



U.S. teachers' conceptions of the purposes of assessment



Nicole Barnes^{*}, Helenrose Fives, Charity M. Dacey

Montclair State University, 1 Normal Ave., Montclair, NJ 07043, USA

HIGHLIGHTS

- Investigated 179 Northeastern U.S. practicing teachers' conceptions of assessment.
- Three factors: assessment as irrelevant, valid for accountability, informing teaching and learning.
- Cluster analysis indicated three unique belief profiles among these participants.
- Findings support perspectives that teachers hold multiple beliefs simultaneously.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 February 2016

Received in revised form

5 January 2017

Accepted 17 February 2017

Keywords:

Practicing teachers

Classroom assessment

Conceptions of assessment

Teacher's beliefs

ABSTRACT

Teachers' conceptions about assessment influence their classroom assessment practices. In this investigation, we examined 179 K-12 teachers' conceptions of the purposes of assessment from a person-centered perspective. An exploratory factor analysis of teachers' responses to the Conceptions of Assessment Instrument yielded a three-factor model: assessment as valid for accountability, improves teaching and learning, and as irrelevant. Next, we used cluster analysis to identify belief profiles of teacher groups: Cluster-1: Moderate, Cluster-2: Irrelevant, Cluster-3: Teaching and Learning. Within and across cluster comparisons revealed significant differences indicating that these are distinct profiles: teachers can, and do, hold multiple beliefs about assessment simultaneously.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In the United States (U.S.), assessment has received a great deal of attention from both the popular press (Ravitch, 2011) and education scholars (Darling-Hammond, 2014). Assessment at the national, local, and classroom level should serve multiple purposes; most salient, assessment should be seen and used by teachers to inform their instructional activities (Black & Wiliam, 2009). However, research and theory into teachers' beliefs has established that teachers' beliefs about their professional tasks (e.g., instruction, assessment) influence the ways that they engage in their work (e.g., Barnes, Fives, & Dacey, 2015; Fives & Buehl, 2012). In other words, how teachers conceive of assessment shapes if (and how) they use assessment results and frames their selection and development of assessment tools in their classrooms (Brown, 2008). Moreover, these conceptions may also influence how teachers engage

students in assessment activities. Thus, as assessment in U.S. schools takes center stage in education policy, understanding the beliefs teachers hold about the purpose of assessment should become more relevant for educational researchers, teacher educators, and school instructional leaders because teachers' conceptions affect their assessment practices (Brown, 2008). As such, the purpose of this investigation was to explore teachers' conceptions of the purposes of assessment.

2. Teachers' beliefs about assessment

There is a long history of research into teachers' beliefs to understand how these constructs serve to influence teacher learning, practice, and understandings of their context (e.g., Fives & Buehl, 2012; Pajares, 1992; Woolfolk Hoy, Davis, & Pape, 2006). Pajares (1992) highlighted that teachers hold beliefs or conceptions about particular things and teachers filter new information, frame problem spaces, and guide actions through those beliefs (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Fives & Buehl, 2014). In the context of assessment, teachers' beliefs about the purposes of assessment may influence how teachers process new information about assessment practices/

^{*} Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: barnesn@mail.montclair.edu (N. Barnes), fivesh@mail.montclair.edu (H. Fives), daceyc@mail.montclair.edu (C.M. Dacey).

principles or help them frame situations where assessments are examined, developed, or selected. If one believes that assessments are used to hold teachers and schools accountable, then teachers can use this perspective to frame or limit their focus when they need to make decisions about assessments in their classrooms. Finally, beliefs about assessment may also serve as guides for teacher action in how they influence the decisions teachers make about other classroom practices such as instructional techniques and motivational strategies.

Within the literature on teachers' beliefs, a variety of terms and definitions have emerged to describe this construct. For instance, Thompson (1992) and Brown (2004, 2006) used the term conceptions rather than beliefs. Conceptions are considered to reflect "a more general mental structure, encompassing beliefs, meanings, concepts, propositions, rules, mental images, preferences, and the like" (Thompson, 1992, p. 130). The use of conceptions allows for knowledge and beliefs to be synthesized into a single construct, and this ameliorates some of the theoretical and operational challenges that emerge when scholars attempt to differentiate the two. In the field of assessment, Brown (2004, 2006) established a line of research using this construct to explore and measure teachers' beliefs about assessment.

