interventions often hinge upon gender-focused observations or recordings of teachers' or student teachers' talk or behaviors. For example, Lundeberg (1997) describes recording pre-service teachers' discussions of their fieldwork in schools and engaging them in a gendered analysis of their own classroom interactions. Similarly, as mentioned in the previous section, Sadker (2000) describes showing videotapes containing subtle messages of gender bias to his pre-service teachers' and engaging them in coding the videos to raise their awareness of these subtle messages.

While such approaches work to raise teachers' awareness of their own practices, they fail to explicitly link teachers' work in the classroom to broader questions of power and access that are at the root of inequities in schools. Scholars interested in engaging teachers in confronting these broader issues assert that teacher education and the act of teaching itself needs to be transformative, and that "teacher education programs need to... make social justice ubiquitous in teacher education" (Nieto, 2000, p. 180). These scholars rely on the original tenet of American schooling as an equalizer to argue that historical forms of oppression as they are reproduced in schools (i.e., through the privileging of White, male, heteronormative discourses) not only need to be addressed, but that our educational systems need to be transformed in order to become equitable systems (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991). For example, Nieto (1996) notes that:

Racism and other forms of discrimination... have a long history in our schools. Each of these forms of discrimination is based on the perception that one ethnic group, class, gender, or language is superior

to all others. In the United States, the norm generally used to measure all others is European American, upper-middle class, English-speaking, and male. (p. 21)

To counteract the privileging of upper-middle class, White, male, heterosexual ways of knowing, Nieto argues for a challenge to those norms that define power and access in the form of multicultural education theory: "multicultural education...entails a direct challenge to the societal power that has historically subordinated certain groups and rationalized the educational failure of children from these groups as being the result of their inherent deficiencies" (Nieto, 1996, p. xviii). Further, drawing on Freirean theories of critical pedagogy and liberatory teaching practices, Greenman & Dieckmann (2004) argue for transformative teacher education "as a site for personal transformation and a lever for social transformation inclusive of social justice" (p. 241).

Largely focused on pre-service rather than in-service teacher education, such advocates for teacher training on issues of diversity – including gender, sexuality, race, and class – emphasize the connection between teacher knowledge and teacher practice in altering the status quo. They highlight the need for teachers to explore their "social moorings" (Grant & Wieczorek, 2000, p. 114) in order to better relate to their students. Noting, for example, that teachers are increasingly demographically homogenous and "have had neither extensive personal experiences nor professional training in cross-cultural issues" (Nieto, 2000, p. 181), Nieto (2000) stresses that teacher education must address not only pedagogical strategies related to educational equity in schools, but that these programs must also seek to transform teachers' attitudes and beliefs about their students' identities. Implicit in this rationale is the necessity for self-reflection; teachers need to not only understand their students' identities, but to also reflect upon and analyze their own personal experiences and identities and the attitudes and behaviors that may result from those experiences.

Likewise, linking professional development to adult learning theory, research suggests that ongoing, consistent challenges to personal beliefs are essential to facilitating adult learning and change (Kegan, 1982; Kegan & Lahey, 1984; Levine, 1989). This research further asserts that in order to facilitate teacher transformation through professional development, models of professional development must provide long-term, consistent, and in-depth opportunities for learning as well as safe, "collegial" environments in which teachers can explore their attitudes and beliefs (Levine, 1989).

Empirical evidence from teacher educators further supports efforts to engage teachers in self-exploration in the context of safe, collaborative environments, with the ultimate goal of teacher transformation. For example, in their qualitative study of students' transformations through their participation in a pre-service course, in which the instructor was a "co-learner", Greenman & Dieckmann (2004) found that forefronting self-exploration helped education students develop a "critical lens". The authors note that their students' transformations were particularly characterized by "awakenings" (p. 250), facilitated by the opportunity to "examine nested, webbed, tangled, and overlapping dynamics of power, oppression, culture, diversity, and equity as they related to the world and their world" (p. 250).

Articulating a theory of change for promoting gender equity in schools

While many scholars advocate for teacher training to focus on personal transformation as an avenue to school-wide change, much of the empirical work supporting these conclusions addresses the experiences of pre-service teachers, seeking to answer the question of how to prepare *new* teachers for today's classrooms. Fewer empirical studies have focused on the question of how teachers experience a personal transformation approach to professional development with their colleagues and in their daily work settings – their schools.

The professional development program, Gender Equity in Model Sites (GEMS), that is the focus of the present study began as an outgrowth of National SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) Project on Inclusive Curriculum, and takes up the area of in-service professional development by engaging middle school and high school teachers in long-term, *peer-led*, "faculty-centered" self-reflection and consciousness-raising groups to discuss plural inequities in the school setting (McIntosh & Style, 1994).

In 2003, the National SEED Project on Inclusive Curriculum undertook an intensive implementation of the SEED model in two Boston-area schools, a middle school and a high school. This special 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 National SEED New Leaders' Week. These newly trained SEED leaders in turn returned to their school communities to facilitate monthly SEED seminars in their schools and to encourage their colleagues to attend the National SEED New Leaders Week 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.

