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Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

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Chapter 9 Group Development

A Significant Moment

It is around 3 P.M. on February 3, 1998. We are in the Language Studies Unit of Aston University. With five colleagues acting as Understanders, I am the Speaker. We are approximately twenty minutes into the session.

Extract 9.1

- | | | |
|----|--------------|---|
| 01 | UNDERSTANDER | You used the word "renewal," a lot there . . . |
| 02 | JULIAN | Yeah. |
| 03 | UNDERSTANDER | . . . "CD renewal" . . . |
| 04 | JULIAN | Yeah. |
| 05 | UNDERSTANDER | . . . but I didn't actually get a picture anywhere of |
| 06 | | just what that renewal meant. You talked about how |
| 07 | | you might take CD into different areas? |
| 08 | JULIAN | Yeah. |
| 09 | UNDERSTANDER | I wondered if you'd actually thought about what that |
| 10 | | means for you, the idea of "renewing CD," you know, |
| 11 | | in what sense? |

The request for clarification contained in these nine lines of dialogue marks a particularly important turning point in my own professional development. Let me first of all interpret the moment in its context and then go on to explain more about the scheme that we were operating here.

The starting point for my work as Speaker that day was the news that my book, *Cooperative Development*, had been deleted from its publisher's list for the following year. I had what I take to be the usual writer's emotions about this fact, but they were mag-

nified on this occasion by the feeling that I was about to lose my main line of communication in terms of the project that continued to motivate me most. I had been running courses and workshops in cooperative development since 1988. The significance of the book was that before, after, or even instead of face-to-face contact with colleagues, I was in a position to communicate my ideas in written form. But as of 1999, I was to be more or less back where I had started. That was how it felt. And I did not know what to do.

At the beginning of that school year (in October 1997), my immediate colleagues at work had paid me the enormous compliment of asking me to arrange some kind of regular professional development opportunity for ourselves as a group. We had been through a series of familiarization sessions in the use of nonevaluative discourse, based on tasks similar to those provided in the first part of this book, and the session from which I take Extract 9.1 was our first full-scale attempt at what we came to call group development (GD).

In lines 01 and 03, the Understander checks that he has correctly identified an expression that the Speaker has used. He then asks for clarification of this expression. In retrospect, I see that the power of this particular move arises from the fact that it functions in at least three ways:

- it requests clarification of a repeated idea that is clearly important to the Speaker—"renewing CD";
- it invites the Speaker to consider the possibility of choosing to focus on this point;
- it shifts the Speaker's orientation from talk to action, in the sense that this idea of renewal can only be clarified in terms of proposing to do something.

Again in retrospect, I see that the Understander chose just that item from my discourse that allowed me to shift my energy away from the disappointment and frustration that had been occupying me and toward the consideration of what my next steps actually were to be. Until this point, "renewal" had been an empty con-

tainer signaling an emotional reaction. I was now called on to fill it with the detail of a response.

As ever, I am not saying that something mechanistic or necessarily causative happened here, but something facilitative certainly did. In that moment, I felt a flash of panic along with a sense of the absolute legitimacy of the Understander's request. From that moment, a hugely empowering and satisfying second wave of cooperative development work has flowed, involving more than I can take space to report on in this book and including the book itself.

The Scheme

As a group of colleagues who already shared a positive working relationship, we agreed to explore the potential of a nonjudgmental approach to individual self-development in a group context. There were eight of us at the initial meeting where the idea was discussed, this being the teaching team for the MSc. in TESOL program that we shared. Six colleagues (four men and two women) wanted to be involved, and two did not, so the six of us proceeded. In our context, no difficulties arose from this division, either interpersonally or in terms of program coordination: some people were involved in this collaborative research and development program, and others were involved in other things.

Another point worth picking up here is that I am sometimes asked how to arrange this work if people do not want to do it or in situations where working relations are bad in the first place. The short answer to this question is that one cannot arrange this work under such circumstances. There is no suggestion here that group development, or any form of cooperative development, can be used to *make* people develop professionally or to establish harmony in place of strife. What I am reporting on is work that we did in the situation in which we found ourselves. In other situations, I would still look for ways to introduce the principles that motivate me, but I am not so presumptuous or naïve as to suggest that we have some kind of a cure-all here. One last comment, however: I would go so far as to say that in a situation in which

people are prepared to offer a certain (if only limited) amount of trust to each other, then working with nonevaluative discourse can certainly help them deepen and extend that trust.

All group members committed themselves to attending meetings regularly and to taking turns being the Speaker at some point. We tried to meet for one hour a week during the semester, going ahead so long as four members could make the session. (I do not want to gloss over the issues of time and effort. No one *has* the time. You have to decide whether you want to *take* the time to *make* the effort. I get upset when people imply that those people who *make* the effort must, somehow, *have* more time. That's a weakness of mine. I return to this subject—in a less abrasive mode—later in this chapter in the section titled "A New Collegiality.")

One colleague chaired the meeting in terms of suggesting when it was appropriate to move to the next stage of the procedure, but all colleagues were of equal status insofar as their roles as autonomously developing professionals were concerned. The fact that one member was director of the unit was not salient in these meetings.

We had two kinds of meetings: core meetings and feedback meetings. Our core meetings were organized in three parts:

1. The Speaker identified a topic of interest on which he or she wanted to work and then presented his or her thoughts while colleagues worked as Understanders.
2. After about 30 to 40 minutes, at what seemed an appropriate point, we changed the flow of discourse so that the colleagues who had been Understanding up to that point had the chance to Speak if they so wished. They did not comment on the thoughts or intentions of the Speaker, either explicitly or by implication. Their statements had to be self-referential. Those colleagues who wished to Speak made statements along the lines of:

In my terms/my world/my field, this makes me think of the following situation/issue/experience ...

We came to call these statements **Resonances**. The intention was to allow colleagues to explore angles relevant to

themselves and to give the Speaker a chance to hear different perspectives that were neither intended, nor to be interpreted, as suggestions, evaluations, or advice. The Speaker or other colleagues could Reflect or ask questions to clarify the resonances expressed.

Intercollegial exchanges were not to be pursued at this point, though matters of interest could be noted for later discussion or possibly as subsequent topics for exploration.

3. The focus shifted back to the Speaker, who might respond to some of the Resonances while reviewing or updating his or her position, making statements such as:

What I'm thinking/feeling now is ...

What I have learned is ...

This helped me ...

This got in my way ...

My next move is ...

The Speaker or chairperson then closed the meeting.

Afterward, of course, colleagues sometimes wished to pursue points arising from the GD meeting. We agreed, however, that our usual, socially sanctioned patterns of discussing, agreeing, disagreeing, advising, etc., should not be taken up immediately, particularly not with regard to the Speaker's expressed opinions or intentions, in order to give the dynamic of self-development a little more space in which to work.

These core meetings were taped, and a part of my work as development coordinator was to go through the tapes and extract what I took to be significant incidents. We would then discuss these extracts at feedback meetings interspersed among the core meetings. For the most part, especially in the early stages, these discussions turned around issues of the legitimacy of Understander contributions in terms of the model we had agreed to work with.

Whenever, for example, a colleague said, "*Ah, I'm not sure if I'm supposed to say this here, but I think it might be useful if I...*," this was a pretty clear signal that the Understander role was about to be abandoned. But there were more subtle diversions to

discuss, and a great deal of learning took place for us all—about ourselves, about each other, and about the processes we were involved in. In time, we moved ever closer to implementing the idea that the Understanders' interventions are intended to serve the self-development of the Speaker.

We had wondered about how Understanders would manage turn-taking among themselves and decided to let matters follow their own course. This did not turn out to be a problem as such, but it remained the case throughout that some Understanders intervened more than others. This was due to some extent to familiarity with the style of discourse, to some extent to the amount of affinity individuals developed with the role, and to some extent to more general issues of personal style and preference. We certainly never felt that it would be useful to formalize taking turns. In retrospect, however, I would add one further comment. We discovered that, as with one-to-one CD, it is very useful to get a Reflection in early. It settles the Speaker, pulls the group together, and reaffirms the style of the discourse. I now feel that the role of providing this early reflection is one that we might have shared out on a turn-taking basis. But that is an idea for the next time, and I am getting ahead of myself.

What I want to do is introduce what happened through the data of the sessions themselves, along with some parallel comments elicited by an E-mail questionnaire. There is an important point to bring out here about what I am trying to communicate. This work means a lot to me, and I would be very happy to know that other people want to get involved in it or in something like it. But I have by now covered enough waterfronts not to want to suggest to people in circumstances other than my own what they should or should not be doing. So it has to happen like this: I'll tell you about the work we did and why I value it. You decide to what extent and in what ways you see anything useful to you.

