



APPENDIX D: NOTES TO TEACHERS

A note on terminology: *The Dialogue Game* was developed out of the practice of Socratic Seminars, a form of Dialogue. Consequently, I use the terms *TDG*, *Seminar*, and *Dialogue* more or less interchangeably.

Teachers bringing *The Dialogue Game* into the classroom face challenges absent from other settings. The strategies in this appendix have helped teachers address some of the challenges unique to the classroom: class size, class time, curriculum concerns, standardized testing, and grading. These suggestions are starting points—not prescriptions. The most effective strategies are tailored to specific time, place, and participants; they change organically as the group develops.

Class Size

The optimal number for playing *The Dialogue Game* ranges from 12 to 20; the typical public school class is larger. This unfortunate reality, one of the biggest challenges in public education, *can* be counteracted.

Inner and Outer Circles

Split the class into inner and outer circles, with half in each. The inner circle does the seminar and the outer circle observes. Consider some of the following strategies.

Specific focus

The outer circle needs something specific to focus on which serves the development of Dialogue. Their job should be a function of what they need to learn; this will change over time.

At the beginning, they might tally the number of statements made in the inner circle versus the number of questions asked. Reporting back to the inner circle during the Reflection will help increase the ratio of questions to statements.

As they master this, they might distinguish between the types of questions asked: for clarification; of assumptions; about a statement's connection to other comments, and so forth.

The best focus depends upon the shortcomings in the Dialogue, and how the group needs to progress. The points of focus should be designed to draw the student's attention to areas needing improvement. These might include:

- * Avoiding the tendency to argue or Debate
- * Making statements which connect to what has just been said
- * Becoming aware of students who dominate and those who are largely silent
- * Specific *Rules of TDG* which could be better applied
- * Specific strategies or techniques the facilitator uses to guide the conversation. The sooner these are made explicit, the sooner students begin to co-facilitate.

- * Dialogue is one of the most powerful **pre-writing** activities available. If a writing assignment follows, or if the seminar grade is based on a written product, the outer circle can take notes to prepare themselves.
- * Taking **Cornell notes** is a valuable practice. Students draw a vertical line down the middle of a sheet of paper. On one side they record interesting ideas; on the other, questions which arise. These notes can be collected in order to grade the activity.

Choosing a focus for the outer circle is a key to the art of classroom seminars. Dialogue will improve naturally over time, especially as everyone learns to trust the process. Participants who feel safe enough to honestly critique what goes on in the Dialogue circle reveal what needs to be changed: which old habits of mind need to be outgrown, and which new ones need to be developed.

Insights gained from one seminar provide points of focus for succeeding seminars. The more you trust the process, the more you'll see this develop organically.

HOT Seat

HOT stands for Higher-Order Thinking. It is an empty seat (or two) in the inner circle that any student in the outer circle may visit briefly, in order to share a burning comment or question. After a predetermined period of time he returns to the outer circle, leaving the seat vacant for someone else. This technique allows the outer circle to contribute to the conversation.

Consider having the outer circle observe and take notes on what is said in the HOT seat and how it affects the Dialogue.

Switching Circles

Teachers can have students switch inner and outer circles in the middle of a seminar, asking them to carry forward the

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threads of conversation already begun. This technique encourages everyone to pay close attention, while sharing ownership of the conversation.

Students can also switch inner and outer circles from one seminar to the next. This allows each group to focus on one function at a time.

Classes can be divided into four groups. First groups A and B will be in the inner circle, then C and D, then A and C, then B and D. This keeps the Dialogue fresh by varying the group's makeup.

Requiring some sort of **written product**—observations, an essay, or a critique of the process—keeps everyone engaged and accountable, while providing the basis for a grade.

Coordinate with other school resources

To lower the class size for Dialogue, teachers can coordinate with other resources like the library or computer lab. With half of the class in the computer lab, you're left with the ideal size group. Next time, reverse roles.

A colleague who facilitates Dialogue is an invaluable aid. Whether she is more or less experienced, your mutual support helps both of you to multiply your experience as you learn to trust the process.

Where the school administration is committed to the Dialogue program, resource teachers and administrators can be trained to facilitate. The classroom teacher takes one half the class, the resource teacher the other. Coordinating texts by grade level makes it easier for facilitators to prepare for multiple seminars.

Student co-facilitators

Many schools already have successful programs to train students as peer counselors. Both student counselors and their

classmates benefit, and the emotional life of the school improves. Training students to co-facilitate Dialogue is just as effective, and stimulates intellectual, as well as emotional growth.

As students become more familiar with the Dialogue process, they can be asked to co-facilitate. A teacher can take half the class, while two students co-facilitate the other half. Since it is a goal of *TDG* to have *all* participants co-facilitate, having two students demonstrate this can accelerate the process.

In a school-wide Dialogue program, older, more experienced students can co-facilitate in lower grades. Common wisdom says, "The best way to learn something is to teach it." Current brain research corroborates this.

Students trained to co-facilitate Dialogue expand their understanding of both *content* and *process*. Because they must carefully read the text in order to facilitate, they learn the *content*. Results are enhanced through the use of challenging core texts, and by facilitating multiple seminars.

By facilitating for fellow students they develop a greater mastery of the Dialogue *process*. This increases both interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence, which are valuable assets in many areas of adult life. As our culture moves increasingly towards teamwork and community-based interaction, these students will benefit their families, corporations, and communities. When Dialogue blossoms in a school, it's evident this highly integral process generously repays the investment of time and resources.

Class Time

Many schools are switching to some form of block scheduling, allowing class time of up to two hours, which is ideal for Dialogue. If you have only fifty-five minutes of class time to work with, you might consider what other teachers have done.