

**RAISING PERFORMANCE IN HISTORY TEACHING WHILE IMPROVING SECONDARY STUDENTS' ESSAY WRITING SKILLS**

Yosanne Vella and Roseline Caruana, Faculty of Education, University of Malta

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**Abstract**

*This paper describes an attempt to improve secondary students' essay writing performance during history lessons. Experienced history teachers intuitively know that stimulating pedagogy will probably result in better quality student essays. However the authors of this paper wanted to see if case-study research evidence can support or question this hypothesis. It aimed to improve students' historical understanding in history lessons through focusing on the processes of essay writing, as normally it is only after writing an essay that students receive feedback in the form of a mark or grade. In the case-study the researchers wanted to create a situation where they involved students, through a range of teaching activities, in the gradual development of their essay writing before final composition. At the same time the case-study firmly kept in mind the time constraints of real classroom situations.*

*The case-study also raises the impact of dialogic teaching based on oracy, discussion, debate and cooperative problem solving with the teacher taking a central role in guiding and supporting interactive learning. The contrast was stark, between the lessons in which students passively assimilated knowledge that the teacher transmitted and the interactive lessons in which the students were challenged and played an active part in developing their ideas and historical understanding. The quality of the essays resulting from the transmission mode of pedagogy and the interactive mode supported the hypothesis that the case-study was testing: there was a major improvement in the quality of essay writing from the interactive lessons.*

**Key words**

Case study, Dialogic learning, Dialogue, Discussion and debate, Discursive pedagogy, Essay writing, History lessons, Interactive learning, Oracy, Passive learning, Pedagogy – interactive, Progression – gradual development, Secondary students' performance, Teaching activities, Transmission model of teaching.

**Introduction**

Essay writing has always been an integral part of history teaching in secondary school. It is often used as a way of assessing students' understanding of a particular aspect of the historical topic being studied. To research the link between pedagogy and essay writing and to improve the quality of essay writing, permission was granted from Malta's Education Department to carry out research with a year 9 class (13 year olds). The Head of School and the class history teacher were both willing to help in this research by allowing the researchers to carry out the history lessons in the school and in the classroom.

In all there were four lessons of 45 minutes each and the topic, which was taken from the National Curriculum and which is part of the syllabus for this class, was 'The building of Valletta, Malta's capital city'. The main objective of the lessons and the eventual titles of the essays were 'Why was Valletta built?' and 'What were the consequences of the building of Valletta?' So basically the history thinking skills the researchers needed to focus on were the concepts of cause and consequence.

Cause and consequence are two major disciplinary concepts in history. Haydn et al. noted they “are arguably the most complex of the key concepts . . . They are difficult to teach because it is easy to make assumptions about the extent of your pupils’ understanding of cause and consequence.” (Haydn et al. 2008, p.105)

Many debates have arisen over the concept of causation. “One of the major reasons for debate here is that causation is rooted in contingency and uncertainty” (Phillips, 2002, p.42). There can be many causes of an historical event. However, it is difficult to say whether one or more causes were the sole causes of the event or whether there was another or others not as significant. The teacher often chooses certain causes over others to present to the class.

However, pedagogical research in history (Counsell,2004; Hayden, 2008; Phillips, 2008) suggests that it is much better to create a learning situation where students decide to highlight which causes are more important after careful analysis of evidence. Then they need to link them together, sort them under long-term and short-term causes and then organize them according to their level of importance as causes of the event. In the case of causes Calleja (2003, p. 35) suggests that, “The learner must understand how the different causes and motives have worked together to make one event, or several events, happen.” Students find all this quite difficult, especially when it comes to linking causes together and to understanding that an event happened due to multiple causes and not just one cause. Students also tend to believe that the final cause in a sequence which precipitated the event is the most important one; “events were ‘inevitable’. It is almost as if, given a certain combination of causes, an event was ‘bound to happen’.” (Haydn et al, 2008, p.106).

