

Guiding Assumptions for Data-Driven Collaborative Inquiry

Data have no meaning	Data are simply information. Individuals and groups create meaning by organizing, analyzing and interpreting data. Interpretation is subjective; data are objective. Frames of reference, the way we see the world, influence the meaning we derive from the data we collect and select.
Knowledge is both a personal and a social construction.	Human beings are meaning-making organisms. Knowledge is socially constructed and individually integrated. We sift experience through personal and social filters, forming beliefs and ways of knowing. Individuals interact with information and with others to shape new understandings from our world and about our world.
There is a reciprocal influence between the culture of the workplace and the thinking and behavior of its members.	Like societies, organizations have cultures that determine modes of behavior. Cultural artifacts, symbols and rituals reflect and transmit acceptable and unacceptable patterns and practices for individuals and groups. The introduction of new behaviors opens opportunities for testing cultural boundaries and shifting organizational norms.
Understanding should precede planning.	When confronted with data, individuals and groups often assign causality and determine solutions without clear problem definitions. They seek the comfort of action rather than navigate the discomfort of ambiguity. Skilled groups cultivate purposeful uncertainty as a pathway to understanding before jumping into planning processes.
Cycles of inquiry, experimentation and reflection accelerate continuous growth and learning.	Learning occurs when we shift from professional certainty to conscious curiosity, from isolated individual to collaborative community member, and from passive technician to active researcher. The pursuit of meaningful questions arises from thoughtful data analysis, careful problem framing, and ongoing monitoring of gaps between goal achievement and current conditions.
Norms of data-driven collaborative inquiry generate continuous improvements in student learning.	That we talk in our schools is vitally important in these changing times. How we talk may be as important. Understanding emerges from thoughtful inquiry and dialogue about important matters. Such inquiry is driven by high-quality data derived from internal and external sources. Because data in and of themselves have no meaning, data alone leads to no action. Meaning and action result from collective processes that develop shared commitment to improved student learning.

Wellman, B. & Lipton, L. (2004). *Data-driven dialogue: A facilitator's guide to collaborative inquiry*. Sherman, CT: MiraVia.