

CHAPTER 2

A History Lived and Lessons Learned: Collaboration, Change, and Teaching Transformation¹

Tim Sieber

Talking to colleagues about what we do unravels the shroud of silence in which our practice is wrapped... Checking our reading of problems, responses, assumptions, and justifications against the readings offered by colleagues is crucial if we are to claw a path to critical clarity. Doing this also provides us with a great deal of emotional sustenance. We start to see that what we thought were unique problems and idiosyncratic failures are shared by many others... Just knowing that we're not alone in our struggles is profoundly reassuring. Though critical reflection often begins alone, it is ultimately a collective endeavor.

(Brookfield 1995, 35–36)

Struggles Over Learning How to Teach

It was 1985, and I was feeling frustrated. After all, my thinking went, wasn't I paid to be an expert in my field? To give my students an accurate and current account of the state of thinking in my Ph.D. specialty areas? wasn't that the reason that my department had hired me for the faculty in the first place, a decade earlier? Of course, what the students wanted to know mattered to me, and they had openings in my classes to say something, and were always asked at the end of each presentation, "Does anyone have any questions?"

It was awkward, but there were seldom many forthcoming. Many informal faculty discussions, in the hallways and in the lunchroom, focused on the perennial problem of how to stimulate more “discussion” in the classroom, especially among the seemingly passive, working-class students we had, who supposedly had little experience with active learning in their earlier mediocre or worse high schools. During my classes, in fact, it was obvious that the students looked bored.

Their evaluations of my classes were not the best, either. This was puzzling, because I was so responsible about doing my job correctly and even felt stung because students did not appreciate my hard work on their behalf! Hewing closely to detailed notes, writing out “the lecture” largely in advance, to make sure everything was covered, always kept me working long hours into the night. Some highly motivated students liked the material, of course, and their engagement showed some enthusiasm, reassuring me of this: there are at least a few smart ones academically capable of understanding anthropology. It took me almost a decade of teaching before encountering a major challenge to my very traditional approach in the classroom, one that had been modeled to me earlier by my own professors.

Of course, my struggles were fairly typical among many of us who were faculty in those days, since very few of us ever had any real pedagogical preparation for teaching while in graduate school. In fact, my graduate school had kept me on a research track all the way through my program, with fellowships that were considered more prestigious precisely because they did not require me to be a teaching assistant. Except for a few guest lectures to talk about my research in other people’s classes while in graduate school, the university’s classrooms were the first ones I ever entered as a teacher. Lacking any pedagogical training, like many others at this time, left little to rely on except replicating the methods that my professors had used. Maybe they were not so bad, I thought—they been effective, after all, in leading me all the way through to the Ph.D.

In 1985, becoming a part of a Center for the Improvement of Teaching (CIT) Faculty Seminar challenged my old assumptions about teaching, suggesting a new way of thinking about my classes. The seminar met weekly to discuss teaching—techniques, challenges, frustrations—and we were a broad mix of professors from different schools and departments. We visited one another’s classes and read a thick stack of readings related to the seminar’s chosen theme for that term—“Group work and collaborative learning”—neither of which had ever been a part of my teaching repertoire. It was hard to imagine that students had much to teach one another about the material—and that was my job anyway—or that there might be

pedagogical roles for me as professor that did not involve my talking, giving information, and being in control of the air time.

The seminar was my first serious exposure to the idea that student learning should be at the center of university teaching, and that techniques to promote it extended far beyond lecturing, beyond “covering the material,” to more complex ways of “uncovering the material,” including helping the students do more of that critical work themselves. To learn what the students knew, it was necessary to listen to them. To know what to say to them and to know how to promote their learning required, first, knowing who they were and what their questions about the material were—exactly the reverse of the pedagogical process I had been following!

Colleagues teaching in business management, nursing, public service, and education had long used group work and collaborative learning to reach learning objectives. In my own more elite academic area, the liberal arts, faculty tended to employ the most hierarchical and traditional learning models of all, designed in part to ensure that optimal conditions of learning and academic success were not extended to all students but instead validated the educational privilege of the few. This is the kind of teaching that involved what Paulo Freire called the “banking model” of education, where the teacher tries to deposit fixed knowledge into the minds of learners who are thought to be empty vessels and then withdraws it through examinations (Freire 1970). This model is simply not effective with the majority of learners.

After this teaching seminar ended, and even during it, it was exciting to try out the new techniques that we discussed. They yielded good results, and my experiments continued; but, it took me many years longer to shake the feeling that I was being neglectful in my responsibility by not filling the classroom with my own voice. Admitting to departmental colleagues what I was doing did not seem advisable, for fear they would label me as irresponsible. Colleagues in my then-conservative department would not approve of these changes or engage with me in critical pedagogical reflections. Fortunately, a supportive network of Center colleagues from elsewhere in the university helped me find my way,² validating for me that these were important and even intellectually stimulating issues to be concerned with.

