



INTRODUCTION

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

A Personal Journey

There is a medieval woodcut of a traveller on the road, putting his head and torso through an invisible barrier into another world. His feet and legs are on familiar ground, while he gapes in amazement at a sky filled with unknown stars. This image aptly describes my first experience of Dialogue.

It took place at an educational conference in Southern California, during a workshop led by Dennis Gray. We read an excerpt from James Baldwin's, "A Talk to Teachers", and the conversation was as electric and exciting as any of the best I'd experienced in high school or college.

The amazing thing was that we were a group of strangers who'd never met before that afternoon. How could this be?

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Part of my mind was carefully following the flow of ideas among the teachers in the circle. Another part was watching Dennis like a hawk, trying to grasp just what he was doing to weave this magic. It was clear he had instigated this radical departure from familiar conversation, and was intervening periodically to maintain the group's peak experience. But I had never seen anything quite like this, and each new comment he made or question he asked had a vague sense of unpredictability.

I left the workshop that day, my mind overflowing with new ideas and insights. I wrote in my journal for hours, trying to capture the geyser of inspiration that had been tapped. This was undoubtedly the most exciting educational workshop I had ever experienced.

As you might guess, I jumped eagerly into the next four-day training that Dennis offered. I enjoyed more of the same, building day by day to new levels of shared insight, intimacy, and exhilaration.

Since that time, I've seen the same thing happen over and over with groups I've led. Dialogue has the power to bring people together, capitalizing on their diversity of experience and perspectives, drawing new insights out of thin air, weaving it all together into a magnificent tapestry of meaning. Peter Senge writes of the desirability of establishing "learning communities." Through the power of Dialogue, I've often seen them manifest in just a few days.

It works with any subject: literature, social commentary, science, even mathematics. As a group relaxes in the atmosphere of safety Dialogue generates, they learn to trust the process, and welcome the opportunity to learn together. (Believe me, it is saying something when a group of predominantly English teachers gets excited by a text about mathematics!)

This book is the result of all this activity. It grew out of the need to present the Socratic Seminar work of Dennis Gray to groups of teachers. As much as I admire Dennis, I have a more systematic bent of mind, and was not comfortable presenting in the same style as he.

The biggest challenge was helping teachers understand that this method is a significant paradigm shift, a new quantum level of conversation. How to initiate a process fundamentally different from anything hitherto experienced—especially when superficially familiar?

The first flash of insight came in the form of a name, *The Dialogue Game*, and the rest followed.

Based on what I learned from Dennis and read in the field, *TDG* consolidates the wisdom of recognized masters into ten simple *Rules*. These *Rules* define the parameters of a new mode of interaction, easy to understand because they are simple and straightforward. (Full application takes some time, but more on that later.)

I've watched many groups apply the *Rules* to radically shift the quality of our conversation. Participants are reluctant for the trainings to end, because the process is so satisfying. Such a relief from the competitive rush which dominates our lives.

At the core of this method are the ten *Rules*, along with eighteen *Keys to Deeper Enjoyment*. They constitute a means for facilitators, first to begin the process of Dialogue, and then to guide it to deeper and deeper levels of satisfying group discovery.

There is great power in naming something. To name something is to gain control over it. If you fear something—but can't name it—you never know where or when it may strike. But if you can name the fear, you start to limit it, and can begin to face and master it.

In positive terms, to name something is to begin to own it. It is the first step to mastery. Each of the *Keys* is just such a naming. *Key 10: The Polarity Switch*, encapsulates a fundamental attitude necessary to successful facilitation. Whether or not you knew the concept previously, this name gives you a handle to recall it at will and apply it as appropriate. Each of the other eighteen *Keys* works the same way.

I support all efforts to promote Dialogue and bring it into the mainstream of our culture, whether by organizations or individuals. Everyone benefits as our families, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and co-workers embody the attitudes and skills involved in this most respectful and insightful mode of conversation. In this spirit, I have listed providers of Dialogue training in Appendix G.

But, all modesty aside, this is an excellent place to start. I know of no better. It draws on the best thinkers in the field, and consolidates their wisdom into ten *Rules* and eighteen *Keys*. This book is a toolbox of essential ideas for any individual or group who wishes to bring Dialogue

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into their life or deepen their understanding and application. Like a set of intellectual jumper cables, I hope it will jump-start your process and speed you to your goal.

This book has been designed, as far as possible, to allow anyone to take these ideas and apply them with a group of friends and colleagues. I wish you every success. If you enjoy your first experiences, then I recommend you seek out some sort of formal training. Only those certified by *The Invisible School* may offer formal workshops or trainings in *The Dialogue Game*.

The Power of Dialogue

Dialogue benefits individuals and groups of all sorts, as it fulfills a wide range of human needs: emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual.

You benefit emotionally from the deep satisfaction of understanding and being understood. You may experience the gentle healing of wounds suffered in childhood or at school. You'll be nourished by the atmosphere of good humor and bursts of spontaneous laughter which pervade a well-functioning Dialogue circle.

