Dialogue Building Blocks

Dialogue is an important tool in creating Gracious Space.

Dialogue:
- dia = through, logos = word or meaning
- Exploring shared meaning through integrating multiple perspectives

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Dialogue Building Blocks

Balance Inquiry and Advocacy
*Ask why, be curious, spend as much time telling your ideas and opinions
as you do asking questions of yourself and others.*

Identify and Surface Assumptions
*Go "fishing." Dig deeper, ask what lies behind an idea or concern.
Find the assumptions that have not been aired and put them on the table.*

Suspend Judgment
*Hang assumptions and judgments out there for yourself and all to explore.
What can you learn from them? Upon further inspection and reflection, do you want to
keep them or let them go in favor of something new?*

Generative Listening
*Group learning, see what's emerging. Put the puzzle pieces together to form
a greater whole. As the puzzle becomes more complete, your understanding grows.*

Behaviors that Support the Dialogue Approach
I remind myself to…

- Be willing to be influenced
- Explore my assumptions
- Speak to the center (avoid cross-talk)
- Invite differences
- Slow down

- Listen to my listening
- Let go of being right
- Seek the next level of understanding
- Be curious
- Speak when moved to speak

Debate and Dialogue
A comparison

Debate	Dialogue
Assuming there is a right answer and that one of us (usually me) has it	Assuming that many people have pieces of the answer and together they can discover and create a new solution
Combative: participants attempt to prove their side right or the other side wrong	Collaborative: participants work together toward common understanding
About winning	About exploring new and common ground
Listening to find an entry point, or for flaws to make counter arguments	Listening to understand, learn and find collective meaning
Defending assumptions as truth or certainty	Revealing assumptions for re-evaluation
Critiquing the other side's position	Re-examining all positions
Interested in proving and defending the opinion one began with	Interested in learning and open to others' thinking can improve on one's own
Seeking a conclusion or vote that ratifies your position	Discovering new options, not seeking closure
Based primarily on advocacy	Based primarily on inquiry
Avoids or disrespects differences	Seeks out and welcomes different perspectives

"Real dialogue is where two or more people become willing to suspend their certainty in each other's presence."   - David Bohm

Based on work by David Bohm, Glenna Gerard and Linda Elinor of The Dialogue Group, Mark Gerzon of the Mediators Foundation, and by The Center for Ethical Leadership.

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Dialogue as a Large Group Change Method

Description	• Dialogue is a large group discussion method. • Chairs are arranged in a circle so each participant can see everyone. • A core question and possible sub-questions are posted visibly. • Participants are reminded of dialogue building blocks.
When to Use	• To open communication channels and engender trust and respect based on deep inquiry and listening • To build a capacity for being a learning community: thinking together, discovering shared meaning among diverse perspectives, and understanding the values, assumptions and beliefs that drive strategies, decisions, actions and results • To build a foundation for aligned action and decision making • To foster thinking and learning that extend beyond the familiar, creating new possibilities • To work with conflict, move from polarization to a whole-systems view, and generate new alternatives • To develop skills and ways of communicating that foster collaboration and shared leadership
When Not to Use	• Leadership is unprepared to support the process with its participation and modeling • There is no commitment of time and money to support the process • Insignificant issues are discussed • Participation is mandatory. Ideally participation is voluntary; however, even when mandatory, participation during the dialogue must be protected as voluntary. Otherwise safety and shared responsibility are undermined.
Impact on Culture	• Moves the organization toward collaborative partnership and shared leadership • Makes visible and holds up for inquiry assumptions about leadership, decision making, planning, communication infrastructures, performance, and incentive systems with the objective of making these more consistent with desired culture and outcomes
Creator(s)	• Current interest from David Bohm's work • US developers from 1990 to present include Glenna Girard, Linda Ellinor, William Isaacs, Sarita Chawla, Mitch Saunders, Barbara Coffman, L. Freeman Dhority
Creation Date	1985 (David Bohm)
Historical Context	• The principles are found in various places over the centuries; examples are indigenous councils, Quaker meetings, writing of Martin Buber and the work of Carl Rogers. • Most recently used by David Bohm, who was stimulated by the thinking of Krishnamurti and the socio-therapy work of Patrick de Mare.

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