



RESEARCH REPORT

T-SEDA trial in a French-speaking context: setting up educational dialogue in secondary 4 Québec-Canada history courses

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Abstract

Background and purpose: Educational dialogue is not widely spread in the French-Canadian context. Trial research was needed to help teachers develop their knowledge of educational dialogue and dialogic teaching practices.

Aims: The main objective was two-fold: first, to enhance educational dialogue in history classes in a secondary school in Quebec, and second, to assist students in making their reasoning explicit and challenging ideas during whole class discussions.

Design or methodology: Drawing upon the T-SEDA inquiry process, this paper presents the findings of a practitioner study driven by the identified scarcity of educational dialogue opportunities within history classes. A formal trial research was conducted to examine the reception of T-SEDA materials among teachers in the Quebec school context and its impact on the development of their dialogic teaching practices. Three secondary teachers, who had expressed interest in incorporating discussion-based activities in their classes and were approached by their PD leader, participated in the trial. Six classes of secondary 4 students aged 15-16 years old, with a total of approximately 170 students, from a public school located north of Montreal participated in this research. A lesson was designed to incorporate features that would promote educational dialogue such as the presence of talking points and ground rules. In-class observations were made and were practitioner-lead. To support students, resources were produced and include diagram for illustrating ground rules and a think-pair-share worksheet.

Findings: Incorporating talking points and ground rules may be insufficient to engage students in educational dialogue when taking ownership of the T-SEDA toolkit. When students are supported through the think-pair-share strategy and a paper-pencil worksheet, dialogue was shown to be more spontaneous and have the desired characteristic such as reasoning and challenging claims.

Conclusions, originality, value and implications: When expressing and sharing ideas publicly are not part of the classroom culture, it may be hard to incorporate dialogue into lesson planning. Thinking alone and sharing in small groups before whole class discussion seemed to facilitate the process. Developing appropriate scaffolding resources for practitioners could be an interesting lead for future design-based research.

Keywords: Dialogue; T-SEDA; History of Quebec and Canada; secondary school.

Context

Recent research results have shown that some features of classroom dialogue are linked to students' learning gain (Howe et al., 2019). In this type of dialogue, students share their ideas, challenge each other's thinking, and make their reasoning explicit. Educational dialogue can be leveraged to promote students' understanding of content knowledge (e.g. Adey & Shayer, 2015; Larrain et al., 2021) and even motivation (Kiemer et al., 2014). Hence, these experimental findings call for teachers' professional development in dialogic practices.

The toolkit for systematic educational dialogue analysis (T-SEDA) was developed to enable teachers to investigate their own dialogical teaching practices. In the T-SEDA resources, teachers can find theoretical underpinnings to educational dialogue, a self-audit questionnaire of their dialogical teaching practices, a step-by-step guide to conduct on their own a reflective cycle of classroom inquiry, and coding tools to analyze dialogue in their classroom (The T-SEDA collective, 2022). Even though T-SEDA has been translated and deployed in several cultural contexts it has never been tested in the French-Canadian context.

Our first objective was to enhance educational dialogue in secondary schools in Quebec. Following this objective, a trial research was designed aiming to understand how teachers receive the T-SEDA materials in Québec school context and how it helps them develop their dialogic teaching practices. Three secondary teachers volunteered to participate in the trial. These teachers were approached by their PD leader because they previously had shown interest in implementing discussion-based activities in their classrooms. Using the T-SEDA materials seemed like an opportunity for them to explore research informed practices.

Acting as facilitators, two PD leaders organized a learning community that would allow volunteered teachers to learn more about educational dialogue, and also exchange and share their findings about their own investigation. Their inquiry cycle took place between September and December 2022 and during that time, four half-day meetings were held with the learning community. These meetings were prepared and hosted by the facilitators and aimed to 1- explain what educational dialogue is; 2- explore the T-SEDA materials and coding scheme; 3- plan and carry out an inquiry that suited the context and motivation of all participants; 4- share the results and reflect on the findings.

