

**Group Dynamics (GD):  
GD#1: Written Self-Portrait**

**Group Dynamics Fall 2014  
Mohamed Lekrama**

**09/04/2014**

**Written Self-Portrait: Past, Present and Future**

**PAST:**

**Questions 1 & 2:**

I participated in a monthly group meeting organized by Darrel Deyoma, an assistant professor of religion. The group's main focus was defending religion through logical thinking and systematic reasoning—apologetics. Students from different religious and ethnic backgrounds met every Wednesday during the last week of each month to discuss and share thoughts and experiences about various religions. Sessions lasted an hour to an hour and a half, usually with Darrel opening the discussion with general questions. After that, Darrel invited us to think the questions over and share our thoughts on the issues at hand. Each student had the same amount of time to share their understanding with the group. Darrel then summarized the different views and evaluated each member's contribution based on more informed perspectives in the field. Students also had one last opportunity to re-evaluate their own perceptions before and after. *(A very interesting process and content.)*

**Questions 3, 4, 5 & 6:**

**What helped:** From my experience participating in the group discussions regularly, group organization was a very important factor in the effectiveness of our meetings. The leader made it easier for members to collaborate and contribute positively by setting ground rules at the

beginning of each session regarding how the group would work and how members would interact as productively and constructively as possible. Some of these ground rules were listening, respecting the time limit, and not interrupting the speaker. *(How was listening defined?)*

**What hindered:** Despite the usefulness of the ground rules, at times members created conflict while trying to defend their views. Other members overgeneralized and diverged from the discussion, leading to confusion. *(Helpful insights.)*

**Role:** I am comfortable listening to others first rather than rushing to offer my opinion. My primary role is determined by the extent to which the conversation is meaningful or understandable to me; otherwise, I resort to being a passive observer of what is going on. *(Very interesting insight.)*

**Strengths/weaknesses:** No matter how fluent in English a non-native speaker can be, thinking and debating at a highly cognitive level will always be a challenge. In communicating my ideas to the group, one of my biggest weaknesses was the inability to convey my message clearly. Being unable to interact effectively resulted in a less-motivated group member who could not connect—even though he was knowledgeable and motivated about the topic. On the other hand, my determination to connect more with the world and the culture I live in motivated me to continue with the group. *(It sounds that there was some internal tension here around how to participate but that you stayed invested in the content.)*

**Understanding:** My experience with the apologetics group greatly contributed to my understanding of groups, ways of working in them, and being part of them. I learned that groups

are very effective mediums for change—in both actions and attitudes. Being part of a group is not only about finding venues to express and share our ideas and influencing without being influenced. Groups are also about confronting various constraints and distractions that shape how you look at yourself from a perspective different from your own, as well as how you fit in as an individual in the group. Being part of a group is about discovering your potential—how you can be a positive person in both attitude and action. *(Yes, I think this is so true.)*

### **PRESENT:**

My reactions to *The Raging River* and *Researching the Environment* were totally different. The difference was mainly due to my impression of how committed the group was to achieving the task. During *The Raging River*, I was more of an observer. In *Researching the Environment*, I was more active. I noticed that my willingness to engage in a task was largely influenced by the group and whether it showed positive signs of commitment. *(Fascinating to look at how you depended on the group commitment.)*

What also surprised me was how the group's motivation and interest could influence a member's decision to engage—as happened in *Researching the Environment*. In contrast, my passivity in *The Raging River* resulted from the lack of challenge and intensity in the task, especially when success counted toward the whole group regardless of who contributed more or less. *(So, you didn't feel a need to cross the river for the groups' sake!)* In *Researching the Environment*, I felt very responsible to the group and became much more willing and adaptable. For example, just before we started our research, I realized my room key was missing and that I might have lost it somewhere. *(Interesting example.)* Although I was worried and concerned, I chose not to bring the issue to the group for fear of being seen as making an excuse to avoid the task or as a

distraction. In this instance, I was very aware of my responsibility as a group member. Since it was a challenge and a distraction, I decided to keep calm and carry on. *(Were you able to concentrate knowing that your key was missing?)*

**PRESENT (Goal):**

As I reflect on the various group activities I have been involved in, I realize I tend to position myself in the middle in terms of involvement and communication. Over the coming weeks, I would like to shift from waiting for the group to decide to becoming someone who takes initiative—who stirs discussion and influences action.

**Response:**

*My dear Mohamed,*

*Thank you for sharing this thoughtful reflection. It sounds like your Apologetics class had a useful process and engaging content but that both the process and content presented challenges for the group. It also sounds like you were aware of these challenges and struggled to interact in the group but maintained interest because of the content and goal.*

*I think your reflection on Raging River are so useful—seeing your own participation in relationship to the commitment of the group. Do you think you can change/influence the group commitment through participation?*

*Your story of the key and Researching the Environment is so interesting. It sounds like you were willing to sacrifice your sense of calmness and personal security in order not to distract the group from its goal. That is a great example, I think, of the kind of things which might prevent a*

*group member from being present to a task. It sounds like you were able to manage that internally—I wonder when you think the group should take responsibility to help an individual member with a problem that might prevent the person from being able to fully participate?*

*I love your goal to become someone who “stirs” and initiates in groups. I think you have a lot to offer and I look forward to watching that experimentation.*

*Thank you,*

*Leslie*