You benefit intellectually by developing reading, writing, listening, speaking, and thinking skills. And you do all of these simultaneously—integrally. Rather than focusing on separate, discrete skills, you focus on making meaning with the group, and *all* your intellectual skills improve. Exploring interesting ideas and issues, a group is deeply stimulated by the exchange, juxtaposition, and combination of different points of view. Everyone develops their ability to think clearly and critically.

You benefit physically because the Dialogue environment is free of argument and competition. Without the stress of more divisive conversations, your body relaxes and your blood pressure drops. When you act on the insights gained in Dialogue, the conditions of your life improve.

You benefit spiritually by relaxing your ego boundaries in order to think as a team, rather than an isolated individual in competition with others. Each participant is necessary to the conversation, adding unique

pieces to the jigsaw puzzle of meaning the group constructs together. Beneath our superficial diversity, all human beings are fundamentally alike; Dialogue allows us to experience a community which recognizes the value of diversity in an atmosphere of equality.

The world is smaller and more crowded every day. There is animosity and conflict between nations, political factions, neighbors, and family members. Dialogue is a tool to bridge differences by creating mutual respect and understanding. It prepares us to make decisions which better serve the well-being of all for generations to come.

Humanity has the means to destroy itself. Weapons of mass destruction, environmental degradation, and climatic change all threaten our survival on the planet. Any war is a crime against the global community of one humanity. We need tools to bridge our differences, make wise decisions, and wage peace. It is difficult to imagine a unified world in harmony with itself without Dialogue of some sort.

No matter what work you do, or what sort of family or community you belong to, Dialogue improves the quality of your life: emotionally, intellectually, physically, and spiritually. The more you practice, the more you benefit.

Persons of all ages—from children to elders—can participate in Dialogue. Schools, families, businesses, and communities thrive on the increased insight and shared understanding which results from more satisfying, productive, and inclusive conversations. As we practice open-mindedness, equality, and acceptance together, we sow the seeds of peace for future generations.

Benefits of Playing *The Dialogue Game*

Intellectual benefits

- Understand information more comprehensively
- Develop thinking and *critical* thinking skills
- Master what you read
- Expand your thinking and make it more flexible

Emotional benefits

- Feel the excitement of exploring interesting ideas with friends
- Enjoy the satisfaction of being heard and understood
- Build friendship and spread good humor
- Feel more energetic and increase your sense of well-being

Practical benefits

- Improve schools with better writing, critical thinking, and citizenship
- Nurture communities with inclusiveness and mutual respect
- Make group decisions which are more grounded and effective
- Build peace—from the grassroots up

Personal Growth benefits

- Clarify values and develop character
- Develop flexible thinking for a broader perspective on life
- Experience healing by being heard, understood, and included
- Improve harmony through mutual understanding with others

How to Use This Book

Recent trends in our culture have brought the practice of Dialogue into greater public awareness. Perhaps this is most evident in the corporate and business world, where results depend on effective communication and clear mutual understanding. Dialogue also has been “rediscovered” by education and used to maintain healthy communities of all sorts.

I developed this form of Dialogue, *The Dialogue Game*, within the context of the school reform movement, as a means to help teachers lead more thoughtful classroom conversations. Based on a survey of the best practices in the field, and tested and refined with thousands of public school teachers, it has reached its present form.

Different individuals will use this book in different ways:

- * Schools can use *TDG* as a blueprint to design a schoolwide Dialogue program encompassing many grades.
- * Teachers can use it as a guide to initiate, develop, and expand classroom practice.
- * Book clubs, community groups, and businesses can select concepts or practices that will increase the effectiveness and enjoyment of their conversations.

A Fundamental Paradox

There is a fundamental paradox in writing a book about Dialogue. A book about a form of conversation—no matter how cleverly conceived and executed—can never *be* a conversation. No book has the flexible give-and-take, the richness of multiple perspectives combined into one dynamic whole. While unable to completely convey the nature of Dialogue, *TDG* does serve as an invitation to discover a new world of group interaction.

In *The Phaedo*, Plato decried “the inferiority of the written to the spoken word,” and said that he never put many of his best ideas in print. This was partly out of respect to the integrity of his teaching, and partly out of recognition of the inherent limitations of the written word. There are things that can be communicated face to face and heart to heart which

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lose all nuance on the page. So it is difficult, if not impossible, to fully convey the joy of participating in a skilled Dialogue group.

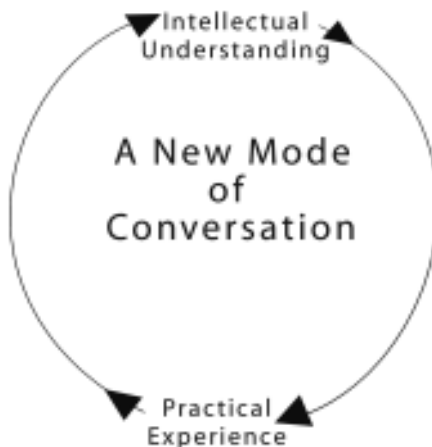
While the word Dialogue is familiar to most of us, the practice isn't. In its truest form, Dialogue is a new quantum level of conversation, as distinct and different from the discussions we have all experienced as steam from water. As different from Debate as war from peace.

