

Michigan Teachers Book Club

Continuing Cooperative Development: A Discourse Framework for Individuals as Colleagues

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Background Information

About the book

Continuing Cooperative Development offers a tried and tested framework for teacher collaboration that maximises the potential for individual development while helping to build a relationship of support and trust among colleagues. The principles underlying the book arise from over thirty years of involvement in TESOL worldwide. They are these:

1. Pursuing the development of one's own teaching can be fulfilling and worth the extra effort involved.
2. In the same way that individual learners have different ways of learning at their best, we teachers each have our own, individual ways of being the best teacher that we can be. You at your best may well employ a different approach to teaching, and use different techniques, than me at my best.
3. To work in a collegial spirit with (at least some of) one's colleagues enhances the quality of one's professional life.
4. Teaching, like any form of action, is *situated* in time and place and in terms of real people. Development involves enhancing one's abilities to act positively with those people, in and on that situation.
5. When someone takes the time, and has the opportunity, to explain their ideas at length, this act of expression also develops the ideas. It's not as though the ideas are fixed and the words just 'say' them: the ideas develop in the telling.

How do you feel about these so-called principles? Can you discuss them with a colleague? Is there anything that you or they would like to add, disagree with, or change?

To these principles, I should like to add one observation: A great deal of our conversations and discussions, whether professional or not, involve the exchange of comments, opinions, suggestions and advice that are based on *evaluations* of one kind or another.

You might want to check out that last observation — preferably with a friend:

Think back to a recent professional exchange you had with a colleague. Is it true that this involved evaluation, of one kind or another, as the basis for comments, opinions, suggestions or advice?

Well, the basic idea underlying my book is that we can encourage each other's professional development by learning to talk and listen to each other in a way that allow us to take the whole idea of *evaluation* (along with the exchange of comments, opinions, suggestions and advice) out of the equation altogether for an agreed period of time. This allows one person, the Speaker, the extra space in which to work on their own development in a way that facilitates the growth of their own ideas, while also encouraging an increase in collegial feeling among the people involved. The book is full of authentic examples of this happening.

It would help at this stage if I could show you an example of what I mean. There is a short article of mine, using data taken from *Continuing Cooperative Development*, at the following site:

<http://www.les.aston.ac.uk/lsu/staff/je/collselfdevel.htm>

The article would be a useful starting point, because it is written to show a whole picture in a few pages, whereas the book is written on a larger scale in order to guide you into the process of continuing cooperative development.

I can honestly say that, whether used in pair-work format, or in group format, I have found this approach to continuing professional development endlessly stimulating. My colleagues and I use the approach on a regular basis and reports are now being published of others doing the same:

Boshell, M. (2002). What I learned from giving quiet children space. In K. Johnson & P. Golombek (Eds.), *Teachers' narrative inquiry as professional development*. (pp. 180-194). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mann, S. (2002) Talking ourselves into understanding. In K. Johnson & P. Golombek (Eds.), *Teachers' narrative inquiry as professional development*. (pp. 195-209). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

If you now go back to the top of these notes and look at the title of the book again, I hope that the significance of the various parts of it are clear to you. I want to offer a way of speaking and listening (a 'discourse framework') to each other that respects our individuality in a context of collegiality in order to help us continue our personal and professional development as whole people-who-teach.

My book itself is designed for *doing*, as well as for reading, and it contains a bank of tasks after each chapter. If you move now to the Discussion section of these materials, I'll suggest some questions for your consideration that relate both to the text and to those activities.

I hope that the work motivates you and your colleagues as much as it does me! If you want to contact me about it, please do: j.edge@aston.ac.uk

About the author

I started out in TESOL in 1969, working for the United Nations Association as a volunteer teacher in Jordan. After that, I lived and worked in Germany, Egypt, Singapore and Turkey. Between those periods, I returned to Britain to continue the formal side of my professional education, starting with a teaching diploma, then a master's degree, and then a PhD.

I now teach at Aston University, England, (<http://www.les.aston.ac.uk/lisu/>), working for the most part on our distance-taught *MSc in TESOL*. The fact that my 'students' are out there teaching on five continents keeps me in touch with the demands of various realities and also gives me the feeling of being able to live, professionally, in the world and not just in one country. I am also lucky enough to be invited to other countries in order to run workshops and teach short courses for ESOL teachers there.

