

## Planning from an Inquiry-Based Approach

“Curriculum planning” can take many forms and has varied meaning to those working with infants and toddlers. In an inquiry-based approach to planning, the interests of the children and the belief that children are competent is what guides practice. Through careful observation, documentation, and reflection of what the children are focused on and engaged in, teachers can begin to design ways to support each child’s growth and learning. This is a process that is continually evolving and changing, just as the children in your care are growing and changing.

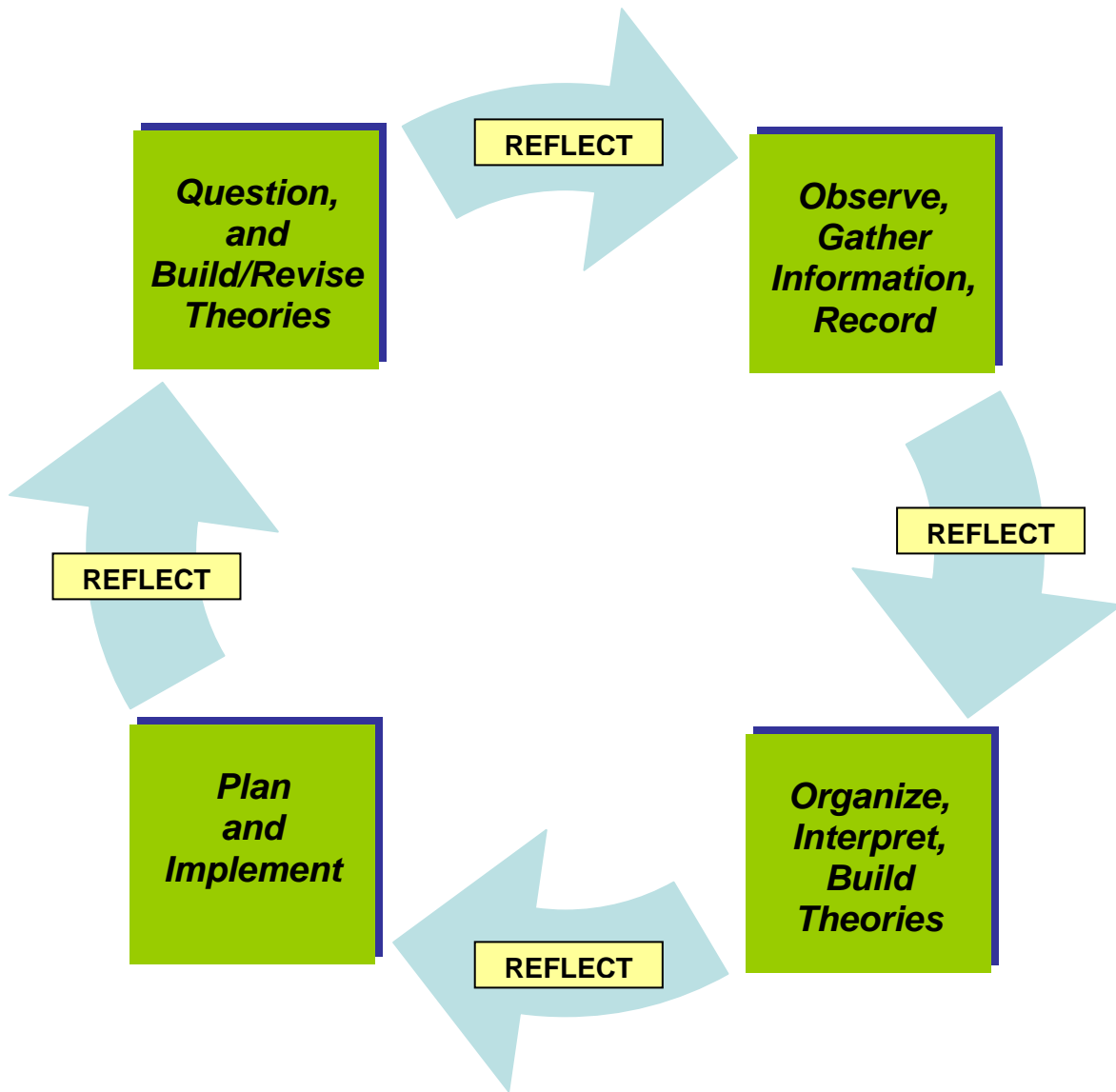
The information you gather through observation, documentation and reflection becomes the foundation for your “lesson plans” each week-that is-your curriculum. To begin with, many teachers find it helpful to write out each step as a way of practicing your thinking and organizing your thoughts to share with others. Eventually, some of the steps may become “second nature” to you and you may be able to do them automatically in your head. Here are a set of guidelines to get you started:

1. Write down observations and reflections on a daily basis to share with others. These can be used during planning time as a way to share the stories of the week. Any original artifacts (children’s art, comments, etc.) should be attached to the observation.
2. Think about the common threads or themes that are present in your observations and/or from visual data. Discuss all possible theories regarding the children’s interests and questions. Some questions to ask yourself might include:
  - ~What do the children know or think based on the observations?
  - ~How are the children exploring materials or experiences? Are they exploring on their own, or collaborating with other children? What interests them?
  - ~ Does the set-up sustain interest, or is there something lacking?
  - ~Are the choices for use of materials clear, or does the environment need to be re-worked?
  - ~Is there another experience or space that might contribute to the children’s inquiry?
  - ~Does this experience address the range of abilities in your classroom so that all children can participate?
3. From your reflections, develop a shared analysis with others involved in the classroom to begin guiding your response(s) to observations.
4. Plan for changes you will make to the environment, or experience. (This will be your lesson plan.) Think through this process carefully and pay attention to detail. Make explicit all the “whys,” “hows,” and “whats” of your set up. Beyond environmental arrangement consider the role of the teacher in this set up. What verbal, physical or gestural prompts could scaffold the experience? Consider how you will document this experience and collaborate with your teaching team.
5. **Begin steps 1-4 again** by collecting observations and documents (photos, video, artifacts, etc.) Does anything need to be made public from last week’s experiences? Who will do this and what format will the documents take?
6. Continue on your journey with the children, exploring and learning together.

**(Note: If you are co-teaching and will be meeting for planning time, each teacher should come with steps #1 and #2 completed, and #4 thought about. Then together you can work through #2, #3, and #4)**

(Adapted from University of Vermont, Children’s Center)

## *Planning Cycle*



<b>Identify Common Threads/Themes</b> (Organize your observations)	<b>What do you think is happening?</b> (Build a theory)	<b>What are you going to do?</b> (Make a plan based on your theory)	<b>How did it go?</b> (Observe the children, gather information)	<b>Identify Common Threads/Themes</b> (Organize & reflect on your observations)