

Phenomenological explanation of an experiential curriculum in medical education: A feministic approach

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This study addresses the design and validation of the experiential curriculum model for medical education using a Feministic approach.

Method: The present study was conducted on two non separable planes. On the first plan, the model was designed based on the Feministic approach using the theoretical study method and emphasizing the perspectives ascribed to Nell Noddings, Madeline Grumet and Janette Miller.

Results: The levels of this model include Expected Curriculum, Imaginal Curriculum, Concealed curriculum, Interactive curriculum (Manifest Curriculum, Latent Curriculum, Look the parenting), Transferential Curriculum and Self Determination. On the second plane, to validate the combined model, a phenomenologically qualitative study was conducted. In this study, using goal-oriented sampling, undergraduate and graduate (Master's degree) students majoring in Dentistry, Nursing at Islamic Azad University Khorasgan Branch, Esfahan as well as those at at Esfahan University of Medical Sciences were selected. Deep interview was used to collect data. The findings were analyzed using Van Manen's six-stage model. To determine the reliability of the findings, reliability of reality reconstruction were used.

Conclusion: The results obtained suggested that: Education is in need of some conceptual reconstruction. On this way, women's perceptions and experience of education and of the interior epistemological and curricular system which shape the discourse and performance of education must be addressed. Serving as a research model offering the various planes of the experiential curriculum and focusing more sharply on the dimensions of curriculum than the formal plane, the present study is recommended to the decision-makers of higher education curricular system. .

Key words: Experiential curriculum, feministic approach, lived experience, look the parenting, transferential curriculum, self-determination.

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INTRODUCTION

Education authorities and thinkers view curriculum as the most essential element in the education system. This area is looked upon as one of the youngest in human science, creating concepts and changing at such a fast pace within its realm that makes it difficult or even impossible to mark the boundaries. Eisner views curriculum as a combination of anticipated events planned to achieve the training-educational results for one or more than one student. He views curriculum as not just a single event, but as the result of learning with not just preplanned aims.^[1]

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Viewed as a means of evaluation, the results can include items other than the intended aims. People vary in being affected by preplanned initiatives.

For the first time back in 1981, Frances Klein advanced a research curricular model labeled “A Study of Schooling” (SOS) used by planners as a scale for measuring the compatibility of the decisions taken on the various factors of a curriculum.^[2] Goodlad *et al.* and Posner^[3] too propounded the levels given in Figure 1 for planning.

Klein defined an experimental curriculum as what students experience from pre-set curriculum projects and the interactions that occur in the classroom. Students, based on interests and values, abilities, and previous experiences select and react toward what is presented to them. This selective process leads to the emergence of a selective and individualized program somewhat unique and personal for each student, which will be called an experimental curriculum.^[2]

Ted Aoki distinguishes between curriculums taken as the plan and those taken as lived experience. The curriculum—as-plan is the work of curriculum planners, under the direction of some official often designated as a curriculum director. Its origin is outside the classroom and that teacher is the only employee and installer of curriculum. This requires abandonment of individuality and absence of living high-spirited individuals in the process of curriculum. In contrast, the curriculum taken as a *lived experience* consists of the real world in the curriculum taken as life, or what has been lived and what teachers have experienced. This is exactly what has been neglected.^[4]

Huebner believes that learning has been recognized as relating to educational psychology and the experiential-analytic tradition in whose wake it has developed into a term suggesting “control.” This language for learning and its aim must be put away and new questions must be posed. To this end, the curriculum must be directly confronted with the reality and not through the limited cognitive frameworks of a particular linguistic system (Tyler technical system). The reality of curriculum must be admitted.^[5] Most teachers and students view curriculum in this light.^[6]

