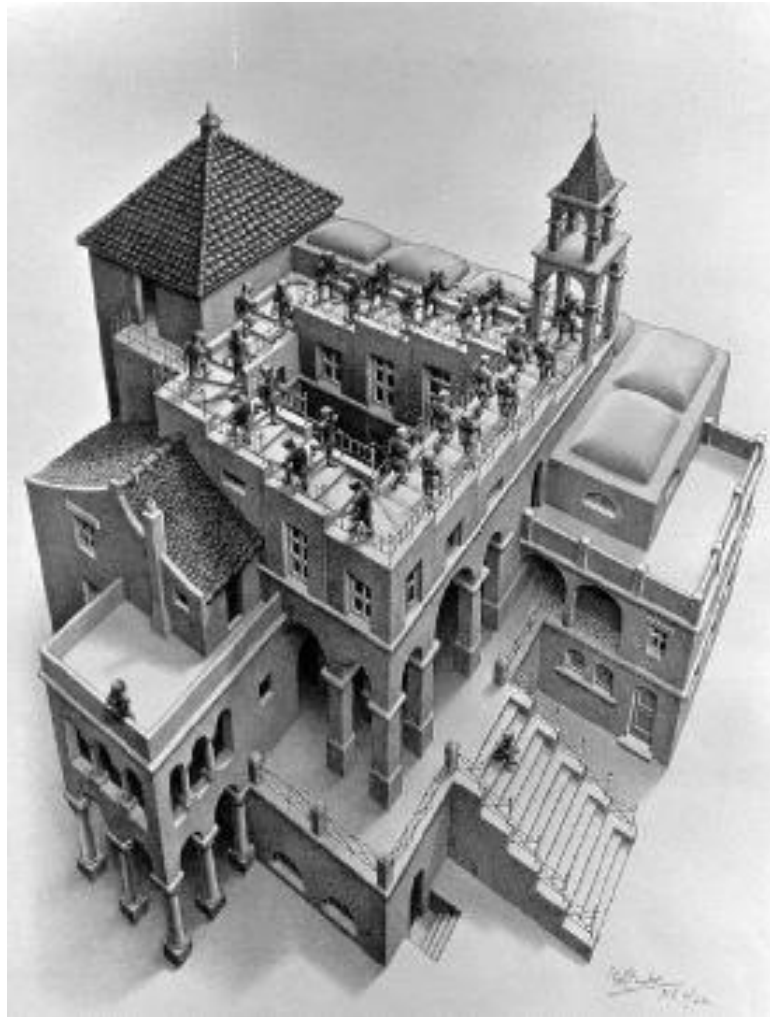


MA in Educational Assessment

Article Review for MMASCH_02 Investigating Research



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The authors Grever, Pelzer and Haydn in this article 'High school students' views on history' reports on the outcomes of a survey of 678 pupils taken from multicultural schools in England, Holland and France. The research was undertaken against the background of concern of recent migrations on the solidity of the nation state. The report puts forward the argument that there is a significant difference between the native and non-native responses and that this impacts on the advisability of pursuing a model for delivery of school history, that is defined narrowly in a national context, which then may result in a lack of relevance for many students. I shall be critically reviewing these claims, focussing specifically on the research methodology used to support these assertions.

The article endeavours to develop an insight in to the views of high school students (aged 14-18 years) about the type of history they consider worthwhile. An interesting statement is used in an attempt to justify the use of the three countries in the sample as they are 'within the mainstream of European educational opinion and climate' (p209). One could easily argue for the inclusion of numerous other countries on the basis of this statement, which may have led to somewhat different results. It is not at all clear if the sample taken is to be representative of any particular population, but a claim is made that the demographics involved in the sample 'is not uncharacteristic of many cities in developed countries' and so the 'outcomes of the survey may have implications for many societies outside those involved in this study' (p210); it is possible that it may, but the likelihood is small given the unique nature of the sample taken and the relatively few schools, 12 in total, involved. On page 212 the article states that 'some caution must be taken in generalizing results to the overall population of multicultural school in urban areas' , a rather mild warning, implying

that with caution some generalizing would be possible, the reasons for why this would be difficult are elaborated upon later.

Interestingly the study initially sampled 678 students, but eliminated all those individuals whose parents who were born in different countries, this reduced the sample to 448 people. It clear that these pupils would not fit into a specific ethnic group, yet they comprise 34% of this sample from the 12 multicultural schools, indeed this proportion is even higher for the UK at 57%. It would be surprising if this did not have an impact on the conclusion later reached, on the teaching of history in multicultural schools, given that this relatively large, non-native, interest group is effectively ignored in the analysis.

It is not clear from the article how the sample has been selected or under what conditions the instrument has been completed. If comparisons between countries are made, which they are, then attempts should have been made to standardize the data collection. Of course, a detailed explanation of this is perhaps not necessary or even appropriate, but an overview would have allowed the results to be viewed with a greater certainty. For example, the age of the pupils in each sample, were these comparable for each country's sample, or stratified to represent the underlying proportions of the population? A sample consisting of older pupils (17-18) would likely have differing opinions to those at the lower end of the age grouping. In two of three countries History is not compulsory after the age of 14. If the sample from one country contained a high proportion of pupils that had selected History for further study, than it would be a reasonable assumption to make that these individuals enjoyed the subjects that were included in the curriculum and may provide different responses to the questionnaire, than those that had not selected History.

