## "Data, data, data"
### Lindsey Stevens

In my building we often say, "data, data, data..". You would have to imagine saying that like Jan Brady would say, "Marcia, Marcia, Marcia."

Data is seen as a hoop in a high school gym full of type-A go getters. I am not kidding about that. Literally ninety percent of this nine-year-old staff is an all-star, or wants to be, or thinks they are. This attitude leads to us thinking we are above change. We are above needing to be professionally developed.

I fit right in here. I try with everything I have to do everything right the first time and no one ever needs to tell me to do anything twice. I have had administrators ooh and ah over my engagement strategies, my Socratic seminars and my classroom management. In the old evaluation system it was sort of assumed that the strong teachers were strong and that was that. This is how I liked it. I lived in my own little glass house at which no one would throw a stone; except one day… the data did. That data, that repulsive spreadsheet, rocked my world.

TPEP, teacher and principal evaluation project, meant that strong teachers are still strong but the assumption was gone. Now, instead of just assuming, we would be asked to show that we could impact student learning through growth goals. The biggest sentiment I heard echoed in my staff meetings was that we set the growth goal and we collected the data, therefore this wasn't scary, we could create whatever outcome we wished. Teachers were literally joking (I hope) about grading everything ridiculously hard the first time, and then just being easier on the kids the next time. They would say, write your goal in a way you can't go wrong, then no matter what happens you look like a rock star. Honestly, this sat well with me. This was the ticket to getting teachers to stop freaking out about the TPEP. Everyone was very worried that this student growth data would reflect poorly on them, or have something to do with who they riffed the next year. The answer was to make very meaningful data on purpose, put it into a fancy spreadsheet and be done with it. Perfect! This I could do.

Keeping in mind the advice of my colleagues, I set a nice solid goal that would prove itself:

I have selected a student growth goal that supports our High Schools at Work (a district connection and initiative) Literacy goal of having students complete a Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) task in each course or subject area throughout the year. I will establish areas of growth for my students after assessing their first LDC task. The rubric for the tasks measures seven specific literacy elements based around the Common Core State Standards. My goal will be to get 80% of my students to improve by two points on two elements of growth established in their first LDC task by the fourth LDC task.

Now all I had to do was create a spreadsheet and enter in the students' scores for each element before handing back their papers. I would just collect and make some copies of their own goals and reflections and this evaluation had almost done itself.

In my classroom I had been working with a framework called the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) designed around template tasks that and a rubric written to align with

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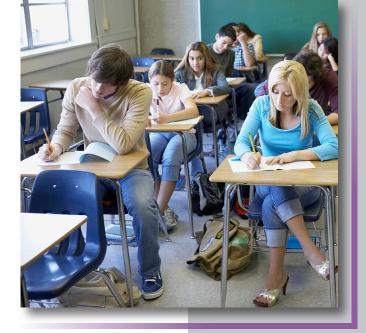
the Common Core State Standards. I had already designed my course so that I used six different LDC tasks throughout the year and could assess their growth in the seven scoring elements. Notice that at this point I hadn't really thought about wanting to maximize the growth of my students. I just picked something I already did that was easily quantifiable. I was just focused on the data. How do I prove to someone else that my students had grown? I did not think at all about optimizing growth. I did not honestly ask myself how I wanted to see them improve and what I might do if they didn't.

As teachers in a TPEP pilot, we attended district meetings with a facilitator from the Puget Sound Educational Service District. At these meetings, wonderful patient people tried to get the horses to drink. We were the go-getters of the go-getters and it was still a very tough sell to get us to see that maximizing student learning was the point. We would all nod and say, "Yes, yes, track the data, data, data. We get it."

The facilitator from the ESD must have wanted to pull her hair out as she tried over and over again to impress upon us the value of meaningful data and student growth. At this time I was just really impressed with my own hoop jumping. By mid-year my students had completed three LDC tasks and everyone was moving up on the rubrics just as I had predicted. They had completed three beautiful essays that had been drafted, peer edited, finalized, and assessed. They had even been writing their own essay reflections and setting new goals for themselves between each one. Yay me and yay them!



In the next unit, I was a week short of where I needed to be for all this editing business, so I had the students write the essay on demand. Quick, down and dirty, they had already done three and I was sure they would just continue on this glorious upward trend. Mid-unit, the ESD facilitator was interested in the LDC and wanted to meet to discuss how the ESD could spread the frameworks in our region. She asked if we could discuss my data. This way she could show how the LDC would help with the Common Core and TPEP all at the same time. I was very excited to show her how great it was working out. We scheduled to meet just after this fourth unit was to be completed.