Hubner believes that existing curricular language is too constrained to address and settle the problems and the complexities related to language and the import of classroom. The instructor must release himself of the constraining plans so that he can re-listen to the world which seeks to remove the existing intellectual obstacles. The current methodologies governing the curricular thinking must open up the way for this new concept.^[5] Viewed in these terms rather than in terms of studying the changes in behavior and making decisions for the classroom, understanding the nature of educational experience becomes the focus of attention.^[7] The main focus of the insider’s experience is the individual’s interest and attention and understanding the impressions and senses that individuals living in a situation make.^[8]

The present study embarks upon the designing and accrediting

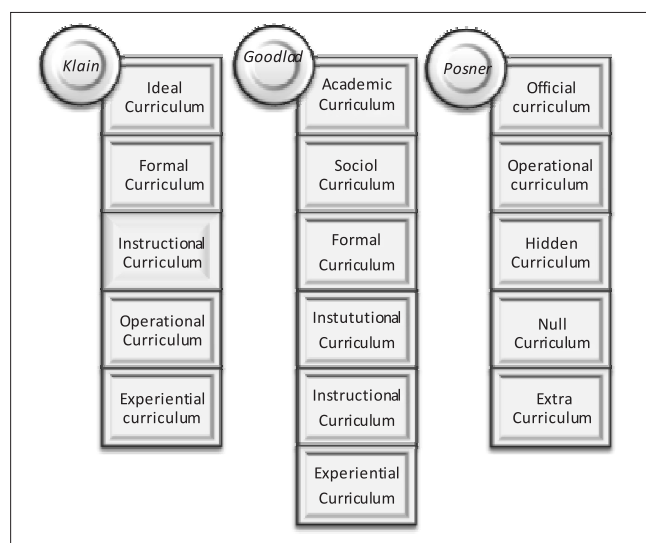


Figure 1: Levels of curriculum

of an experiential curriculum in higher education based on a feministic approach. Being qualitative in nature, this study proceeds to study and search for feministic teachings linked up with the live experience, is capable of increasing the influence ability coefficient of the curriculum, and goes on to design and actually accredit an experiential curriculum model by giving them a pivotal role.

Research questions

1. What is the significance and history of experiential curriculum?
2. What are the nature and the various dimensions of an experiential curriculum at each level?
3. What are the implications and recommendations of feminist theorists for an experiential curriculum?
4. Based on the findings of the study, what, with a view to feministic approach, sort of experiential curricular model can be proposed?
5. To what extent is the proposed feministic model valid in practice?

Research method

The present work comprises two non-separable levels: Design and accreditation. For design, the theoretical discussions available in libraries are used. The second level is a qualitative research, phenomenological in nature. Phenomenology is the study of the world as it manifests itself to people when they are in such a situation indicative of their efforts to free themselves from routine orientations, biases, and beliefs.^[9] Phenomenological study is a kind of “interpretive inquiry” whose focal point is man’s impression and experience. Phenomenological study looks into people’s various impressions and into the results and their descriptions in such a way that people’s impressions surface directly.^[10]

In this study, the researcher is in close contact with the phenomena under study and seeks to identify him/herself in the process of identifying these phenomena.^[11]

Data gathering procedures in this study include: The use of library resources and content analysis to discover their meanings and messages embedded in the text and deep phenomenology interviews, and without any particular guidance for the interviewee, he was helped to talk about the descriptions of his experiences.

Validity in qualitative research data refers to the reality of the findings of the research. In this study, to determine the validity of findings, reality reconstructing validity was used. In this method, results were presented to the participants and they were confirmed regarding the accuracy and completeness. Method of data analysis in this study was reflective analysis or interaction using Van Manen's six-stage method. This method is a process in which researchers rely on their own intuitive judgments from the beginning to visualize the phenomenon in order to evaluate it.^[11]

