

Voices from the Field: Aly Heathcoat



Q1: How can a classroom teacher embed data collection into everyday activities?

In my classroom, we serve children who are funded through the North Carolina Pre- Kindergarten program, children who are receiving preschool special education services, as well as children who pay to attend our early childhood center. It can be challenging to balance the needs of these children and families who come from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. One concrete way to do this is to use data collection to inform instruction in our classroom and to embed instruction across our classroom routines. It is crucial to understand where each child is developmentally in order to move them to the next step or milestone in their development. We collect data on all of the domains of development and use it to inform our planning.

While it is widely recognized that data collection is an essential piece of planning instruction, the time it takes to structure and implement data collection methods can seem intimidating to a busy classroom teacher. As a classroom teacher myself, I can definitely identify with that feeling. However, data collection to inform embedded instruction does not have to be intimidating. In my classroom, my co-teacher and I intentionally plan data collection and embed it throughout our school day. Here is one strategy that we have found to be helpful for embedding intervention and collecting data to inform instruction.

The question of the day provides us with a consistent way to embed instruction in one part of the daily routine of our classroom. Requiring children to sign in as they enter the classroom is common practice in many pre-kindergarten programs. This is done to give children a regular opportunity to practice name writing and allows teachers to assess progress. However, with a little more intentional planning and instructor support, morning sign in can be used to embed instruction and data collection at the start of every school day. In my classroom, we do this by asking children a “Question of the Day.” The questions we use are geared either towards our current study topic or towards a specific purpose such as recognizing the letters in their name. Children respond to the question by signing their name under their answer.

We plan for the Question of the Day when working on our weekly lesson plans. We first look at which objectives we want to assess or what the purpose of the questions for that week need to be. For example, if we need to assess children’s understanding of math concepts, we might ask a yes/no question such as “Do you have siblings?” We can then be intentional about the way we interact with children during their turn to answer the question by discussing which response has more/less, or which answer they think will have more or less at the end. We can also check their ability to look at an amount and guess how many items there are, as well as practice counting by having them count the number of responses on each side. The great thing about the question of the day is while we might focus on one area, the question might allow us to assess or instruct across multiple domains. In this example of “Do you have siblings?,” this is a great time to discuss a new vocabulary word (siblings). We could also use this question for social studies as children are discussing something

about themselves (sense of self) and have to recognize that other people might have a different answer than their own.

Other examples of domains that can be incorporated into the Question of the Day are early literacy (early reading and writing), cognitive/science, and social studies. Early literacy can be incorporated through questions such as “Do you have a (any letter) in your name?” This is particularly helpful when several children in the class are working to identify the letters in their name. However, this can be scaffolded for children who already understand this by looking at the letters in their peers’ name or using the question to look at concept of word (teacher points to each word while reading the question and sounds out words while doing so). The question of the day is a great time to work on making predictions. Children can guess which answer will have the most or least. We also love to use the question of the day to discuss similarities and differences and to help children recognize that other people might have different opinions than they do.

The Question of the Day works best if the questions are relatively simple. We have found that yes/no questions, would you rather questions, or do you prefer questions are the easiest to discuss and assess in a short amount of time. Since this activity requires more teacher involvement than a typical sign in, we usually have one teacher work on calling children to answer the question of the day while the other teacher monitors the classroom. The teacher who is in charge of the question of the day will keep either a clipboard for taking anecdotal notes, or our classroom iPad to take pictures or videos, depending on what we are trying to assess.