

# ***The values of citizenship in a cooperative classroom: early career teachers perspectives***

Kate Ferguson-Patrick, University of Newcastle, Australia, [kate.fergusonpatrick@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:kate.fergusonpatrick@newcastle.edu.au)

*The explicit teaching of cooperative skills should become an integral part of teachers' pedagogy to encourage our students to become multi-dimensional citizens, as well as encourage our students to have a 'communicative capacity' and take 'communicative action' (Habermas 1984; 1987, as cited in Lovat and Toomey, 2007). 'Multi-dimensional citizenship' centres on joint social and public action demonstrating that "citizens must be able to work and interact with other people in a variety of settings and contexts...as well as ...deal respectfully with people whose ideas and values differ from their own" (Cogan, Grossman, & Mei-Hui-Lui, 2000, p.51). Our young citizens-our children –need to work together in cooperation and be able to share viewpoints as well as learn to deal with others' ideas respectfully. Cooperative learning helps students to develop ideas and practices about the need to be critical and reflective about the multiplicity of viewpoints in their nation and throughout the world- it thus enables multidimensional citizenship.*

*This research paper analyses the responses of six teachers during initial semi-structured interviews conducted as a part of a wider research project. Teacher responses were analysed according to their initial understandings of cooperative learning and its relationship to good pedagogy, as well as to ascertain any links these early career teachers made between this and multidimensional citizenship. These interviews were administered before the teachers' embarked on a journey of implementing cooperative learning practices into their classrooms. Although most of the early career teachers were aware of both the pedagogical and social benefits of using cooperative learning, they did not use it often but were aware of its benefits for their students. The implications of the study show the need for an increased focus on cooperative learning through professional learning.*

## ***Introduction: citizenship in a cooperative classroom***

This paper explores the interview responses of six early career teachers who are part of a wider study exploring how professional development in cooperative learning and action research can assist beginning teachers to improve their use/ practice of cooperative learning. One facet of the study was a semi-structured interview at the pre-intervention stage of the study. It was conducted with each teacher participant in order to determine the early career teachers' initial understandings of cooperative learning and its relationship to general classroom pedagogy.

It is argued by Grossman (2000) that a broader conceptualization of citizenship should be taken. His argument was that all dimensions can be considered in a single model called a Multidimensional Citizenship model, "requiring citizens to address a series of interconnected dimensions of thought, belief and action", with these four dimensions briefly explained as:

**PERSONAL:** A personal capacity for and commitment to a civic ethic characterized by responsible habits of mind, heart, and action

**SOCIAL:** Capacity to live and work together for civic purposes

**SPATIAL:** Capacity to see oneself as a member of several overlapping communities – local, regional, national, and multinational

**TEMPORAL:** Capacity to locate present challenges in the context of both past and future in order to focus on long-term solutions to the difficult challenges we face (Grossman, 2000, pp.80-81).

Working collaboratively is an essential facet of multidimensional citizenship and multidimensional citizenship can be developed with the use of cooperative learning, particularly in the dimensions of 'social' and 'spatial' as students recognise their interconnectedness and capacity to work alongside each other. By developing students into cooperative and multidimensional citizens, they are then more likely to take "responsibility for roles and duties within society" (Cogan & Morris, 2001, p.51) If we want to develop such critical, reflective and compassionate citizens then as teachers we should focus on developing these cooperative skills from the early years of schooling.

The development of civics education in Australia has led to the recent development of National Statements of Learning for Civics and Citizenship (Curriculum Corporation, 2006) with the importance of cooperation being stressed in these statements at both primary and secondary level. Students in the primary school in year three should "explore reasons why people cooperate in groups and consider values that communities share to help them live and work together. They develop skills to make decisions in groups to achieve common goals" (p.5) and students in year five should "investigate the range of ways in which people work together to contribute to civil society and discuss values that can help people resolve differences and achieve consensus...as well as... participate in activities that celebrate diversity and support social cohesion " (p.6). References in these statements to making decisions in groups to achieve common goals, discussing values that can help people resolve differences, and achieving consensus between diverse views are all areas that are developed when teaching students how to work collaboratively in the classroom.

