



# ACUE

Student Success  
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Teaching

## Expert Insights: Assigning Greater Weight to More Recent Evidence

**Joe Feldman, EdM; Author & Consultant; Crescendo Education Group** [00:00:13] Traditionally, what we do is we include all of a student's performance at every point of their learning. So at the beginning of a term, I was learning about a particular skill or content. I took a quiz. I later took some summative assessment. And then maybe there's another assessment that comes two months later and then maybe there's another assessment over that same content toward the end. And what we do traditionally is we include all of those scores in the grade calculation. The problem with that is that for students who come in with a stronger educational background or who have had more access to high quality educational supports or who receive that early in the term, they are getting high scores throughout. For the students who have had fewer supports or have had more, have been more historically underserved in getting access to higher educational opportunities, they are going to come in with less prior knowledge and they are going to have lower scores at the beginning of their learning. What we traditionally do is we say, "OK, for the student who had high performance throughout, we're going to look and average those and they've got that high score. And for the student who had low scores at the beginning but ultimately learned it, we're going to average that which is essentially going to pull down the final grade. And we're going to report them as actually having a lower understanding than they actually performed at the end." What we want to do to be more equitable, to counteract those disparities in resources, is only describe student performance and student learning at the end of learning, in the more recent performance. So if a student didn't know something very well at the beginning but learned it by the end, we would only report where they were in their understanding at the end of their learning. And what this is is not only more accurate because we are describing exactly where they are in their understanding and it's more current, we are counteracting institutional biases because now we're not saying, "If you had more struggles beforehand, we're going to disproportionately make it harder for you." And it's also more motivational. When students know that they always have a chance to show success, even if they struggle early, they will be much more motivated and more invested in the classroom and in their learning.

**Ken O'Connor, MEd; Author and Consultant; Assess for Success Consulting, Inc** [00:02:31] I think what we're looking for is evidence that the student knows, understands, and can do. And we get that evidence from the assessments that we've had them submit and we look at the whole body of evidence. I think most learning, in fact I would suggest almost all learning when we are based on standards, is cumulative and developmental. We're moving from not knowing and understanding very well on each of the standards to, with good teaching and good learning, knowing and understanding well. And so if that is the case, we need to emphasize the more recent evidence because that is the result of the learning process when it's happening the way it should. If we average, then early performances that were at a low-level impact the final grade. And we teach, again usually about Grade 5, about measures of central tendency: mean, median, and mode. They each have strengths, weaknesses. They're each appropriate with some distributions and inappropriate with other distributions. And we teach that the mean is an inappropriate measure of central tendency when there are outlier scores. Well, the outlier scores that students almost always have are low outliers. So if there are outlier scores, we shouldn't be using the mean. I like to say, you know, "We've been mean teachers and we shouldn't be." Because it, more often than not, it will not give us an accurate picture. We only get an accurate picture if students are fairly consistent, if we average. Our final judgment should be based on, or a very important part of that should be the more recent evidence: mode, plus more recent, plus professional judgment.

**Joe Feldman, EdM** [00:04:14] Some faculty wonder why only looking at student performance at the end of their learning is fair, right? The student who came in and always performed well would have a particular grade, and a student who didn't perform very well at the beginning, didn't understand but learned well, would have the same grade at the end of the term. And I think the concern is that there's only a limited number of successes that I can have in a classroom. It is applying what is a very old model of thinking about what education is, which is as a sorting mechanism. What we want in our classrooms is to essentially say, "This is the target. This is what you need



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to hit to have an A. And some students will learn it quickly because they had prior background knowledge. Some students will take longer to learn, and it doesn't matter how quickly you learn something. Learning is not a race. The target is clear and fixed. And anyone who hits that target can have a grade that reflects that they hit that target." Students who come into the classroom with weaker background knowledge or who've been more systemically underserved are going to be more motivated to persevere when they know that their early mistakes won't be held against them if they ultimately learn. So they're going to stay motivated. The student who has strong prior knowledge and is successful actually doesn't say, "I'm not going to work hard because I can just work hard later." What that student does is, because they're good at it, they love to keep being good at it. That student loves to continue doing something that they're good at and they continue to get those As. In other words, it doesn't change the motivation for the higher performing student, and it only increases motivation for the students who struggle.

**Ken O'Connor, MEd** [00:06:05] If professors don't recognize the more recent and give students lower grades averaged over the whole course, but the students have really learned well because that professor was a great teacher, if the teacher doesn't recognize that more recent achievement that he or she is putting down the quality of their own work, which makes no sense. Why would you put down the quality of your own work? If your students have got it at the end, give them the grade they deserve and recognize that you did a great job.