A simple ‘clean’ explanation takes away the issue of doubt or uncertainty and therefore it is more comfortable for students to think in this way. Only a few students can actually differentiate between the predictability of scientific causation and the unpredictability of historical events which are contingent on the vagaries of human agency. The teacher’s remit should include the need to remind students to be sceptical because of the human factor particularly concerning conclusions that a particular event was inevitable.

If students are able to master the difference between the motives or hidden agendas and the real cause, then they are able to understand and work through the concepts of cause and consequence. Haydn et al. (2008, p.107) argue that despite the fact that every event is ‘unique’, pupils should use key words such as ‘social’, ‘political’, ‘economic’, ‘technological’ and other adjectives to help them understand and categorize causes and consequences, always, keeping in mind that these terms may be used in diverse events.

### **The survey**

The following is the format of the four lessons conducted consecutively over a period of just over a month. According to the school timetable Maltese history lessons occur once a week.

#### **Lesson 1**

##### *Introduction:*

First the researcher introduced herself to the students and explained the research she would be carrying out. (2 minutes)

Introduction: The teacher showed a picture of Valletta to the students and asked why was it built (5 minutes)

**Step 1:**

A Power point was presented to the students with possible reasons as to Why Valletta was built? The researcher explained the Power point presentation while answering any queries. (15 minutes)

**Step 2:**

After listening to the causes which led to the building of Valletta, the students were presented with a traditional format essay sheet. The sheet included the title of the essay: *Why did the Order of Saint John build the city of Valletta?* and students were asked to write the causes that led The Order of Saint John to build the city of Valletta? (around 200 words) (18 minutes)

**Why was Valletta built?**

There were several causes which led to the building of Valletta. One could mention \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

This was important because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

However, on the other hand, one must not forget that another cause was \_\_\_\_\_  
which led to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Without any doubt, there was also \_\_\_\_\_ which led to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Among others, there was \_\_\_\_\_  
this helped \_\_\_\_\_.

Another cause of the building of Valletta was \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, this cause was important because \_\_\_\_\_.

As could be observed, there were several causes which led the Order of St John and the Grand Master La Valette to build the city of Valletta.

Figure 1 Guided Writing Frame to analyse causes

*Step 3:*

The researcher collected the essay sheets and the students were thanked for their cooperation. (2 minutes)

**Lesson 2**

*Introduction:*

The researcher showed the students a picture of Valletta on the Interactive Whiteboard and asked them 'What was that place?' and 'Why do you think it was built?' (5 minutes)

*Step 1:*

After few minutes discussing their answers, the class was divided into 5 groups with 4 students each. Each group was given a set of causation cards and the question '*Why was Valletta built?*' Each group was carefully chosen so as to have a students at different levels of achievement in each group. Where possible, students were grouped as follows: two high achieving students and two low achieving students. This helped them in supporting each others' learning (5 minutes)

*Step 2:*

For the first task each group had to put the causation cards in a line according to their importance. The group members discussed each cause together and started from the most important to the least important minutes.

*Step 3:*

After each group had finished placing the cards in a sequence of importance, each cause was discussed by the class, in groups. Throughout the discussion, students from each group came out and placed the causes in the line of importance on the Interactive Whiteboard. (15 minutes)

*Step 4:*

For the second task students had to put the same causation cards in an inner or outer square, according to their importance. The causes which the students considered as 'most important' were placed in the inner square, those considered least important outside the square. (10 min.)

*Step 5:*

The teacher, together with the students, discussed the answers of each group. Also, during the discussion, students from each group placed the causes on the Interactive Whiteboard, according to what they had discussed in their group. The researcher also provided students with feedback during the discussion. (15 minutes)

*Step 6:*

All the cards were collected and the students were presented with a guided writing frame with the title '*Why was Valletta built?*' The writing frame is shown in figure 1.

