

Reflections on the Use of Collaborative Action Research to Improve the *Come! Let's Chat* Game

Eunice Frances Chan Hiang Hwee, Singapore University of Social Sciences, Singapore
Sudha Mary George, Singapore University of Social Sciences, Singapore
Carol Ma Hok Ka, Singapore University of Social Sciences, Singapore

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Abstract

Come! Let's Chat (CLC) game was designed for conducting reminiscence activity with older adults. Certified *CLC* facilitators administer a set of pictures of local scenarios, many of which depict the past, to evoke older adults' memories and engage in meaningful conversations. Launched recently in Singapore, and now used in Hong Kong and Taiwan, *CLC* will soon be introduced in China, Indonesia, and India. It is timely then, to examine usable research protocols to improve the *CLC* by building on its strengths and addressing its weaknesses. This paper presents one such effort. In 2025, collaborative action research was conducted on the original Singapore version of *CLC*. Six certified *CLC* facilitators served as co-researchers across two iterative action-research cycles. In Cycle 1, they conducted sessions with the original game, and data from interviews and document review informed several refinements which were then piloted and evaluated in Cycle 2. Thematic analysis culminated in recommendations for the revision of *CLC* version 1. Grounded in this research, we share insights about the scope for periodic collaborative action research to be an integrated part of programmes such as the *CLC*. The *CLC*'s multi-agency collaboration—including trained facilitators at active-ageing centres, gerontologists in academia, and the corporate funder—is a common feature of similar programmes for older adults. Hence, we examine the potential transferability of our takeaways from this research project to other programmes for healthy ageing.

Keywords: reminiscence facilitation, collaborative action research, reminiscence-based tool, intergenerational relationships, older adults

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Introduction

Singapore is among the most rapidly ageing countries globally. According to the United Nations, a nation is classified as “ageing” when at least 7% of its population is aged 65 and above, “aged” at 14%, and “super-aged” at 21%. Singapore has reached “aged” status and is transitioning into “super aged” in 2026. By 2030, it is projected that one in four citizens will be aged 65 and above (Ministry of Health, n.d.).

Against this backdrop, the *Come! Let's Chat (CLC)* game was developed in Singapore as a structured reminiscence intervention using visual prompts grounded in local and historical contexts. Alongside with the game, a Reminiscence Facilitation Training (RFT) programme was introduced to equip facilitators with skills required to guide reminiscence sessions effectively. Since its launch in 2023, the programme has grown significantly, with over 200 facilitators trained in Singapore and additional facilitators in Taiwan and Hong Kong. Plans are underway to introduce the programme elsewhere in China, as well as in Indonesia and India.

Despite its promising reach, there were questions such as whether the game was inclusive enough given the cultural diversity in Singapore. There had been no published research examining its implementation in practice. Most importantly, facilitators' insights remained underexplored, even though they played a key role in delivering the intervention. Without a deeper understanding of their experiences and challenges, the game may not fully realise its potential to foster meaningful intergenerational reminiscence.

This study therefore sought to improve the design and delivery of the *CLC* game, generate evidence-based recommendations for facilitation and training, and contribute to the limited body of research on intergenerational, game-based reminiscence interventions. The research is guided by five key questions focusing on the enhancement of the game's design, the improvement of the pre-session preparation, the competencies required for effective facilitation, the identification of suitable participant profiles, and the improvement of post-session evaluation processes.

Methodology

This study adopted a collaborative action research (CAR) approach, a participatory methodology that emphasises iterative cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection to address real-world challenges (Adelman, 1993). CAR was particularly appropriate for this study as it focused on practice-based improvement and allowed for the active involvement of reminiscence facilitators in the research process. By positioning facilitators as co-researchers, the study ensured that the insights generated were grounded in real implementation contexts rather than conceptual evaluation (Bleicher, 2014; Mitchell et. al., 2009).

Participants were recruited through criterion-based purposive sampling. The study involved six certified reminiscence facilitators who had completed the SUSS Reminiscence Facilitation training programme, and had conducted at least ten reminiscence sessions within the preceding twelve months. These facilitators were selected not only for their experience but also for their ability to participate fully in both cycles of the research and contribute to reflective discussions. Their role as co-researchers enabled a collaborative and iterative process of programme improvements.

The research involved two cycles of CAR, each comprising the phases of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Cycle 1, the lead researcher (Eunice Frances Chan) and the participant co-researchers (the *CLC* facilitators) jointly established research goals, defined session objectives and planned facilitation strategies. The participating *CLC* facilitators then conducted reminiscence sessions using the original version of the *CLC* game. During this phase, data were collected through interviews, artefacts, documents and facilitators reflections, capturing insights into client engagement, interactions and implementation challenges (Arefian, 2022; Arefian & Nami, 2023; Atay, 2008; Cabaroglu, 2014; O’Leary, 2004; Qing-li et al., 2018; Vescio et al., 2008).

