

A negotiated curriculum – 10 step approach

Curriculum negotiation, also known as a co-designed or co-constructed curriculum, is a process through which what is taught and learned is negotiated between teacher and students, rather than being solely pre-determined by the teacher.

This has great potential in Transition year where significant curriculum choice and flexibility is encouraged and where a key focus is on creating space and opportunities for meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences.

This paper provides a summary of the steps involved in adopting a negotiated curriculum approach to planning. While this example shows younger students, the process can be adapted for TY.

You can view this process in action in this 10 minute video produced by researchers in the School of Education, UL [Active Learning in the Negotiated Integrated Curriculum Project on Vimeo](#).

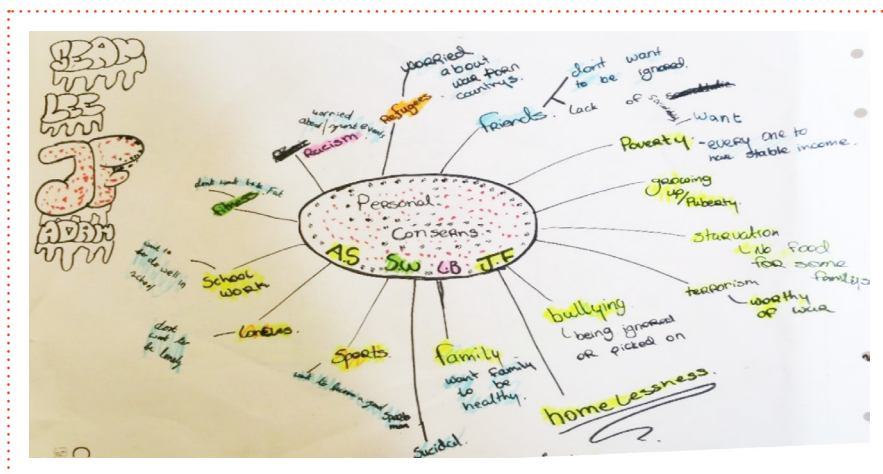
1. Planning

➤ Stage One: Personal concerns

Students individually list personal concerns that they would like to learn more about.

➤ Stage Two: Grouping personal concerns

Students share personal concerns in small groups to establish commonalities and facilitate the social construction of knowledge. It is made clear to students that they can choose what to share and what to keep private. Their concerns are presented to the class in mind-map format and the teacher collects the major ideas on the board.



➤ Stage Three: Wider community/world concerns

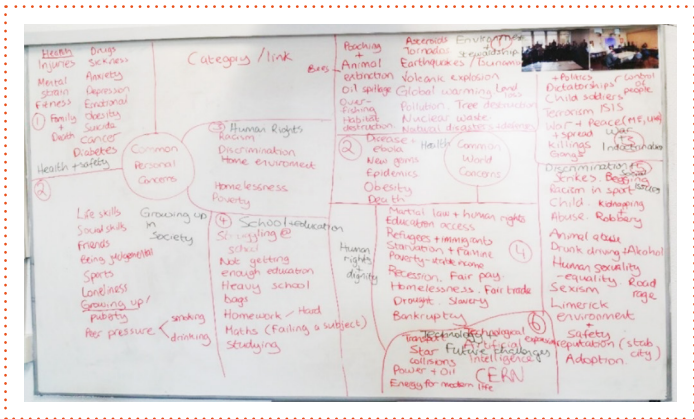
Students individually list concerns they have about the world around them that they would like to learn more about.

➤ Stage Four: Grouping world concerns

Students share world concerns in small groups. These are presented to the class in mind-map format and the teacher collects major ideas on the board.

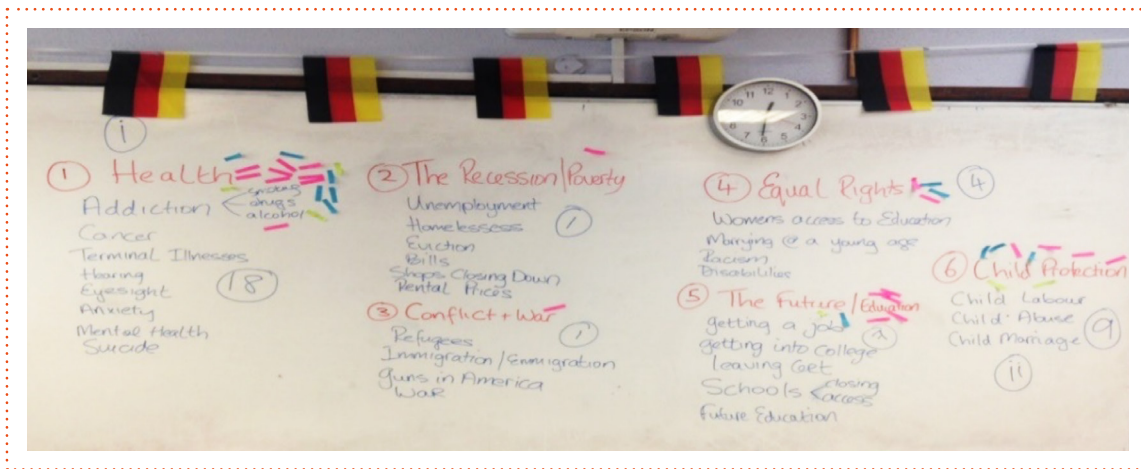
➤ **Stage Five: Finding themes**

The class discusses what is meant by a theme and then uses the material on the board to identify and connect common themes across both their personal and world concerns.