SEED seminars are monthly seminars that seek to both facilitate and scaffold reflective learning on issues of identity as they are embedded in a framework of institutionalized inequity and systems of power and hierarchy. Further, drawing on the conviction that effective professional development opens up a space for reflection and the opportunity for teachers to draw on "the textbooks of their lives" (McIntosh & Style, 1994, p. 1), SEED emphasizes that initiatives aimed at teacher growth and learning must address teachers' life-contexts as well as model respect for teachers as individuals (McIntosh & Style, 1994). SEED allows teachers to share autobiographical experiences in a long-term, safe, collegial group environment. It aims to foster in teachers a greater awareness of how gender, as well as other aspects of their own identity such as race and ethnicity, impacts their teaching practices and their understanding of and interactions with students. The initiative seeks to empower teachers to play an active role in creating an equitable school environment. Further, SEED explicitly aims to value teachers' experiences and voices as integral to their selves and to their daily work.

Given the paucity of research on in-service professional development and in the spirit of the program's efforts to make teachers' voices central to teacher education, this study focuses on teachers' experiences in this in-service professional development program. The program seeks to create personal transformation with regard to teachers' perspectives on and orientation towards issues of equity in their schools.

This study explores these critical issues for teacher education through the voices of teacher-participants, bringing to the forefront their experiences in the program, their efforts to address inequities in their schools, and the challenges that continue to persist in moving these teachers and schools forward in their efforts to foster equity in schools.

Methods

This study was part of a larger *process* evaluation (Jacobs, 1988; Jacobs, Kapuscik, Williams & Kates, 2000) of the overall GEMS initiative of the SEED Project in two schools. The evaluation employed a mixed-methods design, drawing from a wide variety of data sources to examine the long-term goals of SEED/GEMS which encompassed changing teachers' attitudes towards, beliefs about, and awareness of a wide variety of equity concerns related to teachers, students, and the broader school climate. In seeking to analyze teachers' experiences in the program and their perceptions of change over the three year period, this paper relies primarily on qualitative data in the form of self-report, to understand teachers' perspectives. It does not seek to demonstrate actual or observable changes in behavior. Therefore, it draws mainly on teachers' perceptions of their school cultures, on their re-telling of their experiences with regard to race and gender bias and other inequities, and on their feelings towards and perceptions of SEED's contributions to their daily work to answer the research questions on gender equity in particular.

Finally, implicit in an analysis of any dimension of teaching and schooling are the many intersections between gender and other important features of identity, such as race, ethnicity, and class. As Ginsberg (2005) notes, it is important to acknowledge that experiences of being a boy, being a girl, or being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender, vary along these other dimensions. For example, the experiences of Black boys are very different than those of Black girls, Asian girls, White girls, Asian boys, or White boys. The same can be said for the adults that are the focus of this study; the teachers in this study represent a wide array of identities and the various ways they grapple with issues of gender bias and inequities in their schools are necessarily informed by these other factors. However, this study does not explicitly explore the various ways in which teachers' raced, classed, or other identities inform their gender perspectives. Rather, it seeks to broadly describe and analyze teachers' experiences within the context of the SEED/GEMS initiative in order to make statements about the state of gender equity in their schools from the perspective of teachers, and to describe teachers' ongoing efforts and struggles in confronting gender inequity in their daily work.

Sample description

Evergreen High School³

Located in a diverse urban suburb of Boston, Evergreen High School enrolls about 1800 students in grades 9-12, with a student teacher ratio of 15:1. A large percent (~42%) of the student body is Black. About a third (34%) is White and about 15% is Hispanic. Close to 43% of students are considered "low income" (source: school website). As of 2004, there were 174 teachers working in the school.

The teacher sample is drawn from the approximately 40 teachers who participated in the SEED/GEMS Project. Participation in the SEED seminars was mandatory for all

newly hired teachers and was voluntary for veteran teachers. The teachers in the sample were comprised largely of White women, with the new teacher seminar distribution being slightly more varied as it was a requirement for all new teachers and therefore less self-selecting.

Twin Oaks Middle School

Located in the City of Boston, Twin Oaks Middle School enrolls about 250 students, in grades 6-8. The student body is very diverse, with 90% of students being students of color. Seventy-six percent of students received free or reduced lunch and 15% were receiving special education services at the time of the study. With an average class size of 22 students, the school employs approximately 31 faculty and staff members (including administrators), all of whom participated in the SEED/GEMS program. These 31 staff members were made up of roughly 50% women and 50% men. Reflecting the school's diverse student body, no single race or ethnicity was overwhelmingly represented in the staff.

Data sources and analysis

Over three years, one-on-one, semi-structured, open-ended interviews (N=36) were conducted with teachers and administrators who participated in the seminars (N=21). These interviews lasted approximately one hour and covered topics such as the content of the monthly SEED seminars and teachers' beliefs about the seminars' impact on personal and school-wide change related to issues of equity. Each interview was transcribed and coded using an advanced qualitative data analysis software package, ATLAS.ti. (Muhr, 1996).

In the initial stages of coding and analysis, this study was guided by a data-driven, grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and by a process of open coding, in which codes were developed emically and remained very close to the data. This initial open coding was used to generate hypotheses about teachers' beliefs about gender bias and equity, and about the contributions of the program as well as continuing challenges related to gender equity. As these hypotheses were developed, they were tested against the data and organized thematically. Finally, in order to understand and contextualize the efforts to challenge inequities of the entire sample of teachers *as a group*, cross-case analysis was used (Miles & Huberman, 1994) for deeper analysis of themes that cut across all of the interviews.

