WSA-EC PLC Project: Secondary 1 History

Observed Problem and Project Focus

Secondary 1 student responses from Common Test 1 revealed that many of them were unable to make valid inferences in the source-based section of the History paper. Students either lifted information from a source or used grammatically-inappropriate expressions in their responses.

2 Follow-up analysis of this problem further revealed that while students understood what was meant by the command word "infer", they lacked knowledge of the appropriate adjectives for expressing valid inferences. Commonly understood as "describing words", adjectives are useful in helping students describe evidence from a source, which is key to articulating a successful inference.

3 The Humanities Department decided to focus on helping students acquire knowledge of relevant adjectives (i.e. content vocabulary) which can be used to describe people/events frequently encountered in historical sources.

Lesson Study and Intervention Strategy

4 A typical approach often used to address the aforementioned problem would be to provide students with teacher-curated adjective lists for them to memorise and apply. However, we felt that a superior method might be to teach students *how* to generate these lists on their own, and demonstrate how to link these adjectives to pieces of evidence in a given source.

5 Our proposed intervention strategy hence centred on modelling aloud the thinking processes involved in generating adjectives to the students, using the learning tool, Word Splash. A Word Splash is a collection of key terms/concepts associated with a central idea.

6 To ascertain the effectiveness of our proposed strategy before implementation across the entire Secondary 1 cohort, we piloted it in a Secondary 1 Express class and used the Lesson Study teaching improvement process to guide our lesson design and evaluation.

7 The lesson took the following form:

(a) The teacher modelled how to generate adjectives using Word Splash.
(b) In groups, students practiced generating adjectives to describe an Emperor, with teacher guidance.

(c) The teacher issued students a source about the Chinese Emperor, Qin Shi Huang, and asked them to make inferences about Emperor Qin.

(d) In groups, students attempted to match the adjectives they generated earlier to evidence they picked out from the source.

(e) In groups, students presented their answers to the class, with the teacher affirming responses and correcting misconceptions.

Results

8   Students were largely able to generate appropriate adjectives in their groups. They were also largely able to match the adjectives generated to relevant evidence in the source.

9   A comparison of the Common Test 1 results with the Mid-Year Examination results showed a marked improvement (from 12 to 25, out of 30) in the number of students who were able to make a valid inference.

Conclusion, Challenges and Solutions

10   Teaching students how to generate appropriate vocabulary to describe key historical events/people can be an effective strategy to help them make successful inferences.

11   As with most collaborative learning lessons involving pen-and-paper, the butcher sheets which students used to work on were kept by the teacher at the end of the lesson. Future iterations of this lesson can leverage ICT (Wordle) to encourage students to collaborate offline on similar activities, and for easy collation and retrieval.

12   Generally, students still lacked the necessary self-direction to generate adjective lists on their own. To better scaffold this process, the Humanities Department is working to provide students with a list of topical categories (i.e. economic conditions, living conditions) which students are commonly asked to infer about in History.

13   For further clarifications, please feel free to contact Mr Puah You Kai at puah_you_kai@moe.edu.sg.

Puah You Kai, Sembawang Secondary School, 2014