Teachers’ Grouping Strategies for Cooperative Learning and Social Justice In Diverse Schools

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ABSTRACT

For teachers who choose to use cooperative learning in their classroom, ethnically heterogeneous grouping has been established as a grouping strategy that can be highly beneficial in reducing prejudice between students from different ethnic backgrounds. However, many schools in the GTA are characterized with a high level of ethnic diverse, and are no longer dominated by a majority Caucasian student body. In light of this, this research examines how teachers use various grouping strategies when facilitating Cooperative Learning to implicitly teach students attitudes of equity and anti-prejudicial behavior. This study explores the contrast between teachers’ grouping strategies in schools with varying levels of diversity. To do this, interviews were conducted with four experienced teachers working in ethnically diverse schools to understand their attitudes regarding ethnically heterogeneous grouping and if they believe it to be unnecessary in a diverse school. Interviewees indicated that they did indeed feel that heterogeneous grouping was irrelevant in a student body that was already diverse. This may be the case in some schools, however it is problematic in schools that seem diverse, yet are placed in ethnic enclaves of the city. In such schools, the majority of students may be from a south Asian descent, yet they still come from culturally diverse ethnic groups that can harbor tensions between each other. Such schools still require strategies such as consciously heterogeneous grouping to implicitly reduce prejudice among students.

**Key Words:** Cooperative Learning, Group Work, Ethnic Tensions, Heterogeneous Grouping, Grouping Strategies, Diverse Student Body
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

More recently, there has been a move towards character education in new curriculum and ministry documents. To achieve this, various character education programs have been developed, and schools have scheduled character education periods into the weekly rotations. This is a good initiative; however, it leads to the question: does explicitly teaching moral behavior in an isolated fifty-minute period once a week suffice? What about the other thirty hours a week students spend in the classroom, interacting with their peers?

Surely, character education is not isolated from the rest of the education that ensues every day in the classroom. Consequently, teachers must find a way to ensure that character and moral education are integrated in their programs, either explicitly, or implicitly, in the form of a hidden curriculum. Using various strategies, this hidden curriculum integrated into any subject matter, can teach social justice, citizenship and many other moral characteristics without sacrificing subject content.

Co-operative learning is an example of a strategy that can be used to foster attitudes of equity and anti-prejudice without explicit teaching or didactic lecturing. This strategy gives students the opportunity to rid themselves of any stereotypical thinking they bring to the classroom by experiencing its falsity first hand. Many studies show that with the presence of certain conditions, the intergroup contact that students must engage in to achieve shared overarching goals forces them to reexamine preexisting generalizations and stereotypes in the light of new information (Johnson & Johnson 1981), (Mealy & Stephan 2012), (Molina & Wittig 2006), (Sherif 1958).

In today’s society, behaviors such as blatant racism, prejudice, sexism and bigotry are instantly condemned and socially unacceptable. This has lead to the development of what is
called modern prejudice. Modern prejudice, also known as democratic or laissez-faire racism, is an extremely implicit, and difficult to detect form of prejudice that often is subconscious and unintentional (Augoustinos, Tuffin & Every, 2005), (Kalbach & Kalbach, 2000). Most people who hold attitudes of modern prejudice would never consider themselves racists (or any other type of bigot). Thus, such an intrinsic form of prejudice might not be fully addressed by explicit didactic teachings.

Cooperative learning (CL), and the use of superordinate goals are strategies that have been demonstrated to be highly effective in reducing prejudicial behavior, as well as, extremely successful in achieving learning-directed goals in the classroom (Stephan & Mealy 2012). Thus, teachers who employ cooperative learning, can, not only foster non-discriminatory attitudes in their students, but also simultaneously achieve higher academically driven goals in the content they are teaching (Slavin 2012). However, in order to achieve social justice outcomes from cooperative learning strategies, certain elements and grouping techniques must be implemented.

**Research Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to focus on teachers who employ collaborative learning for social, as well as, academic learning goals. The study will explore teachers’ understandings of the social skills diverse students gain from cooperative work, and the effects these understandings have on their grouping strategies. The researcher will focus on ethnically heterogeneous grouping and will explore how different teachers implement cooperative learning grouping strategies in classrooms with varying levels of diversity among students. For example, are teachers in multiethnic schools as inclined to adopt purposefully heterogeneous grouping strategies as teachers in majority Caucasian schools? Do teachers in different schools concentrate their grouping strategies to focus on ability rather than ethnicity, gender, sexuality
and SES? These are important questions as research has shown that the effects of intergroup contact may be enhanced if students perceive that authorities and institutions support the cooperative learning activities designed to promote contact (Brewer & Brown, 1998). This means that if some teachers use cooperative learning strategies without appreciating the benefits due to institution wide initiatives, it may not be nearly as effective in reducing prejudice and promoting social justice.

Furthermore, in ethnically diverse areas such as the GTA, teachers may not feel the need to create ethnically heterogeneous groups, as Caucasian students are no longer the majority. However, further understanding why teachers vary in their implementation of cooperative learning for social justice goals is essential to developing more effective professional development programs (Abrami et al 2004).