**Lesson 3**

*Introduction:*

The researcher showed the students the first slide of the Power Point which was a picture of Valletta and asked students if they remembered the causes which led to the building of Valletta. (5 minutes)

*Step 1:*

A Power Point was presented to the students, this time with the possible consequences of the building of Valletta: 'What were the consequences of the building of Valletta?' In a similar way

**What were the consequences of the building of Valletta?**

The building of Valletta left several important consequences, such as \_\_\_\_\_  
This was important because \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Another consequence of the building of this city was \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ which led to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Without any doubt these effects brought about other consequences, such as \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

However, on the other hand one cannot forget that there was also \_\_\_\_\_,  
because this helped \_\_\_\_\_.

Among others, there was also \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ which led \_\_\_\_\_.

Today, Valletta is the capital city of Malta, which provides the government of Malta with an administrative centre.




Figure 2 Consequences guided writing frame

to the first lesson, the researcher read all the consequences and explained them one by one in further detail, while answering any questions. (15 minutes)

**Step 2:**

For this step of the lesson students were required to write, in a traditional essay form, the consequences of the building of Valletta. Students were presented with an essay sheet including only the title 'What were the consequences of the building of Valletta?' They were asked to fill in the sheet by writing the consequences that came about due to the building of the city of Valletta. (20 minutes, around 200 words)

**Step 3:**

The researcher collected the essay sheets and the students were thanked once again for their co-operation. (2 minutes)



#### **Lesson 4**

##### *Introduction:*

The researcher showed the students a picture of Valletta and conducted a brainstorming session of the situation in Malta after the building of Valletta. (5 minutes)

##### *Step 1:*

The class was divided in 5 groups with 4 students each. Each group was given a set of consequences cards and the question '*What were the consequences of the building of Valletta?*' (5 minutes)

##### *Step 2:*

For the first task each group had to put the consequences in sequence according to their importance. Starting from the most important consequence to the less important ones, the students discussed them together and arranged them accordingly. (10 minutes)

##### *Step 3:*

After each group finished placing the cards in the line of importance, each consequence was discussed together in class, as groups. Throughout the discussion, students from each group came out and placed the consequences in the line of importance on the Interactive Whiteboard. (15 min.)

##### *Step 4:*

For the second task students had to put the same consequence cards in the square or outside the square, according to their importance. The consequences which the students considered as 'most important' were placed them in the, while those which they considered as 'less important' placed outside the square. (10 minutes)

##### *Step 5:*

The teacher together with the students discussed the answers of each group. Also, during the discussion, students from each group placed the consequences on the Interactive Whiteboard, according to what they had discussed in their group. The researcher also provided students with feedback during the discussion. (15 minutes)

##### *Step 6:*

All the cards were collected and the students were presented with a guided writing frame with the title '*What were the consequences of the building of Valletta?*' The writing frame is shown in figure 2. (20 minutes)

##### *Step 7:*

The researcher collected the students' writing frames and they were thanked for their cooperation. (2 minutes)

#### **Analysis of students' responses**

Students' essays (total of 4 essays one produced at the end of every lesson) were marked according to prepared criteria. The marking criteria was set up so as to allocate marks for each cause and consequence mentioned. Each cause and consequence mentioned held one mark, while two marks were allotted for a detailed explanation of the cause or consequence. This was an open-marking scheme. Hence there was no maximum number of marks a student could obtain. The more detailed causes and consequences the student mentioned, the more marks were allocated.

The marks acquired for each cause mentioned in the students' essays, after lesson 1 and after lesson 2 were gathered and a graph was plotted for each cause given. The following is a table with all the causes presented by the students:

<b>Causes: Why Was Valletta Built?</b>
Fort Saint Elmo did not offer proper defence for the Grand Harbour
After the Great Siege life was different: the Order decided to stay in Malta and thus needed a good fortified city
The Order wanted to build a city which could protect two important harbours; Marsamxett and The Grand Harbour
The village of Birgu did not give them good shelter anymore
It was La Valette's wish to build a new city
The Order of St John had the money, therefore they could build this big city
The Order of St John wanted to show their greatness and economic power with this city
The Order wanted a city like Rhodes
The Order wanted to have lots of cities
The Order wanted a new city

