

Research Theme vs. Theory of Action

San Francisco Unified School District's Office of Professional Learning and Leadership provides the following useful guidance about a Research Question (Research Theme) and Theory of Action.

A Research Question:

- Is **BROAD**
- Ideally targets **ONE** or **TWO** elements within your vision for student success
- Is an authentic question without “an answer,” worthy of life-long exploration

Sample Research Question:

How will using Teaching Through Problem-Solving in the math classroom strengthen students' math comprehension and number sense?

A Theory of Action:

- Is **NARROW** (focuses on specific student actions, etc.)
- **NAMES STRATEGIES** that will be used to impact student actions, etc. (teaching moves, shared routines, etc.)
- Has **CLEAR, MEASURABLE OUTCOMES** (you know you will have reached goal when...)

IF/THEN/RESULTING IN framework:

IF WE AS TEACHERS _____ (*teaching moves*),

THEN _____ (*changes in student actions*),

RESULTING IN _____ (*how student learning or outcomes will change*)



Sample Theory of Action:

If we implement routines and teach strategies within our K/1 math classroom designed to strengthen students' abilities to construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others when solving math problems **then** students will be able to justify/explain their thinking, help their partners by teaching not telling, use a variety of strategies to share their thinking, and utilize specific (developmentally-appropriate) academic vocabulary **resulting in** deeper math conceptual understanding and stronger math reasoning skills.

Indicators of Progress:

What student actions will indicate success? In the preceding examples from Matsuzawa School and San Francisco USD, notice the specific indicators of progress, such as students "explain their thinking using diagrams and equations," or "help their partners by teaching not telling." Find similarly specific indicators that are linked to your vision of student learning. Try to avoid vague indicators ("students are engaged") that reveal little about students' thinking or development.

