The Similarities & Difference of Classroom Test & Standardized Achievement Test

Assessments serve several purposes, but they are most commonly used to gauge the level and depth of student learning and skill retention. Assessments can be either formative or summative. In a classroom, formative assessments are used to help teachers plan future lessons and identify areas they have to reteach or ways they must adjust their lessons. Formative assessments are usually not graded as strictly as summative assessments. Summative assessments, like standardized achievement tests, are used to gauge where students are at a particular time in relation to specific learning goals.

1. Purpose

The main similarities and differences between classroom and standardized achievement tests lie in the purpose for which a particular test is administered. Classroom teachers utilize formative assessments because they are more concerned with equipping their students with certain knowledge and skills while, standardized test administrators' sole purpose is to evaluate student readiness.

2. Standardized Assessments

Standardized achievement tests are used to test a student's understanding of skills and knowledge in comparison to students of the same age group or educational level. The scores from these tests are used in determining a student's readiness for college, graduate school and professional programs. The SAT, for example, is a well-known summative test that is used to determine a student's aptitude for college. Several standardized achievement tests are given in elementary, middle and high school to provide schools with the data they need to see how a school and its students are performing in comparison with other states across the nation.

3. Similarities

Classroom and standardized tests are similar in that they both test student skill and knowledge at various levels. In high school English class, for example, teachers can choose to give students a summative, standardized test that assesses understanding of grammar and usage just like a standardized achievement test. However, teachers may choose to test only the areas covered in class, while standardized achievement tests are likely to cover more ground.

4. Differences

Some of the major differences between classroom tests and standardized tests is the allotted time, structure and content of the tests. Classroom tests can be much more individualized. A teacher may choose to test students specifically on the subject matter he or she taught in class. They may also vary the amount of time allowed for their students to take a test. In a standardized testing situation, students all take the exact same test and are given the same amount of time to take it. With the exception of accommodations for students with disabilities, standardized tests are much more structured and uniform than classroom tests.

Standardized tests are created by a testing agency outside of the school environment. A classroom test is created by the teacher or perhaps a textbook company and aligned with the state standards. A standardized test is comprehensive and measures what the student has learned over a particular grading period - a semester or year. A classroom test measures what has been learned over a shorter period. With the increased emphasis on accountability in education, students are subjected more to both tests. Although there are differences between them, there are similarities also.

Decisions Regarding Administration of Test

- There are state and federal mandates directing what standardized tests are taken by students and when, and at which levels those tests will be taken. The administration of a classroom test is a decision determined by the classroom teacher. Both tests are taken under the direction of school personnel and opportunities for making up in case of an absence are available for both tests.

Reliability and Validity

- Although the classroom teacher ensures the classroom test is a reliable and valid measure of student knowledge, this is not established via statistical testing. However, the reliability (consistency) and validity (accuracy) of a standardized test is established by a testing agency, well in advance of mandated administration.

Testing Environment

- The administration of a standardized test is entirely scripted, from the delivery of instructions to the end of the test. A set amount of time is allotted for testing and there are even required

- restroom breaks for students. The atmosphere of a classroom test is more relaxed. The teacher gives directions without a script and makes decisions regarding students leaving the classroom during the test. Although these differences exists, the atmosphere in both cases is serious and students are closely monitored.

Effect of the Testing Results

- Standardized tests are sometimes referred to as "high-stakes testing," because the results are used for educational decision making. For instance, the results of a high school exit test, a common standardized test, could have a serious effect on a student's chance to graduate. Both tests play a part in the academic advancement of a student. However, the grade of a chapter test in biology affects a student's academic progress to a lesser extent.

Assessing Group Work

- All of the basic principles of assessment that apply to individual work apply to group work as well. Assessing group work has added wrinkles, however. First, depending on the objectives of the assignment, both process and product-related skills must be assessed. Second, group performance must be translated into individual grades – which raises issues of fairness and equity. Complicating both these issues is the fact that neither group processes nor individual contribution are necessarily apparent in the final product. Thus, the instructor needs to find ways of obtaining that information. The following general principles should be adapted to the context of specific courses.

Assess process, not just product.

- If both product and process are important to you, both should be reflected in students' grades – although the weight you accord each will depend on your learning objectives for the course and for the assignment. Ideally, your grading criteria should be communicated to students via a rubric. This is especially important if you are emphasizing skills that students are not used to being evaluated on (such as the ability to cooperate, meet deadlines, etc.)

Ask students to assess their own contribution to the team.

- Have students evaluate their own teamwork skills and their contribution to the group's process using a self-assessment that focuses on the process skills you are emphasizing, e.g., respectfully

- listening to and considering opposing views or a minority opinion; effectively managing conflict around differences in ideas or approaches; keeping the group on track both during and between meetings; promptness in meeting deadlines; and appropriate distribution of research, analysis, writing.

Hold individuals accountable.

- To motivate individual students and discourage the free-rider phenomenon, it is important to assess individual contributions and understanding, as well as group products and processes. In addition to evaluating the work of the group as a whole, ask individual students to demonstrate their learning. This can be done via independent write-ups, weekly journal entries, content quizzes, etc.

Ask students to evaluate their group's dynamics and the contributions of their teammates.

- Gauge what various group members have contributed to the group (e.g., effort, participation, cooperativeness, accessibility, communication skills) by asking team members to complete a group processes evaluation form. While this is not a fool-proof strategy (students may feel social pressure to cover for one another), combined with other factors promoting individual accountability, it can provide you with important information about the dynamics within groups and the contributions of individual members.

If you are gathering feedback from external clients (for example, in the context of public reviews of students' performances or creations), this feedback can also be incorporated into your assessment of group work. Feedback from external clients can address product ("Does it work?" "Is it a good solution/design?") or process (based on the client's interaction with the group and its ability to communicate effectively, respond appropriately, or meet deadlines) and can be incorporated either formally or informally into the group grade.

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