UNDERSTANDING GROUP ENERGY IN UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE CLASSES

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Uwe Pohl
Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest
uwe.pohl@gmail.com

Margit Szesztay
Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest
margit.szesztay@gmail.com

Abstract: In this paper two university language tutors explore the notion of *group energy* as a key factor in the dynamics of their language classes. In particular, the article focuses on the way *teacher presence* impacts on the quality and level of energy in classroom groups. The findings, primarily based on interviews with experienced colleagues, suggest that teachers have preferred ways of accessing and aligning the flow of energy in a given group. The authors identify a number of such access points to group energy as well as their different manifestations.

Keywords: group energy, group alignment, teacher presence, language classes

1 Introduction

1.1 What got us started

This article gives an account of a small-scale investigation into *group energy*. Our starting point was a number of casual tea-time and after-dinner conversations about something that we were puzzled about. We have both had language classes in the past which were lively and energetic, where active student participation within the group led to exciting, joint learning experiences. And we have also had classes which just did not take off, in spite of conscientious planning and – it seemed - all the ingredients of a good session. We wondered what made the difference. A number of hunches, based on our own experience and informal observations, led us to believe that the amount and type of *energy* generated in a group has a lot to do with the answer. What prompted us to start this investigation, then, was the conviction that a better understanding of the elusive phenomenon of *group energy* would enable us to recognize its different manifestations in our classrooms and would also help us to work with it more consciously and purposefully.

1.2 What we wanted to find out

Originally, we were only thinking about doing some observation-based classroom research focusing on the groups that we taught ourselves. However, when we actually took the first steps and discussed what we had observed in our classes, we felt that it would be interesting to widen the scope of the investigation and find out how colleagues in the *Department of English Language Pedagogy* at *ELTE* see group energy, as well. In fact, we were hoping this would not only benefit our investigation but also contribute to their professional development (cf. Allison & Carey, 2007). Knowing how busy everyone is, though, we decided to involve only colleagues

who were especially interested in the dynamics of their own seminar groups and were keen to find out more. In the end, 10 colleagues volunteered to be part of the project, though in fact the whole staff of twenty got involved, as we presented our findings at key stages of the investigation. Discussing our interim findings with the whole staff, and seeing how our emerging insights about group energy resonated with fellow professionals, played a key role in shaping the later stages of our research.

2 What is group energy and why does it matter?

2.1 What is group energy?

Before we describe the project itself we consider it important to define some of the key concepts and terms which are in the focus of our investigation. These are *group energy*, *group alignment, presence and rapport.* It is hard to pin down what *group energy* is, to come up with a neat and tidy definition. We think that the definition given by Trevor Bentley captures its dynamic nature and, at the same time, highlights some essential features:

> "[Group energy] is the moment-to-moment fluctuating balance of mental, emotional and physical intensity and vitality that can be felt like a positive or negative electrical charge in the air as if the group is switched on or off." (Bentley, 1994, p. 23)

We also feel that it is very perceptive to refer to group energy as an *electrical charge*. To follow up this metaphor, the three aspects mentioned in the quotation can have a positive or negative charge; that is, they would be perceived in positive or negative terms. For example, if a group of people are feeling enthusiastic, excited, involved, then the *emotional* dimension of group energy has a positive charge. By contrast, if there is not much emotional investment shown by the members of a working group, because the topic at hand, the activity or the other members 'leave them cold', the emotional energy has a negative charge. To take another example, *mental energy* might be running high, and thus have a positive charge, when group members are cognitively challenged, perhaps trying to figure something out or come up with a solution to a problem-solving activity. Conversely, mental energy investment might be low when the majority of people in the group feel under-challenged by a task. Finally, the *physical energy* charge might run into the positive when members are being expressive or animated, they are using a lot of gestures and other forms of body language to get their ideas across, their whole bodies are involved in the interaction. A counter-example here might be when the dominant state of the group is that of physical exhaustion, perhaps after a PE lesson in a school context, when everyone is feeling very low on physical energy.