Limitations of the study

Neither the overall evaluation study nor the present study employs an experimental design. While the long-term goals of the program encompassed a wide variety of concerns related to teachers, students, and the broader school climate, changing teachers' awareness, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors around equity issues was the primary goal of the program. In the *Evaluation Exchange's* recent interview with Thomas Guskey – a well-known expert on professional development evaluation – Guskey notes that the “messy” nature of doing work in schools often makes linking these long-term changes to program variables difficult, if not at times, impossible. He further goes on to state that in evaluating professional development, “...‘scientifically based research’ may be too restricting. A lot of valuable research does not meet the criteria of randomized designs, but can provide us with good, important evidence.” (Kreider & Bouffard, 2006, p. 14). Reflecting this approach to

the evaluation of professional development, this study does not seek to measure long-term outcomes, but rather delves into teachers' thoughts on equity and identifies emerging themes related to how teachers locate and work to combat gender inequities in the context of the program, and where they continue to struggle, both personally and systemically, with gender bias in their schools and themselves.

Findings

How do teachers who participated in SEED/GEMS describe or explain their awareness of, and practices in response to, gender inequities? From their perspectives, what role did SEED/GEMS play in facilitating their work to address gender inequities both in themselves and in their schools?

When asked to describe their experiences with regard to exploring issues of gender equity in the seminars, participants most frequently referred to strides made in their personal development and to their practices in the classroom. Detailed content and thematic analysis revealed these strides largely to be in the areas I describe as *personal transformations, acting for change, and community building*. In the following section, this paper presents, drawing on teachers' own words and descriptions, the contributions of the program in each of these areas.

Personal transformations

In describing important features of the SEED/GEMS program that contributed to their understanding of gender bias and inequity, the seminar participants describe a growing sense of consciousness, both of themselves and of their own contributions to gender inequity in schools, and an increased awareness of sources of bias in their schools. They described how participating in interactive, non-confrontational, anonymous exercises allowed for effective challenges to their personal beliefs, particularly around gender and sexual orientation.

Seminar participants referred to exercises about sexual orientation, more than those around other issues, as representing the biggest challenge to their personal beliefs. However, these teachers also referred to the changes brought about by these challenges in more positive terms than terms used to refer to other types of changes, often using phrases such as "eye-opening" when referring to their personal progress towards understanding sexual orientation. Teachers who described either their own or others' transformation with regard to sexual identity felt the seminars played a crucial role in helping them work through feelings of discomfort towards GLBT students and colleagues by creating a forum that questioned their beliefs and in making them aware of "how rampant" homophobia was in their schools. Some teachers also explicitly linked their increased openness to analyzing their feelings about homosexuality to a growing awareness of how issues of sexual identity might impact their students. One middle school teacher described how his being "closed off" to homosexuality rendered it invisible in his understanding of his students, as he previously considered his students to be "unaware" of homosexuality. However, as a result of his experience in the program, he now realizes that it is a dynamic at play: "[homosexuality is] a reality, and [through GEMS], I was faced with [the fact that it is an important aspect of many students' identities]..." (Interview, November 1, 2004).

It must be noted that not every teacher described undergoing drastic personal transformations relative to their understanding of gender equity. The majority of these teachers described themselves as members of the “choir” – individuals who had a long-term commitment to fostering equity in their schools before joining the seminars. While these teachers did not characterize SEED/GEMS as having facilitated the kind of eye-opening described earlier, they did stress that the SEED seminars served as important reminders of the ongoing struggles for equity and helped challenge or deepen their prior understandings, particularly around knowledge of cultural differences and of power relationships. For example, when asked if SEED/GEMS had been transformative for him, one teacher explained that though his participation in SEED/GEMS had not transformed his own personal identity, it *had* forced him to critically examine his personal relationships in the context of male privilege and the intersections of race and gender:

No, [SEED/GEMS did not transform me] because I [had already] dealt with all of that stuff. I've dealt with a lot of this stuff in my mind.... Actually, it did get me to question relationships I was in and understanding where the relationships were breaking down when they weren't *just* (emphasis added) [about] male privilege but [also about] internalized notions of race and oppression. Whether it was Black males I had been in relationship with or Latino males. Or White males. And it got me to question... [But] you see, I wasn't transformed or converted. It was not a radical, what do you call it, the veil didn't fall from the eyes, my dungeon didn't shake, and my chains didn't fall off. It wasn't like the allegory of the cave in [Plato's Republic] and so that wasn't transformative for me. Maybe we're actuated and catalyzed by some of that experience [in SEED] but some other things as well so to cite that experience for some change in my life, I think it would be fair to say but I can't say that there was something of the moment in time and space during [the SEED seminars] that really altered who I am as a person so I can't say that (Interview, October 29, 2003).

SEED/GEMS seminar participants also described how they used their newfound awareness to engage in critical self-analysis, ranging from examining their own teaching practices (e.g., teachers actively examining their own patterns of calling on students and finding that they called on boys more than girls) to examining patterns of inequity that might be manifested more broadly in their schools (e.g., noticing that certain types of students – White students and Black girls – are overrepresented in their Advanced Placement classes). Finally, almost every teacher I interviewed felt that SEED/GEMS had helped to forefront conversations about equity and had encouraged them to “name” oppressive behaviors in their classrooms. For example, the following quote from a high school teacher describes how SEED/GEMS gave him the language to help his students understand the many ways oppression operates in society:

I have since learned language and I've heard the study about these – isms [racism sexism, classism, ableism, etc.] and the oppressive systems in operation, so I've incorporated it in terms of teaching tools in my curriculum and the curriculum framework, in the language that helps kids understand what they're going through or understand what's going on in the world... so they can understand how they are party to it, how they've internalized it (Interview, October 29, 2003).

