Managing change in the Adult Migrant English Program

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ABSTRACT

Teachers undergoing institutional change require professional development to support them through the initial change period. Previous studies of change in education have highlighted self-directed professional development and a collaborative work environment as important elements for the successful implementation of new systems and practices. Through peer-assisted reflective practice, involving non-judgmental discourse, teachers can draw on experiential knowledge in finding solutions to concerns, while promoting a more collaborative work environment. This article reports on a study to evaluate the use of Cooperative Development, a form of peer-assisted reflective practice, during program change in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) in Perth, Australia.

Introduction

At the beginning of the 2006 academic year, AMEP teachers at Perth Central TAFE¹ were required to teach a class at a level they were not accustomed to teaching. This initiative came from the Program Manager, who felt that teachers and students would benefit from such a change. Many teachers had taught students at the same level for a number of years, and teaching a different level demanded significant adjustments in the style and content of lessons and general approaches to teaching.

A survey of teachers, administered prior to implementing the initiative, posed a question about what professional support teachers would like to see in relation to the proposed change. Of the 16 teachers surveyed, 15 chose peer-assisted professional development activities from a list of choices. Consulting with colleagues was also chosen by 14 teachers. The teachers clearly identified a preference for self-development, involving peer collaboration, to support them through what could have been a period of major professional upheaval.

This article briefly reviews literature on educational change and introduces the style of professional support adopted during the educational change at Perth Central TAFE. It then outlines a research project evaluating the use of Cooperative Development as a means of collaboratively dealing with educational change (Butorac 2006) and draws conclusions and recommendations from the study.

Change in education

Change has been a defining aspect of educational institutions in English-speaking countries for the past 50 years (Fullan 2001: 4). It has also been a significant feature of publicly funded English as a Second Language programs delivered to adult immigrants to Australia. These programs have had to respond to demographic and pedagogic changes, increased levels of scrutiny with respect to performance standards, and increased accountability to funding providers.

Schön (1971: 30) claims that constant social and institutional change represents a loss of the stable state, in response to which ‘we must invent and develop institutions which are learning systems; that is to say, systems capable of bringing about their own continuing transformation’. He suggests an existential model of learning, incorporating non-rational elements, where knowing derives from observing and reflecting on the here-and-now, and using conclusions from this process to make projections onto new, comparable situations.

According to Fullan (2001: 289), ‘educational change involves learning how to do something new [and] [g]iven this, if there is any single factor crucial to change, it is professional development’. Fullan acknowledges that there is a place for skill-training workshops in the ongoing professional development of teachers but maintains that it is through reflective practice that reculturing takes place. This is ‘how teachers come to question and change their beliefs and habits’ (Fullan 2001: 34). He also maintains that peer support and collaboration help teachers to broaden and deepen their development and to cope with change.

‘Significant educational change consists of changes in beliefs, teaching style and materials, which can
only come about through a process of personal development in a social context’ (Fullan 2001: 124).

Studies of teaching cultures across the United States of America (eg Rosenholtz 1989) have found that teacher practice is often characterised by isolation and lack of collaboration, sharing of ideas and observation of peers. Fullan (2001), however, reports on many studies in United States and Canadian schools where key elements in teachers coping with educational change were their relationships with colleagues and the degree of collaboration within their institutions. ‘Within the school, collegiality among teachers, as measured by the frequency of communication, mutual support, help, and so forth, was a strong indicator of implementation success.’ Virtually every research study on the topic has found this to be the case’ (Fullan 2001: 124).

This point is also made in Slatyer (2003), who describes the impact of the implementation of a new curriculum framework – Certificates I, II and III in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) (NSW AMES 2002) – in the AMEP. She found that programs with the greatest degree of collaboration among teaching professionals were the programs that coped the best with change.

