

Assignment: Psychology and Your Assessment
IEA Civic Education assessment

Theory and research in psychology had the most influence on the design of the IEA Civic Education assessment in terms of determining what should be assessed about adolescents in civic education (the ECD-student model). Phase 1 of the study was devoted almost entirely to reaching consensus among the 28 participating countries about the nature of knowledge and skills that should be considered part of civic education. The study began with a series of meetings between national research coordinators during which a theoretical model was developed. This model was based on situated cognitive theories of Bronfenbrenner, Lave and Wenger. This model emphasizes both individual and societal level components of civic development including immediate surroundings such as family and school to more macro levels of economic, political, and cultural processes. This model was used a framework for the national case studies, in which each country assessed the status and key components of civic education in their country. The case studies were used to create *Content Guidelines for the International Test and Survey*. The outcome of the case studies and subsequent development of the test and survey reflects the strong influence of both the cognitive and situative psychology perspectives and the lingering influence of behaviorist and trait approaches.

One outcome of the case studies was agreement about a common core of topics and concepts central to knowledge in civic education. These three domains were Democracy, Democratic Institutions, and Citizenship; National Identity, Regional and International Relationships; and Social Cohesion and Diversity. The case study findings illustrated that the primary inference of interest across countries was being able to assess what students knew about democratic principles and institutions. Information about the process of knowledge construction and participation of adolescents in civil society were considered part of civic education as noted

in the Phase 1 book of case studies, “civic education should be cross-disciplinary, participative, interactive, related to life, conducted in an non-authoritarian environment, cognizant of the challenges of societal diversity and co-constructed with parents and the community (and non-government organizations) as well as school” (Torney-Purta, Schwille, & Amadeo, 1999)¹. However, these parts of civic education did not receive the degree of support that content knowledge did. Therefore, content from Domain I formed the majority of the knowledge test items. This appears to be a demonstration that only part of the cognitive perspective was considered when deciding what sort of performances could demonstrate content knowledge. Although “the cognitive view emphasizes questions about whether the students understand general principles in a domain...”(class overhead 3/19/2001), it also considers the process of knowledge construction and its practical use. The IEA assessment neglects the portion of the cognitive approach that addresses the methods and strategies that are used to during problem solving or knowledge construction. It also makes little attempt to address the role of prior knowledge or a model of progression in learning.

The inclusion of the survey portion of the study is a reflection of the influence of the situative model. Although the study did not actually observe adolescents civic action situated in a community of practice, it did attempt to indirectly gauge the frequency with which adolescents were participating in their civic communities or the “degree to which one can participate in a form of practice” (Pellegrino et al., p. 63). Questions were asked about how often students participated in activities such student government, and about how likely they were to engage in such activities as voting, running for office, or protesting in the future.

¹ Torney-Purta, J., Schwille, J. & Amadeo, J. (1999). Civic education across countries: Twenty-four national case studies from the IEA Civic Education Study. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: IEA.

Practical constraints of the study restricted the influence of cognitive and situative psychology on the development of an evidence model. So although the case studies during Phase 1 established a student model based on cognitive and situative perspectives these views were not the only ones that determined what would be observed nor the tasks designed to elicit such evidence. Although there are many examples of behaviors that can be assessed to measure practice (from the situative perspective) or knowledge construction (from the cognitive construction) these potential behaviors or performances were never seriously considered for the IEA study. For example the MSPAP social studies test uses document based questions with open-ended responses to measure student application of content knowledge. From the inception of the IEA project the coordinators recognized the budgetary constraints of attempting to assess such tasks across countries.

The test and survey construction relied heavily on previously constructed instruments and techniques. Consequently despite the consensus about the importance of the cognitive and situative perspectives, the study reflects some aspects of differential and behaviorist traditions in the behaviors it measures. Early research in the area of political socialization constructed a model where attitudes were considered to be stable characteristics. Once established in adolescence, it was believed that attitudes persisted into adulthood. It is based on this perspective that questions of attitudes were framed. For example, rather than consider the influence of economic context on attitudes towards immigrants, questions about rights for immigrants were asked without such contextual influences. According to the behaviorist tradition, civic education was conceptualized as the transmission of important principles of democracy, in a linear progression of complexity. The emphasis in the study of constructing a knowledge test with certain key principles of democracy highlights this perspective.

So, although the assessment design of the IEA Civic Education Study emphasized the perspective of the situative and cognitive perspectives when determining the nature of skill and knowledge it wished to measure, the complexity of these perspectives was lost during the development of the evidence model. The behaviors that were considered to measure civic education fell back on behaviorist and differential psychology theories highlighting a progression of content knowledge and stable attitudes. The tasks constructed ended up reflecting a combination of all four traditions.