The students finished the globalization unit and turned in their essays. When I had finished scoring them I plugged their scores on each element into the spreadsheet and dun, dun, dun.... They didn't grow. Almost seventy percent of them actually did worse on organization.

What had I done?

What was I thinking?

I switched up the mode of writing and didn't think that this would impact the outcome. This happened the day before I had the meeting with the facilitator and I was supposed to show her this god-awful spreadsheet in which not only did my students not meet the growth goal, they did worse.

My first thoughts were of damage control. I stared at that spreadsheet for quite some time and thought of my options. I could close the document without saving it and then claim I hadn't

had time to put this assessment in yet. I could blame it on the students. I am sure I could think of some really honest hurdles the kids had that week. They must have been hungry, that was it, everyone always says if kids don't eat a good breakfast they can't do well in school. As I grabbed at the thinning straws I had to just live with the reality of the data, and decided to meet with the facilitator as scheduled and admit that I hadn't taught the unit correctly. I clearly needed to include a lesson on how to organize an on-demand essay. My students needed a better drafting mechanism for this type of writing. It was a skill I hadn't actually checked for. I could see from this data that I had taught my kids how to organize a formal essay through peer edits and multiple drafts but I had failed to teach them how to do this in a different situation. I had failed, not them.

When I walked into that meeting, I felt foolish. We sat down, and I explained. I showed her my horrid spreadsheet. I showed her how, shamefully my kids had actually moved down on the scoring element of organization when given an essay that was on-demand. I confided that I was afraid I would fail my evaluation now.

And she just said, "What are you going to do about the on demand writing skills of your students?" Well, that I had an answer for. I had already re-written the next literacy task to be on demand and planned two different lessons that included four different strategies the students could employ. That was not what I was worried about. I knew how to fix the teaching and learning problem. What I didn't know how to fix was a data problem.

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The facilitator looked so happy. I thought maybe she was just amused at my pain and thought this was funny, but that was not the case. She was actually excited about the fact that the data had done exactly what it was meant to do. It had informed my teaching. The data had become the vehicle that made me a better practitioner. The data had ensured that the students who left my classroom that year were better writers and analytical thinkers across the board and they, for sure, could organize and complete an essay both through multiple drafts and on-demand that showed well employed literacy skills. I didn't have a data problem at all. What I had was an authentic use of student growth data.

After I completed the next unit, every single student scored a three or higher on the organization element of the rubric. By the time I did the sixth assessment, not only had 80% of my students moved up on the scoring elements but 100% of the students who completed all six assessments made growth of at least two points on at least two of the elements. The moment I looked at the data and thought about how it could inform my teaching and not just as "data, data, data," I understood what it was all about. I realized that this TPEP process was going to be as valuable and I chose to make it. The data was just data unless I looked at it as growth over time.

At my final evaluation I sat down with my Vice Principal. We went through all of the criteria together one by one. When we got to the student growth goal and the data, I pulled out my highlighted-analyzed-pored over-spreadsheet and a few of my kids' growth goal worksheets, and said I thought I should be at a two, basic. Though I had made the ESD facilitator very happy in providing an authentic case study, I felt as though at the end of the day I hadn't met the goal I had written in the box on the form. My evaluator just said, "Really Lindsey? A two?" I thought, "Oh great, she wants to give me a one." Instead she said, "Based on what you just explained and how I saw the kids grow, I think this is where you get a four. It is distinguished

teacher behavior to set a goal for your kids, have your students also set their own goals and then figure out how to get them there, especially if they don't perform as expected the first time. It's good that this happened. This shows growth for both you and your students."

I had really learned something about my teaching practice for the first time in an evaluation.

I had made a mistake; I hadn't been the perfect shiny example of a teacher I felt I always needed to be. I had used my data in a meaningful way that had informed my practice, caused me to grow, and helped my students be better writers. This outcome didn't happen because I made a spreadsheet or because I collected the data. The data wasn't meaningful because I was trying to prove to people I was a good teacher; the data was meaningful in spite of it. The data was meaningful because I looked at the numbers and saw myself and the kids through them. Numbers are just numbers, data is just data, and it's what we do with that data that makes it meaningful. Isn't that what we all want out of our evaluations? We want meaningful practice that improves our instruction.



I know the data mattered because I still keep the spreadsheet for all of my students even though now it's for no one but myself. I still collect data about their growth, I still have them write essay reflections and goals and not for anyone but the students and me. The data has become a tool to detect when I am making mistakes and correct them as opposed to trying to never make mistakes at all. It's always messy and quite often it comes out completely differently than I had hoped. At the end of the day the data is still just data unless I use it to get better. My spreadsheet is not perfect, I know I am not perfect, and that's good for my students.

Watch Lindsey's video… http://tpep-wa.org/student-growth-case-studies

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