

The Let's Talk Card Game: Developing an Educational Resource for Productive Academic Discussions in Subject Classrooms

ELIS and CHIJ OLQP

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Background

- Developed by ELIS
- Premised on the belief that quality academic conversations in the classroom can be carried out between students in whole classes with appropriate scaffolding
- Address the challenges faced by teachers trying to implement quality academic conversation in classes across subjects for learning

Aims

- Help build effective communication in English across a range of subject classrooms
- Provide an accessible resource that English-medium teachers can use with ease to develop effective communication in English in class
- Provide a resource which help to develop some of the 21st Century Competencies in student learning

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Talk and learning

- We use language to transform individual thought into collective thought and action (Mercer, 2002)
- Academic conversations allow students to closely examine, scrutinize, criticize, validate and shape the ideas being discussed (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005)
- Together, in the context of a rich task... talk moves help to build a classroom culture of equity, risk-taking, intellectual effort and respect (Michaels and O'Connor, 2012)
- Becoming an educated person necessarily involves learning some special ways of using language (Mercer & Littleton, 2007, p. 2)

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Talk and learning

- ...well structured oral and collaborative activities 'maintain children's time on task more consistently than do solitary written and text-based task (Alexander, 2004, p. 14)

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Let's Talk theory

- Zwiers & Crawford (2011), which addresses the challenges facing productive academic conversations across content areas and presents **five core skills** to make conversation more academic.
- Develops on other academic discussion skills card games (Reese and Wells, 2007)

Talk Moves

Category of Talk Move card	Colour	Purpose
Elaborate	White	To give more information
Support ideas with examples	Yellow	To give examples
Build on an idea	Green	To add to or question earlier statements
In other words	Blue	To say in different words
Summarise	Pink	To summarise or comment on all the previous players' responses
Change topic	Light blue	To enable a transition to a different topic

(from Zwiers & Crawford, 2011, p. 31-44)



Let's Talk key points

- Talk topics already exist in subject teacher /learner guides
- Can be applied across all subjects
- Teacher role: can check conceptual understandings of topics and themes by the students – the game can be applied for many purposes and points in lessons
- Can be used to support other skills such as writing



Impact on teacher-participants

- Increase teacher's awareness and understanding of how to improve the quality of academic conversations
- Students learn how to hold productive academic conversations
- Card games can change the way students and teachers interact with each other, so learning and teaching can become richer.
- Games can be a good medium to use information for problem solving and inquiry (Tan Mingfong, 2013, NIE Research Scientist in Game-based learning).



Reaching into schools

- Real, physical resources which are easy to use and take up a short amount of time and resources
- Enabling subject related talk to happen in classrooms
- Answering demand for schools who are:
 - building spoken skills for learning in classrooms
 - developing card games/resources for communication
 - trying to infuse 21CCs into subject classrooms



Trial at CHIJ OLQP (July 21, 24)

- Two classes
- P4 Maths and P5 EL
- Held a briefing session with the teachers and two training sessions with the students
- Tried to ensure conversation topics were relevant to different English medium subjects



Example topics

- P4 Maths: Are decimals important in everyday life?
- P5 EL class: Is it important to communicate in your mother tongue?



Are decimals important in everyday life?

- S4: **To begin this conversation, I think that** decimals are helpful and important in our everyday life...as we use them in money and other things.
- S1: And **an example of this** could be when we are in a supermarket we always see prices on the things that we are going to buy like some canned drinks and food.
- S2: **I think the point is important because** we see decimals every day to buy food and we need them in our daily life.
- S3: **I would like to add that** decimals are also very helpful for us because we use them to measure our height and weight.

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P5 EL Excerpt

- S4: **After listening to** [student 3] **I think it means that** it is not important to communicate in our mother tongue language because some people may get the wrong idea but they don't speak the same mother tongue language as you then they think that you may say something bad about them, one another.
- S5: **For instance**, many Indians may not understand what Chinese are saying and they might think they are saying something bad about them but actually they are saying something good about them. And so I think it is really important to learn a similar language as everyone, so that we can communicate with each other clearly. So that everyone can understand whatever we are saying.
- S1: **However, I think that** nowadays, kids like us and other people, they don't really speak their own mother tongue language and they become very foreign to them...so, less close in their own mother tongue language although they are ...maybe from their culture.

