Chapter 10 Visiting Speakers

Extending Invitations

The work I report on in this chapter arose directly from the perceived successes of our group development work. We asked ourselves to what extent it would be feasible to place the understanding potential of our group at the service of our wider peer group of teacher-researchers. Whether they saw this work in developmental terms or, more pragmatically, as a way of moving some ideas forward, we hoped that the possibilities might be attractive to them.

Once again, let me make this point about the story I am telling. On one level, this is a narrative tied into a certain time and place, involving actual people with their real concerns and aspirations. On this level, I hope that it is interesting. On another level, for some readers, I hope that the story might also be significant. It will be significant if it helps these readers see possibilities for themselves in their own times and places. At this level, the story is not about which Speakers addressed which topics, and what they explored, discovered, or planned. The examples might be of a professor of linguistics speaking about lexical cohesion, or of a teacher educator speaking about materials for the teaching of reading, or of a ESOL teacher speaking about motivation problems with children who have to attend extra language classes at the end of a full school day. The function of these Speakers and their topics in this sense is to exemplify the potential of the process and the power of the discourse. Each reader will have to decide for her- or himself the extent to which the examples achieve this kind of significance.

We expected three major (and, of course, overlapping) problems:

• *Intellectual*: Without a lengthy introduction, it was unlikely that a visiting Speaker could create enough common ground to enable us to understand the critical point on which he or she wanted to work.

• *Emotional*: Without the close affective bonds of mutual trust that we had developed, visiting Speakers might not be able to open up sufficiently to work in public on their own professional development, not even on the academic/professional side of the coin.

• *Procedural*: With no experience of the kind of discourse we had developed, Speakers might not even be able to proceed.

We addressed the first problem by inviting visitors to attend two sessions. In the first, they gave the usual type of talk about their work that visiting speakers give. This was an open session for anyone among students or staff who wished to attend. We asked visitors to choose the topic of their talk, however, with the specific criterion in mind that it should also briefly understand the restricted-access, developmental session that would follow. In this second session, the visitor would speak about some aspect of the talk that he or she wanted to focus on in an attempt to take his or her thinking further. On one occasion, the visiting Speaker did not give such a talk, but sent us a paper she had written as background to her session as Speaker.

As for the emotional and procedural hurdles indicated above, these were the very issues that we wanted to explore, and we saw no equally explicit way of addressing them in advance of the sessions themselves.

I contacted potential visitors first by E-mail and then by phone, when I talked them though our idea for an invitation. Afterward, I followed up with a letter which is reproduced at the end of this chapter. Three proposed visits fell through for various reasons, but we still had seven visitors, four men and three women. I knew two of them personally quite well, two of them slightly, and three not at all. We taped the sessions, and I extracted data that seemed particularly interesting. I then set tapes of the whole sessions and of the extracts to the Speakers and fixed dates.
to get together with them to discuss their reactions. Finally, I reported back to our group, and we discussed the sessions further. Everyone concerned has read this chapter and provided any input to it that they wished.

Unanimously, the visiting Speakers reported positively on the experience, at least to the extent that they found it “interesting”! The two difficulties most commented on were the lack of normal, evaluative feedback from listeners and the awkwardness of going beyond what one felt sure about being justified in saying. In other words, the pressures that characterize CD discourse from the Speaker's point of view were immediately apparent to them. Nevertheless, in four of the seven cases, there were explicit discoveries, clearly identifiable in the data and afterward corroborated by the Speaker. We, in our turn, learned more about understanding and gained new perspectives on our own work in GD.

From this point, I have organized the rest of this chapter in the following way. Initially, I set out to build a composite view of the visiting Speaker sessions, drawing on data from both of them and from the follow-up interviews. Here, I use a range of extracts from different sessions in order to demonstrate the outgrowth of the cooperative development scheme in its various aspects. I then look at three longer data sets in order to give a sense of individual events in their own right. As we go along, I draw out what we as a group learned from the visiting Speakers, and I close the chapter with a personal meditation of my own.

The names of the visiting Speakers are included in chapter 12. In my discussion of their work, I use pseudonyms and either he or she to refer to each visiting Speaker. In order to provide a greater element of anonymity, I do not guarantee that either the name or the gender of the pronoun chosen reflects the sex of the person referred to. In this chapter, I do not usually identify individual group members as Understanders, because I want to foreground the relationship between the Speaker and the Understanding group. I discuss the background to these decisions further in chapter 12.

**Extract 10.1**

**Speaker**

I was expressing my nervousness beforehand and I think it might be useful to start from that nervousness (Understander: Mmm). I'm nervous because this is the first time you've done this with an outsider, and also because, like everyone, I'm insecure, really (laughs). The places where you are doing your creative thinking are also the places where you are most vulnerable (Understander: Mmm). So, I feel I'm exposing myself to you, and what I'm going to expose is areas where I think I might be muddled (that's why I'm nervous and embarrassed in a way), but also by exposing the muddle, I thought, these are the areas that I am also most interested in, and most anxious, in a way, to work through.

So, as a basic attitudinal set, then, you are saying that you do feel nervous about engaging in this (Speaker: Mmm) exchange, because it's a new one and we... Yeah, I suppose what I'm saying is that I've always done my thinking privately and then exposed it when I thought it was safe (Understander: Mmm) and you're inviting me to expose my thinking before I was ready to expose it (Understander: Right). I don't mind doing that—well I do mind doing it in a way! (general laughter)—but I am quite happy to do it because it seems to be a sensible position to put oneself in.
The Reflection here (16–18) is the kind of thing that we would think of as quite normal by now: an early move to settle the Speaker and cue the style of discourse that the Speaker should expect. The Understaner Reflects the emotion not only because this is frequently a useful move to make but also because on this occasion the Speaker himself has highlighted it.

In a later interview, the Speaker commented on this opening exchange:

*Having bad some experience of counseling, I recognized this kind of response and it felt rather mechanical. The interesting thing then, though, was that it did give me the chance to say an important part of what I wanted to say—about exposing private thoughts—and when I heard myself say that it made me realize that it’s also true generally that I am essentially a private thinker—I don’t usually work my ideas out with someone else, I tend to keep my thoughts to myself until I’m ready to go public with them.*

So, what was initially perceived as a mechanical procedure nevertheless facilitated improved communication and a more relaxed atmosphere for that communication (19–27). Furthermore, in a way that could not be obvious to us at the time, it enabled the articulation/creation of a meaningful personal insight for the Speaker (19–21). Notice, in the commentary, the key statement, “*when I heard myself say that it made me realize.*” The interactional space that the Understaner has made available allows the Speaker this unusual opportunity to hear himself and to realize the significance of what he has said.

