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Continuity and Coherence: An Analysis of Cultivating the Literacy of Historical Evidence in Grade Nine from the Perspective of Junior-Senior High School Transition

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Abstract: There is a gap of thinking on the discipline between junior and senior high schools, even though they have the same conceptual orientation on historical evidence. Grade Nine review teaching is a key link; it is prone to be exam drilling, which is not conducive to the development of a whole coherent literacy. Based on the curriculum standards and theories of cognitive development, this study puts forward the concept of "Three-Tier Objectives, Three Rounds of Review, Three-Stage Classroom", and aims to realize the progressive historical source thinking in the classroom. The three aims progress from perception to multi-perspective discrimination to full argumentation. These are embedded throughout general review, themed review and mock exam review. The classroom model shifts from unpacking topics using concrete and tangible resources to diversified argumentation and then to insight elevation through reflection in the real world and a two dimensional rubric. This framework can help to join the gap between junior and senior, help to change the Grade Nine review from the simple review of knowledge to the serious cultivation of literacy, and provide feasible solutions for front-line practice.

Keywords: Historical Evidence, Junior-Senior High School Transition, Grade Nine History, Review Teaching, Progressive Thinking.

1. Introduction

Historical sources constitute the primary basis for understanding history. Identifying and rationally utilizing historical sources lies at the core methodology for history disciplines to pursue historical truth. Both the junior and senior high school curriculum standards rank historical evidence as one of the five core literacies. This unified literacy framework lays a conceptual foundation for coherent history teaching in secondary education. Meanwhile, differentiated tiered requirements for this literacy are defined for junior and senior high levels, outlining implementation directions for gradient transition teaching. Nevertheless, consistent conceptual principles have not translated into smooth cross-stage transition in classroom practice. The fundamental divergence in historical evidence teaching between junior and senior high schools lies in different tiers of thinking cultivation: junior high focuses on understanding history through credible historical sources, while senior high emphasizes collecting, organizing, discriminating, and verifying historical sources to distinguish authentic records from falsehoods.[1][2]

Grade Nine plays an important role to construct source-reading skills between junior and senior high. It must build up students' fundamental knowledge of history and their skills in reading historical sources. It should also equip them for the higher order thinking needed in senior high. The new national history textbooks explicitly state that one of the most important ways of learning history is by reading history sources. In recent years, examinations have increasingly emphasized the skills to locate the source – in particular, skills in locating evidence and skills in logical reasoning. However, teaching in the Grade Nine review classes is largely exam oriented. Historical sources are only used as material for test questions. There is little training in thinking about sources, such as considering their origins or making comparisons among sources. This way students are thinking in a linear fashion. They just take conclusions directly from sources. Hence they are not prepared to tackle the more demanding program of the senior high schools, which includes analyzing viewpoints, examining conflicting records and providing full interpretations. This further contributes to the thinking gap from junior to senior high. Considerations should also be given to textbook rules, exam trends, and actual classroom problems. In order to solve these problems, in this study, a learning theory-based teaching framework is constructed. It has three levels of review tasks, a three step classroom model and clear scoring tools. We have some examples of review lessons to demonstrate how to use the framework. These are just a sampling of the ways to make exam practice meaningful.

2. Re-evaluating Grade Nine Teaching Positioning and Transition Dilemmas

2.1. Grade Nine: The Critical Stage for Advancing Historical Evidence Literacy across Junior and Senior High

Grade Nine has unique transitional value in the developmental chain of secondary history literacy cultivation from three aspects. Chronological Dimension: Grade Nine is the final step of the junior high history learning system, so it has a pivotal position in creating a junction between junior high and senior high history learning; Disciplinary Competence Dimension: After systematic study of ancient, modern and contemporary Chinese General History in grade 7 and 8, students have already formed a complete framework of knowledge and have basic ability of perceiving history source, from which they can obtain knowledge carrier for cultivating evidence literacy; Cognitive Dimension: Compared with lower junior high, students in grade 9 show significantly greater abstract logical reasoning and critical

thinking. They have the cognitive ability to participate in moderately complex activities with historical sources.

Grade Nine, the foundation for the senior high school, is the key moment to overcome the gap in teaching and learning history sources between junior and senior high schools because the students have integrated state of complete knowledge reserves, building foundation competencies, and developing critical thinking in history learning. Suitable guidance in this phase, from argument building using one source to cross-checking using multiple sources, can remove thinking barriers to in-depth history learning throughout school stages.

