How Academic Conversations Help to Foster Critical Thinking and Language Skills Development

Sharing by Ms. Jenny Chan and
Mr. Adam Dowler
from St. Mary's Canossian College

School Background

Band 1 Girls' Secondary School

Junior levels – streaming

- Relatively abler students are grouped together in 2 classes
- Remaining classes are split into 5 groups (Core subjects)
- To provide suitable differentiated learning materials and tasks for students of different abilities
- To provide students with various extended learning activities to broaden their experiences and widen their exposure

Student Profile

GENERALLY GOOD STANDARD OF ENGLISH AND WILLING TO LEARN ENGLISH

HIGH-FLYER PROGRAMMES FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE STRONG IN ENGLISH -> SCHOLARS' CLUB

MEMBERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO TAKE PART IN **VARIOUS ACTIVITIES INSIDE AND OUTSIDE SCHOOL.**

EXAMPLES: DIFFERENT **WRITING & SPEAKING** COMPETITIONS, **SPEECH** FESTIVAL, **DRAMA** PERFORMANCES AND CONTESTS, **RADIO PLAYS / BROADCASTING** PROGRAMMES, **ENGLISH LEARNING ACTIVITIES LED BY THE NET AND ENGLISH PREFECTS, TALKS / WORKSHOPS HOSTED BY VARIOUS ORGANISATIONS**

Why we joined the Read to Speak (R2S) project

In line with School L&T Major Concerns (2021):

- *To extend learning opportunities to **elite students** to enrich their learning experiences and increase their exposure academically and non-academically*

We joined this "Seed" project to:

Stretch students' potential further and strengthen **the junior students' oral and communication skills**

Enhance students' communication skills **through increased exposure to varied inputs**

Why we joined the R2S project (cont)

In line with one of the Departmental Concerns (2122):

*To develop and enhance **teachers' pedagogical knowledge and skills** in response to the changes in student needs and learning style*

We joined this seed project to:

solicit professional support and resources to

- prepare **Form 2 teachers** for designing R2S activities and assessment tasks
- equip teachers with the skills and pedagogies to use various online tools / platforms flexibly to design speaking tasks and facilitate students to do speaking practice /assessment

