

# Assessment for Learning in History: Maximizing Error Analysis to Bridge Students' Learning Gaps in Answering Source-Based Case Study Questions

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## Introduction

Source-Based Case Study (SBCS) is a compulsory part of the formal history assessment in Singapore. It falls under Assessment Objective 3 which requires students to “interpret and evaluate source material” (MOE, 2013). Since this is an important component in the current assessment framework, history teachers spend a significant amount of time helping students to master the requisite source-work skills. In addition, they would frequently be engaged in the task of setting and marking SBCS assignments. Some of these teachers would strive to give feedback to help students know where they stand and how they can improve. They would normally include comments and some may write copious amount of feedback. While these teachers held good intentions when writing feedback, for example, to help students improve their performance, anecdotal evidence suggests that students were likely to skim over written feedback and instead concentrate mainly on the marks and grades awarded. This action on the part of the students, however, negates the purpose of Formative Assessment (FA) “as one that is specifically meant to provide feedback on performance to improve and accelerate learning” (Sadler, 1998, p. 77).

Another issue hindering student improvement in answering SBCS questions

is their over-reliance on the teacher, especially in going through detailed explanations for each question after the marking process, and then for students to merely address the corrections by copying given answers. This situation can be described as “learning is being taught” (Watkins, 2003) where the traditional roles of the teacher as the provider of all knowledge and that of the student as the absorber of passed down knowledge play out in the context mentioned above. While doing corrections may suggest that students have comprehended their mistakes, anecdotal evidence again suggests the ineffectiveness of this approach as the recurrence of the same mistake being made by students appears very high. One reason is because most students – without being consciously aware – are just copying the model answers without ever thinking about the question again. While some students may independently re-look and try to make sense of these answers before tests and examinations, a large number of them can experience “rumination”, a state in which students get stuck on their mistakes and wander around them without learning how to find a solution (Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2014). Moreover, the copying of model answers erroneously reinforce the idea that the teacher’s answer is the only logical or correct one while discarding the possibility of other acceptable answers (which the students are not exposed to).

This article aims to share how designing a comprehensive error analysis lesson package, which was implemented at Broadrick Secondary School (BSS), can serve as a means for thinking about a student-centered approach to bridge their learning gaps in answering SBCS questions. Teachers can leverage the opportunity of maximizing error analysis methods into an Assessment for Learning (AfL) design by using marking codes, feedback, questioning, gradual release of responsibility, differentiated instruction and self-reflection to engage students in their learning.

### AfL as a way to learn

AfL or FA “is an active and intentional learning process that partners the teacher and students to continuously and systematically gather evidence of learning with the express goal of improving student achievement” (Moss & Brookhart, 2009,

p. 6).

Error analysis becomes a form of AfL when feedback, questioning, collaboration and differentiated sense-making are established into a model of learning. This type of learning follows a socio-cultural model of learning and can be considered as co-constructivist as learning takes place through interacting with others in meaningful contexts and through problem-solving activities (Watkins, 2003).

### Doing Error Analysis in the History Classroom

Figure 1 below shows how error analysis was carried out in a history classroom at BSS. It required thoughtful preparation work (as seen in the pre-lesson preparation stage) and clarity of the teacher’s role as a facilitator of learning in the lesson enactment stage.

**Figure 1. Error Analysis Lesson Stages**

Stages	Steps	Considerations
<b>(i)Pre-Lesson Preparation</b>	1. Marking and Coding	Marking codes
	2. Writing feedback on students’ answers	Hattie and Timperley’s Process and Self-Regulatory feedback
	3. Selecting suitable answer scripts	Authentic students’ answers
	4. Scaffolding questions	Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy
<b>(ii)Lesson Enactment</b>	1. Establishing Lesson Objectives	Critique, Create and Reflect Positive classroom climate
	2. Applying Gradual Release of Responsibility	Modelling of “I do”, “You do it together” and “You do it alone”
	3. Differentiating Instruction	Tiering of instructions
	4. Self-reflection	Two-pronged approach

