

# DATA INQUIRY FOR EQUITABLE COLLABORATION

## THE CASE OF NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE'S DATA CAROUSEL

THE EQUITABLE PARENT-SCHOOL COLLABORATION RESEARCH PROJECT PUBLICATION SERIES

In this brief, we describe one example of an inquiry process that engages a broad range of stakeholders in making sense of data to improve the work of an educational organization. We call this process **data inquiry for equitable collaboration**. Our research suggests that this model has potential to become a “next practice” for building more equitable collaboration between marginalized families, educators, formal leaders and community members.

Although data in educational organizations – from early childhood to K-12 – have historically been used for compliance and accountability purposes, research suggests that using and sharing data with other stakeholders can fuel organizational learning and help address disparities in educational systems, policies, and practices. Our research suggests that we understand problems more clearly and come up with better solutions when we ensure that those with less power traditionally have voice and influence in using data to create more equitable learning environments.

### Guided by Equitable Collaboration Design Principles<sup>1</sup> from our research, equitable data inquiry:

- Highlights and prioritizes addressing disparities in student and family experiences and opportunities;
- Builds collaborative capacity, relationships, and leadership amongst both families and educators; and
- Aims to transform how schools and organizations educate and serve children and their families.





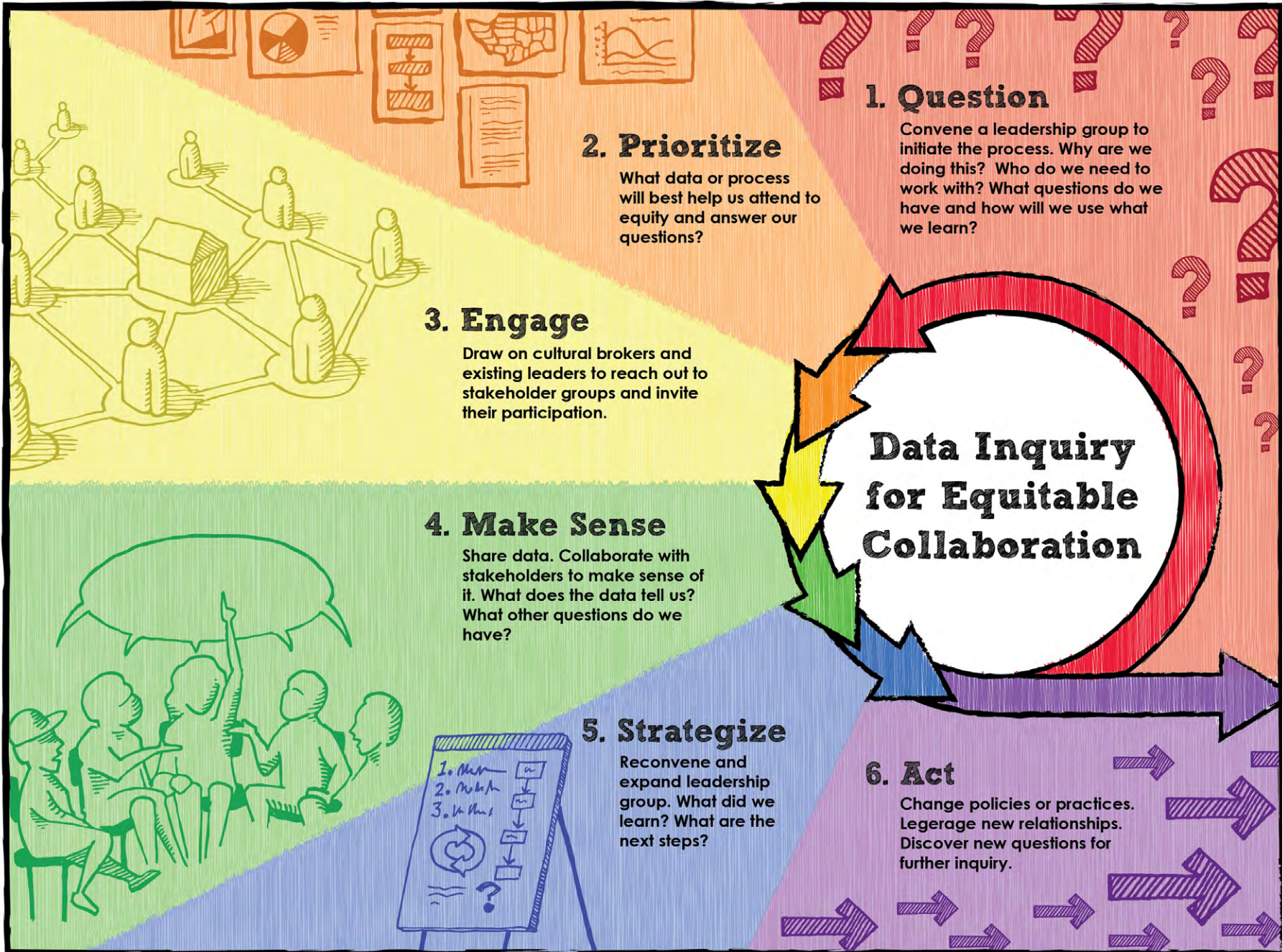


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## DATA CAROUSEL: A CASE STUDY

We studied a data inquiry process within the early childhood education (ECE) programs at Neighborhood House (NH), a community-based organization that serves 23 culturally and linguistically diverse low-income communities. In 2014, the NH Head Start, Early Head Start, and Parent-Child Home Programs each held their third data carousel. Adapted from the model described in *Getting Excited About Data*<sup>ii</sup>, the events enabled staff to facilitate discussions about program data with small groups of families, staff, administrators and community members. They talked about the data, made sense of it together, and raised questions. One staff member explained that, over multiple years, the data carousel practice has been important in helping them grow and improve: “[Through] that cycle of reflection, we’ve created a shift in our program, a transparency, and a vulnerability that you need to be more effective.” This brief primarily describes the 2014 data carousel with select changes made in 2015.

For each phase in the data inquiry for equitable collaboration (see graphic), we explain how Neighborhood House used the data carousel in the process. We identify “Next Practices” that represent the next level of work in moving towards data inquiry for equitable collaboration, many of which are recommendations from Neighborhood House staff.

### 1. QUESTION

Convene a leadership group to initiate the process. Why are we doing this? Who do we need to work with? What questions do we have and how will we use what we learn?