The need for teachers to enquire into their practice as a means of professional development is acknowledged as far back as Dewey (1916, 1933). Many theorists (Schön 1983; Pugach and Johnson 1990; Richards and Lockhart 1993; Fenstermacher 1994; Gebhard and Oprandy 1999) have identified the need for reflective practice to be assisted by one or more observers, and others (Bailey et al 1998) describe the benefits of small group collaborative conversations. For Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) and Richards and Lockhart (1993), reflective practice follows from a targeted, non-judgmental observation of specific aspects of practice by a peer. For Fenstermacher (1994), Schön (1983), and Pugach and Johnson (1990), the role of the observer is to prompt, through questioning, a justification of professional practice that might lead the practitioner to deeper understanding and further development of his or her practice. Observers can be a peer, a student or a supervisor. It is against this background of collaborative peer development and interactive awareness that the discourse framework of Cooperative Development was introduced.

Cooperative Development
Cooperative Development (Edge 1992, 2002) is a discourse framework for peer-assisted self-development. It provides the teacher, known as the Speaker, with an opportunity to engage in reflective practice around a work-related issue in the presence of a non-judgmental listener, referred to as the Understander. This provides an opportunity for the practitioner to reflect in greater detail and to greater effect than would be possible through self-reflection.

Cooperative Development differs from other forms of collaborative reflective practice in that rather than responding to questioning or an evaluation, Speakers lead the process of learning and discovery through the articulation of ideas and beliefs that derive from their own experiences of teaching and their own expertise. ‘We learn by speaking, by working to put our own thoughts together so that someone else can understand them’ (Edge 2002: 19). This process of articulating thoughts non-defensively enables the teacher to access knowledge from what Carl Rogers (1983) terms experiential learning. The Understander aims to respond to the Speaker’s thoughts on the Speaker’s own terms, with empathy and with neutral mental and physical stances. It is this empathetic understanding that can establish ‘a climate for self-initiated, experiential learning’ (Rogers 1983: 125).

As a form of self-directed professional development, where the teacher is learner, Cooperative Development has philosophical links to Freire (1970: 58), particularly with respect to his contrast between teaching as a banking process and more liberating and humanising forms of learning. ‘In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing’ (Freire 1970: 58). Forms of teacher development, which involve passively receiving how-to information or advice from external sources, such as from skill-training workshops, colleagues
or methodology gurus, can be seen as conforming to the banking concept. In contrast, a framework such as Cooperative Development, where Speakers undertake their own processes of discovery and learning around issues of their choosing, guided by empathetic equals, can be defined as ‘[l]iberating education [that] consists in acts of cognition, not transferrals of information’ (Freire 1970: 67).

Through non-judgmental, empathetic listening and response, the Understander in a Cooperative Development dialogue creates a space in which the Speaker can direct an individual course of learning. According to Edge (2002: 17), ‘I need people to work with, but I don’t need people who want to change me and make me more like the way they think I ought to be. I need people who will help me see myself clearly so that I can make my own evaluations.’

The Understander contributes to the Speaker’s exploration of a teaching-related issue. Such explorations are illustrated below through excerpts from Cooperative Development sessions (involving six teachers) that occurred in the study during Term 1 of the 2006 academic year.

**Attending**

Attending involves listening with empathetic and non-judgmental mental and physical stances.

**Reflecting (fig. 1)**

Reflecting involves paraphrasing or recounting back to the Speaker the central points of the issue, so that the Speaker might hear and better understand her own key actions, thoughts and feelings.

