

The IVAC Approach

Definition of the IVAC model

The Investigation-Vision-Action-Change (IVAC) model provides a framework for the development of health-promoting strategies that ensure that the insight and knowledge that pupils acquire during the project is action-orientated and interdisciplinary and, therefore, conducive to the development of action competence⁸. For the purposes of the Shape Up project, the model is complemented to emphasise the **selection** and **critical reflection** (i.e. **evaluation**) phase.

Use the IVAC model to create action competence. But what is action competence?

Several attempts have been made to define the concept of action competence. Among other things, the following constitutive elements have been pointed out:

Insight and knowledge

This component is concerned with children's broad, positive, coherent and action-minded understanding of health. It implies a coherent knowledge of the health problem of concern to children (for example overweight or a lack of physical activity), knowledge about the nature and scope of the problem, how it emerged, whom it affects, and the range of possibilities for solving it.

Commitment

The commitment component refers to a person's motivation and drive to become involved in initiating change regarding children's own lives and the processes of a dynamic society. This component is closely related to the previous one, because knowledge about a problem is not transformed into action unless commitment and courage are present.

Visions

This component implies the ability to go beyond the health issues and think creatively. It deals with the development of children's ideas, dreams and imaginative perceptions about their future lives and the society in which they will be growing up. For example, what would a world without cars look like? What are the future, healthier alternatives to existing methods of transport? What kind of living conditions would provide all people with the opportunity to eat a balanced and healthy diet?

Action experiences

The experience component of action competence refers to the experience of action by participating individually or together with others in initiating health-promoting changes within a democratic framework and considering how barriers can be overcome. In order to develop their action competence, children and young people need to be involved in real-life actions at different levels, such as the classroom, school, local community, city or even beyond. The action experience is more beneficial to the development of action competence if it is reflected upon and guided by more experienced adults; in the case of Shape Up, these will be teachers, facilitators, coordinators and other Shape Up staff.

⁸ JENSEN, 1997; 2004.

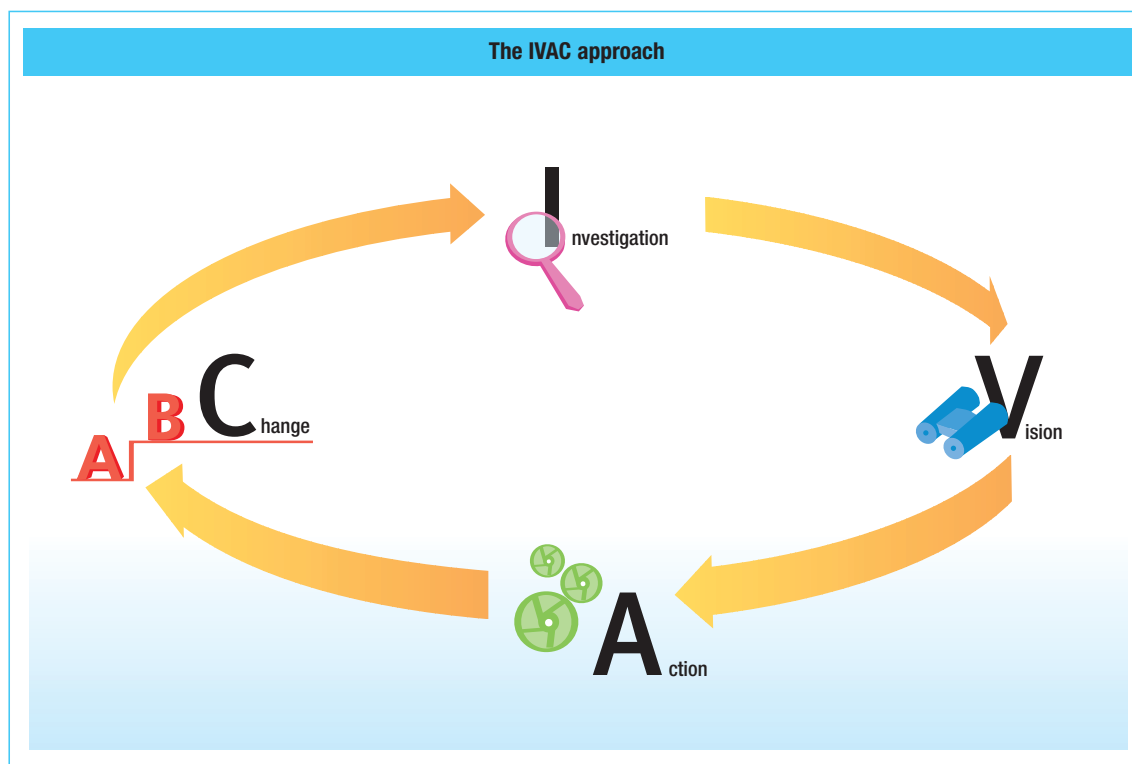
	The main perspectives of the IVAC approach in Shape Up
S+I	Selecting and investigating a theme
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Why is this important to us? ■ What is its relevance to us/others, now/in the future? ■ What influence do lifestyle and living conditions have? ■ What other influences are we exposed to and how? ■ Have things always been like this or have they changed over time?
V	Developing visions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What alternatives are foreseeable? ■ What are the conditions in other countries and cultures? ■ What alternatives do we prefer and why?
A+C	Taking action and initiating change
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What changes will bring us closer to the visions? ■ Changes within ourselves, in the classroom, in society? ■ What possibilities exist for taking action to carry out these changes? ■ What barriers might prevent the performance of these actions? ■ What barriers might prevent actions from resulting in change? ■ What actions will we initiate? ■ How will we choose to evaluate these actions?
E	Reflecting critically, or evaluating
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What changes did we achieve? ■ What was the most important factor in achieving these changes? ■ What were the barriers? ■ What changes did we not manage to achieve? ■ What were the reasons? ■ What lessons were learnt?

