Typhoon – the learning activity that can weather all storms

Workshop session at ELTC Conference 2011 – Ruth Wickham, Training Fellow at IPGKDRI, Kuala Terengganu

Your lesson is about to die a natural death, but there is still an hour of class time left ...
Or you are about to face a class which last week proved unmotivated and difficult to control ...
Or your PowerPoint presentation just went south because the projector died, your computer malfunctioned, the electric power went off ...
Or you simply need a fun way to revise and practise vocabulary or a newly-learned grammar concept.

Think of all the horror stories that teachers can tell, times when a magic wand would be so very useful, and then make sure that you have "Typhoon!" in your grab-bag to pull out at a moment's notice. Not that you have to wait until disaster all but overtakes you, it's much better to plan it into your day ahead of time.

There are a great many reasons to use this activity, and occasions where it can save your sanity as a busy teacher. The only materials needed are a white (or black) board, a piece of paper, some questions you could ask, and a class that is looking for something to motivate and engage them. With those ingredients your students will leave the room at the end of the lesson with smiles on their faces and learning reinforced in their heads.

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By Ruth Wickham, Training Fellow at IPGKDRI

Introduction

All teachers are eager to find ways to liven up their classes, keep the students awake and learning, but there is not enough time to find something new and exciting all of the time.

The game, 'Typhoon', has been around for a lot of years, though not quite in the form as it is described here. I have used, reused, adapted, and readapted this game so that it fits my style of teaching. Other teachers have adapted it in other ways. Possibly whoever thought of it first (and I' afraid I don't know who that was) has changed it since they started too.

Just like well-known old favourite games such as 'Hang-Man', it is what you make it. It is a germ of an idea that each teacher can use in their own way.

Included here are instructions to play it my way, and suggestions for parts of it you might want to vary.

Context for presenters

This workshop was a brief (25minute!) session presented at the ELTC Conference in 2011. Presenters wishing to use this material will doubtless have more time and be able to present the workshop with a full practice game at the end.

Presenters need to make sure they have tried and experienced the game with at least one class before attempting to present this workshop so that they are able to field questions.

Background

This game, or "interactive learning activity", first attracted my attention when I was instructing a class of disgruntled and reluctant Chinese teenaged students who were supposed to be learning Australian Social Studies as well as English comprehension. The game as I discovered it (on the Internet) originally involved cards with scores on them which were to be stuck to the blackboard in a grid pattern. When the students selected a particular card it was turned over to reveal the score. There were so many practical problems with the cards themselves (bending, falling apart, and dropping off the board), and then there was the time needed to set the game up while the class became increasingly disruptive. Nevertheless, they loved the game and I realised it was worth making some adjustments to make it more practical.

After modifying the game, teaching English to middle management in Chinese factories, I found that even 'serious' men and women were enthralled with the game as it was used to practise business English expressions.

Then, when I was working in Turkey, each lesson was four hours long, and by the fourth hour serious teaching was clearly out of the question. After playing "Typhoon" a couple of times, my students started

expecting and even demanding it. So I let small groups take it in turns to organise it, and soon they were trying out modifications – some of which were useful while some were less so.

Several countries later, Typhoon still saves my sanity and improves my students' learning at least once a week. Even without planning ahead, when a lesson starts to flag, or the students are reluctant to be involved in hard slog practice, I start by drawing a grid on the board. I then get the students organising themselves into teams – this can be done in a variety of ways depending on the class. While they are doing that, I draw up the grid on a piece of paper and add in scores (and special points such as 'T' for 'Typhoon') – or a student or group can be set this task. Finally I decide on the topic or style of the questions – which will also depend on the particular lesson – or again a student or group can be responsible for this.

I vary the size of the grid according to the time allowable in the lesson. Usually a 6x6 grid will fill a 45 minute lesson – depending on the class and the question styles. If it gets close to the end of the lesson with too many grid-squares still unused, then I make sure the game is finished by going into "no question, just choose" mode allowing each team in turn to make a choice.

As well as the number scores in most of the squares on the paper grid, some squares have special points such as 'T' for 'Typhoon' and any other custom scores the teacher chooses. A favourite is 'S' for 'Steal'.