#### AT NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE:

In 2014, Neighborhood House leadership staff wanted to use the data carousel to create a more reflective learning culture where staff could think critically about their work, ask questions, and engage in conversations with other staff that push beyond compliance. Each program planned its own event based on questions related to their own priorities. In 2015, leadership sought to foster staff collaboration by creating one event and using the theme “Tinker, Play, Collaborate, and Reflect” as a guiding vision. They hired a consultant who guided the planning process and provided facilitation training.

#### NEXT PRACTICES FOR EQUITABLE COLLABORATION

At the question phase, the data inquiry leadership group works to discover stakeholder (i.e., parent/families, community

members, educators) concerns to fuel the inquiry. Consider: Who is currently empowered to voice their concerns? What opportunities do parents/families, community members, educators or students have to identify issues or concerns? What do we want to know and work on that we can commit to follow-through on?

### 2. PRIORITIZE

What data or process will best help us attend to equity and answer our questions?

#### AT NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE:

In 2014, each program held several planning meetings preceding the data carousel. During these meetings, management teams presented data from service areas such as health, education or family services to discuss as a group. Each program chose their own goals and data to share, such as parent meeting attendance or the number of dental exams completed. In 2015, a “design team” of staff across programs received training in group facilitation and prepared for the event in Data, Outreach and Logistics teams over 6 weeks. They chose to examine how the organization’s unprecedented growth in the past year impacted health, family partnerships, and cultural responsiveness. Rather than creating a health data station with many different tables and charts, the design team selected a single set of data across programs to shed light on how program expansion may have affected the health outcomes of children and families. The team rehearsed discussions about the data and selected data and displays to produce richer conversations about the core question.

#### NEXT PRACTICES FOR EQUITABLE COLLABORATION

NH staff emphasized prioritizing time and focus dedicated to getting the data right, with an eye towards “less is more” and moving beyond counts towards data about impacts. They recommended identifying and collecting data as early as possible – both quantitative and qualitative. If families and community members are not already part of the planning team, they can help look at the data and share in the decision making about what to display and why. The team can tap “data brokers” – teachers, parents, community partners, or other staff with data literacy skills – to improve data displays. Consider: What data do we need to investigate the issues raised? Do we have it or do we need to collect it? Who is involved at this point and what role do they have in selecting data?