It is a coincidence of my involvement in this work over time and with different colleagues that the one-to-one CD featured in part 2 of this book relates almost entirely to topics directly concerned with classroom teaching, while the topics here do not. I know of

no reason why GD should not be carried out among full-time classroom teachers of ESL, but that has not been my experience of it. I have chosen to keep the data authentic and allow my readers to make their own decisions about the usefulness for themselves of the work on which I am reporting. That seems to me to be in line with the principles of respect, empathy, and sincerity that underpin all these efforts. As I said in the opening lines of chapter 1, the issue is not whether we are teaching preschool or supervising doctoral students but how we can develop as professionals.

We are going to look next at three GD sessions in some detail in an attempt to track significant moments in episodes of individual development. After that, we will look at the work again from the viewpoint of an enhanced collegiality. The names used in the extracts are pseudonyms. Everyone concerned has read this chapter and had any input that they wish. So right now, let us return to Room 742. It's sunnier now. We're in June 1998, and Bill is Speaker.

Bill as Speaker

Particularly on Bill's mind is the need to give a talk at an upcoming conference, but the issue he is working on is one that is common to other situations in a teacher or teacher-educator's professional life. Here is how the Focus comes to be articulated (01-08) and Reflected (09-17). Notice how the Reflection leads to a further articulation of the Focus (18-22), making explicit Bill's feeling of failed communication when he gives a planned talk.

Extract 9.2

| | | |
|----|------|---|
| 01 | BILL | For whatever reason, I've got a strong sense that I'm |
| 02 | | much better at improvising and off-the-cuff talking |
| 03 | | than I am at planning. As soon as I enter into a |
| 04 | | planning world in terms of talking, it seems to put |
| 05 | | on some kind of stress, which I feel imposing on me, |
| 06 | | and this imposition, this structure that I've |
| 07 | | preplanned, is, is a saddle, a chain, something that |
| 08 | | inhibits me. |

| | | |
|----|------|---|
| 09 | JOE | So, if I can just check that with you, this area of |
| 10 | | focus that you want to work on is a preference for |
| 11 | | off-the-cuff talk, as opposed to planned talk (Bill: |
| 12 | | Mmm). You feel that when you plan something, that |
| 13 | | when you start to talk, you feel that plan as an |
| 14 | | imposition on you and it constrains you and ties you |
| 15 | | down, and you feel that you're not being as |
| 16 | | productive as you could be in your talk (Bill: Yes). Is |
| 17 | | that right? |
| 18 | BILL | That's right. It has a ... in the experiences of public |
| 19 | | talk that I've had, where I've planned to a higher |
| 20 | | degree, I've had a very strong feeling that I haven't |
| 21 | | ended up communicating very much at all, because |
| 22 | | of that structure. |

At this point (in Extract 9.3), Harry asks for further clarification of the stress/pressure/inhibition that Bill has Spoken of (01-06). While GD does not usually favor the use of either/or questions (and Harry tries to back away from making such a move (05-06)), one can appreciate here the sensitivity of Harry's question, which Reflects quite explicitly the two aspects of difficulty that Bill has indeed expressed, but not articulated separately. As he is asked to dig deeper into this area, Bill makes a de facto Focusing choice (07-08) and also develops further the communication element of what he has said (08-27), drawing on his earlier background in acting (10-15, 18-19) and also making an analogy with music (15-18). The length and enthusiasm of this turn indicates how helpful Harry's previous move has been, and its closing lines (24-27) suggest that there is a long-standing personal preference here that Bill is bringing to bear on professional duties, which have perhaps sometimes been more shaped by his ideas of what a person is *supposed* to do. Sara's Reflection (28-32, 35) picks up the audience/communication Focus that is clearly important to Bill, and Lucy's simple but powerful metaphorical Reflection (40-42) allows him to express the depth of the constraints that he feels (43).

Extract 9.3

01 HARRY Can you just clarify something for me about this
02 pressure? When you say it's like an imposition, is that
03 an imposition in the sense that consciousness of the
04 plan places a psychological pressure on you, or is it
05 that having the plan constrains what you can say? Or
06 is it both?

07 BILL I think it's both, and the interesting thing about the
08 second one, the constraint element, is that a lot of
09 the thoughts, or this vague thought that I've got,
10 relates to drama, where you have a choice between
11 scripted performance and improvisation. Back in
12 the eighties, I was part of a theater group, Improv, it
13 was called, where you had very loose structures,
14 and you'd walk onto stage as a group, and you
15 improvise . . . I suppose this is very much like jazz,
16 where you play together and the more you get to
17 know each other, the more you know what you
18 might do . . . But the actual line that you're going to
19 take is often supplied by the audience. And I think
20 there's a parallel there with the kind of public
21 talking that we do, where the more constrained you
22 are, the more planned it is, the less able you are to
23 respond to your audience, the people you are trying
24 to communicate with. And I think for a long time
25 I've believed that really I would be better having a
26 very loose structure and walking in to do whatever I
27 do, a lecture, a presentation, a talk . . .

28 SARA Just picking up on what you said about the
29 audience, do you feel that you've had experiences
30 where you've received some kind of signal from the
31 audience and you've been unable to change in
32 response to it?

33 BILL I think it's partly that and partly the fact that I don't
34 feel open to any signals.

35 SARA So, you don't feel that you see them?

36 BILL I see the two things, you know, in opposition: this
37 driving force to get through the plan does mean that
38 I don't even see the signals, let alone invite them or
39 deal with them.

40 LUCY As though you're looking back into your head all the
41 time, rather than looking out to your audience and
42 communicating with them?

43 BILL Yes!!

Later in the session (Extract 9.4), Paul takes Bill back to his drama analogy, reflecting his Understanding of what is involved (01-03) and checking how this transfers to Bill's present situation (05-09). Again, this elicits quite a lengthy response (10-26), one that turns out to be significant to the session as a whole in that it foregrounds a distinction between preparation (11-14) and having an explicit, planned structure (18-26).

Extract 9.4

- | | | |
|----|------|---|
| 01 | PAUL | You mentioned audience involvement, audience participation, or the audience actually changing the story line ... Have I got that right? |
| 02 | | |
| 03 | | |
| 04 | BILL | Yeah, yeah. |
| 05 | PAUL | Is that right? How important is that element in this? |
| 06 | | In other words, I can understand that you don't |
| 07 | | know where to go ... Is it the case that you don't |
| 08 | | know where to go until somebody has made a |
| 09 | | contribution? |
| 10 | BILL | I think there are plenty of places I <i>could</i> go with a |
| 11 | | talk opportunity. I'm not talking about knowing |
| 12 | | nothing about the area you've allotted to talk about. |
| 13 | | I'm not talking about no <i>preparation</i> , no <i>reading</i> , |
| 14 | | no <i>thinking</i> around the area, but the more |
| 15 | | experience I have of this kind of teacher education, |
| 16 | | the more comfortable I am with the idea of taking |
| 17 | | my thoughts and my current understanding in, |
| 18 | | without a clear structure (Joe: Mmm). And at the |
| 19 | | same time, I know that audiences sometimes like to |
| 20 | | see a clear structure, because they take that as the |
| 21 | | sign of a good, of a professional, somebody who has |
| 22 | | planned, and I think there will always be those who, |
| 23 | | if you don't say, "Look, there are five stages to the |
| 24 | | presentation today and I'm going to cover this, that |
| 25 | | and the other," then they will assume that you |
| 26 | | haven't <i>prepared</i> , even. |

Joe then (Extract 9.5) offers the two terms *planning* and *preparation* that Bill has used in Thematizing a possible contrast (01-08). Bill is enthusiastic about this (09), and the insight he achieves

through reseeing preparation in this light is articulated via another analogy, this time having to do with sports (09-15).

Extract 9.5

- 01 JOE Mmm. And that's the big distinction I hear now in
02 what you're saying: between being prepared to enter
03 the arena, and to deal with the topic in the context
04 of the people, on the one hand, which is what you
05 do want to do. And the idea of having a plan (Bill:
06 Mmm), which you think will ride roughshod over
07 the discourse possibilities that could have occurred
08 in that arena.
- 09 BILL Yes, yes! And another thought hits me from that,
10 from this preparation/planning distinction, is that an
11 athlete doesn't necessarily prepare for a hundred
12 meters by doing a hundred meters. They prepare in
13 lots of different ways. That to *plan* for a speech
14 event, if you take the metaphor to its conclusion, is
15 not a good way to *prepare* for a speech event.

Bill talks more about audience and student expectations of plans and also about a distinction that is important to him—between a debilitating *tenseness* that he sometimes feels and a creative *tension* that is necessary to high-quality performance. He then (Extract 9.6) returns to the warming-up metaphor (01), and we see—marked by pauses as well as explicitly signaled (04-05) and expressed (05-07)—how Bill's developmental goal is taking shape for him. Joe's Thematizing (08-10), which is over-explicit in purist CD terms, again draws an enthusiastic response (11), and Bill's Goal setting is now articulated in terms of possible action strategies (16-20).

