Analysing national assessment systems for washback from PISA

A KNOWLEDGE PROTOCOL

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BACKGROUND

Current literature in the fields of both assessment and policy borrowing sees the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) frequently cited as a decided influence forced change in assessment systems at the national, cross-national and intranational levels. While policy makers and researchers alike often highlight the impact of PISA in various countries, does there exist sufficient evidence to support their claims? How do we analyse national assessment systems – in particular, national assessment materials – for possible washback effects from PISA?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What elements of PISA do nations borrow?
Why have these elements been chosen?
How do nations adapt elements of PISA?
How do elements of PISA transform within each national context?

KNOWLEDGE PROTOCOL

LAYOUT

SKILLS REQUIRED

CONTENT COVERED

QUESTION TYPES

assessment analysis in five dimensions

RESOURCES

MATERIALS

THE MORPHOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE:
RECONTEXTUALISING THE DECONTEXTUALISED

METHOD

A longitudinal analysis provides the foundation for internal and external comparisons – past, present and future. Have elements of PISA been introduced over time? If so, how have these borrowed elements of PISA been translated into the vernacular of the national assessment system?

As, for example, in the CRAS framework (Hughes, Pollitt and Ahmed, 1998) which evaluates demand, analysing materials along multiple dimensions allows for thorough investigation of the relevant assessment materials.

RESULTS

A first stage of analysis has been conducted upon GCSE English materials from 2000 to 2012 and upon PISA Reading Literacy materials since the first cycle of PISA in 2000.

As seen here, both PISA and the GCSE feature tasks upon employment. The GCSE asks students to contemplate their dream job or interview talking points, and PISA asks test-takers to interpret a personnel announcement. That the GCSE requests elements of self-reflection removes the task from the environs of the office, as in PISA, and instead places focus on the identity of the student and the environs of the school.

While similarities may exist across several dimensions of PISA and the GCSE, the context of each assessment system cannot be ignored. Using the Knowledge Protocol creates insight into the context of an assessment system and, importantly, calls to question the possible context of PISA. To what extent can we regard PISA as a decontextualised tool?

PLANS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Improve and modify dimensions of the Knowledge Protocol in order to analyse assessment materials from other countries. Create a cross-national database of assessment systems to investigate for potential washback from PISA.

And, feedback would be greatly appreciated!
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REFERENCES

AQA (2000-2012) GCSE English: Question papers and mark schemes. Manchester, AQA.
Hopmann, S., Brinek, G. and Retzl, M. (eds.) PISA according to PISA. Berlin: Lit Verlag.
Dale, R. (2001) Globalisation and education: demonstrating a ‘common world educational culture’ or locating a global

Sample Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Types (by Percentage)</th>
<th>GCSE English</th>
<th>PISA Reading Literacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-15%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-30%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-45%</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-60%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-75%</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is washback?

“It is common to claim the existence of washback (the impact of a test on teaching) and to declare that tests can be powerful determiners, both positively and negatively, of what happens in classrooms.” (Wall and Alderson, 1993)

A new definition of washback?

“Current international comparisons, for instance the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), have introduced a new high-stakes phenomenon – that tests are low-stakes for the individuals taking them and for their schools but high-stakes for politicians, policy makers and governments.” (Stobart and Eggen, 2012)