Needless to say, the actual 'fluctuating balance of […] intensity and vitality' (cf. Bentley above) in a group is a lot more complex than the above description might lead us to believe. Firstly, it is not just an *either-or* as far as the various aspects go: each one comes in many shades and colours. For example, a strong emotional charge might mean enthusiasm and enjoyment, but it might also involve negative emotions such as feeling hurt or frustrated. To complicate matters even more, the three aspects are just that: aspects or dimensions of the same phenomenon. As we show in Figure 1, they do not exist in isolation, but easily blend together, reinforcing or

weakening each other. For example, feeling cognitively under-challenged is very likely to have an effect on emotional involvement, as well.

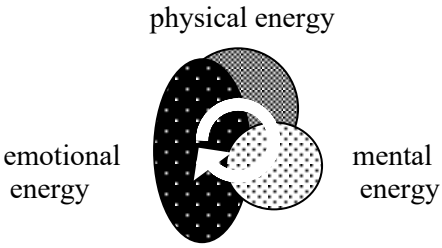

Figure 1. Interplay of group energy dimensions

Next, we would like to situate group energy within the wider educational landscape. Here it is a central part of group dynamics, the study of the way in which people in learning groups function together. We believe that the 'intensity and vitality' of group energy at any given moment is what propels and moves the members, and in this sense it is very much the same as the dynamic of the group. This is, for example, supported by Heron's definition of group dynamics. He sees it as "the combined configuration of mental, emotional and physical energy in the group at any given time; and the way this configuration undergoes change" (Heron, 1999, p. 51). In his study of a U.S. American second-language classroom setting, Freeman (1992) also notes "a sense of movement which keeps things alert and always in flux" (p. 59), and concludes: "Energy seems to be a raw social force which occurs naturally when adolescents meet. It is created through interaction. The teacher's job is to use it for learning" (p. 62).

2.2 Why group energy matters

If we accept that group energy is what propels and moves a group, we can also think of it as a source of motivation present in the group at any given moment. The group is made up of its individual members, so group motivation draws on the motivation and self-perception that individual members, including the teacher, bring to the group (cf. Menyhárt, 2008). It is important to remember, though, that this is a two-way process; in other words, the amount of curiosity, vitality, and intensity that each member contributes can help to create something bigger than its constituent parts, which in turn can help to foster curiosity, vitality and intensity in other members of the group, as well.

Thinking of group energy as a source of motivation highlights its crucial role in the group teaching-learning process. In fact, language lessons, as Prabhu observes, are just a special arena of human interactions, a social site of "more elemental, inevitable interactions which occur simply because human beings, with all their complexity are involved" (1992, p. 229). This also entails that group energy – as a raw natural force – needs to be synchronized in order to function as an engine that powers thinking and joint exploration. Senge (1990) also highlights the need for such synchronization and refers to this as energy *harmonization* or *alignment*. He visualizes the

difference between unaligned and aligned energies in a team or group as shown in Figure 2 and explains:

> "When a group of people function as a whole […] a commonality of direction emerges and individuals' energies harmonise [as] their shared vision becomes an extension of their personal vision" (Senge, 1990, pp. 234-235)

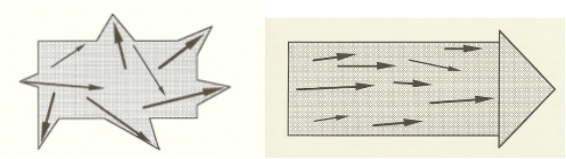

Figure 2. Non-aligned and aligned groups

Here Senge singles out the role of *vision* in this alignment process, and it may be that, in the business context that he is writing about, this is the crucial element. However, in an educational context like ours we believe that alignment can come about in a variety of different ways. The equivalent of *vision* in a classroom might be *aims and objectives* that both the teacher and the learners consider important and worthwhile. In addition to such shared aims, joint experiences are also an important way of harmonizing groups. This might mean watching a film together, for example, or engaging in a problem-solving task. The important thing is the level of engagement, the degree to which participants pay attention and take part. To take the example of a problem-solving activity, people in the group can have very different opinions or strategies when approaching the task, but in order for the group to be harmonized they need to share a similar level of engagement or attentiveness. In other words, when the arrows are all pointing in the same direction, i.e. the group is aligned, members show roughly the same degree of involvement. We are aware that other factors help to determine whether a group is harmonized or not – the presence or absence of clashing personalities might be one, for instance – but it is our conviction that engagement is the key factor.

