

Data-Driven Decisions: Making Sense of the Data We Have

ISSUE: In early childhood settings, the data gathered for licensing and accreditation requirements is intended to cast light on children's needs and drive improvements in quality. All too often these data are not used beyond compliance purposes. In order for data to inform day-to-day teaching and learning, professional development, and organizational planning, leaders must create the time and structures needed to make data-driven decisions. In this brief, we review four key categories of data collected in early childhood settings, clarify the information each provides, and illustrate how the data are meant to be used to improve practice and quality.

Data Categories

WHAT THESE DATA CAPTURE

FORMAL CHILD ASSESSMENTS

- Children's learning and development across domains, including identifying risk

e.g., Creative Curriculum, ASQ, TS Gold

ASSESSMENTS OF CLASSROOM PRACTICES & QUALITY

- Classroom interactions, instruction, and organization

e.g., CLASS, ELLCO, ECERS

SETTING-LEVEL QUALITY

- Curriculum approaches
- Health and safety routines
- Workforce qualifications and training
- Family and community engagement
- Leadership quality

e.g., QRIS, accreditation

INCIDENT REPORTS & DAILY LOGS

- Patterns of illness, injury, and behavior
- Implementation of health and safety routines

e.g., Injury, attendance, medications, incident

Case Example: Data Reflection for Use

After seeing the last child off, Melinda, the director of an early childhood center, sits at her desk and turns back to her [quality rating report](#). She picks up where she left off: Curriculum and Learning. The previous year, she and her teachers examined scores on their [formal classroom observation tool](#) and noticed that one weakness was the level of talk and discussion in the classroom. Understanding that discussion can help build [higher-order thinking](#), the staff agreed to focus on using book reading and extended conversations to generate substantive talk during class time, among children and teachers. They committed time and attention during professional learning community sessions to this often difficult instructional approach and, as [observations](#) confirmed, the staff worked daily on increasing classroom talk. Before submitting this year's classroom observations as documentation to support her [self-assessment](#), she looks over the other areas on the report, to identify additional areas for growth. Next, Melinda moves on to review this month's [daily logs](#), flipping through the pages of the [Incident and Injury Report](#). Reviewing them together for the first time, she sees a pattern: A majority of the incidents occurred following afternoon snack, between 3:30 and 4 p.m. She realizes that this is during a staffing change...

SELF STUDY

Use the Following Questions to Start Reflecting on How You Use Data

- How do we support educators to interpret and use data such that we improve instruction and interactions?
- Do we use data to reflect on all the critical components of early learning? Do we look at:
 - individual children's needs, including learning, health, and safety risks?
 - the overall setting, including patterns of interaction, instruction, organization, and children's learning?
- Do we use patterns in data to guide decisions and improvement plans, including those focused on:
 - structures (e.g., daily routines, staffing, and scheduling)?
 - instruction and classroom interactions?
 - professional development? (Briefs 3 & 4)