Our secondary goal was to document the inquiry cycle of each participant. This paper is one of three in a series that details the trial research conducted with each participating teacher. This particular article focuses on one participant's inquiry cycle, which involved helping her students make their reasoning explicit (R) and challenging ideas (CH) during whole class discussions. The report focuses on Melanie, the teacher who teaches History of Québec and Canada to six classes of secondary 4 students (aged 15-16), with each class consisting of approximately 30 students. She has been teaching for 20 years, and this subject for more than 7 years. Her school is a public school part of a schoolboard located north of Montréal. Approximately 1,500 students attend this secondary school which is situated in the lower range in terms of socio-economic status.

Since Melanie did not feel comfortable enough with the idea of writing her inquiry report in English, she accepted that one of the facilitators wrote it in her name. In the spirit of fairness and

transparency, the report was proofread and edited by Melanie to ensure that it reflected her inquiry process. The supplementary material is provided in French as it was used in Melanie's context.

Motivation, focus and questions

After completing the self-audit (T-SEDA tool 2H), Melanie was under the impression that she did not use much educational dialogue in her classroom. She wanted to provide more opportunities for her students to engage in meaningful dialogue. But to plan lessons that would allow her students to engage in that kind of activity, she decided to think thoroughly about the questions that would serve as conversation starters. Drawing on the concepts of talking points (Dawes, 2008), and historical thinking (Seixas & Morton, 2013), Melanie wanted to ask questions that would allow students to interpret historical facts, but also to explore, and share different points of view.

Talking points refer to « a strategy for stimulating speaking, listening, thinking and learning» (Dawes, 2008, p. 40). For example, a talking point could be a statement which may be correct, false, or likely to cause disagreement. Melanie wanted a proper talking point that would bring her students to share their ideas publicly, but also allow them to discuss how we make choices about what is worth remembering in history (or historical significance). Historical significance is one of the six concepts of historical thinking (Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness, 2014). It brings students to reflect on events that resulted in significant change over long periods of time for large numbers of people, mostly allows students to consider that significance depends upon one's perspective and purpose.

To sum up, Melanie wanted a question that would allow her students to challenge (CH) each other perspective on historical significance and make their reasoning explicit (R). Her success criteria was to plan and implement at least one lesson for all her classes that promotes educational dialogue and historical thinking and by doing so, improve her student's subject understanding.

Inquiry plan and activities

As mentioned above, Melanie wanted to incorporate more opportunities for dialogue in her lessons. Instead of planning a brand-new lesson that would fit her purpose, she thought about modifying one existing lesson and incorporating some of the features that would promote educational dialogue. The lesson she chose focused on Canada's builders, more specifically on the controversial political figure of John A. MacDonald. Melanie planned to teach as she normally does some of the contextual elements of the historic period around the 1860s (for example, the railway development and Constitution Act). As part of the usual lesson, she also intended for her students to read an excerpt from a comic book about Louis Riel (Brown & den Dries, 2012), a Metis leader of the time. This allowed the introduction of the Metis uprising, resulting in the arrest and execution of Louis Riel as commissioned by MacDonald.

To incorporate prompts for dialogue, Melanie had to make some changes to her usual lesson. So instead of lecturing her students on the controversies around John A. MacDonald, she opted for a whole class discussion. She decided to modify her lesson and introduce a talking point. She asked her students 'Is John A. MacDonald part of Canada's builders'?

Planning for the whole class discussion, Melanie prepared on her own a diagram showing the ground rules for dialogue (see *Supplementary materials/resources*). Rules were organized in four quadrants following the 4Cs (caring, collaborative, critical and creative) (Phillipson, 2020). The five rules she chose were as follows: 'You can have a respectful dialogue', 'Listen to others in an active and positive way', 'You may disagree because...', 'You can express yourself by using the ideas of others and or by inviting others to add to your ideas' and 'You find other examples to express your ideas'. She created this diagram because her students were not accustomed to using educational dialogue. It helped her illustrate the expected behaviours before the whole class discussion. Students were allowed to ask clarification questions about these rules but were not invited to negotiate them.

To have her students make their reasoning explicit (R) or challenge (CH) someone else's claim, Melanie used the coding scheme (p.12 of the T-SEDA main pack). She carefully explained these two codes and gave examples of sentence stems students could use. However, to collect data, Melanie did not plan on using any of the coding templates that were provided in the T-SEDA main pack. Instead, she trusted that she could remember how students interacted with each other and what type of reasoning they would make during the activity. This information would lead to a global sense of how educational dialogue was being used in the classroom but could not inform her specifically about who said what, when and how much these codes were used during the activity.

