Ludic Language Pedagogy Playground

Teaching English communication skills with the board game Captain Sonar

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📍 **What is this?** A short, easy-to-read example of my Kotoba Rollers framework for teaching English with the game Captain Sonar.

📍 **Why did you make it?** My Kotoba Rollers walkthrough paper in LLP is a deep dive and covers the whole framework from 10,000m up. With this, I wanted to create a simpler, easily implementable lesson plan around a single game.

📍 **Who is it for?** Teachers that are interested in teaching with games and are looking for a concise, practical and usable guide with a specific game.

📍 **What's next?** If the reception to this piece is positive, I would like to continue making guides for teaching with various games.

Tweet synopsis

There are few practical guides to teaching specific skills with specific games. This is one. You don't need computers, or tablets, just a board game which you could make yourself. This is how to put games at the core of your language class

#GBLT #KotobaRollers

View at the LLP Playground: **URL**

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What is this? (Introduction)

Hello everyone! This is James York from Tokyo Denki University[1]. This playground piece is my attempt at a simple to follow, step-by-step guide to teaching English language skills with board games. The content here is based on my own teaching which means that, yes, I have tested this lesson plan in person. The article follows this order:

1. The game
2. The teaching model
3. The mediation (The step-by-step process)
4. A link to **downloadable worksheets** for your own context.

In this playground piece I focus on adverbs of probability (perhaps, maybe, probably, definitely, etc.). Captain Sonar is a great game for teaching this skill. Let's find out why.

1. The Game

Figure 1 *A game of Captain Sonar underway ([source](#))*

The following text explains the game. It is from the awesome board game community website: Board Game Geek[2].

> *At the bottom of the ocean, no one will hear you scream!*
>
> *In Captain Sonar, you and your teammates control a state-of-the-art submarine and are trying to locate an enemy submarine in order to blow it out of the water before they can do the same to you. Every role is important, and the confrontation is merciless. Be organized and communicate because a captain is nothing without his crew: the Chief Mate, the Radio Operator, and the Engineer.*

As the above description makes clear, in Captain Sonar, players (or, in our case, learners) will have to communicate and collaborate with one another to successfully steer their own submarine, make a plan and decide what should be done on each turn, and finally, speculate where the enemy submarine

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[1] https://ra-data.dendai.ac.jp/tduhp/KgApp?kyoinId=ymbsgsyoggy
[2] https://boardgamegeek.com/

is based on the limited information that they have collected. In sum then, this game is ideal for promoting the following skills: collaboration, speculating, planning, giving and receiving advice.

2. The teaching model

There are of course many different approaches to teaching languages. This paper introduces a TBLT approach, but consider what you already know and what would work in your context:

- PPP
- TBLT
- CLIL
- Multiliteracies
- Total physical response?
- Others, as necessary

The model used here is based on my "board-games meet TBLT" instruction model known as Kotoba Rollers. I have written about it in much more detail in the following places (for those interested, of course. Stay tuned for a quick rundown next!).

- In my LLP walkthrough paper here.
- On my blog here.
- On the elt.training blog here.

The framework is an extended version of the pre-task, task, and post-task cycle by Willis (1996). This framework was inspired by two things: 1) my training in applied linguistics and TESOL and 2) my reading of the literature on games and language teaching, specifically, Sykes (2014, p.153) who highlighted the similarities between the games and the pedagogical principles of TBLT. I have written about these similarities in York and deHaan (2018). A graphical representation of the framework is available in Figure 2. The framework is designed to take at least 5 lessons.
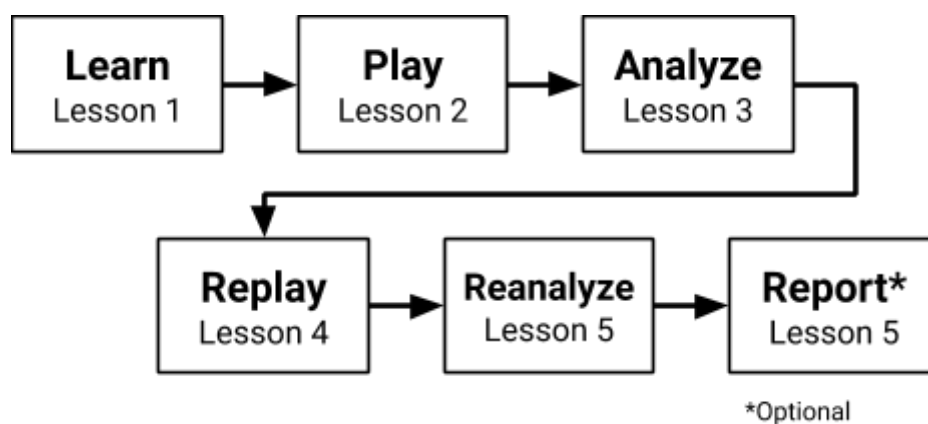

Figure 2 *The five lessons you'll need to run this project*

1. Lesson 1: Students learn how to play the game (and thus reading and listening skills are a focus of instruction and activity)
2. Lesson 2: Students play the game (focusing on productive language skills) and RECORD the gameplay audio which is then transcribed as a homework activity.
3. LESSON 3: Students analyse their own performance (focusing on form) with the aim of improving their language skills for a subsequent, assessed play session.