In this research, along with paying attention to the phenomenon which has been the heart passion of the researcher, it was attempted to identify the phenomenon and find an orientation toward it. Then, the phenomenological questions were set and pre-assumptions and assumptions were described about the experiential curriculum before their meaningfulness was assessed by the students. Researchers' own experience was considered as the starting point in the study and then the students were interviewed. Qualitative research forces the researcher to think and reflect about the whole research process and its individual stages. The rotational relationship between collection and interpretation of data on the one hand and selection of the experimental materials on the other gives the researcher the possibility to fulfill the procedures, issues, and theories used, and the results could be examined through interviews. The classification of the research process in qualitative research to individual steps from each other is difficult. The researcher attempted to study the nature of the phenomenon, as students have experienced and made meaningful for themselves, free from prejudices and personal understandings and judgments. Then, to evaluate and analyze the experience of students, attempts were made to search terms in common use data obtained through interviews, survey memoirs, and describe them experimentally. By thinking on the main issues, it was tried to relate aspects of the phenomenon and isolate the statements related to the main issue. Finally, with regards to the content analysis of texts and hidden messages in them and comprehensive interviews, the main concepts were identified.

Research environment

In this study, using goal-oriented sampling, undergraduate and graduate (Master's degree) students majoring in Dentistry, Nursing at Islamic Azad University Khorasgan Branch, Esfahan, as well as those at Esfahan University of Medical Sciences were selected. Deep interview was used to collect data. The findings were analyzed using Van Manen's six-stage model. To determine the reliability of the findings, reliability of reality reconstruction was used.

RESULTS

Results were obtained in the two forms of inseparable and

simultaneously performed sections that are provided as follows:

- the design of the model of an experiential curriculum
- the accrediting of the model

Proposed model based on feministic approach to curriculum

Nodings, a feminist neo-conceptualist authority, in the introduction to "Teaching and Reflection on Curriculum" by Marshall, notes that one should not assume that curriculum is simply a written document teaching pre-designed courses such as Mathematics, English, and Social Studies. Most teachers and students do not look upon curriculum as a field of study; rather, they look upon it using a traditional approach.^[6] He does not believe in affected, pre-designed environments for education; rather, he finds learning and teaching possible in unaffected, real-life environments, normal and routine relations, and social relations.^[10]

Nodings maintains that a specific aspect of the post-modernist approach to curriculum is that it addresses curriculum from various aspects. It introduces new concepts on curriculum, concepts which lie between the social interrelations and curriculum, studying the role each plays to shape the other. He does not interpret Tyler's method as expressive of curricular development, but rather of curricular strictness.^[10]

Grumet observes that curriculum is in need of a conceptual reconstruction. One needs to go back to correct the conceptual structure which shapes our activities. To him, curriculum is the child of culture.^[12] Grumet portrays women's perceptions and experiences of education and its reconstruction within the epistemological system and the curriculum which shapes the discourse and performance of general education.^[13]

Considering the feministic perspective of curriculum, especially by NelNodinger, Madeleine Grumet, and Janet Miller, and considering the experiential curriculum model based on phenomenological approach^[14] and performing deep interviews, six main themes (the expected curriculum, imaginal curriculum, concealed curriculum, interactive curriculum, transferential curriculum, and self-determination) and three minor themes (pedagogical activities, covered curriculum, and parents' relationships) were extracted. Issues (levels) are as follows in Figure 2.

Expected curriculum: This curriculum states the addressee's expectation and prediction of the curriculum, and their expectations of what they are going to learn. Typically, the topic of each course carries specific meaning for the learner, which shapes the expected curriculum for each student. This, in fact, states the addressee's perspective of the target curriculum and what they think they will learn.

A female student of dentistry expresses her expectations from a course of Radiology as such: "I think the lesson radiology course is not interesting and it is not filled with variety, it is dry and uniform. We only deal with a series of cases for which we take several types of radiographs. However, I can just tolerate this class. I am sure that I will not select to become the expertise in this field."

Imaginal curriculum: This plane of the curriculum comprises an image shaped in students under the influence of social–historical structures and cultural expectations prior to entering the class.

