Moderation matters
A guide to leading collaborative moderation in schools
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Valuing teacher professional judgement

‘Australian teachers ... must fight to retain both their pre-eminence and their rights as the best judges of how well their students are doing. (Information about learner progress and achievement) must be grounded in and informed by the rich judgments of the teachers who see children at work every day.’ (Garth Boomer 1991 in the foreword to: Evaluating Literacy: A Perspective for Change p.v1)

As a South Australian educational leader widely recognised for his forward thinking, insight and high regard for teachers’ work, Garth Boomer’s words about the importance of teacher professional judgements endure the passage of time. His recognition of the importance of teachers’ professional judgements in determining what and how well students are learning, and the progress they are making in their learning journey, remains as critical today as in 1991.

When A – E grades assigned by teachers to report on student progress and achievement take their place alongside NAPLAN, PAT and other data sets, teachers’ professional judgements are an integral part of the picture painted by the available data on student learning. In order to hold their own amidst the information used to determine learner progress and achievement, teachers recognise that A – E grades require teacher professional judgements which are informed and consistent.

“....the majority of teachers believe that moderation using standards does result in consistency of teacher judgement.”
(Connolly et al 2012 from Queensland ARC Linkage project)

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers
Professional Practice
5.3 Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning

http://www.aitsl.edu.au/australian-professional-standards-for-teachers/standards/list?&s=5
Developing consistency of teacher professional judgement

When teachers get together in professional discussions about student progress and learning, they enrich their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum as they learn from each other about designing learning, about what student progress and achievement looks like and about assessing learning. Their development of shared understandings about the curriculum, including the achievement standards, leads to greater consistency in their professional judgements about progress and achievement and about the quality of that achievement. As teachers develop deeper understandings of the curriculum, the intent of the achievement standards and what quality learning looks like, they more consistently and confidently assign valid, fair and robust A – E grades against the achievement standards.

Using Learning Design teachers align the WHAT and HOW of teaching and learning in the Australian Curriculum. 

www.acleadersresource.sa.edu.au

“Working together with this mob really helped me get a handle on the importance of understanding the (AC) achievement standard to identify what the intended learning might look like so that I can be surer about the grades I give.”

(Primary teacher, October 2014)

“Teachers are best placed to determine quality of student achievement over time and at specific points because teachers are integral to requirements of teaching, assessment tasks and expectations of quality performance.”

(Wyatt-Smith, Klenowski & Gunn, 2010, p.61)
Making on-balance judgements

Achievement standards

Each achievement standard in the Australian Curriculum describes the expected quality of achievement for students as a result of being taught the learning in the content descriptions for that year of schooling.

The achievement standards describe what students are typically able to understand and able to do. Across Reception–Year 10 the set of achievement standards describe a broad sequence of expected learning.

The sequence of achievement standards within each learning area or subject emphasises the depth of conceptual understanding, the sophistication of skills and the ability to apply essential knowledge expected of students.

Achievement standards provide reference points for monitoring students’ learning progress. In doing this, they also describe an entitlement for all students and provide the reference for teachers’ planning, programming and assessing.

In planning for the learning, the teacher identifies the verbs and nouns within an achievement standard.
Quality assurance

In order to demonstrate that the judgements made by teachers and reported to students, parents and the system are valid, they must be quality assured.

Teachers make professional judgments about student achievement on a daily basis - it is a key professional skill. When they assign A–E grades and report these to parents/carers they want to be confident that the grades are fair and consistent. **Collaborative moderation** is one of the most effective methods of quality assuring judgements as it strengthens the consistency of teacher judgement. The data derived from teacher judgements about the allocation of grades, quality assured through moderation processes, assures the system that a ‘C’ is a ‘C’ no matter where or when it was assigned. It assures our education system that teacher judgement is consistent, valid and defensible.

Working with peers across schools and local partnerships to consider students’ evidence of learning through collaborative moderation ensures that teacher judgements are adjusted or validated, quality assured and deprivatised.