### ***The value of collaboration and cooperation in student learning***

The social dimension of teaching is crucial for enhancing citizenship skills with positive interpersonal relationships between teachers and students, as well as students and students, being significant in the promotion of student learning. If teachers select instructional methods, or pedagogical strategies, that model the importance of collaboration, then both emotional and academic developments can occur. Collaboration is the key to developing such relationships and in turn the child's individual capacities. The trusting relationships that are built from collaboration are crucial in the development of both the children's emotional as well as academic development, as in a climate which is built upon supportive trust, student learning can thrive (Lovat & Toomey, 2007). Research conducted by Saronson states "the overarching goal of a teacher is to light intellectual fires, to make the world of learning and ideas interesting and self-propelling; that is, to engender in students the desire to know more" (Saronson, 1993, p.52). When using cooperative learning in the classroom, which is built upon trust, then the teacher is more likely to be able to light such intellectual fires as students explore the multitude of viewpoints, and thus students are more open to perspectives of citizenship.

The focus on cooperation in the early years is crucial in order to later develop students with the capacity to collaborate. Cooperative learning is a set of strategies and principles designed to promote both social and academic learning whereas collaboration is a general term which considers the importance of people working together for different purposes. In cooperative learning specific skills of collaboration are taught. Cooperative

learning is appropriate for younger children as they require careful and explicit teaching of the required cooperative social skills (Bruffee, 1984, 1995).

Collaboration is an essential aspect of pedagogical quality (Williams & Sheridan, 2006) suggesting the need for teachers to ensure there are numerous collaborative learning experiences planned for their students. The National Goals for Schooling (MCEETYA, 1999) suggest that students should develop strengths and expertise in collaboration by the time they leave school and many theorists have suggested that "children learn through, among other things, collaboration and togetherness" (Williams & Sheridan, 2006, p. 84). The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling for the Twenty-First Century (MCEETYA, 1999) further states, "schooling should develop fully the talents and capacities of all students. In particular when students leave schools they should: have the capacity for, and skills to collaborate with others (1.1)." The research behind this declaration includes the need for collaboration and the importance of a 'communicative capacity' (Lovat, 2005). This communicative capacity allows students to develop the kinds of trusting relationships that allow them to explore the multitude of viewpoints in their classrooms and come to see their own "life-world as just one that needs to function in a myriad of life-worlds" (Lovat & Toomey, 2007, p.9).

Interactions among students are crucial to cooperative learning and the interactions that occur in the groups help to facilitate the learning (Gillies, 2002) with positive relationships occurring as students help each other and enhance thinking. In cooperative groups students are more likely to demonstrate the ability to provide explanations and instructions and develop implicit understanding of the needs of other group members than in other types of groups. Cooperative Learning has strong research evidence suggesting it as an effective strategy in maximising learning outcomes of all students (Gillies, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2000; Slavin, 1995, 1996) as well as social skills development (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1990; Slavin, 1995, 1996; Stevens & Slavin, 1995). Using cooperative learning strategies, teachers carefully scaffold the teaching / learning experience by teaching social skills, assigning roles, and sub-tasks. It is a structured style of learning which involves heterogeneous groups participating face to face in clearly structured tasks with a common goal, ensuring all students participate through careful allocation of roles or sub-tasks, to ensure positive interdependence and individual accountability (Gillies & Boyle, 2006; Johnson & Johnson, 1994; Slavin, 1987). Additionally it requires time for reflection based on both task outcomes and social skills.

"When children work cooperatively together, they learn to give and receive help, share their ideas and listen to other students' perspectives, seek new ways of clarifying differences, resolving problems, and constructing new understandings and knowledge. The result is that students attain higher academic outcomes and are more motivated to achieve than they would be if they worked alone" (Gillies, 2003, p.35).

However, despite the research indicating its success, cooperative learning is under utilised in schools (Muijs & Reynolds, 2005). Teacher selection of instructional strategies which do not require students to be grouped can be explained by the "increased pressure to meet academic standards using individualized tests" (Darling-Hammond, Aness, & Fauk as cited in Lopata, Miller, & Miller, 2003, p.237) causing teachers to refrain from selecting cooperative learning lessons, instead focussing on individual tasks.