Following Cycle 1, the *CLC* facilitators and the lead researcher engaged in collective reflection to identify both strengths and areas for improvement. These reflections informed a series of modifications to the game, including the introduction of six new box design proposals, thirty-one additional visual cards, and five new open-ended questions designed to broaden discussion themes.

In the second cycle, *CLC* facilitators implemented the revised version of the game in a new round of reminiscence sessions, with at least four weeks to trial these revised materials. Data collection and reflection processes were repeated, enabling the research team to assess the effectiveness of the modifications and identify further areas for refinement. This iterative process allowed the game to evolve through continuous feedback and collaborative learning.

Data from both cycles were analysed using thematic analysis, to identify recurring patterns related to design, facilitation, and participant engagement. Themes were refined across cycles to ensure that they reflected the complexities of real-world practice.

Researcher Insights

This study prompted several insights about the *CLC* game design and the processes, as well as the value of conducting action research using the CAR approach. In this section, we share in first person several key thoughts as captured in the journal of the lead researcher, Chan.

Situated within Singapore’s multi-racial context—comprising Chinese, Malay, Indian and Other communities, with major religions including Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Taoism and Hinduism—one of the most significant reflections concerns inclusivity in the programme design (Singapore Department of Statistics, 2020).

Through the sessions, I became increasingly aware that participants engaged with visual prompts in different ways, often shaped by their cultural backgrounds and personal experiences. What I had initially assumed to be broadly relatable content did not resonate equally with all participants. This prompted me to reconsider the idea of a universally applicable intervention and recognise that inclusivity cannot be assumed—it must be intentionally and thoughtfully embedded. This reflection has highlighted the importance of designing with, rather than for, diverse groups, ensuring that representation is meaningful and contextually relevant.

Another key reflection relates to the role of facilitation. I came to understand that the success of the game was not solely dependent on its design, but significantly influenced by how it was facilitated. Observing and engaging in sessions made me more aware of the importance of creating a psychologically safe environment, especially when participants shared personal or emotionally charged memories. Some prompts, particularly those connected with historical

events, evoked strong emotional responses, and I realized the need for facilitators to be equipped with sensitivity and appropriate skills to navigate such moments. This experience reshaped my perception of the game—from being a structured activity to a relational experience shaped by the interactions between participants, facilitators, and materials.

I also reflected on the complexity of the co-creation process within CAR. Rather than following a straightforward or linear path, the process was dynamic and at times challenging, requiring continuous reflection, negotiation, and adaptation. This challenged my initial expectations and pushed me to become more open to uncertainty and change. Over time, my role shifted from that of a developer focused on outcomes to a listener and facilitator of collective learning. This shift deepened my awareness of issues such as identity, representation, and inclusivity, and emphasized the importance of remaining responsive to feedback throughout the process.

Finally, the iterative nature of the research process allowed me to reflect on the value of ongoing refinement. Observing improvements in later cycles—such as greater participant engagement, smoother conversations, and increased facilitator confidence—reinforced my understanding that meaningful practice develops over time through reflection and adaptation. These experiences have strengthened my appreciation of CAR as a reflective, evolving approach to developing practice-based interventions.

Concluding Thoughts

The findings of this study highlight the importance of viewing reminiscence interventions as dynamic and context-dependent rather than static tools. The effectiveness of such interventions depends not only on their design, but also on the relational and environmental contexts in which they are carried out.

The study underscores the need for intentional inclusivity in programme design, particularly in multicultural settings. It also reinforces the central role of facilitators in shaping participant experiences and outcomes. By foregrounding practitioner insights, the study contributes to a more grounded understanding of intervention success.

CAR proved to be a valuable methodological approach, enabling real-time improvement and fostering a sense of shared ownership of the study with the participant co-researchers. It provided a framework for integrating reflection and practice, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Looking Forward

This study is limited by its small sample size. In addition, this action research did not directly capture the experiences of the older adult clients who played the game. We hope future research will be done with greater participation of programme stakeholder, including clients as co-researchers.

While this action research met its purpose of improving *CLC* programme, future studies could investigate *CLC* participant outcomes for both older adults and younger game facilitators in intergenerational settings. Also, as the *CLC* programme is implemented in other Asian countries. There is also a need to explore its adaptation across different cultural contexts. As such, we see the *CLC* game as a continuously evolving tool, supported by ongoing feedback and collaboration.

This study demonstrates the CAR provides a structured yet adaptable framework for improving community-based interventions. The findings highlight the importance of inclusivity, facilitation, and continuous adaptation in the design and delivery of reminiscence-based programmes.

Ultimately, the study underscores that meaningful interventions are not static products but evolving practices shaped through listening, reflection and collaboration. As ageing populations continue to grow, such approaches will be essential in developing responsive and sustainable programmes that support the well-being of older adults.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, ChatGPT was used to refine sentence structure, improve clarity and tone, and suggest alternative vocabulary, and the Scribbr Citation Generation for APA 7 alignment for citations and references. The authors reviewed and edited all content and takes full responsibility for the final work.

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