Acting for change

Further analysis of interviews with seminar participants revealed *where* these teachers were making changes and moving from awareness to action, in what *areas* they were making changes, and *how* they made these changes. The teachers interviewed for this study credited SEED/GEMS with facilitating their efforts to examine and alter their teaching practices, to make changes to curriculum, and to “create safe spaces” in their classrooms and schools.

One main cross-cutting theme that emerged from my analyses of teacher interviews was that teachers *explicitly* linked their raised consciousness and increased comfort around issues of gender bias and inequity to their own practices. Interviewees spoke about using this raised consciousness to inform their practice in two ways: first, by pushing *themselves* to actively challenge gender bias in their daily lives, for example by being self-conscious about language embedded with gender bias, making more effort to encourage boys to take dance or sewing classes, encouraging girls in physical education and sports, and making greater efforts to call on girls and recognize when they call on boys who might get more attention by being more aggressive; and second, by pushing their *students* to actively challenge gender bias in *their* daily lives by putting gender issues “on the table” for kids to discuss during classes and having more conversations with students about gender and gender norms.

Further, in one of the study schools – the middle school – the SEED seminars motivated the entire school to further examine itself as an institution. The seminars continue to focus on self-awareness and self-examination, but also now make room for teachers to look at and analyze patterns in their school to answer questions of inequity, such as what kinds of students get sent to student support, what kinds of students do well on test scores such as the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), and so on.

A final theme related to SEED/GEMS’s contributions to motivating teachers to act for change was teachers’ increased efforts to actively create “safe spaces” both in and out of the classroom, particularly with regard to GLBT youth. All of the teachers interviewed in this study expressed a strong commitment to this effort, with some having reported a previous commitment to intervening in name-calling and fostering safety and others expressing a shift towards this commitment as a result of their participation in SEED/GEMS.

The majority of the teachers noted that intervening in name-calling was the major representative of their efforts to create safe spaces. Teachers’ strategies for intervention varied from speaking up when students say “that’s gay” by pointing it out as “offensive” to “prod[ding]...pok[ing]... [and] pull[ing]” (Interview, November 3, 2004) kids to think about why they use slurs and what they really mean to simply setting and holding to a standard, reasoning that if teachers pay enough attention to the use of “fag” and “gay,” students will understand it is inappropriate – the line is clear, and students should now know what is right and what is wrong. The range of strategies teachers reported using to intervene in name-calling range from simple, telling students to stop using inappropriate language, to complex, making efforts to adjust the norm by prodding kids to analyze their uses of certain words or names.

Community building

Describing the ways in which SEED builds community among teachers was not an explicit goal of this study. However, the SEED Project is intentionally designed to build community. The theme of community building emerged in almost every interview with both SEED seminar leaders and participants, despite it not being a focus of the interviews, as an important context in which teachers spoke about their efforts to challenge gender inequity in their schools. The unique format of the seminars (long-term, year-long, monthly, group conversations about personal identity and experiences) appears to lend itself to fostering a strong sense of community and collegiality among SEED/GEMS participants. Teachers felt SEED/GEMS not only gave them a general sense of community that helped to counter their daily isolation at school, but also served as a “support group” by allowing them to “walk the talk” – that is, teachers felt the seminars allowed and even *required* them to put their “talk” about challenging inequity into practice. As one participant put it:

I think [SEED/GEMS] builds community – I think the most important thing, and maybe this is not the [main] goal, is building community among the teachers, because that is what we lack so much, because of all the disruptions and the administrators and everyone coming in with their memos.... I think [we need] more opportunities to just informally talk to other teachers. It could be about curriculum, it could be about students, but more importantly, about what teachers find are important issues and [anything] teachers want to discuss and want some feedback on. I think that SEED/GEMS has that potential. And it can evolve... I think it is... important that teachers are realizing that their colleagues are available and [that] they are dealing with the same kinds of things. We are so isolated usually, so it is a nice opportunity (Interview, March 3, 2004).

In addition to building a general sense of community, teachers described the ways in which SEED/GEMS allowed them to gauge where their colleagues stood on issues related to sexism and homophobia, and were encouraged to find allies among their colleagues in their work to shift school culture around these issues. For example, one teacher optimistically described learning during a SEED seminar that his fellow teachers were passionately committed to confronting homophobia:

I think the SEED seminar that we had today was a big step forward. And I felt myself challenged as well, around the concept of [homophobia].... And I was actually encouraged by hearing so many of my colleagues speak up and say that they wanted to do this – they wanted to take a step forward – that even though it was going to require a lot of time, sacrifice, cost in the sense of emotional cost. So I was wondering more where my colleagues stood on these issues, and how much do we really want to come around as an entire school around this. And I found myself pleasantly surprised. I think people in this school are deeply passionate about things, and have very strong opinions, in my opinion, strong good opinions. And I just think we're fearful of sharing those things or putting it out there, but I think we agree on things more than we disagree. And people are more open to things than I thought they were (Interview, December 10, 2003).

In what ways do teachers who participated in SEED/GEMS continue to grapple with issues of gender bias and inequity? What challenges exist in forwarding the project of gender equity in schools?

