

Different types of assessment in the education system



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Formal assessments are given in a formal environment and are distributed by testing companies that provide statistical data related to large reference groups. Informal assessments are what teachers do on a daily basis throughout their classrooms to measure the amount of material the students comprehend. In this essay, I will compare and contrast the formal and informal assessment techniques used for measuring student progress in the schools educational system.

The first formal assessment examined was the standardized achievement test. Test of this type provides a level of achievement with a specific reference group. Achievement test measure the schools in broad state mandated goals; there are several advantages and disadvantages to formal assessments such as achievement test (Miller, Linn, & Gronlund, 2009).

Advantages in giving achievement test vary from students, parents and school administration. First, students learn when a demand of certain learning proficiency is expected of them. If there is no standard to set students goals of achievement; there will be no expectations and student success will be absent. Parents, communities and the school will be able to identify the students' knowledge by comparing their students to other schools in specific reference groups. Educational systems are able to measure and set goals to work more efficiently and increase productivity to achieve national, state and regional standards.

A second advantage is that achievement tests can highlight gaps and show areas in which improvements need to be made. Many times it may show the need for student improvement, but often it shows a need for continued

teacher education, improvement in teaching practices and the allotment of monies to be spent on resources for the classrooms.

A disadvantage in achievement testing could produce careless performance of standards and have a negative impact on students. First disadvantage is that standards are vague and uncertain in subject areas. Difficulties occur when standards are not concrete pertaining to what knowledge the students should have at that level.

A second disadvantage to achievement testing is the standards that are imposed by federal and state. Those standards can create problems by forcing content related specifications without considering the different needs, opportunities to learn and skills that may be appropriate for specific districts or states.

Another type of formal assessment examined was the aptitude test. As in the achievement test, the aptitude test provides qualities of good assessment such as: reliability, standardization, validity and practicality. The primary purpose of the aptitude test is to assess students' general capability to learn. This test is supposed to help predict their general academic success. All standardized test have their advantages and disadvantages.

An advantage of the aptitude test is the practicality. The standardized aptitude test takes less time to assess the students than informal testing procedures. They are easily administered by giving explicit directions to each student in the same manner. Machines to the grading and computers track the levels of achievement to different reference groups.

A second advantage to aptitude test is objectivity. A standardized aptitude test does not have emotion or biases. It is completely objective in assessing the students' achievement gains. High expectations are set for the students in objectively by specific reference groups and it holds them accountable to the standards in the effort to high achievement gains.

A disadvantage in an aptitude test is the amount of pressure placed on the curriculum being taught in the classroom. This affects how the teachers teach their student and how much meaningful learning actually takes place in the classroom. It is a misconception that what is taught in a classroom and what the students are tested on is one in the same. Most often what the students are tested on do not always match up to the instructional content and objectives of the classroom curriculum (Ormrod, 2003).

A second disadvantage to aptitude testing is the negative impact it holds over the students, teachers and school. School systems hold their school accountable when test scores do not continually improve. This places pressure on the teachers to get students to raise their scores. However, this can lead to dishonesty on the part of the teachers and principals. They exclude students who may have special needs or other considerations. With the pressure to improve constantly, the right thing to do becomes clouded. Teachers may feel the need to cheat to keep from having low performance scores in their classrooms to maintain their job.

Informal assessment is conducted daily in the classroom setting. It is used by the teachers as a form of evaluation to determine the students' level of comprehension. This type of evaluation will allow for immediate assessment

for the teacher to review during instruction to the student. Informal assessment may consist of assigned homework, group cooperation activities, one on one interview with student and teacher created checklists.

The first type of informal testing is homework. A teacher assigns homework to be completed at the end of formal instruction or to be completed outside the classroom. Advantages to using this type of assessment is that it allows the students to take their time to get the assigned work completed before due date. This can alleviate stress for the student who is a slower worker. Another advantage to using homework as an assessment is that it is easy for the teacher to grade. The teacher may wish to allow the students to grade their own papers. The rationale behind this process is that the students will see the errors they made, corrections will be given by the teacher and a clearer understanding of the mistakes will provide the student with a new perception.

A disadvantage to using homework as an assessment is the fact that students can cheat. They may not do their own work; this would not provide a clear depiction of the student's performance. Another disadvantage is the student has use of their notes, books, and other resources to help recall the information. Therefore, an accurate measure of student comprehension cannot be achieved.

A second informal assessment is group cooperation activities. Assessments of this type allow the teacher to observe the students and see the students use what they have learned from the formal instruction. The first advantage to group learning is that it allows the student to engage and learn from their

peers. Things are discussed and thought out by each member of the group to arrive at the final answer. The second advantage is that the teacher can observe the students and make decision concerning the review of particular items that may be unclear and need to be explained further. The teacher can adjust her lesson plans to meet those needs immediately.

A disadvantage to group cooperation activities is that if not monitored closely the students may see this time as free time or busy time. Teachers cannot expect the students to break off into groups and stay on task if not monitored. The students need to know the teacher is coming to their group to check on the task at hand. They have to know they will be held accountable to their part of the group work. This brings up the second disadvantage. Group cooperation activities cannot be used for teacher preparation time. The teacher who uses this time to grade papers for another class or simply take a break will bring chaos to the classroom. A group cooperation activity is a process thought out and organized by the teacher to create a powerful explorative learning tool which has to be monitored to make student assessments.

The third type of informal assessment is a one on one interview with a student. This allows the teacher to assess the students' level of knowledge and understanding over the content of the course. An advantage of the interview is that it allows the student to explain to the teacher what he or she does not fully understand. This helps the teacher to adjust the instruction to help that particular student. Another advantage is that it can assist in parent teacher conversation over their students' progress. It allows the teacher to give suggestions for additional help at home.

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A disadvantage to a one on one interview can be that it is time consuming. It requires that a teacher schedule a private meeting with each individual student. Another disadvantage is that the one on one interview does not provide a clear concept of the students' knowledge. The student may not be able to express or communicate the content they are having difficulty understanding.

And the final informal assessment is a checklist. It is created by the teacher to contain certain qualities, information, or skills and knowledge that they want to see exhibited by the students after a unit has been completed. The first advantage is that it does not take a lot of time and can be completed over a period of time when the teacher sees a display or lack thereof from the student. Another advantage is that the checklist is made by each individual teacher and he or she can cater it to the skills and knowledge they want the students to achieve from the unit based on the amount of material covered.

A disadvantage to a checklist is that it does not inform the teacher where additional instruction is needed. It cannot determine the knowledge and skills that students are meant to learn throughout the course. Another disadvantage is that while the short term goals for student assessment are being met, long term goals and objectives are missing from the information on the checklist.

Most schools and teachers use a variety of assessments to test the students' knowledge and comprehension of subjects. It is important that the teacher uses multiple methods of evaluation to assess the content being covered in

the course so that we can better provide for the educational needs of the students. Students differ in their abilities to test just as we differ in our ability to test the knowledge taught. The more often we assess the students and make adjustment to our teaching the more successful the student will be. The student's future will be successful and the teachers will have validation for their teaching skills.