It is a sad commentary on how thorough my own academic socialization had been that it was so hard for me to accept that what happened in the classroom was not principally about me but instead was about my students and about what promoted *their* learning. What promoted their own learning would also promote my own, it became clear. This was a truly liberating realization in my career as an educator. In the early years of the Center, many young faculty of my generation experienced similar epiphanies as we

learned better to understand the challenges of teaching. Teaching could let me see my own disciplinary knowledge from a different vantage point, that of my students, allowing me a fresh, clear, and critical examination of so much that I had come to take for granted in my graduate school training. Seeing our subject through the eyes of our students allows us to relearn the material and reexamine our fundamental understandings about it, again and again, more deeply each time. As Paulo Freire has so insightfully suggested in his writing about the teacher's own learning,

The learning of those who teach...lies in their seeking to become involved in their students' curiosity and in the paths and streams it takes them through. Some of the paths and streams that students' at times almost virgin curiosity runs through are pregnant with suggestions and questions never before noticed by teachers... Teachers... learn how to teach as they teach something that is relearned as it is being taught (Freire 1998b, 17).

After the seminar, fortunately, this new collegial network of veterans of teaching seminars, all from outside my own department, who understood these more learner-centered pedagogies, and who thoughtfully promoted critical learning in their classes, taught me much and offered their support. The resulting informal faculty conversations, in contrast to earlier ones, did not fixate on why the students were a problem—the problem instead was how to discover the best way to promote their learning. Through these conversations, my own learning about how to teach better also continued, and this process still continues today, almost twenty-five years later. I am grateful for the new stance toward teaching and toward my students learned from participation with colleagues in the Center. It has helped me learn to listen to students, understand them much better, connect my work more effectively with their own hopes and aspirations (Sieber 2001, 2006), and understand and formulate better my own thinking on key issues in my academic field.

The Faculty Seminar: Creating a Climate of Dialogue, Trust, and Innovation among Faculty

These realizations were powerful, gained from collaboration with colleagues, beginning in the faculty seminar. The faculty seminar is, indeed, the key-stone of our teaching center's community building among faculty. Forming a seminar means that a group of eight to ten faculty members, coordinated by a senior peer, is granted extra time in their teaching schedule for weekly

collaborative meetings to study pedagogy and to reflect critically on their own teaching experience and issues. The university recognizes the value to faculty of a critical reflection on teaching, and the fact this is hard, serious work, by considering seminar participation as part of a faculty member's regular workload, that is, it is "on load," typically replacing one course from which they are released from teaching for that term. It was this kind of seminar in 1985 that first prompted me to reflect in probing ways on my teaching.

Participation in seminars is always voluntary, and faculty must apply to participate, including supplying a narrative of their teaching experience and critical questions they want to work on during the seminar. The Center board makes an effort to select participants who represent all the university's colleges and who come from a broad range of disciplines and a diversity of backgrounds. Some seminars concentrate specifically on issues of untenured faculty, whereas others mixed in faculty seniority are more general in focus. Some have a special agenda within which individuals fit their own issues, related to topics such as "Collaborative Learning," like my own, "Using Technology," or "Grading and Standards," the general topic in the seminar I later coordinated myself in 1995. For the most part, however, in keeping with the democratic and grassroots character of Center activity, seminar members set the day-to-day agenda, which includes grappling with each person's particular teaching issues. This makes the seminars always practical and relevant to participants.

To encourage open communication among seminarians, the only non-negotiable seminar rule is the following: to ensure that the seminars are a safe place for faculty to admit to problems and dilemmas in their teaching, all discussions are confidential, and everyone involved—including seminar coordinators—pledges to insulate the discussion from the university's personnel evaluation process. Nothing that is said or revealed in the seminar can ever be inserted verbally or in writing into any university personnel deliberation. The opportunity for faculty to discuss challenges, doubts, and struggles has been "reassuring," as one participant termed it. Another addresses the resulting and rare sense of "safety" in the seminar setting: "The seminar afforded a 'safe' place to talk about the issues facing the... teacher at UMass Boston... Being given this time for an honest discussion about teaching is invaluable!" Another faculty member said that she was "able to raise somewhat risky issues that I have never discussed before, such as how gender and age might impact teaching."³

Being able to compare experiences in this manner has allowed participants, whether they are junior or senior faculty, to understand that learning how to teach more effectively involves a process of ongoing learning for

everyone. Faculty continue to be challenged by new types and mixes of students, changing disciplinary content, growth in their own thinking about critical issues, and the results of trial-and-error assessments of their practice. In all of this, one faculty member learned in her seminar that, regardless of their discipline,

everyone struggles with similar issues and that no one had the “right answer” or “right approach” to any question or situation. Discussing these struggles helped me realize that it is OK to try different things and risk failure since that is the only way to improve one’s pedagogical skills.

As another participant suggested, such discussions “provided an opportunity for all to realize that their personal troubles are not just personal but also public issues pertaining to broader aspects of our shared experience” at the university. Another participant found that her “seminar opened up new possibilities for refining or modifying our approaches to teaching so that we might make the most of the particular complexities of each classroom experience, semester by semester.”

The seminars help faculty adopt a flexible and nimble pedagogical style more effective with the university’s diverse student body. The extensive discussions in the seminars of the challenges of teaching students at different levels of skill and academic preparation in the same classroom fundamentally changed one seminarian’s teaching practice. She wrote that

I used to avoid students in my class by lecturing the entire class and lecturing above their heads. I knew they were bored and disconnected from the class and their exams showed that. Maybe I was afraid of my students because I didn’t know who they were. I went to the seminar looking for help and support. I came away being able to take risks, to know students in my class, to let go of my Ivy League notion of higher education—and feel that it was okay to teach differently.