2.1. Conceptions of assessment

In our recent review of the research on teachers' beliefs about assessment, we framed these beliefs on a continuum from an extreme pedagogical to an extreme accounting (accountability) conception (see Fig. 1, Barnes et al., 2015). Our review drew heavily on the work of Brown and his colleagues, who have explored teachers' conceptions of the purpose of assessment in multiple international and diverse cultural contexts, but not the U.S. (e.g., Brown & Harris, 2009; Brown, 2004, 2006). Brown (2004, 2006) developed and used the Conception of Assessment (COA-III) instrument to assess teachers' conceptions of the nature of assessment. Brown based the COA-III on the extant literature to describe the purposes of assessment, such that assessment is used to (1) promote or advance teaching and learning, (2) ensure that students are held accountable for their learning, and (3) ensure that teachers and schools are held accountable for students' learning (e.g., Heaton, 1975; Torrance & Pryor, 1998). Extending from these three conceptions for the purpose of assessment, Brown (2004, 2006) suggested that a fourth conception of assessment is prevalent among teachers, namely that assessment is irrelevant. Based on this framework, Brown developed the four-factor COA measure to assess teachers' conceptions of assessment. Below we describe these four conceptions within our proposed continuum of assessment for pedagogical to accounting purposes (Barnes et al., 2015).

At the pedagogical end of the continuum, we hold that teachers conceive of assessment as serving the purpose of informing instruction and improving student learning. The purpose of

informing instruction and improving student learning aligns with Brown's (2006) factor that reflects assessment as improving teaching and learning. On the COA-III, 12 items are associated with the factor of improving teaching and learning. These items tap into conceptions of assessment for the following purposes: improving teaching (e.g., "Assessment information modifies ongoing teaching of students"), improving learning (e.g., "Assessment feeds back to students their learning needs"), and describing abilities (e.g., "Assessment measures students' higher order thinking skills") (Brown, 2006, p. 168). In addition, a fourth conception of assessment as valid (e.g., "Assessment results can be depended on") is associated with this factor (Brown, 2006, p. 168). Thus, conceptions of assessment as informing teaching and learning are integrated with the conception that assessment provides valid and potentially useful information (Brown, 2004). Brown (2004) argued that for assessment information to inform teaching and learning, teachers must be able to trust that information. As such, conceptions of assessment as valid are a prerequisite for teachers to conceive of assessment as applicable to teaching and learning activities.

Toward the middle of our continuum we include the perspective that assessment is used to hold students accountable (Barnes et al., 2015). The three items on the COA that assess this conception of assessment describe assessment as "placing students into categories," "assigning grades," and determining "if students meet qualification standards" (Brown, 2006, p. 168). The degree to which teachers engage these conceptions to inform either instruction or determine grades (and therefore hold students accountable for their learning), likely varies by the teacher and the specific assessment tool/technique employed. Therefore, we argue that responses to these items might reflect a mixed conception of assessment as addressing both the pedagogical and accounting perspectives. As such, we placed it in the middle on our continuum.

At the accountability end of our continuum lie the conceptions that assessment is for holding schools and teachers accountable for student performance (Barnes et al., 2015). Specifically, the instrument includes three items that assess conceptions of assessment as providing information on school performance as an "indicator of school quality," and "a good way to evaluate a school" (p. 168). These items then provide a perspective that the purpose of assessment is to evaluate and make judgments about school and teacher quality and performance. That is, the purpose of assessment is to hold schools accountable rather than to inform teaching and learning, and as such it is placed on the accounting end of our continuum.

Brown (2004, 2006) includes a fourth conception of assessment (the contention that assessment is irrelevant to teaching and learning) which we placed outside of our continuum (Barnes et al., 2015). The assessment is irrelevant to teaching and learning factor is qualitatively different from the previous conceptions because if one considers assessment as irrelevant to teaching, then assessment cannot be used for either pedagogical or accounting purposes.

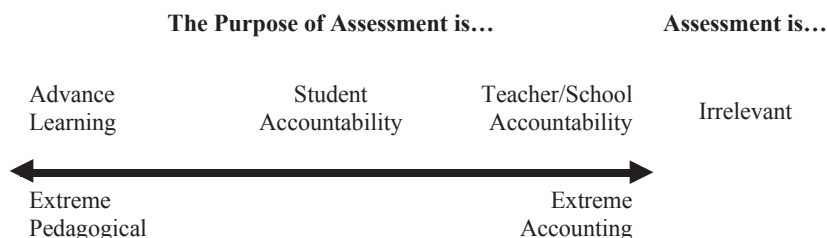


Fig. 1. Conceptions of assessment continuum.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4941542>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4941542>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)