Thus, in order to better understand how teachers use co-operative learning grouping strategies in the classroom, I have examined how teachers use various grouping strategies when facilitating cooperative learning for social gains. I have explored what encourages or deters teachers from using various grouping strategies and why some teachers might not find heterogeneous groupings useful. Further, I have also analyzed the conditions present in the student body that influences teachers’ choice of grouping strategies, specifically, ethnic diversity. I then asked if teachers feel it is possible to facilitate cooperative learning using heterogeneous grouping for prejudice reduction with or without these conditions in the classroom, and what obstacles might prevent this possibility. Finally, I examined whether the teachers who use cooperative learning for social justice do so in accordance with the conditions set out by research for effective cooperative learning.
**Researcher Background**

Having completed a B.A with honors in Social Psychology, intergroup relations have always been a focus of my studies. I found concepts regarding prejudice reduction and social justice incredibly fascinating, and determining ways to turn these concepts into practice is one of the driving forces that led me to teaching. I believe that the school, as a primary institution, has the utmost responsibility to ensure that students are being socialized to fight prejudice and build social cohesiveness in our community. However, throughout my four different practicum placements in the Master of Teaching program, I observed that there often tends to be a gap between pedagogical theory and practice. My motivation is to understand what leads to these gaps, and how they can be reconciled.

**Direction And Content Of Research Project**

This research project first provides a summary of the literature on teachers who use cooperative learning in the classroom for both social and academic gains. The literature examines their motivations behind certain grouping strategies, as well as, the conditions necessary in cooperative learning to achieve anti-prejudicial outcomes. It is beyond the scope of this literature review to examine the success of cooperative learning as an academic and social teaching tool, as its success has already been well established and documented. I then provide an overview of the methodology employed in the research, as well as, a detailed description of the participants. This is followed by a report of the findings and an analysis and discussion, as well as, limitations encountered and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers’ Motivations To Use Cooperative Learning

In order to better understand teachers’ motivations, Abrami, Chambers, and Poulsen conducted research where they applied expectancy theory to construct a unified model of the issues that influence a teacher’s decision to implement and persist in the use of Cooperative Learning (Abrami et al. 2004). According to this model, a teacher’s decision about whether to implement cooperative learning is related to how highly s/he values the strategy; how successful s/he expects to be; and how high s/he perceives the costs of implementation to be (Abrami et al 2004). This would also apply to a teacher’s likelihood to invest time in using grouping strategies that encourage anti-prejudicial learning in cooperative learning. Thus, it follows that a teacher who values cooperative learning as a tool for anti-discriminatory education, and believes it will be successful, will be more inclined to invest time in using grouping strategies that result in heterogeneous groupings of ethnicity, gender, ability and SES as long as, the cost of this investment is not too high. Teachers’ success expectations for cooperative learning are based on confidence, cooperative learning skill, and expectations for student compliance; these teachers believe students have the skills (or will be able to acquire them easily) for effective teamwork (Abrami et al 2004).

Abrami et al. had 1,031 teachers from a mix of primary, secondary, adult education/vocational and social affairs schools complete the CLIQ (cooperative learning implementation questionnaire) and found that 61% of teachers reported cooperative learning was somewhat part of their current classroom routine while 15% reported it was “largely” or “entirely” part of their current classroom routine, and 11% responded “not at all” (Abrami et al 2004). The research found that the surveyed teachers employed cooperative learning more to
improve social than academic skills, and that 72% of these teachers rated both objectives as being somewhat important (Abrami et al. 2004).

An earlier study by Antil, Jenkins, and Wayne in 1998 found that out of 85 teachers from six elementary schools, 93% used cooperative learning and 71% had social learning benefits as a rationale (Antil et al. 1998). When Antil et al. interviewed 21 of the surveyed teachers, it was revealed that the principal reasons for adopting cooperative learning included both perceived academic and social learning benefits, better student involvement in lessons, and personal insights from their experiences as learners (Antil et al. 1998). Cooperative Learning was an attractive option to most teachers interviewed because it enabled them to address both academic and social learning goals with a single approach (Antil et al. 1998). All but 6 of the 21 interviewees included social learning in their rationale for using CL, and the majority of teachers gave rationales that emphasized both social and academic learning (Antil et al. 1998). This supports Rich’s hypothesis that teachers' receptivity to cooperative learning depends on the weight they give to social outcomes and on their perception of its efficacy (Rich 1990).

The element of social learning that was targeted by most of these teachers was to teach students to cooperate and to value cooperation (Antil et al. 1998). Other skills that teachers hoped children would learn from cooperative learning were listening and responding respectfully to peers' contributions, reaching consensus and learning to work with non-preferred classmates (Antil et al. 1998). However, most of the interviewed teachers expressed a narrow viewpoint on the value of social learning (Antil et al. 1998). Despite suggestions of policy analysts that cooperative learning is more than a tool for students to acquire and practice skills that will help them "get ahead", but, rather a way for students to prepare for democratic citizenship, the value these teachers placed on learning to cooperate was set directly in the workplace (Antil et al.)
1998). All teachers interviewed, with the exception of two, explained that students’ future job success depended on learning to cooperate (Antil et al. 1998). Many of the interviewed teachers spoke easily about the relationship of learning social skills to long-term economic and occupational outcomes rather than the potential inherent in cooperative learning to produce social capital (Antil et al. 1998).

**Cooperative Learning Grouping Strategies Used By Teachers**

Although one of the initial motivations for advocating for Cooperative Learning, (and a focus of this study), is the improvement of race relations, none of the teachers referred to race or ethnicity at any time in their interviews (Antil et al. 1998). This was the case despite the fact that two of the four schools in Antil et al.’s sample had significant multiethnic and multiracial enrollments (Antil et al. 1998). There was no mention of, or indication that attempts to enhance racial or ethnic relations were made through grouping strategies (Antil et al. 1998).

