Developing appropriate cultures of teacher learning

Understanding and using Cooperative Development

Karen Barber, Donna Butorac and Shirley Haak

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Teaching issues

What should I do about my teaching approach?

“…I need to think about my ‘softly, softly’ approach and decide if it would be appropriate for this new group of students.”
Teaching issues

What should I do about a student who is worrying me?

“He started off last term really enthusiastically and has gradually become less and less communicative in the classroom with me and the other students…”
Teaching issues

How can I manage time in the classroom?

My problem “mainly revolves around time – estimating the amount of time it takes to do an activity or explain something in class.”
Teaching issues

How can I pace my class?

“I suppose my main concern is pacing the class and keeping it interesting and useful, so they do enough reading. I guess I’m not that sure about how to go about teaching reading.”
What is Cooperative Development?

A framework for peer-assisted teacher development

a structured dialogue between:

- Speaker – has a teaching issue to explore
- Understander – listens to the Speaker, helps the Speaker work through the issue in a series of structured dialogue responses
What is Cooperative Development?

Cooperative Development is marked by:

- non-defensive speech (Speaker)
- attentive listening and non-judgmental, neutral response (Understander)
What is Cooperative Development?

Goal of the Speaker:
- to explore an issue through guided reflection, towards better understanding of its defining aspects
- to identify a possible response to the issue
- to contribute to ongoing personal teacher development
What is Cooperative Development?

Goal of the Understander:

- to listen attentively
- to create a space for the Speaker to explore the issue in
- to respond without advice or comment
- to help the Speaker move through discovery towards action
How to practise Cooperative Development

The Speaker
(issue explorer/problem solver)
- explores
- clarifies
- discovers
- sets goals
- trials
- plans

The Understander
(listener)
- attends (is there)
- reflects (restates)
- focuses (to establish main issue)
- thematises (to point to connections)
- challenges (to point out contradictions)
- supports the Speaker to set goals, trial and plan
How to practise Cooperative Development

Hints:

Speaker: focus the issue/problem in yourself
- Some students always come late.
  - I don’t know what to do about my late arrivals.

Understander: Invite/offer
- Why do you want to do that?
  - Would you like to explore why you want to do that?
How to practise Cooperative Development

Attending

Reflecting

**Speaker:** I’m feeling very uninspired teaching the letter of application as the main writing competency, especially in light of the fact that many of my students want to exit this term, so would not have had much writing of any other kind of text.

**Understander:** So you’re faced with the dilemma of exiting them with what you feel is not very inspiring or the most useful writing.

**Speaker:** Yes. I think I will have time to do a bit of exposition work with them in weeks 9 and 10, but I’m feeling like I want to teach them how to improve their writing within the constraints of the letter of application.

**Understander:** So what do you mean ‘within the constraints of the letter of application’? Are you talking about grammar structures or the fact that teaching the letter constrains with time?

**Speaker:** I think it’s the grammar and the language of the letter. There doesn’t seem to be that much to explore and exploit and many of my students seem fairly sophisticated in their writing although their accuracy is more limited.
How to practise Cooperative Development

Focusing

**Speaker:** Well, I guess it seems when we write a letter of application, we use fairly simple sentence patterns, formulaic language and there doesn’t seem to be the opportunity to really challenge them in their writing. Also, because some of the students haven’t worked or will end up applying for a job they really aren’t qualified for or want, they have to imagine and this makes the task difficult.

**Understander:** So you feel they have to imagine too much which makes the task difficult but that they are quite sophisticated in their ideas despite not being very accurate. Do you want to explore the idea of them becoming more accurate?

**Speaker:** Yes. And I guess if they are writing simpler sentences then they would have a chance to improve their accuracy. Maybe this could be the challenge to their writing. To consolidate what they can do already and be more accurate. I think too, I would feel happier if I thought the letter they will learn to write would be useful for them.
How to practise Cooperative Development

Thematising

Understander: OK, so broadening the scope would, for you make the task a bit more relevant. Would that fit in with your previously mentioned aim of getting better accuracy as well as being useful?

Speaker: Yes. That’s it. I could achieve a few aims at once. Accuracy and purposeful writing where they would really have to write about their skills and attributes and give real life examples. And within that context, look at the errors they are making.