Extract 9.6

- 01 BILL That's where the warming-up comes in, the
02 preparation, you need to reach that pitch where
03 you're excited enough to talk and I think that, what,
04 one realization that is becoming even clearer to me

| | | |
|----|------|---|
| 05 | | now is that I need. I need to <i>try</i> to not wrap myself |
| 06 | | up with a highly planned product, and to take a few |
| 07 | | risks with a couple of presentations. |
| 08 | JOE | Because the highly planned product brings you |
| 09 | | tenseness, whereas a well-prepared improvisation |
| 10 | | gives you tension? |
| 11 | BILL | Yes! Yes. I've got to. I started to say this earlier and I |
| 12 | | somehow got sidetracked, but, in terms of |
| 13 | | preparation, I have never been able to say, "Right, this |
| 14 | | presentation is an hour. I'm going to rehearse this. |
| 15 | | I'm going to put a clock down and give this |
| 16 | | presentation to nobody." I just can't do that. And |
| 17 | | there are, there are other things: I can do snippets, I |
| 18 | | can read, I can voice things. There are other forms of |
| 19 | | warming-up that I think, that I feel more comfortable |
| 20 | | with. |

It seems fair to describe what happened in this session in the following terms. Bill articulated important personal preferences in terms of his own style of communicative action and also identified other people's expectations—and his need to live up to them—as getting in his way. He discovered a way of expressing this contrast that allowed him to evaluate his preferred style highly enough to validate goals and actions based on it. In these necessarily brief extracts, I have tried to present the essential data of this process.

As well as the developmental progress achieved here by the Speaker, there were other outcomes. The planning/preparation distinction, capturing as it does two important dimensions of how we work, has become a part of our everyday discourse in the Language Studies Unit. Lucy commented, "*This has definitely sharpened my thinking about preparing talks, and has had a real developmental effect for me.*"

For me, this session also provided an example of how Understanders must be willing to be changed if they are to be open enough to Understand. I state my general position on planning and flexibility in chapter 8 (p. 117). Faced with the prospect of giving a talk at a conference, my preferred strategy involves pro-

ducing a full written text of an appropriate length, which I then read onto a tape. I listen to the tape a couple of times and make headline notes from it. On the way to the conference, I listen to the tape while reading my text. Before my talk, I listen to the tape while looking at my notes. When I get up to speak, I am not only prepared—I am *planned!* I do not find this constraining. I find the procedure lengthy and arduous but eventually liberating. I find that *my* best chance of communication lies in the clarity that I believe I produce with this kind of planning. This is how I am best prepared.

But there are occasions when I cannot achieve this kind of planned preparation, and I have found that reflection on the distinction between planning and preparation, which had not been explicitly available to me before this session, has proved enormously helpful to me in avoiding the kind of tenseness that can interfere with anyone's performance. I see more clearly now that a planned message without personal preparation may not communicate well at all, whereas if I am prepared in myself to communicate, then I am likely to have things to say that will be meaningful to my audience. To give a specific instance, I recently ran a weekend workshop for participants in our distance-learning MSc. in TESOL program. In the time available to me, I reduced the period I might have spent planning content and prepared myself by rereading the participants' background files. The workshop went well.

We have looked at the way in which Bill used his personal experience and analogical thinking to bring individual preferences to bear on professional difficulties and goals. In the next session, we deal directly with contending personal and professional demands, although that's not where we begin.

Sara as Speaker

During 1998, our MSc. in TESOL teaching team organized a series of mutually supported periods of study leave. In May 1998, Sara was coming toward the end of her ten-week sabbatical period, in

which she had been working on her Ph.D. She was concerned about what was going to happen when she returned to full-time work. This concern is what she chose to Speak about.

Extract 9.7

- 01 SARA ... and that led me to think that perhaps a
 02 reasonably fruitful topic of discussion for today
 03 would be if I, we, tried to talk about how I'm going
 04 to carry on with it once I've finished this wonderful
 05 experience of a sabbatical.
- 06 JOE Okay, so you, you're staying with the topic that
 07 you've headlined for us before, "working (Sara: Yes)
 08 on the Ph.D."—not in the sense of there being any
 09 specific problem you want to work on, but with a
 10 focus on how you're going to handle that when
 11 you're back at work.
- 12 SARA Yeah, I think so, yeah.
- 13 HARRY Can I also clarify something, that that comment at
 14 the end, this "wonderful" period of a sabbatical, was
 15 that significant (Sara: Oh, yes!) in the sense that, that
 16 you have, you know, you have doubts about what's
 17 coming up ...
- 18 SARA Oh, yes! (laughs)
- 19 HARRY Yeah, right, Okay, thank you.
- 20 SARA Yes, definitely. The reason is, I mean, it's obvious, but
 21 the sabbatical has made a tremendous difference
 22 because, from an academic point of view, the Ph.D. is
 23 all I've been concentrating on. When I return to
 24 work in just two and a half weeks' time, that won't
 25 be the case anymore, and especially now that I'm
 26 nearing the end of the project, and therefore have to
 27 hold it all in my mind, whatever bit I'm working on
 28 (Harry: Yeah). The idea of doing that when also doing
 29 all the other things I'm supposed to be doing is very,
 30 well, it's worrying in two senses: in one sense it's
 31 worrying because, erm, I think it will be much
 32 harder to do the Ph.D. that way, and it's also
 33 worrying because I think that in my attempts to do
 34 that I risk, not doing other things quite so well as I
 35 might, so it worries me two ways.
- 36 JOE So, you're concerned that going back to work is

- 37 going to "get in the way" of continuing with the
38 Ph.D. . . .
39 SARA Yes! (laughs)
40 JOE . . . and balancing that is this concern that your
41 determination to get the Ph.D. done and finished
42 now it's entering its final stages might get in the way
43 of your doing the job as well as you want to—(Sara:
44 Yes)—both those.

By the end of these introductory exchanges, Sara's topic has been clearly stated. After her opening (01-05), Reflections by Joe (06-11) and Harry (13-17) have helped her deepen her original formulation by bringing out the importance of the timing of her return to full-time work in terms of her completing her doctorate (20-30) and have separated out the two-way difficulty she feels she will have when trying to make a good job of doctorate and teaching (30-35).

Shortly afterward, however, as we see in Extract 9.8, the picture changes significantly.

Extract 9.8

- 01 PAUL We work here flexi-days rather than flexi-hours (Sara:
02 Yeah). What kind of a time scale do you think in—in
03 terms of weeks, or days, or hours, when you see
04 these conflicting interests?
05 SARA Days, days.
06 PAUL And you don't think that you have in fact got control
07 over your days, after coming off sabbatical?
08 SARA Well, I think I have very limited control over them. I
09 mean, that this is in my, this is further compli-, since
10 I've had Adam, this is an extra factor that complicates
11 things for me (Paul: Ah), erm, inasmuch as I, that you
12 know, I've got days that are days that I spend with
13 him and that I wouldn't want to break into.
[Sara talks here about earlier periods before Adam
was born of working on her research for long,
uninterrupted stretches.]
14 SARA It's as if, because, because, Okay, you know, a person
15 has their home life, their social life, but among
16 adults, you know, say in marriage, there's always

| | | |
|----|------|--|
| 17 | | possibility for negotiation (Bill: Mmm) but I don't |
| 18 | | think, you know, when toddlers are involved it's not |
| 19 | | like that. Erm. I wouldn't want . . . |
| 20 | LUCY | Especially if you're around in the house and they |
| 21 | | know you are. |
| 22 | SARA | Yeah, er, I wouldn't want to anyway. I don't think it's |
| 23 | | fair on, on Adam, so. So, it's as if, it's as if balancing a |
| 24 | | job and a Ph.D. might have been a bit difficult but it |
| 25 | | was perfectly possible: managing a job, Ph.D. and a |
| 26 | | toddler (Joe: Mmm) really seems to me like the limits |
| 27 | | (Lucy: Mmm) of what is humanly possible. |

I should perhaps explain Paul's use of the expression "flexi-days" (01) here. As most of our teaching is through a distance-learning program, it is possible for us to move our work around, to chunk it in different ways, to work from home and go into the university more in order to meet with people than to teach. In this later extract from the session, Paul asks his question about time scale in order—as he commented later—to help him get a better view of how Sara saw the demands on her time. In explaining her perspective further, however, Sara introduces into the equation the presence of her young son and of her determination to safeguard extensive periods of time with him (09-13). At this point, therefore, the two conflicting pulls on her time that she originally identified as the nub of her problem have become three (25-27).

Another point to note here is Lucy's intervention (20-21), which is not really legitimate in terms of our rules of procedure. What Lucy is doing here is introducing an element of her own experience and attitudes, based on an evaluation of the practicality of getting work done when a toddler is in the house. The sympathy expressed is undeniable, but as an attempt to express empathy it fails (22) because it is not in fact based on an understanding of what Sara is saying; Sara does not *want* to act in this way.

