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Online Assessments

Assessment is an important part of teaching and learning. It helps both students and instructors evaluate both learning achievement and the learning process. Assessments provide a means for instructors to see (or evaluate) how much students are actually grasping the presented material and when it's time to move on. Two types of assessment, formative and summative, come into play within instruction, and each type has its place in the online as well as the physical classroom. Both types of assessments are necessary for any successful course, and the proper balance of these two assessment types will maximize student learning.

Assessment Types

Formative Assessments

Formative assessments are assessments for learning—the results can help teachers plan instruction to meet their students' current needs. These kinds of assessments are typically low stakes (or no stakes) assessments that are not intended to measure learning achievement for purposes of grading. Formative assessments inform the learning process by providing a two-way exchange of information. For the student, this provides information on the student's progress in the course or unit of instruction. For the instructor, this provides information on the effectiveness of instruction, materials, or educational technology. The primary goal with formative assessments is feedback rather than scoring or calculating a grade. This type of assessment may require evaluation of student learning outcomes several times during the term and facilitates the evaluation of different content areas, skills, and the progress of learning within specific knowledge domains. Formative assessment could occur with repeated use of the same assessment form (e.g., a quiz four times in a semester) or with the use of multiple assessment forms (e.g., a quiz, an essay, and an experiential activity).

Summative Assessments

Summative assessments are assessments of learning—the results are for evaluation of student achievement. These kinds of assessments are typically higher stakes measurements of student learning at the end of an instructional unit, which may quantify and compare it against some standard or benchmark. Summative assessments can sometimes occur at the beginning of the course or instructional unit to ensure students are at the appropriate level for the course. They also play a role periodically throughout the course and at the course's end to both test student knowledge and create a body of work on which to base students' final grades. Summative assessment is a measure of an end product (Perera-Diltz, 2009), and at best represents a holistic and qualitative appraisal of student achievement of specific learning outcomes. Measures such as a capstone final project or a comprehensive final exam are examples of

common summative assessment tools. However, there are times that formative assessment could serve summative purposes (Gikandi, Morrow, & Davis, 2011) when it informs stakeholders regarding a student's progress (Smith, 2007). Similarly, summative assessment can serve in a formative role when results are used for learning in subsequent units (Gikandi et al., 2011).

Assessment Examples

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS

Formative assessments may include exit tickets, comprehension checks, running records, short-cycle or just-in-time evaluation of student work, measurements for checks for understanding during instruction, or non-evaluative interim tests that cover recently taught material that can align with unit or module level learning outcomes/objectives.

According to Gikandi et al. (2011), characteristics of validity in formative assessments include:

- Authenticity of assessment activity (i.e, engage students in decision making and problem-solving relevant to real-world situations).
- Effective formative feedback (i.e., useful, timely, ongoing, and easy to understand feedback to student).
- Multidimensional perspectives (i.e., diverse opportunities for the student).
- Student support (i.e., the mentoring role of the teacher).

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS

Summative assessments in online education need to be based on facilitating and documenting the learner's abilities to synthesize his or her own perspective and personal experiences with knowledge artifacts. They should map to course level learning outcomes.

Some summative assessment examples may include:

- Unit tests.
- Midterms or final exams.
- Capstone projects.
- Final papers, or final presentations representing scholarly work covering the entire course.

References

Gikandi, J. W., Morrow, D., & Davis, N. E. (2011). Online formative assessment in higher education: A review of the literature. *Computers and Education*, 57(4), 2333–2351.

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Perera-Diltz, Dilani M. and Moe, Jeffry L., (2014). "Formative and Summative Assessment in Online Education" *Counseling & Human Services Faculty Publications*. 37. https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/chs_pubs/37