## (i) Pre-Lesson Preparation

### 1. *Marking and coding*

Error analysis begins with marking where history teachers can leverage on marking codes which at BSS was self-created. This is similar to the marking of English Language papers where common marking codes such as “Sp” (which means spelling errors) are often used by English Language teachers. In the Humanities (History and Social Studies) department at BSS, teachers have utilised the Professional Learning Circle to come up with common marking codes such as straight underlines with double ticks which mean well-explained answers; “ATQ” which means “Address the question” and “W<sup>3</sup>T” which means “What’s wrong with this?” This is a necessary condition for AfL to take place because visual cues help students go about the process of understanding their learning strengths and areas for improvement. Marks are not written on students’ assignments as teachers focus on coding and also providing feedback. An extensive review on the effects on learning and motivation of providing three types of feedback – grades, grades and comments and comments only – found that the effects were the most positive when it was done with comments only (Butler, 1988). Students who were accustomed to receiving marks in their SBCS assignments would feel uneasy at the start but with the correct message reiterated to students to focus on the effectiveness of feedback and evaluation, such fears can be easily managed.

### 2. *Writing feedback on students’ answers*

In tests and examinations where marks must be awarded, feedback can still be done in a simple manner which allows the teacher to quickly present some pointers for students’ reflections. Hattie and Timperley

(2007) provides a helpful model of feedback which allows teachers to tap on even during the marking of tests and examinations. Their model discriminates between four levels of feedback: the task, the process, the self-regulatory, and the self-level. In my case, I would write short written feedback such as “Include the provenance for clues” (process level) and “Spot the missing element” (self-regulatory level) to provide cues to the next step of learning for my students. Lines are also deliberately drawn below such feedback to signal to my students that written responses are also expected at the identified points. Necessary space (lines) is provided by the teacher and time is also allocated in the classroom for students to respond to the feedback during error analysis. If the aim is to enable our students to regard feedback as important and to allow them to see the alignment with student-centred learning, we need to scope feedback such that this can appropriately that move their thinking forward. Comments like “Vague inference” and judgemental remarks like “Why do you write this after I have taught you so many times?!” will have a negative impact on students’ receptiveness to engaging in effective error analysis.

### 3. *Selecting suitable answer scripts*

The next step is to select suitable and authentic answer scripts that range from common problems and misconceptions to those which present a well-crafted argument. Sequencing of students’ answers play an important role for the teacher to move students’ current understanding of SBCS skills to their next level of performance. Suggested teacher’s answers can be weaved in as exemplars for students to examine and analyse. The usual copying of corrections is deliberately excluded to encourage students to develop and demonstrate their understanding.

4. *Scaffolding questions*

A series of questions are included in the error analysis template and are juxtaposed beside the suggested student's sample answer. These questions help to focus the students' attention on the sample answers

and help to scaffold their thought processes. Bloom's Revised Taxonomy is used to build progression in the questions as it serves as a useful tool to move students beyond the simple *recall*-type of questions into higher order thinking of *analysing*, *evaluating* and *creating* of own answers (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2. Example of questions using Bloom's Revised Taxonomy**

Student's Answer	My comments
<p><b>Student A :</b></p> <p>No, it does not mean that Source A is of no use as evidence about the USA involvement in the Korean War in 1950 as the Truman Doctrine shapes the way USA acts and thinks. Not only that, the Truman Doctrine was technically applied in the Korean War as the Truman Doctrine was actually one of the reasons to why there was USA involvement in the Korean War. Source A suggests that the doctrine is a policy of the United States to <u>support people who are fending off against invasions by external powers primarily through economic and financial aid. Coming from the context of the 1950s, North Korea had external powers helping them, the USSR, which threatened South Korea due to their aggression. However, just like the source, "....." (assuming evidence fully supports inference) USA got involved and supported the South Koreans by providing them financial and economic aid and also military aid later on. This is evident from, "....."(assuming evidence fully supports inference)</u></p> <p><i>This answer stops here. Should it stop here? (Teacher's comment)</i></p>	<p>[Evaluate]:</p> <p>1. Do you think ATQ was done? Why/Why not? → <u>YES. ATQ was done as the answer links the Truman Doctrine clearly to the Korean War and even explains the reason why there was involvement in the War because of the existence of the Truman Doctrine.</u></p> <p>[Create]:</p> <p>2. How can the ATQ be polished further? Take a <b>green pen/pencil</b> to revise Student A's answer</p> <p>[Explain]:</p> <p>3. Explain how the CK makes sense to the inference provided: → <u>The CK makes sense as it links the Korean War to the threats from USSR and justifies why the USA eventually got involved in the War to support the South. It is not simply a piece of general information left hanging without any link to the inference.</u></p> <p>[Create]</p> <p>4. What else is missing? → _____ _____</p>