A discussion of a professional development program's contributions to fostering a gender equitable school culture would be incomplete without addressing the continuing challenges that exist in forwarding the project of gender equity in schools. Drawing on concepts from the literature as well as on teachers' words, I identified three major challenges to SEED/GEMS's – and teachers' – efforts to foster gender equity in schools: gender blinding, internalized –isms, and men's reluctance to be part of a "gender equity" project.

"Gender blinding"

Evidence from student testimony in the larger evaluation study suggested that gender bias and sexism were rampant in both schools (for more detail, see Deshmukh Towery, Oliveri, Gidney, Chen & Goldberg, 2006; Oliveri, Deshmukh Towery & Gidney, 2005; Oliveri, Goldberg, Deshmukh & Gidney, 2004). However, when asked about the problem of gender equity in their schools, some teachers claimed sexism was *not* a problem in their schools. For example, an ironic one given the key role she played in bringing SEED/GEMS to her school, an administrator at one of the schools said that she did not see gender as a key issue because she was satisfied with the perceived strides that had been made towards dismantling institutionalized sexism, and because when compared to what she had seen elsewhere, the sexism at her school did not strike her as much of a problem. The following excerpt describes a conversation between this administrator and her interviewer, who specifically asked her to discuss gender issues at her school:

Interviewer: What about the gender thing?

Administrator: Well, I don't see the gender thing as much here, as I have in other places.... I think because of the strides women in general have made in history, and there are so many women [that] are the head of households...

Interviewer: So you don't see a lot of sexism in hallways and...

Administrator: No, I don't.... I don't see it really being played out, because there are so many strong [women].... In addition to that, I just don't think it's as bad as it used to be. I still think there are perceived roles but they're getting chipped away (Interview, December 12, 2003).

Even others who did see sexism as a problem claimed girls seemed resigned to it, as though that summed up the problem. One teacher described observing frequent physical horseplay and touching that she felt was: "not very appropriate. I would be uncomfortable with it, but the female students don't seem to be uncomfortable with it" (Interview, January 20, 2005).

Some teachers used popular culture, media, and society to explain what they perceive to be girls' indifference to manifestations of gender bias. Their explanations for what they saw to be girls' passive reactions to sexual harassment were centered on girls buying into popular images that sexualize girls and women. I heard from teachers that girls "don't get it" and "it's not even a part of their vocabulary" (Interview, January 20, 2005). For example, one teacher at the high school explained that she often observed sexism that was perpetuated by popular culture at

play in relationships between boys and girls but that girls didn't seem to understand why it was offensive (Interview, January 20, 2005). These teachers' explanations were in contrast to evidence from the girls themselves, who described their passive reactions to sexual harassment as "getting used to it" (for more detail, see Deshmukh Towery et al., 2006; Oliveri et al., 2005; Oliveri et al., 2004) and thus suggests teachers may be blind to sexism in their schools and even may actively be blinding themselves from seeing that they could counter the effects of the sexism they do observe.

On the other hand, over the course of the three years, after having been explicitly made aware – through their participation in the evaluation – of the prevalence of sexual harassment in their school, several teachers championed the importance of dealing with this problem as a school community. As part of the larger evaluation study, data about students' experiences in school was gathered through the conduct of student focus groups. Researchers partnered with teachers at each school to conduct focus groups that grouped students together according to their racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender identities. These groups were meant to offer a safe forum for frank expression of students' personal experiences at school with regard to their identities.

Teachers were eager to hear about students' experiences and share students' concerns with their colleagues as part of their work toward school equity, and they played an active role in recruiting students and leading the discussions in the focus groups. At both schools, the majority of girls participating in these focus groups reported frequent (daily, and in many cases multiple times a day) sexual harassment in the form of inappropriate touching, name calling, and other harassment. As noted earlier in this paper, the girls who participated in these groups strongly stated that they were not immune to such harassment, but did not know what to do about it or did not think anything could be done. The teachers who were present during these focus groups were visibly shocked at hearing girls' accounts of their experiences in school. These teachers' participation in student focus groups played a key role in making them aware of the prevalence of sexism and sexual harassment in their schools. During my interviews with teachers, the few teachers who most strongly expressed the imperative to raise this issue in their SEED seminars were those teachers who participated in these focus groups. Unlike those participants who did not see or were unable to see the daily, frequent manifestations of sexism in their school, these teachers not only saw and acknowledged these instances, but also undertook visible leadership efforts to lead their schools in combating these inequities, but did so only after their "blindness" to sexism had been removed. For example, one male middle school teacher described bringing his revelations from a student focus group to his SEED seminar:

Yeah, today, again [in our SEED seminar], I would say that I didn't know how seriously [my colleagues] wanted to take the sexuality [referring both to sexual harassment and homophobia] issue. And I brought it up...that [the problem of sexual harassment and homophobia] was rampant, that it was something that my eyes were being opened to, that it was so rampant, that it was a serious issue to take care of (Interview, December 10, 2003).

In this example, the use of the term "blinding" is once again useful in illustrating the way these teachers became aware of sexual harassment and homophobia in their

schools; the teacher referred to his "eyes being opened" as a way of coming to understand how sexism and homophobia operated in his school culture. Even in the context of their participation in SEED/GEMS, prior to their participation in the student focus groups and other activities of the larger evaluation, these teachers described the process of becoming aware in passive terms rather than actively seeking out possible sources of sexism and homophobia. Once aware, however, they described actively bringing these issues to the forefront of their conversations in SEED/GEMS. This finding suggests that for some teachers, the process of becoming aware as a passive one may contribute to gender blinding in that it places responsibility for awareness of how students experience gender inequities outside of the duty of teachers and into the hands of students, or, as in this case, outside observers.