Teachers in this study also failed to acknowledge issues of mixed ability levels as a pedagogical motivation for cooperative learning (Antil et al. 1998). Although some of the teachers created heterogeneous ability groups, this was by no means their dominant approach to grouping (Antil et al. 1998). Rather, most teachers used random assignment, student selection of teammates, and groups of convenience as their grouping strategies (Antil et al. 1998). According to Antil et. al., teachers tried to create groups with maximum efficiency and as a result, most of the time, ability composition was not their concern, nor did it seem to affect their decision to use cooperative learning. However, a meta-analysis of 66 studies on small-group work by Abrami, Lou, Spence, Poulsen, Chambers, and D'apollonia found that students, generally, performed better in mixed-ability groups, although medium-ability students appeared to perform better in same-ability groups (Lou et al. 1996).
A study of classroom grouping practices in the UK by Baines, Blatchford, and Kutnick showed that grouping strategies were aimed at maintaining control and on-task attention and maximizing teacher directed learning (Baines et. al. 2003). Another more recent study on group composition by Gillies and Boyle was conducted by interviewing 10 teachers from five different schools. The interviewed teachers reported that they used a variety of strategies to form small groups, including mixed gender, random, or friendship-based (Gillies & Boyle 2010).

A study on student interactions by Webb found that forming groups based on mixed genders was a more difficult task than it might seem, as an unbalanced combination tends to be less productive. However, when teachers managed to create gender-balanced groups, all genders were equally interactive, and there were no differences in achievement outcomes (Webb 1991).

**Discrepancies Between cooperative learning In The Research And The Classroom**

Questions about how teachers think about cooperative learning and how they incorporate and adapt it to their classrooms are of interest to the educational community because they relate to the issue of the impact of research on instructional practices (Abrami et al 2004). Achieving social justice and anti-prejudice education requires that certain conditions be met in the composition of Cooperative Learning groups. These conditions have been defined and tested repeatedly. For example, according to Alport’s contact hypothesis, for Cooperative Learning to produce anti-racial gains, certain conditions must be satisfied such as cooperative interdependence, acquaintance potential, equal status, and institutional support for positive intergroup interaction (Molina & Wittig 2006).

This premise is also shared by David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson who also agree that promoting constructive interaction among ethnic groups requires far more than simple proximity in group work, but rather, interventions are require to induce positive interaction and
promote constructive relationships between heterogeneous students (Johnson & Johnson 1981). Johnson and Johnson have published a multitude of research on the subject of cooperative learning establishing a five-element standard for classifying group work as cooperative learning. These standards include; Positive interdependence; promotive interaction; individual and group accountability; teaching students the required interpersonal and small group skills; and group processing (Johnson & Johnson 1991).

Of these five elements, cooperative interdependence has been the most frequently studied condition of contact beginning with the classic Robert’s cave studies by Sherif M. (Antil et al. 1998). Some research even suggests that both the cooperative and the interdependent elements of cooperative learning is required for reducing racial prejudice as cooperation alone actually increases pre-existing intergroup tensions (Walker & Crogan, 1998). The “jigsaw” classroom is an example of a cooperative interdependence strategy that typically involves learning groups of students of different ethnic backgrounds who are interdependent on each other to contribute unique information to a joined project on which their collective performance depends (Molina & Wittig 2006).

Using Johnson & Johnson’s five-element standard, Antil et al sought to understand the shape cooperative learning takes in classrooms and the correspondence between classroom and research models of cooperative learning. They assessed the role of teachers' beliefs and goals for CL, their experiences with the practice, personal estimation of its efficacy, and the ways that they use it (Antil et al. 1998). In their research, they looked specifically to see how closely teachers adhered to models tested by researchers. They also looked to see whether teachers who adapt Cooperative Learning for their particular circumstances, choose to include those elements of the practice that researchers believe are important (Antil et al. 1998). They found that all of
the teachers interviewed mentioned using at least one of Johnson and Johnson's five defining elements of Cooperative learning, and most indicated use of several elements, however, only one teacher incorporated all five criteria (Antil et al. 1998).

**Recommendations To Increase And Improve The Use Of CL**

In order to maximize the implementation of any educational innovations, Abrami et. al. suggest that professional developers must attempt to enhance teachers’ expectations of success (Abrami et al 2004). Thus, In order to encourage teachers to implement anti-prejudicial education through CL, they need to believe that they can do this successfully, specifically within their own context (Abrami et al 2004). This suggests that it is not sufficient to show teachers how successful others have been with cooperative learning techniques. Rather, professional developers must aim to create communities of practitioners that provide mutual support; follow-up training for skill refinement and adaptation of the innovation to a teacher’s particular situation (Abrami et al 2004).
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Methodology

The research procedure followed the suggested processes of an exploratory qualitative research method. A qualitative approach was most suited for this topic, as it provided in-depth raw data necessary to understand the multiple, and complex factors of Cooperative Learning. This allowed for an exploration of the interconnected and complex elements of the topic in a way that would not have been possible using quantitative data.