Sometime later, Sara is again exploring her attitudes toward various aspects of her work and has just talked about a feeling of having lost touch with course participants as individuals during her time away. She continues:

Extract 9.9

| | | |
|----|-------|--|
| 01 | SARA | I suspect that another reason is because, as I say, |
| 02 | | with Ph.D., job and toddler, you know, things are just |
| 03 | | getting so squeezed and that worries me because I'd |
| 04 | | rather, erm, be able to, you know, have a level of |
| 05 | | emotional investment with the participants I'm |
| 06 | | working with that I'm comfortable about. So again, |
| 07 | | it's that, I'm sort of feeling gosh I must I really must |
| 08 | | make space again for those people. I mustn't see |
| 09 | | them as getting . . . you know . . . |
| 10 | HARRY | Getting in the way, yeah? |
| 11 | SARA | When I receive a query from a participant I must |
| 12 | | not see this as getting in the way of my Ph.D.! |
| 13 | | (Harry: [laughs] Yeah) I mean, you know, I just (Bill: |
| 14 | | Mmm), it's supposed to be job first and people first |
| 15 | | (Harry: Yeah) (Lucy: Mmm). |
| 16 | HARRY | So what you're saying, if I understand you correctly |
| 17 | | is there's a big psychological weight, as well as the |
| 18 | | purely practical weight of having to complete the |
| 19 | | Ph.D. |
| 20 | SARA | I suppose there is, yeah. |
| 21 | HARRY | And that's, that's . . . |
| 22 | SARA | I suppose there is, yeah. |

What Harry picks up in his Reflection (16-18) is that Sara is struggling with more than a question of how to schedule a certain number of tasks into a given amount of time—that she also has a set of expectations regarding emotional investment and her own attitudes with which she needs to find a sense of comfort or well-being. The moment of insight that Sara achieves here is caught in her thoughtful, repeated acknowledgment (20, 22) that something important is happening here and in the fact that Harry, recognizing this, does not go on (21) to spell out the importance that he sees in this.

When we moved into the Resonances phase of the session, Paul set out to say that for him it had been interesting to hear an apparently familiar situation described from a perspective so different from his own.

Extract 9.10

- 01 PAUL The point being that your situation is not for me, it's
 02 for my daughter and my daughter-in-law. They're
 03 both in identical situations, one has got an MBA to
 04 finish and one has got a PGCE [teaching
 05 qualification] to finish and they've got kids, little
 06 ones. And they are both in exactly this kind of bind,
 07 but without a sabbatical. And, er, we have a solution,
 08 and that is that my wife goes and takes over, to let
 09 those pieces of work continue and, er, be finished.
 10 And I was just dwelling on the enormous impact of
 11 that, it simply makes possible what would otherwise
 12 be impossible (Sara: Mmm). But it's not so much the
 13 circum-, my private circumstances, but the fact that
 14 I'm in a different context (Harry: Yeah) (Sara: Yes). So
 15 I hear it with different ears (Joe: Mmm).
- 16 SARA Yes, but what you say still gives me an angle on the
 17 nature of the thing, inasmuch as, I think if I wanted
 18 to, well, I think unquestion-, unquestionably, if I
 19 wanted to get more help with childcare I could. But
 20 I don't (Paul: Mmm). I don't want to.
- 21 PAUL Oh, er, a grandmother looking after the child is not
 22 the same as ...
- 23 SARA No, but I mean I have that ...
- 24 PAUL ... "childcare."
- 25 SARA It is to me! I mean, my mum looks after Adam
 26 sometimes when I'm at work and, and I'm very
 27 happy with the arrangement, but I wouldn't want to
 28 extend it any, I mean, there's a certain amount of
 29 time when I want to be the one who is looking after
 30 Adam, and it doesn't matter if it's Ted, if my mum, it's
 31 me, I want it to be me.
- 32 PAUL It's a totally different ball game.
- 33 SARA Yes (laughs) (Paul laughs). It's, but what you said is
 34 helpful to me, because it helps me to, it concretizes
 35 for me that in that sense my problem is not a
 36 practical one.

While Paul is thinking about the experience (and the difficulty) of what he calls, "hearing with different ears"—a very Understander-related experience (01-15)—Sara chooses to relate his situation

more directly to hers and to evaluate Paul's family's response in terms of her own preferences (16-20). We are on the borderline of our procedural agreements here, but I believe that we stay inside them in terms of Paul's Resonance being neither intended nor received as a suggestion as such. Where we almost short circuit is with Sara's use of the expression "childcare" (19) and Paul's feeling that he, in turn, has not been well Understood (21-22, 24). Sara's definition of this concept for herself (25-31) seems to mark out another highly significant incident in this session, in that it becomes very clear to Sara that her problem is "not a practical one" (33-36).

At the opening of the GD session, Sara identified her topic as a pragmatic problem of how to fit in her teaching and her doctoral study. By the end, she sees it rather differently, as a complex situation involving her family relationships, her levels of emotional investment with course participants, and the psychological weight that her definitions and expectations create for her.

This is how the session closed:

Extract 9.11

- | | | |
|----|------|--|
| 01 | JOE | Is there anything you want to say to round up? |
| 02 | | About how the topic, or responses to it—anything |
| 03 | | you want to say? |
| 04 | SARA | Mmm. Just that the way I've experienced the session |
| 05 | | has been looking in much more detail and from |
| 06 | | many more angles about the, at the, situation, or |
| 07 | | problem, or situation that has been problematized |
| 08 | | for the purposes of this session (Joe laughs) and that |
| 09 | | has been interesting and I think I have a fuller sense |
| 10 | | of it than I did when I walked in. I think I probably |
| 11 | | have more of a sense of why it was getting to me, |
| 12 | | actually, inasmuch as it's in a sense been shown as |
| 13 | | more of a problem than I would have said it was! |
| 14 | | But that's good, because otherwise you're aware on a |
| 15 | | subconscious level that it's a problem. If you haven't |
| 16 | | made it conscious it can bother you more actually |
| 17 | | (Lucy: Mmm), you know, it can get to you more. Erm, |
| 18 | | I don't feel particularly at the moment moved |
| 19 | | forward in terms of possible solutions, but I |
| 20 | | wouldn't expect to and . . . I'm quite happy to just |

- | | |
|----|--|
| 21 | now go to sleep on the train on the way home and |
| 22 | just see what happens (Harry: Yeah). Yeah. And that's, |
| 23 | that's all I have to say. |

In the earlier chapter on Reflecting (chap. 5, p. 68), I use a quotation about how the Understander can sometimes be frustrated by the feeling of not having helped enough. I suggest then that this is one of the hard parts of learning to be an Understander—that making suggestions is a lot easier than creating an opportunity for self-development. The quote that I use came, in fact, from feedback on this session. I introduce it again here, now in its proper context.

Lucy:

My feeling was one of frustration as Understander—I understood her problems so well I didn't need or want to simply reflect (having been through similar conflicts myself). I interpreted her speaking on this as a cri de coeur and desperately wanted to take an active role as sympathizer and a suggester of solutions. We did discuss these things in a separate chat later on, but somehow it was not the same. Maybe, having acted as Speaker, she had got it off her chest publicly and was slowly coming to her own solutions. Hope so—though I can't be sure.

Sara:

That session really did help me to clear my thinking on the point I discussed and it has helped me shape my priorities and feel less conflict afterwards. This I find interesting because I don't think it was a session where "outcomes" were particularly salient at the time.

Sara completed her doctorate on schedule, now has a second child, and has changed her employment pattern for the medium term by entering a job-share arrangement with another colleague on a fifty-fifty basis. None of us would claim that all this flowed from our one-hour GD session! But neither would we dismiss the significance of such sessions to the facilitation of an individual's developmental decision making and the building of a collegiality in which such development can flourish.

Bill as Speaker (Again)

Why Bill again? Why not Paul, Harry, Joe, or Lucy this time? Might it be that Bill is a person who gets more out of this sort of work than the others? Well yes, it might. That is how things work out; nothing is equally good for everyone. On the other hand, feedback from the group suggests that all members have benefited significantly from their work as Speaker and Understander, as well as from the new collegiality that I discuss further below. Harry is on record as saying that one of his sessions as Speaker "*ultimately changed my way of working.*" Paul's session on the coordination of our research efforts not only enabled him to discover strengths in his work that he had not been aware of (see Data 9.19) but also took us all very meaningfully into areas of common ground and differences between and among us, as the Resonances show.

So why Bill again? Because I need to select data that seems to me most coherently extractable in terms of communicating with my readers. The issue is not whether development took place but whether it can be shown to be taking place in the explicit record of a few snippets of data. Here again, in February 1999, I think that this is quite demonstrably the case.

When I took on the role in the unit of special responsibility for our professional development, Bill took on a similar responsibility for what we refer to as the pastoral care of our course participants. Generally speaking, this refers to the ways in which an institution looks after its students outside the purely academic demands of its courses. As our MSc. in TESOL is a distance-learning program taken by mature people (usually in the 25-45 age range) living in countries all around the world, the issues to be dealt with that fall outside purely academic ones constituted little less than life itself. What can pastoral care mean under these circumstances, either as a concept or in terms of our actions? This was what Bill wanted to work on.