3 Teacher presence and rapport

In our project we decided to focus on the role of the teacher - a *seminar tutor* in our tertiary education context - in shaping and working with group energy and alignment (cf. also Szesztay, forthcoming). Therefore, two other concepts which are central to our investigation are teacher *presence* and *rapport.*

3.1 What is presence?

For Underhill (1997) *presence* is almost identical with the unique climate or psychological atmosphere that the teacher creates. He also believes that personal qualities such as patience, warmth, confidence or spontaneity play a major role in creating one's unique presence and that is has as much an effect on the class as the teaching methods used (Underhill, 1996). Voice, posture, gestures and other forms of body language also contribute to it. Rogers, one of

the founders of humanistic education, believes that such personal qualities and ways of relating to students are actually the most important determining factors in creating the optimal learning environment, which in turn is the key to successful learning (Rogers, 1983). For Spiro (2009) a teacher's presence is the key to what she calls *creative space*, "an environment not owned either by teacher or learner, but by both, and creative in the sense that it can lead to real transformation. […] It is a shared and mutually made setting [which] is no therapeutic, comfortable space [but] combines the expectation of best possible achievement, with the opportunity for this (p. 1)."

3.2 What is rapport?

Heron describes *rapport* as "the felt sense of the shared experiential space of the group" (Heron, 1993, p. 49). If *presence* refers to the atmosphere that one person creates, rapport is what is created when different presences meet. It is the bridge between individuals in the group, the channel through which they communicate verbally and non-verbally. Freeman (1992) describes the central role of the teacher in achieving such rapport as "a delicate sharing of authority and control, authority over language and control over activity shift back-and-forth from teacher to student and back again" (p. 60).

If there is rapport among a group, some kind of emotional and psychological connectedness already exists. If the rapport is strong, individual members understand each other, they are on the same wavelength, as the expression goes. Again, it is important to stress that rapport does not mean agreement. Rapport in a group can be very high while different perspectives are being articulated, though it takes a great deal of intelligence and awareness for this to be the case. In some ways, rapport and group alignment refer to similar phenomena. In other words, when there is good rapport in the group, alignment has taken place.

4 How the investigation evolved

4.1 The stages of the investigation

Looking back, our investigation can be divided into three distinct stages. During the first stage we both kept teaching diaries in which we noted down anything related to group dynamics after our classes. Once a week, we sat down to share our observations and list factors which seem to have an effect on group energy. At the same time, we did some reading on the topic, as well. Based on our readings and our initial observations, the key concepts discussed above were beginning to emerge and gave the investigation a sharper focus.

The second stage involved bringing in the *student's perspective*, finding out how participants in university seminars view group energy. We felt that the simplest and least intrusive way to do this was to devise an end-of-semester student feedback sheet with a special emphasis on class involvement. We wanted to find out what helped students to participate actively and take part more fully. Our assumption was that when group energy levels are high,

students are active and engaged, so we thought that this would be an indirect way of getting to know their views about the main focus of our investigation.

We asked the colleagues who volunteered to be part of our project to hand out the end-of-semester feedback sheets to their students (cf. Appendix A). Using an ordinary feedback questionnaire meant that there was no need for extra research questionnaires to be handed out and collected. An additional benefit was a fairly high return rate as we got back 210 out of altogether 216 feedback sheets from 18 different student groups. It does not fall within the scope of this article to give an account of everything that we learnt from these feedback sheets. Neither do the questionnaire data yield specific insights related to the teacher's role in working with group energy. What we would like to highlight here, however, is that it became very clear that these students see the teacher as the single most important factor in helping to create active student engagement.