### 3. ENGAGE

Draw on cultural brokers<sup>iii</sup> and existing partners and leaders to invite stakeholder groups to participate. Cultural brokers are individuals (including but not limited to staff) who work as bridges between schools and families, particularly from non-dominant or immigrant communities, to create stronger connections and improve student success.

#### AT NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE:

In 2014, each program invited families and community partners who were directly involved in their own program, using face to face invitations, fliers, and email invitations. In 2015, the outreach team coordinated across all three programs to invite staff, families and community partners face-to-face, drawing on their Family Advocates and other staff to invite participation and create a warm and welcoming environment. About 40 parents (5% of NH families) attended out of over 150 participants at the 2015 event.

#### NEXT PRACTICES FOR EQUITABLE COLLABORATION

At the Engage stage, the leadership team invites everyone they want to be a part of the collaborative data inquiry process. Parents/families and community members who have attended the event in prior years might reach out to others they know to encourage their participation and explain why it was a valuable use of their time. Plan the event at a time that works for parents/families and community members and provide childcare, transportation, interpretation, food, and other logistics.

### 4. MAKE SENSE

Share data. Collaborate with stakeholders to make sense of it. What does the data tell us? What other questions do we have?

#### AT NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE:

In 2014, the programs displayed a large amount of mostly quantitative data, like attendance at parent events, enrollment numbers and assessment data. Qualitative data included interview transcripts and stories from home visitors. Participants moved around the room looking at different data displays at 4-5 stations and responding to open-ended prompts such as, “What is the data telling us? What does it not tell us? What else do we need to know?” Facilitators sometimes added specific questions, such as how to prioritize enrollment or support stronger school readiness. In 2015, the leadership team restructured the event so that participants seated in table groups stayed together through the entire two-hour event and discussed less data to allow participants to develop relationships and deeper conversations. Trained facilitators used a protocol to keep the conversation focused on the data (all quantitative data in charts) and questions.

#### NEXT PRACTICES FOR EQUITABLE COLLABORATION

We learned that conversations were more focused and productive in providing new insights when participants talked about the data itself – rather than related issues that were not tied to the data – and left sufficient time and space for participants to make sense of the data together. Well-labeled and constructed data displays with brief explanations can

focus conversations on substantive issues, rather than lengthy explanations. Facilitators also play a key role in helping balance power dynamics between families, staff, and community partners at the tables and ensure that family experiences and voices are heard. Linguistically or culturally-specific groups may provide safer spaces for multiple stakeholders to develop relationships and raise frank questions.

## 5. STRATEGIZE

Reconvene and expand leadership group. What did we learn? What are the next steps?

### AT NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE:

In 2014, Neighborhood House ECE leadership staff held a post-event reflection meeting with all the management and home-visiting staff to learn about similarities and differences between the data carousels, reflect on the events, and make recommendations for next time. These recommendations included the need for a clearer vision of the goals and purpose of data carousel, adequate planning time and greater engagement of parents, families, and community members. In 2015, the planning team met with ECE leadership and consultant to debrief the 2015 event, revisit their original goals, and make recommendations for the future. These recommendations included reintroducing qualitative data, collecting, selecting, and displaying data earlier in the process, keeping the roundtable discussion format, and inviting parents into planning and facilitation.

### NEXT PRACTICES FOR EQUITABLE COLLABORATION

The data inquiry leadership group reconvenes to reflect on the data sharing, consider the feedback and determine next steps for improving the work of the organization (not just the data carousel itself). Reflect back on the original goals and questions to determine whether they have been addressed, and if not, what can be done about it. Facilitate a transparent process for synthesizing what emerged from the data inquiry conversations and plan for how this will be shared with the broader organization. This can also be an opportunity to expand the data inquiry leadership group and include parents/families in deciding how to move forward with what was learned.

## 6. ACT

Change policies or practices. Leverage new relationships. Discover new questions for further inquiry.