**(ii) Lesson Enactment**

1. *Establishing Lesson Objectives*

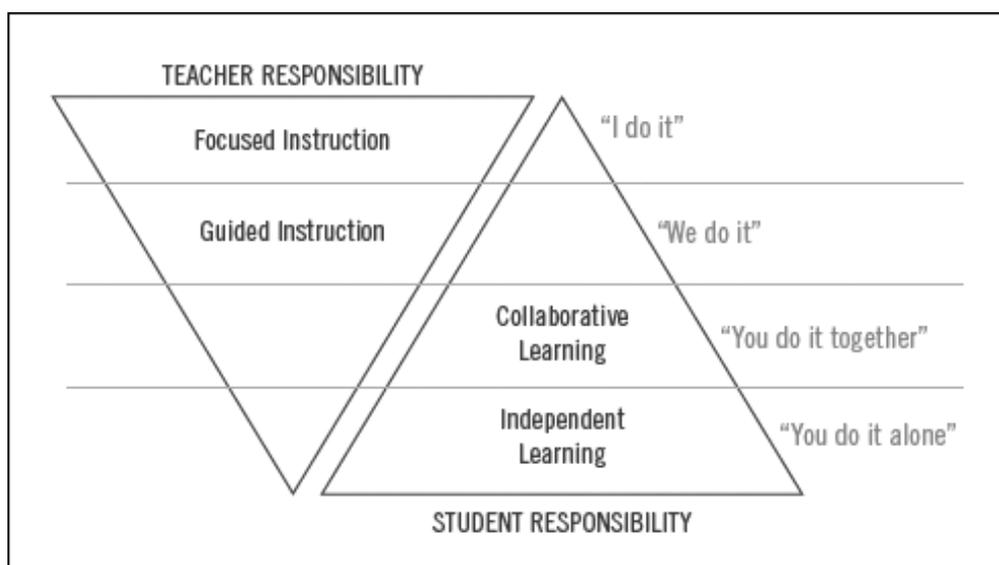
Once the pre-lesson preparation is completed, the first step in the lesson enactment stage is to establish appropriate lesson objectives with students and to state explicitly how the error analysis lesson is going to be different from a usual corrections-styled lesson. For my class, I informed them that the lesson objectives were as follows: (a) to develop the ability to critique each other’s answers, (b) to create new answers and (c) to self-reflect on their own answers. Teacher-student relationship in terms of the rapport and positive social and emotional connections are of vital importance throughout this process. Positive teacher-student relationships refer to the extent to which students perceive they are respected, supported, and valued by their teachers (Doll, Zucker and Brehm, 2004). It is vital for the teacher to lay the ground for a positive and respectful classroom climate in order to carry out an effective critiquing session. In my case, I did this by thanking the students whose answers were selected for the error analysis

lesson and was mindful of how my comments were crafted and communicated during the lesson. The bedrock of trust and respect needs to be firmly built right from the start and throughout the lesson students are reminded to be respectful when dealing with the sample answers during the analysis of the thinking behind the responses. The teacher’s own attitude and a mindful growth language is critical in fostering a positive way forward in the classroom.

2. *Applying Gradual Release of Responsibility*

The second step is applying the Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR) to facilitate active participation of students in the co-construction of knowledge (see Figure 3). For this transfer of responsibility to occur, teachers must recognize the recursive nature of learning and cycle purposefully through purpose setting and guided instruction, collaborative learning and independent experiences (Fisher and Frey, 2008). It can positively move classroom instruction from teacher-centered to collaborative work and finally to independent learning.