Is it possible to communicate to a molecule of water (which has never been steam) what it's like to change state and soar high above the earth, rather than hugging the ground? To fully transmit in words something never experienced? No.

Dialogue is conversation of a radically different quality, which requires both intellectual understanding and practical experience. Although no book can provide the practical experience required to master a new activity, this book will introduce you to the satisfactions of a new mode of interaction.

After this book gives you a new conceptual framework, as complete and comprehensive as possible, I hope you'll find a group of sympathetic people to play *The Dialogue Game* with. The practical experience you gain together will deepen your intellectual understanding of this new quantum level of conversation.

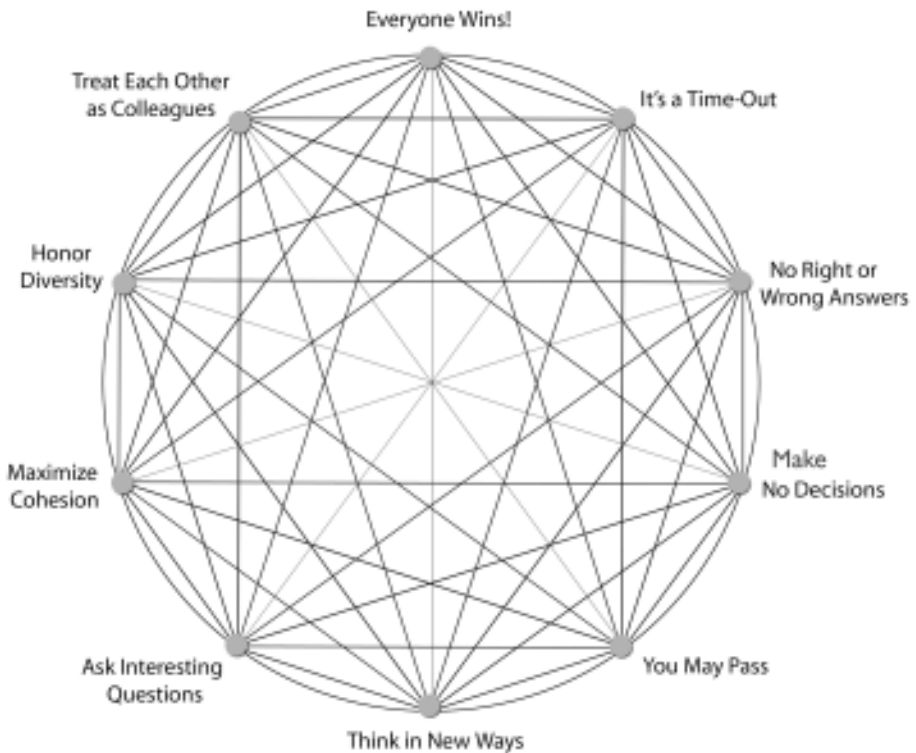
Greater understanding supports a better practical experience, which stimulates deeper understanding, which improves the practical experience, in an unending cycle of growth.



Ten Rules and Eighteen Keys

The core of this new conceptual framework is laid out in ten *Rules* and eighteen *Keys*. The *Rules* and *Keys* are like the facets of a diamond, each facet reflecting and amplifying the others. Individually, each one gives a glimpse into a new world of experience; together, they paint a broad, multifaceted panorama of Dialogue. None of the *Rules* means as much by itself as when reflected by the other *Rules*. As is often the case, the totality is greater than the sum of its parts.

Rules of *The Dialogue Game*



Keys to Deeper Enjoyment



Any group which continues to engage in Dialogue and to re-examine these different facets of the game will deepen their understanding and enjoyment over time. If you experience even a fraction of the fulfillment I've found in Dialogue, then your time will have been well spent.

Organization of the Material

The material is organized into four sections:

Section One presents introductory and background information to help you begin to understand the nature of Dialogue.

Section Two defines the ten *Rules of The Dialogue Game*, which taken together, create the conceptual framework for engaging in a new form of conversation.

Section Three examines the eighteen *Keys to Deeper Enjoyment*. Each *Key* contains hints on how to continually improve the quality of your Dialogue experience.

Section Four, the *Appendices*, points to additional sources of information: other books on Dialogue, sources of interesting texts, and providers of formal training.

You can read this book from cover-to-cover or jump around, following your interest. Feel free to make your own path through the material, discovering what is most useful to you.

Once *The Dialogue Game* has piqued your interest, find a group of friends to play with. If you are eager for practical experience with an experienced guide, you can seek Dialogue training from one of the organizations listed in *Appendix G: Providers of Dialogue Training*.

These ideas—and the practice that embodies them—require application, exploration, and refinement over time. This book is intended to serve as a resource and reference to support you for years to come.

May the ideas expressed in this book bring increased understanding and peace into your life, so you may share it with the world.