### AT NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE:

In 2014, NH committed to using data to build relationships

between parents, community and staff, and they restructured the 2015 event to build staff capacity and invite deeper participation. Individual learning and improvements to practice emerged organically from the process in both years, as staff reflected on what they heard from other staff, families and community partners. Leadership staff shared their learning with the Policy Council and the Board, several staff are using the work as a project in their studies, and the feedback from the data conversations will go into “the blender” to shape next year’s plans and future work.

### NEXT PRACTICES FOR EQUITABLE COLLABORATION

The final stage presents the opportunity to change policies or practices to improve the work of the organization. Leadership staff can play a key role in designing an inclusive process for determining what broader, systemic changes to make based on learning from data inquiry. Consider: What did we learn from the feedback at the data carousel? What changes might improve services, support, opportunities or outcomes? How will those changes affect different stakeholders? What data should we be collecting to monitor improvements and who will collect it? At this time next year, what is our goal with regard to the issues of concern and what actions can we take now to ensure those goals are met?

## CONCLUSION

The case of data carousel highlights possibilities for using data inquiry as a collaborative process to 1) build stronger, more productive relationships between families and staff; and 2) fuel reflective practice and organizational learning towards greater equity. This innovative approach to data inquiry draws on community expertise, creativity and concerns. Families most directly affected by organizational policies and practices can provide important insights in conversations about data related to an organizational issue or problem of practice. Although organizations will continue to use data to demonstrate compliance with regulations and grant stipulations, the Neighborhood House data carousels illuminate a collaborative data practice that allows for a wider range of engagement, goals, and outcomes. Organizations who seek equitable and collaborative ways to collect and use data do so not to survive, but to thrive and grow. Data carousel is a process and not a one-time event. As one NH staff advised, “Be open to the uncertainty [of] bringing such a diverse group of people together and really try to make meaning and holding that space for that to happen.” In that space, new insights, relationships, and “next practices” can emerge.

## DATA CAROUSEL Q&A

### Q: WHY ENGAGE STAFF, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS IN DATA INQUIRY?

When undertaken as a process, rather than a one-time event, equitable data inquiry can:

- Build closer relationships and mutual learning between families and staff;
- Improve staff collaboration and goal/vision alignment;
- Increase capacity and leadership across the organization; and
- Improve programs and identify solutions informed by those closest to the action.

### Q: WHAT KINDS OF DATA SHOULD WE INCLUDE?

- The overarching question(s) you identify in the first phase shape these decisions. Start early, as the question may require new data to be collected.
- Select or collect data that can lead to rich conversations about improvement, not just summarize services provided.
- Consider including both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data can identify what happened, and qualitative data can shed light on why.
- Recognize the sharing of personal experiences as knowledge and expertise in making sense of data and identifying potential solutions. When gathered systematically, this is qualitative data!

### Q: WHAT SUPPORTS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CAN MAKE THIS PROCESS SUCCESSFUL?

- Integrate this process with broader organizational efforts to build authentic relationships across roles and a reflective learning culture.
- Data literacy training can build staff capacity and confidence in working with data.
- Facilitation training can contribute to better group processes, including division of roles and responsibilities and equal voice and participation of all group members.
- Sufficient planning time is critical (the NH team met weekly for 4 hours over 6 weeks).
- External partners can help organizations to reflect on their process.

## RESOURCES

- Equitable Parent-School Collaboration Project (2015). User's Guide for Road Map Family Engagement Survey: Data Inquiry for Equitable Collaboration.
- Holcomb, E. L. (2004). Getting excited about data : combining people, passion, and proof to maximize student achievement (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif: Corwin Press.
- Equitable Parent-School Collaboration Project (2015). "It's Really About Empowering the Families." Cultural Brokering in Family Engagement Initiatives.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### OTHER PUBLICATIONS IN THE EPSC SERIES

- Building Relationships, Bridging Cultures: Cultural Brokering In Family Engagement
- Developing Common Parent Engagement Indicators (White Paper)
- Charting a Course to Equitable Collaboration: Learning from Parent Engagement Initiatives in the Road Map Project (Case Studies)

### FIND THESE AND OTHER RESOURCES AT:

- <https://education.uw.edu/epsc/publications>

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