My major interests are in professional development and action research. Apart from *Continuing Cooperative Development*, my two latest books have also been in these areas: *Case Studies in TESOL: Action Research* was published in 2001 by TESOL Inc., and *Continuing Professional Development: Some of our Perspectives* was published in 2002 by IATEFL.

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Questions for discussion

Beyond the large number of tasks and discussion topics that the book contains, I offer below some additional possibilities for initiating further reflection and/or group discussion. As in the book itself, the choice remains open as to whether one wants to refer to Chapter 12 (where source texts are introduced and some ideas taken further) as one goes along, or to leave Chapter 12 until its place in the sequence of chapters. As the book leaves Chapter 12 to its place in the sequence, I have decided, in these materials, to refer to it as I go along, marking the relevant questions with an asterisk (*).

Chapter 1

1. To what extent do you feel addressed as one of the readers sketched in the first few pages?
2. How do you feel about the idea of an '*internal growth*' approach to professional development, as well as an '*external model*' approach?
3. Is there anything else in this chapter that stands out for you, for good reasons or bad? (You can — and I hope you will — apply this question to any chapter, of course.)
4. * If you wanted to, you could look ahead to Chapter 12, where pp. 265-66 establish some connections with reflective practice and action research. If you are familiar with these approaches to professional development, how do you see cooperative development fitting in?

Chapter 2

1. How do you feel about what is said here with regard to subjective and objective truth?
2. Do you recognise from your own experience the distinction made here between learning through experience and learning intellectually? What might your examples be?
3. Does the chapter succeed in making clear that it is *not* an argument against arguing, but a suggestion that we don't have to argue all the time?
4. Make your own notes on what you understand by the attitudes described here as respect, empathy and sincerity. See how your version matches that of a colleague.
5. * In Chapter 12 (pp. 266-71), the most important issue that arises for me is the distinction between the kind of work we are doing here and any kind of *counseling*. Certainly, many styles of counseling use non-judgmental language similar to that used in cooperative development, as do people who work in conflict resolution, as do people who work in inter-cultural communication, but it is unhelpful to confuse these different purposes and relationships based on a style of language use, simply because we are familiar with one usage and not with the others. That is my position. How convincing do you find it?

Chapter 3

One of the reasons that I am so pleased to have *Continuing Cooperative Development* included in this Michigan scheme is because it brings the book to the attention of teachers who work together. How do you feel about making tasks and activities a part of your reading and collaboration? Do you prefer to read and discuss? Might it be worth agreeing to try some of the tasks?

Chapter 4

1. Did you try any of the activities? If so, to what extent did they add a dimension to your understanding of the ideas in the book?
2. How do you feel about the comments on '*body language*' (*including the further notes on pp. 271-273)? Has any of this helped you learn anything about yourself or anyone else? (As with all these references to Chapter 12, you can just ignore them for now if you prefer and come back to them later.)

Chapter 5

1. How would you sum up the idea of Reflecting?
2. What do you see as the purpose of Reflecting?
3. What are your own comments on this technique, as they arise from your experience of the tasks, or from experience outside the book?
4. How easy or difficult do you find it to read the transcripts? Does it help if you pause and try to imagine the situation, or if you read the transcripts aloud?
5. If you did tasks 5.4 and 5.5, how did you find the application of skills learnt on a fictional narrative to the development of your own narrative?
6. * The comments on pp. 273-75 refer to the coming together of post-modern ideas of '*multiple selves*' and the humanist idea of the '*whole person*.' How meaningful, or useful, or exciting, is that to you?

Chapter 6

1. How clear are the concepts of Thematising and Challenging? Is it useful to refer to them as two sides of a coin (called Making Connections), or are they fundamentally different?
2. On p. 82, I suggest that there are more relationships possible than simply 'same' and 'different.' What might some examples be of those other relationships?
3. If you are doing (some of) the tasks, which one(s) have worked well for you so far?
4. If you look back to earlier tasks you did, can you see how Thematising and Challenging might have fitted in to what the Understander did?
5. Do you find the mixture of the personal and the professional useful, annoying, or what? (*You could pursue this further via some of the references on pp. 275-76.)

