

Data isn't just a four letter word

Like it or not, data cannot be dismissed as “just another four letter word”. Now, more than ever, gathering, synthesising, analysing and reporting on data is an intrinsic part of working in education. Therefore it is both essential and wise to invest time in developing strategies and systems to not only cope, but thrive, in the data-informed school environment.

Here are some ideas for lightening the load:

1. Work backwards – start where you hope to end up. Know WHAT you need to assess, WHEN you need to report on it and WHO you are sharing that information with. Understanding the difference between formative and summative assessment is critical to this step. Leaders need to ensure staff are clear on their purpose for gathering data and teachers must always know their audience.
2. Use technology as a tool to help gather data, particularly if it offers time-saving options such as direct input from students and tools to aid in synthesis and analysis of results.
3. Wherever possible, share the responsibility of learning from data WITH students. They can be instruments not only in gathering and synthesising data but if you can maintain anonymity, students can also analyse and interpret the data on their class to make inferences that help direct where their next steps in learning are. Increasing autonomy via input both decreases your work burden and escalates student engagement – a win for all!
4. Use the language of learning intentions to develop simple systems / codes to share feedback. Don't get bogged down in detail.
5. Share and collaborate as often as you can – the happiest teachers are the most efficient ones; they work smarter not harder and embrace the “beg, borrow and steal” philosophy. When leaders build time into work schedules for this, the return on investment is always significant.

Without data you are just another person with an opinion.

W. Edwards Deming

Formal reporting has traditionally been a time-consuming, stressful period for teachers but you can use the climate of persistent assessment upon us to your advantage. Assess and evaluate yourself now and check whether you are embracing improvement, not just compliance.

In our time-poor world, too much data is almost worse than no data at all, staff teams need to unite to determine what information really IS valuable. The collection of data should not dominate teacher time to the exclusion of analysis or implementation of revision and change. It is the latter that gives us satisfaction as educational professionals. Critically, time for refinement needs to be incorporated, as this is what allows us the chance to truly feel like we are making a difference and helping students.

Efficiency

Key points

Too many teachers say they are “drowning in data”.

Focus on the end goal of high expectations for learning.

Work smart by working backwards – know where you want your students to end up and then fill in the gaps.

Be discerning about WHAT data is gathered and valued.

Don't waste time or energy on inefficient processes or irrelevant data.

Steve Francis MScM, BEd, DipT

www.SteveFrancis.net.au

Steve is an expert in school leadership and work-life satisfaction. Steve was a Principal for 20 years and is the author of four books, 'Time Management For Teachers', 'A Gr8 Life...Live it Now!', 'First Semester Can Make or Break You!' and 'Attitude is Everything'. Steve lives in Brisbane with his wife and family but works with school leaders and staff in schools across Australia and internationally.