Additionally the tensions for early career teachers in their first years of teaching suggest that they may be less likely to use this strategy as they "grapple with the demands of teaching full time which include programming, catering for a range of student needs, assessment and reporting and the overriding issues of classroom management" (Ewing

& Manuel; Ewing & Smith; Khamis & Manuel as cited in McCormack, Gore and Thomas, 2006, p.96). Even though, as Feiman-Nemser (2001) argues, these early career teachers “must create and maintain a classroom which is not only productive of student learning but is also safe and respectful...and... this can be achieved through building a classroom culture which promotes cooperation” (McCormack, Gore, & Thomas, 2006, p.104) these teachers are more likely to revert to more teacher centered, didactic approaches in their survival mode. This could also be as a result of what Khamis (2000) describes as “the anguish of compromise... where their ideas, actions or teaching may conflict with the prevailing professional climate of the school” (McCormack et al., 2006, p.109). Feiman-Nemser (2001) argues further that “a major role of induction into teaching is to assist early career teachers to enact and broaden their early repertoire of teaching skills by not abandoning these completely for safer, less complex activities or actions, but by developing and extending these skills with an understanding of their new work environment and context” (McCormack et al., 2006) and it is this focus that this research project takes supporting these teachers to see the value of cooperative learning and how it can support the development of multidimensional citizens.

### ***Cooperative learning, multidimensional citizenship and a communicative capacity in the classroom***

The links between cooperative learning/ collaborative learning and multidimensional citizenship can be enhanced by developing in students ‘a communicative capacity’. The essence of Habermas’ (1984;1987) definition of ‘a communicative capacity’ is “challenging students to see that whatever beliefs and values they brought with them are but one set, one life-world...and that they should “consider the life worlds of others” (cited in Lovat and Toomey, 2007, p.9). This definition considers how self reflection of one’s own life world enables a knowing and understanding of a student’s life as being only a part of many life worlds (Lovat & Toomey, 2007). I would suggest that cooperative learning enables a ‘communicative capacity’ to be developed with students developing an understanding of many others’ beliefs and values and through this exploration being able to consider others’ viewpoints and values. Research conducted by Cogan and Morris (2001) suggest that important values to be focussed upon should include:

- “Democratic values (e.g., equity, majority rules, rule of law, freedoms).
- Civic life and community values (e.g., individual rights, local needs, common good).
- Social cohesion/diversity (e.g., tolerance, social justice, acceptance, common good).
- Family values (e.g., respect, support, protection, moral behavior, togetherness).
- Self-cultivation (e.g., truth, law-abiding, honesty, civility, helping others).”(Cogan & Morris, 2001, p.7).

These values link clearly to Grossman’s model of multi-dimensional citizenship with the personal, social, spatial and temporal dimensions clearly evidenced (Grossman, 2000).

I would further suggest that if teachers allow an exploration of such values then students are able to move towards “tolerance and understanding and social justice” and this will allow them to make a difference to their community with a personal responsibility and commitment, which in turn can lead to practical action that can make a difference (Lovat & Toomey, 2007).

In a cooperative learning environment, which promotes *equity* and *common good*, teachers develop the skills of conflict resolution *where majority rules, acceptance* and *respect* are taught and this communicative action can be realised. Advanced group work skills such as, respecting other people’s ideas and opinions, negotiating, mediating

when others can't agree and suggesting and persuading instead of bossing also help to develop understandings of social justice and *togetherness*. The cooperative learning environment also encourages *truth*, *honesty* and understanding about *helping others*. The Commonwealth commissioned, and Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (*MEETYA*) supported Education Study, which identified some key principles for values education, argues that teachers should additionally "help students exercise ethical judgement and social responsibility" (Curriculum Corporation, 2003, p.10). The National Framework's values included nine values for Australian schooling. These values also reflect the need for strong personal relationships whereby students can exhibit an understanding of respect, responsibility, tolerance and an understanding of pursuing and protecting the common good.

In order to develop the kinds of attitudes and values that will encourage students to embrace diversity, with a sense of responsibility to others and their world, and to be individuals committed to universal values, human rights, sustainable futures and conflict resolution through negotiation (Grossman, 2000), the early career teachers in this study were asked to reflect upon the links between cooperative learning and the development of students' understandings, skills, values and attitudes in the classroom. The teaching and learning cycle suggested by Grossman (2000) (students learning first about themselves (Knowing), then understanding oneself and others (Understanding), moving on to accepting, respecting and appreciating oneself and others (Valuing) and finally being able to decision make and use effective communication (Acting)), demonstrates a holistic approach to citizenship education (Grossman, 2000, p.15). This cycle concurs well with cooperative learning as heterogeneous groups of students develop an understanding of the importance of themselves (individual accountability), as well as the whole group (positive interdependence), as they work towards a common goal using social skills which require negotiation and respect in order to act in decision making processes.