Within the seminars, usually with considerable diversity among participants, the stage is also set for potentially transformative faculty reflections on questions of difference. In the words of one seminarian,

I never before realized that my white colleagues were really committed to dealing with conflicts and misunderstandings around race issues. I felt differently about my work at the university once I learned that this was the case.

For another faculty member with a complex, ethnically, and nationally mixed biography, the seminar provided an opportunity to reflect on her multiple identities and homes, as she put it, and to find a way to “continue to root myself to this institution, this place, with the sense of community that CIT has planted in me.” Yet another expressed gratitude for the way her seminar group helped her work through the difficult issues about under what circumstances, as a lesbian, it might be appropriate for her to come out to her students.

The seminars foster an atmosphere of mutual respect, congeniality, and caring among participants. Virtually all appreciate this feature of collegial relations, especially since this climate is too often absent in the highly evaluative, judgemental culture of regular departmental and collegiate life. In discussing this theme, faculty quickly make the link between the positive collegial atmosphere and the safety they feel for frank and open dialogue. One participant offered this observation: “As the group became closer, members came forward to present problems and situations that confronted them in the classroom and the group respectfully offered support and suggestions in each instance.” For many, the implications for their own classrooms and relations with students were obvious; as one observed, “The seminar also set a good example itself, of how highly interactive classrooms can provide a caring as well as learning environment.”

This trusting, open climate of dialogue and critical reflection, of course, extends far beyond the faculty seminars to suffuse all the contexts in which, under Center auspices, professors gather to talk and reflect on their teaching—such as one-time forums and panels on different teaching issues (as diverse as “Teaching about Race, Class and Gender,” “Plagiarism: Whose Problem Is It?,” “Teaching in a Time of War,” and “Increasing Student Participation in Large Lecture Classes”), to the annual teaching conference, and countless other informal conversations within faculty social networks.

How and why did faculty at the university create this supportive network of colleagues who have collaborated in constructively helping one another find more effective ways to promote student learning? All of us involved in these conversations knew that we were part of something new and emergent, perhaps even fragile, because few of us had experienced such a climate in graduate school, or, in most cases, as undergraduates. We also knew that openness and trust did not characterize the relations that we had with campus administrators and even with many senior faculty in our own departments. A full answer to this question requires a look into the historical context in which our new university had taken shape in the mid-1960s.

***The “Urban Crisis” and 1960s Social Movements
as Historical Factors in the University’s 1964 Founding***

The Center and its seminars grew out of a strong culture of teaching that characterized the university from its first days. The new university and many of the pedagogical innovations of its mostly young faculty drew inspiration from a wider history of struggles for change that were then omnipresent in the United States. The university’s founding itself was a response to the crisis of equity and access in US higher education at that time. Its pioneering faculty were also mostly “children of the 60s,” well aware of—if not directly involved in—social movements running through most universities of the time. By the time they became faculty, many of the university’s new, young professors were already seasoned activists who believed in collaboration, were not reluctant to question conventional practice, and understood the value of grassroots organizing for change.

There were many compelling models to follow. The contemporary civil rights movement made effective use of decentralized circles of practice and organization that had served well in organizing change. Debates over the democratic, egalitarian politics of Ella Baker and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee were very much in the air in that era, inspiring efforts to promote grassroots engagement by people from all walks of life. Baker contended that inclusive, collaborative types of organization could inspire ordinary people to “assume initiative and act independently” on the basis of “group-centered leadership,” rather than “leader-centered groups” (Baker 2009, 399–400; also Grant 1998; Ransby 2003, 245). Baker believed that visionary, dynamic, but distinctly “unheroic” leaders could foster deeply grounded organizations relying on decentralized decision making and the cultivation of grassroots leadership.⁴

Inspired by the African American civil rights movement, related models of participatory democracy and anarchist practice were also evident in general New Left organizing, the antiwar movement, and second-wave feminism—all movements that influenced many early faculty who had come of age in the era. Growing out of these social and cultural transformations of the period, new streams of thinking about pedagogy also emerged and were carried into academia by young faculty entering the professoriate at places like University of Massachusetts Boston (UMB). They included feminist pedagogy, ethnic studies, Freirean methods, critical pedagogy, and discovery- and learning-centered models in science, to name only a few—all of them now largely mainstreamed into higher educational practice as standard varieties within most universities’ teaching repertoires. Beyond pedagogy in the classroom, the historical moment lent an air of optimism to those of us who

wished to invest energy in promoting change in the wider university. In my own case, it was the reason I joined the first effort to unionize our faculty in the late 1970s and later to accept Esther Kingston-Mann’s invitation to join the campus Working Group advocating for curriculum change to address diversity. Esther made it clear to me that this effort was not “just another” university committee with a schedule of meetings, and a narrowly defined bureaucratic charge, that would be another chore to add to my already long list of administrative responsibilities. I knew from my own experience as an activist since childhood that it is quite possible to achieve meaningful change through engaged organizing, that is, through careful, one-on-one, persistent persuasion and encouragement at the grassroots level. To recruit other faculty colleagues to join our wider process of institutional transformation and help convince them to try rethinking their stance toward teaching, of course, was not only a compelling organizing task but also, like most organizing tasks, a pedagogical challenge in its own right. It was clear to me, and to the rest of us involved, that this work could really produce results, that is, genuine change that would benefit both students and faculty.