**Figure 3. Structure of Gradual Release of Responsibility**



In the “I do” stage, although the focus is on the teacher who is going through a comparison question and using a particular Student B’s answer, the students are also making sense of the teacher’s thought processes. Step 1 of Figure 4 shows how prompts and questions are explicitly used by the teacher to role-model the thought processes as the teacher verbally skims through Sources B and C to understand the main ideas of the sources. This is followed up by the teacher reading aloud Student B’s answer and then finally evaluating what works for the answer. Step 2 of Figure 4 shows the “You do it together” stage, where students work in small groups to develop their thinking as they collaborate to discuss and jot down points of learning on the worksheet. The responsibility is now shared

with peers as they add new ideas or build on other’s responses. The teacher spends less time talking and more time listening to what students are discussing. This is followed by the teacher facilitating whole class discussion. According to Mercer and colleagues (2004), “when students are actively involved in discussion, not only do they learn more but their general ability actually increases”. In such a scenario, all students would have the opportunity to contribute to ideas as they have had the prior chance to engage directly in the earlier small group discussion. Step 3 of Figure 4 shows the “You do it alone” stage where the individual student takes full ownership of their learning and moves away from peer collaboration to self-management when answering the questions.

**Figure 4. Teacher facilitating “I do”, “You do it together” and “You do it alone”**

Level	Answer	My comments
STEP 1	(Student B’s Answer)	<p><i>I DO stage: Teacher Models the thinking</i></p> <p><i>[Understand]</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Skim through Sources B and C in the question paper quickly. (Get the main ideas of B &amp; C)</i></li> <li>2. <i>Read the Student B’s Answer.</i></li> </ol> <p><i>[Evaluate]</i></p> <p><i>I DO stage: [4 min]</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>What works for this answer?</i></li> </ol> <p style="margin-left: 40px;"><i>(a) Examine the two inferences</i></p> <p>➔ <u>The inferences provided are a valid comparison as there is a common criteria stated and both inferences are well explained. Evidence clearly supports each inference from Source B and from Source C.</u></p>
STEP 2	(Student B’s Answer)	<p><i>[Evaluate]</i></p> <p><i>You DO it together stage: [5 min]</i></p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;"><i>(b) Examine the <u>intended outcome</u></i></p>

		<p>→ _____ _____</p>
<p><b>STEP 3</b></p>	<p>(Student C's Answer)</p>	<p><i>[Understand]</i> You DO it alone stage: [6 min]</p> <p>2. Explain what Student C was trying to do in this answer: → He/she was trying to give a .....</p> <p><i>[Evaluate]</i> 3. Do you agree with the DIFFERENCES in inferences given (portion underlined)? Why/Why not? → _____ _____</p> <p>4. Do you agree with the intended outcome? Why/Why not? → _____ _____</p>

### 3. Differentiating Instruction

Differentiated instruction can be introduced into the error analysis lesson as another way of increasing students' engagement in bridging their learning gaps. This is because not every student is ready to attempt the highest level of thinking and explanation in their answers. Differentiated instruction in the form of tiering helps the teacher to move away from the one standard approach of questioning and teaching. Since every student differs in readiness, interest, ability and needs, tiering helps to pave the way to the next level of readiness for each student. According to Wormeli (2006), tiering means primarily emphasising the adjustments we make in assessments according to students' readiness levels, not interests or learner

profiles. Differentiating the instruction demonstrates that the teacher recognizes that learning works better when the error analysis activity is adjusted to provide different tiers or stages of difficulty which will enable them to keep pace with their own learning and move onto the next level of readiness.

#### 3(a) Tiered instruction based on their results

This can be done by providing "next" tiers of sample answers for different groups of students to evaluate and point out successes in the different sample answers. The tiered instruction based on the students' current attained levels of answers can be found in Figure 5. My aim was for each student to draw the links to their next level of readiness. For instance, high needs

students (those scoring less than 4 out of 6 marks) are directed to reading and evaluating Student D’s answer (which is deemed as “mid-ability” level). Similarly, those who are considered “low needs” students (those already scoring 4 marks and above), are directed to reading and

evaluating Student E’s answer (which has been identified as the “highest level of excellence”). This simple tiered instruction enabled my students to be suitably challenged to their next differentiated readiness level without feeling a sense of de-motivation.

**Figure 5: Tiered Instruction based on their attained levels of answers**

(Suggested Student D’s Answer)	Individual Learning: Refer to Suggested Student D’s Answer if you obtained less than 4 marks.	<u>Evaluating Student D’s Answer:</u> What went well?
(Suggested Student E’s Answer)	Individual Learning: Refer to Suggested Student E’s Answer if you obtained at least 4 marks and above.	<u>Evaluating Student E’s Answer:</u> What went well?