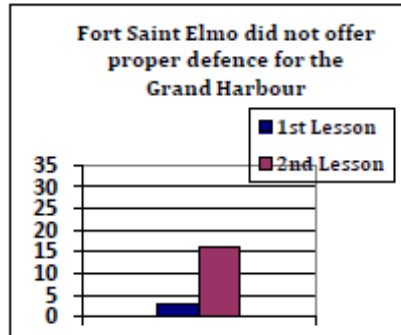
TABLE 1 All the causes mentioned in students' essays

Similarly marks acquired for each consequence mentioned in the students' essays after lesson 3 and after lesson 4 were gathered and a graph was plotted for each question. Table 2 shows all of the consequences the students. Noted:

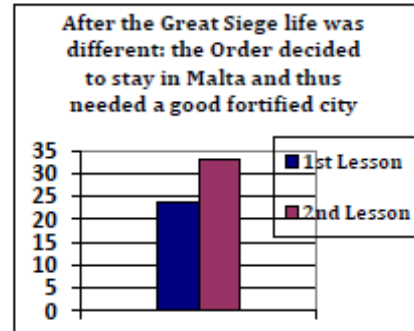
Commerce moved from Birgu to the new city
A new city equipped with all the necessities
City with the highest defence
Mdina and Birgu lost their importance
Auberges and places of great importance surviving up to today where built inside this new city
The Order of St John remained associated with the city of Valletta
A city that became the capital of Malta where you find shopping centers, bars and shops among others
The British, who were the successors of the Order, used this big city
Today, the government of Malta uses this city as an administrative centre
The Order of St John showed their economic and social power with the building of this city

TABLE 2 All the consequences mentioned in students' essays

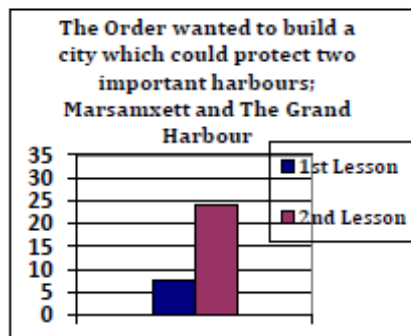
Graphs comparing 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson's essays



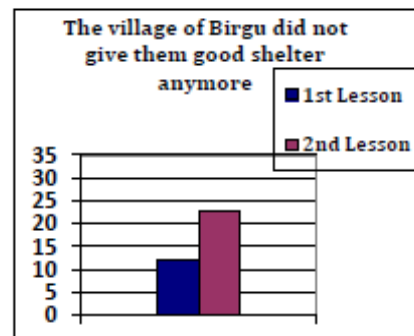
Graph 1



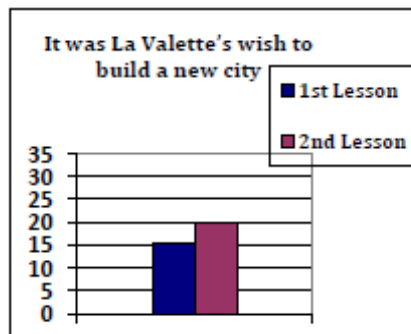
Graph 2



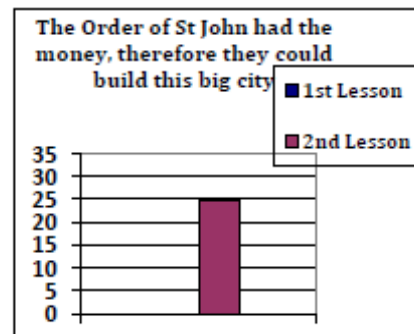
Graph 3



Graph 4



Graph 5



Graph 6

TABLES 1-6 compare students' essays after the first two lessons

### Comparing essays after lesson 1 and after lesson 2

Graphs 1-6 compare the average class marks achieved in the essays after the first lesson and the average class marks of the essays produced after the second lesson, They show a significant improvement in the average marks of the class. Table 1 shows the criteria used for marking. There is an overall improvement. The extra lesson revisiting the causes by means of interactive tasks appears to have greatly aided in getting pupils to give more causes and to accompany these with explanations.