share good practices learnt with other panel members

Our R2S project focus for 2021-2022

Benefits of Academic Conversations

Focus on improving and fostering thinking skills

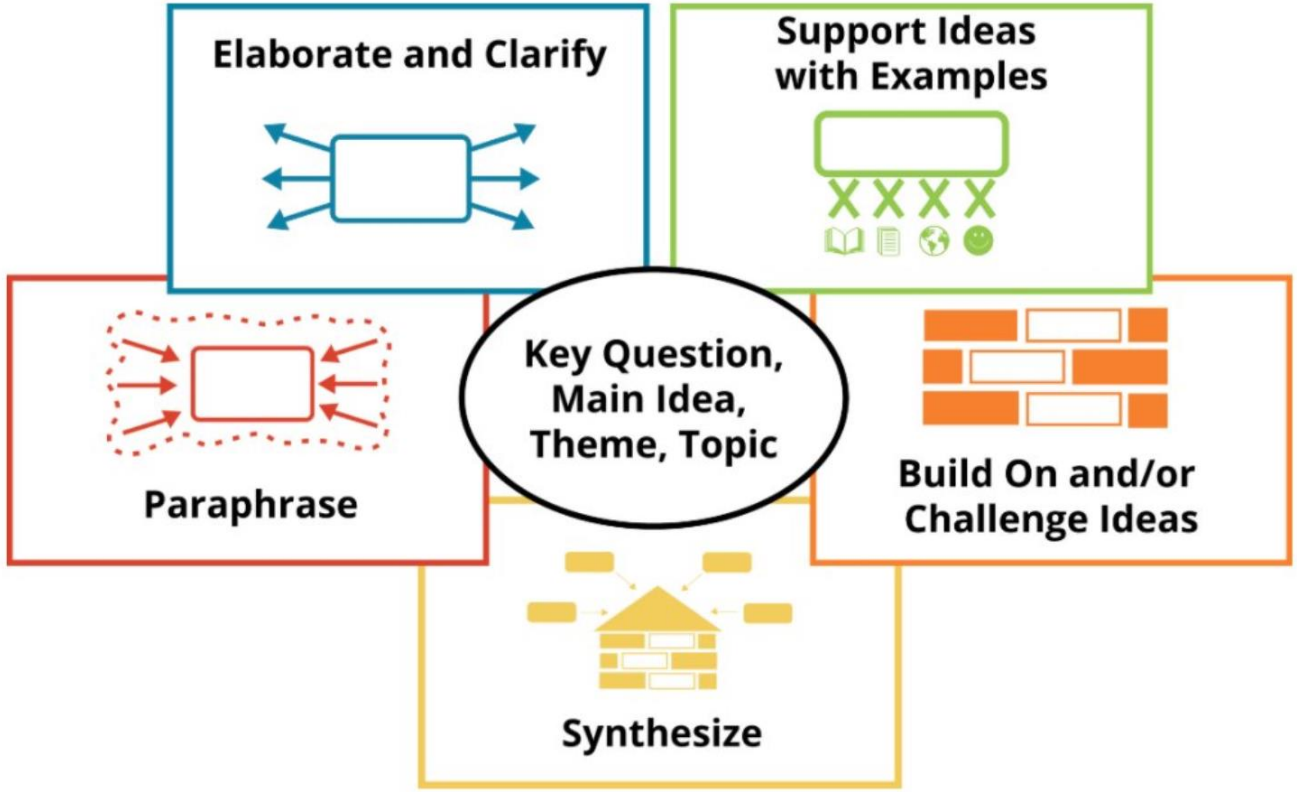
Helps promote thinking skills

- Students can learn from each other
- Questions and confusions are addressed
- Different opinions and perspectives help foster deeper understanding