After collaboration with my research supervisor, and receiving approval from the board of ethics of the University of Toronto, the data collection process took place. Semi-structured interviews were conducted between September 2014 and March 2015. The interviews explored the perspectives of teachers who use Cooperative Learning for social justice on various grouping strategies. The research explored the teachers’ experiences with Cooperative Learning, as well as, their grouping practices, ideologies, familiarity with the research, and the difficulties they face in the classroom.

Instruments of Data Collection

The research consisted of semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The questions were open-ended to allow participants to expand on their experiences. The interviews last between 20-25 minutes and took place at mutually agreed upon locations. Interviews were audio-recorded, supplemented by researcher’s notes and transcribed verbatim. The interview records were then analyzed and consolidated into common themes. An example of a research question with a follow up prompt is: what types of grouping strategies do you employ in your classroom and why? See Appendix A for the full interview script and protocol.
Recruitment And Participants

Four junior, intermediate and senior teachers were recruited using the snowball sampling method. Participating teachers were practitioners who regularly use cooperative learning in their classrooms with the intention of fostering social, as well as, academic skills. Recruitment was from teachers in the Peel school board, which serves a highly ethnically diverse community. Participants had multiple years of teaching experience both as contract teachers, as well as, long-term occasional teachers. Participants were selected from schools with high levels of diversity. I did not control for ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, or socio-economic status, as with such a small sample size controlling for these differences between participants will be unfruitful. Further, these specifications are not pertinent to the research in question.

The first participant is referred to as Sasha. Sasha is an Egyptian-Canadian female in her mid-twenties who has approximately four years of classroom teaching experiences. She is currently supplying at the senior level. Her classroom experiences consisted of occasional teaching and four long-term occasional placements within the Peel district.

The second participant is referred to as Lauren. Lauren is a Canadian female in her early thirties who has approximately eleven years of classroom teaching experiences. She is currently a homeroom teacher for grade eight Independent-Learning-Plan cluster classrooms. Her classroom experiences consisted of five different schools within the Peel district, all of which had relatively high student diversity.

The third participant is referred to as Christopher. Christopher is a Cyprian-Canadian male in his late forties who has approximately fifteen years of classroom teaching experience. He is currently a homeroom teacher for a grade eight-gifted classroom. His classroom
experience has all been through teaching in the same school that he is currently teaching in, which is also a highly diverse school within the Peel district.

Finally, the fourth participant is referred to as Stephan. Stephan is a Canadian male in his mid-forties, originally from New Brunswick. He has approximately eight years of classroom teaching experience. He is currently a homeroom teacher for a grade eight classroom. His classroom experience has been in two highly diverse schools within the Peel district.

**Ethical Considerations**

Prior to the interview, participants received a letter of information (see Appendix B) and any additional questions they had were addressed. Participants were notified that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point. To ensure confidentiality, participants are referred to using pseudonyms throughout the results and description of this study. After the completion of the interview, participants were debriefed and asked to sign a consent form confirming their confidentiality (see Appendix C). They were also offered a copy of the final MTRP article upon completion. Participants did not receive compensation for their participation.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The data was analyzed using theoretical thematic analysis. This consisted of analyzing each interview in comparison to the others and identifying particular themes or patterns within participant responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The method of open line by line coding was utilized, as outlined by Strauss and Glaser, where the researcher codes the interviews by comparing the interviews to one another and going through them line by line in as much detail as possible (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Through this process, significant phrases and terms were identified and appropriate themes were formed, which were then analyzed and related to the literature.
Ethical Review Procedures

I followed the ethical review approval procedures for the Master of Teaching program. A blanket approval form to interview teachers and practitioners in the field of education was submitted and approved. The real names of all participants and schools will remain confidential and the raw data will be kept for up to 2 years after publication, at which point it will be destroyed.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

All teachers interviewed implemented group work in their classrooms in accordance with some of the conditions set out by research for effective cooperative learning. This included accountability, interdependent goals, and teaching students the social skills required to conduct successful group work. Thus, the way all the interviewed teachers set up Cooperative Learning in their classrooms would be ideal for developing social gains, inducing positive interactions and promoting constructive relationships between heterogeneous groups of students.

Use of Cooperative Learning For Social Gains

When questioned about the motivations behind using Cooperative Learning, all participants mentioned social goals, as well as, academic goals. One of the social goals that all participants claimed to be important is giving students the opportunity to both learn about others and to develop the ability to work well with those who might be different from them. Sasha explains that students need to work in groups, “to learn to deal with different types of personalities, they are not all the same”. She also says, “I just feel like they really do learn about each other by talking to each other and communicating with other people”. Stephan also shared this view as he stated, “There is that social gain of kids learning to work with other people…the biggest one would be respect for others, listening to others”. Lauren also talked about the importance of children working with others as she said, “I don’t think it matters what career any of these kids go into, working with others is a necessity, even if you work in an independent job, you still have to have those collaborative skills”. Christopher also stressed the importance of this as he says, “I have used group work to build rapport amongst the kids and getting them to know each other”.

TEACHERS’ GROUPING STRATEGIES FOR COOPERATIVE LEARNING
Although all participants shared the understanding that Cooperative Learning could be used to have students interacting positively with those who are different than they are, none of the participants extended this concept towards anti-prejudicial education. The participants talked of children working with “others” or people who are different from them as a general goal; however, they did not specify whether these differences were general personality differences or if they encompass different cultures, religions, etc. The focus of this social goal was to develop important social skills, rather than for social justice. This is aligned with current research on teachers’ motivations behind using Cooperative Learning in their classrooms.