The Speaker begins with what appear to be a number of issues all tied into what she sees as her teaching problem. The Understander comes in, when the Speaker pauses, to reflect back part of the Speaker’s explanation of the problem, and actually pushes the Speaker to further clarify exactly what she sees as the problem. The Understander continues to prod the Speaker towards clarification of exactly what the problem is – *So, are you talking about reading quality? Is reading the main issue?* This leads the Speaker to select, from her initial explanation, the main problem she is confronting – *I guess I am not quite sure about how to go about teaching reading. In a sense, the Understander has not only reflected, but*

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<th><strong>Speaker</strong></th>
<th>We have just changed levels … we have had three weeks so far at this level and I suppose what I am thinking about most is the difference of levels in the class … those people who can read and those people who can’t and trying to pitch the levels so that everybody gets something interesting and at the right pace and level for them. I suppose that my main concern is pacing the class and keeping it interesting and useful so that they do enough reading. I guess I am not quite sure about how to go about teaching reading. What we are doing at the moment is doing little text … doing some cut-up text and reading it aloud and doing it part at a time. I just wonder if that is being effective really.</th>
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<td><strong>Understander</strong></td>
<td>So, if I can just clarify the concern, it is that there are different levels or that you feel some people are not getting what they need and some are. So, what do you think is the problem there?</td>
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<td><strong>Speaker</strong></td>
<td>Yes, I guess the majority, or at least half of the students, can’t read and those who can do so slowly.</td>
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<td><strong>Understander</strong></td>
<td>So, are you talking about reading quality? Is reading the main issue?</td>
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<td><strong>Speaker</strong></td>
<td>Yes, reading is the main issue and from that springs the pacing and the interest and motivation really.</td>
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has also focused the Speaker in this exchange. The exchange shows the power of reflecting, which is not done simply to make sure that the Understander is hearing the Speaker correctly, but also to enable the Speaker to hear herself. In this example, after hearing herself, the Speaker is able to make progress in defining her problem.

Focusing (Fig. 2)
Focusing involves identifying key Speaker utterances for possible further examination.

This exchange between two different teachers shows an example of an Understander inviting further focus on something the Speaker has said. The session was dealing with the Speaker’s waning enthusiasm for her job, following a change in instructional level. The Understander notes the theme of creativity that the Speaker has mentioned a few times and invites her to explore it further. The Understander, referring to the creativity theme, asks a question – Have you explored that enough? – inviting the Speaker to refocus on creativity and perhaps to make sure that the Speaker is really satisfied that she has fully examined the theme. Even though the Speaker starts out saying that she had examined this fully, she nevertheless goes on to look at further options for bringing a sense of creativity to her work.

Thematising (Fig. 3)
Thematising involves identifying related threads in the Speaker’s comments and inviting further analysis to explore that relationship.

In this exchange, the Understander clarifies a connection between two ideas the Speaker has mentioned which prompts the Speaker into a longer explanation.

Challenging (Fig. 4)
Challenging involves identifying apparent contradictory threads in the Speaker’s comments and inviting further analysis to explore that relationship.

In this exchange the Speaker is working on a problem of pacing reading activities in a Level 3 class. After outlining the issue and what she

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| I am not so sure about the language, I just think that being able to be creative might help. And I already know that, when we go out and do something different, I don’t need any bidding to sit down and write a model recount. Probably because it’s in my head, because we have just done it, but it is quite easy to do because to write 100 words about something is not a hard task for anyone, but I quite enjoy doing that. So I suppose what I am saying is, if I investigate it further I might be able to harness something of that enjoyment because I think that’s the way you develop satisfaction in your teaching if you can explore the area further that you are already enjoying. Since you have mentioned creativity a few times, are there other ways that you can use that creativity within that Certificate? I am thinking about you being ASL 2 [Advanced Skills Lecturer] … are there any avenues there that you could look for… as an organiser … is there anything creative? Have you explored that enough?