When A–E grades take their place alongside NAPLAN, PAT and other data sets, teachers’ professional judgements are an integral part of the picture. Teachers recognise that to be highly regarded, their professional judgements need to be consistent, informed, reliable and of high quality. This is vital in valuing the daily work of teachers and in ensuring public confidence in our education system. We need to be able to demonstrate with certainty that learning in our schools is at the expected standard and that schools are meeting the goals of education.

It is important for DECD teachers to have confidence in their assessment practices, in the feedback that they give to students and in the information that they provide for parents about their child’s progress, including grades in a report. Quality assuring the teacher’s judgements through the collaborative moderation process can provide that confidence.

“The value of looking at student work resides in its potential for bringing students more consistently and explicitly into deliberations among teachers. Looking at student work has the potential to expand teachers’ opportunity to learn, to cultivate a professional community that is both willing and able to inquire into practice, and to focus school-based teacher conversations directly on the improvement of teaching and learning.”

(Little et al, November 2003)

I need to develop confidence in sharing my practice with colleagues – collaborative moderation can help this.

(Teacher, Settlers Farm, 2014)
School improvement

Collaborative practice is identified in current research as a significant feature in high achieving schools and systems.

The fundamental purpose of collaborative moderation is to enhance consistency of teacher judgements across a school and within local partnerships to ensure that the data that is analysed for school improvement is valid and reliable.

Collectively, everyone in DECD is responsible for maximizing each and every student’s learning, to help them become the most successful learner they can be (DECD, 2014). For South Australia to have a strong public education system, characterized by high achievement, growth, challenge, engagement and equity (DECD, 2014), there needs to be public confidence in the data that schools use to demonstrate their improvement. Achievement information beyond standardised data provides a rich picture of learning within a school.

To ensure that this information provided to students, parents/carers and the community is consistent, fair and reliable, the judgements that teachers make about student learning need to be moderated as part of a school’s regular quality assurance processes.

In her study of over 1,000 Year 4 and 5 teachers in New York City, Leana found that, “Students showed higher gains in math achievement when their teachers reported frequent conversations with their peers that centred on math, and when there was a feeling of trust or closeness among teachers.”


Role of leaders

“It is school leaders who promote challenging goals, and then establish safe environments for teachers to critique, question, and support other teachers to reach these goals together that have most effect on student outcomes.” (Hattie, 2008)

The process for managing collaborative moderation in a school will include discussions between leaders and teachers about:

- managing the portfolio system i.e. when (dates), what (content), where (storage), who (access).
- determining the number of student portfolios that each teacher will collect
- establishing a program of collaborative moderation across the school year (e.g. before mid-year reporting; school closure days)
- developing local partnership and/or secondary school networks collaborative moderation groups
- setting time aside to collect work samples
- analysing the data for future planning

“Effective collaboration involves more than simply working together. It demands a disciplined and purposeful approach to collaborating to solve the challenges that are most important to improving student outcomes.”

AITSL 2012
Moderation Matters – Version 3.0
February 2016

Collaborative moderation

“Standards and exemplars will not lead to consistent judgments in and of themselves. Moderation practice is central to sustainable cultures for system and site validity.”
Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith (n.d.)

Collaborative moderation is the DECD preferred way that consistency of teacher judgement can be improved at a year, learning area, school or local partnership level. Teachers collaboratively look at a portfolio of student work to adjust or validate the judgements they make about the quality and achievement of the student’s learning. Collaborative moderation is more successful when it is preceded by the engagement activities. 
Assessment, moderation and reporting - DECD intranet site

Research has shown that for teachers to effectively assess student work they require a deep understanding of the standards (Harlen, 2004). The clearer teachers are about the goals of students’ learning, the more consistently they apply the assessment criteria. Quality assessment practices need planned and structured time for teachers to meet and share their expertise, knowledge and understanding.

Collaborative moderation processes as professional learning are based on the use of a process.

Process:
• is led by a facilitator
• ensures professional respect and safety for all participants through regulated discussion
• enriches understanding of the achievement standard
• provides opportunities for different views to be shared and heard
• maintains the focus of discussion on the evidence and the achievement standard
• ensures achievement feedback and the assigned grade for the student is fair, consistent, valid and defensible.

Collaborative moderation is the most effective of a range of strategies.