As a group, we found in this commentary a confirmation of the power of Reflection in terms of keeping the Speaker’s ideas available for the Speaker to work on. It also lent support to the idea of getting on board with an early Reflection so as to help the Speaker experience and identify the style of the interaction. The Speaker also affirmed that it was the assumption of a supportive attitude and his predisposition to trust us that allowed him to take these first steps on what he called “*a journey into the unknown.*”

The Speaker’s further comments reveal how in tune he was with the style of work, recognizing intuitively through this experience the purpose of our undertaking as a whole:

*The nervousness faded after about five minutes. Perhaps addressing it directly helped to deal with it. Looking back on the session, it was a useful—in a sense liberating—experience. The ideas that you normally present in a talk have stopped being your thinking because you tell people what you know that you know. In this environment, you have a chance to do what you can’t normally do, to follow routes that aren’t yet ready, but seem like they may be important.*

Visiting Speakers generally commented positively on the early Reflection, with one saying that it had helped her “*find my start,*” adding that having the emotional side (being worried) of her experience Reflected helped her “*put that aside and focus on the topic.*”

In an initial Reflection from a later session (Extract 10.2), the Understaner works to capture the not quite explicit attitude behind the Speaker’s opening and comes up with the expression, “*worth it*” (12). The Speaker, who is developing an approach to teacher education, partly accepts this Reflection but is also motivated by it to articulate further the criterion that, in his terms, would make the effort worth it (14–18).

**Extract 10.2**

01 Understaner Just before you go on, can we just clarify that base position? (Speaker: Yes) You’ve said that there is this question of an “enhancement paradigm;” and what does that mean? And you want to work on that, not just as a concept, but the detail of how that would be implemented (Speaker: Mmm). And you said earlier that you feel a particular—I’m not sure that “pressure” is the right word—but there’s a life-cycle element to this as well (Speaker: Mmm), and you’re looking to evaluate what it is that you’re getting into here, because you want to commit to something that
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(Speaker: Mmm) you feel is *worth* it, almost
(Speaker: Mmm), is that right?
Yes, that’s right. I mean, I’m not ... it could be, it might turn out to be just a waste of time, in the sense that it’s a blind alley. Right? It might be something that sounds very good, but then when you get down to it, it is actually not very *useful*.

He later commented:

>This was a very productive way to begin. In the articulation of my thinking, the concept of usefulness became highlighted, and I think this is in fact the touchstone of my whole approach to professional development.

The issue of people speaking from different roles or identities also surfaced again in these sessions. One Speaker was both a practicing therapist and the director of a university-based counseling service. The two roles did not always easily coexist, and this Speaker (who was, of course, a sophisticated user of a related style of discourse) used the group to try out various ideas and consider what was reflected back to him. Prior to Extract 10.3, he had spoken about short-term and long-term educational goals and had distinguished between helping people to deal with an event that is troubling them and helping people in a more general, holistic sense. Understanders combine to Reflect (01–12) and Thematize (14–18).

**Extract 10.3**

01 **UNDERSTANDER** Do I get the sense here that, going back to the beginning again, when you talked about the university and the essential journey toward the degree which you want to help students to make (Speaker: Mmm), and taking this event/person distinction, that at one time perhaps the focus was on a particular event that might get in the way of that, but now you’re dealing with the person who

09 actually sets out on the journey (Speaker: Yes), having brought with them all sorts of problems (Speaker: Exactly). And that’s a big change in terms of orientation.
10 I think it is, yeah, yeah.
11 And that, what Harry just said there, is that connected to the earlier distinction you made between education in the narrow sense of a course, and education of a person in the longer life-sense?
12 I think it is. I think it is. Yeah, yeah. It is. I suppose I’m also, while we’re on that, I have to ask myself, I guess, if a student comes in their first year, with quite severe difficulties, what can we offer them?
13 Can we offer them help for the next three years?
14 (Understanders: Mmm, Yeah) Or can we say, "Well, within the university, what we can help you do is a short piece of counseling work that might help you to cope with this year (half-laughes) (Understander: Mmm). And when you might be welcome to come back in, say, your final year, if you want a bit more help, to see you in your final year."

The Speaker said later:

>I was trying an idea out here, and I don’t like it at all. Our work should be to make ourselves redundant in the life of our clients, not just to do some patching up till the next time.

In another section (Data 10.4), the same Speaker takes the Understander’s Thematizing (01–11) as an opportunity to explore beyond the connection made (12–29) in a way that provoked the following comment later:

>This really was a chance to explore by thinking aloud—not exactly free-association, but I felt I had the space to look around without having to construct an argument or come up with a definite answer to anything.
familiar discourse, and differing personal styles meant that we did not move along in quite such harmony. One visiting Speaker session began:

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With hindsight, it is fair to say that the Understaner's probably over-explicit insistence on a Speaker/Understander relationship along linear tracks (06-08) and the Speaker's rather dubious response to this prospect (09) signaled a standoff that was never properly resolved, although a lot of interesting things were said.

In the following extract from the same session (Extract 10.6), the Understaner is attempting to Thematize from what the Speaker has said in hopes of offering a Focus for further Speaker exploration (01-06). The Speaker recognizes where the Understaner is headed and goes there immediately (07), but the Understaner soldiers on to establish the connection more formally in his own terms (12-15). Once he has done so, however, the Speaker barely stays to acknowledge the link that he confirms he has just made (16-20) before going on in the next utterance to a different issue (20-22).

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Some time later in the same session, the Speaker has been describing a television program he has seen about a language teacher who uses unorthodox methods apparently to great effect. In Extract 10.7, we see how the Understannder tries once again to establish thematic links across the Speaker’s discourse (04). Once again, the Speaker sees it coming (05), and once again the Understannder doggedly perseveres (06). This time, however, the Speaker confronts the mismatch of styles explicitly and then jokingly acknowledges a personal preference for nonlinear thinking and talking (07–10).

Extract 10.7

01 Speaker He was dealing with these sixteen-year-old kids at school in Islington. So he, you know, cannot, be as an individual, replicated, you know?
02
03 Understannder Mmm, so, this is another input into …
04 Speaker Yeah, it could be.
05 Understannder … your terms of art and science?
06 Speaker It could be! It could be! You see, you’re going to discover my dark side! Which is that I sort of talk
07
08

Once it had been brought out, this issue of individual style resurfaced periodically throughout the session, perhaps becoming the unspoken (and certainly not Focused!) topic of the session as a whole. The Speaker referred to “my tendency to drift”; the issue of “Where do I stand?” is common to three of the topic areas he addressed; and he reported a criticism of his writing as being good on summary and analysis but lacking in conventional argument. At one point (Extract 10.8), he explores briefly the idea that there is perhaps a distinct type of contribution to be made by a discourse style outside the normal rhetorical expectations of the modern academy but concludes that there is little possibility of having such a piece published.