Once the game is set up, the teacher or questioner student/group asks a question of each team in turn. If they give a correct answer within a reasonable time (the class may choose to have a timekeeper), then they have the option to 'choose a box' within the grid. The score on the paper grid is then written in the box on the board as well as next to the team name on the tally board. If 'T' is the score, the team chooses which other team will have their score 'blown away' to 0. Of course 'S' means they can 'steal' another team's score.

For the purpose of the workshop, participants will be asked to contribute a possible question, and then join a team for a practice of the game. Participants will be encouraged to share any modification ideas or previous experiences of the game or similar they may have.

Conclusion

The above summary describes only the simplest forms of this activity. There are endless possibilities for variations.

Workshop:– Typhoon! The Learning Activity that can weather all storms.

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This is an interactive learning activity that you can 'pull out of your hat' in many situations, with all age groups, and with any type of lesson.

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My background – I am presently an English Training Fellow at IPGKDRI in Kuala Terengganu. I have a Bachelor of Education, and a Master of Education in TESOL.

I have taught ESL in China (for 2 years in 2 different places), in Turkey (for 1 year), in the UK (in 2 different universities), in Saudi Arabia (for 1 year as a course coordinator) and in Australia.

Before all that I was a primary school teacher in Western Australia for 20 years.

And before that I worked as a field linguist in the Torres Strait for 8 years.

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In my first year of teaching English in China, I had a very unmotivated class of teenagers (yes – these ones!). I discovered the game 'Typhoon' on the Internet, and I am sorry but I do not remember where. I tried playing it in the form that it was explained, and came up against all sorts of practical problems. So I adapted and changed it, and here presented is my version of this game.

If you search for it on the Internet, you will find various people have developed their own version, and of course it is up to you to use and adapt it in any way that suits you.
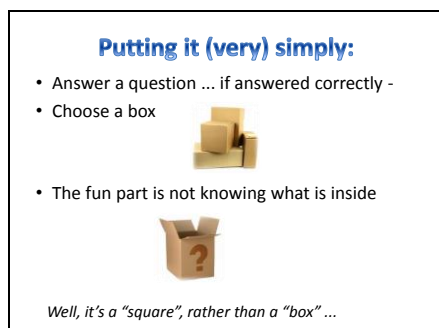
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The game is a bit like a 'game show' on TV, and can get very exciting. But, unlike a game show, it is a low resource activity and can be 'up and running' in just a few minutes.

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So -why is it called "Typhoon"?

Think of a very strong wind

that blows **everything** away.

The name 'Typhoon' comes from the idea of a strong wind that blows everything away. Explain this to your students before they start the game – it's a good vocabulary activity.
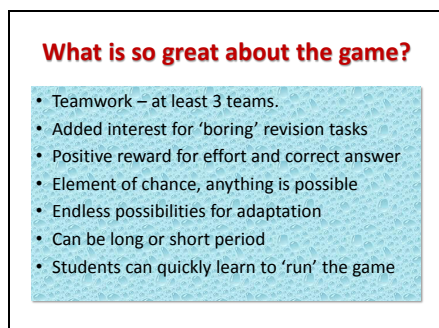
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Putting it (very) simply:

• Answer a question ... if answered correctly -
• Choose a box

• The fun part is not knowing what is inside

Well, it's a "square", rather than a "box" ...

Game shows commonly are based around 'choose a box' – without knowing what is inside – and this is where the element of chance adds fun and excitement to the game.
Unlike a game like 'Jeopardy' where the player chooses a box containing a *question*, the teacher/leader/mc chooses the question (which you expect them to know the answer to because you have already taught it) and if they answer correctly *then* they have the option to choose a box containing an unknown prize.
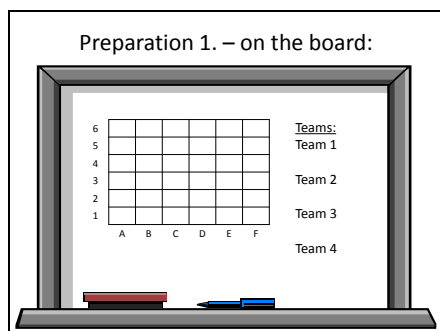
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What is so great about the game?