2.2. Practical Dilemmas in Historical Evidence Teaching for Grade Nine

From classroom observations, teaching practice and the analysis of student sample assignment responses from regional Grade Nine history programs, four barriers to coherent development of historical evidence literacy exist in the context of high school entrance examination preparation:

First, studying for exams takes up teaching time that could be spent on advanced historical source inquiry. Grade Nine second semester students go into intensive examination cycle, during which instructional materials almost exclusively focus on examination key point sorting and standardized response training. The use of historical sources is almost exclusively used as sources for exam questions and inquiry activities with a focus on comparative analysis and discrimination of diversified historical sources are almost non-existent. In the long-term training based on the template, the students' cognition shows that the students know that “arguments must be based on historical sources” as a fundamental principle of historical learning, but they do not have much ability in the identification of historical sources and multi-source cross-checking, so there is a gap between cognition and ability.

Second, the teaching content is full consistent with the assessment requirements of the high school entrance examinations, and the teaching of the low level thinking is dominant. In recent years, the design of the test in history subjects in junior high has shifted to become more literacy-based, but the use of sources is still limited to low-level skills: grouping, getting information from the source and explanation with prior knowledge. The distinction between the two is obvious, as the tasks required in senior high school are more challenging, such as analysing the standpoint of the source, cross-referencing conflicting records and constructing a comprehensive argument. The training of instruction only focuses on the format of the questions in examinations, and teachers only provide conceptual instruction on the terms “historical sources” and “historical evidence literacy” but fail to have students go through the entire process of inquiry. Students are still constrained in reading the sources, and are not able to think argumentatively.

Third, junior and senior high history teachers have no awareness of cross stage transition and operative implementation strategy. The majority of secondary history teachers do not have a unified perspective on cultivating literacy. Grade Nine teachers focus more on improving students' scores in the exams and less on preparing students for the senior high standards in terms of historical thinking. A small number of teachers have an understanding of the importance of transition but do not have theoretical frameworks and tiered instructional tools to review lessons and are unable to regularly offer in-depth learning activities with historical sources.

Fourth, the passive learning methods over the long term lead to the fixation of the learning patterns of students, and block the transformation of their thinking. The teaching model of “teacher-centered – rote learning – rote responses” in Grades Seven and Eight made students' learning habits set. Despite the newly added “historical learning methodology” in new textbooks, students are still studying such content superficially in the form of empty slogans, and do not conduct in-depth learning. In particular, in the process of review with huge amounts of historical materials, students focus only on looking for regular answers, and cannot extract historical understandings from the materials themselves, let alone make a cognitive transformation from accepting the results of other people to constructing the interpretations of the past themselves.

3. Theoretical Framework for Transition-Oriented Cultivation of Historical Evidence Literacy in Grade Nine

3.1. Core of Transition: Hierarchical Advancement of Historical Source Thinking

Cultivating historical evidence literacy is essentially a process of acquiring historical thinking and research methodologies, rather than memorizing and replicating historical conclusions.[3] Xu Lan and Zhu Hanguo explicitly propose that the core of junior-senior high history transition lies in progressive thinking: junior high concentrates on basic interpretation of historical sources, while senior high emphasizes comprehensive utilization of historical sources.[4]This assertion constitutes the core theoretical foundation for the framework developed in this study.

Characterized by logic of historical source cognition, junior high students see historical sources as an objective record of historical facts, and only extract superficial information such as time, figures, and events so that it is characterized by passive receptive thinking in the narrative.Senior high school requires students to recognize the temporal limitations and subjective standpoints of source authors. When confronted with contradictory records, students must proactively investigate contextual origins and authorial standpoints, accomplishing a cognitive evolution of “accepting recorded history – questioning and discriminating – synthesizing and judging evidence”.

From the perspective of reasoning pathways: typical junior high training matches a single historical source to one singular conclusion, forming linear, unidirectional thinking. Senior high centers on cross-verification across multi-origin sources, requiring students to compare discrepancies among sources, evaluate source credibility, and synthesize multiple pieces of evidence to form multi-dimensional historical interpretations, which is a critical, reticulated critical reasoning process.

As a transitional stage, Grade Nine bears the dual educational mission of consolidating junior high foundational source interpretation skills while scaffolding advanced comprehensive source analysis thinking for senior high, establishing gradient transitional scaffolding between superficial source comprehension and in-depth source argumentation.