## ***Findings***

### ***Initial understandings of cooperative learning***

The six teachers selected for this project all work in the Catholic and Independent school systems in the primary school sector. They are all in their first, second or third year of teaching. Their classes range from year one to year six (students aged from 6-12). The interview responses were categorised according to teacher reporting of frequency of use of cooperative learning, understanding about good teaching and cooperative learning, teacher perceived advantages and disadvantages for teachers when using cooperative learning, and advantages and disadvantages for learners by using cooperative learning. For this particular paper's focus, in order to determine how teachers view the value of some of the key features of multidimensional citizenship these interviews were then further analysed. An analysis was undertaken of how these teachers recognised the importance of encouraging their students to respect others' viewpoints, become thoughtful, caring and reflective citizens and resolve conflict in a non-violent way developing this communicative capacity. Key themes associated with values of multidimensional citizenship emerged. These themes included; respect and risk taking; open discussion and forming argument; appreciation and tolerance; thinking and challenging; mutual respect and valuing of students; interdependence of students and the value of recognition of all students' strengths.

### ***The values of citizenship in cooperative classrooms***

#### **Respect and risk taking**

Trusting relationships are crucial in these early career teachers' classrooms, especially given that they want to develop students who can, "*deal respectfully with people whose ideas and values differ from their own*" (Cogan et al., 2000, p.51). One teacher, Jill, acknowledged that students' needs are important and social support was necessary to encourage students to be able to risk take. In her classroom it was possible to see,

*"...children concentrating, but you'll also see them smiling, you'll also see a little bit of restlessness because that's okay I don't want a rigid classroom. You'll be hearing people make mistakes, you'll be hearing the positive feedback after that mistake I hope, just seeing an overall view of the students intermingling with each other and feeling comfortable with each other... just hearing discussions amongst the students and conversations and hopefully no putdowns"* (Jill)

If cooperative team skills (social skills) are taught in classrooms then there is more likely to be increased group solidarity. In such an environment, the value of all students' contributions leads to a classroom environment with strong mutual respect. Trusting relationships are seen as crucial in such quality learning environments (Lovat & Toomey, 2007) and in such environments respect and risk taking are crucial.

Jill also claimed that the thinking involved in a good cooperative task, helps her students to be such risk takers. This teacher demonstrated an understanding of the importance of the NSW Quality Teaching element of *high expectations* where students are encouraged to take risks as they engage in challenging tasks (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003). Her students engage in the kind of tasks requiring higher order critical analysis needed to become such multidimensional citizens,

*"I am really happy with the way their thought process has changed and how open they are now to accepting a mistake and going out there and saying something, knowing that, thinking to themselves 'oh this may not be right, I may be way off track here but I'm going to actually have a go' and that's the part, that's really struck home..."*(Jill)

The multidimensional citizen needs to be able "to work and interact with other people in a variety of settings and contexts...as well as ...deal respectfully with people whose ideas and values differ from their own" (Cogan et al., 2000, p.51) and to do this they need to be able to take risks in contributing their viewpoints in a respectful environment.

### **'Lighting fires' with open discussion and forming argument**

When designing open ended cooperative learning tasks, teachers are more able to be focussed toward designing such learning tasks which can "light intellectual fires" (Saronson, 1993, p.52). These tasks require students to discuss values, be able to resolve differences, and achieve consensus. By using cooperative learning strategies, teachers can encourage their students to form intellectual and persuasive arguments, and engage in critical analysis, as well as be more able to see others' perspectives and develop thoughtful and reasoned judgements. When using cooperative learning Jill states she is more likely to consider open ended tasks, which in turn promoted open discussion, "*doing PMI's and discussions, open discussion, to come out with all these different ideas, and that's what I think's great about collaborative learning* (Jill)."

Additionally, it is important to establish a Quality Learning Environment, by developing tasks that encourage students to assume some responsibility for either "the choice of activities, time spent on activities, pace of the lesson or criteria by which they will be assessed" demonstrates high *student direction* (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003, p.36). This helps to develop the desire for students to know more and light such intellectual fires. At times the teachers in the study recognised the need for students to determine significant

aspects of the task, recognising the need for this student direction in their classrooms (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003). They also reiterated that the cooperative learning tasks that they talked about planning tended to be more exciting enabling *“the groups ...to... see what they can come up with (Bill).”* Bill recognised that his students are at times able to develop student direction, and Jill also acknowledges this ability to light intellectual fires as she explains: *“with three or four ideas, you’ve got four minds here that’ll come up with four each and there’s a lot of brainstorming going on” (Jill).*