In his opening statement, of which only the last, summarizing sentence is given here (Extract 9.12), Bill emphasizes the issue of interaction. Let me highlight again the early Reflection. In this instance, we might suggest that Bill's explicit summarizing of his goals (01-03) can be seen as a signal to the Understander that this

would be an appropriate time to come in, that this is the end of his opening statement and that it should be checked. Notice how Joe's Reflection (04-07) presents pastoral care and interaction as two topics to bring together. Hearing the image in the Reflection ("when you say that") allows Bill to recognize and move on from this separation (08-11):

Extract 9.12

| | | |
|----|------|--|
| 01 | BILL | So, they're my goals. I suppose, to try to get this, to |
| 02 | | develop this sense of where we're going with |
| 03 | | pastoral care, but also tie in this idea of interaction. |
| 04 | JOE | So, pastoral care, but specifically interaction (Bill: |
| 05 | | Hmm) is the, is the, that's what you want to bring |
| 06 | | together: pastoral care and how we interact with our |
| 07 | | participants, that's what you want to explore. |
| 08 | BILL | Yeah, and when you say that, I wonder if there is |
| 09 | | actually anything else? Is there anything else in the |
| 10 | | field of pastoral care that isn't interaction in some |
| 11 | | way? |

Bill then Speaks about the various forms of interaction that take place between our participants and ourselves. As he does so, he warms to his insight regarding the inseparability of pastoral care and interaction (Extract 9.13, 01-03). Joe attempts a Challenge in terms of Bill's earlier statement (04-05), but Bill's exploration has brought him to a discovery ("I've realized") that is important to him, as is clearly signaled (13-14) by the comment, "I've never understood as clearly as I do today."

Extract 9.13

| | | |
|----|------|---|
| 01 | BILL | Yes, interaction in all those senses because I think |
| 02 | | that that is what pastoral care is, it's almost |
| 03 | | synonymous with the idea of interaction. |
| 04 | JOE | So it's not . . . is that a change? Have you just |
| 05 | | changed what you mean by interaction? |
| 06 | BILL | No, I think what I've done is I've realized that when |
| 07 | | I talk about pastoral care, I've thought about pastoral |

08 care—it's one of those words which, which I've
09 been living with for a long time . . .
[Here Bill gives some autobiographical details.]
10 . . . and I think I've always thought of it as a system,
11 and now I'm thinking of it more as interaction, and I
12 think it's a difference in emphasis. And maybe the
13 two things . . . I've never understood as clearly as I
14 do today that really there is nothing else except
15 interaction, as long as you include any printed
16 matter that we might send, or any future websites
17 that we might put together.

Bill continues to explore the possibilities of what interaction-as-pastoral-care might mean, and one of the group Reflects back a problem-solving scenario as an example to check whether or not he has Understood. In Extract 9.14, Bill confirms the accuracy of the Reflection (01) and also uses it (“hearing you talk about that has made it clearer”) as the basis for a new discovery (02-07). Paul Challenges Bill with regard to his current and previous definitions of *interactive* (08-10), and Bill, after a significant pause to think (11), uses this Challenge to clarify the relationship that he sees between the two definitions (11-15). When Paul Reflects this relationship (16-17), Bill takes a further step to establish a three-part characterization of pastoral care in terms of interaction (18-20). He refers to this as a genuine discovery in GD terms (“a real sense of outcome”). The unusually long pauses here also mark significant moments when Bill is doing a Speaker’s work in Under-stander-supported silence (11, 18).

Extract 9.14

01 BILL Yeah, I think so. I also think, and hearing you talk
02 about that has made it clearer, that one of our duties
03 is not just to respond to problems, as a pastoral role,
04 our duty, or part of that role, is to anticipate what
05 these problems are going to be and be well ahead of
06 them, and that might mean looking at trends and
07 trying to see what's going to happen.

| | | |
|----|------|---|
| 08 | PAUL | Have you moved over the last half an hour, a little |
| 09 | | bit, from the purely interactive to the more |
| 10 | | proactive? |
| 11 | BILL | (five-second pause) Yes. I think so. I think that's true. |
| 12 | | That interaction feeds from that sense of being |
| 13 | | proactive and trying to anticipate what the problems |
| 14 | | are and then we think, well, how can we best, how |
| 15 | | can we best work with this possible problem? |
| 16 | PAUL | Does that mean a dual relationship between pro- and |
| 17 | | inter-? |
| 18 | BILL | (three-second pause) Yes. Yeah. I like that distinction, |
| 19 | | and then we have, we have, <i>reactive</i> , <i>proactive</i> and |
| 20 | | <i>interactive</i> |
| 21 | PAUL | Reactive being the "fire fighting"? |
| 22 | BILL | Yeah. |
| 23 | LUCY | So, our first telephone call would be proactive . . . |
| 24 | BILL | I think you might have given me a nice title there, |
| 25 | | Paul! I like it! Yeah. I think that's a really good |
| 26 | | distinction for me. That maybe we've been living in |
| 27 | | reactive worlds with our pastoral care. I think that's |
| 28 | | a real sense of outcome for me. that distinction. |
| 29 | | Thanks. |

Bill's use of "given" (24) and "Thanks" (29) draws a response from Paul at the Resonances stage of the session. Paul expresses his Resonance in terms of the process we are involved in (Extract 9.15, 01-11), which draws in Bill, Joe, and Lucy in a celebration of what has happened.

Extract 9.15

| | | |
|----|------|---|
| 01 | PAUL | This is a part of the joint discovery that we've |
| 02 | | commented on before (Joe: Mmm). Yes, exactly. And |
| 03 | | this is looking at the process, and Bill imagining that |
| 04 | | I had actually given him something! Which I didn't! |
| 05 | | That's an entirely wrong way of looking at it, |
| 06 | | because I wasn't aware, yeah? I didn't have anything |
| 07 | | up my sleeve at all. They were just little pieces that |
| 08 | | came together in the way that you were Speaking |
| 09 | | and it seemed to me, you know, in what you were |

- 10 saying, those pieces were there rather than I was
11 telling you anything.
12 BILL I think so.
13 PAUL They just came out.
14 LUCY Mmm.
15 BILL Definitely, that was my sense. But I think there's a
16 sense of "being given" something by the very clever
17 pulling out of two things.
18 JOE Again, it's the power of Reflection, isn't it?
19 BILL Yeah, I think that's a really good example. Because I
20 said both those things, proactive and interactive ...
21 LUCY ... and reactive ...
22 BILL ... but I wouldn't have seen that relationship if you
23 hadn't reflected that back.

Finally, when the Speaker role returns to Bill (Extract 9.16), he confirms his sense of a discovery that can form the basis of professional action. Where he had previously been concerned that his vagueness was at fault, he now feels that there is real complexity to deal with, and he has the confidence to employ the framework that he has worked out in order to move forward with his special responsibility for pastoral care.

Extract 9.16

- 01 BILL I've probably had the same feeling that most of you
02 have that really quite a lot of issues were raised
03 today and I think that I'd started off with a feeling
04 that if I'd been more organized about this, there'd
05 have been a clearer sense, but the more we talk
06 about it, the more this pastoral sense of it gluing
07 together all the things that we do, and all these
08 different interactions, there are so many things
09 involved in pastoral care, that talking them through
10 today and hearing some of your Reflections and
11 Resonances, has kind of given me the confidence that
12 those things are multifarious (Joe: Mmm) and that if I
13 start with that perception, then I can work with this
14 model thing, I can start to look for these interactions
15 and present choices to you, and we can decide what
16 we as a group, collectively, think is best.

Once again, it is tempting to detail the work that has arisen from the discoveries and goals signaled here, but that is not my specific focus, and space is limited. It will have to suffice to say that we feel that we now have proactive, interactive, and reactive systems for taking care of our course participants with which we and they are well satisfied, even if there is always room for improvement.

I have repeatedly stated the importance to us of the reflexive relationship between individual and group development. Having concentrated so far on individuals, let us now turn to a group perspective.

A New Collegiality

In this section, I draw on responses to a brief questionnaire that I e-mailed to GD colleagues. The questionnaire itself is reproduced at the end of the chapter. As I have already emphasized, we began our group development work in a positive, collegial atmosphere. This was already the kind of place where, if you needed a helping hand, you would not often have to ask two people. So that is where I was starting from. Another important way of describing our situation would be to acknowledge explicitly again the level of commitment that leads a group of professionals to take the time out of their busy schedules in order to meet for an hour most weeks and work together in this way. We tried a few scheduling tricks (none of them successful) in order to enable ourselves to clear a few minutes' space before our meetings, but in the end we had to admit that life was too hectic. As one colleague put it:

*Though I do know it would be more productive and rewarding not to go into a GD session feeling, "Oh ****! I still haven't . . .," it always happens. If only I were better organized, I'd do 5 mins Tai Chi before each session!*

Once we were in a GD meeting, it also took some time for us to come together in terms of what we were trying to do, rather than just going through the motions. It took a while for the outside world to slip away or for us to slip away from it.

