

Cooperative Development

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About Cooperative Development

'Cooperative development' (CD) is a way of working with one colleague or more to develop your practice and research. Drawing on Rogerian (Rogers, 1980) ideas of non-judgemental understanding, Julian Edge presented a model for this way of working in 1992 in a book called *Cooperative Development*. Since then, teachers and researchers have used CD to develop practice in numerous countries around the world. As well as working face-to-face, CD has been used in a computer mediated communication CMC medium (email and MSN Messenger). These pages provide a brief guide to the CD process. There is a short introduction to the values and principles that underlie this way of working. Following a description of a typical CD session, key moves are then described. The guide ends by providing a description of a CD session.

Why CD?

Cooperative development is best seen as exploratory spoken discourse. As such, it is an ideal complement to action research or exploratory practice. It is a way of exploring our practice and formulating ideas, plans and next steps. As practitioners, we realize that our professional development is largely in our own hands. However, there is often a lack of space, time or support. There can be a sense of isolation and a feeling of overwhelming pressure and contradictory demands and information. CD is not presented here as some sort of cure-all, but many teachers and researchers have found that it provides a way of working that encourages us to look more closely at ourselves, our choices, puzzles and development.

Values and principles

CD arises from a view that the practitioner is in the best position to reflect on action and practice. A number of expressions have been used to capture this emphasis on self-development:

- reflective practitioner (see Schön 1983)
- action researcher (see Burns 1998)
- teacher-researcher (see Freeman 1998).

These three views of the practitioner share the idea that decisions about development are usually best made by the individual practitioner. However, some support and opportunity for reflection, clarification and action are useful.

Finding a balance between self-direction and having some peer support is central to Edge's view of cooperative development:

I need people to work with, but I don't need people who want to change me and make me more like the way they think I ought to be. I need people who will help me see myself clearly so that I can make my own evaluations. To make this possible, we need a distinct style of working together so that each person's development remains in that person's own hands. This type of interaction will involve learning some new rules for speaking, for listening and for responding in order to cooperate in a disciplined way.

Edge 1998: 17

CD, as a 'distinct style of working together', is derived from Rogerian principles. Rogers argued that:

... the major barrier to mutual interpersonal communication is our very natural tendency to judge, to evaluate, to approve or disapprove, the statement of the other person, or the other group.

Rogers 1951[1992]: 28

The CD framework is strongly influenced by Carl Rogers' work in non-judgmental understanding (see Rogers 1980, Rogers and Freiberg 1993 or Teich 1992).

In particular, CD sees respect, empathy and sincerity as important sustaining values. The Understander respects the Speaker's choice in what they want to speak about. The Understander's role is to put his or her experiences, opinions and viewpoints aside during the session.

In terms of empathy, part of the Understander's role is to try to get as close as possible to the Speaker's emerging focus, viewpoint and ways of describing and articulating. The act of empathizing comes from attending and concentrating energy fully on what the Speaker is saying.

The quality of sincerity (Rogers uses the term 'congruence') is simply a case of really respecting and empathizing. There is no room for any pretending. If you cannot really set aside your own evaluations on a consistent basis, you cannot really support the Speaker. As Edge (2002: 17) says:

Insincerity is when you are stringing me along in order to bring me round to your way of thinking in the end, perhaps with a few well-chosen questions which will help me see the error of my ways — from your perspective.

If the Understanders can avoid judging and evaluating, energy can be directed towards trying to understand and helping the Speaker develop a chosen focus. (You will notice that capital letters are used to denote special CD roles and moves).

A typical CD session

The central aim of CD is to set aside some time, preferably on a regular basis, in which the rules of engagement are consciously changed. By doing this you can:

- talk your way into better understandings
- hothouse an idea
- develop a research proposal
- get further with a course design
- articulate a possible change to teaching methodology
- make space for an internal dialogue.

It may help to divide a session into three phases:

- Speaker Stage
- Resonance Stage
- Summary Stage.

Speaker Stage

The Speaker brings to the CD session a topic of interest, a focus or a puzzle on which he or she wants to work. This might be quite a vague or half-formed idea. On the other hand, the Speaker might be ironing out the details of something more well-formed.

