

7 Principles for data

1 Do it together

Professionals begin their work by getting the data on the situation to be dealt with. Teachers as professionals learn their work with and from each other. If learning is everybody's business, therefore data is everybody's business. Do you have a data wall you continually look at? Don't keep data secret.

2 Inquiry before judgment

The data, used well, frame good questions
Used poorly, they rush to judgment
Questions are starting points for future action; judgments are stopping points, assigning blame or credit without giving a way forward. You may come to a judgment eventually, but it needs to be as a result of an inquiry process that works on good questions.

3 Be courageously honest

Without data, I'm just another person with an opinion
The point of having data is to avoid self-delusion. There are hard questions to be answered in the productive use of data. Don't avoid them. Don't believe your own advertising!! Discipline around Inquiry before Judgment clears the air for investigation of the hard questions. It is also vital that leaders model integrity in their approach to the data; doing things to "fix" the students' marks (selective absenteeism etc) does not help the learning.

4 Cross-investigate Status, Gain and Improvement

Status – where the student or class average or percentage is at the moment – is only part of the data story. Gain – the difference for the student between now and a previous score on the same skill – gives a basis for interesting questions about teaching. Improvement – how the school is faring on any indicator compared to previous years – needs to have an overview of both status and gain. Learning to work the three of these concepts with each of the other two is the basis of the most useful questions.

5 Drill down

Start looking at an overview of the whole group you are responsible for – a system, a school, a class. Look at status, gain and improvement measures. Select one area to start with. Go in, one level at a time – the school within the system, the class within the school, the student within the class, the student in a particular area or question. What are the patterns, where are the questions?

6 Put a face on the data

Having a clear idea of individual students and their results is the aim. Classes don't learn, students do. What we are looking for is the patterns across students that give good questions. Then, when students are again facing up to an assessment, engage in the exercise of putting the data you expect with the person. It is a great discipline to compare this with what is actually achieved, and look for the learnings there.

7 Frame the questions to lead to learning

What are our students' learning needs?
Therefore, what are our learning needs?
Until we get to relevant answers to these questions, we do not have a way forward. When we do, we can frame a course of action that improves student learning. By improving our learning.

and its use in informing learning