The first five minutes are always spent feeling pressures fall off. The immediate question is always, "Can I afford the time?" when the real question is, "Can we afford not to?"

We took that time on the initial premise that we would be using it in specific ways in order to further individual professional development. One of our earliest formulations of this was made in comparison to the time that we spend in our regular unit meetings, at which we exchange opinions, argue, make suggestions, and behave in all those socially sanctioned ways that one expects to behave at meetings. In the unit meetings, we said, the individual works for the good of the group. In the GD meetings, we wanted to create a situation in which the group worked for the good of its individuals. In the ways that I have sketched above, I believe that we have had some success in this. The following piece of feedback came in response to the first question on the E-mail questionnaire, in which colleagues were asked to recall one particular moment from the sessions so far:

The thing that comes back to me most vividly is the memory of telling everyone in the resonances phase of Sara's last session that I rarely say, "I know just how you feel . . ." but that I thought I could make an exception in this case, only to hear her say in her response that my description bore no relation to the way she felt. Two things learned:

- *In future, NEVER think I know how someone feels.*
- *Being an Understander in the way we're trying to be Understanders at least minimizes the chance of coming away with self-satisfied illusions about the extent to which we've really understood: the aim of these sessions is to help the Speaker, not to come away impressed with our own powers of insight.*

However, it is precisely in this new style of focusing on the individual that what I am calling our new collegiality is based. Sustainance of the individual is a social phenomenon; we did not work to promote the individual as separate from the group, but as

a member of it. In an important sense, this type of individual is impossible without the group; such an individual is in the group, of the group, and for the group:

For me, whatever else this may be, it's a weekly demonstration that as colleagues we really do have time for one another and respect for one another. To know that at some point my colleagues are going to give five hours a week of their combined time to something I think is important enough to tell them about fills me with a sense of wonder, surprise, gratitude, and, most of all, faith in what we can do together. It's a weekly affirmation of our sense of shared responsibility and commitment.

So our focus on individual development has led toward a growth of collegiality that had not been foreseen, even if it should not have been surprising. In other words, we knew that the original form of CD pairwork has clear outcomes for Speaker and Understander, not only in terms of specific goals achieved and in terms of more general communicative attitudes and abilities but also in terms of relationship. Similarly, our group development work added a layer of outcome in terms of enhanced collegiality that we all felt and commented on.

I'm not going to try to weigh that and count it out for you. I don't know what the units would be. Instead, I'm going to look at some of the ideas that arose in our feedback sessions and, as we go along, try to tie them into this concept of collegiality.

The Whole Person and Multiple Identities

A great deal of work that has been done in TESOL over the last twenty-five years has turned around the idea of language learning being a whole-person process, as distinct from simply an intellectual one. All the materials and techniques, now commonplace, that invite students to invest their opinions, emotions, and experiences in their language learning are based on this fundamental principle. At the same time, a great deal of postmodern writing in dif-

ferent fields has emphasized the idea of each one of us having different identities at different times. Sometimes I speak as a motorist, sometimes as a cyclist; sometimes I argue against censorship of any kind, and sometimes I argue as the father of a teenage daughter. As we have already seen in this chapter, a person might sit down with a self-image of two competing identities, that of teacher and that of student, and discover that it is a third identity, that of mother, which is at least as important.

As the Reflecting, Thematizing, and Challenging moves interwove over the months, we also talked about how these two views—of wholeness and multiplicity—are two ways of looking at the same phenomenon, of the whole person not as an undifferentiated whole but as the meeting place of different roles and identities. What we all seek is awareness and coherence. As each one of us in the group came to insights that helped us think about our own individual coherence, we came as a group to have a much clearer picture of how we fitted together and to have more acceptance of those aspects of others that might perhaps have otherwise been unappreciated or even found annoying. We saw how one person might find linear thought liberating and another might be constrained by it, how one person might use hyperbole without intending to express anything more extreme than what another would express through understatement, how one person might move their ideas forward via constantly shifting analogies while another might find this process disorienting. These propositions are perhaps commonplace as abstractions, but it is a rich and binding experience to have them unfold in personal terms within a group of colleagues.

Being involved in the GD interaction helped us all work on ourselves as colleagues, as well as working on ourselves as individuals. To clarify this, here are two more items of feedback from the questionnaire that well represent, I think, the depth of commitment that was made. Once more, in response to the first question:

Q1: Does any one moment from the GD sessions come back to you particularly?

I recall not one moment, but one kind of moment. A combination of:

(a) an awareness that the persona into which I had developed, for reasons I consider natural, meant that much of my past understanding had been in terms of situations and problems, rather than people, and the expectation, what was really wanted, was that I would deliver, rather than Understand in the GD sense. Which called for a more sensitive output monitor than I had so far developed.

and

(b) an awareness of the nonhomogeneity of the group with regard to that generosity of spirit, or the experience which breeds it, to Understand sympathetically, rather than silently bridle.

This kind of moment was occasionally uncomfortable.

And then, after colleagues had been asked to respond to a number of lexical prompts that I had chosen:

Q7: Is there a different key word or phrase that you would have put in that list?

Personality. An odd one, but it keeps cropping up in my thinking. Do I need to become in some sense a different person in order to be an Understander? I'd like to think not, but I have a growing feeling that in some respects I do. It's easy for me to be nonjudgmental because that's the way I've always been, more or less, but I can't easily hold back on the philosophical, and I wonder whether sometimes I manage to convince myself utterly that what I'm doing really is no more than Reflecting, when in fact . . . The same applies to other colleagues in different ways, I think. Perhaps the biggest challenge is to remain yourself and be a genuine Understander.

Differentiated Understanding

We have already talked (chap. 5, p. 65) about the inevitability of some element of difference between what the Speaker says and what the Understander recognizes and then re-articulates as a Reflection. This slippage between the two is the dialogic strength of the Speaker/Understander engagement—it is what makes the difference between the Understander and a tape recorder or a diary. When we have more than one Understander involved, however, this dialogic strength risks becoming a problem.

When Understanders who know relatively less ask for clarification, this should present no difficulty, as both the Speaker and a better-informed Understander can use this as an opportunity to check common ground and enhance empathy. But when an Understander who shares with the Speaker a higher level of knowledge about a given topic asks for clarification of a point, this may appear to be a mystification to the other Understanders. It may appear that this Understander is looking to contribute to a discussion or to lead the Speaker. In Extract 9.17, the Speaker is working on her ideas regarding the identification of lexical chunks and their use as teaching material.

Extract 9.17

- | | | |
|----|------|--|
| 01 | LUCY | In other words, a chunk might have slots in the |
| 02 | | middle, or they might come at the end, that can be |
| 03 | | changed, but the basic frame of the chunk itself is |
| 04 | | static. |
| 05 | PAUL | Are you referring to changes of tense, or the use of |
| 06 | | pronouns, that might change, but it's still the same |
| 07 | | chunk? |
| 08 | LUCY | Yes, very often they're grammatical choices. |
| 09 | PAUL | It's "tweakable." Grammatically tweakable. |
| 10 | LUCY | Yes, er, sometimes they're grammatically tweakable, |
| 11 | | sometimes they're not. Sometimes they have a kind |
| 12 | | of . . . |
| 13 | PAUL | Does that correspond . . . |
| 14 | LUCY | . . . an environment that's favored, like "set eyes on," |
| 15 | | which is almost always present perfect and almost |

| | | |
|----|------|---|
| 16 | | always on "her" or "him." So there are favored |
| 17 | | grammatical environments. |
| 18 | PAUL | You mentioned DeCarrico [Nattinger and |
| 19 | | DeCarrico], does this correspond with their |
| 20 | | canonical and noncanonical contrast? |
| 21 | LUCY | Yeah, roughly . . . er, no. sorry it doesn't. Because |
| 22 | | they . . . |

In lines 01-12, the Understander is checking that his Understanding is true to the idea that the Speaker wants to develop. From line 13, however, the Understander wants to introduce the Nattinger & DeCarrico comparison. Between himself and the Speaker, based on their shared specialist knowledge, this seems to be a legitimate move; indeed, it does help the Speaker to clarify her position further. For the perspective of the other Understanders present, however, the significance of this comparison was only partially accessible.

It is from this kind of experience that we formulated the term *differentiated Understanding*. It is a feature of GD, but it need not necessarily be seen as a problem. To the extent that it proves to be one, I know of no straightforward solution, other than what we might call ongoing sincerity checks by the specialist Understander as to the nature of the interventions. In the above extract, for example, the issue for Paul at line 13, and more particularly at line 18, is to be very sure that he needs to introduce this distinction in order to Understand what the Speaker is saying. If so, he should. Any other motivation would be dubious. What quality of attention was available to the Speaker during lines 14-17? You cannot read this from the data, but this is what counts.