- Benefit from shared knowledge and experience

Develop language and oracy skills

Helps improve language / oracy skills

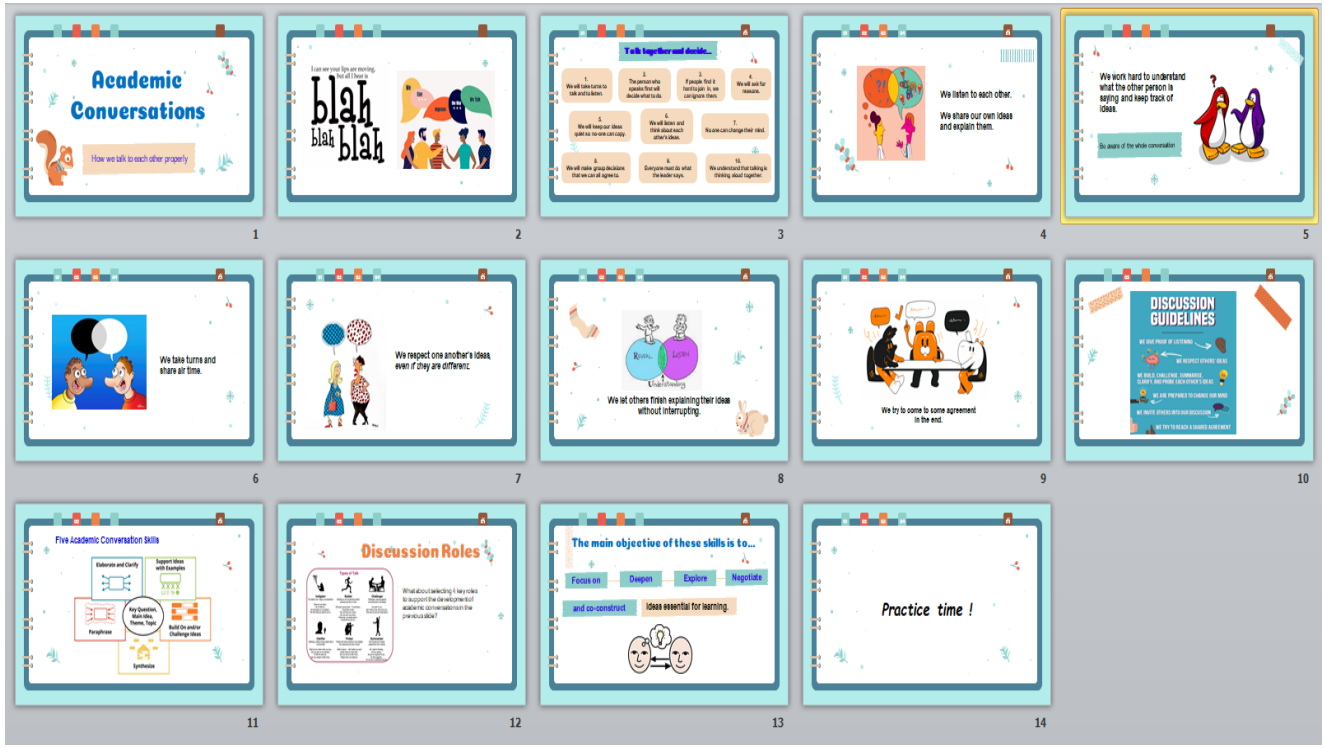
- Students gain confidence speaking with peers
- Academic conversation helps students prepare for real world settings (University etc.)
- Students are pushed linguistically to understand others and empathize with others