3.2. Core Theoretical Foundations for Transition Cultivation and Adaptive Interpretation

3.2.1. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development Theory

Grade Nine students' current developmental level enables independent extraction of information from single historical sources, while their potential developmental level encompasses autonomous comparison of diversified sources and discrimination of contradictory records. Teachers' core responsibility is to construct tiered instructional scaffolding, designing historical source inquiry tasks slightly exceeding students' current capabilities yet achievable with guided support. Gradient tasks drive continuous advancement in students' historical evidence proficiency, directly underpinning the overall design of the three-tier literacy objectives and three rounds of tiered review outlined in this paper.

3.2.2. Ausubel's Subsumption Theory of Cognition

Students' accumulated experience of perceiving sources and extracting information from Grades Seven and Eight forms the original cognitive foundation for subsuming advanced source discrimination skills. Grade Nine instruction must neither repeat low-level training leading to stagnant competency nor directly impose senior high multi-source cross-verification standards triggering cognitive disconnection. Transitional tasks must be inserted between single-source interpretation and multi-source argumentation, allowing advanced evidence-based methodologies to be integrated into pre-existing cognitive structures and enabling spiraling growth of competencies.

3.3. Three Tiered Cultivation Objectives for Grade Nine Transition Teaching

Based on the laws of student cognitive growth and the curriculum standards, three-layered curriculum cultivation goals are set, and the behavior mark of the student's observable competencies in each layer is set:

Basic Tier (Minimum Benchmark for All Students): Interpret written, pictorial and physical sources with proficiency; retrieve information from basic sources accurately; identify basic types of sources; undertake basic evaluation of the credibility of basic sources; consolidate key historical source skills needed at compulsory education level.

Progressive Tier (Core Transition Objective): Develop awareness of comparative discrimination from diversified historical sources, identify contradiction and discrepancy of historical records from different sources, analyze the root cause of interpretational differences based on the author of the source and the background of the historical event, and abandon blind dependence on single-source records; meet the basic requirements for source discrimination in senior high school.

Extended Tier (Advanced Objective for High-Achieving Students): Make detailed argumentation from sets of conflicting historical sources; synthesise sources of historical evidence for independent interpretations; make detailed arguments from historical sources and analysis; provide cognitive scaffolding for extended essay writing in senior high history coursework.

The three tiers progress sequentially and mutually reinforce one another, anchoring basic historical learning competencies stipulated by compulsory education curriculum standards while benchmarking advanced senior high requirements for historical evidence literacy. They provide clear competency benchmarks informing the instructional design of the three rounds of tiered review and three-stage classroom model elaborated below.

4. Practical Pathways for Transition-Oriented Cultivation of Historical Evidence Literacy in Grade Nine

4.1. Tiered Historical Source Instructional Design Embedded within Three Rounds of Review

Cultivating historical evidence literacy relies on teacher-guided questioning and student-centered inquiry to drive instruction.[5]Centered on the three standard rounds of Grade Nine high school entrance examination review, tiered cultivation of historical evidence literacy is fully embedded into the review workflow, forming a progressive chain of "basic perception - thematic discrimination - comprehensive argumentation".

4.1.1. First Round is General History Review: Consolidate Foundations, Prioritize Source Perception

Organize chronological general history reviews, pairing core textbook knowledge points with tangible historical sources including images, statistical data, and brief primary documents. Instructional questions focus on foundational prompts such as "what historical facts does this source contain?" to train all students in information extraction and source classification, fulfilling Basic Tier cultivation objectives.

4.1.2. Second Round is Thematic Review: Restructure Topics, Emphasize Source Discrimination

Break free from textbook chronological sequencing and integrate diversified sources of divergent origins and standpoints around core thematic units. Design comparative prompts addressing "what discrepancies exist between these records?" and "what factors generate these discrepancies?" to guide students in analyzing source standpoints and fulfill the core Progressive Tier transition objective. Taking the thematic unit "Explorations in China's Modernization" as an example, primary documents authored by Westernization Movement advocates, Reformists, and Revolutionaries are presented concurrently. Students compare divergences in national salvation proposals across groups and analyze standpoint divisions within their historical contexts.