The Speaker articulates his or her thoughts. The Understanders support the Speaker by maintaining a non-evaluative role. The Understanders can use CD 'moves' described below. The Understanders can also ask questions in order to clarify the Speaker's ideas. However, these are best kept to a minimum and need to be kept non-evaluative.

Resonance Stage

The Understanders can use this space to download ideas that have struck them while listening. These should not comment directly on the Speaker's thoughts or ideas. It is important that they do not reflect evaluatively on what the Speaker has said.

Summary Stage

The Speaker reflects on the statements made by the Understanders. The Speaker may make further comment on these perspectives and also summarises outcomes, developments and next steps articulated in the session.

There may be a few closing comments on the session as a whole. Typically, the Speaker says things like:

- 'What I'm thinking/feeling now is ...'
- 'What I found helpful today was ...'
- 'I think I can see now that ...'
- 'What I can do now is ...'

CD moves

On page 1 above, the important contribution that Rogerian ideas make to CD procedures was explained. Edge also acknowledges the influence of Egan (1986) in the specific moves described below.

CD aims to enable a distinct discourse. It is consciously very different from everyday conversation or academic debate and exchange. It is not proposed as necessarily better than exchange, debate or argument. However, because it is an alternative form of discourse, it does have specific moves which can help maintain focus on the Speaker's ideas.

If the Understanders can make appropriate CD moves, it lets the Speaker know that Understanders are interested, that they are not making judgements, either positive or negative, and that they are putting their energies into understanding as fully as possible.

In the 1992 version of *Cooperative Development*, Edge proposed nine facilitative moves as follows:

Exploration

1. Attending (see www.aston.ac.uk/lss/research/prodd/CD/Ch5.jsp)
2. Reflecting (see www.aston.ac.uk/lss/research/prodd/CD/Ch6.jsp)
3. Focusing (see www.aston.ac.uk/lss/research/prodd/CD/Ch7.jsp)

Discovery

4. Thematising (see www.aston.ac.uk/lss/research/prodd/CD/Ch8.jsp)
5. Challenging (see www.aston.ac.uk/lss/research/prodd/CD/Ch9.jsp)
6. Disclosing (see www.aston.ac.uk/lss/research/prodd/CD/Ch10.jsp)

Action

7. Goal-setting (see www.aston.ac.uk/lss/research/prodd/CD/Ch11.jsp)
8. Trialling (see www.aston.ac.uk/lss/research/prodd/CD/Ch12.jsp)
9. Planning (see www.aston.ac.uk/lss/research/prodd/CD/Ch13.jsp).

A full description, exploratory tasks and examples of these moves can be accessed from the websites listed above.

Trying CD

If you feel that you would like to try CD, you have a choice. You could work through some of the tasks and practice activities in the links above. An alternative would be to jump in at the deep end and use the materials for follow-up discussion as you go along.

The most important of the moves to get right is Reflecting. Mann (2002) (see www.education.bham.ac.uk/staff/profiles/mann_s_thesis_vol1.doc), on the basis of the analysis of two years of CD meetings, found that Reflecting was the 'core' move in establishing successful CD interaction. Not only is this the key move in its own right, but an element of Reflecting is facilitative in other moves.

Other outcomes of this longitudinal study into CD use found that:

- sessions often begin with an 'early Reflect', which has the role of making the Speaker feel listened to and establishing a focus for the session
- there was little evidence that 'Challenging' was used and it may be better to combine 'Thematising' and 'Challenging' in one move, 'Relating'.

The typical reaction for a Speaker trying CD for the first time is an initial feeling of discomfort (speaking about ideas in rough form). However, this feeling quickly gives way to a very positive feeling of being listened to and understood.

In the early stages of establishing CD discourse, in addition to 'Attending', the following should be sufficient.

Reflecting

Reflecting is trying to say back a version or part of what the Speaker has just said. This both helps the Understander to show that he or she understands the Speaker's ideas and also allows the Speaker a chance to hear a version of their account coming back.

Focusing

Here the Understander picks out one element of what the Speaker has said and offers it back to the Speaker. An example of this might be if the Understander says, 'You said ... would you like to say any more about that?'. This can be particularly useful early in a session.

Relating

Here the Understander picks out two or more elements of what the Speaker has been saying and offers the speaker the chance to articulate their relationship. An example of this would be if the Understander says, 'You have talked about (A). ... and ... (B). Do you see a connection between them or do you want to say more about how they fit together?'.