Nonspecialist Understanders must assume sincerity and can choose to ask for further clarification if they wish. Occasional retrospective discussions of these interventions on the basis of taped extracts proved extremely helpful to us. In retrospect, moreover, we also see that it is in identifying and negotiating a response to this phenomenon that our collegiality has been further enhanced.

Choice of Topic and Focus

There is another strand of our weave to pull in here. Apart from differences of content, are there fundamental differences of kind between the topic brought to the group by Sara (Extracts 9.7-9.11) and this last one, brought by Lucy (Extract 9.17)? Between what we might call the personal and the academic sides of the professional? For me, there is no easy answer, but it was the concept of differentiated Understanding that helped us clarify the issue somewhat.

In one way, it seems clear that the pedagogic use of lexical chunks is a topic about which one can claim to have, or not to have, specialist knowledge (of concepts, of terminology, of the literature) and experience (via corpus linguistics, materials writing, classroom teaching). Balancing the demands of one's personal and professional lives, on the other hand, is a challenge that we all face on a regular basis. It is essential to remember, however, that we are not talking about a discussion here.

In the terms of group development, it is in both cases the Speaker who is the knower, and it is from this knowledge base that we want to proceed. Although it is the academic/professional topic that throws differentiation into greater relief, Understanding is always differentiated, and it is always up to each Understander to negotiate an Understanding that is useful to the Speaker without disassociating the Speaker from the other Understanders present. While we all have experience of balancing personal and professional demands, none of us has inside knowledge of Sara's experience of those demands, and it is to achieve empathy with her experience that we all have to work. Through the Resonance provided by Paul, we get an insight into the differentiation that he has been working to escape in his Understanding. Furthermore, it is in the differing definitions of childcare, as a technical term, that some part of the differentiated Understandings is made clear and through which the Speaker moves toward her own discoveries.

Another important lesson that we learned through the personal/academic contrast relates to the way in which the Speaker initially presents his or her topic. With a more academically ori-

ented topic, there is a temptation for the Speaker to slip into the more familiar seminar-presentation mode of talking, in which the Speaker sets the scene, explains the background and history of the topic, and carefully moves toward the issue of concern. If the Speaker takes up this stance, the Understanders risk being reduced to the role of listeners. The Speaker needs to work as soon as possible at the cutting, or crumbling, edge of their thinking; this is where Understanders can be of most help, and if they need background, they will ask for it.

This whole issue of topic and focus is not simple, nor am I trying to present it as such. It may be that a Speaker wants to approach a session with only a hazy idea of a topic area to explore (see Bill's pastoral care session, Extracts 9.12-9.16), in order to see what discoveries might arise. It may be the Speaker's purpose to explore the history of a project, perhaps in the search for alternative avenues that might have been taken or in order to identify mistakes that were made, in which case it is this history that is the focus of the initial exploration. What the Speaker needs to avoid, however, is the type of scene-setting introduction so necessary—or at least usual—in other kinds of discourse that one associates with serious professional, academic, or research-oriented topics. If the Speaker does have an academic issue to deal with, then, as Lucy put it, the Speaker must look for a way of:

starting slap in the middle, and then unfolding outwards, petal by petal, rather than building up to it chronologically.

To sum up then, we found different dynamics and different learning opportunities associated with different choices of topic and with different Speaker stances in relation to their topics. Fundamentally, however, I find that any topic chosen by a Speaker has more in common with other Speaker topics than it has differences from them. Furthermore, it is from the common respect for all Speaker choices that another element of our enriched collegiality is woven.

Individually Owned Coconstructions

While it is the Speaker's responsibility to bring a topic on which to work, we have seen that a specific Focus may arise unexpectedly in the interaction between Speaker and Understanders. And if the Speaker's exploration leads to an overt discovery, whose is it, this concept, this plan, this analysis, this technique?

If what we are saying about the value of re-cognizing—and the value of this approach as a whole—is true, then what we have is a coconstruction in which a group of people has been involved. We have seen a striking example of this in Paul's Reflection to Bill during the pastoral care session (Extracts 9.14, 9.15). We have a more borderline case when Paul himself is Speaker (Extract 9.18).

Paul has special responsibility in the unit for coordinating our individual research efforts into what might pass for a coherent profile. He has been Speaking about his plans to do this, outlining a framework constructed by sets of rules organized hierarchically. As the Speaker makes the rules and their relationships clear, Harry Reflects this in a way that Paul accepts. After a few further comments from Paul, Harry says:

Extract 9.18

| | | |
|----|-------|---|
| 01 | HARRY | So it's also a heuristic among ourselves for clarifying |
| 02 | | decisions about our research? |
| 03 | PAUL | (laughs) I hope you're clarifying my thoughts, |
| 04 | | because I didn't know I'd had that one! |
| 05 | | (general laughter) |

This was a discovery, and a very useful one, but whose? The Understander had no doubt that he was Reflecting what he Understood the Speaker to have told him and that this was the best way of checking that Understanding. The Speaker recognized the discovery as arising from his work, although the term *heuristic* was not one that he had used, any more than he had intended to develop the idea of a heuristic at this time.

In the sense that the discovery was even more than usual one

that arose unbidden from the discourse and that it was made possible only by our interaction as colleagues, it seemed to develop our collegiality further. It also made us think more deeply about the matter of ownership of the ideas produced in our GD sessions.

Such a discovery may lead to other things. There may be financial implications arising from a talk, an article, even a book. Our suggestion is that the ethics of the approach lead to a distinction between involvement in construction and ownership. When the people of the neighborhood come together to help me put the roof on my new barn, we have built two things: a barn and a community. The barn alone is mine. The community and the building of both barn and community belong to all of us. Similarly, the Speaker's discovery, coconstructed with the help of Understanders, belongs indisputably to the Speaker. One might expect due acknowledgment to be made of the others' involvement if this intellectual property were invested further. The collegiality and the process of discovery belong to us all.

A different situation arises if an Understander has taken an idea from a session and then done his or her own work with that idea. There must come a point at which the former Understander earns the right to claim the idea that he or she has in the meantime developed. The ethics of this situation suggest to us that it is the Understander's responsibility to keep the Speaker closely in touch with such developments and the Speaker's responsibility to be prepared to acknowledge a point at which an idea has left his or her domain of development and is flourishing elsewhere. At best, this might lead to a more orthodox form of collaboration between the two or more people concerned, outside the Speaker/Understander relationship.

Resonances

When I first suggested this stage of the GD procedure, I was mostly motivated by the prediction that maintaining a Speaker/Understanders relationship over a whole hour would not be optimally profitable, especially when the majority of the group had no experience of it. I wanted to make sure that everyone in

the group had the chance to express something for and of themselves in each session without compromising the discipline of the discourse.

However, things turned out better than we had the right to expect, and the Resonance stage of the sessions turned out to have its own dynamic and its own interest. During one of our feedback sessions, we came to distinguish differently weighted types of Resonance, including personal, professional, and procedural elements. We have already seen how an essentially personal resonance of Paul's helped Sara clarify aspects of her dilemma (Extract 9.10) and how his essentially procedural Resonance helped our thinking on the issue of ownership (Extract 9.15).

On occasion, the Resonance phase exceeded itself, in the sense that one or more of the group took extended turns in terms of the development of their own thinking. It was also the case that we sometimes slipped into what I would have to call a listening-discussion mode, when the intensity of the Understanding and the desire to develop carried over into what looked like, but did not feel like more usual turns in a discussion. The following extract (Extract 9.19) begins with Harry's (essentially professional) resonance following Bill's Speaking in what we came to refer to as the preparation/planning session (Extracts 9.2-9.6). Harry's Resonance has less to do with preparation or planning itself and more to do with how and when he feels that he achieves his best communication (01-07): when "something goes wrong."

Joe's Reflection (08) leads Harry to articulate his idea further (09-12), but he is explicitly dissatisfied with what he has said (12-13). Joe, however, has shifted enthusiastically into Resonance, rather than Understander mode and wants to articulate his own, very different, view of when he himself is at his communicative best as public speaker (14-18).

In a way that will continue for much of the exchange, Harry insists that their two views are compatible (19-22). While Lucy's Reflection (23-24) helps Harry articulate his position further (25-34), this only serves to reconfirm Joe in his sense of difference (35-36). Surprised, in fact somewhat taken aback, Harry invites Joe to explain (37).

