

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 decidedly influential force driving 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?

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)

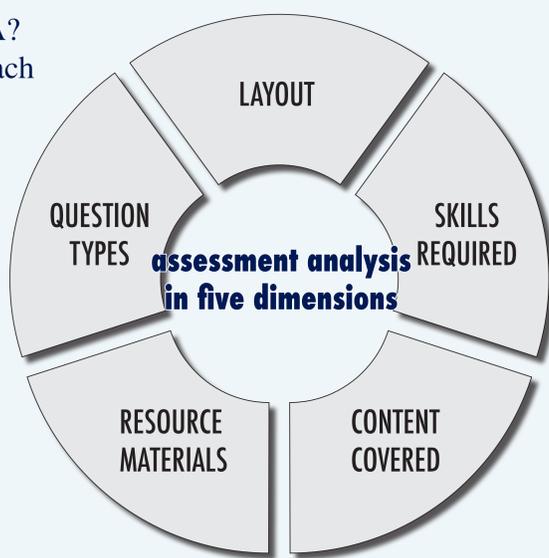
A new definition of washback?

“Current international comparisons, for instance the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), have introduced a new high-stakes phenomenon – tests that 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)

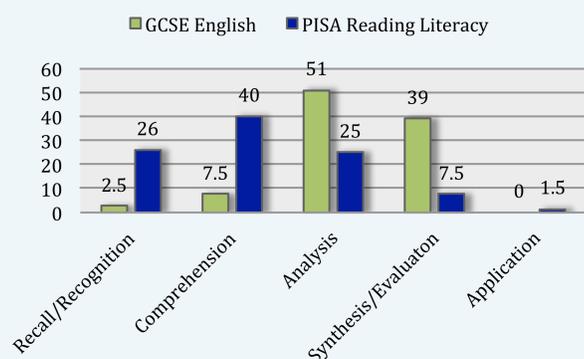
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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

KNOWLEDGE PROTOCOL



Question Types (by Percentage)



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 for demand, analysing materials along multiple dimensions allows for a thorough investigation of the relevant assessment materials.

Content Topics by Frequency

PISA	GCSE
geography social issues charity, volunteering environment: nature, natural disasters business: information delivery, retail concerns school experience health employment scientific technology legal issues: fairness, law	school conditions: welfare for students, teaching practices, skills, educational issues technology: internet, mobile phones, TV, computers, video games decisions: problems faced, mistakes made, lessons learned holidays: places, trips abroad, adventure, tourism environment: global warming, natural disasters, weather young and old: generation gap, opinions of teenagers, parent/child relationships charities, volunteering privacy identity: being yourself, independence, your experience employment for teenagers/secondary school students

Sample Matrix

Employment	AQA 2004	Edexcel 2005	Edexcel 2007	OCR 2000	PISA	
Question (Actual)	Write an article for a careers magazine... in which you give advice to other students seeking a job...	Comment on your ideal career...	How well does the leaflet achieve its purpose...?	What do you think? [Should secondary school students have part-time jobs?]	According to the announcement, where...?	List two ways...
Question (Type)	Synthesise/Evaluate	Synthesise/Evaluate	Analysis	Synthesise/Evaluate	Recall/Recognition	Analysis
Skills Required	(i) communicate clearly and imaginatively, using and adapting forms for different readers and purposes (ii) organise ideas into sentences, paragraphs and whole texts using a variety of linguistic and structural features (iii) use a range of sentence structures effectively with accurate punctuation and spelling	communicate clearly and imaginatively, using and adapting forms for different readers and purposes organise ideas into sentences, paragraphs and whole texts use a range of sentence structures effectively with accurate punctuation and spelling	evaluate how information is presented read with insight and engagement identify implications select material appropriate to purpose understand and evaluate how writers use linguistic, structural and presentational devices.	1 read with insight and engagement, making appropriate references to texts 2 evaluate how information is presented 3 follow an argument, identifying implications and recognising inconsistencies 4 understand how writers use linguistic, structural and presentational devices to achieve their effects	correctly retrieved information	
Resource Material	None	None	Leaflet about youth employment regulations in England	1. Newspaper article: "Overworked and underpaid – and only 15!" 2. "Helen wants a job", excerpt from novel	Announcement from personnel department	
Context	employment, job seeking, careers, other students, peers	employment, job seeking, dream job, career	employment, youth employment, England	employment, youth employment, England, thoughts and opinions	employment, job seeking, careers	

THE MORPHOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE: RECONTEXTUALISING THE DECONTEXTUALISED

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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Examples of washback effects from PISA	
Germany	PISA Shock! and ensuing reforms
Hungary	knowledge debates and curriculum reforms
Japan	curriculum and national testing reforms
Portugal	program reforms and teacher training implementations
Switzerland	cross-cantonal restructuring
Turkey	curriculum reform

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