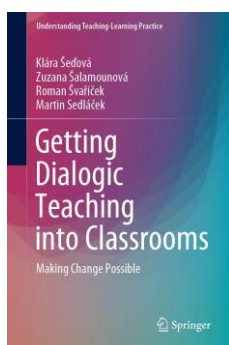




Book Review. Getting Dialogic Teaching into Classrooms: Making Change Possible, by Klára Šed'ová, Zuzana Šalamounová, Roman Švaříček, Martin Sedláček

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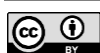
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The book *Getting Dialogic Teaching into Classrooms: Making Change Possible* by Czech researchers Klára Šed'ová, Zuzana Šalamounová, Roman Švaříček, and Martin Sedláček refers to their action research on dialogic teaching in the Czech Republic.

As it is evident from the title of the volume, dialogic teaching does not yet have its place in classrooms. Moreover, a completely different discourse prevails in most of the Czech Language and Literature lessons. Teachers focus on relaying “ready-to-eat” information from them to the students. Hník and Jindráček (2020, p. 7) criticize this approach because students “predominantly just write down facts that they then have to memorize, and think far less about the meaning of the text”. In that case, we cannot think of students as anything other than consumers of facts.

The passive role of students is also pointed out in the annual report of the Czech School Inspection (*Výroční zpráva České školní inspekce za školní rok 2019/2020*, 2020, p. 113), in which it is stated that teachers “very often choose methods and forms of work in lessons that do not allow the active involvement of



students in the educational process". This situation is also confirmed by the results of a survey conducted by Vočková and Vala in January 2021. 809 vocational high school students from the Czech Republic were asked about the content of their literary lessons. Only 7% of respondents answered that they primarily discuss literary works. That means that most students learn about literature instead of experiencing it. It seems that it is similar to talking about the prepared dishes at a feast but not tasting any of them. Books are meant to be read just like food is meant to be eaten. Hník (Schuster, 2022) highlighted that theoretical knowledge is also preferred by many pedagogical faculties. The more emphasis is placed on theoretical knowledge, the less space is given to communication in the class. As Šed'ová stated in an interview (Smetana, 2020), the lack of communication in a classroom may be due to the fact that teachers teach what they were taught as students, even though they were introduced to modern teaching methods and had been exposed to the significant role communication plays in a classroom during pedagogical training.

For the above reasons, the efforts of the authors of *Getting Dialogic Teaching into Classrooms: Making Change Possible* to contribute to making the classroom discourse more dialogic are welcome. For a large number of teachers, dialogic teaching is something innovative that contradicts the "traditional" approach they prefer and refuse to give up. The reason behind why they do that might potentially be due to assuming the hold on unwavering knowledge associated with the position of a teacher which makes teaching easier and more comfortable. Asking stimulative questions rather than simply relaying information is something that may be demanding for teachers and can also cause them to end up in failure.

In light of the above-mentioned findings, this book is extremely beneficial, especially for pre-service and in-service teachers who intend to implement dialogic teaching as easily and efficiently as possible. The book contains valuable case studies from which any teacher can learn the potential situations they might face when implementing dialogic teaching. However, the reader can lack reasoning as to why out of the eight teachers who participated in the research, the authors included the cases of teachers Daniela and Marek.

Nevertheless, both stories are worth reading because they show that although the teachers have entirely different personalities, especially their level of self-confidence, they invariably face difficulties and obstacles when implementing dialogic teaching. Thanks to the case studies, we are aware that putting theory into practice takes a lot of effort and that partial failure is an inevitable part of the process.

But let us now look at the structure of the book and the content of individual chapters and what we can learn from them. The volume consists of eight chapters that were published as separate studies in the Czech language in the past. Thanks to this, all the chapters end with a listed bibliography which is very handy when looking for other sources of information.

Chapter 1, entitled *Thinking About Classroom Dialogue: Introduction and Theoretical Background*, is an introduction to this book. The authors reveal their motivation for writing the book—to contribute to understanding how teachers can improve classroom dialogue and thereby boost student learning. Second, the organization of the book and the content of individual chapters are presented. Third, dialogic teaching is defined. Fourth, the authors get readers familiar with the essential concepts and theoretical inspirations that were the basis for this book.