The importance of Intellectual Quality is evident when teachers also design open ended tasks which encourage *higher order thinking* (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003). When using such strategies, intellectual fires can be lit with student direction encouraging the desire to know more. The fact that one teacher recognised that *“there’s a lot of the higher order skills like analysing things or creating things that lends itself more to group work” (Jill)* demonstrates the point that teachers are more likely to plan such tasks which require analysis, creativity and evaluation when planning cooperative tasks. Students who engage in such cooperative tasks are required to share their viewpoints, reflect on a variety of viewpoints and develop reasoned viewpoints.

### **Appreciation and tolerance**

Acceptance and tolerance were also highlighted as being important values in these teachers’ rooms. Cooperative learning enables Elizabeth’s students to appreciate and accept others. When her students work in cooperative groups it helps to build trusting relationships that allow them to explore the multitude of viewpoints in their classrooms, and helps them come to see their own life-world as just one (Lovat & Toomey, 2007).

*“It [cooperative learning] can definitely benefit because you’re, if you’re working with a group and you sort of, it helps you appreciate and be exposed to different, you know, cultures, religion, societies and it’s like that peer thing, oh you know, I don’t do that, such and such does. So it’s sort of like a, acceptance at a young age, other religions, cultures and, you know, why people do it a certain way. So that’s where I think cooperative learning would definitely help which is sort of assists in becoming more tolerant” (Elizabeth).*

Elizabeth recognised that it is important for her students to “deal respectfully with people whose ideas and values differ from their own” (Cogan et al., 2000, p.51). It’s interesting too that she is coming to grips with the understanding that when using cooperative learning it develops students’ abilities to discuss and compare viewpoints on issues. She is still concerned that students have a ‘live and let live’ attitude. She doesn’t believe at this point in time that critical analysis and reflection about different viewpoints should be able to change their own viewpoints. She states;

*“if you sort of set your students up, okay you’re not going to have the same opinion as everyone else, but that’s the idea, is that you accept other people’s opinions and you have your own opinion and no one’s trying to change sort of” (Elizabeth).*

This suggests that Elizabeth needs to go further and understand herself that she may need to also “see that whatever beliefs and values...she has ... brought with ...her... are but one set, one life-world...and that ...she... should also start to “consider the life worlds of others” (Lovat and Toomey, 2007, p.9).

### **Thinking and challenging**

Students experience a variety of views, whilst examining and sometimes challenging their own preconceived values, as they work with others in collaboration. In this capacity they learn valuable lifelong skills, such as, giving

and receiving help; sharing ideas and thereby constructing new understandings from different perspectives (Gillies, 2003). Suzy recognises the importance of designing challenging tasks to encourage such diverse thinking that requires students to move out of their comfort zone by experiencing others' viewpoints and developing this multidimensional citizenship.

*"I guess to me good teaching is challenging students and pushing them out of their comfort zone and making them think about something" (Suzy)*

### **Mutual respect and valuing of students**

If cooperative team skills (social skills) are explicitly taught, there is more likely to be increased group solidarity. In such a cooperative environment, the value of all students' contributions leads to a classroom environment with strong mutual respect. Elizabeth clearly acknowledged that her students' needs are important and that social support is necessary to encourage her students to be able to risk take. This early career teacher advocates the importance of strong positive reinforcement to develop such an environment,

*"Good teaching is good management, good positive reinforcement, good content knowledge and being prepared and being the actor, like always draw your kids in" (Elizabeth)*

Additionally, the modelling of lifelong learning, and a love of learning, are important to Jill who wants to develop this strong mutual respect in her classroom,

*"Good teaching is knowing your student, knowing your student, caring, I think is, caring about your student, caring about the words that come out of your mouth, continually learning to grow and learn yourself, forever researching yourself, never, just lead by example. Show the children that you are continually wanting to learn yourself, do it in front of the children" (Jill).*

Valuing the contribution of all students is important as Suzy argues the need to cater for all learning styles,

*"so doing things in a variety of ways to cater for that so that all students sort of feel motivated by at least something in the lesson" (Suzy).*

### **Interdependence of students**

Multidimensional citizens need to have this sense of responsibility for others in society and teachers can help students to develop this sense of their "responsibility for roles and duties within society," (Cogan & Morris, 2001, p.51) by encouraging responsibility within the classroom. If students develop an understanding of individual accountability in their classrooms, for example understanding that each student is responsible for learning all parts of the material / task; or needs to have completed and shared their own part of a task; or fulfilled a specific role within the task, then that shared learning responsibility helps complete the task.