Battling internalized -isms

Teachers expressed both frustration and discomfort toward battling their own internalized -isms. When referring to their own internalized -isms, teachers most frequently spoke about their personal and professional discomfort in dealing with homophobia in their classrooms. Two of the White, male, heterosexual teachers interviewed felt challenged in dealing with their own attitudes towards homosexuality, and though happy with the progress they had made towards confronting these attitudes, felt it came at an "emotional cost" (Interview, December 10, 2003). Some teachers felt that being an ally exacts a cost in relationships with students who might wonder if they are gay. Additionally, teachers described the cost of having difficult conversations about homosexuality as painful and time-consuming. For example, expressing both these sentiments, one teacher explained:

I think the SEED seminar that we had today was a big step forward. And I felt myself challenged as well, around the concept of sexuality, and really thinking about it in relation to me, and how important is it to me, and how much sacrifice it takes in terms of time... Even my saying... when a student says "that's gay" "you're a faggot" – you know that kind of thing, which you hear ALL the time, and my saying, "You know, that offends me, and I have friends that are gay, and you wouldn't [use derogatory language in reference to African-Americans]. You don't use a group term that way." And then the cost is [a] student's actually questioning my [sexual] identity because, you know, it doesn't matter what I am, but as a straight man, being able to advocate there's a cost of being an ally, which is that they may back away from a relationship, or think that I'm gay, and that's a real cost (Interview, December 10, 2003).

Additionally, though they recognized the need for change in their schools, and hoped for cultural shifts with regard to homophobia in their schools, some teachers expressed reluctance at initiating the conversations that would be necessary in addressing the problem:

I would hope that by the end of the year we will have [made some curricular changes with regard to homosexuality], and [that] there would actually be posters up and that students would actually see that is the norm, and not be like "eeww, that's disgusting"... part of me doesn't want to have the cost of having those conversations, but part of me says it would be great to get over that hump and to really think that

this is a safe place, and to know that students who I see struggling with their sexuality could have that affirmed, or feel like they can be accepted. Or at least it's a safe place, even if they're not accepted by their peers. I was reminded today that even if for some reason none of my students were gay, homosexual, lesbian, that they probably know someone from their family who is (Interview, December 10, 2003).

In each of these examples, the cost of exploring personal and systemic homophobia, through the fear of being an ally and through the fear or reluctance to bear the emotional brunt of these conversations, served as a hindrance to teachers' progress and represented what seemed to be a form of homophobia itself. However, despite these feelings of reluctance and fear, every teacher in this study reiterated his or her commitment to working through these issues even when they were uncomfortable, giving hope for their future development and for their work to consciously and deliberately alter their school cultures.

Bringing men into the conversation about gender equity

When asked about gender bias and inequities in their schools and classrooms, teachers tended to focus on issues related to girls and GLBT youth, often overlooking the ways in which boys may experience gender bias. For example, conversations with students conducted for the larger evaluation study revealed that both boys and girls felt that girls receive favorable treatment from teachers and were recipients of higher expectations than are boys (Deshmukh Towery et al., 2006; Oliveri et al., 2005; Oliveri et al., 2004). During the first two years of data collection, teachers rarely mentioned observations of how boys might be victims of gender bias.

The challenge of bringing men into the conversation about gender equity was also reflected in SEED/GEMS's ongoing difficulties in recruiting male teachers' participation in the seminars at the high school. While male teachers' participation in the seminars had been growing, women continued to represent the majority of participants. Some of the male participants welcomed the opportunity to learn about their own gender privilege; however, others expressed frustration at this very focus on gender privilege, explaining that at times they either felt "invisible" or felt they were framed as "oppressors". The following quote from a White, male, middle school teacher describes experiencing both of these feelings of frustration and humility:

It's not pretty to have a White male [in SEED]... I mean... you're a shooting target. You're a target for going into a racism conversation. You're in a... [position] of power, you're viewed as [central to the] power relationship. So it's humbling. [I] can't change it. So I try to understand it (Interview, November 1, 2004).

Discussion

How do teachers who participated in SEED/GEMS describe or explain their awareness of, and practices in response to, gender inequities? From their perspectives, what role did SEED/GEMS play in facilitating their work to address gender inequities both in themselves and in their schools?

The findings of this study suggest that teacher training programs like SEED can have a profound effect on in-service teachers' perceptions both of themselves and of their

students, as well as on their classroom practices. Moreover, teachers at all levels of development experience benefits to their thinking about issues of gender equity. Furthermore, the data suggest that though SEED/GEMS catalyzed changes in teacher behaviors, enactment of these changes was not uniform across the sample. Finally, the data indicate that a positive consequence of SEED/GEMS was that it fostered a greater sense of community and common purpose among participants, suggesting that programs structured like SEED may be critical in fomenting positive social change in schools.

