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Abstract

Twenty academics from five disciplines in Australian universities were interviewed about the assessments they usually employ in their undergraduate classes. The interviews focussed upon their beliefs about the nature and function of their assessments relative to what they had taught, and on the characteristics of good and poor performances. Using a grounded categorisation method, the interview transcripts were analysed for the academics' global orientations to assessment practice, and six categories emerged. These were further analysed for the beliefs implicitly constituting them, and six qualitative belief dimensions emerged, resulting in a matrix in which each of the six orientations to assessment practice was described in terms of its unique profile of six beliefs. The orientations could be ordered along a continuum anchored at one end by an emphasis on knowledge reproduction and at the other by an emphasis on knowledge construction and/or transformation. This ordering was strongly related to the orientations to teaching and learning obtained in an earlier interview which, in turn, had been ordered according to their emphasis on teaching-centred versus learning-centred beliefs (Samuelowicz and Bain 2001). The findings are related to the literature concerned with the influence

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