Other strategies for improving the consistency of teacher judgement in a school

Teachers can become more consistent in their judgements about student achievement through a range of collaborative professional activities, such as:

• planning teaching and assessment together
• developing shared understandings about the achievement standards and their developmental sequence through engagement activities
• developing common criteria from an achievement standard
• comparing samples of student work against aspects of an achievement standard
• discussing annotated work samples (such as the portfolios on the Australian Curriculum website)
• comparing student work samples generated through teaching and learning activities, with the AC annotated portfolios and other collected examples of student work
• sharing understandings about assessment
• using common assessment tasks across classes and comparing the learning outcomes
• peer reviewing and providing feedback
• examining quality professional learning resources in PLCS, such as research articles, TFEL resources and videos such as on the AITSL website
Teachers who engage consistently in the collaborative moderation process are able to:

- build a shared knowledge and understanding of the achievement standards and curriculum expectations
- develop a deeper understanding of their students’ thinking and learning
- assess student performance more effectively, consistently and fairly
- more closely align their teaching and assessment practices
- share effective practice to meet the needs of all students and monitor growth
- enhance their own learning about pedagogy, curriculum and assessment.

It is the important teacher talk and interactions during moderation meetings that impact positively on assessment practices, task design, student learning practices, teaching and assessment.

(Klenowski, 2008)

“It is through moderation practice over time that teachers develop judgement practice that is dependable and defensible.”

Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith (n.d.)
Portfolios: Collecting evidence of learning

For the purposes of collaborative moderation, a portfolio is an organised collection of evidence of a student’s learning. It is used by the moderating group of teachers to support the grade assigned to the student’s work by the teacher.

A portfolio comprises a set of student work samples, which when considered in an on-balanced way, will provide an accurate picture of a student’s learning across the semester or year in relation to the relevant achievement standard(s) in the Australian Curriculum. Teachers and learners can be discerning about the selection of work samples that are included so that the portfolio demonstrates learning against the achievement standard.

Developing portfolios

Portfolios describe a comprehensive picture of a student’s progress and achievement.

They:
- allow teachers to develop consistency of judgement
- highlight the aspects of the achievement standard for which evidence is demonstrated
- can be useful evidence in reporting and sharing with families
- foster student-teacher communication
- can provide models of quality work that can be used as exemplars for other students
- document student learning and progress over time
- can provide a focus for student self-assessment and goal setting for their learning.

Collected evidence in a portfolio could include:
1. high quality assessment tasks which address a range of new contexts
2. work samples that represent a variety of ways of demonstrating learning e.g. oral presentations, team work and individual artefacts, photos, videos, etc.
3. peer and self-assessments
4. teacher anecdotal notes, check-lists, planning sheets, etc.
5. a completed cover sheet attached to the front of the portfolio, each of the work samples and each of the assessment task/s.

Annotated portfolios of student work samples can be found on the Australian Curriculum website. They are first mentioned at:
http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/overview/structure

To moderate, teachers will need to collect a portfolio from:
- one student at satisfactory achievement of the standard
- one student at above satisfactory achievement of the standard
- one student at below satisfactory achievement of the standard.

Using portfolios in the collaborative moderation process:

Teachers will need to provide multiple copies of the portfolios of student work to the moderating group. This requires advanced planning and organisation by the teacher/s. It is important that the contributing teacher is both supported during this collection process and protected during the collaborative moderation process through the use of the moderation protocol. A facilitator will need to be decided upon for each table and provided with time to familiarise themselves with the protocol before the collaborative moderation session.

Portfolios can be passed on to the next teacher if it contains relevant information for the next year of learning or they can be sent home with the student at the end of the year or kept as model samples.
## Verbs and nouns

To identify knowledge, understanding and skills as described in the achievement standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verbs</th>
<th>Nouns/ Noun phrases</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List each verb once</td>
<td>List nouns or noun groups</td>
<td>Identify from achievement standard the context in which nouns apply</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Collaborative Moderation Process