(3 turn takes later)

Supports to make plans

Speaker: Yes. I want the letter writing to be a way to learn more about language and use. I’m actually feeling enthusiastic about this ‘bloody’ letter now. I think I can see real possibilities for learning in the areas of accuracy and in using language in many ways. It’s rather exciting.

Understander: Isn’t discovery wonderful! You’ve moved from, ‘I’m feeling uninspired’, to ‘I can see real potential’. Do you want to explore these ‘real possibilities’?

Speaker: Well, I think tomorrow I’ll get each student to write down their pathway. Then I can find ads and situations that will fit each student…
How to practise Cooperative Development

(A different extract)

Challenging

The Speaker is working on a problem of pacing reading activities in a Certificate 3 class. After outlining the issue and what she has done already, a challenge comes from the Understander, who finds two possibly contradictory statements in the Speaker’s utterances.

Understander: So, it seems to me that you are saying that your premise at the start of this conversation - that you would treat them a bit the same as the Cert 1s, in that you would make sure they all understood you before moving on - is where you have actually come back to. But you also talk about the fast and the slower ones needing different treatment - do you want to explore that a bit?
Teaching issues

I don’t know what to do about…

- timing
- pace
- materials
- organising group/pair work
- student behaviour
- teaching approach
Why we use Cooperative Development

- Experiential knowledge is an important source for continued development
- We benefit from being reflective teachers
- CD is a very practical and productive form of reflective practice
- Peer-assisted reflective practice:
  - Helps us make discoveries about our teaching selves
  - Promotes a more collegial teaching environment
- We feel empowered by being able to find our own solution to a teaching problem
- We find solutions that are meaningful and appropriate
Using Cooperative Development in a time of program change

Aspects of change in education:

- loss of the stable state
- need for professional development to support change
  - teacher-driven
  - development, not training
  - need for reflective practice
- importance of collaborative work environment
Using Cooperative Development in a time of program change

How Cooperative Development supported AMEP teachers

CD provided a disciplined approach:

Teacher: “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 (CD) 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: “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.”
Using Cooperative Development in a time of program change

promoted discovery:

Teacher: “I do lots of reflection anyway but the outcome is always completely different if I just sit by myself to reflect, and I think the phrasing back, the clarifying and focusing, usually gets me going in a different direction than I ever imagined, so it’s essential.”
Using Cooperative Development in a time of program change

enabled a shift in responsibility for problems:

- Teacher: “Nearly always it starts off as a student-centred problem really [...] and then it comes back to ‘ok, that’s something that I didn’t do that well [...] instead of blaming someone else you begin to own a problem and once you own a problem you can do something about it.”
Using Cooperative Development in a time of program change

-created a more collaborative work environment:

- **Teacher:** “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.”
Using Cooperative Development in a time of program change

- the listener learned from the speaker:
  - Teacher: “We are all teachers of the same type of groups... it (CD) helps us learn from each other by hearing what other people are going through and also because we are hearing how other people are solving it. We are not telling them ‘oh well, this is what you should do, this is a great idea I have’ because if you tell them back what they should do when you hear about their problems then you are giving your own perspective, but by allowing them to solve it you are hearing them work through the issues and solve the problem in their own way, which then is an idea that you have not necessarily thought of.”
Computer Mediated CD (on-line/MSN)

Advantages
- allows for professional development with colleagues from all over the city, state, world
- can read what you wrote down again while your partner is writing her response
- hard copy available after session to refer to again and again
- allows for shorter turn takes (in some cases)

Disadvantages
- technical problems
- worry about spelling and expression
How can you make Cooperative Development work for you?

- commit to two terms of practice
- pick a partner and have a regular time slot to do CD
- work with colleagues you feel some empathy with
- record your sessions and reflect on the process at the end of each session
- recognise that it is hard to be a Speaker and NOT receive advice
- recognise that it is hard to be an Understander WITHOUT offering advice
- get support from your manager in the form of allocated professional development time for CD
Final thoughts

After 15 months of practising Cooperative Development the AMEP at Central TAFE has a team of 11 practitioners who really believe CD works and describe it as:

- exciting
- satisfying
- powerful
- concrete
- clarifying
- practical

“Cooperative Development makes you feel like you are more resourceful than you might have imagined”