4.2 Interviewing colleagues

During the third stage of our project, we decided to concentrate on *the teacher*, to examine the way her or his unique presence and style of teaching influence the changing dynamic in the seminar group. This was a natural follow-up to the student questionnaires, and focussed on what seemed to be of central importance based on our readings and our own initial observations. We interviewed 10 colleagues at the *Department of English Language Pedagogy* using an interview schedule of eight questions (cf. Appendix B). The interviews lasted around 45 minutes and were only semi-structured: our aim was to achieve focus and consistency with the help of the eight questions, but at the same time to take up any themes or issues raised by our colleagues. When we listened to the interviews and transcribed potentially interesting sections, we realised that there were three questions in particular which yielded useful data from the point of view of the teacher's role in working with group energy. These questions were the following:

- *Think of a perceptive student in one of the groups you have been teaching recently. How would this student describe you and your teaching style? What adjectives or phrases might they use?*

- *What, in your experience, influences the energy of a teaching or training group the most?*

- *How does your particular presence influence the quality of a seminar group?*

In the next section, then, we will share with you what we discovered by analysing the ten interviews. During the interpretation of the data we followed a *grounded theory* approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Focusing on the way the teacher's presence influences the changing dynamic of a seminar group, we wanted to tease out the sub-themes and categories by examining the data. In our close-reading of the interview transcripts, we were also looking for rich or perceptive descriptions, ones that highlight different aspects of our main theme. In other words, we were not just looking for categories and sub-themes but hoping to identify phrases and expressions which capture the essence of the way teachers and trainers work with group energy (for a similar approach, see Curtis & Szesztay, 2005).

5 What we found

5.1 Teachers' ways of managing group energy

In the interview data we identified four relatively distinct categories around which these teachers' ways of working with group energy seemed to cluster. Predictably, we also found individual variations within each category, which seem to reflect the teachers' personal style or preference. In the following, we will illustrate each category with a selection of quotes, each taken from a different interview.We have given each quote a title to highlight these variations. We feel that perhaps the most valuable part of our findings is the way experienced teachers themselves name and describe how they work with group energy (cf. also Bolitho, Einhorn, & Szesztay, 2007; Szesztay, 2004). This is why we will only provide a minimal analytical commentary on each category.

INTENSITY

I'm coming for *you*
"In the corridor towards the classroom I'm trying to concentrate on that bunch of people. They are sitting there, they are expecting something, they are waiting for me. We should be doing something together. So I walk into the classroom in a rather energetic way [laughs] and I'm trying to show: 'I'm coming for you. We are going to do something together.'"

The teacher is the engine
"If you go into a group where you see a tired and boring teacher the group is not going to be very energetic. On the other hand if you have a tired group but a very energetic teacher, even the tired members will pick up a lot of energy. I really think that it's the teacher who is the engine. I think that being energetic is infectious. They just pick it up sub-consciously."

I'm difficult to ignore
"I think I'm difficult to ignore. So I bring some energy into the classroom. It's not difficult for me to be the centre of attention and to hold the processes in hand. [...] You are in a leadership role and you have to have some credibility as a leader for all of this to work. And the students sense that and accept it happily. It seems very democratic, it seems that I trust the group or the energy a great deal. But in fact it's not very democratic at all. I set out the framework. [But] I accept their ideas or their protestations in the sense that I answer them and I tell them what principles prompted me to act the way I do."

Striking up an energetic note
"I consciously try to be alert, cheerful, energetic when I enter the classroom – even if I am not. I always start with a very cheerful 'Good morning!' - in Hungarian we say '*megadom az alaphangot' [set the basic tone]*. I try and strike a basic tone to the lesson."

Putting on a hat
"As I lock the door of my room, I'm putting a hat on. Whether I've got a headache or feeling lousy, I put on a hat and walk into the classroom switched on, for real or otherwise. And when that class finishes I'm not a different person but if I walk into a classroom without the wherewithal to keep the place, ehm ..., you know, when you've got sticks and on top of each stick there's a plate... so if I don't have the energy to keep all the plates *spinning*, I can't do that class very well… [But] I don't walk in to spin the plates. I'm happy to set them up but I'm not going to keep them all going."