4. LESSON 4: Students play the game again, this time with teacher speaking assessment. Again, students record and transcribe the gameplay audio for homework.
5. LESSON 5: Students compare their performances in the two game play sessions.

3. Teaching Procedure (step-by-step)

For ease of reading, the step by step lesson plans appear on separate pages. Consider printing these pages out and writing notes in the blank spaces.

Step 1: Learn how to play the game

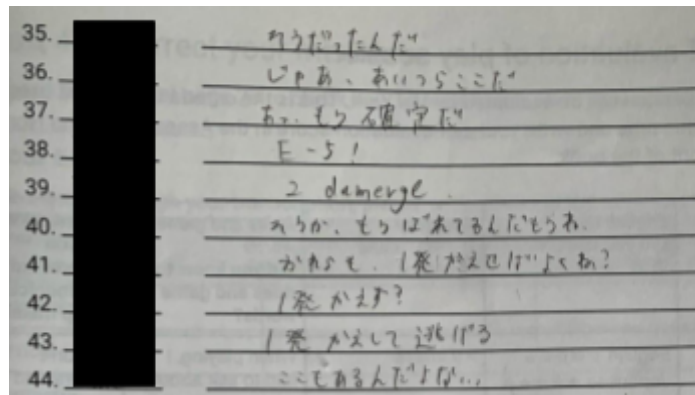| Student activity	How to support them (your role!)

Read the rulebook as a group	- Instruct students to avoid using a Japanese version of the rulebook.
	- Help groups with poor communication to engage better:
	    - Model ideal group behaviours.
	    - Ask such groups to watch how other, more successful groups are cooperating.
	- Answer questions regarding rules, grammar, vocabulary, etc.

Make questions about the rules	- Provide example questions.
Watch YouTube videos	- Answer questions regarding the language used in videos. - Instruct students to pay attention to certain parts of videos. - Ask questions regarding the videos to generate group discussion.
Test play the game	- Promote students to reflect on what they are saying during gameplay. - Correct any errors regarding language use or the game rules.

Step 2: Play and record the game

Student activity	How to support them (your role!)
Check rules.	- Instruct students to use the questions they made in the previous lesson to check comprehension.
Drill "useful expressions."	- Instruct students to drill in pairs. - Let students know that the translations in the book are only one example, and that there are various alternatives.
Consider what words, phrases and grammar will be required to play the game in English.	- Offer advice proactively --, ask students how they might say an expression from their L1 in the L2. Write common errors you hear on note paper or whiteboard for the group to see. - Offer advice reactively -- walk around the classroom and answer questions that students might have.
Play and record the game.	- Observe each group playing. - Write useful words, phrases or grammar points on nearby whiteboards. - Offer corrections to rules that are not fully understood ("Offer" rather than "inform" because sometimes students want to play with their own "house rules").
Prepare for their transcription homework.	- Instruct students to divide the recorded audio evenly between players. - Offer advice on how to share the audio for those that did not record.

> 〴〵〿 **TEACHING TIP**
> Have student groups sit apart from each other and announce actions in a loud voice. This allows them to speak in a louder voice when planning.

Step 3: Analyse gameplay transcription

Student activity	How to support them (your role!)
Find errors in transcription.	- Refresh students' memories regarding error types. - Check students transcriptions for errors. - Promote students to look up specific grammar points.
Translate Japanese into English.	- Provide suggestions for translations. - Encourage groups which have a large volume of Japanese speech in their transcriptions. The Japanese speech is valuable data for figuring out what they need to say in English during subsequent play sessions.
Watch online gameplay videos.	- Observe students as they watch individually. - Check answers to questions on the worksheet and promote students to look for answers in the video.
Create a short presentation and quiz questions based on group research.	- Check grammar points. - Check quiz questions. - Provide additional information if group presentations fall short of explaining something.

> **◺◹▱ TEACHING TIP**
> Don't worry if your students used a lot of their mother tongue in the first session. This is valuable language to be translated into the L2. ✌

Add any grammar points that you want to focus on here. **This game is ideal for practicing adverbials, conditionals, and for offering and giving requests.** Of course, you can find many resources for teaching these grammar points online. In my context, I limit my adverbs to **definitely, probably** and **maybe** so as not to overload students with unnecessary words during their game play. I usually create a simple diagram which can be copied down and referenced during their understanding (which can also be used during game play). See Figure 3 below.
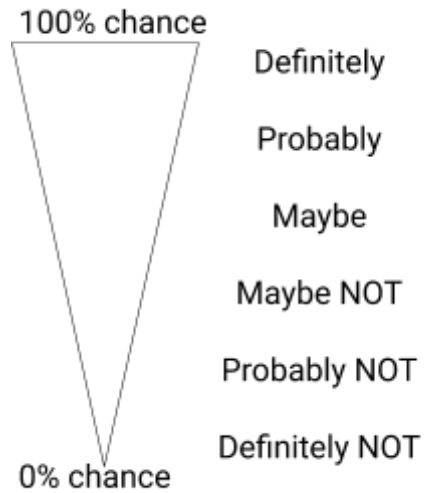
Figure 3 *A simple diagram to express possibility*

Note, students often need instruction regarding the position of these adverbs in sentences. Do not give these words in isolation, but as part of sentences. The following table is a simple example of how to explain adverbs of possibility.

