

The following examples of typical reactions from teachers to the data that FirstSchool provides may help leaders and other educators anticipate how discussions about data might evolve as they begin to foster more collaborative inquiry!

## **Introducing Collaborative Inquiry**

Because our participants have never been asked to examine this type of detailed data before, learning how to effectively utilize information about their classroom instruction becomes part of a continual development process. We consistently observe patterns that educators move through as they become more used to using data for inquiry into their practice:

1. Blame (“It was a test prep day,” “These people don’t know what they are talking about”)
2. Denial (“We don’t do that”)
3. Frustration (“That’s terrible that we do so little X or so much Y”)
4. Acceptance and inquiry (“What can we do to make this different?”).

As teachers become proficient in understanding and interpreting the data, we hear a variety of comments, especially as they observe changes made from one observation period to the next:

***“I am happy to see that we are spending 13% of our time focused on vocabulary development because we noticed how little of that we were doing last time. This is true not just at our grade level, so it means this is becoming part of our school culture.”***

Teachers who are satisfied with changes they have made may continue to monitor their progress or seek to gain more fine-grained information, such as what teaching approaches are being used with a focus on teacher-student and peer interaction to ensure and support learning.

***“That is too much whole group time. I want there to be less.”***

Teachers who wish to make changes in activity settings may then think purposefully about how to reduce the time children spend in too-prevalent activity settings and what other types of activity settings might benefit children (e.g., by increasing small group or free choice time).

***“I see that the research tells us that many of the things we want to have happen for children happen during time when children have choices and we only do that 2% of the day.”***

Often, teachers do not independently set up the activity settings in their classrooms. Rather, time spent in settings such as whole group instruction or individual seatwork is dictated or influenced by school or district policies. Teachers armed with information about how children use their time, as well as the research that supports the importance of choice, are well-equipped to have frank discussions with school and district leadership about changes

that could be made to improve children's experiences and increase flexibility in their instruction.

***“We cut our transition time by 30 minutes per day. That translates into 12 whole school days over the course of the year.”***

Often, data provide the means to gauge successes. Few things are more heartening to professionals than seeing the fruits of their labors in the data and seeing how small changes led to improved instructional experiences for their students.

***“We think we are so lucky to see this data. Not everyone gets to know so much about what happens in their classrooms.”***

Using data often begets more data use. When teachers see the power of data to provide a new lens on their practice, they often find more creative ways to use systematic information to shape and improve their pedagogy.

***“If we're spending 40% of our time in didactic instruction, 15% in scaffolding, and 2% in reflection – what is happening the other 43% of the time?”***

Often, teachers cannot see their own practice effectively. Here, teachers may wish to further investigate why so much of the day features children working without instruction. Some of this time may be used well as children work with one another or practice previously taught skills. Other time, however, may be ripe for additional teacher input to help scaffold students' learning. Gathering more data will allow these teachers to discriminate between the two scenarios.

***“We're pleased to see that there is a connection between our Kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade classrooms in the area of whole language instruction. It looks like we are moving slowly from an emphasis on phonics to a focus on whole language skills.”***

Data gathered in classrooms may be most effectively acted upon when it is paired with extant research on best practices from peer-reviewed journals. Here, teachers are moving to act on research that suggests a more balanced literacy approach rather than one relying entirely on phonics. The information gathered provides the means to confirm that such changes are occurring vertically throughout the school.

### ***Suggested citations:***

Holland, A. (2013). *Introducing collaborative inquiry*. Chapel Hill, NC: FirstSchool.

*This information can also be found in Chapter 2 of our book:*

Holland, A., Crawford, G., Ritchie, S., & Early, D. (2013). A culture of collaborative inquiry. In Ritchie, S. & Gutmann, L. (Eds.), *FirstSchool: Transforming PreK-3<sup>rd</sup> Grade for African American, Latino, and Low-Income Children*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.