Extract 10.8

01 Speaker What if, you know, what if that’s just a different way? I mean, that could have a function as well, just sort of talking around ideas (Understannder Mmm). And so then, going back to what I was saying before about reading authors from previous decades, who actually got away with that sort of thing—maybe because there was no one else around who could organize their writing any better (smiles)—so, I mean, I don’t want to get into saying that I could be Max Weber (general laughter), but the thing is, there’s just no niche for that.
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This was not a session, then, that followed clear-cut lines or that led to Speaker discoveries identifiable in the discourse. For me, however, this was a session that stood out in terms of Understannder learning—my learning. It was a powerful reminder to me that although language itself has some necessarily linear features and rational thought (as understood in contemporary Western culture)
also has some necessarily linear features, neither personal nor professional development is linear. Anyone looking for the footprints of development in the data of discourse does well to remember this fundamental mismatch. In other words, the tracks of what cooperative development looks to facilitate through language will not always be demonstrably there in the record of the language used, even if the development is taking place.

But if I am to communicate more to you than assertions of value, it is in the language data that I have to search for evidence. I believe it is fair to say that all the visiting Speakers felt that they had spent their time usefully and that the comment reported in Extract 10.9 is typical of one kind of outcome, even where no explicit discovery could be documented.

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Having given this composite image of visiting Speaker sessions and provided some examples of how Speakers interacted with our understanding procedures in general terms, I now want to look at connected extracts from three individual sessions in order to investigate how the Speakers concerned moved toward their own outcomes. It is not an easy ride through these rich and complex exchanges, but as you have come this far with me, I hope you will buckle up for the extra mile.

To give one advance organizer, in the terms of how thought and action interact that I use in Task 8.2, I would say that Rebecca brought along a means-oriented problem, which she explored to pragmatically useful discoveries at the theoretical level. David explored details of linguistic theory and discovered links toward coherence in his own personal and professional development. Liz's focus was means- and ends-oriented, and her explorations opened up personal, professional, and institutional dimensions of discovery regarding her research goals.

Rebecca as Visiting Speaker

Interviewed a couple of weeks after the session, Rebecca commented on the distinctive nature of the experience in terms of its being "neither explaining to students nor discussing with colleagues." She said that we had not given her any new ideas but that we had provided her with a framework. Illuminatingly for us, she referred to this framework as being "like Vygotsky in reverse." In Vygotsky's theorization of child development, the child can be helped beyond its current level of ability by working with an adult, with someone who knows how to function at a developmental level just beyond where the child is at any given time. This is what Vygotsky calls the zone of proximal development. Rebecca suggested that our group inverted this relationship, providing the possibility for the person who knows to "see at a greater level of delicacy" and thereby "to learn more about what they already perceived."

When listening to the tape of her sessions, she noticed the silences before she spoke in a way that she had not been aware of at the time, indicating, she thought, the mental work that she was doing. She enjoyed the Resonances section, saying that it was intellectually stimulating and useful to hear them and that it was also rewarding in an affective sense to see that one had touched people in individually meaningful and necessarily unpredictable ways.

Rebecca had brought along a specific problem. She was devising a research project concerning the use of reading texts in
TESOL classes, with specific reference to gender issues. She knew that something was not quite right about the project design, but she wasn’t sure what the problem was. She later singled out three specific outcomes from the session, and I shall try to capture these as discoveries in the data of the interaction.

Initially, Rebecca told us about how data had been collected in different countries and then (Extract 10.10) she introduces the need for a model of analysis, one which would enable the researchers to identify different types of text and different ways of using texts.

**Extract 10.10**

| 01 | Speaker | So, we had three sets of data there and it became fairly obvious that what was lacking in this was a way of analyzing it... What we were actually trying to do was somehow relate the teacher treatment to the text, right? So you need a model in which you can analyze teacher treatment in relation to a text. So, you might have, you might want to categorize the texts into types, right? (Understander: Mmm) And also categorize the treatments into types, right? (Understander: Mmm) So you’ve got at least a double-layered model. |
| 02 | Speaker | |
| 03 | Speaker | |
| 04 | Speaker | |

The analytical framework that Rebecca had developed (in a simplified version sufficient for our purposes here) comprised three lines of questioning:

1. Does the text concern people? If so,
2. Does the text represent people in traditional roles or non-traditional roles?
3. Does the teacher (a) ignore the social significance of this representation, (b) endorse it, or (c) subvert it?

A key moment comes (Extract 10.11) when Rebecca is asked for clarification of the importance of teacher intention in the third line of the model (01).

**Extract 10.11**

| 01 | Understander | Are the teachers' intentions involved here? |
| 02 | Speaker | This third line does not allow for teacher intention at all. |
| 03 | Speaker | Ah. Okay, good. That clarifies it to me. Because this is an observational model (Speaker: Yes) of a certain paradigm of social science (Speaker: Yes). It isn't in any sense a participatory, 'Let's try to understand what people think they're doing' (Speaker: No) type of research. It's, 'This is what happened (Speaker: Yes). I identified this behavior in this sense' (Speaker: Yes). It's that tradition of observational research. |
| 04 | Speaker | Yes, yes. It's not ethnographic (Understander: Yes, right). If it were, then I suppose you could replace that third line completely, and then you'd need a separate model rather than an additional line. |

The clarification effected by the Reflection (04–12) was crucial to the Understanding that the group could offer. In terms of communication between Rebecca and the group, it was important that the matter be spelled out so explicitly because the Understanders were more used to working in a research tradition that inquires into the meanings that people attribute to their actions, hence the initial question in this extract. The significance of this spelling out, however, proved also to be of great value to Rebecca, who was, as is evidenced by her six Yes's (04–12) and explicit distancing statement (13), firmly committed to working in a tradition based on an external observer of objective behaviors. Her comment on "a separate model" (16) will prove significant later.

After she had talked for some time longer about problems associated with the different levels, or lines, in the analytical model, she is invited to Focus (Extract 10.12, 01–04). This Focusing and a Thematization (21–33) lead to what Rebecca later described as an important outcome for herself, the identification of the "double-layered problem" in the second line of the model (34–35).
Can we invite you, then, out of these areas you’ve touched on, to decide which area you want to Focus in on right now? Is that second line the area you want to focus on?

The second line, I mean, I would love to focus on it. I can’t see... what can I say... I mean, I’m open really to the idea that a text, I mean, in some ways I can see that a text has got limited meanings, it hasn’t got infinite meanings, but I like the idea that a given text, anything can mean anything, you know, because I think that anyone who uses language in all sorts of ways is aware that things can mean huge amounts (Understander: Mmm) depending on all sorts of codes and what people mean by them. So to me, in a sense, that second line is sort of unresolvable in some ways and it is hard, I mean, especially if you take, say, [a certain text], how do you solve it, you know? How do you decide which role it is? Even if you decide that it has got one meaning? Or maybe two boxes are not sufficient for that... So, is the difficulty there: you’ve got the issue of, to what extent do we want to limit the potential meanings of the text?—that’s an issue in itself?

