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# *Solo Flights of Thought:* **The Power of Introversion in a World of Learning**

## Learners and Leaders

The International Dialogue Education Institute attracts educators, facilitators, coaches, consultants, trainers, and others who are interested in, or currently use, Dialogue Education™ (DE) in their work. They come from many countries around the world and a wide variety of organizations from the non-profit, academic, and corporate sectors. Many (although not all) of them typically work in the following fields: adult education, animal protection, civil society, faith-based, international development, human services and public health.

There is an interest in the latest research around such questions as:

- *How do we define introvert and extrovert?*
- *Are these categories or places on a continuum?*
- *Do people fall in one category or does it vary depending on particular situations?*
- *How much do they change with life stage, age, and other circumstances?*

Those attracted to these sessions probably have bumped up against challenges. For example:

- Introverts - live/ work in a noisy world
- Extroverts - live/ work with others whose need for solo time may confuse or unnerve them.

These sessions will attract people who are curious about their own style and how it might be affecting their work and life. They'll want to check their assumptions and learn how to be more inclusive of others when they are designing and teaching.

We all wonder about such questions as:

- *Are our learning designs truly inclusive and safe for all? or, do we too fall in the trap of prioritizing extroverts and how they like to learn and engage with new content?*
- *How does dialogue-based learning maximize creative thinking (or not)?*
- *What more can we do to allow everyone's strengths to emerge?*

Today there is a trend toward increased designing for, and facilitation on-line. Many participants will want to look at how online design/ facilitation can open opportunities for both introversion and extroversion as well.

## The Current Situation

This is a new and important area to explore as designers. With its emphasis on pair and group work, DE can have a tendency to create a learning environment that favors extroverts. This is dangerous and needs to be avoided.

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Our experience renovating the core GLP course *Learning to Listen Learning to Teach* raised our awareness of our own tendency to emphasize “group think” processes over “solo think” process. We intentionally strengthened the course in this regard to be more fully inclusive, honouring both introverts and extroverts. However, we found ourselves wanting to discuss, reflect and explore this issue with more DE practitioners/ colleagues.

*Quiet* is THE airport book right now – and needs to become THE designers’ book as well! Susan Cain’s work has been a big hit, created growing awareness of our own culture and history of prioritizing extroverted characteristics.

## Changes We Hope to See

Participants will leave feeling more validated about their own introvert tendencies/ preferences. This heightened self-awareness will give them a greater sense of power and voice, no matter where they fall on the I/E continuum.

Participants will experience the power of “solo flights of thought”, as Susan Cain so beautifully states in your book, free from the influence of peer input and “group think.”

Participants will be more likely to expand beyond their comfort zone (both for solo work and group work) when they feel it benefits them. And, will be validated to question the push to group work when it may not be to their greatest benefit.

As designers of learning events, participants will create richer designs and facilitate with greater sensitivity toward a whole range of introvert/ extrovert needs. They will leave more equipped with insights and tools that maximize learning for all participants.

Participants will have a broader sense of the following DE principles and a broader array of practices at their disposal through which to honor these principles, including:

- Inclusion
- Safety
- Engagement
- Respect
- Immediacy.

## Time and Timing

This is a two-part series including 1.5 hours on Friday and 1.5 hours on Saturday. There will be some solo, reflective work between the sessions.

## Location and Space

The conference is at the Baltimore Marriott Waterfront, 700 Aliceanna Street, Baltimore, MD.

We will be in a break-out room with LCD projector, screen, and internet for the facilitators.

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## Content and Objectives

By the end of this two-part 3-hour learning session, we will have:

- **Assessed** our own preferences for inner and outer dialogue
- **Described** our own experiences with “the extrovert ideal” in different life stages, cultural settings and circumstances
- **Named** ways that introversion and extroversion can be honoured and encouraged in a learning event
- **Analyzed** some recent research that challenges common practices of group facilitation
- **Launched** a new approach to viewing our own needs and those of the people with whom we interact
- **Created** and **personalized** an E-I journal that captures new insights and ideas going forward.



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Welcome! 5 min

On your seat is a small gift – a journal – that is yours to use during today’s and tomorrow’s sessions, and in-between. You may also choose to take it with you to use after the IDEI as a resting place for more “solo flights of thought”.

One: Who Am I? 20 min

**A**lone and silently ...

Take a look at the resource noting commonly-noted characteristics at either end of the Extrovert – Introvert spectrum (RP p2).

*Where would you put yourself on this spectrum?  
Why?*

The True/ False questions from Cain’s book *Quiet* may be useful to you as you reflect on your own characteristics. Respond to these questions now if you like (RP p3).

Use the opening page of your journal to draw and/or write something about your own E-I preferences.

**I**n pairs, when you are ready ...

Reflect on the way your tendencies may play out differently in the following situations:

- Party
- Typical work day
- Community meeting
- Family reunion.