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Looking at the data

- Students created original, coherent discussions
- All students were engaged in the discussions
- Sentence stems were used with ease
- Students could make academic conversations across several subject topics
- The game rules and play were understood with ease

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Looking at the data

- The data were collected outside of regular class time, so the academic talk was not situated in the 'real' subject class over a scheme of work
- Some repetition in responses of students (even though the students did self-police each other)
- Topics need to be pitched at the right level to challenge students but maintain quality input

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Teacher feedback

- Gameplay: **Engaging**. Maybe could consider an exciting element to motivate pupils to 'win' the game.
- The game has **helped pupils have academic conversations** as they have to make use of the five core skills in their conversations. Therefore they are **more aware of the ideas they contribute** and **how they convey/structure the ideas in words**.
- Pupils are **more focused**. They **exercise greater listening skills** as they need to keep the conversation going.
- Pupils can practise oral conversation as the skills can 'train' them to be **more coherent** in their thoughts.

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Teacher feedback

- It is **non-threatening**. Pupils work **with their peers** and there is **no right or wrong answer** to their responses.
- The game could be used to achieve the speaking and listening objectives during English lesson. With carefully chosen topics, **pupils can be encouraged to speak and listen** in a **structured way** and in an 'authentic' context.
- In **Maths lessons**, this game can **replace pupils' journal reflection** on the topics that they have just learnt. In a way, pupils will be exercising their metacognitive skills.

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Teacher feedback

- Questions 'forced' pupils to be **strategic** in their questioning, and **not veer off** to another unrelated topic.
- The questions can be connected to **any topic** as '**triggers**' to lesson, as **recapping** or **reinforcing** lessons and even in **summing up** lessons
- Greatly assists in **concept development / concept attainment** (ie. Hilda Taba)
- Can be used for anything, up to the teacher – as '**triggers**', to **reinforce concepts**, to sum up lessons, **oral examination revision practice** etc.



Teacher feedback

- The **stem** of the questions '**shaped**' their conversations
- Pupils have difficulty in 'summing up' the whole conversation.
- The game does not have enough of a competitive edge to it, unlike other games



Student feedback

- I liked **talking with my friends** in the **topic** given by **using the phrase given** on the cards (P4)
- I liked **sharing** about the **topics** and **interacting** (P4)
- I liked that we could **express ourselves more** by using many **academic skills** (P4)
- I like how we can **communicate more with our classmates** (P4)
- I like the part when we are **saying what we think** about a topic (P4)
- **Learn English speaking skills** in a better way (P4)



Student feedback

- It helped me to **get my thoughts out** (P5)
- The game helped us how to **express our feelings** with the **right words** (P5)
- I can **use phrases provided** to say the sentence (P5)
- I liked the topics and being able to **express ourselves through our ideas** (P5)
- I liked **sharing my ideas and opinions** about each topic (P5)
- I like it that we were **given opportunities** to voice out our **opinions** and we can **hear what our friends think** about the topic (P5)
- It helps us to **expand our knowledge** on the topic (P5)



How did the teachers find it?

- Setting
- Preparation
- Challenges / Surprises



How did the students find it?

- P4 Pupils:
- Something novel for the pupils
 - Topic for the talk helps them in their reflection journal
 - Active participation (even the shy & quiet ones contributed)
 - Notice that pupils exercise patience towards one another
 - Exhibit SEL competencies



How did the students find it?

P5 Pupils:

- Provided a structure for strategic questioning & meaningful conversations
- Fully engaged learners; they had to listen actively to their peers in order to respond effectively
- Learnt to suspend judgement; saw their peers in a different light
- Reinforcement of prior knowledge in applying it to the context or the topic in conversation
- Attainment of new knowledge through the topic-centered conversations



Applications for the game

- Can be carried out across all subjects
- Duration of 1 to 2 periods
- In line with the new format stimulus-based conversation for oral, the card game is a good a platform to practice discussing on a variety of topics



Lessons learned

Potential:

- The card game is a good tool to help English-medium teachers to develop effective communication in English. Pupils will definitely exercise speaking and speaking skills in a focused and structured manner.
- More applicable to Upper primary pupils
- Pupils across all progress levels can benefit from the card game pupils (LP pupils will require more scaffolding by the teachers to start off)

* Our personal takeaways



Lessons learned

Challenges:

Ways to make the card game more exciting and/or competitive (in order to live up to the word 'game' and to sustain its novelty)

* Our personal takeaways



The End

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