These adverbs usually come <u>in front</u> of **the main verb**:

- She is <u>definitely not</u> **going**.
- Will they <u>definitely</u> **stop** before 9pm?
- We should <u>probably</u> **launch** a torpedo now!

And they adverbs usually come <u>after</u> **the be verb**:

- They **are** <u>definitely</u> here!
- He **is** <u>probably not</u> happy.
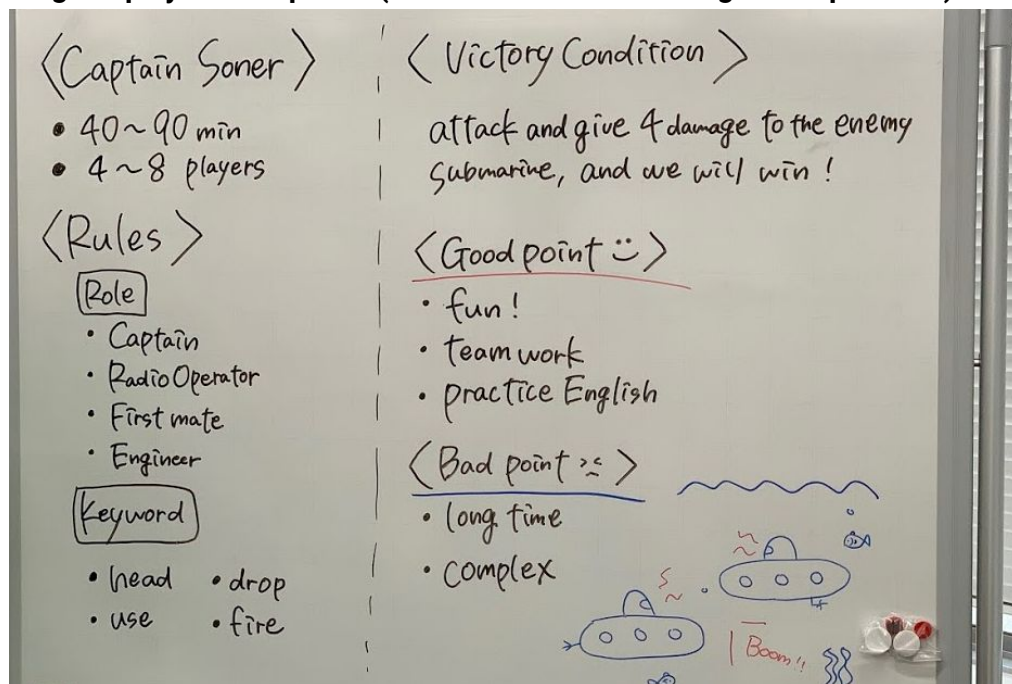
Step 4: Replay the game

Student activity	How to support them (your role!)
Recheck rules.	- Inform students that this class will be evaluated, and introduce the rubric. - Refer students to the questions they made about game rules during the Learn lesson (Part 2 in the workbook).
Rewatch online videos. Review language from the analysis lesson.	- Instruct students to drill and practice useful expressions from the KR workbook, expressions from online videos, grammar, phrases and vocabulary.
Play and record gameplay.	- During the play session, circulate between all groups and complete my evaluation. - Offer suggestions and feedback regarding language usage. I want students to perform as well as possible during their evaluation, thus a dynamic approach to assessment is taken.
Divide audio for transcription homework.	- Instruct students to divide audio equally between players.

> **◣◣◳ TEACHING TIP**
> During this step, I grade my students on their ability to communicate in English. Consider doing the same! ➥

Step 5: Reanalyse the gameplay transcriptions (and tell others about the game experience)

Student activity	How to support them (your role!)
Check if errors were corrected in the second play session. Check if words and phrases translated from Japanese were used. Check if words and phrases collected from YouTube were used. Complete a self-evaluation form.	- Instruct students that they are looking for new errors AND checking whether their previous errors have been corrected.
Introduce their game to other groups (Poster session/presentation).	- Introduce a model presentation. - Inform students that the presentation sessions will require *each student* to individually present their review of the game they played. - Circulate through the room, listening to presentations, asking questions about various games, modelling an ideal audience member, and helping presenters with language difficulties.
Complete the online report form.	- Remind students that this report is not a test and that they are free to discuss their answers with other group members.

4. Wow! Worksheets! 🤩

I have created worksheets for each stage of the framework outlined above. You can make a copy and use these worksheets in your own context.

Worksheets available here

References

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