Our comments

These quotes highlight the importance of teacher *presence* in creating a centre of attention or focus right at the beginning of a class. As one of the interviewed teachers said elsewhere, "the moment a colleague enters the classroom, the atmosphere, the level of awareness changes. There is no room for cheap compromises on the part of the teacher" (Pohl, 2009). In their different ways these tutors all seem to provide a kind of 'start-up energy' that both acts as a signal - 'Work has started, let's go!' - and amounts to an actual injection of physically felt energy to carry the group along. Achieving this quality is seen as fundamentally the tutor's responsibility, whether it is conceived of as being 'switched on' and alert, very visible in the group leader role, 'the engine' behind what is to happen or as providing the 'basic tone' of the unfolding classroom atmosphere. At the same time, the teachers are aware that their initial energy injection must trigger a commensurate effect on the part of the students, if the 'plates are to keep spinning'.

HUMOUR

Joking around
"And, you now, sometimes Friday morning I go into a class and everybody's sitting there like Zombies and nobody talks and you say: 'Oh, you really managed to wake me up this morning.' And they start laughing."

Friendly banter
"There is a lot of humour, a lot of laughter in my classes and that keeps people on their toes. A class where there is smiling, and laughing, like making someone, like repartee, witty repartee between people, quickly responding to things in unexpected ways."

Play acting
"Another thing that I often do […] is that I act as the 'silly' student, as the 'naughty' student, and this somehow raises their spirits, and they very often comment on how difficult it was to deal with me as a student, and because I am there offering myself for criticism, they take criticism a lot better from one another. And they can see how they can learn from that."

Shared laughter
"Well, [humour] creates something we agree on, we're on the same wave-length. If we are laughing together it means that we can do things together in a good mood, and are moving on from there."

Our comments

The usefulness of humour and laughter as 'attention-grabbers' in EFL settings has often been pointed out (Medgyes, 2002; Prodromou, 1998). But the kind of humorous intervention these quotes illustrate does not come all that easily. For us, it is really an expression of the ability of a teacher to respond creatively and expertly to the non-linearity with which classroom events evolve (cf. Mallows, 2002). As can be seen, getting things right in this respect might take several forms: a perceptive mock-'tell off' or an ironic statement, prodding students to engage the teacher wittily in a light-hearted conversation or, literally, acting out of role and telling humorous anecdotes on the part of the teacher. Clearly, at such moments the students understand that they are invited to join a positive egalitarian act – laughing together *with* the teacher at nobody's or everybody's expense or that it is "the friendly banter of a group engaged in a common task" (Freeman, 1992, p. 58). Bringing about this realization probably requires a fair amount of mutual familiarity and trust as well as teaching experience. It is the uplifting release of shared laughter and the mutual agreement in the group about what is happening which seem to create the energizing expectation to 'do things together in a good mood.'

EMPATHY

A leader among equals
"Formally speaking, the role of the teacher in a university seminar should be more like a leader among equals. It should be very possible to treat participants as fellow adults. And I have always tried very hard to do that. […] But the fact is that I have always tried to do that at [secondary] school, as well. And I succeeded, on the whole. Which meant that I have never been able not to respect people in my classes. I have never been able to regard myself as the boss. And although I told people what to do, and I suppose I told school kids what to do more than here at university, I have always felt the need to at least explain what's going on. And wherever possible to negotiate what's going on."

No putting on the spot
"Often it's a friendly buzz. It's noisy at times, there are discussions and arguments but in a friendly atmosphere.And at the beginning of every lesson I try to link back to the previous lesson without putting them on the spot. So it's not 'What did you read for today?' or 'What was your homework?' but I help them recall some of the things ..."[*Interviewer*: "Being friendly is not just chit-chatting, then."]. "No, it's caring."

Criticising in a non-damaging way
"As I always do, at the beginning of every term I always say - 'Produce masses, but don't be afraid of making mistakes. That's what I am here for, that's what all of you are here for.' - I think it's fairly brutal, but I think it needs to be said, especially in Hungary, where making mistakes is a crime. You don't do it. So with these school leavers, I think 'Make lots of mistakes' is something that has to be said. … And it takes a bit of time. You can't just say it and expect it to happen. What you can do, what I try to do is to give a good example of this, in other words, to criticize in a non-damaging way."