The IVAC approach assumes various perspectives. These are suggested as a starting point for planning and implementing the action and participation aspects of Shape Up. The overall themes for Shape Up are eating and body movement. The perspectives and phases of work presented below could be used for the theme in general, or for more specific topics within these themes. It is important to note that the questions in each phase can be modified, and new questions can be included, as suggested by pupils, teachers, or other Shape Up participants in each particular context.

- **Selecting and investigating (S+I)** deal with obtaining a common perception of an actual health problem. Pupils have to be actively involved in choosing the health topic or issue and they need to explore the reasons for which this issue is important to them. In Shape Up, the overall project topics are pre-determined,

as the project is focused on food, eating and body movement. However, children and young people should have the opportunity to *select* different aspects of these topics that they would like to focus on and explore. Further, they should also work with the historical dimension. To be able to reflect on how present-day conditions or a given development came to exist, it is important to understand which conditions contributed, over time, to creating the problem. It is also important to identify the factors that lie behind the problem. Even if the problem manifests itself in the classroom, the school or the city (be it in relation to food or the quality of the playgrounds in the neighbourhood) the underlying causes will often turn out to be operating outside these contexts. Therefore, a framework to observe and analyse health problems as embedded in economic, environmental, cultural and social structures is important here.

- **Vision (V)** deals with the development of children's visions about the future in relation to the health problems at hand. In other words, in this stage, pupils develop creative ideas, perceptions and scenarios about their future life and the society in which they are growing up.
- As shown in the perspectives in **action and change (A+C)**, it is also important to enable the imagination to bloom and foster a wealth of possible actions connected to the implementation of some of the visions that have been created. It is of great importance that all proposals are dealt with seriously and given equal attention. The actions suggested should be discussed with reference to the potential barriers that might arise in attempting to bring about changes and the effort required to do so. Specific actions should be selected on the basis of these considerations.



- **Critical reflection or an evaluation (E)** of the process, aimed at assessing (i.e. [e]valuating) the achievements, analysing the reasons for the failures and learning from experience. It is important to note that even if pupils do not manage to bring about change, the evaluation phase can show that the project was successful; that is, that the pupils have learnt a lot and gained valuable experience.

Implementation: a flexible framework

In practice, pupils never follow the stages outlined in the model: starting with selection and investigation, moving on to visions and ending with action and evaluating the change. The reality is much more complex and pupils might, for instance, start with a concrete action trying to influence the school setting and then, after a while, realise that they have not decided on a clear target for their actions. Consequently, they might need to go back to discuss and clarify their visions before redeveloping their action strategy, identifying new partners, etc.

Rather than seeing the three phases as taking place in a definitive successive order, the elements in the IVAC approach should be viewed and used as components within a fluid and flexible framework, which the teacher and other adults working with children can use when planning, carrying out and evaluating the Shape Up activities.

The IVAC approach does not automatically lead to the development of action-orientated knowledge or action competence; nevertheless, it is a good starting point and a valuable practical tool for teachers and other adults. Below are a few ideas on how the IVAC approach can be used at different levels in Shape Up.

Possible and concrete uses

At the **school level**, teachers should guide pupils through these phases to select, explore and work with the different aspects of eating and body movement. All the phases are equally important and rely upon the teacher's guidance. However, pupils might need more guidance when they plan the action part and less guidance when they develop visions and future alternatives. It is the responsibility of the teacher to provide a fine balance between sensitive encouragement when needed, and room for children's creative imagination and their influence on the process and content. It is very important that the pupils' visions are taken into account when planning action, so that the actions serve as a bridge between their dreams and reality, and as an attempt to bring the reality closer to the ideals. Also, the pupils' ideas about which actions are to be taken should play a central role in action planning. The actions should be relatively realistic or achievable.

At the **local community, city and national level**, the Shape Up coordinators, facilitators and the local promoting group should provide the conditions, opportunities and support for the children and young people to go through the IVAC phases and use the local community and the city as an extended classroom. In this way, they can explore the issues of food, body movement and health in close relation to their everyday lives, and learn about the importance of a healthy and balanced diet and physical activity by bringing about changes in their living environments. Real-life changes in the community are not possible if pupils do not receive support from the Shape Up staff. This does not mean that the role of the Shape Up local community staff is to fulfil pupils' wishes. Rather, they should engage in dialogue and action together with children



and young people and involve them seriously in the decision-making processes. In this way, children learn about health, food and body movement, but also about democracy and bringing about changes by working in partnership.

At the **European (international) level**, children and young people can be supported by the teachers and Shape Up facilitators to use the Shape Up portal to exchange/discuss/compare their investigation findings, visions and actions. Furthermore, they can plan and carry out joint investigations with peers from the other Shape up schools throughout Europe. For example, they can explore, compare and discuss the physical environments of the school canteens, or the quality of the food offered in a number of European countries (that is, in the Shape Up cities). The discussions and comparisons will provide additional information and inspiration when children and young people plan and take actions to initiate changes at the local level. Also, they can create visions together, imagining alternative solutions to health problems related to food and physical activity.

Joint Shape Up weeks and other cross-cultural activities

- Pupils can decide to take action together across borders. Here are some examples of possible cross-cultural actions:
Joint Shape Up weeks, during which they invite peers from other cities; joint letters suggesting policy changes at the European level (for instance, with regard to the provision of food in schools, or food labelling); joint participation at conferences and lobbying for health-promoting changes at different forums.