

Mixed method approaches: design of authentic assessment tasks

Carla van Boxtel

Abstract:

Researchers in the field of history education investigated several approaches to assess historical thinking (e.g. Breakstone, 2014; Ercikan & Seixas, 2015; Reich, 2009; Stoel, Van Drie & Van Boxtel, 2017; Trautwein et al., 2017). In this contribution I suggest a mixed method approach for the design of authentic tasks for classroom assessment.

I present the method of a recent study aiming at the development of authentic tasks to assess upper secondary school students' causal reasoning ability in social science education. In this study we combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. We started with the design of a cognitive model defining components of the ability and underlying substantive and methodological knowledge. We defined design principles that eight teachers used to develop authentic assessment tasks (e.g. write an advise to the mayor of your town about the question how to organize the housing for refugees). To evaluate the quality of the tasks, we did a quantitative analysis of 392 student products. In this analysis we determined to what extent students' products reflected the behaviour that we defined in the cognitive model. To investigate students' perceptions (experienced authenticity, congruency with lessons, clarity, difficulty), we administered a questionnaire and conducted interviews with students. Finally, we asked teachers to write a reflection on their experiences with the task (strong points and points for improvement). This mixed method approach enabled us to draw conclusions about the validity and feasibility of the tasks and to improve the tasks.

References:

Breakstone, J. (2014). Try, try, try again: The process of designing new history assessments. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 42, 453–485.

Ercikan, K. & Seixas, P. (2015). *New directions in assessing historical thinking*. New York: Routledge.

Reich, G. A. (2009). Testing historical knowledge: Standards, multiple-choice questions and student reasoning. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 37, 3, 325-360.

Stoel, G., Van Drie, J., & Van Boxtel, C. (2017). The effects of explicit teaching of strategies, second-order concepts, and epistemological underpinnings on students' ability to reason causally in history. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 109, 3, 321-337.

Trautwein, U. et al. (2017). *Kompetenzen historischen Denkens erfassen – Konzeption, Operationalisierung und Befunde des Projekts “Historical Thinking: Competencies in History” (HiTCH)*. Münster: Waxmann.