Chapter 7

1. How difficult do you find it to identify a focus for your thoughts and actions, and then to stick to it? Can you think of examples?
2. If you've tried Tasks 7.3 and 7.4, do you find one of them more naturally sympathetic? If so, does this tell you anything about yourself as a thinker and a planner?
3. There's not a lot to go on in Chapter 12, so let me refer you to something I've read (on the recommendation of my friend, Mark Clarke) since my book was published: Wendell Berry. 1990. *What are people for?* New York: North Point Press. In a discussion of Emerson, Berry writes (p. 85):

'And action, of course, implies place and community. There can be disembodied thought, but not disembodied action. Action — embodied thought — requires local and communal reference. To act, in short, is to live. Living "is a total act. Thinking is a partial act." And one does not live alone. Living is a communal act, whether or not its communality is acknowledged.'

To what extent does this resonate for you with the shift we are making now in cooperative development from (only) thought and talk to action?

Chapter 8

1. In this chapter, we return to the data that I used in the short article I suggested you read in my background introduction. If you did read the article then, what differences do you notice in your response to the data now?
2. Are there experiences of your own, either as teacher or teacher-investigator, that the work in this chapter reminds you of?
3. The tasks this time are pretty large-scale and pretty demanding. Is there one that you particularly took to, or took against?
4. * In Chapter 12 (pp. 276-77), the quote from Reason casts his comments once again in the frame of Problem/Solution. I am coming to think more and more that there are many different ways of categorising our responses to our environment, and that it may well be helpful in each instance to think about what those specific categorisations might be: Goal/Way; Opportunity/Seize; Challenge/Accept;

Barrier/Remove, and what others? How might you describe some of your action points in terms like these?

Chapter 9

1. How clear is the Group Development scheme to you?
2. Can you imagine it working among colleagues of yours?
3. Do any of the sessions reported on speak to you particularly?
4. What do you make of the claims regarding increased collegiality?
5. How useful are the discussions of *differentiated understanding*, *choice of topic*, *individually owned co-constructions*, and *Resonances*?
6. * The notes on p. 278 link the issues of the 'whole person' and 'multiple identities' back to Q6, Chapter 5, above. Has this become any more interesting?

Chapter 10

1. How clear is the Visiting Speaker scheme to you?
2. Can you imagine it working among colleagues of yours?
3. Do any of the sessions reported on speak to you particularly?
4. Can you make sense of the paragraph that runs from p. 211 to p. 212? It still seems important to me.
5. Do you find it naïve to believe — against an increasingly gloomy educational background — that making small improvements in one's individual context is worthwhile?
6. *The discussion in Chapter 12 (pp. 278-80) picks up Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, which was introduced by Rebecca. Have you come across this in other contexts? Might it be a useful way of talking about the discoveries that Understanders can help Speakers to make? Or would that be just an example of borrowing a valid concept from one area of research and using it as though it were explanatory somewhere else, when all you really have is an attractive metaphor?

Chapter 11

1. Do you find any one of the guest sections particularly interesting?
2. If you have been doing the tasks, or trying out cooperative development with your own colleagues, do you recognise the difficulties that Steve raises?
3. How do you feel about the CD at-a-distance possibilities that Neil and John describe?
4. Might you be interested in CD via chat-room? If so, do get in touch, this is now taking place.
5. Both Andy and Anne use non-judgmental discourse outside the CD framework. Do either of these possibilities look attractive to you? Or can you envisage an adaptation of your own?
6. Are you familiar with counseling-learning from another context? How do you feel about the overlaps and differences suggested here (* and on pp. 270-71 & 280-81)?

Chapter 12

If you have skipped the references to Chapter 12, now might be a good time to go back and pick them out. They are all marked with an asterisk*. You might also want to share out some of the references that you come across for individual reading and report back to the group.

Chapter 13

1. How do you feel about this dabbling in physics and philosophy? Can it help us understand what we are doing, or does it strike you as essentially just posturing?
2. How do you find Harry's response to my e-mail? I still find it immensely impressive (and not a little moving). And his first single-authored book will appear this year.
3. Does Tannen exaggerate the threat of our '*argument culture*'?
4. Now that the book has to stop, do you see any way forward for yourself with regard to the use of cooperative development?