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# Teachers' Conceptions of Assessment

Gavin Thomas Lumsden Brown

M. Ed. (Hons.) Massey University

B. Ed. (TESL) (Dist'n) Concordia University

Supervisor: Professor John A. C. Hattie, University of Auckland

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## **Abstract**

Teachers' conceptions are powerful in shaping the quality of their instructional practice. The purpose of this thesis is to defend a four-facet model of teachers' conceptions of assessment, which revolves around emphasising improvement or school accountability, or student accountability purposes or treating assessment as irrelevant. Further, it explores how those conceptions relate to teachers' conceptions of learning, teaching, curriculum, and teacher efficacy.

A literature review is used to identify the major conceptions. Multiple studies led to a 50-item Teachers' Conceptions of Assessment (COA-III) questionnaire based on the four main conceptions of assessment. Structural equation modelling showed a close fit of a hierarchical, multi-dimensional model to the data. Teachers moderately agreed with the improvement conceptions and the system accountability conception. Teachers disagreed that assessment was irrelevant. However, teachers had little agreement that assessment was for student accountability. Improvement, school, and student accountability conceptions were positively correlated. The irrelevance conception was inversely related to the improvement conception and not related to the system accountability conception.

A four-factor structure of teachers' beliefs about assessment, curriculum, teaching, learning, and teacher efficacy, was found. Teachers agreed that assessment influences and improves their teaching and student learning. They agreed less strongly that assessment, measuring surface learning only, makes schools, teachers, and students accountable and that teachers are able to conduct assessment through a systematic technological approach. They agreed at a similar level with student centred learning that involves deep approaches to learning, divorced from assessment. They disagreed with a telling type of teaching that focuses only on intellectual development of students or on reconstruction or reform of society.

Use of the CoA-III makes teachers' conceptions of assessment more explicit and will assist in the development of teacher training programs, the design of assessment policy, and enhance further research into educational assessment practices. Furthermore, explicit attention to teachers' conceptions of assessment is expected to be a precursor to teachers' self-regulation of their assessment beliefs and practices.

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The bus is coming, and thanks to all of you, the story of how New Zealand teachers conceive of assessment can be told before it leaves!

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