Title: Assessment Through Evaluating Sources in Social Studies

Author: Lim Shok Hoon

Co-Author: Chew Chih Hsien Bryden

Affiliation: Raffles Girls’ School (Secondary)

Email: shokhoon.lim@rgs.edu.sg

bryden.chew@rgs.edu.sg

Abstract:

The Article Review as an alternative mode of assessment, enables students to apply disciplinary concepts in evaluating perspectives contained in sources. They evaluate the usefulness of such sources in contributing to understanding of an issue and in formulating perspectives. They synthesise different sources in arriving at a personal perspective and resolve different points-of-views. This Presentation provides an assessment mode which builds on the students’ skills of essay-writing and develops their skills in evaluating perspectives on issues by analysing complex sources.

Assessment Through Evaluating Sources in Social Studies

Assessment of Social Studies in RGS

The primary purpose of assessment is to enable students to develop their potential and demonstrate their ability at that point of time. Assessment is carried out as assessment for learning (formative) and assessment of learning (summative). It is also an assessment of conceptual understanding as opposed to content retention; of systemic skill application as opposed to set-piece application of fixed formulae; of critical and creative thinking.

There are various modes of assessments employed in evaluating the students’ academic performance in Social Studies. They are, for example answering an essay question; answering a source-response question and article review. In answering an essay question which is a traditional mode of assessment, students demonstrate their understanding by deploying conceptual or disciplinary understanding and select and applying information in context, discussing and analysing an issue.

Rationale for Departure from the Traditional Mode of Assessment

However, there is a need and place for differentiated and varied testing which is authentic, to expose students to infinite sources. Students will have to analyse, evaluate and synthesise sources to create and manipulate understanding of knowledge and perceptions- a feature of the modern world. In our curriculum review some years back, it was found that there was a need for greater media literacy; to emphasise on conceptual understanding of concepts from social sciences and the realisation that existing methods of testing could not capture high level analysis and skill application

Summary of Article Review as a Mode of Assessment

Hence, the introduction of an alternative assessment mode- the Article Review. The rationale for such an assessment was firstly, students were generally not so comfortable with media sources. There was a culture of rote learning and an emphasis on content meant for testing without seeing strong connections and value of the content. The approach was rather mechanical than skill application.

There is also a need for authentic and reliable testing which is pitched to the student’s abilities which must leverage on media literacy. It has to include new forms of media. In the Article Review mode of assessment, sources are given to the students to analyse and evaluate, when responding to a given question.

Assessment and Scoring

Basically, two sources are provided, Article 1 (Seen Article) and Article 2 (Unseen Article). In this model, the Unseen Article provides the unpredictability as the students get information when they least expect it and have to deal with it. For example, in an assessment on the topic of Globalisation, the question given was whether Article 1 (adapted from Economic Review, This Global Show Must Go On by Tyler Cowen, Published June 8 2008) had presented a convincing argument that the benefits of economic globalisation far exceeded the costs. Article 1 presented the benefits of globalisation and free trade, highlighting the potential for economic development. The author also acknowledged the negative impact of globalisation but felt that on a whole, the benefits outweigh the costs.

However, Article 2 (adapted from “The Overselling of Globalisation” 2005 written by Joseph E Stiglitz, a Nobel Prize winner in Economics) pointed out that there were adverse economic consequences which resulted from the failure to pay attention to non-economic issues. For example, unregulated industrialisation at the expense of environmental sustainability would result in economic costs in the long run.

In this mode of assessment, the students have to make inferences from analysing the sources

in conjunction with one another. They need to identify assertions and assumptions made within the sources while applying evidence in context to support or undermine a perspective on an issue. They need to determine what inferences are made in context and also whether these are rational. They have to examine whether the assertions and assumptions are valid or logical. In the process, students will also evaluate the impact of bias contained in sources and their impact on the usefulness of such sources in formulating points-of view.

In their response to the question and sources, students are required to support their opinions made. These opinions are to be credibly supported and evidence provided need to pertinent. They are to synthesise the sources in arriving at a personal perspective on a source’s usefulness in contributing to understanding on an issue. Also, if there are differences in points-of-view, they need to bridge or resolve these and are strongly encouraged to create new knowledge.

With the copious nature of information today, there is a need to synthesise information as it is a key skill in most job requirements. There is also a need to synthesise perspectives and opinions both within and across disciplinary areas in the academia. The skills mentioned above are listed in a scoring rubric in which the criteria are as follows:

i) Supports opinions;

ii) Reflects on points-of-view and questions assumptions;

iii) Compares and analyses information;

iv) Organises information and makes a resolution.

To score the highest mark for Criterion (i), support for student’s opinion has to be persuasive. Relevant information and detailed analysis are strategically deployed in supporting opinion.

For Criterion (ii), the student has to insightfully reflect on different points-of-view and astutely questions assumptions made by the author.

For Criterion (iii), the student has to critically compare both articles and with external information. The student is also able to explain with conviction the convergence/ contradictions between both articles.

For Criterion (iv), the student has to coherently organise information and make a convincing resolution.

Overall, the student thus, has to apply information and media literacy skills to acquire, manage and use information creatively and effectively.

In the Article Review mode of assessment, the students therefore need to apply critical thinking skills in evaluating sources of information and to draw sound generalisations and hypotheses from different sources. They have to develop well-reasoned, balanced and substantiated arguments and construct sound criteria when making an evaluation.

Using the Article Review as an alternative mode of assessment, the students initially had difficulty in identifying assumptions made within the sources, and applying evidence in context to support or undermine a point-of- view on an issue. They also found it challenging to synthesise the sources, in arriving at a personal perspective on a source’s usefulness in contributing to understanding on an issue. However, with scaffolding and guided practice,

they could gradually do so and also develop well-reasoned, balanced and substantiated arguments.

Summary of Presentation

This Presentation introduces the Article Review as an alternative mode of assessment that enables students to:

i) Applydisciplinary concepts in evaluating perspectives contained in sources,

ii) Evaluate the usefulness of such sources in contributing to understanding of an issue and in formulating perspectives,

iii) Synthesise different sources in arriving at a personal perspective and resolve different points-of-views.

It therefore provides an alternative assessment mode which builds on the students’ skills of essay-writing and develops their students’ skills in evaluating perspectives on issues by analysing complex sources.

End-of-Paper