Extract 9.19

- 01 HARRY What excites me is that I am never completely sure,
 02 when I stand up and I start talking, whether people
 03 are listening to me or the message, and whether
 04 we're really connecting. And when something goes
 05 wrong, all of a sudden I get that feeling that there's
 06 me and the people out there, and there isn't, there
 07 isn't anything ...
- 08 JOE There's no message getting in the way?
- 09 HARRY Yeah ... There's no *preconceived* message getting in
 10 the way, there's no what-they-expect-to-get, or what-I
 11 expected getting in the way of my direct contact
 12 and my direct delivery of this message now. It's very
 13 difficult to put this ... Okay. Let me start again ...
- 14 JOE No, no, that's tremendous for me! That's now made
 15 me think ... oh ... when I engage, there is really
 16 only the message (Lucy: Mmm) (Harry: Yeah) It's not
 17 really them and me at all ... it's being involved in the
 18 message ...
- 19 HARRY That's it! That's what I mean. I put it the other way
 20 round. It's not me and my preconceptions or them
 21 and their preconceptions, it's just the two of us and
 22 therefore the message.
- 23 LUCY But the message is like it is because of them, and
 24 how they react to you.
- 25 HARRY Yeah, mmm, well, I guess I'm trying to do it here!
 26 The image I have is of something between me and
 27 my audience, and when something goes wrong, it
 28 shatters that, and there's just me and them, and we
 29 can wing it together from then on and I feel really
 30 close and the messages that come out then seem to
 31 me to be genuine, and it's not connected with the
 32 title of the talk, or the theme of the seminar—it's
 33 just what I'm putting across right now in this
 34 moment.
- 35 JOE Yeah, I think we are talking about very different
 36 things.
- 37 HARRY Yeah? Well that's what I'd like to know.

In Extract 9.20, we see Joe take up the invitation. He begins with a careful Reflection (01-06) of Harry's position that Harry con-

firms as correct. Harry's further elaboration (07-08), however, leads Joe once again to differentiate between their two statements (09-10). At the same time, Joe realizes that he is acting outside the agreed GD framework and tries to withdraw (10). Harry encourages him to go on (11) and the two go once again through an exchange of Reflection and confirmation (11-15).

We then see Joe struggling to articulate a position that is clearly new to him and one with which he seems uncomfortable, a position that has "very little to do with people" (16-24). When Harry once more insists that their two statements are alternative expressions of the same position (25-30), Joe finally distinguishes the two in terms of the way he feels about what he is saying (31). At this point, and once again genuinely surprised, Harry concedes the difference and the tension is released in laughter (32).

Joe is left quite alienated from the image of his current position that he has come to create, but this represents a potential growth point for his own future Speaking. After a long pause (32) that acknowledges the difficulty that Joe is in, Harry affirms the different mode that the discourse has moved into and asks to maintain it (33-34) while he expands on a type of communicative experience that gives him a particular kind of satisfaction (35-47). In effect, this functions as a more orthodox statement of a Resonance, and soon afterwards the group returns to Bill for his rounding-up statement.

Extract 9.20

- | | | |
|----|-------|--|
| 01 | JOE | For me, what I heard you (Harry) saying was talking |
| 02 | | about those moments when some unforeseen event |
| 03 | | (Harry: Mmm) takes away the expectations, the |
| 04 | | planning, the preparation, the everything else, and |
| 05 | | allows you to get into real, immediate, here-and-now |
| 06 | | contact (Harry: Yes) with those people. |
| 07 | HARRY | That's what I meant (Joe: Yes) . . . and getting the |
| 08 | | message across like that. |
| 09 | JOE | Ah, well, it's that last bit that you said there that for |
| 10 | | me is the distinction . . . Oh, I'm sorry . . . |
| 11 | HARRY | No, get it! Really! |
| 12 | JOE | Well, because of that interconnectivity, you feel you |

- 13 can communicate the things you want to
 14 communicate.
- 15 HARRY Exactly!
- 16 JOE Yes, and somehow I was feeling, and I'll just have to
 17 think a lot more about this because I've never
 18 thought it before, but I was feeling that, when I'm at
 19 my best (four seconds pause). I don't think there's
 20 very much of me, or them, it's . . . it's the message.
 21 It's those meanings out there in the world, and it has
 22 very little to do with people . . . (general laughter) . . .
 23 I'm afraid . . . it's nothing to do with getting close to
 24 people, it's . . . phew! Woah! It's *this!*
- 25 HARRY Yes, but the point is that when you get that close,
 26 the *this* is all there is. You're not conscious of this
 27 being me and that being them, you're just conscious
 28 of a connection. You're talking about a message,
 29 we're talking about a connection, but the thing is the
 30 same, it's . . .
- 31 JOE Yeah, but I *bate* what I'm saying!
- 32 HARRY Oh, really?! (general laughter) Oh, I love it! (four
 33 seconds pause) I'll tell you what, while we're
 34 opening up like this, can we carry on in this mode?
 35 (General: Yeah. Mmm) Because we were talking
 36 about planning and messages, and I know that for
 37 me what's best is when I've got a really simple
 38 message and I actually could say it in one sentence,
 39 but I'm going to take an hour, and at some point that
 40 message is coming across in just the right way and
 41 what the hour is about is finding the right moment
 42 that gives me the opportunity, do you see what I
 43 mean? And when that goes across, you know it, and
 44 it only comes through that point of human contact,
 45 and you can feel it, it's visceral. And sometimes you
 46 walk away and you haven't felt it, and they've been
 47 listening to me talk about something, and that's all.

I am motivated to comment further on what Harry can have meant by the expression "in this mode" (34). There is an amount of linguistic investigation to be done before anything could be said with any level of certainty, but I believe that what is happening here is a halfway house between conversation and what we had actually aimed to do in the Resonance part of the session.

At one level of analysis, Extracts 9.19 and 9.20 together comprise Harry's Resonance and, inside it, Lucy and Joe work to Understand him. Running parallel with this Understanding, however, Joe is articulating his own Resonance from what Harry has said. Joe's Resonance is both intellectually and emotionally dissonant with Harry's and, while Harry initially takes it to be in tune with his own, it is Joe's affective evaluation (31), rather than an intellectual clarification that makes Harry realize that it is not.

What remains consistent throughout these extracts, and what I believe Harry is referring to when he talks about carrying on "in this mode" is the quality of the attention which is given to each person as they speak. People *are* trying to articulate different ideas, but there is a group commitment properly to Understand all of them. While the Speaker/Understander role is not clearly maintained, the ability to offer cooperative understanding is massively present. This is something that we have added, as a group, to our communicative repertoire, and which has, in turn, enhanced our collegiality. I believe that I am reporting here on processes and experiences similar to those that Anne McCabe writes about in chapter 11.

The feedback discussion on this session made a specific point of the need truly to live with the frequently asserted observation that different people work at their best in very different ways.

A Kind of Conclusion

The phase of work I have described in this chapter came to an end in the summer of 2000. One member of the group reached retirement age, and two decided for different reasons to shift to job-sharing arrangements, thus bringing in two new team members. Also, the work that we had been doing and the obvious satisfaction that we were getting from it had attracted the attention of other colleagues in other sections and departments of our school.

The work now faces new challenges. Can the group renew itself? Can it grow bigger? How many members would be too many? How much explicit training should new members have before they try the whole format in real developmental terms?

Would it be better to start new groups with only new members so that they can negotiate the finer details of their own interactions, as we did ours? To what extent is it even true that we renewed CD in a group format, following guidelines that I suggested? This was not Paul's perspective.

I do not see things so much in terms of Speaker and Understander. More a group consciousness. The development has been social. I could not go to another arbitrary group and (alone, ipsissimus) Speak or Understand. I could only become more aware of the degree to which different rules operated.

Responses to these questions take me beyond the scale of this book. I haven't gotten there yet. There is one issue that Paul raises, however, that has received some kind of a response. The experience of our group development sessions was so positive that we began to wonder if it might be possible to offer it to others, who might indeed be able to come along and Speak and be Understood. We turn to a brief account of this experience in the next chapter.

To close this chapter, let me make one final and explicitly evaluative comment in the general area of working for a living. This period of time, this work, with these people: as far as I know, this is as good as it gets.

The E-Mail Questionnaire

Hi,

This is the promised (threatened) request for feedback on our group development work so far. As you can perhaps guess, I am stuck between asking lots of specific questions and none at all. I have come around to what follows.

Hey, don't do this now if you're feeling frazzled. Excuse my temerity, but make an appointment with yourself for when you can meet with yourself for a while and do it then.

When you find you want to take the time, please type your responses into this message and send the whole thing back to me. I look forward very much to hearing from you. I'll then get back to you with a summary-cum-response of my own.

REFLECTIONS ON LANGUAGE STUDIES UNIT GROUP DEVELOPMENT 1998

1. Does any one moment from the GD sessions come back to you particularly? Any idea why?
2. Does our GD work remind you of anything else? Any idea why?
3. What is the general emotional response you have right now as your mind turns back to the GD sessions?
4. Are there any comments you'd like to make about your experience as Speaker, either during your session as Speaker or when reflecting on it?
5. Are there any comments you'd like to make about your experience as Understander?
6. Do any of these words facilitate any response from you?
skills, concerns, values, changes, doubts, wishes, language, pressures, reservations, recommendations, requests
7. Is there a different key word or phrase that you would have put in that list?
8. If I wasn't getting in your way like this, what would YOU like to say?

Thanks,
Julian