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<td>I think so, because I will probably … after we have finished talking, I will probably mull over that a little bit more and maybe I might even come back to it in another session and it may clarify whether I go into a second term of Certificate II [new level]. So, other options. A couple of other options occurred to me … one possibility is to get more involved with the conferences and forums and things like that, maybe to present a paper or to do a workshop, or something like that. I quite enjoyed the workshop that we did at the end of the year; the Best Practice Forum, so maybe that’s one other possibility for me to get stimulation which is outside the classroom, that is, getting more involved in academic things.</td>
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has done in dealing with it, the Understander challenges the Speaker over conflicting logic in her approach to the reading problem (ie treating the higher-level students the same as the lower-level students and needing to deal differently with slower and faster students in the same class). This causes the Speaker to re-examine her thinking around the issue and, in doing so, she comes closer to a plan for dealing with the problem. The Speaker goes on to further define this approach, with the Understander reflecting and clarifying as she does, and eventually comes to a concrete plan of action. The Understander’s challenge seems to have prompted a useful shift in the Speaker’s analysis.

Goal setting (Fig. 5)
The following exchange took place at the end of a session in which the Speaker was trying to shift from a teacher-centred to a student-centred classroom. After working through the dynamics of group interaction with her new level and some scenarios that seemed to have worked, the Speaker explains what she might try. Here the Speaker is verbalising a plan of action towards achieving her goal of creating a less teacher-centred lesson style. The Understander reflects and clarifies the Speaker’s plan. (Fig. 6)

The Understander then checks that the Speaker has identified a course of action. In so doing, she is suggesting an end to the session, which the Speaker accepts by acknowledging her forward plan. (Fig. 7)

Through the Cooperative Development moves outlined above, an Understander helps a Speaker explore an issue, discover some of the defining aspects of the problem and develop a plan of action in response to the problem. This plan of action is...
the goal of the Cooperative Development session, and forms the next move in an action research cycle to resolve teaching-related issues. Cooperative Development offers the opportunity for the Speaker to step outside previous thinking around an issue, invites a deeper focus on key utterances and points out common or contradicting themes, prompting a richer, even lateral, examination of issues. As Mann (1999: 208) points out, ‘using Cooperative Development and putting aside our normal evaluative discourse, we open up different possibilities’.

The study
The group of nine teachers involved in the 2006 AMEP research project committed themselves to engaging in Cooperative Development sessions during the first term of the program change. This was a means of dealing with teaching issues that arose as a result of teaching students at a different level. In a sense, Cooperative Development functioned as a form of change management for these teachers during a potentially difficult period of teaching. An additional aim in using Cooperative Development was to evaluate its effectiveness as a tool for professional development during a period of change, given that teachers in the program had already indicated a preference for peer-assisted professional development activities.

The teachers in the AMEP Cooperative Development study met on a regular basis during the first 11-week term of the program change. Some teachers met every week and some met every second week because of the need to
coordinate a mutually convenient time. Two teachers conducted the Cooperative Development sessions using MSN Instant Messenger, practising what Edge (2006) refers to as Computer mediated Cooperative Development (CMCD). These two teachers had participated in a previous project using Cooperative Development and were interested in trying an alternative means of practising the framework. In addition, it made it possible for them to continue their involvement from home. All face-to-face sessions were recorded on a digital voice recorder and the CMCD sessions were printed and filed.

Each participant worked with two different partners during the course of the study, sometimes as Speaker and sometimes as Understander. Five of the teachers had experienced Cooperative Development in a previous AMEP study (Edge 2007), and four had been trained by the researcher. In choosing a partner, the participants considered such factors as complementary work schedules and previous satisfactory working relations. While it should, in theory, be possible to engage in Cooperative Development with anyone who is well trained and observant in the application of non-judgmental discourse, it is also the case that Speakers may find, through experience, that some Understanders are able to reflect back more satisfactorily than others, with the potential for more productive collaborations.

This qualitative study sought to evaluate (Guba and Lincoln 1981, 1989) a situated application of Cooperative Development. It focused on the impact of Cooperative Development, on how the teachers experienced program change and on ongoing professional development. The participants were asked to give feedback on their impressions of Cooperative Development, on what happened in the sessions, and on how it impacted on their experience of the important aspects of program change, including the teaching context, teacher development and peer collaboration.