Auntie work
"Because they're 1st year students I do a bit of, call it 'house-keeping' or 'auntie' work and I do things like: 'Are you drinking enough water? 'Are you drinking your litre a day?' or 'Are you getting a decent meal?' Just a few more comments to demonstrate that I care and I know that it's difficult and I know that it matters and I know that if they are not looking after themselves, I can't expect them to hand in decent assignments …"

It's important to be personal
"I have a 15 year old daughter, so I know about the things that fifteen-year-olds do. I talk to her about *YouTube*, things I really wouldn't know about if it wasn't for her. Sometimes I just mention those things and they find it interesting. It's not my purpose to talk about my family… but it's important to be personal to a certain extent."

Our comments

The colleagues quoted above seem to be interested in building and maintaining a special kind of connection with their groups. First and foremost, they seem to approach students as *human beings* and are concerned about their physical and psychological well-being. These teachers also seem to share the belief that university students are not only fellow humans but also young fellow *adults* and should be treated as such.

What makes these colleagues acutely aware of the students' needs, interests and anxieties is perhaps best described as a form of *empathy* in the sense used by Bennett (1998). It allows them to anticipate, intuit or 'read' the state of a group and to act swiftly on their perception. What is more, the teachers also communicate their care, for example, by non-threatening forms of feedback, personal disclosure or simply small acts of outright care-taking. This creates a positive psychological bond within the group, one that students often describe as 'a warm or cosy classroom atmosphere'. This atmosphere acts as an energizer because group members feel safe and valued, which encourages everybody to contribute their ideas, views or questions and to overcome inhibitions in expressing themselves.

CHALLENGE

Finding out who they are
"Theirs is a narcissistic age, this young adult age. You want to find out who you are and you find it out from other people. I think what I successfully do is that I give them an opportunity, a lot of opportunities to try themselves and to evaluate themselves in these contexts; make a conscious effort by inviting self-assessment and also give feedback."

Intellectual challenge
"Challenging tasks. I think intellectual challenge is the most important kind. They will want to prove themselves, to show that they are up to it."

Changing the focus of attention
"I like fast thinking in my groups, which means not progressing slowly along a linear direction. But if something happens in the class, something funny, something not related, I then try to respond to that straightaway so that people have to change the focus of attention and understand and then get back. So there is this kind of speed which I like to build up."

Taking risks together
"For example, is everybody in the group prepared to take risks together, in front of each other? At the most basic level, are they prepared to speak English together, even that can be risky for some people? If they are, are they prepared to express real opinions in front of each other? If they are, are they prepared to comment on – even negatively – each other's opinion? Is that going to hurt people or is there a kind of group character that will accept that, allow criticism?"

Tickling the 'dead fish'
"Each group has a different chemistry. There are groups where the students inspire each other. Then there a groups.... I think my main 'enemy' are the kinds of students that I call 'the dead fish', who are either too shy, too disappointed or cynical to contribute. These are individual students and this can add up. When there is a critical mass of these students then this can add up to these negative kind of dynamics. Even these students I can usually manage to 'tickle to life' (*laughs*). They simply have to perform in front of the group. There is no exception to that, they can't just shake it off."

Our comments

Challenging the group to use or stretch its capabilities seems to be another type of energy creation and management. The challenge may be directed at the whole group as the teacher sets a task that engages students cognitively because they have to stretch their linguistic resources or apply their thinking, problem-solving or interpersonal skills. The robust engagement with the task

is likely to be felt as a kind of 'group-think' or 'buzz'. Alternatively, students may be energised and kept on their toes because the class is fast-paced and the teacher moves craftily and unpredictably ahead, which generates the energy of suspense.

Szesztay (2001) observes that learning groups tend to settle into a dominant mode, which sets boundaries for the kind of energies available in the learning process. Sometimes this mode leads to what Francis (1986) called 'solidified patterns of interaction'. Such patterns can have positive as well as negative effects on the degree to which students participate. This is perhaps especially true of young adults who are still very much negotiating their identity within the communities they are part of (Wenger, 1998). To prevent a build-up of negative dynamics in the group, the teacher might need to 'tickle', cajole or downright push individual students to go beyond what they are used to or think they can do within the boundaries of a course.

