

## **PDIG Final Report 2018**

Matthew Russell & Emma-Leigh Welsh

This goal of this project discussed was to create a vertical map of skills in Social Studies. We were partially able to fulfill this goal, as outlined below.

### Project Description

The initial goal of this project was to create a model of progression of the Social Studies disciplinary skills that students employ in their competency development. We hypothesized that though the use of high impact instructional strategies we could track our students' progress through the model of progression.

The first step was to create the model of progression. We realized that creating a model of progression for numerous skills was going to be too ambitious. Instead, we settled on the skill of causation because it was one that we felt could give us a clear picture of where our students were. Causation is foundational to the development of critical thinking skills and the negotiation of different perspectives, which is relevant to all disciplines and classrooms. Exploring causation first would furthermore allow us to introduce the Secondary I students to the use and interpretation of documents within a framework that they can understand: cause and effect.

Using the work of scholars in the field of Social Studies education, we created a rubric so we could make a judgement about a student's understanding of the concept of causation. The rubric consisted of five columns that scaffold an understanding of causation from "listing" to a holistic interpretation of a range of different causes that can be ranked in importance. The rubric is student-friendly both in language and format. Rather than isolating the distinctions between two levels, it provides a fluid model for how progression can be made in regards to understanding causation. An understanding of one level is equivalent to working on the next. Students are therefore never faced with a barrier on their understanding. Progression is natural. This is especially true if a rubric such as this follows students across multiple cycles.

We created two causal tasks, one for Secondary I Geography and one for Secondary IV History. In each task students were given a number of documents from multiple sources that had different causal factors. Students were asked to write an explanation of why an event (either geographical or historical) had occurred. This provided the data upon which our progression model could be built.

### What Went Well

The ability to work collaboratively across the cycles worked well. It was beneficial to us both to learn about the contexts in which we teach and what the challenges were in both settings. We were able to extend our understanding of the disciplines of History and Geography by critically assessing the components of each program, aligning the skills to be developed and ultimately growing our knowledge of the subject-specific competencies.

This allowed us to develop a rubric for the skill of causation, a key component in both History and Geography. We constructed learning tasks that were accessible to both levels of students that we were targeting and also relevant to the course material being explored at the time.

The data that we collected was useful in situating student achievement so that we could begin to construct a picture of how students should be able to progress through Social Studies in high school.

Students also benefitted from the consistent practice with multiple source documents in anticipation of their exams.

### What Could Be Improved

It would have been beneficial to have more members on the team, as originally planned and proposed; however, Victoria was not teaching Social Studies this school year.

In applying for the project, we over-estimated the scope of such an undertaking, especially for two individuals. It is clear to us now that to build a progression model for the many skills in Social Studies (cause, consequence, change, continuity) it would require much more time.

Furthermore, we also under-estimated the time constraints put on us both. For Matthew, it was teaching the new History of Quebec and Canada program. For Emma, it was teaching new subjects across a variety of grade levels.

### Project Goals

We were unable to fulfill the goals of the project entirely; however, the work that we accomplished will be beneficial to our own practice, our colleagues and most importantly, to our students. Now that we have a working and editable rubric outline, with time the other Social Studies skills, like continuity and change, could be formatted within this same framework. This would provide students with even more consistent and transparent assessment tools.

As noted above, the project was over-ambitious in its original conceptualization and we did not appreciate the other constraints that were put upon us.

### Project Outcomes

For the students in Secondary I, we were pleasantly surprised to see that some of them demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the skill of causation; however, most of the students were only listing multiple causes and describing them. Some were beginning to develop explanations. This provides us with a powerful starting off point, as this data could help track these students throughout their Social Studies education. Determining groups for partner work related to the skill of causation is also simplified if using this data.

For the students in Secondary IV, we found very few listing causes without explaining them. These older students, as might be expected, showed stronger abilities in providing a causal explanation. A number of these students were moving into the highest levels of causal thinking where they were establishing clear links between causal factors and making judgements about the relative importance of these factors.

As such we believe that we can create a model of progression that will be beneficial to teachers for developing an understanding of the skill of causation.

### Reinvestment

We would characterize this work as a work-in-progress. As mentioned above, the rubric created for causation could certainly be formatted for any and all of the Social Studies skills if time and the number of participating members would allow. With changes being made to these curricula, it is important to establish and ensure consistency across all levels. We believe our undertaking was unique in that data was simultaneously collected from the newest cohorts to our school and from a graduation requirement class. The same rubric for the same skill was used, but with students presenting very different abilities, prior knowledge, critical thinking skills, etc.

Other teams could undertake this project; however, we would recommend looking at one Social Studies skill first, rather than attempting to conquer them all at once.