5 key Academic Conversation Skills

Reference: Zwiers, J., & Crawford, M. (2011). *Academic Conversations: Classroom Talk That Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understandings.* Portland, Me., Stenhouse.

Project highlight : Using multimodal texts



Introducing the concept of academic conversation in a simplified way to students

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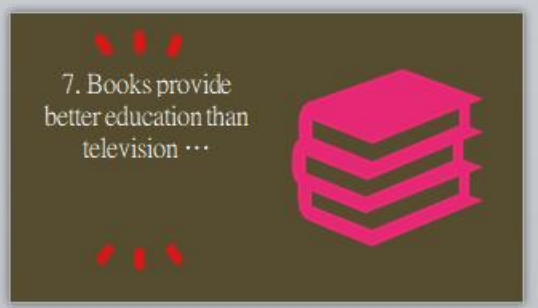

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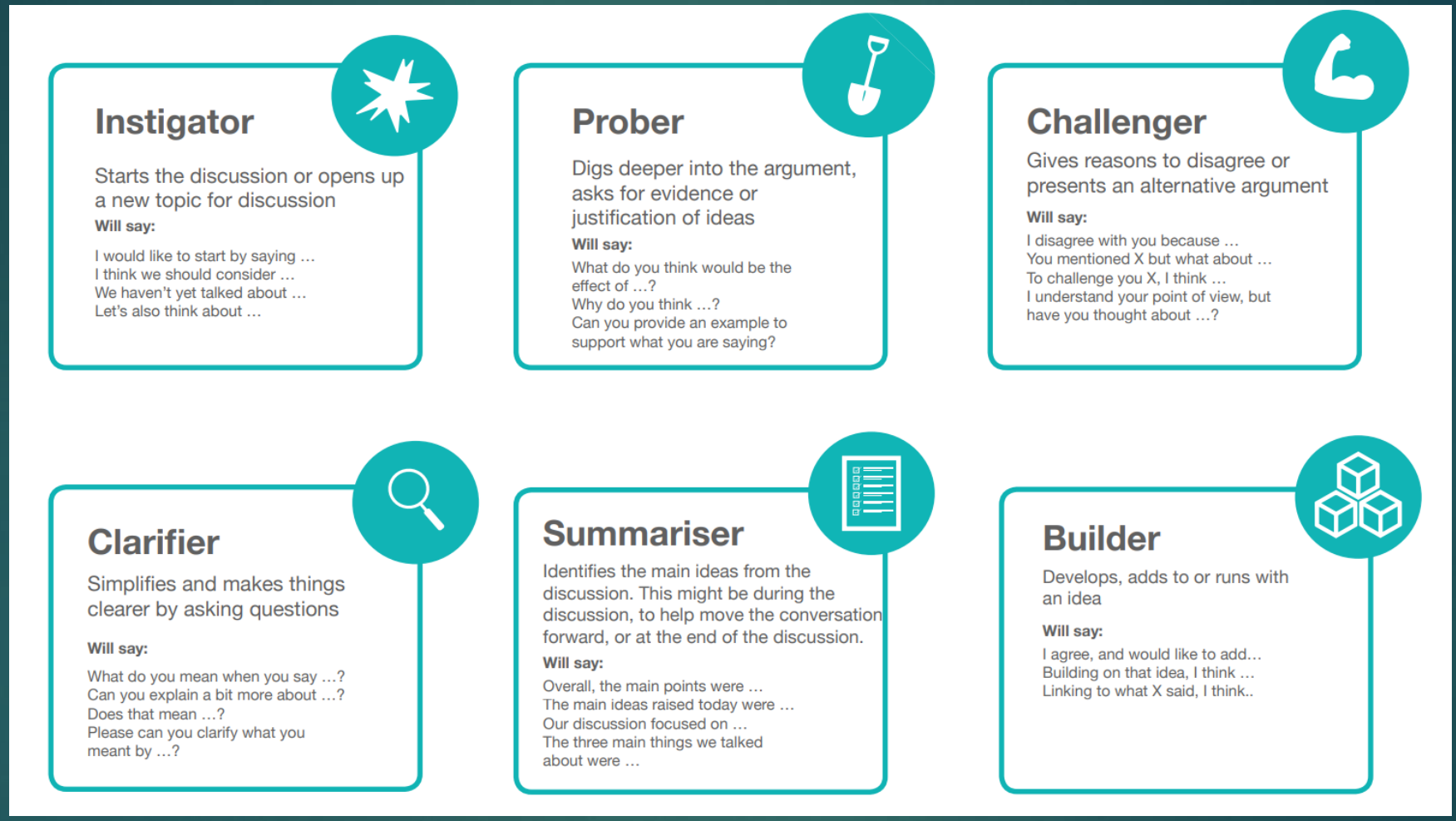
Talking points :

Useful warm up activity to engage students in meaningful discussion

Oracy Tools : Discussion Roles



Source: *How to Develop Independent Student Discussion.* Voice21 Oracy. https://voice21.org/how-to-develop-independent-student-discussion/

Oracy Tools : Concept Cartoons

Why do people travel?

What makes a place worth visiting?

We plan our itineraries around those 'must-see' tourist attractions – they are usually the iconic landmarks, for example, Statue of Liberty in NYC and Eiffel Tower in Paris.