The study is constructivist on two significant levels. First, the framework of Cooperative Development can be seen as demonstrating a joint construction of reality, based on the dynamic of the Understander guiding and interpreting the Speaker’s examination and exploration of a teaching-related issue. Second, the focus of data analysis was on participant impressions of their Cooperative Development experiences, as explained to the evaluator, coupled with the evaluator’s interpretation of the recorded Cooperative Development sessions and post-study interview data. Guba and Lincoln (1989: 88) suggest that ‘it is impossible to separate the inquirer from the inquired into. It is precisely their interaction that creates the data that will emerge from the inquiry’.

There were three stages to the study.

Stage 1: In this stage a survey of all staff members was conducted to determine their responses to the proposed program change, the types of professional development they already engaged in, and the types of professional development activities they would like to see management provide to support the program change.

Stage 2: This stage involved listening to the recorded weekly Cooperative Development sessions during the first term of the program change. In order to gauge how the teachers felt about the process and their role in it, they were also asked to record immediate post-session reflections on each session.

Stage 3: To gain further feedback, and for triangulation, all participants were interviewed at the end of the period to record their impressions of the problems they had experienced as a result of the program change, their impressions of how using Cooperative Development had assisted them in dealing with those problems, and their impressions of how Cooperative Development might have contributed to their teacher development and experiences of a more collaborative work environment.

Findings

The post-study interviews revealed many positive results, which are detailed below, from teachers using Cooperative Development to support them through a period of major program change.

Discipline

All the teachers in the study noted that Cooperative Development helped give them a
disciplined approach to dealing with problems, enabling them to approach them more clearly. As shown in the following excerpts, teachers felt that they had many intertwined problems to deal with. The process of articulating them in a Cooperative Development session to an Understander, who reflected them back through paraphrase, helped them to recognise and define the problems as discrete issues that could be considered separately.

It really helped me focus on the main issue at the time, which was the levels … it helped me to see what the main problem was. Before I went into the first session I just had a mind full of a big fog of these are the things that are bothering me, and it wasn’t until I had actually voiced them to [the Understander] that when she then reflected back to me it became clear that … there were one or two things that were more urgent than others and were the basis of all the other problems … Partly it was actually saying them out loud, whereas before it had just been up here and I had not done anything with it, but the fact that I had actually said it … I had verbalised it and then hearing it come back, it was actually quite strong, and then I felt I could deal with one thing at a time. (Teacher 2)

The first and main thing that I found … I was actually bringing up multiple problems – it was like everything was difficult to manage – so … it [Cooperative Development] actually helped me to focus on looking at one thing at a time really and focus properly and … how best to get some control over it and understand it. (Teacher 3)

Another aspect of discipline was dealing with teaching issues because the teachers had committed to Cooperative Development sessions to address the issues. Those who commented on this made the point that they would not have dealt with the issues by themselves in such a disciplined and conclusive manner.

[Cooperative Development] forced me to talk about things more methodically, whereas if I am doing it in my head … there are a lot of interruptions to it and [Cooperative Development] made me complete things. (Teacher 4)

I tend to be a reflective teacher … I have conversations in my head … but by forcing me to do it in a more systematic way and having the time to consider options, it helped me to have concrete resolutions instead of a great idea. (Teacher 4)

When someone is sitting there saying, ‘OK, so you think this and what happens from here?’ you have to think about that now … someone puts you on the spot really and you think ‘well, what will I do?’ You have to actually keep going and you might feel like you would otherwise stop, but you have to keep pursuing the problem. (Teacher 3)

The Understander nudges the Speaker along through an analysis of the problem to the articulation of a possible plan of action, and the next teacher refers to this aspect of feeling pushed to work through a problem.