Ethical considerations and relationships

Melanie took mental notes of her observations during lessons although, that was not that easy to do at the same time as teaching. Once, she had the support of one PD leader to collect observations which helped to analyse and reflect on the process. However, the observations that were collected were not based on transcripts or live coding of any sort. As mentioned above, this led to very general observations about education dialogue.

While changing her practices, Melanie was aware that there was a risk that this would not go as planned. For sake of transparency, she did inform her students that she was participating in a trial that involved a change in her teaching practices. No issues were raised relating to Melanie's role as a teacher and her relationship with her students.

The school principal was also aware of the inquiry and was willing to free Melanie during school time so she can attend the PD meeting with the learning community. In this school, teachers are encouraged to change their teaching practices on research-based knowledge.

Regarding the use of her name, as Melanie is one of the authors of this paper, she acknowledges the fact that she and her institution can be identified. It is worth mentioning that when Melanie was participating in the learning community, she did not identify her students by their names when she reported her findings.

Findings

During the learning community's third meeting, PD leaders gave participating teachers time to plan their inquiry. However, Melanie had already experimented with a whole class discussion at that moment with four classes out of six. She agreed to share how she planned her inquiry and what

happened during the whole class discussion. She told the learning community members that during the whole class discussion, her students seemed completely overwhelmed because they were not used to sharing their ideas publicly. Most of them were not eager to participate; shy students remained silent, while only the more confident students shared their thoughts. Melanie thought that because it was not a paper-pencil activity, the students did not engage in the same way as they normally would. Nevertheless, the whole moment felt uncomfortable. Melanie managed to get some students to share their opinions and make their reasoning explicit. However, she refrained from prolonging the discussion due to the discomforting ambiance. The activity was experimented in four classes out of six because, in the other two she was behind in her planning, so she skipped it.

While sharing her story, Melanie mentioned that she was discouraged and thought that this whole idea of educational dialogue was not for her or her students. The members of the learning community who took part in the T-SEDA trial were listening carefully and questioned Melanie without being judgmental. They were all trying to help her recognize the positive impact she had made even though from her point of view what happened during the whole class discussion was a failure. Her colleagues helped her focus on the fact that some students were indeed able to find justifications for their points of view. This meant that the way Melanie designed her talking point was good in the way that it could generate different perspectives.

Melanie's case became an opportunity to reflect collectively on how to better organize and plan educational dialogue in the classroom. While discussing the case, members reflected that although Melanie's lesson included key features that could promote educational dialogue (i.e., the presence of a talking point and ground rules) many students did not engage in the activity. Willing to help her improve, her colleagues raised interesting points. For example, they brought to her attention that it might have been difficult for students to speak out their ideas because they didn't have the chance to figure out their opinion by themselves first. Following this idea, one colleague suggested to add a 'think-pair-share' activity before having a whole class discussion. Another colleague suggested to try group work before the whole class discussion, because it might be less embarrassing to speak in front of two or three classmates instead of the whole class. These new ideas gave Melanie the motivation to try again and plan another inquiry.

Changes to practice

Because her first try with the whole class discussion did not go as planned, Melanie decided to make some adjustments. She modified a different activity that aimed to discover when the French-Canadians adopted the Christmas tree as part of their traditions. In order to propose a date, students received documents with primary sources they had to scan for evidence (for example, pictures from that time, paintings, cut-outs from newspapers, etc.). Melanie organized the activity as a 'think-pair-share'. They first had to think individually about what clues they found in the documents and attempt to answer the main question by themselves. Melanie chose a paper-pencil support (for the worksheet, see *Supplementary materials/resources*) so students could take some notes down, and for her, this document would serve as learning evidence. Then in groups of four, they shared the clues found in the documents until they reached an agreement. They were then invited to indicate on a

timeline drawn on the classroom whiteboard the date that their team agreed upon. All teams shared their thoughts on the whiteboard and the whole class discussion could now take place.