5.2 Access points and the group energy field

We think of the four main ways in which these colleagues generate energy in their classes as *access points* to building and maintaining a *group energy field* (Heron, 1993, p. 46). Our visualization in Figure 3 illustrates how each of these points may be connected to such a field. It should be noted, though, that there may be other ways of accessing group energy. Neither are we suggesting that the interviewed teachers only use the access points we identified in the data to manage group energy. As the arrows below the field indicate, a teacher may in fact move from a particular access point in the direction of any other point in order to maintain the necessary energy level in the field. But in their responses to our findings, these colleagues acknowledged individual access points as recurrent or even *preferred* ways of reaching a certain level of group energy needed for their class work.

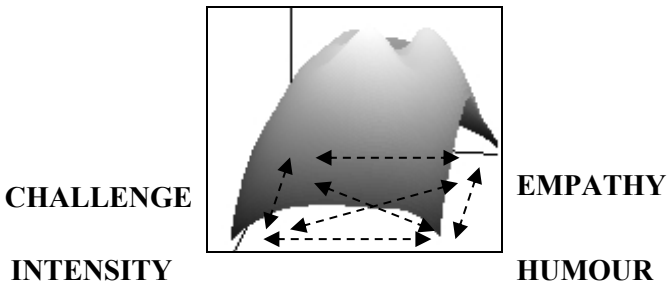

Figure 3. Access points in the group energy field

It may also be helpful to go back to the analogy of group energy being felt like an electrical charge. The access points act rather like 'switches' in an *energy* circuit. Like its electrical equivalent, this circuit needs to be complete to function so that individual member's energies can flow freely and an accumulation of energies can occur. When a teacher switches into the *intensity*, *humour*, *empathy* or *challenge* mode in the right way, their intervention gets individuals connected, energies are harmonised and a group energy field builds up.

6 Summary

We set out to achieve a better understanding of the term 'energy' in the context of language practice groups at university. Our assumption was that there are different but equally valid types of energy present in a given seminar group – dynamic in nature and strongly influenced by the particular presence of the teacher. Consequently, we were looking for a way to describe usefully how such personal energies are manifest in the classroom and how experienced teachers achieve a harmonisation of individual energies. The interview data of such teachers revealed different access points for generating the energy needed to connect the members of a group and align their energies for the purpose of learning, as we show in Figure 4.

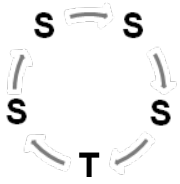

Figure 4. Group with a connected energy circuit

While, clearly, several factors impinge upon the flow of energy in a group, our findings suggest that the teacher is a key element in achieving such alignment. The concept of access points has also proved a useful tool for us in teacher training, as we have experienced in a number of more recent national and international in-service training workshops. It has made the notion of group energy more tangible for teachers and helped them to reflect on their personal energy preferences.

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APPENDIX A

Student feedback questionnaire

1. Please describe in a few words what the seminar group is like:

2. How did you feel during the sessions?

3. Why do you think the group behaved / functioned the way it did? Please try to be as specific as you can.

4. When did you feel most energetic / alert in this group?

5. What tasks / activities did you benefit the most from? Why?

6. What could have helped to make this course (even) more beneficial for you?

APPENDIX B

Interview schedule

1. *How would you summarise what you have learnt about the way groups work since you started teaching?*

2. *Can you think of a metaphor for the way university seminar groups function?*

3. *Think of a perceptive student in one of the groups you have been teaching recently. How would this student describe you and your teaching style? What adjectives or phrases might they use?*

4. *What, in your experience, influences the energy of a teaching or training group the most?*

5. *How does your particular presence influence the quality of a seminar group?*

6. *What do you think helps to boost group energy? Do you have any favourite energising warmers, activities or strategies?*

7. *What drains a group of its energy?*

8. *How do you recharge your own 'batteries'?*