_Ethnically Heterogeneous Grouping_

Upon asking the interviewees about their usual grouping strategies, it became clear that ethnically heterogeneous grouping was not a strategy that most of the interviewed teachers ever purposefully utilized. In fact, participants were unaware of this grouping strategy as a viable option, as well as, its benefits for anti-prejudicial education. They did however describe gender and ability based heterogeneous grouping to be among their preferred grouping strategies.

When directly asked if he used heterogeneous grouping, Stephan, who teaches in a highly diverse school, explained that he hadn’t even thought of creating ethnically heterogeneous groups before, as he says,

> It's interesting with ethnicity, I hadn't really thought about it. I don't really do groups according to that. Sometimes you will see there will be a few [students] who share some sort of background who … will flock together and if they work together that's great, but no I usually have enough to handle making the groups in terms of behavior.

After thinking about it further, Stephan decided that he doesn’t see himself using this grouping strategy in the future, he says, “The only reason I would is if it was relevant in some way to the purpose of the grouping. In grade 8, gender is very relevant, and I don't want to put a boy in a
group of all girls and vice versa”. Further, Stephan prefers to create groups for his students by mixed ability, as well as, manageable behavior. Occasionally he will allow students to choose their own groups.

Christopher, who also teaches in a highly diverse school, had never used this grouping strategy, and admitted that ethnicity is something he purposefully chooses to ignore in his classroom, “Honestly, I don't even look at their ethnicity. I don't see them as that. I notice gender; I do not notice ethnicity, which is good for me. I think we should all be like that, right?” Christopher was in fact quite against the concept of mixed ethnicity groupings as he goes on to say, “I would be very uncomfortable to mix groups together based on ethnicity. I don't even know how you would go about doing that and it would probably be so obvious that it would be uncomfortable. I would be so uncomfortable that I would never do that”. Rather, Christopher groups students using random grouping, student preference, and multiple intelligences. Christopher strives to create groups that include a variety of different intelligences so that students can complete and support each other in different areas.

Like Christopher and Stephan, Lauren was also more focused on gender based heterogeneous grouping, as she explained that with the diversity of her current student body, ethnically heterogeneous grouping was not in her toolbox of grouping strategies. She says, “I feel like its very difficult to get the kids to be productive, they need the balance of female influence in the group to keep them under control. I prefer to have a mix, I think that it’s a healthy balance for the kids”. Further, for Lauren the only time purposeful ethnicity based grouping came into play was in creating homogenous groups due to cultural sensitivities. She says,

There has only been a few specific times in the past 10 years that I can think of where I’ve done groups based on culture, in specific situations,
such as teaching dance and I have a group of girls based on religious beliefs that cannot dance with boys, I would make sure that just to make them feel inclusive they would be put into a group of girls who would be similar to their personality and style and comfort level so they could participate as much as they felt comfortable doing so.

Lauren also prefers to rely on ability based grouping, as well as, behavior-based grouping, random grouping and student choice.

Unlike the other three participants however, Sasha, who based her answers on experience from four different Long Term Occasional positions, had some experience with ethnically heterogeneous grouping. She had noticed that students from the same cultural background tend to stick together. Sasha explained that when she notices this happening, she tends to separate them. She also says,

I do also like to have diverse groups because then you have diversity in the classroom. It's all about diversity now and you want all the students with different cultural backgrounds, to get along especially with issues of bullying and discrimination and all that, which there is a lot of, you would be surprised

However, Sasha also talked about instances where she had to avoid creating an ethnically heterogeneous group due to ethnic tensions with specific students. In a particular situation she had to, in fact, separate two students from different ethnicities to avoid clashes and conflict. Instead she placed them in more homogenous groups

Thus, contrary to the literature on grouping strategies most often used by teachers, the results from these interviews indicate a tendency towards ability based heterogeneous grouping, as well as, gender-based heterogeneous groups. However, as suggested by the literature, ethnically based heterogeneous grouping is not often utilized. Further, the interviewed teachers appear to be unaware of the social benefits of ethnically heterogeneous groups.
**Student-Body Diversity and Ethnic Tensions**

All teachers interviewed where either currently working in, or had experience in, schools with highly diverse student-bodies. Most teachers also felt that these schools experienced relatively low levels of overt racism. Stephan described his current school saying, “It’s quite a diverse school in terms of ethnicity, wealth, everything … I like having the variety of cultures and backgrounds”. When asked about the level of racism or ethnic tensions in the school Stephan said, “They grow up with [diversity]. The community itself is diverse and by grade 8 they have come to be accustomed to the fact that there will be other people with other opinions in the room and they seem to be comfortable with that”. When I pushed further, and asked if he thought there might be prejudicial attitudes between members of minority groups from similar ethnic backgrounds, he said, “it’s quite a good mix in that you don't get that, people seem to like each other for who they are. You don't seem to have that clustering. I imagine a part of this is what they bring to the classroom, students are bringing that inclusivity and respect from home”.