Fundamental knowledge regarding dialogic teaching, especially its indicators and principles which are considered the essential components of dialogic teaching, are provided in Chapter 2, entitled *Elements of Dialogic Teaching and How to Get Them into Classrooms*. Dialogic teaching can be brought to life in the case of the presence of the following indicators: the teacher's open questions of high cognitive demand (i.e. students are made to create and support an answer with logically reasoned evidence), uptake (i.e. the teacher's questions are connected to students' previous responses) and open discussion (i.e. students are free to react to each other while discussing the given topic). However, just the presence of the indicators does not mean that dialogic teaching is taking place. According to Alexander (2020), a classroom dialog has to be: collective, supportive, reciprocal, deliberative, cumulative, and purposeful.

Diverse outcomes of several studies are presented in this chapter. They prove that it is not easy to train teachers to implement dialogic teaching in their classrooms. There are a lot of obstacles teachers have to face. The most common have been commented on at the end of the chapter. The authors divide them into three categories: organizational constraints (because of the curriculum teachers tend to emphasize disciplinary knowledge and find discussion as something additional), the teacher's mindset (for many teachers learning still means getting familiar with the facts), and unbearable complexity of change (implementation of dialogic teaching is demanding).

Chapter 3, entitled *How to Change Classroom Talk: TPD Program Design and Research Methods*, is presented as a teacher professional development program registered at the Czech Ministry of Education as “Effective Classroom Dialogue”.

The program was based on previous research that showed that the nature of classroom discourse in a typical Czech classroom differs from dialogic teaching.

The program was conducted with eight Czech teachers between 2013 and 2015. Its first aim was to induce a change concerning dialogic teaching in participating classrooms and the second was to study the processes of teachers' development and learning during the program. The program consisted of three components: theoretical, in which the teachers were introduced to the theory of dialogic teaching in the form of workshops and possible procedures for its application were discussed; experiential, during which the teachers tried to bring the given theory into their teaching; and reflective when in a teacher-researcher tandem they watched the video recordings of the teaching and discussed their content. With regard to the second aim of the program, four case studies were created, two of which are part of the book (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6).

Chapter 4, entitled *Did Transformation Happen? The Effects of the TPD Program on Classroom Talk*, examines whether the TPD program was successful. To answer this question, the authors compare pre- and post-intervention lessons and look for differences in the presence of dialogic indicators and principles.

The longest chapters of the book are the two case studies. Chapter 5, entitled *The Case of Daniela: The Nonlinear Development of Change*, is about teacher Daniela's participation in the project. Attention is paid to both the course of her lessons (there were 10 of them in the project) and the follow-up reflexive interviews led by the researcher. The most significant parts of dialogues and discussions are cited. Daniela's case proves that change toward dialogic teaching cannot be gradual nor constant but nonlinear.

The second case study is presented in Chapter 6, entitled *The Case of Marek: Tension and Conflict in a Dialogic Teaching System*. It centres on teacher Marek who considered himself experienced in the field of dialogic teaching and had intended to demonstrate his expertise with his participation. However, the analysis of his lessons depicted otherwise. His case proves that it is not enough to focus on one isolated element of dialogic teaching since the interconnection of indicators, principles, and methods is needed to implement dialogic teaching.

Chapter 7, entitled *Teachers' Self-understanding and Emotions as the Catalysts of Change*, focuses on the teachers' self-understanding and emotions during the TPD program. The eight teachers are categorized into four types: perfect (one teacher), eager-to-learn (two), positive (three), and insecure (two). Each group

experienced different emotions. The researchers tried to find out a connection between the type of teacher and the extent of the changes they implemented. Negative emotions (e.g. hopelessness, anxiety, disappointment, shame) were found to have a positive impact on the participants as they had pushed them to bring a change in their practice.

The last chapter, entitled *Generic Processes Behind Dialogic Teaching Implementation: Discussion and Conclusion*, summarizes the main findings presented in this book and explains some generative mechanisms underlying transformation. The chapter ends with the prospects for further research in dialogic teaching.

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