Miller believes that structural relations and strata of cultural and social expectations as well as clichés turn into personal expectations. These expectations shape women's self-perceptions and their potentials for learning and teaching. Such structural relations influence their interest in class and curriculum. He maintains that historical, social, and cultural facts influencing the university play their parts in constructing this mental image. Educational strategies and curricula treat sex differences as an inherent rather than an accrued problem. Nancy Chadverve observes that women's personality is more often defined in relation to other people than men's.^[15]

A female student of dentistry expressed, "I assume that since male teachers' prospectives are overall and do not enter into the details, calling the role and absurd works are not important for them, however female teachers are more stringent, and lay more emphasis on the presence and absence of the students. This lesson, which is presented by a male faculty member, will be more beneficial for me."

Noodinges believes that being emotional and more compassionate is considered as weakness in the world of male; some women do everything they can to be deleted from this charge! Because of this problem, they seem more serious, drier, and more rigid. Whereas the process of education requires trained care of parents and maternal eyes, the absence of this relation makes the process difficult. He states that people's identities are gained in the process of social life and they can know themselves. When a person knows his own individual share in the social life and knows his participation as a member of the community, confirmation and authentication of people, behaviors, dialogs, behavior patterns, and what society considers as desirable and interesting play a fundamental role in approaches and methods that form one's individual life. He believes that institutions and centers of higher education usually want female teachers not to be a sympathizer and let education be relatively unmarked, insipid, and without emotions. In this case, these individuals have put aside emotional relationships and emotional education of their own life and household affairs and in fact they have removed such factors from the environment.^[10]

A female student of dentistry believes, "I think female faculty members are very exact and want to announce their strictness and that they are not less than men."

Miller expressed what are the constraints of form, of propriety, or proper academic demeanor and scholarly approach that force such accommodation, restraint, repression within me myself inside. At the same time, how aware I am of the existence of a forum that increases my efforts to resist against patterns of men's domination that constituted the world of a female professor? These are the questions that always occupy my mind. Women on campus who are in the network environment where men still have a life, seemingly filled with pride and spirit that

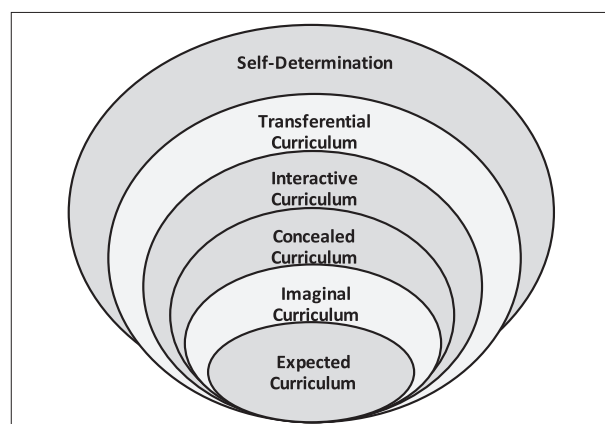


Figure 2: Experiential curriculum model based on feministic approach

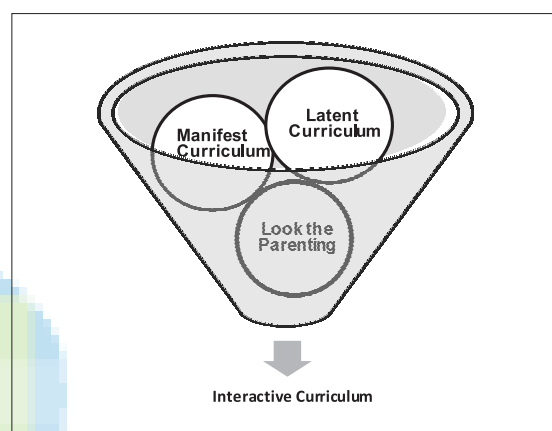


Figure 3: Interactive Curriculum

is constantly renewed, must sometimes confront the kind of views that question human capabilities in female master and teacher and also I feel like that only some parts of me work, separate parts are put together and act strangely.^[15]

Certainly, the expectations that women as teachers must think like men and be engaged in academic activities like men has caused some female faculty members to act in a dry fashion. The kind of behavior that Miller believes has disintegrated her, the parts that act separately. They behave like this to be permitted to enter the world of men's gain.