The following process should be led by a nominated group facilitator. 2 hours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The following process should be led by a nominated group facilitator. 2 hours.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction, working in a small group</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Presenter and participants briefly introduce themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clarify year level focus and pairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Familiarity with the achievement standard, working in pairs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Highlight, list and discuss the <strong>verbs and nouns</strong> in the relevant achievement standard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Resume as a whole group and discuss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Initial scan of the work samples, working individually</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participants look through the portfolio/work sample.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Refer to the standard with reference to the work samples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Make some notes of initial impressions on the Moderator Record Sheet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflecting on the evidence, working in pairs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on the evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Look closely at the work samples in the portfolio and discuss:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Is there sufficient evidence to make a judgement about the achievement of the standard?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o What are the gaps if any in the evidence?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o What further evidence might be required to demonstrate achievement of the standard?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• As teachers work through the portfolio, it is useful to highlight the aspects of the achievement standard for which evidence is demonstrated. This provides a visual image of the aspects of the achievement standard represented by the portfolio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Has the teacher provided opportunities for the student to show what they know, understand and can do against the achievement standard?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discussing the evidence, working in a small group</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To determine as a group if the portfolio provides sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the student has demonstrated satisfactory achievement of the standard:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Each teacher declares if they believe the portfolio, on-balance, provides evidence of satisfactory achievement of the standard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participants then provide justifications and defensible arguments for their decision, referencing examples in the work sample to the achievement standard, providing clear indicators of the connections between the evidence and the achievement standard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Determining the A – E grade, working in small group (may need to go into paired discussion)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>To provide advice to the teacher regarding the grade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discuss the grade that each person has allocated to the portfolio, providing a key reason for the determination</td>
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<tr>
<td>• If the group does not have common agreement, then return to discussion to reconsider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Further discussion as a group then occurs and a group decision on the grade is reached, based on the evidence and reasoning provided by the participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constructing Feedback, working in small group</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feedback for the teacher who provided the portfolio is documented by each participant on the Moderator Record Sheet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moderation notes: It is important to record thinking to inform decisions, discussion and feedback to the teacher providing the portfolio.

Teacher/Portfolio: ............................................................................................................................................

Learning Area/Standard: ....................................................................................................................................

1. Initial thoughts on the evidence provided in the work samples.

2. What evidence in the work samples aligns with the standard? How? (Be specific)

3. What are the gaps in the evidence? What further evidence might be required to demonstrate achievement at the standard? (Be specific)

4. How might the assessment be modified to better reflect the standard? (This may apply to some, none or all of the tasks)
Peer Review

Moderation notes: It is important to record your thinking to inform your decisions, discussion and feedback to the teacher providing the portfolio.

Learning Area/subject:

Year level:

Reviewer Names:

Portfolio identification (e.g. student name/coded identifier)

Grade assigned by teacher (circle one): A B C D E

Achievement standard (insert relevant achievement standard)

1. What evidence in the portfolio aligns with elements of the achievement standard? (be specific)

2. What are the aspects of the AS not covered in the portfolio? (be specific)

3. Other observations

1. Peer Review - this portfolio is (circle one): A B C D E

2. Peer Review - this portfolio is (circle one): A B C D E
# A-E guide reporting resource

A guide to making A – E grade judgements when reporting against Australian Curriculum achievement standards in DECD schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Word equivalent</th>
<th>A – E indicators: <em>In relation to the achievement standard, the student has demonstrated</em> ...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| A     | Your child is demonstrating excellent achievement of what is expected at this year level | • high level capacity to apply knowledge, skills and understandings in new contexts  
• extensive understanding of concepts and key ideas and ability to make connections between them  
• outstanding development of skills  
• comprehensive knowledge of content |
| B     | Your child is demonstrating good achievement of what is expected at this year level | • strong capacity to apply knowledge, skills and understandings in new contexts  
• deep understanding of concepts and key ideas  
• high level development of skills  
• thorough knowledge of content |
| C     | Your child is demonstrating satisfactory achievement of what is expected at this year level | • capacity to apply knowledge, skills and understandings in new contexts  
• adequate understanding of concepts and key ideas  
• sound development of skills  
• adequate knowledge of content |
| D     | Your child is demonstrating partial achievement of what is expected at this year level | • capacity to apply knowledge, skills and understandings in familiar contexts  
• some understanding of concepts and key ideas  
• some development of skills  
• basic knowledge of content |
| E     | Your child is demonstrating minimal achievement of what is expected at this year level | • beginning capacity to apply knowledge, skills and understandings in a familiar context  
• beginning understanding of concepts and key ideas  
• initial development of skills  
• limited knowledge of content |
Student portfolio cover sheet
To be completed by teacher providing portfolio for moderation and attached to the cover of the portfolio