Because data collection was not supported by a coding template it is difficult to measure the difference between what we could call baseline data (i. e. the John A. MacDonald activity) and the second activity (i. e. the Christmas tree activity). But for Melanie, there was a clear difference between the first activity and the second. In the first, students were uneasy, and shy and did not engage in dialogue. In the second, students were engaged in the inquiry, challenging each other ideas ('How did you come up with that date?') and making their reasoning explicit ('Look! The date is written here, on the side of this picture!'). Melanie and the PD leader remembered hearing two students challenging each other in that way because it was an exemplary practice of what was expected. Melanie was amazed about how the students were able to negotiate ideas and base their reasoning on the clues they found in their documents.

Reflective evaluation on the process

The aim of Melanie's inquiry was to create more opportunities for educational dialogue and to enhance students' subject understanding. Melanie succeeded in having two lessons that suited her endeavour. Although the data collection were not organised in a way that could support a fine analysis, Melanie had the feeling that there was a general improvement in her students' reasoning, and they were able to challenge each other's claim. However, to have a more precise understanding of how much the dialogue improved, a coding template would have been a better option.

The facilitators were instrumental in the process by ensuring that sufficient time and space were allocated to learn about educational dialogue before assisting in the planning of the inquiry. The provision of a safe space within the learning community for teachers to share their ideas and discuss the challenges encountered during the conduct of the inquiry was certainly beneficial. However, holding some of the meetings during classroom time could have presented challenges. This required planning for a substitute teacher, which is challenging given the current labour shortage.

For Melanie, one of the challenges was getting acquainted with the basics of educational dialogue and making the transition from theory to practice. Educational dialogue is not something teachers in Québec are familiar with. For any practitioner, implementing a new approach can be a challenge. It necessitates time and numerous trials and errors. It certainly was a challenge for students as well. Speaking publicly in front of their peers may be intimidating for some students. The use of the 'Think-Pair-Share' strategy appeared to guide the students in the activity, thus allowing them to express themselves with increased confidence. The ground rules also helped to make explicit the expected behaviours and link them to values (e. g. caring, collaborative, critical, and creative) that were important for Melanie and essential for productive dialogue to occur. In the future, Melanie may consider asking students to provide elaborations of the expected behaviours and incorporating them into her diagram. This may foster a sense of ownership among the students towards these rules and increase their inclination to abide by them.

In conclusion, as advice for teachers that are new to educational dialogue: begin with something simple, incorporating features that allow for educational dialogue. Do not hesitate to provide support to students if they are not used to speaking out publicly. Allow yourself to try and do not worry if it does not work after your first try. Surround yourself with colleagues with whom you can share your experiments, for they might have solutions you did not think of by yourself.

Next steps

Melanie says that she wants to continue to use dialogue in her classroom, as she believes it can help students feel more comfortable expressing their thoughts. She believes that students can develop new skills and competencies for their future life. She thinks that the more students engage in meaningful dialogue, the more comfortable they will become.

Melanie has already planned other lessons that combine historical thinking and educational dialogue with her students. For example, one includes a group work in which students must choose an event among a list of 10. Then, they must justify why they think it is the most important of the list and write down their reasons. After, a spokesperson shares the group's reasoning with the whole class. Melanie also has other ideas she wants to investigate. For example, she would like to explore the podcast as a mean to offer an alternative to written justifications or explanations in history classes.

A dialogic approach certainly has great potential value in the Quebec school context. In fact, it should be better known and promoted more. Melanie's reflective inquiry has shown that dialogue can help improve student engagement as well as enhance critical thinking skills. It provides students with better preparation for the real world, as it helps them develop important communication and collaboration skills that will serve them well in their personal and professional lives.