Further, under what conditions was the questionnaire completed and were these the same for all the subjects? In each case was sufficient time given for a thoughtful measured response; was it possible for a further explanation of each question to be provided to ensure understanding. It would have been particularly important in these circumstances, as a reasonable assumption to make is that many of the non-native pupils did not necessarily have as a first language the carrier language of the questionnaire. It may be possible that the pre-trial on page 210 partially addressed this issue.

The main instrument used, a questionnaire, has some disadvantages in its use, such as the differing interpretation of questions by individual subjects, which the authors attempted to address by using a pre-trial (p210). However, this pre-trial did not involve any pupils from France, which one would argue is the most culturally distinct of the three nations involved. When using a questionnaire for data collection the reliability of responses or internal consistency is of crucial importance, as we want the instrument to be reliable across people and occasions of its use. Yet, there is no evidence of the use of Cronbach's alpha analysis to gauge a measure of this internal consistency. A further issue relating to the instrument is the number of questions which it contains; on page 211 it is claimed that there are 14 questions, yet on page 221, the historical profiles have been based on '16 out of 30 questionnaire items'. It is peculiar that there is no mention of these additional questions or their analyses, even if it was not significant.

A brief analysis of gender difference is made on page 217, where a conclusion is reached that 'In England, girls show more interest in the history of religion'. Of the sample taken from the English schools only 18 of the 72 were female, it is not clear what proportion of this 18 were of the non-western non-native grouping, who valued

history of religion highly. If groupings are to be compared it is normally good practice for these to reflect the proportions in the underlying population, especially if generalisations are to be made. A possible explanation for this finding is that the group of 18 females were made up of a high proportion of a non-native non-western background.

An additional gender analysis is undertaken comparing the differing average scores on the profiles of historical interest (p224). A number of significant differences are found between genders and on the basis of this result, it is highlighted as an area which may require a need for further research (p225). However, in regards the findings that in Britain girls have a significantly lower score than boys for pride and connection with national history, the argument regarding the composition of the sample detailed in the paragraph above is valid. In addition, the fact that this group also have a higher score than boys for 'a connection with the history of migrants' supports the view that the female grouping is predominantly comprised of non-native non-western. The French gender result is interesting, as it would appear that there are relatively few non-natives in the sample and also that the females comprise a majority. However, on page 211, it is noted that there is a significant presence of 3rd generation migrants amongst French natives. It would be interesting to know if these formed a substantial proportion of the French females as this may have had an effect on the results.

A further conclusion drawn from the factor analysis (p221) is that for the Dutch and English data, all five historical profiles are shared, but for the French only three. In essence this means that for the French, the four questions in profile one and the two questions on profile five are not measuring the same thing, that there is a lack of construct validity amongst these groups of questions. It is possible to explain this in a

number of ways. Firstly, that the questions were interpreted in the same way as the English and Dutch subjects and that there is no connection between the questions in the two profiles. Or, given the complexity involved in translation that these questions are not measuring the same thing that they are in English and Dutch. The latter explanation does have some merit as there was no pre-trial/pre-test for the French questionnaire, unlike the Dutch and English version. Interestingly, research such as Brodbeck et Al (2000) indicates that England and the Netherlands show close cultural links, which may make translation of ideas and concepts between these two languages more straightforward; whereas France have their own rather unique culture which does not group naturally with any other country. If between country comparisons are to be made, as they are in the case of this article, it is surprising that detail is not included of the statistical analysis undertaken, such as split ballot assessments, double administration tests and post hoc analyses as described by Harkness et Al (2004), which test the comparability of the translated questionnaire, between the different countries involved. However, it is noted that a number of semi-structured interviews were conducted with Dutch students to try and address this issue (p210).

In conclusion, it is very difficult to generalise the results obtained by the research to any population at all, certainly not to the population of multicultural schools, however this may be so defined. In fact, it would be difficult to even generalise the sample from each individual school to the population of all students at that particular school. A number of the gender comparisons would benefit from additional information about the composition of the relevant sample, before robust conclusions are able to be drawn. Similarly, some of the comparisons between the different countries seem fraught with uncertainty, due to the lack of evidence of pre-trials for all three

countries and further statistical analysis to gauge the comparability of the translated questionnaire responses. However, it has given some insight into the views held by a number of migrants in a small number of schools on their beliefs and views of History, although given recent developments in History curricula in the UK, it is unlikely to have much influence or impact on its possible content. In fact, it would be possible to argue that increased migration has led to a move towards Historical study in schools having a greater identity with the nation state.

References

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Harkness, J., Pennell, B.-E. and Schoua-Glusberg, A. (2004) Survey Questionnaire Translation and Assessment, in *Methods for Testing and Evaluating Survey Questionnaires* (eds S. Presser, J. M. Rothgeb, M. P. Couper, J. T. Lessler, E. Martin, J. Martin and E. Singer), John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, NJ, USA