4.1.3. Third Round is Comprehensive Mock Review: Open-Ended Tasks, Strengthen Source-Based Argumentation

Deploy comprehensive mock inquiry questions featuring open-ended source argumentation tasks, requiring students to synthesize multiple sources to formulate complete historical viewpoints and construct standardized arguments integrating evidence and conclusions. Guiding questions center on "utilize all sources to construct an argument supporting your viewpoint," benchmarking senior high comprehensive argumentation competencies and fulfilling Extended Tier cultivation objectives.

Each round of review carries distinct instructional priorities. Gradient questioning drives students to independently engage in source comprehension, comparative discrimination, and comprehensive argumentation, sequentially delivering the

three tiered cultivation objectives and enabling staged advancement of historical evidence literacy.

4.2. Three-Stage Progressive Classroom Implementation Model for Single Review Lessons

Drawing on instructional practice, this study develops a three-phase teaching workflow tailored to Grade Nine review lessons: "unpacking topics via tangible historical sources - conducting argumentation with diversified historical sources - elevating insights through real-world reflection". A complete review lesson case on The Two Industrial Revolutions illustrates implementation.

Phase One: Unpack Topics via Tangible Historical Sources, Activate Prior Cognition

Class openings utilize intuitive tangible sources including images and statistical datasets to rapidly construct historical contexts and activate students' existing general history knowledge. For the unit "The Two Industrial Revolutions," visual materials display core inventions: Watt's improved steam engine, Stephenson's steam locomotive, Edison's electric light, and Karl Benz's automobile. Supplementary datasets track industrial output shifts across Britain and major European and American nations from the 18th to 19th centuries, alongside statistical charts of global urbanization. These materials intuitively illustrate technological innovations and surging productivity characteristic of each industrial revolution, clearly distinguishing their chronological contexts and core transformations, laying robust contextual and knowledge foundations for subsequent in-depth source inquiry and comparative analysis.

Phase Two: Conduct Argumentation with Diversified Historical Sources, Drive Progressive Thinking

Integrate multi-standpoint, multi-type source sets and design gradient question chains to sequentially guide students through information extraction, cross-source comparison, and comprehensive judgment. This lesson supplements four categories of materials: excerpts documenting the transition from manual manufactories to machine production, inventories and application records of scientific and technological breakthroughs during the two industrial revolutions, accounts of environmental pollution and wealth disparity stemming from industrialization, and dialectical evaluations of the Industrial Revolution from modern historical scholarship. Tiered guiding questions progress as follows: (1) What transformations and impacts of the two Industrial Revolutions are documented in each source? (2) Comparing source data from both revolutions, what core discrepancies exist in power sources, scientific and technological sophistication, industrial structure, and spheres of influence? (3) Synthesizing all sources, how can we deliver a dialectical, holistic evaluation of the historical impacts and temporal limitations of the two Industrial Revolutions? Layered questioning delivers targeted training in multi-source cross-verification, comparative discrimination, and dialectical evaluation, advancing students' historical evidence and comparative reasoning capacities.

Phase Three: Elevate Insights through Real-World Reflection, Transfer Evidence-Based Thinking

Historical understandings derived from source inquiry are moderately connected to contemporary real-world issues including modern technological revolutions and industrial upgrading. Instruction prioritizes training students to transfer historical evidence analysis methodologies to new contexts, avoiding superficial emotional value commentary. For this lesson, students draw on historical lessons from the Industrial Revolutions-technological progress drives social advancement yet generates social and ecological crises-to deliberate over governance logic balancing contemporary technological innovation, industrial upgrading, and green development. Students conduct dialectical assessments of the benefits and drawbacks of technological advancement, emphasizing cross-context transfer of evidence-based analysis and dialectical evaluation methodologies. This avoids overgeneralized ideological sublimation disconnected from sources and historical facts, achieving deep integration of historical thinking and contemporary cognition.

The three-stage classroom model adapts to the unique instructional context of Grade Nine exam review, overcoming drawbacks of conventional review lessons that overemphasize exam preparation and memorization while neglecting literacy and critical thinking. It constructs a logically closed, sequentially layered historical inquiry classroom system. Tangible historical sources lower entry barriers for diverse student cohorts and consolidate universal foundational source interpretation skills; inquiry into conflicting diversified sources dismantles students' linear exam-response thinking and fosters reticulated dialectical reasoning; cross-temporal contextual transfer facilitates internalized application of evidence-based methodologies. The complete workflow effectively mitigates cross-stage barriers to historical literacy cultivation, furnishing standardized, operable classroom implementation references to shift Grade Nine history review from exam drilling to coherent literacy cultivation.