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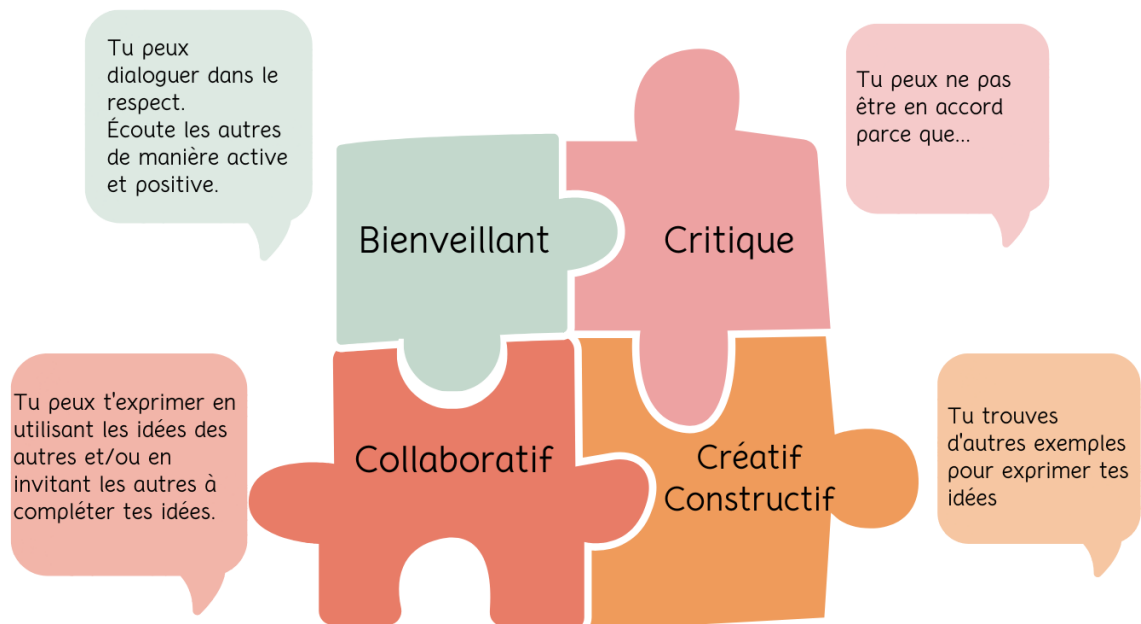
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Appendix 1: Think-Pair-Share Guidance



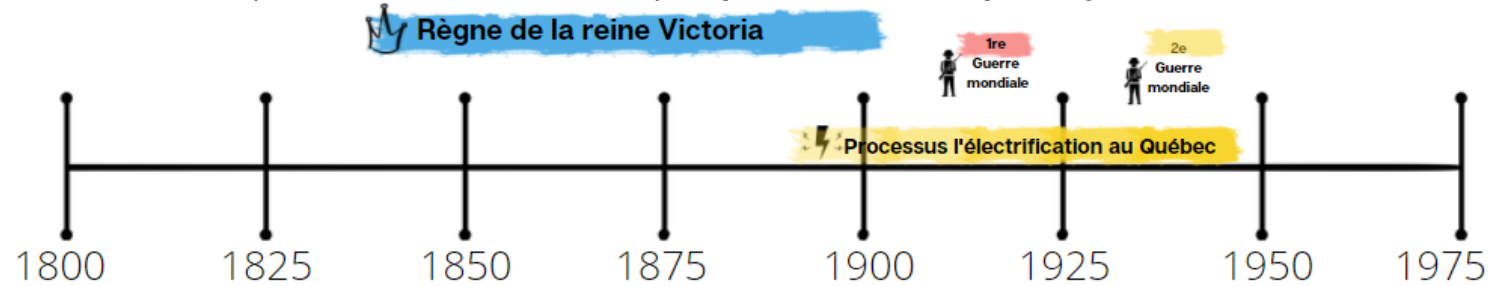
Appendix 2: Activity Guide

Nom : _____ Gr: _____ Date: _____

Des documents, qu'est-ce que ça donne?

Question d'enquête

À quel moment les francophones du Canada ont-ils le plus **probablement adopté** en grand nombre la tradition du sapin de Noël?



Votre hypothèse	Selon moi, les francophones du Canada ont-ils le plus probablement adopté en grand nombre la tradition du sapin de Noël
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Doc.	PENSE seul (5 minutes) Trouvez des indices de temps, d'espace, des objets, etc. qui vous permettront de délimiter la date approximative de l'adoption du sapin de Noël au Canada.	PARLE en groupe (10 minutes) Déterminez deux indices qui font consensus et qui vous permettent de délimiter la date approximative de l'adoption du sapin de Noël au Canada.
Sources primaires		
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
PARTAGE en groupe-classe : À quel moment les francophones du Canada ont-ils le plus probablement adopté en grand nombre la tradition du sapin de Noël? [Mentimeter Link Here]		

Sources secondaires

Retour sur mon hypothèse	
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Type de source	Bénéfices dans l'enquête	Limites dans l'enquête
Primaire		
Secondaire		



Pourquoi utiliser ce moyen didactique dans une classe?