And did you just say that another problem is that even if we can come to a working agreement on that and say there is a relatively delineated meaning for a text, we would still, when making this choice, have the problem of, conceptually, will this person decide that that is a traditional role (Speaker: Yes) whereas another person will decide, “No, that’s not a traditional role,” even though they both agree what the text says?

That’s an additional problem, yes! So, it’s a double layered problem, yes. Yes, yes.

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As the Speaker also discovered, the unspoken interplay between observer categories and participant categories was causing problems at the level of research paradigm. We can follow the route to this discovery via a string of exchanges (Extracts 10.14-10.17) that, in real time, ran parallel to the above extracts.

At an early point in describing her model of analysis, Rebecca explains:

The Understander carefully restates to Rebecca the points that she has made in order to check for connections, and Rebecca makes the discovery (34-35) that she later described to me as "more important than you realized!"
Extract 10.15

01 **Understanding**
Where’s your thinking going at the moment? Do you want to push any further in the directions that you’re currently working on?

04 **Speaker**
Well, I shuffle backwards and forwards being puzzled about the second line and being puzzled about the third line (Understanding: Mmm), I think. I must admit, I would like more data. I mean, for one thing, this “subversion” box—I haven’t got any, you know! I mean, it’s there because it’s logical, you know (Understanding: Oh yeah!), somebody could do it. And because it could be done, even though it hasn’t been done, it should be in the model. So, I would see this model as being both data generated and logical, or visionary, or whatever.

In another part of the session (Extract 10.16), Rebecca introduces her preferred metaphor for discussing research questions in general (01-09). She applies this to her current project and, in so doing, draws back in the issue of teacher intentions (07-09), although her use of “somehow” suggests how troublesome this concept remains. Rebecca then accepts the Reflected Understanding (10-17) with enthusiasm (16-18).

Extract 10.16

01 **Speaker**
My personal vision is that it [a research project] is like a carousel. It’s all going round and the research question is actually the pole in the middle, and everything else, your data collection, your analysis, somehow has to relate, somehow, right from the horses on the outside to the pole in the middle (Understanding: Mmm). It’s almost as if it all goes round and somehow you pick up teacher intention on the way, you know?

09 [This line of thought is set aside for a few moments as Rebecca Speaks about the importance of student-generated data, too.]

10 **Understanding**
So what you’re saying is, if I’ve understood you correctly, if you watch, if we can carry on with this

Shortly thereafter (Extract 10.17), an Understanding attempts to pull together some of the points that Rebecca has made (01-17). Unlike the Thematisation illustrated in Extract 10.12, this constitutes a Challenge, and the Understanding is particularly careful to check each point with the Speaker. Rebecca’s initial response resists the Challenge and includes a highly creative extension of the original metaphor (18-20). At this point (21), the Understanding almost steps out of the Understanding role and into a discussion. He recovers after a pause but then fails to deliver a reasonable Reflection of what the Speaker did say, ending with an apology (21-23). Rebecca, however, acknowledges the difficulty here and works on it (24-36). The long pauses here are indicative of the exploration going on behind the words, and Rebecca later confirmed the articulation of “mixing your research paradigms” (36) as a discovery in CD terms. The Understanding then affirms that it was this “mixing” that he was feeling as “tension between the two” (38-39), which in turn leads Rebecca to a good humored acceptance of the need to work more on this paradox (40-44).

Extract 10.17

01 **Understanding**
Can I check a couple of points together that I can’t fit together at the moment? It goes back to this metaphor of the carousel (Speaker: Yes). We’ve got this action going on at the periphery (Speaker: Yes), and we said that that could be seen as the data being collected (Speaker: Yes) and we said that if we get enough of that (Speaker: Yes), if we get a sense of the patterns (Speaker: Yes), that could help us understand the mechanisms (Speaker: Yes) that are more central to the whole issue of gendered texts
of course, a confirmation of the open, positive, and collegial attitude that Rebecca brought with her to what we might want to start calling our development forum.

**David as Visiting Speaker**

This session reported here contains more technical terminology than any of the others. I include it in part for that reason. Professional development must mean different things for different professionals. One meaning it must have for colleagues in higher education, a part of whose responsibility it is to contribute to the intellectual growth of their discipline, is conceptual development in terms of the issues with which they deal. There is no doubt that this visiting Speaker was operating at a level of expertise in advance of that of his Understanders. And still, I want to claim, we can demonstrate that the framework that Rebecca described as "like Vygotsky in reverse" was helpful to David in taking these ideas further. I ask you here not to worry about unfamiliar linguistic terminology but to read for the developmental points that are germane to our topic. (In other words, perhaps, to do the kind of thing that we regularly ask language learners to do when they read texts that contain words they don’t know!)

As we join the session, David has already distinguished between information that is _explicit_ in a text and information that is _evoked_ in a reader by a text. He has also used the term _transformation_, which he marks as difficult because of its history in linguistic theory. At the opening of Extract 10.18, an Underst aer tentatively Reflects (01–10) what he understands the term _transformation_ to mean in terms of these two types of information:

**Extract 10.18**

01 **UNDERSTANDER** Can I pick that one up? Because you’ve mentioned that, and it’s very powerful, and you moved back from it—"transformation"—and I understand, I think, why you moved back from it but it was, as you were talking earlier on it came back into my mind,
Moving on, David retrospectively characterized what followed as “working out more fully some thoughts that I had had.” In CD terms, we would call this exploration, which is also what David calls it (Extract 10.18, 15). In order to explain his use of transformation, David began by making some background comments on genre studies and semantic patterning in text. Extract 10.19 picks up his exploration at the end of this introductory phase (01–07). David points out explicitly (02–03) that he is working with ideas that he is not sure about, and he then continues with a flow of creative discourse that takes him “out to the very fringes” (14–16) of his thinking.

**Extract 10.19**

| 01 Speaker | So I think the genre thing needs mapping in some way onto my categories and I don’t know how to do that. That’s another of my insecurities there. But the transformation idea comes from this. I want to set up two kinds of transformation, and I mean it, in a sense the two terms, I’m almost using “transformation” polysemously—polysemously. Erm, at the first level, I want to say the archetypal structure is Situation, Problem, Response, Evaluation and so forth, and I’d want to say that there are transformations of sequences of this, so that you can have the Response first and then the Problem, or the Response and Evaluation and then the Problem, and I’d want to be able to say in principle (and this is right at the very fringes of what I’ve explored, and I’m not sure whether I’m right in saying it anyway) that there are also certain sequences that transformationally wouldn’t occur. So you wouldn’t get, erm, Response and a Situation together and then a Problem and then the Evaluation. I think you always, if you did combine them, you’d have Response, erm, Problem, or you’d have Response and Result, but I don’t think there’s a reason, er, in a Situation before a Problem arose I don’t think would be necessarily encoded. So I’d want to say that certain kinds of sequence are in fact variants within the use of the code. That’s one sense.
| 02 Speaker | Mmm.