4.3. Restructuring a Process-Oriented Assessment System Aligned with Cross-Stage Transition

Classroom teaching and classroom evaluation are interdependent;[6]To address the limitations of summative assessment based on a single examination, the use of a student-centred evaluation approach is needed along with the use of process-oriented formative assessment and a mixed model of differentiated task assessment and a standard two-dimensional analytic assessment rubric.

4.3.1. Shift from Singular Outcome Assessment to Holistic Process Assessment

Traditional source-based exam questions give marks only for the final conclusion without taking into account the argumentative process. Transition-oriented assessment includes three types of criteria that are assessed concurrently: (1) does the student compare multiple sources, (2) does the student support conclusions with evidence from sources, and (3) is their argumentative logic complete and coherent, adequately documenting the full range of student thinking in the process of historical source inquiry.

4.3.2. Design Tiered Historical Source Inquiry Tasks for Differentiated Learning

Three levels of gradient tasks are designed for the three cultivation goals for the same instructional themes: basic tasks involve extracting information from one source; progressive tasks involve comparing inconsistencies between two sources; extended tasks involve synthesizing multiple sets of sources to build complete arguments. This design helps to cater for foundational training for less able students and extension for more able students according to the Zone of

Proximal Development Theory.

4.3.3. Construct a Standardized Two-Dimensional Scoring Rubric: "Historical Source Analysis – Conclusion Reasoning"

The rubric is designed to be tightly coupled with the connotation of historical evidence literacy that presents in Compulsory Education History Curriculum Standards (2022 Revision) and focuses on two key dimensions: source interpretation and evidence-based argumentation, which has three proficiency level descriptors for classroom tasks and review exams. The entire rubric table is shown below:

Table 1. Historical Evidence Competence Assessment Form

Assessment Dimension	Core Assessment Criteria	Proficient (High Level)	Intermediate Level	Basic Level
Accuracy of Historical Source Analysis	Source identification, information extraction and interpretation	Precisely distinguishes source types; fully extracts explicit and implicit information; interpretations contain no bias	Identifies basic source types; extracts primary information with minor omitted details; interpretations align with original source intent	Struggles to classify sources; extracts fragmented, one-sided information; interpretations contain obvious misjudgments
Rationality of Conclusion Reasoning	Evidence utilization, logical deduction, integration of sources and arguments	Strictly grounds arguments in historical sources; employs multi-source cross-verification; rigorous, layered reasoning	Derives conclusions supported by sources; basic alignment between evidence and arguments; coherent logic yet lacks multi-source cross-verification	Conclusions lack source substantiation; prominent subjective conjecture; disconnection between evidence and arguments; fragmented reasoning logic
Initiative in Real-World Connection	Cross-temporal linkage, cognitive transfer, historical reflection	Independently establishes connections between history and contemporary society; develops profound, flexible transfer insights grounded in sources	Derives basic real-world revelations from historical facts; valid cross-temporal linkage yet limited critical depth	Derives basic real-world revelations from historical facts; valid cross-temporal linkage yet limited critical depth

5. Conclusion

Grade Nine represents a critical transition period, moving from simple interpretation to full use of historical evidence literacy. This study shows that source language teaching in the high school entrance exam preparation should go beyond the surface of exam teaching. Taking a junior-senior high transition point of view in setting the benchmark of advanced senior high history competency requirements can reduce the cross-stage gap in literacy cultivation.

The tiered, gradient historical source inquiry design is an effective pathway to provide transition-focused literacy cultivation for instructional implementation. Teachers can take advantage of gradient source tasks and inquiry-driven tasks so that student's proficiency in multi-source cross-verification and dialectical interpretation can be developed gradually. Assessment is regularized by complementary process-oriented assessment tools to support its guiding role and cultivate literacy of historical evidence.

Looking from a long-term educational standpoint, in addition to the cross-stage transition, Grade Nine's historical source teaching plays a role in promoting students' awareness of evidence and rational critical thinking through the evidence-based inquiry. In the context of a complex and information-rich landscape, this is an attitude of rigorous questioning and research that is an important intellectual resource for pupils' sustainable development during the compulsory school years. This is the practical application of the basic task of history education: "fostering virtue through education" in grade 9 history teaching as well as the supreme intrinsic value of history source teaching that goes beyond the exam and is dedicated to its fundamental teaching task.

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