A male student of dentistry said: "Due to the less experience female teachers have in Dentistry, I think they do not possess the ability to teach the necessary skills courses."

Miller expressed that when academic women learn the practical ways to resist against the influence of repressive notions about the inability and being not practical, they can go on and become the world's best knower.^[15]

Concealed curriculum: This plane of curriculum comprises previous learning, experience, student's learning styles, and whatever they bring along to class and which affects further learning.

Interactive curriculum: The content of this curricular plane comprises three planes [Figure 3].

Manifest curriculum: Grumet finds this curricular plane being composed of participative ideologies achieved by efforts and astuteness. Put otherwise, he views this aspect of curriculum an opening or window which makes activities visible and comprises course credits, course period, current conventions, general education, and knowledge of computer, teacher's command, course work for humanities (seven major subjects emphasized by classical education) and reading.^[13] Nodings maintains that in formal studies and discussions of values, a discourse approach should be adopted. Like students, teachers must recognize the fact that they need to learn basically and broadly about values and that they can learn a lot in this respect from their students. In this process, teachers cooperate largely as responsible individuals, facilitators, and instructors. Teachers are hired to develop learning curricula; hence, they should involve students in designing educational curricula. They should encourage classroom discussions and decide through open discussion and discourse of issues. Nodings emphasizes discourse and discussion for moral education, application of individual experience, involvement in educational process, and proper use of life-related literature.^[10]

Grumet treats the content of Latent curriculum were opportunity determined by social class and the replication of labor/management relations in the classroom and the school.

Look the parenting: Grumet observes that a curriculum is living when it calls on students to review the identity of the curriculum through the parenting look and that it has a mechanical symbol when teachers and students are strict and cold under the influence of a gaze.^[13] He treats "Look" as a feministic-political event as understandable as a phenomenological event. Grumet views "Look" as a way to emphasize the subjectivity of the world, a channel among individuals. He believes that the origin of knowing depends on subjectivity, especially the original mother-child relation. Although parenting and educational roles are different, Grumet believes that they influence each other. For both, "Look" indicates the complexity of the relations governing familial and educational relations. Grumet views parenting look as containing the subjectivity and explicitness present in the child-parent as well as in learner-instructor relations.

Nodings believes that one should not ignore the motherly and loving and caring relation needed for education. Womanly qualities must be attended to in the curricular process. In classroom, in the teacher-student, student-student, and teacher-teacher relations, sympathy must receive focal attention.^[10]

Grumet poses the basic question of whether education must interfere with the mutual teacher-student relations. Parenting relations make mutual relations possible for this kind of relation is shaped and changed over time.^[10] Nodings believes that educational institutions and centers commonly require female teachers to stop being sympathetic and engage in anonymous,

mechanical, and emotion-free education. Grumet observes that the child-parent story is that of exchange of looks (a short and fleeting look). The educational look is unidirectional and indirect which sees students only. This issue is not simple in the teacher's activities in modern schools. The educational look needs to see and to be seen by others. Curriculum itself is an archive of looks, an ordered collection to supply, and reveals the symbols and signs of our shared experience. With this perspective, the teacher reacts to the curriculum as a sign and symbol of life which calls on us to come back to the world.^[13]

A male MA student of nursing believes: "Women classroom teachers are drier and less attractive. Their words are gentler; that is why they are not good for more serious aspects of lessons that are more realistic, such as emergency department care unit."

A male dentistry student states that male teachers in the classroom have stability and moral hauteur and are assertive. Class control is easier for them. Their language is more understandable.

A female nursing student states that female professors act according to the law and do the teaching accordingly. Men professors try to interact with the students and try to provide convincing arguments.

A female dentistry student asserts that women are serious and talk quickly, men are active and happy.

A male dentistry student believes that female teachers have a nice personality and attend to students more, but male teachers are more educated and transfer the concepts more easily.