Christopher felt the same way about the general ethnic relations of the students in his school. However, when I questioned Christopher about attitudes minority members from similar ethnic backgrounds might hold towards one another, he acknowledged that there might be some tension there, although it is not explicit. He says,

Well I’m sure that is the case because at this age they are very influenced by the parents and it depends on the parents beliefs and values, do they act on it when they are here overtly? No, because they know it is frowned upon and we don’t accept it. I mean we can’t control what they think but at the same time they know what we think about it so they fight it I think. There has been a couple of issues over the years, a couple of things said by students, not maliciously but you know, they said it because that’s what their parents would say or think. They don’t realize what they said is either prejudice or racial or mean spirited, they don't realize it because it’s what they know. So in those cases you kind of address it when it happens but in general when it happens today it’s not overt.
Thus, Christopher acknowledges the possible existence of implicit and hidden prejudicial attitudes between minority groups even though there may not be a blatant racism problem within the school.

Lauren also describes the student body of her current, and past school as diverse and inclusive. When asked if there were any general ethnic tensions she said that she could not think of any during her time there. When I prompted to her to think of ethnic tension between minority groups however, Lauren mentioned some issues between Arabic students. She explained,

There has been some issues with the Arabic group of kids in the past and there kind of continues to be … things such as the Arabic kids just abusing their own language by speaking Arabic in class … insults are being given to both staff and peers, and they are doing it in their own language to avoid being understood, and there has been a little too of racial conflict with the Arabic students at times and some of the other cultural groups.

Like Christopher, Lauren explains that these covert ethnic tensions between groups originate form prejudices held at home, as she says, “Kids aren't born understanding racial conflict as a natural innate character trait, it’s something they are usually exposed to and they pick up, even if its just very subtle amongst private conversations that they are exposed to”.

Sasha, on the other hand, has had experiences in diverse student-body schools with low racism, as well as, high racism. Sasha mentioned witnessing ethnic tensions between minority groups such as between Indian and black students. She also believes there are tensions between minority members from similar ethnic backgrounds, such as between students from different Arabic countries. Sasha, like Christopher and Lauren, believes that this is also a result of the influence parents may have on the students, as well as the media, as she says,

I feel like it’s the media, a lot of the media they are watching now is making fun of all the different cultures but they think it's a joke, so they come to class and they say these racial comments … media does play a
huge role … And it could be coming from family, depends on the
dynamic. Some people might not be comfortable with different
races, so they see what their parents are against and they just bring it
with them into the classroom so a lot of the family does really affect the
students’ behavior

Thus, all interviewed teachers had experiences with diverse student bodies, although they
were aware of racism between students to varying degrees. All teachers agreed that students
bring with them to the classroom attitudes they are exposed to at home.

**Need For On-Going Anti-Prejudicial Education**

Although not all interviewed teachers felt that racism was an issue in their current
schools, Stephan, Christopher and Sasha agreed that on-going anti-prejudicial education is a
necessity for good education. Stephan says, “You have to learn to be sensitive and help students
be sensitive too”. However, Stephan adds the stipulation that explicit and direct anti-prejudicial
education would not be as relevant or successful with his student-body. He explains,

I remember going to some workshops and training and thinking the
way that they packaged it wouldn't work here, because to make it a
general isolated program thinking that we need a quick fix in the
school? Then no. But if you make it relevant to things that are
happening here in the school, then, yeah. I mean we can all do better at
making people feel confident in the classroom by making it relevant,
how is it connect with their lives here.

Thus, Stephan calls for on-going anti-prejudicial education that is more implicit and natural to the
classroom environment.

Christopher also felt that on-going anti-prejudicial education was absolutely important, as
he says, “Just because we don't have any issues doesn't mean there aren’t any, … as far as anti-
prejudicial education, that goes without saying and that is sexual orientation or ethnicity or
religion or whatever it may be”. He also stipulates that anti-prejudicial education need not be
explicit, as he says, “we have never had to stop and pause and say, ‘Oh we have a real problem,
lets address it’. It’s not that. We just do it for everyone globally because it’s just good education to practice”.

However, Lauren had a different opinion in the matter. Even though Lauren had mentioned ethnic conflicts with Arabic students in her class, she felt that the students were so used to diversity, they no longer need anti-prejudicial education. She says, “I don’t [think that anti-prejudicial education is relevant for this student body] because this school is so diverse, you don’t need to teach it to them, its normal to these kids already”.

**Heterogeneous Grouping In Diverse Schools**

Despite three out of four interviewed teachers acknowledging the need for implicit anti-prejudicial education in schools with diverse-student bodies, all four teachers felt that creating purposefully heterogeneous groups was not necessary. Lauren explains that in her current school there are so many different cultures within the classroom that it is almost given that every group is going to have a mix of cultures in it. She provides an analogy to further explain her point, saying,

> Because my class is already very mixed, … I think its a lot easier to do naturally because now if you have a whole bag of Smarties if you reach in and grab a bundle you will get a pretty diverse group, but if you only have red, green and whites, when you reach in you might pull out a lot of reds, so I think you can benefit from the fact that the group is already very multi-cultural. In general any random grouping is probably not going to get a group of all Asian, Chinese, Pilipino, South African, Indian or Pakistani kids … Even if you grab 10 random kids, it would already be a very diverse group

This rationale was shared by Christopher who explained that because the classroom was already so diverse, ethnically heterogeneous groups were inevitable and did not require any purposeful manipulation. He says, “in a diverse school [heterogeneous grouping] is addressed
with random groupings, so you do get that every once in a while, its just not the driving force behind everything”.

Sasha also felt that a diverse school does not require as much of a conscious effort for heterogeneous groupings, as she says, “For me personally, in a more ethnically diverse student body I am not as conscious of heterogeneous groupings as the groups are normally diverse”.

