# Developing a theory for improvement

A theory is just a set of linked ideas. A theory for improvement is a set of linked ideas about how to improve some aspect of what is happening in your school for your learners. This learner-related improvement is usually expressed as a goal.

The point of developing a theory is to get everyone onto the same page about the strategies you have decided collectively will achieve your goal and the reasoning that underpins those particular strategies – why these and not others.

Most theories for improvement identify:

* Your long term outcomes and annual goal – usually expressed as a measurable target.
* Proposed strategies to reach the target – usually staged because some things need to be in place before other things can happen.
* Why those strategies and not others.
* Ways to monitor whether you are making progress towards the goal.

## Mapping your theory

The following mapping example is based on Pasifika learners improving their writing in ways that enhance their Pasifika identity. The map is relatively simple for reasons of space. Most maps have arrows going all over the place.

### Step 1

Begin with the end in mind. Put your goal on the right hand side of the paper with the target underneath.

Goal: Year 5 Pasifika students improve their writing in ways that enhance their Pasifika identity.

Target: Each student will improve at least two sub-levels on asTTle, with those below level 2 improving three sub-levels by November.

Learning environments will:

* Utilise Pasifika languages and literacy resources in ways that promote Pasifika identities.
* Begin with the structure and vocabulary for recount because it is least complex for staff and students to master.
* Then transfer learning to other features of recount, then to narrative.

### Step 2

Describe what will be different in the school, teaching and learning environments and write this to the left of the goal with an arrow connecting the two boxes.

[ In this example, the reasoning for beginning with the structure and vocabulary of a recount is that learning something deeply, then transferring that learning, is more consistent with what is known about learning than learning many things superficially. ]

### Step 3

Decide what needs to change for the learning environments to reflect this picture. It may include aspects such as:

* purchasing more bilingual texts and English language texts relevant to the school’s Pasifika learners
* promoting teachers’ knowledge and skills in how to teach recount writing through using bilingual resources and pedagogical practices.

### Step 4

Decide on the changes that need to happen for step 3 to happen. It may include:

* engaging someone with expertise in utilising Pacific linguistic resources to develop leaders’ knowledge and skills so they can work with teachers
* engaging parents as sources of knowledge.

### Step 5

Decide what you have to stop doing in order for this all to happen without overloading yourselves, teachers and learners. Often schools stop administration meetings in order to create the time for professional learning meetings.

**See next page for example map.**

### Next

There may be many more steps or other things that have to happen concurrently. Put them into the map for your theory for improvement. Most maps look far messier than the one below.

You can use your theory for improvement to decide what you need to monitor to make sure you are on track to make enough of a difference. If, for example, you cannot find someone with the appropriate expertise to help you, then the whole plan is in jeopardy.

You could work out with the teachers and students how to monitor whether the learning environment does reflect the identified priorities.

Put in next year’s budget and purchase more Pasifika languages texts and appropriate resources.

Purchase more bilingual texts and English language texts relevant to the school’s Pasifika learners.

Involve parents in the process in ways that they consider to be appropriate

Learning environments will:

* Utilise Pasifika languages and literacy resources in ways that promote Pasifika identities
* Begin with the structure and vocabulary for recount because it is least complex for staff and students to master
* Then transfer learning to other features of recount, then to narrative
* Check staffare informed about important admin matters.
* Check teachers are improving their understanding of promoting recount writing through using bilingual resources.
* Check have some workable strategies for parent involvement.

Work with staff to develop ways to check how things are changing in Pasifika students’ learning environments

Develop ways to check and a timetable for checking to make sure students’ progress is on track

*Monitoring strategies*

Goal: Year 5 Pasifika students improve their writing in ways that enhance their Pasifika identity.

Target: Each student will improve at least two sub-levels on asTTle, with those below level 2 improving three sub-levels by November.

Ask parents to be sources of knowledge and work out ways with them to engage with teachers and learners.

Find and engage someone with expertise in utilising Pacific linguistic resources to develop leaders’ knowledge and skills so they can work with teachers.

Replace fortnightly admin meetings with team-based professional -learning meetings. Provide admin information over intranet.

Promote teachers’ knowledge and skills in how to teach recount writing through using bilingual resources and relevant pedagogical practices.