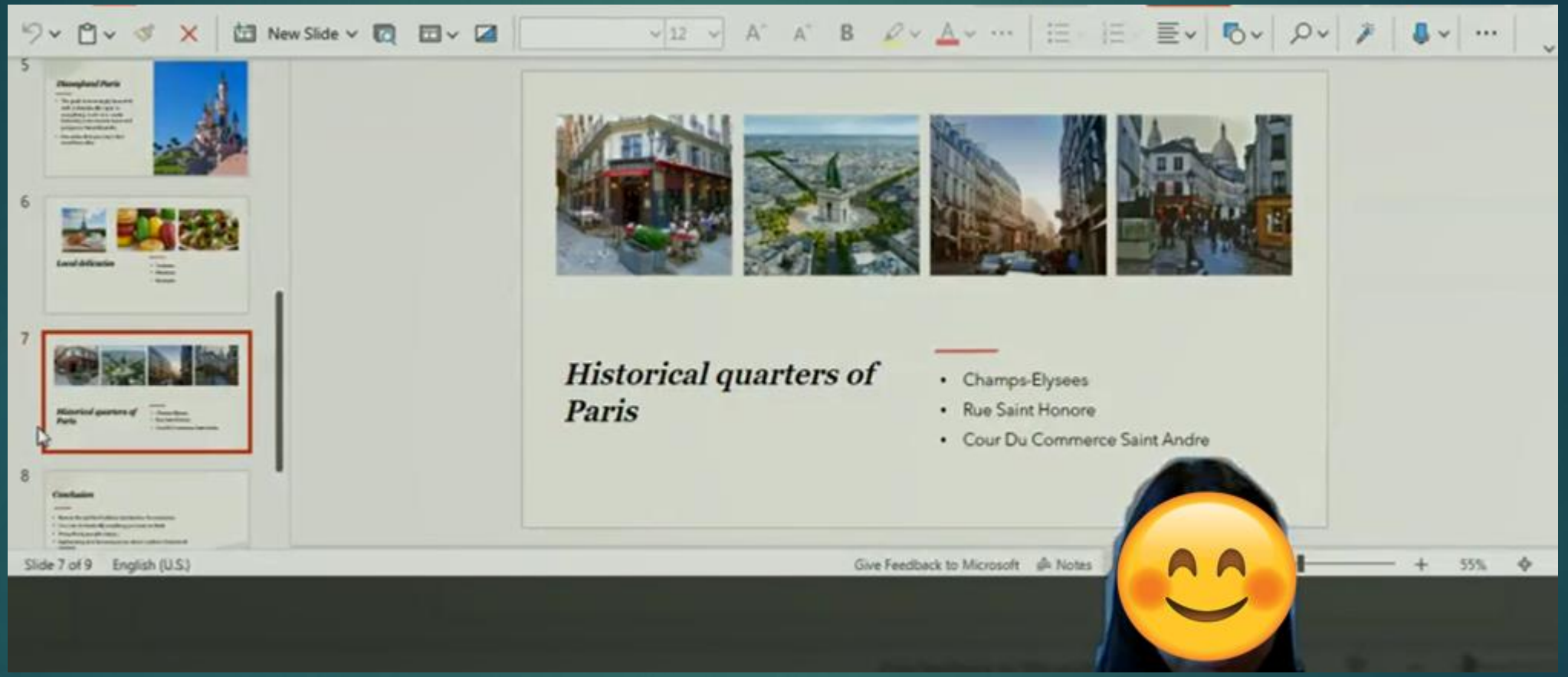
According to the statistics, people would like to learn more about other cultures when travelling to different places… you can find more information on this website: https://www.hospitality-school.com/why-people-travel/

Travelling is my passion. I have nothing against the touristy places but I would rather spend time exploring new things and experiencing different cultures. I'm also into architecture, gastronomy, natural landscape and shopping, but it's not the true beauty of travelling. I really want to interact with people; experience their culture and their ways of life. After all, it's how we make the travelling experiences count.

Discussion task based on video : Instagrammable Spots in Hong Kong

- Discussion task :
- After watching the video, decide on the top three Instagram spots to take tourists in Hong Kong. Discuss with your group members and explain your choices. Use the discussion role cards to help you and think about different reasons for, and benefits of travelling when offering the explanation.

Enrichment task : Travel to Europe


New Slide
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Historical quarters of Paris
Champs-Elysees
Rue Saint Honore
Cour Du Commerce Saint Andre
Slide 7 of 9
English (U.S.)
Give Feedback to Microsoft
Notes
55%

Reflection

- Teachers:
- Provided more creative input and modified design of learning tasks for able learners;
- Gained useful insights through professional experience sharing with the NET Section officers (e.g. pedagogies, materials, eLearning tools);
- A fruitful collaboration despite the delay in teaching schedule because of the special vacation

This year 2022-2023

- Incorporate academic conversations in short stories / readers
- Use oracy tools across different areas of the curriculum to facilitate discussions
- Extend to other Form 2 classes
  - Material and task design (students of average abilities)
  - Discussion roles and skills
  - Exposure to more text types
- Reading across the curriculum

References

Zwiers, J., & Crawford, M. (2011). *Academic Conversations: Classroom Talk That Fosters Critical Thinking and Content Understandings.* Portland, Me., Stenhouse.

How to Develop Independent Student Discussion. Voice21 Oracy.
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