Establishing a Democracy Classroom: Cooperative Learning and good teaching

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A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Signed: ................................................................. Date: ........................................
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First Year Teachers' Practices in QT

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Abstract

The Melbourne Declaration (2008) established a strong framework for educating the 21st century Australian student - a framework focussed towards collaboration and the ability to work in teams. Collaboration is an essentially democratic skill and in classrooms can be supported by the use of a model of pedagogy such as Cooperative Learning (CL). In this study, Early Career teachers (ECTs) were mentored in the use of this long standing pedagogy because collaborative classrooms need to be seen as the fundamental basis for twenty first century learning skills in a time of increased testing and focus on individualised learning. The case studies of early career teachers evolved, in an action research process, as the researcher monitored the outcomes of professional development in CL and investigated links between CL and early career teachers overall pedagogical strategies and their classroom ambience. Rich cases emerged as a result of intensive and iterative interrogation of multiple sources of types of data. Comprehensive, systematic and exhaustive coding of this data, in phases of research provided evidence of an emerging democracy classroom. The professional development in CL improved the four early career teachers’ understandings and practices in CL; improved aspects of their understandings and practices in overall pedagogy (as measured by the New South Wales Quality Teaching model) and a classroom with a ‘Democracy Stance’ emerged. Professional development in classroom pedagogy is important and does make a difference and democracy classrooms can emerge as a result of a focus on Cooperative Learning. In an environment that increasingly focusses on accountability, this study demonstrated that social and academic learning for both teachers and students is possible and important for a democratic society.