Transfereential curriculum: Grumet believes that transference is a psychoanalytic concept suggestive of past reproductive models in the existing relations.^[10] In the opinion of Pinar and Grumet, every individual looks for meaning in the current life events. For this reason, when faced with problems and events, they go back to their past to historically recognize the origin of the problem and map out the possible directions for future. Hence, curriculum turns into a process of re-understanding and exposing the individual experience for future use, and the individuals attain further understanding of their self, other individuals, and the world by re-conceptualization.^[16]

This concept makes reference to the process of attaching feelings and attitudes to individuals involved with unfavorable events and accidents. Psychoanalysis involves analysis of transference. Should these feelings and attitudes affect the individual's conduct and performance as characteristic of them, this process maps out and makes possible the course to one's original dependencies.^[13]

Grumet believes Lakan always treats transference as dependent on the individual who knows and on another individual aware of this meaning, and when it releases the symbolic control process. Thus, transference is a process by which we try to preliminarily introduce ourselves to teacher via symbolic instructions. When we ask them questions about methods and techniques, we are suggesting past the process of transference.

Our dependence on them often makes us pretend that they know. In fact, we ask questions to connect with them. Astonished, we desire to maintain the dependency chain hanging on our necks. All of our symbolic (linguistic) activities are affected by interest in and concern for others. Language cannot express the concept of “self” separately and independently of others.^[13]

Nodings observes that people acquire their identities in the process of social life and manage to know themselves. When the individual finds himself sharing in the social life, he participates in it, believing himself to be a member of the society. Others’ acknowledgments, confirmations, conduct, dialogs, and whatsoever the society has concern in the individual’s approaches and methods as well as shaping of life. The structure of schools should be of such a nature as to foster friendship and intimacy among friends so that they express their daily emotions and contribute to life in an unpretentious relation.^[10]

A male dentistry student believes: “Type of relationship of female faculty members with students is such a manner that causes students to be engaged in various activities, students participate in courses and students dare ask questions and give comments in class. Some male teachers do not let the students speak their own words, and if a student wanted to give theoretical comments, the instructors would immediately mock him.”

A male dentistry student believes: “I often felt a kind of fear in distant past when I wanted to ask questions in classes from male teachers, and perhaps it still continues now that I’ve become a teacher and sometimes the confidence to question vanishes in me or I get a type of anxiety.”

Grumet observes that if we treat teaching as a process containing transference in teachers and students, we should be aware of the original look and original gaze which contributes to the early formation of individual identity. Teaching and learning involves studying the process of transference in lecture classrooms. We should study the golden roles of pedagogy. Like art, teaching involves studying the process of transference. We build our pedagogy not only on our feelings but also on why and how students’ feelings are influenced as well as on the method we apply in teaching.^[13]

Self-determination: Grumet observes that curriculum is our struggle in wanting and self-determination via making a world for children who understand and break the constraints encompassing them.^[13]

Nodings believes that teachers must encourage classroom discussions and help learners make decisions through open discussions and discourses of issues. Grumet believes that “belonging and affiliation” are linked to weakness, inability, as well as family, particularly to women. The world of the general public and symbols taken as a defense against restrictions on familial intimacy have exerted their influence, tenaciously affecting the intimacy of mother–child relations and carrying it away from ordinary course.^[10]

Grumet maintains that quest for an everlasting moral value-based curriculum is a project which delineates the degrees of influence and protected communication of children, teachers, parents, and a situation involving other influences. The common, accepted favorable goal of all national schools is to expand the classical concept of education. Understanding the family, neighbors, neighborhood, and the state is looked upon as a vain effort. The morals in making decisions on curriculum has always hinged upon values with the weakest bond to major clients and the strongest bond to unknown people.^[13]

This level of curriculum experience which is the final stage has two sections: 1) short-term outcomes which develop in the context of the university with professors, students, family, and local community and 2) long-term outcomes which happen in the context of society and in relation to family life and professional persons after graduation, which could not be addressed in this research. This can be pursued after graduation of the students and review their behavior in the context of society for validation purposes at this level.

