Clip 4 - Considerations When Determining a Grade

Narration: When teachers have collected a valid and reliable body of evidence, how do they determine a grade? How do teachers use their professional judgment when they embark on a systematic and purposeful thinking process to determine a final grade? In this video, you'll hear how teachers analyse and interpret their evidence to arrive at a final grade.

Teacher: At the end of a reporting period I have all of the essential learning for a student throughout the entire semester, and I've got all their achievement I do weight certain learning more than others and it's only at the reporting time that I start to give a numeric value or weight to each. So a student would have a certain range of marks. So that's where I use the achievement chart to assign a mark. And then I collect them all together and that's how I get my final numerical mark at the end.

Teacher: The first thing we need to do is establish what the tool is and that might be software, it might be a calculator, but we certainly need some help with some of the math. then we need to decide what we put into that software, and that evidence is of learning. It could be conversations, it could be, like you say, products. It could be observations, but ultimately you know, they reflect the learning goals. And the greater degree to which they reflect the learning goals might affect the weighting. And I think that's really important, too, if there's a lot of learning being demonstrated and it's addressing many of the learning goals then it's going to be weighted higher than just, for example, if it was just one. And then, once we get a number or a level, or whatever it is we use to put into the software then we have to make sure that it's influenced and perhaps verified by all the anecdotal evidence that we have, as well. So it's important to have a record of those things. That's where your professional judgement comes in. And it's informed professional judgement if you have the evidence there and if the evidence is documented then you're much more comfortable making those decisions. And at that point we use the software again, which is just a tool, we use it to try to help us find patterns and those patterns are important. And once this number's generated, well again it's going to be verified or influenced by all the things that I have, all of the evidence that I have. And I think that's what's new to me is that I have a much better record of those things. I'm still trying to get better at that but it's now a much more informed professional opinion and with that evidence I can confidently say no, this is where it's going to be. And I'm really hoping of course that all the evidence that I have is completely aligned with what the software is generating. Because that is again just a picture - the software doesn't give the mark. I mean I believe I give the mark.

Teacher: I keep a record in a binder and then I also use some software that the school has provided. And through that I can chart whether or not it's assessment for learning or assessment of learning. One thing I do is that I record everything and that shows me afterwards for example it may not necessarily count in the final evaluation but there's a record that the student has completed it and to what level they've completed it. So then in the end when I want to give them a mark I can refer back to some of the evidence that I've recorded and that way I can see if there's a consistency, if there's been an improvement and of course towards the end of the term when I'm giving final marks say for a report card I'm going to look at the most recent work that they've done. When I record my marks I also consider weighing things based on how much work is involved and how many expectations are

addressed. I have to have evidence of the work that the student has done so I have to look back on everything that they've completed throughout the course. I look at, again, consistency. I look at growth so where did they start – where did they come to. I look at the learning through the conversations that I've had with students and through the products that they've created for me. In order to come to a final mark I will enter data into a computer. I will organize it into different categories of learning, so for example application and I will enter all of the data, I will weight it depending on how important that particular expectation is, how much time we've spent on it. And then the computer will give me a measure of central tendency at the end and I look at that and I consider that but I also have to consider the most consistent marks that the student has achieved I look at   the most consistent the most recent but also any outliers so anything that might have influenced that mark and I have a general sense of how a student has done so if the information on the software suggests that the student receive say a level 4 if that is consistent with what I'm thinking and I take everything into consideration then I will come up with a numerical mark. But it isn't just something that I'm going to use a computer mark that it spit out. I'm going to use my professional judgment in coming up with a final mark for a student.

Narration: Teachers also consider, as part of their analysis and interpretation, the potential influence of outliers and the role of bias when determining grades.

Teacher: When sitting down to determine a grade, midterm final I'm gonna gather all of the data that I've collected throughout the semester and review that from as many perspectives as I can so if we're looking at numerical information that I've received from assignments that students have handed in where we've generated a numerical grade, I'll enter those into a managing program. And I'll let the computer program manipulate those numbers and give me ways to look at that collected numerical information from as many perspectives as possible. I can identify where the outliers are, things that don't really fit the central perception that I'm receiving from the data. I'll have observation notes from what kinds of things I've heard from the students while they're working with each other to identify where their learning's at and which learning goals perhaps they've demonstrated more clearly and concretely in those observations and conversations than I might have seen in the numerical data and once I have all that information in front of me I'm looking for the best picture of their most recent most consistent achievement taking into consideration things like their independent project at the end of the semester and their final exam performance because that's the most recent evidence of their growth in terms of learning throughout the semester so I definitely want to make sure that that gets some focused attention as part of the big picture. Then it's a matter of determining what level of achievement seems to be the most appropriate to go with that body of evidence, numerical and anecdotal and then once you have a level established the questions is what number can we give for report card purposes that best matches that level that the data represents in terms of student learning throughout the course of the semester.

I think one of the issues to help with bias is to look at what are you bringing to your review of that information. Look only at the information that you have in front of you focus on how does the work meet the learning goals? And then in terms of work habits one of the issues really is thinking about the fact that we want to look at what represents learning, so what's concretely learning. There's always the case of the student who you know is putting in a lot of effort and putting in a lot of time and you'd really like to see something represent that but if you're evidence support that a particular measure of achievement matches learning then you need to set aside that personal desire to offer a reward and recognize that that marks are not rewards but are representations of learning and the learning needs to be tied directly to the learning goals that you've determined from your curriculum expectations. So go back to the document, go back to the learning goals and make sure that what you're measuring is learning and not measuring student performance in other areas.

Narration: When teachers and students share an understanding of how assessment practices contribute to learning, students can articulate how they are doing throughout the assessment process. Students can explain clearly the degree to which they are achieving and why. They are also fully aware of how teachers will determine their grades throughout the course.

Student: And I would say she keeps us updated along the way so it's never like a level that we get on an assignment is super surprising cause we know where we're at and we know where we need to improve

Teacher: I think for me as a parent what do I want out of the education system for my children. I want them now a love of learning. Everything will fall into place as long as they love to learn. What we do creates an environment where kids can learn and feel comfortable about learning and that is the only focus and really that is our only job as educators. It's not to put a stamp on a kid. That's the worst thing that we can do. I still have a lifetime of learning to do as an educator and I really look forward to that. So I'm happy that I've learnt this and I know the next 15 years or 16 years of my career I'm going to continue to learn and I'm excited about that

Narration: When teachers collect a valid and reliable body of evidence, and engage students as collaborative partners in the process of analysing that evidence by looking at outliers and contextual information given by the student, then teachers can use their professional judgment to interpret that evidence and use mathematical calculations to arrive at a final grade that best represents the student's learning.