Personal transformations

The type of awakenings (Greenman & Dieckmann, 2004) and reminders teachers participating in SEED/GEMS describe reflect an appreciation for the very kinds of self-reflection and awareness that some scholars in teacher education propose are the first steps towards fostering gender equity in schools (Causey, Thomas & Armento, 1999; Greenman & Dieckmann, 2004; Masland, 1994; Nieto, 2000). The teachers in this study reported that SEED/GEMS effectively stimulated self-reflection in a number of different areas related to gender and gender inequity, particularly issues of sexual identity. SEED/GEMS also successfully motivated teachers to make their own beliefs and biases explicit to themselves. This awareness was a critical first step and, in some cases, made teachers cognizant of the prevalence of gender inequities in their schools. This study suggests that professional development programs like SEED can raise teachers' awareness of gender inequities in both themselves and their schools. Moreover, the data indicate that this type of teacher training has utility for teachers at various stages of development in their thinking about issues of social justice. For teachers with a history of engagement with issues of gender inequity, their participation in SEED/GEMS served as a reminder of the importance of their activism; for other teachers, SEED/GEMS was an awakening – to themselves and to the social worlds of their students.

While some strategies for professional development around equity issues focus on self-reflection and awareness (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 1999; Greenman & Dieckmann, 2004) as the avenue for teacher change, the movement from awareness to action is essential to gender reform in schools (Kenway & Willis, 1998). After successfully making teachers aware of gender inequities, SEED/GEMS effectively encouraged teachers to take actions to combat these by making changes in their classroom practices and by challenging gender inequities in the school community. In some cases, these changes and challenges took the form of critical self-analysis while in others it meant that teachers revised their curricula to reflect their newfound awareness. The data suggest that teacher training programs structured like SEED are able to effect positive change in classroom practices around issues of gender equity. This finding lends support to the notion that awareness can be the first step to action (Greenman & Dieckmann, 2004; Nieto, 2000) and provides a counterpoint to critics of consciousness-raising as a vehicle for reform, who have pointed out that raising awareness is not enough (Kenway & Willis, 1998).

One explanation for this discrepancy between this study's findings and claims made in the literature that consciousness-raising is inadequate may lie in how teachers commit to a full year of monthly SEED seminars. Many of the teachers interviewed felt motivated to make changes as a *result* of their raised awareness. SEED seminars do not provide direct instruction related to teaching practices and curriculum. Rather, participants in the seminar group engage in self-reflection using exercises through

which they explore their identities and biases, and in turn, their students' identities. At times expressing frustration with a lack of direct instruction, teachers *themselves* compensated by using the reflective exercises they did with one another in the seminars in their own classrooms with their students. Though the SEED exercises are not intended as explicit tools for use with students, teachers' use of the exercises in their classrooms suggests that SEED and other teacher training programs might benefit from encouraging classroom use of activities which adults use with themselves around the topic of educational equity.

SEED/GEMS was not uniformly effective in providing teachers with the language to challenge homophobic name-calling. Accordingly, teachers used a variety of strategies when confronting students' use of homophobic slurs: from simply asking students to stop to engaging them in deeper examinations of the slurs they use. Research on confronting name-calling (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 1996; Troyna & Hatcher, 1991; Troyna & Hatcher, 1992a; Troyna & Hatcher, 1992b; Troyna & Hatcher, 1993) suggests that if teachers say only "stop it" when students call each other names, it may not be enough to change student attitudes. Furthermore, such admonitions, while reducing name-calling in the presence of teachers, risk making students' sexist or homophobic name-calling covert. Researchers suggest that, in order to make more profound changes, teachers must engage students in the type of critical examinations that SEED requires of teachers.

Community building

In her analysis of strategies for promoting adult growth in schools through professional development, Levine (1989) notes that despite the fact that they are surrounded by people all day, teachers, overburdened by the daily pressures of the very act of teaching, often feel a sense of isolation and disconnectedness from their colleagues and other adults in school. Community building is a goal of the SEED Project. The unique format of the seminars (long-term, monthly, group conversations about personal identity and experiences) lends itself to fostering a strong sense of community and collegiality – "a community of critical friends" (Nieto, 2000, p. 185). The data suggest that long-term programs like SEED serve an important function of bringing teachers together to discuss issues of pedagogy and school environment, which in and of itself fosters exchange of ideas and classroom practices and can lead to group consensus and successful activism. However, one major challenge to replicating this function of SEED is the difficulty of engaging critical masses of teachers in such a project, particularly given the many other pressing demands on teachers' time.

In what ways do teachers who participated in SEED/GEMS continue to grapple with issues of gender bias and inequity? What challenges exist in forwarding the project of gender equity in schools?

Despite the successes of SEED/GEMS discussed above, several substantial challenges remain. Foremost is the fact that the very presence of gender bias and gender inequity is often invisible to teachers. Some of the teachers in this study believed that gender inequity was not an area of concern in their school. Additionally, some teachers, though committed to equity, still struggled with internalized -isms, homophobia in particular. Finally, another challenge to teacher training programs is recruitment of teachers, especially those who are reluctant or resistant to critical, and often discomfiting, examinations of their own identities.

"Gender blinding"

In recounting his experiences training teachers to recognize and confront gender bias in their classrooms, Sadker (2000) describes how at the beginning of each training program he encounters a "gender block" (p. 80) – a lack of awareness and even recognition of gender bias on the part of teachers. He uses the term "gender block" to explain how teachers were unaware of their own contributions to gender bias. However, once shown concrete evidence of their actions (e.g., videotapes of classroom strategy), the teachers took ownership of these actions.

Rather than the term "gender block," I use the term "gender blinding" to describe the very *active* ways teachers were *not* seeing, only partially seeing, and even erasing sexism from their everyday experiences in school. For example, despite students' reports to the contrary, some SEED/GEMS participants – in their discourse about gender bias in their classrooms and schools – blinded issues of gender in their schools by claiming sexism not to be an "issue". These adults' inability to see, and therefore acknowledge, continuing gender inequities in the school environment make training and education around these often "subtle, unintentional, but damaging" (Sadker, 2000, p. 80) inequities all the more important.