Consider a recent experience you had in any of these different situations which may illustrate your own tendencies. Tell the story to your partner.

**I**n a circle ...

*What insights or questions do you have right about the E-I spectrum that you’d like to share with the group?*

**An E- I Lens**

*Which part of this opening task felt most comfortable for you?*

*To what extent do you feel your own E-I preferences influenced that level of comfort?*

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## Two: The Extrovert Ideal 40 min

In preparation for today's session, many of you watched a 19 minute TEDtalk by the author, Susan Cain *Quiet*. Glance at a sample journal page about the TED talk. Technology permitting, we will watch an excerpt of this TEDtalk now [http://www.ted.com/talks/susan\\_cain\\_the\\_power\\_of\\_introverts.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/susan_cain_the_power_of_introverts.html). Take 5 minutes to journal about what you saw (or add to the journal you already started on the topic before coming here today).

In pairs ...

exchange highlights of Susan Cain's work for you. Reflect on the highlights of her work as presented in Val's journal page (RP p4), if you choose.

Alone ...

read an excerpt from Susan's book *Quiet* (RP p5) in which she outlines the unfortunate negative impacts of "the Extrovert ideal." Reflect on a time when you contributed to the extrovert ideal.

*How did you impose it on yourself, or others?*

In full group ...

bring forth your questions and insights about "the Extrovert ideal."

*What have your observations and experiences been with it across cultures?*



### An E-I Lens

In this workshop we do what we believe stimulates a group's best thinking - we challenge introverts with group work, and equally challenge extroverts with solo work.

*As a designer, what do you think of this idea?*

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### Three: Understanding and Honouring the E-I Spectrum 25 min

**O**n your own ...

read a few more observations about Introverts and Extroverts in your resource packet (**RP p6**). Alone or with others, note any implications this might have for you as a learner or a teacher/trainer/designer.

**W**ander around the room (with others as you wish) and consider how the E-I spectrum may shift or expand your view on six fundamental principles of Dialogue Education:

- Inclusion
- Safety
- Engagement
- Respect
- Immediacy.

**I**n full group, share how your thinking has shifted or expanded. Make note of some questions we encourage you to carry with you as you leave today and want to watch for at this conference.

**G**o forth and experience the IDEI!

#### Continuing the Discovery

Between now and Part II of this session, **scan** the article *Six Things You Thought Wrong about Introverts*, The Huffington Post, 2013 (**RP p8-10**). **Read one tip** that hooks your curiosity and we'll invite your reflections when we get back together tomorrow.



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#### Four: Training Our Eyes 10 min

*Welcome back* (or, Welcome to our group!)

In a circle ...

Exchange on your observations and reflections over the last day (see your notes on **RP p7**, in your journal, etc).

*What did your eyes see? What did your heart feel? What did your mind tell you?*

#### Five: Designing and Teaching 30 min

Research around the power of introversion gives us pause as designers and teachers. Consider another reading from *Quiet* (**RP p11**).

*In what ways do you design or teach to maximize “deliberate practice”?*

Many researchers of late have given us a lot of food-for-thought as designers and teachers. For example, a number of studies have brought into question the value of extremely common group facilitation techniques. Consider a final perspective from *Quiet* (**RP p12**) drawing from this research.

*How does it shake you?*

*What does it solidify for you?*

#### Six: Practice 30 min

Choose to work alone, in pairs or in small groups. Choose to sit or to walk. Choose to do either of the following tasks, both created to strengthen our ability to honour the Introvert-Extrovert spectrum in our designing and facilitation.

**Option #1:** Analyze a design that is near and dear to your heart ...

*What do you see in terms of opportunities for introversion? for extroversion?*

*How could this design be strengthened to offer an even more balanced learning experience to those along the E/I spectrum?*

*If this is a distance learning or blended design, what would you do to maximize the learning experience for anyone along the spectrum of Es and Is?*

**Option #2:** Analyze this two-part IDEI design. Consider the same italicized questions above.

In a circle ...

*What insights or questions do you have about the E-I spectrum as a designer, teacher, or facilitator?*

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Six: Moving Forward, Differently 20 min

Explore one or both sample tip sheets adapted from Susan Cain's work (RP p13-14)

- Tips for designers and facilitators
- Tips for supporting young introverts

Take away something new to enrich your inner life, and your life's work.

*What do you now want to take away as you leave this session?*

Capture your thoughts anyway you like in your E/I journal – which we hope you'll continue to use for your **ongoing flights of thought**.

**Ongoing Reflections**

As a parting gift, you have received a hard copy of a provocative article *Six Things You Thought Wrong about Introverts*, The Huffington Post. 2013.

*When you find yourself wishing for more conversation about the E/I continuum, read this article and journal about it. It will provoke a deep inner dialogue, we promise.*