It helped that the university itself, and its founding, reflected the era’s spirit of transformation and social reform. UMB was created during the turbulence and the urban crisis of the 1960s as a grand liberal experiment with a mission to provide quality undergraduate teaching to students previously excluded from higher education opportunities. The need was urgent. According to former university president Robert Wood, before the 1960s, fewer high-school graduates from the city of Boston went to college than in the state of Mississippi (Kingston-Mann and Sieber 2001, 7). As part of the last great wave of university expansion that produced new, urban public universities like the University of Illinois-Chicago, the University of California-San Francisco, and the University of Missouri-St. Louis, UMB emerged in response to a perceived national “urban crisis,” evidence of a new political commitment to invest public resources in upgrading urban social infrastructure, including higher education (D’Arrigo 2004, 11).

In Boston, the challenge was to create a university more accessible to lower-income urban students, immigrants, and minorities but comparable in its educational standards and quality to more privileged local institutions. Some even referred to the university as a new “Harvard on the Harbor” for the underserved. As historian (and former dean), Richard Freeland has remarked,

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who were constrained by circumstances to seek education in a public, urban university should have access to programs comparable to those offered by the nation's top residential colleges. (Freeland 1992, 331)

All the elements of the university's educational approach—small class sizes, a liberal arts curriculum, personal attention to the underserved, and strong faculty-student interactions—thus came to be “a hallmark of UMB's commitment to fulfilling its urban mission throughout its history” (D'Arrigo 2004, 43).

Faculty meeting their classes in this unusual university, themselves typically the product of elite research university training, were thus challenged from the outset to understand diverse students who were the first in their families to attend college or worked full-time and raised families while studying. Our students differ widely among themselves in age, ethnicity, social class, educational preparation, learning style, and style of life. About 40 percent are students of color, another 10 percent are international students, and a majority of the white American student body are of working-class origins. Few of them come from families with much experience of higher education, most being the first in their families to attend college. Historically many have been veterans of recent US wars. A strong immigrant presence of first- and second-generation “new immigrants” has been visible, and growing, since the 1980s. The modal student is nontraditional in age, too, the median age being twenty-five years.

Reluctant to view students as a homogeneous group that learned in uniform ways, or to assume that their professorial role was to set all the terms of the educational encounter, most faculty found their students to be quite different from themselves and from their peers at their previous, mostly elite colleges and graduate schools. Thoughtful faculty recognized that it was risky to suppose that they possessed expert knowledge about the lives or expectations of their students. It soon became obvious that to be effective as teachers, faculty needed to learn about them, and in a commuter campus with no dorms, that knowledge had to be mostly generated in the classroom. This also set the stage for pedagogical experimentation, especially toward models of teaching and learning that allow students more voice in the classroom and that permit ongoing assessment and discovery for faculty.

Particular challenges presented themselves, of course, for the 25 percent of our faculty who are newcomers themselves to academia, minorities of all kinds, and many of working-class origins. Strangers to the academy (in Patricia Hill Collins's phrase [1990], “outsiders within”), they may themselves be engaged in uphill struggles to make their way up the career ladder, even as they work as compassionate and constructive mentors toward

students with backgrounds resembling their own. Like the rest of their faculty colleagues, however, they learn very quickly that the teaching models used by their own teachers rarely work well in classrooms at their new workplace. They have often been among the sharpest critics of conventional approaches.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that there has never been consensus about the terms of this “culture of teaching,” and pedagogy has always been a contested terrain, between large faculty factions, linked generally to the Center, that promote more critical, learning-centered models and those who hold the torch for more traditional educational approaches. All sides have always defended their approaches as necessary for quality instruction. We have always estimated that about one-third of our colleagues were part of our more collaborative process, with another third potential recruits, and only a third unalterably opposed. These numbers still constituted a critical mass sufficient to make a real difference in the teaching culture of the university and to offer collaboration and encouragement to one another—for us, indeed, to imagine we were part of a “community,” as we sometimes called it, even if it did not include everybody.

Developing an Institutional Innovation

This faculty community, however, had taken some time to build. In 1983, English professors Russell Hart and Jim Broderick created the CIT as one of the nation's first teaching centers for university-level faculty. With funding from the Ford Foundation to support faculty training for teaching in a newly revised “core curriculum,” Hart and Broderick organized the first semester-long, faculty-led pedagogy seminars in the College of Arts and Sciences. A response to the absence of pedagogical training at the graduate schools from which most of the university's faculty members were drawn, the Center provided them with a rare opportunity to reflect collaboratively on effective teaching practice.

In 1991, nearing retirement, they invited historian Esther Kingston-Mann to direct the program. Under Kingston-Mann's leadership, the Center's mission was dramatically expanded to include a particular focus on diversity and inclusion,⁵ with all of the university's then five colleges included alongside the College of Arts and Sciences. In addition, Center activities were extended beyond the original seminar focus. Having recently led a successful faculty/student/staff effort to institute a university-wide diversity curriculum requirement at the university, Kingston-Mann viewed the Center as crucial to the academic credibility of this initiative. As she saw it, diversity could only become a standard feature of academic inquiry if faculty were to

acquire—through the seminar process—the knowledge and experience that could equip them to teach diversity-oriented courses that were rarely part of their own graduate training.