3(b) Tiered instruction based on preference

Motivation to learning also takes place when students are interested and feel that they have a say in the construction of their learning and also have a greater say in their

choice of learning. Figure 6 shows the tiered instruction based on students’ preferences. A point to note is that a safe and conducive learning environment needs to be created for students to discuss, learn and co-create the next step of answers together.

**Figure 6. Tiered Instruction based on students’ preferences**

<b><u>Differentiated Instruction/Activity:</u></b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Skim through Student F and Student G’s answers.</li> <li>2. Decide for yourself on which activity you would like to discuss</li> <li>3. Come to a group consensus:</li> <li>4. Two persons to work on Student F’s answer.</li> <li>5. Two persons to work on Student G’s answer.</li> </ol>	
<b>Student’s Answer</b>	<b>My comments</b>
(Suggested Student F’s answer)	<i>Pair work:</i>  <i>[Understand]</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Did Student F address the question?</li> </ol>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>OR</b></p> <p>(Suggested Student G's answer)</p> <p><u>(The answer from Student G ends here. Should it end here?)</u> (Teacher's comment)</p>	<p>→ _____ _____</p> <p><i>[Evaluate]</i> 2. Do you agree with the inference given? Why/Why not?</p> <p>→ _____ _____</p> <p>3. Did the Cross-reference(s) work well? Why/Why not?</p> <p>CR to Source C</p> <p>→ _____ _____</p> <p>CR to CK</p> <p>→ _____ _____</p> <p><i>[Understand]</i> 1. Did Student G address the question?</p> <p>→ _____ _____</p> <p><i>[Evaluate]</i> 2. Do you agree with the inference given? Why/Why not?</p> <p>→ _____ _____</p> <p><i>[Create]</i> 3. Create an appropriate "ending" below:</p> <p>→ _____ _____</p>
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A significant point worth highlighting is that there is no need for high, medium and low tiers in differentiation. The differentiation in the activities shown above takes two different tiers instead of all the levels available in a typical set of SBCS levels of response marking. It not only prevents differentiation fatigue for the students but more importantly, it should be tailored to suit the expectations of the teacher. The teacher’s expectations will be the basis of a productive differentiated instruction learning environment. It is wiser to start at the standard or benchmark level because “if teachers start lower or higher than the standard performance, we tend to distort our expectations, losing sight of the learning outcomes or benchmarks for that particular skill being taught to students” (Wormeli, 2006).

#### 4. Self-reflection

After going through the various

activities, students then move on to the “Evaluating my own answer” in the self-reflection section (see Figure 7) to deepen their understanding of their own current abilities and learning gaps in each SBCS question. Two simple questions of “What went well?” and “Next Steps for me?” require students to pause, examine and evaluate the good points or strategies used in their own answers, as well as what they need to do to reach the next level of performance. A good example of an effective student’s self-reflection response would be one that reveals the ability to internalize his/her learning gaps without the teacher having to identify the mistake for the student. Additional “Free Space” (see Figure 7) is added for students to scribble, add pointers or their own comments, and even draw to create their own style of learning or key takeaways. This “Free Space” is deliberately created to address students’ common complaint of not having enough space to write.

**Figure 7. A sample of a Secondary 4 Express student’s self-reflection**

<p><b><u>Evaluating my own answer: [ 4 /5m]</u></b></p> <p><u>What went well?</u></p> <p>I was able to provide a well-explained inference that addressed the question and my evidence supports it. I also gave the intended outcome that was specific to the context of the audience.</p> <p><u>Next Steps for me?</u></p> <p>I must have relevant contextual knowledge that links back to the inference given and the context of that time.</p> <p><i>(Note: The self-regulatory feedback written on this student’s script was “Spot the missing component in your answer.”)</i></p>	<p><u>Free Space (to scribble pointers):</u></p>
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A safe learning environment can be further strengthened by inviting students to articulate the self-reflected learning points, then encouraging and affirming students of their growth mindset which has helped them in their self-assessment. Such an

ability to “look again” is key to learning in complex settings: learners must learn to monitor their performance, see their learning in context and to respond with awareness to the tasks (Boud, 2007).