What is it for?

The way of talking offered in CD provides a way in which teachers can:

- increase awareness of teaching or research issues
- enable greater self-awareness and understanding of influences, beliefs, strengths and skills
- develop an ability to interact positively with changes in teaching or the research environment
- demonstrate an attitude of support and willingness to work for the benefit of the Speaker
- make a connection between an emerging focus and possible next steps or actions.

Based on Edge 1998: 13

The idea that professional talk can easily get sucked into unnecessary evaluation and argument is not a new one. Debate styles of talk are ubiquitous. Deborah Tannen (1999) has written about this tendency in her book *The Argument Culture*. CD explicitly moves us away from one form of argument and makes space for another. There is no room for arguing 'about' and more room for the Speaker to argue 'that', in other words concentrate on developing a line of argument without having to be defensive or keeping one eye on possible objections or refutations.

CD creates a non-judgemental space for the Speaker to sort and clarify an aspect of practice or research. There are a number of possibilities that are opened up in this space for internal dialogue. There can be dialogue between:

- received knowledge and experiential knowledge (Wallace 1991: 15)
- personal and public theories (Griffiths and Tann 1992)
- ideal self and actual self (Rulla, Imoda and Rideck 1978)
- espoused theory and theory-in-action (Argyris et al 1985).

How is it Different? What is Meant by Articulation?

Many groups of teachers around the world currently use CD to get further with their thinking (see Edge, 2002). Why is this way of talking successful for these groups? Speakers almost always say that they feel particularly well listened to, supported and that an idea has been given room to grow. In addition to this extra space, there are reports that the intellectual and interactional effort feels concentrated in one direction (ie, where the Speaker is going).

It might be helpful to consider an analogy here. Apparently, when geese fly in a 'V' formation, they do so because when each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. The flock can fly 70 per cent further than the range of a solo bird. Evidence from various individuals and groups suggests that Understanders' attention and concentration creates space and energy for a process of heightened articulation. Taylor (1985) provides an insightful definition of articulation which is helpful in getting a sense of this particular form of exploratory talk:

Articulations are not simply descriptions ... articulations are attempts to formulate what is initially inchoate, or confused, or badly formulated. But this kind of formulation, or reformulation does not leave its object unchanged. To give a certain articulation is to shape our sense of what we desire or what we hold important in a certain way.

Taylor 1985: 36

The sense of becoming, and of ideas emerging and taking shape are what is important about articulation in this definition. Speaking out ideas has the potential to change them and change the way we feel about them. Whether we use the term articulation, formulation or argument, it is important to recognise that CD creates a supportive discourse where ideas can take better shape and grow. The articulation that emerges may well be the basis for further action and moving the Speaker in an interesting direction.

Example Session

This example aims to give you a flavour of how CD discourse provides support in helping a Speaker develop ideas about practice. The transcript of the full session can be found at www.education.bham.ac.uk/staff/profiles/mann_s_thesis_vol2_transcripts.doc.

In this session, Vince is preparing for a conference presentation. The relationship between planning and communication is being explored. In this first extract from early in the session, Vince introduces the topic:

- 024 Vince as soon as I enter into a planning world (.) in
025 terms of talking (0.4) it seems to cause some
026 kind of stress,
027 Nick Mmm
028 Vince which I– which I feel imposing on me.
029 and this imposition, (.) this structure that I've
030 pre-planned, (0.4) I find is– is a saddle (.) a
031 chain (.) something which inhibits me.
032 Nick so can we just clarify where we are now?
033 you're now into (.) what may not be a
034 continuing topic but the first area

035 of topic focus is what you're working on now
036 and that is this preference of yours for off-the-cuff
037 talk as opposed to planned talk. (.) you're saying
038 (.) that if you plan something then when you
039 start to talk you feel that that plan is an imposition
040 on you and constrains you and ties you down and
041 you feel you're not being as productive as you could be.

Nick's Understander move (033–034) is doing two things. It is clarifying the emerging focus ('you're now into (.) the first area of topic focus') and it is Reflecting back key elements and giving the Speaker a chance to 'hear back' a version.

