

The spiral of inquiry: An introduction to taking action



ECE resources

Taking action involves learning more deeply about new ways of teaching by **exploring and evaluating different teaching strategies in action**, informed by a thorough understanding of why they might be effective in a particular context. It is a much more informed and critical process than simply implementing new strategies or trying out innovative or exciting ideas suggested by research or teaching colleagues. It takes account of contextual knowledge and complex relationships between teaching and learning, and includes children's perspectives in decision making. It also requires changes to practice to be evaluated in order to understand the impact they are having.

No matter how strong the support or evidence for a particular approach or practice, every idea or strategy needs to be tried out and evaluated in context. Deep learning occurs when new approaches are trialled, evaluated, and then trialled again. In the inquiry spiral model, taking action occurs after considerable investigation and reflection on the strengths and needs of children, the teacher's actions and beliefs, and engagement in new learning.

A guide to the taking action phase

Start by **selecting from the knowledge and ideas you have learned** and put them into **focused, informed action** to test out. Ensure your inquiry is tight, focused and manageable, focusing on learning rather than activities. **Be systematic, targeted and explicit** about what actions you are taking and how you are going to monitor and modify them. **Be aware of the assumptions and beliefs** underpinning your plan for action and carefully consider the validity of these.

Next it is time to **develop a clear plan with timeframes**, which includes strategies for monitoring the impact of changes. **Set goals** for both your teaching practice and children's learning, and ensure there is alignment between the needs your inquiry is addressing, the resources available, the actions to be undertaken, and how these actions will deliver outcomes. **Encourage children to be involved in the inquiry** and to take responsibility for goals they have identified with you. **Anticipate potential barriers** and consider strategies to overcome them.

As you start to **implement your chosen strategies and actions**, be sure to **expect dips and plateaus** and be ready to clarify and refocus your efforts with the intended outcomes. See plateaus as opportunities to consolidate gains. Be prepared to **take risks, make mistakes and try again**: have courage and experiment. **Celebrate successes**, expect some failures and make sure that you learn from these.

As you proceed with taking action, it is essential to engage in **ongoing monitoring and evaluation**. Check what is going on for children as a result of your actions. Keep a diary to note the progress of an intervention, and use it as a tool for reflection. **Create opportunities for observation** such as peer observation or video recording to aid your evaluation. Observations will enable you to develop a sense of what new practices are like from the children's perspective. **Review the use of your chosen strategy or action** by ensuring you have a schedule for reporting to others, which helps maintain momentum, and creating opportunities for dialogue to get ideas from other people. It is important to **evaluate actual outcomes rather than your intentions** by asking yourself 'how do I know that this is the impact or

outcome?' Finally, be prepared to adjust by **modifying your strategy or action** depending how things are progressing. **Show persistence** as you inquire again and again.

Tools for taking action

The following tools may be useful during the taking action phase of your inquiry, although it is not essential to use any formal tools.

Action plan tool: Use this detailed chart to record iterative cycles of planning throughout the inquiry.

Monitoring progress tool: This simple tool provides the space to list and monitor the progress of actions you are planning to take and/or strategies you are planning to trial.

Next steps

While the taking action phase requires you to monitor and evaluate as you go, the [checking phase](#) of the inquiry spiral requires you to engage in more detailed measurement of the impact of your new approach or strategy.

References and further reading

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