Stephan, who was the only teacher who was completely unaware of any possible tensions between minority groups with similar backgrounds, claimed that the only case in which he would consider using heterogeneous grouping in a diverse school would be if there were issues regarding ethnic tensions. He says, “If I went into it knowing that there was some kind of a sensitivity then I would be thinking how can I do that and whether it is to spread things out so that ethnicities are represented throughout groups”. However, in his current diverse student body, he has not come across the need to use heterogeneous grouping.

**Heterogeneous Grouping In Non-Diverse Schools**

When the interviewed teachers were asked if they would be more inclined to use ethnically heterogeneous grouping in less diverse schools, only Christopher insisted that he would not be comfortable making any grouping decisions based on ethnicity, regardless of the level of student diversity. On the other hand, Stephan felt that in a less diverse school or society, heterogeneous grouping would be more relevant, as he says, “You would want to be very sensitive of those groupings ... Certainly in a homogenous school it would be a bigger issue”.

Lauren also felt that her grouping straggles would vary in a less diverse student body. She says,

I think that if there was a clear divide in the class then my hope is always to have every child feel included and to have an inclusive classroom so I think if I ever notice as an educator that when grouping
was being done all the Caucasian students and all the south Asian were constantly in separate groups and there seems to be a divide then I would arbitrarily step in and ensure that mixed grouping were done to just build a more blended community.

This shows a clear distinction between Lauren’s attitudes regarding ethnically heterogeneous grouping in schools with a diverse student body and schools with a non-diverse student body.

This distinction is also evident in Sasha’s attitudes regarding heterogeneous groupings, as she explains,

In [a school] where the majority of my students were white, I was more conscious of heterogeneous grouping since my class did not have a diverse student body. I tried to mix groups as much as possible, so that students were able to communicate and meet with students of a different background than their own and in turn students got to develop respect, open-mindedness and tolerance to students of different ethnicity.

Thus, despite being aware of ethnic tensions between minority groups and between groups of similar ethnic backgrounds, both Lauren, and Sasha did not feel that ethnically heterogeneous grouping was necessary in diverse schools, yet they admitted to being more likely to utilize it in less diverse schools where ethnic differences were more distinctive.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Analysis of Findings And Implications

Although one of the main reasons cooperative learning was developed, and encouraged as a desirable teaching strategy was for the improvement of ethnic relations (Antil et al. 1998), none of the teachers interviewed in this study referred to ethnicity or ethnic relations when discussing their motivations behind utilizing Cooperative Learning in their classrooms. They all spoke about using Cooperative Learning to allow students to learn about one another and to build tolerance through cooperation. They also all designed their Cooperative Learning lessons to included many of the important elements for social gains as outlined by research such as accountability, and interdependence. However, their negligence of the connection between the social goals of Cooperative learning and social justice is problematic. That is because as indicated by the literature, teachers who used Cooperative Learning strategies without appreciating its benefits for anti-prejudicial teaching may not be as effective in reducing prejudice amongst their students and promoting social justice.

After specifically asking the teachers about their attitudes regarding ethnically heterogeneous grouping, it became clear that only Lauren and Sasha, (two out of the four interviewed teachers) were aware of the benefits of ethnically heterogeneous grouping. This suggests a need for professional development programing that explicitly addresses the social justice benefits of cooperative learning and the ways in which it can be utilized for anti-discriminatory education. This is an important implication as a teacher who values cooperative learning as a tool for anti-discriminatory education will be more inclined to invest time in using grouping strategies that result in heterogeneous groupings of ethnicity.
Although Christopher, Lauren and Sasha were aware that prejudicial attitudes may exist within their students despite it not being an overt problem, all three, as well as, Stephan, felt that creating ethnically heterogeneous grouping was not necessary when dealing with a diverse student-body.

For Christopher, this opinion held true even when hypothetically dealing with a less diverse student body. This rationale was due to a colorblind discourse, as Christopher felt that it was more appropriate to ignore students’ different ethnicities rather than to take them into consideration. This belief may be the result of simply not knowing the research supporting heterogeneous grouping for anti-prejudicial education in which case, as previously mentioned, more informative professional development on the matter is required.

Lauren, Sasha and Stephan however, attributed this rationale to the fact that in a highly diverse student body, ethnically heterogeneous grouping is inevitable. All three teachers agreed that in a more Caucasian majority school, ethnically heterogeneous grouping would be a relevant grouping strategy that they would utilize often.

The belief that ethnically heterogeneous grouping is more relevant in less diverse schools than it is in diverse schools could be the result of two different factors. The first factor might be that teachers are unaware of ethnic tensions that might exist between minority groups from similar ethnic backgrounds; for example, the ethnic tensions between Indian and Pakistani students or Palestinian and Lebanese students. If teachers are unaware of the cultural differences, (and potential tensions) between such minority groups, they may not realize the importance of being purposeful with how they are grouping these students. All teachers except for Stephan seemed to be aware of the existence of underlying and implicit prejudices that students may
bring from home, however, only Sasha seemed to be aware of possible tensions between minority students with similar ethnic backgrounds.

The second factor that could lead these teachers to feel that ethnically heterogeneous grouping is more relevant in less diverse schools could be the type of diversity of their current school. In Lauren, Christopher and Stephan’s current schools, the student body is highly multi-ethnic. As Lauren described, when picking a random group of students it is highly unlikely that the group would consist of more than one Chinese or Arabic or Indian student for example. Thus, in highly multi-ethnic schools such as this, it would hard for students of the same background to cluster together in the classroom and avoid working with others.