It’s about forcing myself to devote time to talking about it and therefore finding solutions which I might otherwise not have done. I think that was the important thing for me because if you are aware that something is not right, there is a big difference about being aware and of actually saying that you are aware and are actually going to do something about it. (Teacher 2)

As Edge (2002: 92) maintains, the ‘undiluted purpose of Cooperative Development is to move through increased awareness toward action, toward doing something. While one can talk generally, one can only act specifically, and so one of the necessary goals of the Speaker is to focus his or her thoughts and talk towards the specific.’

**Discovery**

The participants commented on how the process of articulating their thoughts to a listener helped them organise their thinking and make discoveries about the issues and their responses to them.

First of all, hearing what I was saying being echoed back was very good for me because it helped me to work out what was emotion getting in the way and what was real, and separate out the issues that I could actually do something about so I wasn’t left in a situation of just feeling yuck and feeling helpless. (Teacher 1)
‘We learn by speaking, by working to put our own thoughts together so that someone else can understand them’ (Edge 2002: 19). In a Cooperative Development session, the process of articulating thoughts to a listener and having those thoughts reflected back helps realise the contributions to a body of knowledge from both intellectual and experiential learning. As Edge (2002: 20) explains, ‘it is in my attempts to express myself – to express my self – that I bring together my intellectual knowledge and my experiential knowledge in a way that obliges me to fuse the two into one person’s integrated statement: mine.’

The discovery of self happens for Speakers in Cooperative Development partly through the process of having their thoughts reflected back in someone else’s words. This gives these thoughts a new objective reality, which allows Speakers to examine them from new perspectives and make discoveries that might not otherwise have been possible. The following teacher comments from this study speak about this process.

I have had conversations in my head about teaching but it was hearing the words back and actually hearing [the Understander] say something … that made me go, ‘oh!’, and if I had had that dialogue in my own head I would have been repeating the same words again, whereas she came back with the same idea but using a different word, so that made me pick up on that and I don’t think the conversation in my own head would have had the same result. (Teacher 4)

It’s almost that when the other person talks back to you or repeats something back it gives your mind a rest for a moment and then you can pick up on it … instead of focusing on forming the words, when you are listening to the words you can then analyse the words at the same time, so maybe it gives you that moment to do that … it’s almost like you are looking at the text instead of creating it. (Teacher 4)

[Cooperative Development] makes you feel like you are more resourceful than you might have imagined. (Teacher 3)

Teachers all have knowledge and beliefs gained from years of teaching and learning, but they are not always conscious of how these resources can enable them to deal with new contexts and situations.

Collaboration

Fullan (2001) discusses the importance of a collaborative work environment for the successful implementation of change, and Hargreaves (1992: 217) claims that ‘the way teachers relate to their colleagues has profound implications for their teaching in the classroom, how they evolve and develop as teachers, and the sorts of teachers they become’. The AMEP at Perth Central TAFE enjoys, by most workplace standards, good levels of staff collaboration. However, all the teachers in the study said that using Cooperative Development through the initial stage of program change led to an increased sense of collaboration.

I think it made me feel much more part of the staff in AMEP because it gave me more connection to people and more connections to actual teaching. (Teacher 4)

I got to know her [Cooperative Development partner] better and so the next time you see that person you are already on a different level … you have a bond between you, whereas before you did not. (Teacher 2)

Two teachers felt that Cooperative Development fostered better working relationships among participants and that non-participating staff were missing out.

I … think that it’s quite an intimate thing and in the staffroom it’s actually very good for the relationships in the staffroom to do it [Cooperative Development]. I actually have a feel for … and I don’t know whether others think this as well … of the others missing out if you are doing it. (Teacher 1)

Perhaps the sense of collaboration increased the bonds between the participants in the study, allowing the teachers to see each other as equals in moments of self-doubt and when confronting problems for which they did not have ready-made answers. Being a learner can inspire feelings of vulnerability, as the following participant commented.

