Assessment Map: Organizing Types of Educational Assessment

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Assessment comes in a wide variety of forms based on its intended purpose, and can be used to evaluate and improve student learning, teacher effectiveness, and/or program effectiveness. According to Popham (2014), educational assessment is a "formal attempt to determine students' status with respect to educational variables of interest." (p. 8). These variables of interest determine which type of assessment is needed, such as traditional, alternative, affective, informal, summative, and/or formative. I organized my assessment map (Appendix A) so as to represent these types and their relationships to each other.

Traditional and Alternative

Many assessments can be divided into the categories of either *traditional* or *alternative*. Traditional assessments are easy to objectively grade, yet tend to cater to instructional objectives on a lower level of cognitive development (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, and Zvacek, 2012). These include *selected (fixed)-response* (e.g., *binary, multiple-binary, and multiple choice*; and *matching*). Traditional assessments that are more subjectively graded and require a somewhat higher level of thinking are *constructed response* (e.g., *short answer* and *essay*) (Popham, 2014).

Alternative assessments must be subjectively graded, tend to cater towards instructional objectives on a high level of cognitive development, and allow for individualization (Simonson et al., 2012). Alternative assessments usually measure *performance* in oral, written, or product form. Types of performance assessments include *authentic* (focusing on application in real-life situations), *extended projects* (promoting synthesis and use of resources), and *portfolio* (work sample collection) (Ohio Department of Education, 2000; Popham, 2014).

Affective and Informal

Other main types of assessment (less prominent than traditional and alternative) are *affective* and *informal*. Affective assessment recognizes the impact of affective variables on

learning, and consequently attempts to measure student interests, values, and/or attitudes through *self-report* assessments. Students complete self-report assessments, usually anonymously (e.g., *Likert inventory* and *multifocus affective inventory*) (Popham, 2014).

Teachers complete informal assessments in order to learn more about their students so as to teach them more effectively. Types of informal assessments include *teacher observations*, *teacher checklists*, and *conversations/interviews* with students (Ohio, 2000).

Summative and Formative

Two more major assessment categories are *summative* and *formative*, which connect the timing and frequency of assessment with its purpose. For example, summative refers to assessments which are given only at the end of an instructional unit/activity to collect evidence to evaluate that completed unit/activity. Almost any assessment type mentioned previously can be used summatively, though some are more common (e.g., traditional final exams, extended projects, and portfolios) (Monroe County Intermediate School District, 2014; Popham, 2014).

Formative, on the other hand, refers to assessments given in the midst of an instructional unit/activity, which provide students and teachers with reoccurring feedback to allow them to make adjustments as needed during the learning/instructional process. Virtually all assessment types can be used formatively, but some of the most common include teacher observations, on-the-spot performance assessments, and traditional quizzes (Monroe, 2014; Popham, 2014).

Conclusion

While many different types of assessment exist, one type is not necessarily superior to another. Assessment types are linked and sometimes even overlap each other. They should be chosen based on the intended purpose, instructional objectives, and kinds of results desired.

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Appendix A