With enthusiastic support from the chancellor and provost, and generous Ford Foundation funding for a multiyear faculty development project, Center seminars became a venue for faculty explorations of diversity as a pedagogical and content issue.⁶ Between 1991 and 1996, the Center coordinated semester-long pedagogy seminars for eight to ten faculty members per semester that focused on issues of diversity and inclusion. In the course of the 1980s and 1990s, faculty gained a new space to share problems, to implement innovations, and—together with colleagues—to reflect on student responses to the changes they proposed. By the mid-1990s, campus administrators were so impressed with the Center's impact on faculty teaching effectiveness that the provost's office and the deans of the five colleges—with the support of the chancellor—decided to institutionalize the initiative and fund the seminars out of their own budgets. The seminars still continue today, a quarter century later.

Administrative support for the Center, however, was not unwavering. The faculty-led entity was a challenge to the traditional “chain of command” notion of leadership within campus settings. As administrators arrived and departed over the years, the faculty's teaching initiative was sometimes the target of opposition by senior officials. Key central administrators in the mid-1990s attempted to sideline the Center and its programs, co-opt the issue of teaching improvement as part of their own leadership agendas, and start a rival, competitive organization for assessment and improvement of teaching, all under central administrative control. In another case, for many years, the response was simply low-intensity hostility from the provost, an educational traditionalist, who resented the Center's independence. Despite administrative attempts to undermine the Center and its leaders, and an enormous investment of resources and the expenditure of much unpaid faculty labor they commanded from allies in their efforts, these attempts to undermine or replace the Center never gained much steam.

In such struggles, the Center was able to persist and survive, thanks to the powerful support generated by the by-now hundreds of its seminar veterans and the continued support of the Ford Foundation. A few especially thoughtful administrators, some highly placed, such as Sherry H. Penney, chancellor of the university between 1991 and 2000, also were consistent and helpful supporters. What was most crucial about their support, as will be explained below, was that such administrators gave encouragement and resources, while continuing to leave ongoing direction of the initiative to the faculty.

Organization and Structure of the CIT: A Faculty-led Teaching Center

The Center's leadership and inspiration were originally generated by discipline-trained faculty in the liberal arts and sciences, with strong participation from scholar-practitioners from the Graduate College of Education. Long-term adjunct faculty, as well as undergraduate and graduate students, also have been regular parts of the board, and all six colleges are represented. Since the early 1990s, between 40 and 50 percent of the board have been faculty of color, and the majority have been women. The broadly inclusive and participatory nature of the Center is consistent with the manner in which its seminars have always been conducted.

A key feature that has enhanced CIT's integrity and reputation has been that its leadership has operated according to principles consistent with broader pedagogical relations among faculty, that is, according to a nonhierarchical, collaborative model. A study of the Center by a graduate student team from the Harvard Graduate School of Education in 2002 remarked, for example, on the “open, nonhierarchical community” it formed: “The members enjoy the camaraderie, collegiality, friendship, and the overall feeling of community that is missing in so many academic settings today” (Backer et al. 2002, 3, 12). The Harvard group noted that, though Esther Kingston-Mann was the “visionary” for the group, the Center board—composed of a dozen faculty—still accommodated a variety of people exercising shared leadership, who “possess various strengths and leadership styles which has kept the group dynamic and diverse” (Backer et al. 2002, 2). As the study concluded,

The organizational plan of CIT resembles a web where all members' opinions are valued. Although Esther was the “visionary” behind the organization and the leader for many years, her role was more of a collaborator than an authority figure. Rather than leading the group from the top-down, she efficiently and effectively managed the group from the center. . . . The members of CIT had professional autonomy and the freedom to explore their own interests (Backer et al. 2002, 5).

At all levels, from the board to individual seminars and forums, the Center has always been committed to acting collaboratively and to sharing and widely extending leadership among faculty, so that leadership is more “group centered.” This has always taken the form of involving as many different faculty as possible in typical academic leadership functions—directing seminars on campus, making presentations on the Center's work at

national and regional conferences, serving as visiting consultants to other universities, accompanying the director to attend meetings with high-level administrators, doing research on the scholarship of teaching, and writing for publication.

Many of our faculty have come to see teaching at UMB as an intellectually challenging experience—one that fosters a spirit of critical reflection and practical experimentation. Appreciating the unique challenges and rewards of working in a diverse, urban, public institution, many faculty have used our collective reflections on teaching as a crucible for critical scholarship. They have also begun to emerge as significant contributors to the scholarship of teaching, particularly as it relates to questions of diversity and inclusion, and many dozens of books and articles have recently resulted.⁷ This is scholarship that furthers the university's most fundamental mission: devising more effective models of teaching for our students, promising people eager to learn who have little other access to higher education.

Interdepartmental Conversations: A Good Medium for Dialogue about Pedagogy

The Center and its seminars and other activities offer flexible arenas for open discussions of teaching. In most universities, of course, the academic or departmental unit is viewed as the appropriate peer group for work on teaching improvement, and there is surely no better unit for assessing disciplinary or course content, that is, for devising strategies that will help students better understand psycholinguistics, for example, or in deciding which textbook is preferable as an introduction to biological anthropology. Departmentally based considerations tend to be limited, however, precisely because of the priority they usually give to curriculum or disciplinary content. Such forums can easily leave unaddressed broader but important questions of pedagogy that always cut across disciplines. When the focus shifts away from content to pedagogy, on the other hand, faculty set aside more parochial differences in what content they know to address common teaching challenges. Physicists, sociologists, art historians, and nursing faculty, for example, face quite similar problems in teaching critical thinking and problem solving, in using grading and assessment as tools to help discouraged students invest in improving their work, or in managing the numbers of students sitting in large lecture classes.