David’s rejection of the Reflection (11) is hedged, of course, and triply so, by “Erm,” by “I think” and by “in a way,” but the assertion “you’ve misunderstood it” remains an unusual one that might be found abrasive in regular discussions. An interesting insight here arose from David’s later comment:

> I felt very comfortable with the Understander’s Reflection and the chance to clarify for him and for myself what I was saying here. Under these circumstances, I didn’t feel a need to worry about the Understander’s “face,” and I didn’t think that he did, either.

The Understander confirmed that this feeling was indeed shared. In other words, it seems fair to claim that the trust and respect being extended in this style of discourse, the sensation of being on the same team in terms of the search for new meaning, can also simplify communication with regard to at least some of the need to hedge for politeness. Rather than have an adverse effect on collegiality, this straightforwardness can serve to affirm the affective and intellectual bond between Speaker and Understander.

We have seen how David explicitly marks the failed Reflection as an “opportunity” (13), and it is one that he seizes enthusiastically and at length. In this regard, he commented later, “Mistaken Reflections are inherently self-justifying, which is not to say that others don’t have their own value” (see, for example, Extracts 10.21 and 10.22).
David then moved on (in Extract 10.20) to deal with the second of the two senses in which he wanted to use the term transformation, a sense which he said he found more interesting. Leaving aside, to the extent that one can, the detail of the linguistics, we have further clear indications here of the exploratory nature of the work that David is doing in real time. We find explicit reference to the newness of the work (01–02, 45–47), significant pauses and asides as he thinks of and comments on examples (05, 22, 27–28), and particular care over the use of emerging technical terms (35–38). Moreover, there are distinct changes in delivery from the speed and relative lightness of Extract 10.19 and 10.20 up to the strongly emphasized "So" (07) which marks the importance of what follows, into the preparatory period of 08–24, and then on to the much slower and increasingly thoughtful work of 26–48.

David's retrospective comment on this stage of the session was: "The link with Offers and Requests was new. I was making this up as I went along." It seems fair to claim, then, that Extract 10.20 provides us with an example of exploration pushing on into discovery.

Extract 10.20

01 **Speaker**
02 One of the things that I've tried to explore, and I'm not yet very far down the road with it, is that each of the patterns that I've talked about actually has a correlation with a quite specific set of syntactic statements—in an archetypal form (two-second pause).
03 So, for example,
04 [an aside here about not having some data with him]
05 Problem is, using Halliday's categories, is characteristically represented in terms of a relational process with a carrier and attribute: "Something is bad." That's the archetypal structure. And is followed by a statement of a material process, not necessarily directly, but shortly afterwards, with an actor and material process: "Someone is doing something," and there's a causal connection between the two. So, erm, "The weather was bad, so I put my umbrella up." Archetypal structure: The Desire/Arousal pattern

In contrast, and without wanting to underestimate the usefulness of articulating a review in its own right, David said of what followed later:

The last part was making public something I had already worked out. I found it difficult to concentrate when listening to the last part again, but even now I find listening to the other parts interesting—I want to bear what I say! You can tell how new most of this is by the fact that so little of it exists in written form.
Perhaps picking up subconscious signals that the Speaker is losing enthusiasm, and certainly under pressure to keep up with what is being said, an Understander Reflects his own partial Understanding of where the Speaker has reached (Extract 10.21, 01-12). The Speaker responds to this by confirming the Reflection (13) and then going on to amplify the claim (13–20). We have here one of the values of an accurate Reflection—the Speaker is motivated to take the point further and to articulate a far-reaching goal of the work he is engaged in.

Extract 10.21

01 UNDERSTANDER So, can I check this with you? If we take the, the dynamic between Situation 1 and Situation 2 and we say that Problem/Solution is one possible dynamic, Question/Answer is another possible dynamic, and, Goal/Means of Achievement is another possible dynamic, what you are positing at the moment is the idea of certain syntactic realizations of those dynamics, where the—you can map a certain sort of syntactic choice onto the kind of, let me use "problems," the instigating item of the pattern that links up with the choice in the "Response," whatever we decide to call it ...

02 SPEAKER Yes, that's right, that's right. Yeah. So, what you'd have is, if you like, the El Dorado of being able to kind of link the syntax in with the text structure in such a way that you'd have a relationship that was, that was clear. Erm, if that could be shown to be true on a general level, it would mean that you would have, for the first time, text-structural descriptions that link directly into syntactic choices.

Next, as David pauses in his expansion of the claim (Extract 10.22, 09), an Understander picks up his return to transformations, (01-02) in order to check a slight shift that has taken place, namely that the Speaker has now outlined a greater challenge that goes beyond his earlier use of the term (10–20). David enthusiastically confirms this interpretation (13, 16–17, 19) and expands on it (21–27).

Extract 10.22

01 SPEAKER If it's going to work at all, though, it's got to work through transformations. Because you, it's self-evidently true that quite a lot of patterns don't have, don't have those things. So you've got to have a way of getting to ... the other possible structures. You know, if it's just simply true that a lot of the time ... it's interesting. But if one could show that the other versions are, in some sense, genuinely new versions of the original structures, then, mmm ...

02 UNDERSTANDER So, if I've understood you then, and again, perhaps I've misunderstood, the challenge lies in actually finding those transformations.

03 SPEAKER Yes, it's

04 UNDERSTANDER It's not virtually the things you've talked about—that's where the, the real ...

05 SPEAKER Yes, the challenge, you're absolutely right, the challenge lies in finding those steps

06 UNDERSTANDER those steps

07 SPEAKER those steps, those further steps.

08 UNDERSTANDER Yeah

09 SPEAKER And if I could do that, that would be very exciting. And it might link in with the kind of, the other work, the "other me" which I have talked about which is the collocation/colligation me, because it may be that what I am about to want to say is that there are, these syntactic patterns are ultimately the result of the conflations of various colligations, and it would be nice to think that ...

10 ALL (gasps and laughter)

11 SPEAKER (with humor, in acknowledgement of the size of the claim) ... that one could make that connection.

Now, leaving aside again the nature of the linguistics involved here as a topic, notice how, as a result of a further amplification based on an accurate Reflection, David reaches out intellectually to formulate, in this social situation, a vision so tentative (and so powerful) that he prefaces it with, "it may be that what I am about to want to say is that ..." (24–25).