Pupils picked up information mentioned in the Power Point and then discussed it during the tasks in the second lesson; for example 'Fort Saint Elmo was not enough to protect the Grand Harbour' which was later reproduced in their essays.

It was however common for students when writing down causes which they remembered to do so in very short sentences or phrases, sometimes even four word sentences such as: 'Saint Elmo is not enough.' This hindered them from gaining marks because it showed that they did not understand the real cause but they only remembered bits and pieces of it. On the other hand, they did use long sentences after the second lesson when they tried to link causes to each other, although still often failing to explain the causes correctly.

The 'bound to happen' reasoning Haydn (2008) talks about occurred with the cause that stated that 'After the Great Siege life was different: the Order decided to stay in Malta and thus needed a good fortified city'. Where students discussed how life had changed after the Great Siege, many students were inclined to attribute this as one of the major causes for the building of Valletta and they did this before and after all the lessons.

It is encouraging to see that some causes not mentioned at all or mentioned very briefly in the first essays started to appear in an elaborated way in the second essays. For example, this happened with the following cause: 'The Order wanted to build a city which could protect two important harbours, Marsamxett and The Grand Harbour'. In spite of this being a very important cause, students failed to explain it well, or did not mention it at all after the first lesson while was given much greater significance in the essays after the second lesson. In their first essay most students just mentioned the cause; in fact at this stage only one student added an explanation to this cause in her essay. In comparison, after the second lesson there were 9 students who elaborated this cause. Moreover, there was a difference in the language usage by some students. For example, 'On the other hand, one must not forget that another cause was that the Order of Saint John wanted to build a city which would protect the two most important harbours of Malta, those of Marsamxett and The Grand Harbour.' This student in her previous essay had not mentioned this reason at all. This would imply that, through the activities, she gained more insight and now not only mentioned it but added an explanation.

As the lessons progressed, especially during the class interactive card activities, students were directly involved in the decisions on which causes were most important and which were less important. Through discussions and debates, students reasoned the causes together and agreed as a whole group where it was best to put these. The class discussion was very important when it came to students' understanding of each cause and one could notice during the task that students were elaborating their answers by recalling what had been said in class. This was clear when students first discussed how '... the Order was afraid of being attacked again, he had to do something to protect the people ...' and wrote '... the Order feared an attack and thus they wanted a city which could protect them.'

'The village of Birgu did not give them good shelter anymore' was quite familiar to the students and they referred to it in all their essays. However, it is interesting to note that in the first essays many students were not assigned marks for this cause, not because they did not mention it, but because they did not use the correct wording or explanation. A considerable number of students described Birgu as: 'broken', 'fallen', 'not good anymore'. Using only these words, students did not succeed in explaining the cause. One student, showed that she was aware that Birgu was not needed anymore by the Order of St John but did not know or did not mention why. However, the same student in her second essay wrote, 'Another cause of the building of Valletta was that the Order realized that Birgu was not of any use to them anymore, hence they wanted a new city.'

This confirmed, yet again, the importance of involving students orally in decision-making tasks, in order to achieve complete understanding and mastering of skills. Those who mentioned it elaborated it very well, giving the full cause with further explanation. The interactive conversations and discussions held between students during the tasks facilitated mutual learning as they supported each others' understanding. The students were definitely learning from each other and evidence for this can be seen from the essay answers after lesson 2 when students often used similar words such as 'feared an attack' and 'St Elmo was heavily damaged'.

There were causes, for example, 'It was La Valette's wish to build a new city' which were very popular and appeared in all the essays after both the first and second lessons. In fact there is only a nominal difference between the marks obtained in both essays. (see graph 5) This is probably because Valletta being named after La Valette is easy to remember.