### **Students' Feedback on Error Analysis Lessons**

At the end of Semester Two in 2018, a focus group of about 20 Secondary Four Express students and 13 Secondary Five Normal Academic students participated in a survey, gave feedback and shared their experiences undergoing the error analysis lessons over the course of their upper secondary school years. Selected findings based on an analysis of some of their responses are represented below:

- (a) All students agreed that one benefit was the lessons allowed them to learn from their own mistakes. They had a heightened awareness of their own learning gaps such as using general information erroneously to pass off as contextual knowledge or inferring without addressing the question. They found that they were easily able to figure out what went wrong through the self-reflection section "Next steps for me".
- (b) They also felt that they were learning more than doing normal corrections as the time was better spent on understanding, analysing, evaluating and creating answers instead of just copying answers. More significantly, they commented that because better students' answers were made available for their learning, it helped them to prepare to write better answers for the subsequent SBCS assignment and exam.
- (c) Some students also mentioned that they would like to have an error analysis lesson for the Structured-Essay Questions (SEQ) section as they liked how the error analysis package helped them to re-look at their learning gaps while affirming

their current abilities to answer the various SBCS questions. Thus, a handful of students wrote that they wanted to have a similar approach for the SEQ as well.

- (d) Generally, students agreed that they were pleased with the error analysis lessons that were designed with their learning needs in mind. One reason for them to give positive feedback is when students are freed up from the confines of the product (endless copying of corrections), they can concentrate more on the process of finding out 'where they are, where they need to go and how best to get there' (ARG 2002).

### **Implications and Considerations**

Teachers who have seen me conduct such lessons agreed that this was an authentic student-centred approach that effectively bridged students' learning gaps in answering SBCS questions. They saw that students were actively engaged in collaboration with others (through the Gradual Release of Responsibility) and had sufficient control over their own learning (through Differentiated Instruction and Self-reflection). While the term "differentiation" sparked the interest of teachers, it is also important to note that not all activities need to be differentiated. Teachers can always differentiate by giving extra time to high needs students and groups or support their learning through scaffolded questioning.

At the same time, concerns have also surfaced among fellow teachers who have tried such lessons for the first time. They noted that the lessons require teachers to do more work in both pre-lesson preparation and lesson enactment. The scarce affordance of time is a common refrain because the enactment of such lessons

typically requires about three to four periods of a 35-minute lesson. This is where teachers need to take into account the type of SBCS learning outcomes they have in mind for their students.

It is also useful for the teachers to note that not every piece of SBCS assignment or test has to be redesigned into an error analysis lesson package. But a potential shift from passive learning to active engagement can easily occur when error analysis is used in a normal class assignment or class test where the components of the SBCS questions are relatively fewer. The writing of effective feedback is more manageable for the individual teacher since the number of skills tested is fewer. The teacher can narrow down to perhaps just two selected SBCS skills to deepen students' engagement in their own learning. At the department level, teachers can work together as a level (for instance Secondary Two Express teachers) to share the load of selecting ideally-suggested answers and the sequencing of strategic questions. When teachers are clear about the learning objectives (e.g. understanding, analysis, evaluation and self-reflection as evidence of learning), they can effectively steer or maximise error analysis into one that enhances student learning in their history classrooms.

### Conclusion

The error analysis lesson package is a work in progress and it is but one way to do AfL to bridge the students' learning gaps in answering SBCS questions. The tasks that were built into the package, the questions to elicit students' thinking, the stages to move their understanding forward and the conditions required for a positive classroom climate need to be constantly tweaked to meet the different learning needs of different batches of history students.

Having introduced error analysis in BSS, moving forward, a more systematic implementation and infusion of the error analysis lesson package will be incorporated into teacher "rounds" to support the professional development of fellow teachers in my department. The concept of "rounds" is borrowed from the training model used in teaching hospitals in which interns and a teaching doctor together visit patients and review, discuss and do research relevant to each case (Prete, 1997). These teacher rounds will be an opportunity for teachers to come together in small groups to share their learning experiences in maximizing error analysis and deepening their pedagogical approaches in carrying out AfL for students. We will be embarking on this journey with the hope that such a professional learning-centered culture for teachers will create a greater shift towards a co-constructivist or socio-cultural model of student-centered learning at BSS.

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