And this is not the only outcome. David's extension of his
intellectual conceptualization enables him to establish a highly resonant connection between two periods of work in his academic career (22–24, 27–28, 31). David later said of this:

*I realised at this point that I have lost touch with a part of my work that was, and still is, very important to me. I don’t see how this connection can be fitted into the book I’ve almost completed, but I do see the need to make this connection and I think I can see in the future where to start.*

It seems fair to claim here that the discourse is functioning not only to serve issues of exploration and discovery in terms of David’s specific disciplinary focus but is also facilitating the kind of discovery that might be important in terms of a larger-scale sense of coherence in a person’s working life. For some people, at least, at some stages of their professional life cycle, such a realization can be importantly affirming, as David found it here.

**Liz as Visiting Speaker**

Our work with Liz started off with a fundamental misunderstanding of her topic. We had understood that she intended to work on the issue of how she was going to take her research forward. After she had sketched three possibilities in an opening statement, therefore, our early Reflection and invitation to Focus were not out of the ordinary.

**Extract 10.23**

| 01 | UNDERSTANDER | Can I just pick up something that Joe said? When he talked about “a scale of excitement,” I sensed, I may be wrong, but I sensed in your reply, there was something more like a “scale of concern” that it might not be doable, or there might not be anything there (Speaker: Yes). Is that right? (Speaker: Yes) Do you want to explore that a little bit more? |
| 02 |            | Erm (ten-second pause), I think (three-second pause), I think there’s another issue, actually, which is that what I’d really like to do at this stage, as far as patterning is concerned, is to get an automatic pattern recognizer—this hypothetical program that someone is going to write for me. |
| 03 |            | |
| 04 |            | |
| 05 |            | |
| 06 |            | |
| 07 |            | |
| 08 |            | |
| 09 | UNDERSTANDER | (ten-second pause). Do you want to start with one of them... |
| 10 |            | |
| 11 | SPEAKER | It might be an idea! (laughs) |
| 12 | UNDERSTANDER | ...and talk it through? Or...do you want to do it comparatively, or... |
| 13 |            | |
| 14 | SPEAKER | (seven-second pause) Yes, the “local grammar”... |
As she explores this theme (Extract 10.25), it becomes increasingly apparent to Liz (as she later confirmed) that the research she wanted to carry out was consistently "tacked on" to something else (01-04), that her enthusiasm was consequently diluted (05-08), and that she was involved in a series of "pretences" (09-12) involving some putative "application" in order to proceed (13-15).

Extract 10.25

01 **Speaker**

... so, one of the problems is that in order to get what I want, which is this program, I'm always having to tack it on to something else that I'm less certain of.

05

... so, you know, you get tied into this, this *project*, half of which you're very, very enthusiastic about, and the other half of which you're very much more tentative about.

09

... so it's as though you've got to pretend that your main research aim is to discover life on Mars, and then you say, oh and by the way, we'll have to build this telescope.

13

I don't think I'm really implying any applications at all, other than the application of knowing what language is like and how it works.

In some ways, it is here that Liz succeeds in reestablishing her agenda for herself. A clarification process is engaged. It is here for the first time that she comes to the realization-cum-decision that she would not pursue any more research grants that involved her in projects to which she did not feel fully committed. This is articulated (Extract 10.26, 08-17) when an Understander picks up on her enthusiasm and Reflects what he heard as a potential focus additional to the ones she had initially stated (01-07).

Extract 10.26

01 **Understander**

Unless I'm mistaken, you seem to be saying that there are in fact four ways you could go, rather than three: one, the unknown; one, the patterns; one, the local grammars; and one, this analytical computer track (Speaker: *Erm ...*). Or would you say that that is not one? You have spoken of that with more enthusiasm, I thought.

08 **Speaker**

Yes, well, that is the one I'm enthusiastic about! But it seems, the advice I've had, is that it's not possible to get that done by itself, because it needs to be paid for, and people won't pay for it because they don't see the outcome of it. I mean, I think, actually, I've got several sort of research proposals going in to various bodies, and I think that if they all fail, I shall forget the advice and (laughs) do what I want to do and try to get money for that, and if that fails as well, then I'll think about that!

From this point on, and despite our occasional misfires in Understanding as we invited her to pursue matters of research content, Liz worked increasingly on the original question that she had brought to the development forum: how does one go about making the choices that one has to make in a situation where one's research enthusiasms are not likely to be funded and the research projects that may have funding available are relatively uninspiring?

In Extract 10.27, she initially indicates that there are issues beyond the software program that she wants as an end in itself (01-07). After a detour into patterning, an Understander reaches back to recall enough of the expression "the question of what I personally do" to Reflect it back to the Speaker and ask if this question is one that she wants to pursue (08-13). There is another long pause (14) in which Liz demonstrates her willingness to do Speaker work. She then takes us through an extended example of what she might achieve in terms of local grammar (14-17) before reaching into a deeper level of attitude and affect, from which she addresses the dilemma that concerns her beyond the specifics of research content (18-31).
At this point, Liz has brought herself face-to-face with at least a
significant element of the issue that she had initially brought to the
development forum. Underlying (and some would say undermin-
ing) all decisions on research direction is the knowledge that a
commitment to any research effort will be judged not only in terms
of its theoretical interest or practical significance but also in terms
of whether it will be seen by panels of evaluators (in whom the
academic community has little faith) and by one's employers as
useful in the sense of earning high marks and thereby bringing in
government funding. When an Understaner draws out and Re-
reflects the key emotive terms that Liz has used (32–35), her laugh-
ter is of surprised recognition, and she suggests an implication (36–
38) that the Understaner denies (39).

Extract 10.27

01 Speaker There's also a question that, if I were to get what I
wanted, and got money for somebody to write this
thing (Understaner: Mmm), there's also the
question of, erm, there's still the question of what I
personally do. In a sense (Understaner: Mmm). If I
have a research day—when I am so lucky as to have
such a thing!—what do I sit and do with it?
The talk moves to the need for more research on
patterning.

08 Understaner Is there any way we can pursue that line that you
said a moment ago of, "What is it that I actually do?"
In a different way than we have so far? There was
something about the way that you said it: "There's
still the question of what I actually do" (Speaker
laughs). Is there any more to say about that?

14 Speaker Erm (eight-second pause). The things that I've talked
about, like the local grammar, one of the things I
could do is write a local grammar, and one of the
things I'm particularly interested in is attribution.
The Speaker says more about this grammar of
attribution.

18 And I suppose I have a fear of saying, "Right, this is
the next thing I'm going to do. I'm going to use all
my research time for the next three months, six

months, or whatever, and at the end of it I'm going
to have a local grammar of attribution." Is that
something I dare spend that amount of time doing?

