 BOOK REVIEW No. 155

Professional Development for Cooperative Learning: Issues and Approaches. Edited by C. M. Brody and N. Davidson, 1998, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.

This book is about training K-12 teachers to adopt a cooperative learning paradigm in their classrooms. It provides a collection of solicited essays aimed at instructing future trainers of public school teachers in America. The book consists of 15 chapters by leaders in the field. In addition there is an introduction and an afterward by the editors. The contributions summarize the principles of major efforts in teacher professional development over the past decades. In addition to distinguishing among the various approaches within the rather incestuous family of practitioners represented, the book relates lessons from the frontlines and addresses the issue of systemic change.

Here is a selection of advice offered the reader (emphasis added): "Teachers need support to *continue* evolving their conceptions of cooperative learning" (p. 45). "Simply providing information and [in-service workshops] result in only a small minority of teachers actually *implementing* the ideas" (p. 60). "Teachers must *'live'* cooperative groupwork in formal training programs" (p. 69). "When teachers learn how to *use* a variety of cooperative learning structures they are empowered to reach various educational objectives" (p. 105). "The Child Development Project's model of cooperative learning builds on . . . teaching prosocial *values* and building a *caring* schoolwide and classroom community" (p. 148). Socially-Conscious Cooperative Learning "teaches about cooperation as an *idea and value* and links cooperative learning in the classroom to the broader goal of building a more *cooperative and just* society" (p. 203). "What happens *between and after* training sessions is more important than what happens during training sessions [and] teachers' behavior is largely determined by the organizational structure of the *school*" (p. 232).

As these excerpts suggest, the lesson learned in struggling to train teachers in non-traditional teaching methods is self-reflexive: the training must itself be non-traditional training. The old in-service presentations must be replaced with processes that involve the participants in cooperative learning activities, transformative practices, and values formation. This raises the question – ignored by the editors and the contributors – whether brief, didactic essays summarizing principles do not suffer the same limitations as instructionist teaching and in-service lectures. One has the nagging sense that this book ignores the very insights that it documents.

It is a sign of how fast the times are changing that just as people start to address the widespread dissemination of cooperative learning approaches, the once avant garde spirit of these reforms seems already archaic. What was leading edge in the 80's or even early 90's is not only now universally accepted in the research community, but feels like a relic of the 50's, when some of this research began. Unfortunately, the reality in most

classrooms, textbooks, and even educational websites is pre-constructivist and non-cooperative. Since one cannot walk before one learns how to crawl, we will have to master the lessons of professional development for cooperative learning if we want to have any hope of transforming classrooms even further. And it *does* seem necessary these days to go qualitatively beyond the view of education espoused in this book.

To someone excited by the promise of *collaborative* (sic, not "cooperative") learning, this book is as old-fashioned and dull as it is still necessary. The pedagogy of collaborative learning, by contrast, is an active and still controversial field, presenting a strong challenge to traditional education, oriented as it was toward the individual student. In particular, computer and Internet technologies have been inspiring new approaches to supporting collaborative learning during the past decade (e. g., Crook, 1994; Koschmann, 1996; O'Malley, 1995). The field is now reaching the point where prototypes are establishing the viability of innovative ideas and the time has come for widespread dissemination. That is, we need to know how to conduct professional development of teachers for collaborative learning.

But the book under review fails to address the distinctive needs of collaborative approaches. In their introduction, the editors pay lip service to collaborative learning and say they "made a conscious decision to use the term 'cooperative learning' as the generic concept" (p. 9). In so doing they reduce collaborative learning to just a set of approaches within their concept. Given that every author has a somewhat different approach, collaboration losses its distinctiveness. However, there is in fact a coherent tradition of collaborative learning that goes beyond cooperative learning in its critique of the tradition. And this admittedly subtle distinction is missed by the editors.

Both cooperative and collaborative learning theories oppose the view that knowledge consists of facts told by teachers for students to repeat back. They may advocate a student-centered, constructivist approach in which students construct their own meaning using the ways in which they personally learn best. Social aspects of learning are considered theoretically important and the use of small group processes is emphasized in practice.

The difference may be defined in terms of the "unit of analysis." Cooperative learning still privileges the teacher as the orchestrator of the educational process and still looks to the assessment of individual student knowledge as the sign of learning. Collaborative learning – for instance in versions like Lave and Wenger (1991) – analyzes things at the level of the community. Here, the teacher is just another participant within the changing roles of the community, and learning consists of evolution of the group and the abilities of its members to participate within it. The classroom may be reconceptualized as a knowledge-building community (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1996) or a learning organization (Brown & Duguid, 1991), where the essential outcomes are measured at the group level not the individual. Thus, collaborative learning constitutes a distinct educational paradigm with a very different approach to defining and assessing learning. Whereas cooperative learning is still measured by post-test evaluations of individual student learning based on teacher-defined goals, collaborative learning is concerned with

evidence of social cognition (Crook, 1994, pp. 132f; Koschmann, 1996, p. 15). Social cognition may involve the creation of new socially-shared meanings, the increasingly skilled enactment of social practices by students, or the evolution of the learning community as such.

Given this distinction, one can see cooperative learning as a halfway stage to collaborative learning in the sense that the dissemination of the former provides an important basis for the implementation of the latter. Collaborative learning – whether supported by computer technology or not – must adopt many of the classroom practices of cooperative learning, such as its refined use of small group processes. While it is disappointing that this new book that claims to encompass both cooperative and collaborative learning never mentions any of the seminal references in this review, the topic of the book is important for advocates of both flavors of educational reform. It might have been even more useful and less redundant if it included discussions of teacher training and educational reform within both paradigms. This would have been much harder, for successes in broadly disseminating collaborative learning are rarer and far less well known.

References

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Reviewed by Gerry Stahl, PhD, Institute of Cognitive Science, Department of Computer Science and Center for Lifelong Learning & Design, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado, USA.