That the Center offers extradepartmental forums for teaching discussions and considers all conversations off the record are important for another reason. Departments are inevitably the arena in which peer judgments and personnel decision making take place, and they can stifle some types of

critical reflection on teaching practice. Not without reason, faculty may fear that open disclosure of teaching problems will be construed as weaknesses for which they will be negatively judged in personnel evaluations or in decisions about reappointment, promotion, or merit pay. Departmental teaching assessments also are typically heavily based on teaching evaluation instruments that survey student satisfaction, often in quantitative terms, but that rarely describe, examine, or reflect on how teaching unfolds in daily practice. Official assessments of this sort seldom give clear indicators for how individual faculty can change or promote their own development as teachers. Center consultations usually pick up where these evaluations leave off, helping faculty understand what to do in response. On the first day of a recent faculty seminar, for example, a second-year professor asked if the group could put this issue on its agenda. As he explained, "Those evaluation questionnaires don't really give me what I need—how can I know, for myself, really, whether I'm really doing a good job or not? How can I tell?"

Another powerful reason for making available a broadly interdepartmental faculty network around teaching is that it can offer a wider range of more specific expertise for colleagues. At a comprehensive university such as ours, faculty teach a great variety of subject matters, at different levels and in different formats (laboratory, lecture, seminar, internship courses, field schools, etc.), and someone with a teaching problem can always find an appropriate person to help. A guiding principle of the Center, in fact, is avoiding any codification of "best practices" that work in all and any situations. Faculty problems are always specific and rarely lend themselves to formulaic solutions. Avoiding the search for "quick fix" packages for those who want to solve their teaching problems once and for all, CIT has instead supported a wide range of solutions that apply to the individual faculty member's particular teaching situation. Individual difficulties are best handled through careful problem-solving with knowledgeable colleagues. This results in a catholic, nonjudgmental approach to what constitutes good teaching and is inclusive of everyone, promotes open dialogue among all kinds of faculty, and steers clear of dogmatism or so-called political correctness.

Solving Professional Problems with Colleagues: Questions of Balance

Seminar support networks are particularly beneficial to junior faculty who may receive little mentoring or support for taking teaching seriously because their departments place such a high priority on the production of scholarship that will aid in progress toward tenure. In their attempts to teach well, diverse student- and community-oriented faculty who are sensitive to the

struggles of our students may not receive significant departmental support for efforts to balance their scholarship against their commitment to teaching. Without minimizing the overriding importance of productive scholarship, Center colleagues can validate junior faculty's teaching commitments and can offer critical support for improving their pedagogical craft. Often this enables faculty to teach "smarter," that is, more effectively, and not feel so overwhelmed and drained by early-career teaching challenges, thus resulting in more time for research and publication. Every faculty member—and especially ones early in their careers—require good mentors from within their own department or program, but some types of essential mentoring are best handled by other faculty colleagues *outside* the department.

Getting help is not just an issue for recently hired "junior" faculty. Senior faculty—who are expected to know all the answers—frequently find it as difficult to ask for help, or admit failures, as newer professors. In a seminar I coordinated, a thirty-year veteran faculty member not far from retirement declared, after hearing seminar colleagues report on teaching frustrations and their efforts to work better with students: "These discussions have really raised my respect level for all my colleagues—all this time, I thought I was the only one who was trying!" Meeting the institution's expectations in the areas of scholarship, teaching, and service is crucial to the untenured faculty member's academic survival. Faculty at *every* level of experience and seniority, however, must negotiate seemingly endless, competing campus demands on their time and energy, in order to sustain a balanced, rewarding life as a scholar-teacher and maintain pride in craft. The CIT model suggests that no amount of technical consulting, video instruction, or "workshopping" by outside experts is as effective in meeting these challenges as the sharing of teaching experiences, problems, doubts, and successes by and among teaching faculty.

Administrators and Faculty: Who Should Lead in Teaching Transformation and How?

Faculty initiative needs to be the start of teaching transformation, but it succeeds best with administrative support. Our UMB experience suggests a possible alternative to conventional notions of university leadership and change—one that includes an all-important role for university administrators but that preserves and builds on active faculty engagement. In the course of our work, gifted administrators committed to the academic survival and success of diverse students (and their teachers) have declared faculty development a priority investment for the university's scarce resources. Not surprisingly, they are administrators who themselves value and employ a collaborative model in their managerial style and are more likely to define themselves

as change agents, ready to give direct support to grassroots faculty leaders and innovations as a way of nurturing institutional improvement. They give encouragement, without forcing faculty to hew to an often-withering academic hierarchy, requesting support from chairs, then deans, and then provosts, before ever reaching the top, as former chancellor Sherry Penney confided in an interview on February 23, 2007. Most importantly, these administrators are willing to back off, resist temptations to "take charge," and allow for a significant measure of faculty autonomy, even if faculty—like all other imperfect agents of change—can make mistakes in the process.