• Teamwork – at least 3 teams.
• Added interest for 'boring' revision tasks
• Positive reward for effort and correct answer
• Element of chance, anything is possible
• Endless possibilities for adaptation
• Can be long or short period
• Students can quickly learn to 'run' the game

Here are some of the advantages of playing 'Typhoon' in a classroom setting:

• It encourages teamwork, always an admirable and worthwhile outcome. So it can be used in a class of 3 students (one team each!) up to a huge class where they are divided into any number of teams with any number of team members. This also takes away some of the fear of making a wrong answer, team member can discuss answers before coming up with a solution, and the shy member can sit quietly if necessary.

• It is a more exciting way to deal with repetitive 'boring' revision tasks. In Turkey when all my classes were 4 hours long, we always played 'Typhoon' in the 4th hour, and the students themselves would design it.

• The reward of choosing a box comes after answering a question, although they have no idea what the reward will be.

• The game is never over until it's over. I am always amazed how the balance of power can shift during a game.

• If some aspect of the game doesn't suit your situation, change it …

• The game can last an hour, or it can fill a quick

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10minute slot when your lesson finishes too quickly.

- After one or two tries, you can set the students to set up and run the game – the amount of responsibility you give them is up to you.

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Preparation 1. – on the board:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
6						
5						
4						
3						
2						
1						

Teams:
Team 1

Team 2

Team 3

Team 4

OK. Here is how you prepare.

On your black / white board, draw a grid. How big it is depends on how long you want to spend on the game. I find if I accidentally make too big a grid, or the game is just taking too long and the students (of course) want to finish, we go to "no question, just choose a box" mode and quickly finish off the game. You can mark the two axes with letters and numbers, as here, or use vocabulary words that you want the students to practice, or even really big numbers just so that they have to read them aloud when they choose their square.

You also need to have a place for recording team scores as you go.

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Preparation 2. – on paper:

	A	B	C	D	E	F
6	20	D	100	100	200	T
5	500	T	20	S	20	50
4	2	100	Swap	200	1	T
3	S	50	10	T	D	1000
2	100	20	3	50	500	Swap
1	T	1000	S	50	10	10

T = Typhoon

S = Steal

Swap = swap scores

D = Double

Draw a matching grid on a piece of paper / in a notebook (somewhere the students can't see it but you can refer to it as you go along). It really doesn't matter what the numbers are. Students like to sometimes put numbers in the millions when they set it up. Students always find it amusing when they get a score of '1' when they were hoping for maybe '500'.

The special categories are up to you. Initially the game only had 'T – Typhoon', but then students complained that it seemed like such a waste to blow away the points when they could just 'S - Steal' them! They also enjoy the irony of getting a 'D-Double' when their score is 0, and getting a 'Swap' when they already have the top score and they have to choose someone to swap with.

I am sure you can come up with other interesting ideas.

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3. Questions – at least as many as there are boxes

Work through a worksheet or (unpopular) workbook.

Give a 'have you ever...?' sentence for this verb.

Say the time on this clock in English.

Explain this phrasal verb.

Make a question for which this is the answer.

Give the negative for this sentence.

Give a sentence showing the meaning of this word.

The hardest part for you, the teacher, is the questions. How are you going to use this as an educational opportunity, apart from the obvious social benefits?

Here are some examples of the types of questions which I have used – but there is no limit. Up to you … or get the students to design questions.

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Please make up a question

Grammar - questions

This question relates to……
Make a question for this answer: at school

Question: ……
Where do you eat your lunch most days?

Answer: ……

Here is an example of a sheet for each student to make up a question – check them carefully before you use them!

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Please join a team

Team 1	Team 2	Team 3
Team Name.......	Team Name.......	Team Name.......
Team Members:	Team Members:	Team Members:
Tom	Donald	
Mary	Sam	
Sally	John	
Peter		

Here is a quick way to put everyone into teams in a big class. Of course there are many ways to work out teams.

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Okay ... Let's play!

Let's experience the game right now. Please put your name onto a team list, and please write a question.

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Here are my details if you have any questions, comments or ideas.