Because you need help with something, it’s something that we see as a flaw and exposed. (Teacher 3)
When learning involves receiving someone else’s knowledge, as in Freire’s (1970) banking concept of learning, learners can feel powerless and inferior. The act of bestowing knowledge on another gives power to the giver and minimises the receiver. In Cooperative Development exchanges, Speakers feel their equality is maintained. This is because they know they are going to solve their own problems in a space where nobody is going to tell them how to proceed and where someone will help them explore their own ideas.

I think it contributes to a growing respect and a growing trust … because of the fact that the other person is there and really listening … and then you hear when they reflect back, you know that is what you said and you also know by doing that they are really helping you … you know that a person will sit and listen to you and in most conversations it is hard to find a good listener. (Teacher 2)

One teacher mentioned the building of trust that happened as a result of Cooperative Development sessions with a colleague.

I think the level of trust that you develop with people after these sorts of sessions is quite significant really … because you are saying stuff to them, one on one, and you trust that they are listening in your interest. (Teacher 3)

An important feature of Cooperative Development is that the Understander should develop empathy with the Speaker in helping with a teaching issue. The Understander must ‘try to see things as if through the Speaker’s eyes … according to the Speaker’s frames of reference’ (Edge 2002: 28).

One teacher, as an Understander, felt a sense of privilege in bearing witness to her colleague’s vulnerability and, through empathy, confirmed her own equality.

I think that when you share something with other people and always when people expose a little bit of vulnerability, um, it strikes a chord in another person because they feel … or I feel that I have to be reminded often that things are not what they seem … so when you see people in the staffroom and getting their things together and reacting with their students, I immediately think ‘they are fantastic … what a great teacher’ … and how easy it is … how it must be. But it’s quite naive, because everyone has their issues … everyone has their problems and difficult students and how they deal with them … so I think when you share vulnerability that you are drawn together because people expose a different part of themselves to what you normally see … and you respect people for that … so I think I do feel closer to the two people that I shared with. (Teacher 3)

According to Fullan (2001: 125), ‘teacher uncertainty (or low sense of efficacy) and threats to self-esteem are recurring themes in teaching’ and there are times when every other teacher in the staffroom seems much more competent and organised. In the excerpt above, the teacher expresses this sentiment and feels reassured, as Understander in a Cooperative Development session, that she is not the only one who does not have all the answers.

Conclusion and recommendations

Using Cooperative Development as a framework for peer-assisted reflective practice during program change was extremely beneficial for the teachers in this study. They found that the discipline it imposed on their handling of teaching problems meant that they translated a desire to solve the problems into ways of solving them. They also found that having their thoughts reflected back to them by an empathetic, non-judgmental listener helped them to organise and define aspects of problems in ways they could not have achieved alone. In the process, they learned more about themselves and their approach to teaching. Moreover, they enjoyed the collaborative work environment developed by engaging in Cooperative Development. They commented on feeling empowered and energised by the experience. All of them wanted to see the practice continue in the AMEP on a regular basis. However, they also noted that, no matter how great the benefits, they might not have sustained their involvement in Cooperative Development had it not been for the research project.

The view that reflective practice makes important contributions to teacher development
is widely held in the literature, but it is not routinely encouraged at a program level, where the commitment by management to supporting such a practice has remained largely ideological. Yet, if forms of reflective practice, such as Cooperative Development, are to be more widely used, they need to be encouraged and facilitated by program managers. Time needs to be made available for structured reflective practice to occur and for training in reflective practices to be undertaken.

The participants in the AMEP study found that having an organised structure and a timetable for engaging in Cooperative Development ensured that they followed through the peer-assisted development around the program change. All of them expressed an intention to continue using Cooperative Development as part of their commitment to ongoing teacher development. However, they stressed the need for program-level recognition of Cooperative Development as an accepted form of professional development and the need to have time allocated to training and scheduled Cooperative Development sessions. They felt that this would help ensure that such a valuable practice was maintained.

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Note
1TAFE is the public system of technical and further education colleges throughout Australia. It provides a range of post-compulsory vocational and educational training.

References