Faculty development initiatives need administrative support through recognition and material resources. Without this support, faculty may understandably view the investment of time in pedagogical work as a kind of "speedup" that adds to their already heavy teaching, service, and scholarly obligations. Faculty need to know that their professional work in this area is valued. This is one of the important messages of our university's regarding teaching seminars as a short-term part of regular faculty work load. It is cost-effective for colleges and universities to support improvements in teaching practice and student learning through valuing their faculty's collaborative work with this kind of support. Without it, it is obvious to faculty that administrators do not value the serious work required to improve teaching effectiveness.

In our experience in various regional and national interuniversity consortia and collaborations,⁸ with public and private institutions, secular and religious colleges, and large and small schools, we have seen that a collaborative model is adaptable to a wide range of institutional contexts. Collaboration is a peer-driven consultative process that helps faculty collectively problem solve about how to be more effective teachers, and this can work in all kinds of colleges and universities. Collaboration lets local faculty find solutions that respect and respond effectively to their own institutional histories and conditions. It promotes locally appropriate, not cookie cutter, solutions. For administrators who care about improving teaching effectiveness and faculty morale at their institutions, it is always a good investment.

Today's increasingly corporate academic culture poses a powerful challenge to collaborative initiatives like ours. As executive decision making more and more privileges activity directed and managed from the top, what opportunities exist for continuing a more grassroots model like the Center's? One chronic dilemma for us, for example, has been the difficulty of gaining a regular stream of resource support from the university. Some administrators have attempted to co-opt our efforts and nakedly sought to extract a price for their support. The Center is, essentially, a unit with a faculty development and training agenda, and resources can be given and withheld in attempts to push our programs toward supporting administratively driven

training and personnel agendas, such as making our seminars mandatory as a kind of punishment for faculty who the administration might define as deficient for some reason. Such coercive agendas, in our view, serve neither the interests of faculty collaboration nor student learning. Our fundamental charter of inclusiveness, supportive collaboration, and avoidance of judgementalism toward peers—whose positive results have been proven again and again—has always made it obvious to us what we need to defend and preserve in our activities. Yet sticking to our principles has often left us poor in resources such as budgets, supplies, staff support, and space. We still have no ample, dedicated budget to fund our operations, after all these years.

We face other challenges, as well. As much as we have accomplished over two decades, what we have built cannot be taken for granted and is still fragile. Faculty come and go, they become senior and retire, and important institutional and professional knowledge is lost with them. Grassroots, participatory movements quickly deteriorate without constant, ongoing efforts to engage and mentor newcomers and for participants to continue to support one another through active collaboration in creative experimentation. This is not always easy work for overworked faculty, even if it carries its own rewards. It also needs to be the ongoing commitment of faculty leaders, even in grassroots endeavors, to lead by being collaborative, encouraging collective leadership, and fostering a thousand leaders to bloom, rather than just one. Leaders can sometimes think it is easier to take shortcuts and make decisions alone, without collaborative involvement, supposedly in the interests of being more efficient.

With university governance becoming more and more corporate in its tone and scope, administrators also continue to find it easy to sweep up teaching into their ever-evolving grand institutional plans, thinking it is the mark of their vision and authority to have control over as many facets of university functioning as possible and to try to reform everything in their path. Of course, this seldom works, but in the process toward failure, faculty and their students are often the losers. To put it simply, anything that takes control over what happens in their classrooms out of the hands of faculty damages the ability of professors and students to know one another well, to dialogue over what and how to learn, and to devise effective learning solutions tailored to *those* people in *that* room.

Administrative myopia, the idea that everything is better if it is rationalized from the top, frequently means overlooking and even undermining the more “invisible” and informal networks of consultation and support that faculty can and do build among themselves to solve problems in teaching. Administrators regrettably do not always trust faculty to give good advice to one another, or support faculty’s attempts to enlist their students in dialogue

over what defines good teaching. Our experience suggests that this type of administrative response is counterproductive to improvement of teaching.

Final Lessons: History, Possibility, and Collaboration

What can be learned from the Center model that could be helpful to higher education faculty more broadly? Our example does not purport to offer one recipe for others to follow, and this presentation has frankly acknowledged the historical particulars that helped define our context for change. Times and circumstances always vary and, of course, continually pose new challenges and opportunities for faculty at each college or university.

Paulo Freire has thoughtfully addressed this issue of how to think about later replications of educational innovations that have grown out of specific historical circumstances. Regarding his groundbreaking 1960s literacy program among Brazilian peasants, outlined for the first time in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), he later observed that each and every example of its implementation would have to be different. As he wrote, “Precisely because the pedagogy is historical, takes place in history, and is being lived by historical beings who, in a way, transform themselves while realizing it, the forms of implementation of this pedagogy . . . vary in time and space” (Freire 1993, 67).

In Boston, the success of our faculty leaders, more than anything else, was in the way they recognized, responded to, and even helped create the historical opening for institutional change. Our innovation did not spring from imagination alone but also from careful assessment of the possibilities in our situation and from organizing action accordingly.