21 Is that going to be a useful thing to have at the end
of six months? Is it going to be publishable?

(Understaner: Mmm) Is it going to go into the
Research Assessment Exercise in some form? You
know, that sort of question. Is it, er, the most valuable
thing? Or should I, you know, is there another form
of sitting down and finding something out and
writing about it, that would be more useful?

32 Understaner When you use words like "care" (Speaker laughs),
"fear," "useful," "RAF" (Speaker laughs) and "should," is
there (Understaner laughs), is there, I mean
(Speaker laughs), anything else to talk about there?
(Speaker laughs) Oh, you think I should be talking
about what I would enjoy spending the research
days working on!

39 Understaner Those words came out very strongly there, that's all!
(three-second pause)

Of Extract 10.27, Liz commented later that she had not previously
realized that she spoke in such terms about her research and that
it was very useful to have it reflected back to her. In the pause that
followed (40), the talk was turned back to the pattern recognizer.
Then, in Extract 10.28, an Understaner invites Liz back to that ear-
ier point of silence (01–05). Liz later identified the five-second
pause that follows (06) as being particularly important, because
there was a set of other project possibilities about which she could
have spoken. Significant for her (and this is what is happening in
the silence) was the in-the-moment realization that none of them
was worth mentioning, in the sense that none of them rated highly
enough to interfere with the important point of principle that she
was formulating regarding how to come to a decision about what
do next. So saying "No" (06) was highly significant.

In the rest of her statement (06–22), Liz rearticulates a version
of her original question in the light of the work she has done dur-
ing the session. Motivation for a reorientation is assessed in com-
parison with the significance for her of her earlier work (06-14); the pressure of research evaluation is acknowledged and put in its place (14-17). Then, after another significant pause (18), Liz quietly acknowledges the condition of her current motivation (18-20), orients it firmly with regard to her established research (20-21), and identifies the key to her next step (21-22).

Extract 10.28

| 01 | UNDERSTANDER | A while back, when you said, “Do you mean things
| 02 | UNDERSTANDER | I’d enjoy more” (Speaker: Yes). Was there anything
| 03 | Speaker      | else, at the end of that?
| 04 | UNDERSTANDER | Was there anything else?
| 05 | Speaker      | Things you’d enjoy more?
| 06 | Speaker      | Er (five-second pause). No. I think if there was
| 07 | Speaker      | something where I thought, like the first time I saw
| 08 | Speaker      | corpus output, I thought, I looked at it and I
| 09 | Speaker      | thought, “That is what I must do!” I mean, from my
| 10 | Speaker      | own internal imperative (Understander: Right). There
| 11 | Speaker      | isn’t anything at the moment where I look around
| 12 | Speaker      | and say, ‘I’d really love to do research on that! That’s
| 13 | Speaker      | the thing I most want to do research on.’ There are
| 14 | Speaker      | items of interest, things it would be nice to do. I
| 15 | Speaker      | mean, if I had that very strong enjoyment motive, the
| 16 | Speaker      | “shoulds” and the “RAEs” and all the other modals
| 17 | Speaker      | (general laughter) wouldn’t matter (Understander:
| 18 | Speaker      | Mmm) (four-second pause). So it’s that sense of the
| 19 | Speaker      | coal that was burning brightly is sort of sputtering,
| 20 | Speaker      | to a certain extent. It’s not that I’m not interested
| 21 | Speaker      | in corpora (Understander: Mmm), but it’s a question of
| 22 |             | how to take it forward. What is exciting?

Or as she later expressed it, in terms that I believe almost any teacher, researcher, or committed human being would find poignant, “When the flames aren’t burning brightly, how do you tend the fire?”

When Liz is asked to sum up (Extract 10.29, 01-05), her statement addresses first of all her original, more subtle question of how to approach the choices that one has to make (06-20). Possibly because she has done the work in this area, she is then also in a position to review her actual research choices in terms of content and direction (21-28) and demonstrates in so doing how their articulation in the session has helped her to prioritize them. Finally, (29-43) she comments on her work with the group in terms that move us all quite deeply, so that only laughter (46) provides an appropriate release.

Extract 10.29

| 01 | UNDERSTANDER | What we do, then, is come back around to you and
| 02 |             | just ask you if there are any closing reflections that
| 03 |             | you’ve got on the ideas that you had when you came
| 04 |             | about what you wanted to talk about. If you feel that
| 05 |             | you have anything that’s shifted—or not ...
| 06 | Speaker      | Erm, I think what I’ve had really clarified for me is
| 07 | Speaker      | the sense that (six-second pause) that you have to
| 08 | Speaker      | do, in a sense, what grabs you (Understander: Mmm).
| 09 | Speaker      | That I think I’ve been putting too much, setting too
| 10 | Speaker      | much store by what would look good on the forms
| 11 | Speaker      | (Understander: Mmm). What are other people going
| 12 | Speaker      | to find? And that when it comes down to it, if you
| 13 | Speaker      | are going to sit there in front of a blank piece of
| 14 | Speaker      | paper, on your research day, you have to do what it
| 15 | Speaker      | interests you to do. And sometimes, just look at that.
| 16 | Speaker      | Not look a year ahead, but just look at this, and if
| 17 | Speaker      | this is interesting, then do it because it is interesting.
| 18 | Speaker      | Forget about where the long-term goal is for the
| 19 | Speaker      | moment and just do it and see what happens when
| 20 |             | you’ve done it.

Erm, I think as I’ve been trying to explain the different possible routes, the “unknown” route is still unknown, but I think that was inevitable. Of the other two routes, as I’ve tried to explain it, I’ve been conscious that the local grammar route I’m able to explain a lot better (Understander: Mmm) and so I think that, of the two, that is the route that I will probably now pursue, one way or another.

Finally, I think that what I’ve got from this and from you, very much is a sense of confidence to do what
I think I ought to do. I think I'd got very much into this 'somebody from outside'—it's a bit like when you start your Ph.D. or something, you want somebody from outside to tell you that your proposal is the right one, and I think I was sitting here thinking that I need someone to tell me which of these, you know, what I can do that is going to be productive in the long run and, of course, nobody is going to do that. But what I think I've got from you is a sense of confidence that, failing anybody from outside to tell me what to do, I'm going to do it myself! (laughs) So, it's taken away some of that fear, I think.

Interviewed later, Liz felt that she had perhaps picked up the expression or perhaps just a mood of doing "what grabs you" (08) in the group, but not that we had tried to move her toward that as an outcome. She thought she had felt, at first, an inclination to hear suggestions where we had not intended them. It is difficult, she said "not to resist what is actually a genuinely natural question." The significance of "had ... clarified" (06) was that she wanted to stress the importance of the interaction with the group, the most useful part of which had been when people helped her see what it was that she was saying.