*"I've told them that they have to help each other because the outcome, whatever I give you depends on all of you, one child can't just do it" (Polly).*

*"Cooperative learning, it has to have, and I do remember something about it has to have everybody contributing the same, where group work necessarily does not have to..."(Polly).*

This dependence on each other is crucial as they begin to understand that each person in the group is positively interdependent on the others with each group member's individual accountability being crucial for success in the task. This then helps to develop ideas about future communicative action with an understanding of personal responsibility and commitment.

## **Heterogeneous groupings – recognising all students’ strengths**

One of the benefits of cooperative learning, and one of the key elements of the model as developed by Johnson and Johnson (1994) and Slavin (1987), is the use of heterogeneous grouping structures. Students need to recognise that all students in the class have strengths and that the strengths of one student should be able to complement the needs of another. By working in heterogeneous grouping structures, the use of cooperative learning assists students to recognise these strengths and needs, and helps them learn to work with all students in the classroom. A number of the teachers formally state that they do not like to group certain students together due to classroom management issues,

*“but it does make it harder management wise but I mean you don’t teach for an easy job” (Jane)*

but they also acknowledge the importance of all students working together,

*“That’s what I’m trying to push so the whole getting along, and we do a ‘you can do it’ program here which is all about resiliency and part of that is learning to get along with other people and learning to accept you can’t always get your own way. That’s a big thing for kids at this age when you get to a group work situation.” (Bill)*

Bill goes on to state the importance of this acceptance of working with all students in the classroom,

*“If they know now I’m not always going to get my own way and I’ve got to learn to work with people that I may not necessarily be friends with, it’s going to help”(Bill)*

Appreciation and acceptance is another advantage that Bill recognised can result in students working in a cooperative group. Students who work in such cooperative tasks should be able “to work and interact with other people in a variety of settings and contexts...as well as ...deal respectfully with people whose ideas and values differ from their own” (Cogan et al., 2000, p.51).

## **Conclusion**

The trusting relationships that are built through cooperative strategies in these teachers’ classrooms will develop collaborative skills that are crucial for the development of both the children’s emotional, as well as academic development. In a climate built upon supportive trust, and where students share viewpoints, as well as learn to deal with others’ ideas respectfully, student learning can thrive (Lovat & Toomey, 2007). Students need to recognise that they are both positively interdependent and individually accountable to other students and must be able to interact with different types of people in different settings and contexts as well as be able to get along with people whose values are different to their own if they are to become multidimensional citizens.

The findings demonstrate that although these early career teachers know cooperative learning is something that they believe they should be using, they mostly acknowledge that it is simply group work that is occurring in their classrooms.

*“I think I know what it is but whether because of the class I’ve got or my lack of practice, whether I do it very well. I don’t know how much mine usually is cooperative, rather than group work” (Polly)*

Additionally they acknowledge the management issues that they struggle with when trying to use cooperative group work,

"Initially this year I've been most put off group work because of the behavioural needs of this class. They were most unsettled when they came in this year" (Suzy)

Although they admit the challenges, all of these teachers demonstrate they want to know more, and that they believe it is a valuable strategy,

"they're going to each bring different knowledge, and by doing it together it deepens their understandings because they're talking, so it creates a learning environment that's going to lead to that deep knowledge and deep understanding thing, because it'll be, I think it'll be a much richer learning experience than just the one idea, provided they can work together to do it." (Polly)

This final statement also suggests that many of the teachers do not realise the key role they as teachers have in facilitating cooperative learning in their classrooms.

When involving students in cooperative learning, teachers can help to develop understandings about democracy; civic life, community and family values; social cohesion/diversity as well as self-cultivation (Cogan & Morris, 2001). I suggest that these early career teachers, with good professional learning opportunities, will further develop their understandings about cooperative learning so that change should occur to both their practice and confidence in using these strategies. It will be interesting to see whether these cooperative strategies allow the students to "step out of the shadow of one's upbringing and cultural heritage, to challenge...one's own deep seated comfort zone of beliefs and behaviours...and in doing so...consider the life-worlds of others" (Lovat & Toomey, 2007, p.9).

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