Learning area/Subject:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work sample #</th>
<th>No. of pages in sample</th>
<th>Title of assessment task/work sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>8</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from ACARA Work Samples Project material
Collaborative Moderation Student work sample cover sheet
To be completed by teacher providing portfolio for moderation and attached to each work sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of assessment task</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Links to the Australian Curriculum

**Achievement standard**
Insert achievement standard and highlight in yellow the aspects represented in the work sample.

**Content description**
Insert the appropriate content description from the appropriate strands.

2. **Background information**
Relevant information to support the work sample e.g. the context in which the unit of work was taught, cross curriculum priorities, general capabilities, etc.

3. **Task description**
Include the wording of the assessment task or attach a copy of the task.

4. **Relevant resources**
Include a list of relevant resources.
## School Improvement

### Thinking about collaborative moderation in your site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Where</strong> does collaborative moderation fit with your site learning plan, assessment practices in the school and Australian Curriculum implementation?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What</strong> will you do to start the process of collaborative moderation in your site?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How</strong> many portfolios for each achievement standard will be enough?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who</strong> will be involved in implementing moderation and PLCs in your site?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Which</strong> teachers will provide portfolios for initial collaborative moderation sessions?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How</strong> will the teachers know at the beginning of the year which students to focus on for portfolio collection?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>When</strong> will you start collecting portfolios, develop PLCs, run collaborative moderation sessions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What</strong> is your timeline for collaborative moderation?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>When</strong> do you need to start thinking about collaborative moderation in the partnerships or secondary network</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What process</strong> will you use to implement collaborative moderation in your site?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How</strong> do you ensure that teachers understand the achievement standards in the Australian curriculum, the reporting requirements and the purposes and processes of collaborative moderation?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How</strong> will you manage the collection of evidence?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>How</strong> will teachers manage portfolios (digital, hard copy)?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>What</strong> support will be provided to teachers who are collecting initial portfolios for collaborative moderation?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Task</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Site expectations about assessment, reporting, quality assurance processes (collaborative moderation) and portfolios determined</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dates for site and/or local partnership collaborative moderation established</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff participated in achievement standards familiarisation activities e.g. achievement standards engagement activities available at <a href="http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/assessment/pages/Leader/LeaderSTAR/?reFlag=1">http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/assessment/pages/Leader/LeaderSTAR/?reFlag=1</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers provided with blank cover sheets for student work samples, assessment tasks and the portfolios</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers begin collecting evidence of student learning</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff meeting planned prior to reporting to ensure clarity of expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Staff PLCs established and focus for discussions decided</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Storage of portfolios arranged</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Which A-E data to be collected from the reports for school improvement discussions is determined</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A-E data is collaboratively shared and discussed for the purposes of school improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other resources

Curriculum, Pedagogy, Assessment and Reporting Policy for Reception-Year 10


Guidelines for the implementation of the Australian Curriculum in DECD schools: Reception-Year 10


There are also several videos on the AITSL website illustrating other ways that teachers can improve the consistency of their judgements (e.g. comparing work samples with other teachers, collaboratively planning units of work):

South Australian Teaching for Effective Learning Framework

Reporting on Australian Curriculum in DECD schools Reception–Year 10 V2.0 (Version 2.0)

References


Connolly, Klenowski, Wyatt-Smith (2012) Moderation and Consistency of Teacher Judgement: Teachers’ Views
http://eprints.qut.edu.au/43600/


Klenowski V & Wyatt-Smith (n.d.) Standards, moderation and teacher judgement for learning improvement: Teachers’ experiences and perspectives


Sadler R: Conversations about the Learning Record http://www.learningrecord.org/sadler.html


Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders AITSL August 2012