CONCLUSIONS

When reference is made to lived experience, it is not meant to say that the only source for determining a situation is individual experience. Rather than emphasize the various problems simply, emphasis is laid on the role of individual experience, thus attaching absolute validity to it. The aim is to recognize individual experience and attend to the teaching and learning processes from the learners’ perspective in order to understand something by which it would be possible to increase the curricular influence ability index in learners. This, in itself, is a basic step in promoting the pedagogical process.

Ted Aoki believes that curriculum taken as a lived experience consists of the real world in curriculum taken as what has been lived and what learners and teachers have experienced; that is, living and being in direct contact with each and every student with unique interests, abilities, and characteristics. This, in fact, is what has been overlooked in curriculum development.^[4]

The experienced curricular model emphasizes the fact that learning is something more than a collection of data and facts. Learning influences the path a person adopts to travel in future. It also influences their attitude and personality and becomes internalized in the process of experience.^[17]

In the process of education, the principal question is always: How can education affect and change man’s behavior into culturally valuable conduct? What experiences do students learn in classrooms? What sorts of experience are curricula unique to each student and developed as a result of classroom interactions based? How can curriculum affect them? Under what conditions is their learning institutionalized?

In response to these questions, every effort has been made to prepare teachers in the course of teaching and dealing with learners to learn the skills of planning their lessons, managerial

skills, classroom management, evaluation and presentation skills, and whatever is technical and professional. However, this is not sufficient. Put more precisely, educational activities require a structure to create critical thinking and provide the ground for introspection and self-reflection. To achieve this purpose, it is necessary to review the curriculum from the point of view of students for whom the curriculum is conducted and from the viewpoint of the target community as well as of the major decision-makers for the curriculum. It is also necessary to see the image that we have formed of the higher education curriculum and has somehow affected the learning.

Miller believes: "When academic women continue to work to understand ways in which we might resist the infiltration, in our minds and hearts, of oppressive conceptions of our (dis)ability and (un)desirability of action, we can continue to move toward truly becoming knowers in our words".^[15] Some of the students believed that astringency and dry attitude of female faculty members is because they want to prove themselves in the world of men. As a result, they act more masculine than men do since the education system has been formed and shaped with this view and they are expected to become "other."

Nodings believes that understanding the curriculum, the men, and their needs have been considered as indicators of curriculum and their characteristics have been used in this connection. Women are asked to become others. Noding believes that education should not be unrelated to maternal and righteous acts. She expresses that the institutes and educational centers usually want female teachers to put aside the feeling of being a sympathizer and do the training in a relatively unmarked, insipid manner, and without emotion.^[10] Being a more emotional and caring woman in the world is being considered to be a weakness; some women take all efforts to clean up these charges! Because of this problem, they are viewed as being more serious and more rigid. This study was followed by the notion concerned with the necessity of parental, maternal, and righteous relationships, the kind of relationships that have been neglected during the training process and curriculum development, the point that the students had also admitted.^[10] Gramt believes that education requires a conceptual reconstruction and to be seen by others. In this regard, concepts and ideas should be drawn from women's perceptions and experiences within the education system and the epistemology and functional discourse of the curriculum should be reformed.^[13] In the proposed model, parental look has been proposed as an interactive curriculum level. This level is an open invitation to the curriculum decision-makers for careful attention to the issue that has long been so neglected or has been deliberately deleted from the commands of the higher education and the deprivation of which has influenced the learning process and achieving sage. In the proposed model, the level constitutes a null curriculum which aims to draw the attention of those

involved in higher education system. The purpose of this study was not to thoroughly discard the technical and professional aspects of teaching, but the importance of this research was to consider those aspects of teaching that were neglected and forgotten, the aspects that phenomenologists lay emphasis on. The present study, as a research model, provides a broad insight and the possibility for all planners and those involved in higher education to consider all aspects of the curriculum system of higher education and not just be confined to the formal curriculum.

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