The cause which stated that 'The Order of St John had money. Therefore they could build this big city' caused much debate. During the group work there were different opinions within the groups, some students said that the Order did not have money, while others said that they did not have enough money because they requested additional funds from the Pope and other European Kings. Three out of five groups opted to place this cause between the most important and the less important. Hence, they did not agree whether it was an important cause or not. The other two groups decided that it was one of the most important causes leading to the building of Valletta. This was clearly reflected in the marks assigned where the total added up to twenty-five marks. It is interesting to note that twenty marks were assigned for an detailed cause, while the remaining five marks were assigned for mentioning only the cause. This meant that students' answers in the essay reflected their opinions expressed in the class group discussions.

The following causes, 'The Order of St John wanted to show their greatness and economic power with this city', 'The Order wanted a city like Rhodes', 'The Order wanted to have lots of cities' and 'The Order wanted a new city' were introduced in the study as possibly less important causes.

Discussions during the tasks took the form of a real debate in which students presented their opinions, while also explaining why they thought other student's reasons were wrong. The common perception among students was that the Order did not specifically build the city of Valletta to show its power or to show that it had a lot of money and as graph 6 shows this was a common student perception before the second lesson. The activities in the second lesson seem to raise the students' awareness to human motivation and hidden agendas.

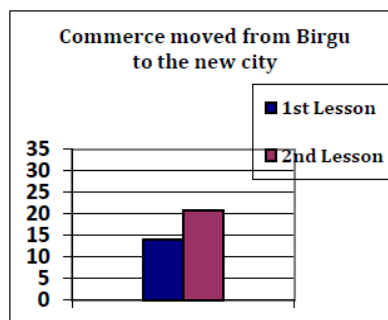
Students did not know where the city of Rhodes was and this created an atmosphere of curiosity among students in the groups. Unfortunately since they did not know anything about this city and its connection with the Order of St John, students concluded that this was not an important cause leading to the building of Valletta. Hence, every group placed this cause as the least important, in the line of importance and made sure it was touching the outer edge of the second task, which meant that it was not important as cause.

The same result was obtained in 'The Order wanted to have lots of cities' which students only obtained three marks in. During the discussions students unanimously substantiated that this was not a valid cause for the building of Valletta. Hence, the majority of students decided to exclude it from their essay.

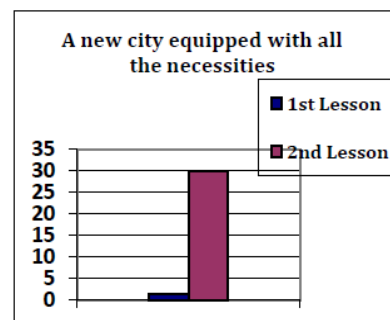
‘The Order wanted a new city’ was a cause which stimulated mixed feelings among students. This was due to the fact that some of the students linked this cause with another cause, which stated that: ‘The Order decided to stay in Malta and therefore needed a fortified city.’ They argued that since the Order wanted a fortified city then they also needed a new city according to their needs. However, during the discussion students debated among themselves that as a cause on its own it did not represent the real need of the Order. As a result, only six students mentioned it in their second essays, with no one elaborating it further.

**Comparing students essays after lesson 3 and after lesson 4**

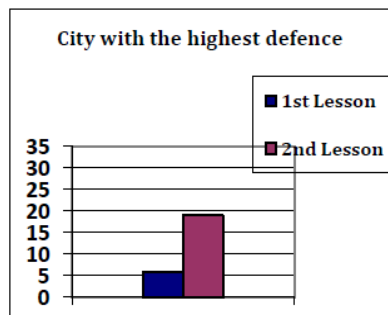
Graphs comparing 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> lesson’s essays