There are thus two key lessons to draw from the UMB example, and the first of them is certainly that faculty everywhere, in all institutions, have the power to assess historical possibilities in their moment, and in their location, for organizing progressive change. It is always possible to do something, and what we do has an impact. This is especially true in the area of teaching—including pedagogy, as well as curriculum—where faculty have special authority, resting on the wisdom of experience, in defining what works most effectively to promote their students’ learning. To organize and coordinate change so that it affects the institution more broadly, and not just a scattering of its individual classrooms, requires numbers, that is, collective faculty effort. Our second lesson is this: to tap faculty’s collective commitment, energy, and wisdom, a collaborative model, from top to bottom, in all facets of the change process, is the best way to proceed. It ensures the widest and most productive dialogue over means and goals, promotes coalition building, pools the most wisdom from practical experience, and identifies the most effective strategic directions for change.

Notes

1. Esther Kingston-Mann has been my continual collaborator, interlocutor, and comrade throughout my involvement in the two decades of change described here. As the visionary and principal leader of these developments, Esther has influenced my thinking on my own experience so much that it is difficult any more to separate my own understandings from hers. In addition, she and I have been discussing this history for many years and worked for years on writing together an earlier version of it, upon which this chapter draws heavily. Conversations with Vivian Zamel, Lin Zhan, Emmett Schaeffer, Estelle Disch, and Denise Patmon, including comments from some of them on earlier drafts, have also been important in shaping my understandings of this history. I thank all these colleagues and hope that my reading of our collective history overlaps substantially with their own.
2. Almost a quarter century later, I am happy to report that the climate toward pedagogical reflection has completely changed in my department; many of us are veterans of the teaching seminars and even more are cognizant of the issues they handle.
3. This and all the following quotes are drawn from mostly anonymous written evaluations of the faculty seminars by faculty participants, between 2000 and 2005, in seminars coordinated by Lois Rudnick, Denise Patmon, Peter Kiang, Eleanor Kutz, Emmett Schaeffer, and Raymond Liu. I thank Vivian Zamel and Denise Patmon for making these available. A few of the quotes are from my own personal records of the three seminars I have facilitated and from Esther Kingston-Mann's.
4. Collaborative networks, of course, are now more and more recognized as a crucial feature of almost all kinds of productive work activity in most types of organizations, including those in the business world. A brief comparative glance at the history of social movements as well as commercial enterprise suggests that participatory, collaborative models promote good decision making, productive innovation, quality control, and progressive change. In nineteenth-century England and the United States, for example, Brafman and Beckstrom (2006) have pointed out that both the abolitionist and the women's suffrage movements took root and spread through decentralized circles of practice and organization. Similarly, "participatory management," "quality circles," and "total quality management" are well known to improve product quality, as well as worker satisfaction and productivity, in today's business organizations (Brafman and Beckstrom 2006). It is ironic, however, that within the supposedly most informed and enlightened institutional sector of all—higher education—this broad consensus about collaboration's benefits is not necessarily common knowledge. Perhaps it is another legacy of the hierarchical pedagogies that faculty everywhere have been working to change in recent decades, but in higher education, some administrators still think in the twenty-first century that it is educationally effective for them to act toward faculty in tyrannical and arrogant ways, under the guise of showing "strong leadership."

5. In recent years, the seminars' focus has shifted somewhat from this earlier primary emphasis on diversity, but that issue continues to be relevant today, if for no other reason than the diversity that characterizes the faculty participants themselves.
6. The Ford Foundation was a key actor in philanthropically promoting US higher education's coming to terms with campus diversity, through its "Campus Diversity Initiative" that eventually came to support 300 US colleges and universities in piloting different change initiatives in the area of diversity, including UMB. In a national wave of reorientation of higher education to take account of increasing student, national, and global diversity, more than 200 other colleges and universities were also assisted by the Hewlett Foundation's "Pluralism and Unity Program," the Kellogg Foundation's "Centers of Excellence Program," the Lilly Endowment's "Improving Racial and Ethnic Diversity and Campus Climate" program, and the Irvine Foundation's "Higher Education Diversity Initiative" (García et al. 2002). In addition to the original Ford grant from the early 1980s, in 1993 with Esther Kingston-Mann as principal investigator (PI), the Center received a multiyear grant to fund teaching seminars for faculty, to support the university's new diversity requirement. In 1996, Kingston-Mann obtained further Ford funding for a Diversity Research Initiative that paired students and faculty into research teams investigating campus diversity issues (see Kingston-Mann 1999). Finally in 2003, together with seminar veteran Professor Rajini Srikanth (English), through another Ford grant, Kingston-Mann was PI in the creation of a New England Center for Inclusive Teaching, Learning, Curriculum Change and Scholarship.
7. See, for example, Kingston-Mann and Sieber, (2001); Zamel and Spack (2004); Thompson, Schaefer, and Brod (2002); and articles on such topics as "Encouraging participation in the classroom" (Disch 1999) and "Reconstructing the paradigm: teaching across the disciplines" (Brown and Pollack 2004). A 2005 compilation of representative publications in the scholarship of teaching by Center associates included ninety-seven items.
8. Center faculty have given leadership to a number of regional teaching consortiums or initiatives with other universities in New England or the northeast United States, and these have introduced us to teaching practices and issues of change at other institutions. These include our working in the mid-1990s as a mentor institution with other universities and colleges as part of the "American Commitments" project of the American Association of Colleges and Universities; our initiating and directing of the New England Center for Inclusive Teaching spanning seven institutions from the region; and the creation of the Students as Scholars Program, a multiinstitutional effort that recognizes student diversity scholarship from our region.