Vince goes on from this early exchange to more fully explore his ideas and preference for ways of working with a group, which are not planned but prepared. He arrived at this distinction by working through a number of related issues and stages:

- a He opened by articulating a feeling that when he is very planned then he feels stress (see 024–026 above).
- b He realized that his preference for improvisation may be connected to his teaching because he feels that the students are more involved (ie, they help to direct the process).

The following is an extract where the Understanders (Ellie and Helen) help Vince articulate an understanding of how planning can make him less responsive as a teacher. It builds on the idea of involvement, noticing and responding to, signals from the students:

075 Ellie you feel that– do you feel that you've had some
076 sort of signals and been unable to change your response
077 to it?
078 Vince I think it's partly that and partly the fact that
079 I don't feel open to any signals=
080 Ellie =so you don't feel you see them
081 Vince .hhh (0.6) I see the two things in opposition
082 >you know< this driving force to get through
083 this plan (0.4) does mean that perhaps I don't even
084 see the signals
085 Helen so it's as if you're looking back into your
086 head all the time rather than looking out
087 and communicating with

Ellie and Helen's Reflecting moves help Vince to move to the next stage in his thinking:

- He thinks this 'connection' with the students helps facilitate a more 'in the moment' communicative event.
- He make a distinction between planning time for students (in order to help facilitate on-task communication) and planning done by the teacher before the session.

In the next extract you can see how stage 5 (above) leads Vince to consider the relationship between planning and communicative events. Here, he makes a clear distinction between the way his preferred classroom methodology has evolved and the role within a task-based methodology for planning time for students:

- 132 Vince I think it's obviously a personal thing because
133 you look around and you see people do plan
134 to a greater or lesser extent (.) and it– methodologically
135 is interesting with that article in Jane Willis'
136 collection (.) the planning time for tasks (.)
137 is it Martin Bygate?
138 Mary Mmm
139 Vince do we want students to plan things and what
140 sort of effect does that have on the language
141 (.) it's perceived as being a good thing (.) a
142 benefit to allow students to– to plan (1.4)

Vince remembers a distinction he has heard of between (task) tension which can help and tenseness which does not. There is a helpful amount of 'tension' for him in not over-planning a session. There is 'tenseness' if he does plan to high degree.

There is an outcome for Vince in that he clarifies a distinction between being prepared (ie having things he could do) and being planned, which directs and often inhibits a communicative event.

Through similar stages, the Speaker shapes experiential knowledge by making distinctions, connections, extensions and clarifications. The extracts above provide examples of how Understanders support the Speaker's articulation. The motivation for this kind of Understander move is twofold:

- a It is a chance for the Understander to confirm that she is on the same wavelength. This motivation is to enable the Speaker to hear a version of what has been said.
- b The Understander may not be sure that she is on the same wavelength. Here the motivation is to enable the Understander to carry on properly understanding.

Vince develops a distinction between prepared and planned. A few moments later, Nick is able to 'understand' this distinction:

180 Nick and that's the big distinction I hear now
181 in what you're saying, (.) between being
182 prepared to enter the arena (.) and the idea
183 of having a plan which you think will
184 ride roughshod over the various possibilities
185 that could have occurred in that arena
186 Vince yes yes (.) and another thought hits me from
187 that, (.) from the preparation planning distinction,...

This gets an enthusiastic endorsement (line 186) and, once this distinction is resolved, it leads immediately to a related idea and this movement is explicitly signalled by 'another thought hits me (186)'. This kind of explicit signalling is common when Speakers feel that they are having 'new' thoughts. There is a sense of momentum that builds up and often a sense of excitement.

The above description gives some idea of how Understanders use CD moves to keep the focus directed on the Speaker's emerging focus.

Further Reading

The best single text available if you are interested in taking this further would be:

Edge, J. (2002) *Continuing Cooperative Development: A discourse framework for individuals as colleagues*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

This comprehensive guide to CD has tasks, and data extracts which demonstrate the scope and effects of CD. Anyone who wants to access the original 1992 text can download information from www.aston.ac.uk/lss/research/prodd/CD/.

If you are interested in finding more transcribed examples of analysis of CD moves you can look at Mann (2002) at www.education.bham.ac.uk/staff/profiles/mann_s_thesis_vol2_transcripts.doc.

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