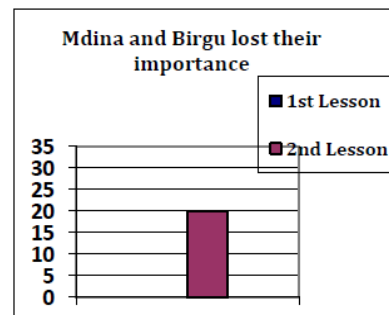
Graph 11



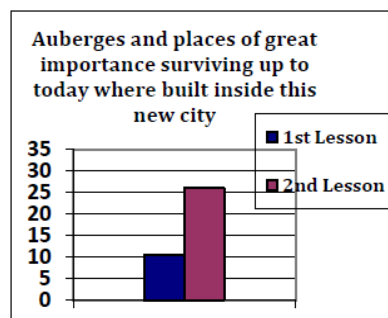
Graph 12



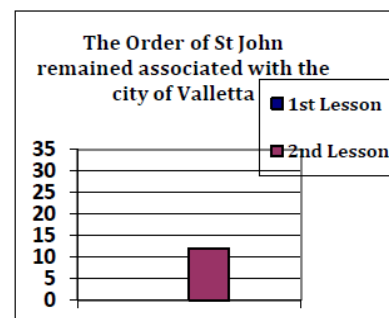
Graph 13



Graph 14



Graph 15



Graph 16

Similarly, as with the case of the causes, at the end of lesson 3 and 4 students were asked to write an essay mentioning the consequences brought about by the building of Valletta. Each consequence was mentioned, both after the third and fourth lesson according to the criteria (Table 2). The graphs comparing the average class marks achieved in the essays after the third lesson and the average class marks of the essays produced after the fourth lesson once again register an improvement in the average marks of the class. It would seem that the pedagogy used in lesson 4, similar to the pedagogy used in lesson 2, helped students to produce better essays, this time on the consequences of the building of Valletta.

In both essays students mentioned various consequences, for example, they often mentioned the moving of commerce from Birgu to the new city as one of the effects of the building of Valletta. One student elaborated further, explaining that the new city attracted people and became a hub of commerce. However, in the second essays a higher mark was assigned, due to the fact that almost all the students mentioned this consequence and also a higher number of students elaborated it further. One particular student who mentioned this consequence in both her essays described the consequence in this way: 'Among other things, there were people who went to live in the new city. This is because there they were protected through the fortification and could also find work. This in turn led the moving of commerce to the city of Valletta where people started selling and buying their products.'

The discussions which took place in class during lesson 4 involved the interactive card tasks and these provided students with opportunities to share each other's ideas regarding each consequence. These gave students a wider context of thinking and linking effects of an event with one another and this helped them to obtain much higher marks for their second essay on consequence.

The consequence of the building of Valletta was that 'the Order and the Maltese could enjoy a new city which catered to all their needs' obtained only one and a half marks in the first essay and thirty marks in the second essay. Despite being one of the most logical consequences of the building of Valletta, students failed to mention it in their first essay. On the other hand, in the second essays high scores were achieved for mentioning it and adding elaborated reasoning. The second time round students showed a higher level of understanding in their essays with such statements as 'Another consequence of the building of Valletta was that they built a new city where they had everything they needed, shops and fortification to protect them from attacks. Consequently people did not have to walk from village to village in order to buy food but they had everything catered for in one city.' Other well-argued and substantiated statements produced by the students were 'The building of Valletta brought about very important consequences, amongst which is the strong fortified city' and 'Without any doubt these effects brought about other effects, given that they wanted a fortified city to protect them from any attacks, they built a new fortified city to protect them from the enemies.' This suggested that students not only understood the consequence, but also identified and linked causes which brought about certain consequences.

Remarkably enough, the fourth consequence which stated that Birgu lost its importance, was not mentioned at all in the first essay on consequence. This reflected the lack of understanding through a mere Power Point explanation where students acted only as listeners and observers. By contrast in the second attempt the high mark assigned for this consequence was twenty. their second essays such answers as 'The building of the city of Valletta left important consequences, amongst which was the loss of importance of Birgu, this was important because it led to the building of a new fortified city, through which they could protect themselves' and 'Without any doubt these effects brought about additional consequences such as the

consequence that the importance of Birgu and Mdina started decreasing because many people moved to the new city.' These sentences indicate that the students had discussed this consequence extensively among themselves, expressing their acquired knowledge in their choice of words and elaborated answers.

