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Title: Historical thinking: In search of conceptual and practical guidance for the design and use of assessments of student competence

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Strand of Work: Theoretical/Interpretive

Abstract

This commentary reviews four chapters on the assessment of historical thinking, using three conceptual frames on assessment: *curriculum-instruction-assessment (CIA)*, *assessment as evidentiary reasoning*, and *evidence-centered design*. The CIA frame emphasizes assessment as integral to curriculum and instruction. The chapters reflect a continuum of sensitivity to this relationship. The assessment as evidentiary reasoning frame examines the alignment of targeted competencies in a domain, observations intended to measure them, and the interpretation of observations. The chapters differ as to what constitutes the domain in terms of epistemological and content knowledge as well as the practices of historical analysis and reasoning, leading to differences in what is observed and the interpretation of the observations. The evidence-centered design frame highlights design decisions as valuable opportunities to make the evidentiary logic of an assessment clearly visible. These chapters discuss moving from conceptions of historical thinking to its assessment and thus provide unique and valuable opportunities for insights into the design process for historical-thinking assessments. The commentary concludes with challenges that remain in conceptualizing and operationalizing the assessment of historical reasoning, including tensions between content versus historical thinking processes, literacy demands of assessments, and developmental and learning progressions in historical thinking.

Implications

The conceptions of history evidenced in these four chapters are closely aligned with the domain analysis that Project READI conducted during the initial phases of its work. The implementations of evidence-based argument modules by design team teachers have underscored the importance of clarity regarding what we want students to know and be able to do as well as the circumstances that will provide evidence of both. Furthermore, these classroom-based instructional experiences make clear the critical need for research on instructional experiences that enable students to deepen their initial conceptions of key historical constructs and inquiry practices.

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