Liz's "as I've tried to explain it, I've been conscious that" (24-25) signals the facilitative nature of the articulation process and her saying "what I've got from this and from you" (29-30) meant, she later explained, that she wanted to refer to the process ("this") and also to emphasize the importance of the interpersonal interaction and the contribution of the people in the group ("you") but not to separate the two.

Once again, our visiting Speaker had matched us in respect and empathy and had sincerely engaged in the process of climbing the scaffolding that we worked to put in place.

A Personal Meditation

In sum, these sessions were immeasurably more rich and rewarding than I feel we had the right to expect. It was a risky proposition to begin with, and there were awkward moments as we went along, but both in terms of Speaker outcomes and group process, I don't think that success is too strong a word to use. I have tried to sketch some distinct Speaker outcomes above. Here, I want to add just two comments, one about the group and one about myself.

Having outside Speakers brought us closer as a group in the sense that we all acted as Understander and could talk as a group about that shared experience. The most profound effect of this was a deepening discussion of the interlocking concepts of respect, empathy, and sincerity; it was at this point that Paul introduced the illuminating idea of the mutually defining set. I shall not go over the definitions again here, because I give that my best shot in chapter 2.

Looking back across this chapter, I find that I have to return to the importance of what the Understander can learn through Understanding. There was one very specific outcome for me, for example, from Rebecca's session as Speaker—an investigative technique that I learned as an Understander and that I will, with due acknowledgment, adapt for my own use as a teacher-researcher.

And in a broader sense than that, the experience of Understanding this range of fellow professionals—who had the remarkable openness, trust, intelligence, creativity, and resilience to work with us in this way—taught me two things that I struggle here to articulate.

First, there are thoughts that I know relate to all the sessions I have described, to group development and to visiting Speakers, but that came closest to conscious formulation following the session from which I have taken Extracts 10.5-10.8, the last session of the visiting Speaker series.

The person who teaches (researches) is so much larger than the functions of teaching (research). Aspects of this largeness may
inform the person’s teaching (research) in various ways. Conversely, the person may gain awareness from and through teaching (research) itself, and this awareness may enhance their personal life. This does not mean that teaching (research) is necessarily sufficient to nurture personal development or that other activities in which the person finds nourishment have any necessary input to teaching (research) other than the enhancement of the person as a person-who-teaches (researches).

Is this obvious? I think it probably is, but I also think it bears saying. I am perhaps influenced in this by the mounting political pressures in my own teaching context, where the government makes increasing demands on teachers (researchers), while simultaneously wanting more and more control over what and how they should teach (research).

Second, and despite the momentary gloom of my last sentence (to say nothing of the continuing gloominess of the situation it describes), I feel so lucky to be involved in this work. I find it impossible to interact with people in this way and not believe that there are good reasons to look ahead hopefully. We can make a difference by the ways in which we behave in our own immediate contexts. It is worth it.

The Invitation

Dear ____________________:

Further to our conversation, I’d like to extend our invitation to you to come to Aston as visiting Speaker. As you know, what we have in mind is rather different from invitations we have issued in the past, and I’d like to outline our thinking here.

A number of us in the Language Studies Unit meet for an hour on a weekly basis in order to work on our continuing professional development. One mode of work that we have developed involves one individual being the Speaker for the session. The Speaker chooses the topic that he or she wants to work on. Some recent examples have been:

- improving pastoral care provision for distance-learning students;
- clarifying ideas for an upcoming conference presentation;
- balancing the demands of teaching, research, and family commitments;
- the pedagogic relevance of lexical chunks;
- coordinating individual efforts into a coherent Language Studies Unit research profile.

These examples are meant only to emphasize the breadth of topics covered, in the sense that whatever the Speaker wants to work on in terms of his or her personal/professional development is by definition appropriate.

The procedure we follow is this: the Speaker talks on the chosen topic in an attempt to further his or her thinking, to clarify ideas, see connections, identify objectives, make plans—whatever seems useful.

The rest of the group makes every effort to understand the Speaker. They do so in a nonjudgmental way, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with what is said. They will sometimes ask questions, but more often they will reflect back to the Speaker what
they have understood in order to make sure that we all have the same picture.

After about 30–40 minutes of this, we change the nature of the interaction. Each of the Understanders takes the opportunity, if they wish, to make a statement of any "Resonance" they have felt in the Speaker's work with ideas or experiences of their own. The Speaker should not understand these statements as comments on what he or she has said, or as advice, because they are not meant in this way. They should be taken at face value, as Resonances honestly reported by the Understanders. These "Resonances" may also be reflected back, either by the Speaker or by other Understanders, in order to check that they have been well understood.

Finally, we move the focus back to the Speaker, who makes a closing, round-up comment on the session, usually in terms of what he or she has discovered or felt during the hour.

As you can imagine, all this puts unusual pressures on both Speaker and Understanders, and that is what interests us. We are investigating the idea that our usual, evaluative, sometimes adversarial exchanges, fundamental as they are to the forging of new ideas, might also mean that some (aspects of some) ideas that could also be interesting never get thought through. We are very excited about this developmental forum that we are building for ourselves, and we would like to find out if it might be of use to other people.

What we would like to do is to provide a somewhat unusual collegial environment, outside your normal working context, in which you could work on an "idea-in-progress." We are inviting you to be Speaker in the group on any topic that interests you, at whatever stage of development you find it. I cannot emphasize enough that we are not asking you to bring along a presentation for this session, but rather a point of interest, an issue that concerns and motivates you, a practical problem, an unlikely aspiration, an idea for future research, perhaps something that has been in a drawer for years and you cannot take the time for in the normal run of events. The main purpose of the session is to help you develop your line of inquiry, but in more oblique ways than is the norm.

With your permission, we should like to audiotape the session, but would not play any part of it to anyone outside the group without your permission. What we would like to do is to analyze the session for incidents that seem to us to be interesting. We would then like to send you a copy of the tape with our comments and interpretations. Finally, I would like to visit you and spend an hour going through some incidents with you in order to check our perceptions with yours.

We are making a conscious effort here to establish additional possibilities in our culture of inquiry, and the discourse of that culture, and especially of this effort, interests us greatly.

One more piece to this jigsaw. As you and we don't work closely together, there is a good chance that you would need to spend a fair amount of time filling us in with background information before being able to move to a potential "growth area" of your own thinking. If you feel this is the case, we would be keen to read something you have written in the area that might fill in this background. Alternatively, or additionally, we would be very happy to invite you to give, first of all, a regular 45-minute-plus-questions talk in your area of interest, which we and probably some of our graduate students would attend in the normal fashion. This talk, which we would welcome in its own right, could then form the common ground on which you could take on the role of Speaker in the professional development session.

We would arrange the talk before lunch and the development session after lunch on a Tuesday that suits you. We would pay normal travel expenses and a small fee for each session.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Julian