The problem however arises in schools that are located in ethnic enclaves of the district. In some areas of the Peel district, there are heavy concentrations of certain ethnicities. For example, certain parts of Brampton are known for their heavy concentration of South Asian immigrants. Schools in these areas would have a high concentration of students form India and Pakistan who may look like they are from the same visible minority group, but have very distinctive cultures. In such student bodies, ethnically heterogeneous grouping would still be relevant despite the ethnic diversity of the school.

Limitations

Due to the lack of funds and resources to conduct the research, it was highly limited by its small sample size. As a result of this, the research was limited to interviewing four participants. As all four participants were teachers at diverse and multi-ethnic schools, the research was only able to explore one side of the picture. It would have been beneficial to interview teachers from less diverse schools, as well as, from schools in ethnic enclaves of the city. Thus, it is not possible to create a full picture of the attitudes held by teachers regarding
ethnically heterogeneous grouping. As a result, no causative or correlative statements can be made on the topic. Rather the research serves to provide more detailed and personal accounts rather than generalizable observations.

Further, discussions regarding ethnicity, gender, SES, ability, and other “isms” tend to be highly sensitive. During an experiment or an interview, various social forces may have influenced participants, resulting in the conscious or unconscious modification of their attitudes or responses. The Social Desirability Bias highlights that there is a tendency for participants to modify their answers in a manner that is compliant with societal norms or expectations on the topic (Fisher & Katz, 2000). Although ensuring the participant’s confidentiality minimizes the influence of the Social Desirability Bias research dictates that this phenomenon can arise regardless. Moreover, the individual’s need for approval and the sheer presence of an interviewer could have impacted the validity and reliability of their answers due to Participant bias. (Lewis-Beck, Bryman & Liao, 2004).

Areas for Future Research

For future research, it would be beneficial to first establish agreed upon definitions and understandings of what is considered a diverse student body. Research should explore if schools that are located in ethnic enclaves could be considered diverse, and if so, how is it distinguished from multi-ethnic schools that have a larger variety of cultural backgrounds.

Regarding ethnically heterogeneous grouping and anti-prejudicial education, it would be beneficial to examine the attitudes of both teachers who work in ethnic enclaves, as well as, teachers who work in majority Caucasian schools and compare them to teachers who work in multi-ethnic schools.
This research could also be conducted as a large-scale survey that would gather information on if teachers use ethnically heterogeneous groupings or not and the level of diversity of their student body. This would provide the evidence required to determine if there are any patterns or correlations.

It would also be interesting to examine the attitudes of newly graduated teachers and teacher candidates regarding co-operative learning and anti-prejudicial education. This would help to determine if there is a need for more explicit instruction in anti-discriminatory pedagogy and theory.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Semi-structured Research Questions

Thank you for agreeing to interview with me, how are you today?
1. What grades do you teach?
2. What subjects do you teach?
3. Can you tell me a little bit about the student-body of your current/past school/s?
   a. Ethnic diversity?
   b. SES?
   c. Student diversity?
If you don’t mind, I would like to begin talking about your experiences with group work.
4. Do you use group work in your classroom? (The answer will be yes as this is controlled for in the selection process)
5. What kind of group-work do you use? Describe it.
6. How often do you use group work?
7. Why do you use group work?
8. What do you feel students gain out of group work?
   a. Social gains? Academic? (Selection will also control for those who use cooperative learning for social gains, this question is merely asked to lead to the next question)
9. What are the social skills/lessons you feel students gain from group work?
10. What grouping strategies do you use for group work?
11. Do your strategies change? Or are you consistent with these grouping strategies?
   a. If they change, what are these changes based on?
12. Which grouping strategy do you find you rely on the most and why?
   a. Random grouping?
   b. Purposefully Heterogeneous or homogenous?
   c. Mix of ethnicity? Gender? Ability?
13. Which grouping strategy do you find you use the least and why?
14. Would your grouping strategies be different if you were dealing with a more/less divers student body, or remain the same?

Questions directed at teachers who work at ethnically diverse - white minority - schools:
15. Please tell me about the ethnic relations amongst the student body at your school?
   a. Do you feel that anti-prejudicial education is relevant for this student body? Why or why not?
   b. Are there any “racial” tensions between students?
   c. Are there tensions between non-white students?
   d. Why do you think this is the case
16. Do you think students from similar ethnic backgrounds (ex. India and Pakistan) hold stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes towards one another? Why?
17. Do you think that heterogeneous grouping is or is not necessary in an ethnically diverse student body vs. a majority white student body? why or why not
   a. Why/ why not?
Thank you for your honesty and taking the time to answer my questions today. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experiences or anything you feel we haven’t touched on in our discussion?

Appendix B: Letter of Information

Date: __________________________.

Dear: __________________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate in the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning department. I am studying cooperative learning grouping strategies for the purposes of a graduate research paper. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this topic as a requirement for the Master of Teaching program. My course instructor who is providing support for this assignment this year is _________________. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 30-60-minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you.

The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in this project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Sandra Guirguis, MT candidate
647-203-6509
SandraNsami@gmail.com

Instructor’s Name: __________________________
Contact information
Appendix C: Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Ms. Sandra Guirguis and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Name (printed): ____________________________________________

Signature: _________________________________________________

Date: ________________________________________________