Moreover, the way some teachers explained girls' passivity or a perceived indifference to sexism seems to serve as another way gender blinding plays itself out in their observations of relationships between girls and boys. While in these examples teachers did see the sexism in the situations they described, they viewed the girls themselves as "blind" to it. In almost all of these teachers' analyses of girls' inaction to situations of gender bias and sexism such as inappropriate touching or harassment, both the passive and the active subjects of these narratives of sexism are girls. In none of these examples are boys called upon to take responsibility for their role in perpetuating the sexism teachers observe; in all of these examples it is either implied or made specific that girls should take the responsibility in combating the sexism they experience. Though these teachers do "see" the sexism inherent in common student behaviors (e.g., boys "inappropriately" touching girls), by deflecting responsibility for this sexism onto girls and popular culture they effectively render it invisible.

Finally, those teachers who felt most strongly about combating gender inequities in their schools primarily described their desire to do so only after their "eyes had been opened" to the "rampant" sexism in their schools. The findings suggest that teacher training programs like SEED must redouble their efforts to not only make teachers aware of gender inequities in their school environments, but also to reinforce the criticality of teachers' active, ongoing analyses of the many ways in which institutionalized sexism and gender inequity permeate throughout school cultures. Teacher trainers must themselves be equipped with awareness of gender blinding and how to both recognize and contest it. These data suggest that even in programs such as SEED, in which gender is an explicit focus of the training, invisibility of certain types of gender bias and sexism continue to persist.

Battling internalized -isms

The findings suggest that some teachers struggle with the desire to be an ally to students (particularly GLBT youth) and the perceived personal cost of being that ally. Though reflective of an internalized bias against homosexuality, this is also not an

unfounded concern. Robinson & Ferfolja (2001) discuss the difficulties inherent in being an ally in the context of pre-service teacher education:

When dealing with difference, particularly gay and lesbian issues, assumptions are made about [the teacher's] sexuality and their reasons for broaching the issue. It is often considered that one has to be gay or lesbian to express an interest in these issues or to be supportive of sexual difference. The assumptionist position in relation to [the teacher's] perceived gay or lesbian sexuality can potentially lead to harassment regardless of one's actual sexuality. Furthermore, giving a focus to sexuality and deconstructing and problematising heterosexuality in the process is often read by some students and colleagues as a means of pushing one's own personal agenda (p. 131).

Nevertheless, the finding that internalized -isms remains an issue for some teachers points to the need for programs like SEED to continually inspire teachers' introspection on questions of internalized gender bias and homophobia. Though it may be easier for teachers to recognize *external* examples of sexism and homophobia in a school environment, perhaps the more important battle against these oppressive ideologies is an *internal* one.

Bringing men into the conversation about gender equity

This study suggests that some teachers, particularly White male teachers, may be reluctant to participate in programs such as SEED because of fears of being portrayed as "the oppressor." Until teacher education programs confront the issues that underlie teachers' reluctance and resistance to participate, their effectiveness will be compromised. When programs like SEED are voluntary, as was the case in the high school in this study, they may attract teachers who, in various ways, are already engaged in combating gender inequities. Teachers who are reluctant or resistant to such examinations abstain from participating. On the other hand, when schools make programs such as SEED mandatory, they run the risk of creating a backlash among teachers who otherwise would not have participated. A possible solution to this conundrum would be to create groups for specific constituencies of teachers, based on both ethnicity and gender. Such groups might be effective in creating safe spaces for the teachers themselves so that they may engage in critical self-examination with less fear of the negative judgments of others. Unless all teachers engage in this process, the struggle for gender equity in schools will remain unfulfilled.

Conclusions and directions for future research

As authority figures in schools, teachers have the potential to interrupt biased behaviors, alter gender-based expectations of students, create gender equitable curricula, and transform their schools into more equitable settings for student learning. The data and analysis presented in this paper suggest that in-service training programs such as SEED can be an important component in the struggle against gender inequities in schools. By fostering greater self-awareness and recognition of how gender inequities are manifested in classrooms and schools, teacher training programs can motivate teachers to take positive steps to combat these inequities. Moreover, by building a sense of community and shared purpose among teachers, in-service training programs can encourage collective action.

However, the data reveal that there are significant challenges, both individual and systemic, to teachers' efforts at counteracting the strong, pervasive influences of gender bias in society. These challenges serve to further highlight that it is critical that more attention – both scholarly, policy, and praxis-oriented – be paid to supporting efforts that further prepare and support teachers as they work towards fostering gender equity in schools.

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¹ Questions about homophobia and more broadly, about sexuality, are not confined to simply questions about gender and gender inequity. However, my analysis of gender encompasses issues of homophobia as well as normative heterosexism because all students, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) students in particular, may face bias and discrimination because of atypical gender performance. I believe questions of gender equity cannot be fully examined nor effectively addressed without careful consideration of how ideologies such as sexism and homophobia privilege or oppress members of a school community across boundaries of gender, sex, and sexual orientation.

² I use the term SEED/GEMS when referring to the specific, gender-focused implementation of SEED, and use the term SEED when referring to aspects of the overall SEED project, such as the SEED seminars which are integral component of the overall SEED project.

³ Author's note: The names of the schools have been changed to protect teachers' anonymity.

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