The consequence that 'Auberges and places of great importance surviving up to today where built inside this new city' brought an unexpected result in the first essays on consequence. Several mentioned it in their first essays and many more in their second attempt where there was a very visible change in the words used in order to describe this consequence. During the explanation in the third lesson, one student asked the researcher what did 'bereġ' mean and the researcher explained by mentioning 'Il-Berġa ta' Kastillja' the office of the Prime Minister. This gave a reference point to the students and thus it was natural for them to write and mention the current Prime Minister in their essays instead of mentioning 'il-bereġ'. During the tasks in the fourth lesson students had the opportunity to discuss this among themselves and explain to each other what were the 'bereġ' and the rest of the important places, such as the Cathedral of St. John. This, in turn, removed students' need to mention the Prime Minister in their essays and to describe clearly the proper consequence.

One of the outcomes of lesson 4 was that students mentioned for the first time that a consequence of the building of Valletta was that the Order of St. John remained associated with this city. Students explained how the Order of St. John remained till this day associated with the city of Valletta and how the Order, especially Gran Master La Vallette, was remembered every time students visited this city.

One of the most popular consequence mentioned by all students in the first essays on consequence was that it 'became the capital of Malta where you find shops, bars and shops among others' – in their second essays there was a deeper level of understanding and analysis based upon the fourth lesson. One student's original answer was 'The city of Valletta is the capital city of Malta nowadays'; her second essay reveals more complex causal reasoning: 'However, on the other hand one cannot forget that there is the city of Valletta, which nowadays is the capital city of Malta where one can find shops which sell everything. This in turn led to the building of commercial centres.' The second answer illuminates the general level of responses to this question by the class, reflected in graph 12.

The British, who occupied Malta after the Order, had their own plans for the city of Valletta. This was clearly explained to the students during the third lessons. However only nine students reported it in their essay, with no explanation but after the fourth lesson students showed from their answers that they were well aware of who succeeded the Order, that is, the British and what buildings they made use of. This was confirmed through the graph 16.

## **Conclusion**

This study has various limitations and by far does not address all the facets of how students can achieve higher standards when writing history essays which deal with the concepts of cause and consequence. This research does not begin to address in depth the problem of 'contingency' and 'uncertainty' mentioned by Phillips (2002) which is a very important issue for causation in history. There were no students who showed during the lesson or in their essays deep understanding of the differentiation between the predictability of scientific causation and the unpredictable historical events which are manipulated by individuals.



It is also debatable how much the students were in fact actually coming up with the causes/consequences themselves. What they were actually doing was getting more involved in the selecting and discarding process of the given causes/consequences. This is very useful for it helped them to produce essay writing of a higher level but ultimately the causes/consequences were given and at no point did they come up with the causes/consequences themselves as advocated in excellent history teaching.

However, students were able to remember more of what was done during the lessons and to produce better answers. Moreover, key words found in the cards of the causes and consequences were significantly used by the students in essays. This implies that students were aware of what was written in the causes and consequences cards and made use of them. The discussions and debates among students put them in a stronger position when it came to writing of the essays. It is evident, from the graphs, that students were not able to deliver elaborate structured statements after just following the explanation of the researcher/teacher during the lesson. This traditional teacher-centred approach gives little space for students to be involved and therefore to be able to investigate their own learning.

In their second attempts they were able to mention more possible causes/consequences and more importantly to support these with reasons and explanations. This is an achievement, for it shows a significant move away from giving a mere short list of causes/consequences towards more categorising and reasoning of causes/consequence. The class activities helped produce better history understanding, and it is a good start towards helping students produce better and more meaningful essay answers.

#### **Correspondence**

Yosanne Vella

[yosanne.vella@um.edu.mt](mailto:yosanne.vella@um.edu.mt)

Rosaline Caruana

[Rosaline.caruana.10@um.edu.mt](mailto:Rosaline.caruana.10@um.edu.mt)

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