➤ **Stage Six: Sharing themes**

Themes are presented and rationalised to remove repetition and overlap.

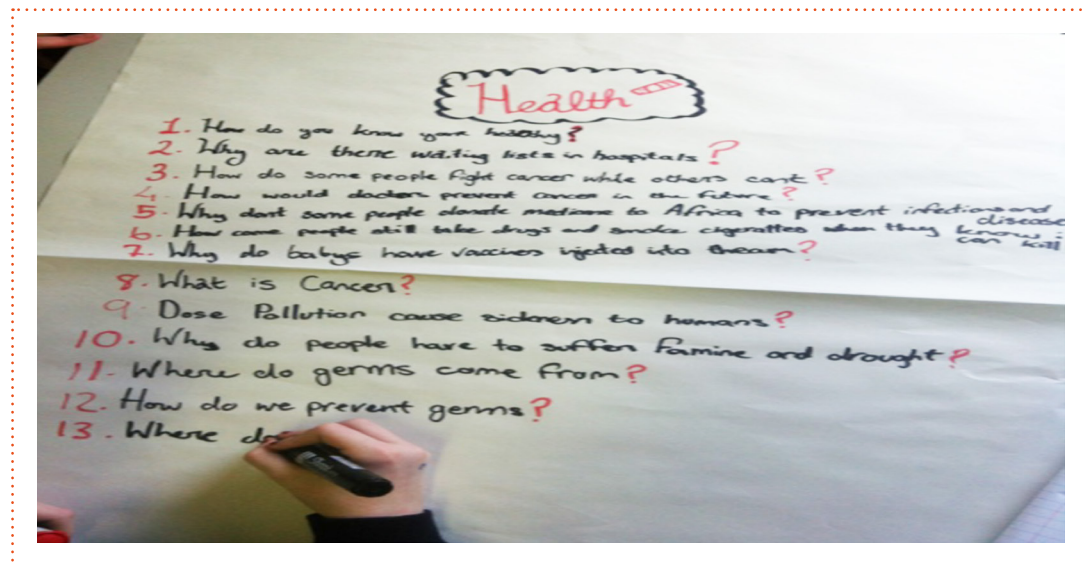


➤ **Stage Seven: Student vote**

Students vote on their preferred themes for classroom learning. Each student writes their top three themes before then placing a sticker on board beside the themes they have selected.

➤ **Stage Eight: Connecting questions to themes**

Students consider what makes a good question. In small groups they then generate their own questions in relation to the chosen themes. Questions are pooled from all groups; overlap is removed and then the questions are written on posters and stuck up on the wall.



➤ Stage Nine: Selecting Activities

Students suggest initial learning activities to address the questions they raised allowing for a sense of learner agency and decision-making. These are written on post-it notes and placed underneath the relevant question.

➤ Stage Ten: Unit Planning

Students' questions and activities are used as the basis for curriculum planning by the teacher(s) separate to the students to allow for teacher agency, decision-making and the introduction of some non-negotiables.



2. Next steps of a Negotiated Integrated Curriculum

Developing from this shared intent, the second component of a NIC involves teachers inviting students to help construct and enact the learning journey on a continual basis. Learning is predominantly co-operative, allowing for significant differentiation as student groups take on various tasks to contribute to developing collective understanding.

Formative assessment is supported, by regularly visiting four questions: What do I know already? What do I want to find out? How will I find out? How will we show what we have learned?

Students engaged in research, survey development, interviews, alongside typical pedagogical methods of instruction.

3. Core findings

The NIC process represents an experience in Participatory Democracy to address real issues in a meaningful way.

The benefits for students included:

- Increased engagement, motivation
- Improvement in capacity to learn, transferred beyond NIC class
- Improved behaviour and socialisation
- Positive disposition towards curriculum for all students in various ways

For teachers:

- Enhanced professional agency: teachers came to trust the place of student voice in negotiating learning: "they lead the way"
- Increased expectation for student capability
- Changes in routines of learning: active, negotiated

Overall the NIC process enhanced student Agentic Engagement:



Agentic Engagement is manifest when students actively express their thoughts, opinions, and interests during activity, when they direct their own learning, when they engage communally, collectively, and critically with others and when they use culturally relevant tools and technologies

(Lawson and Lawson, 2013)

CREDIT: This process is inspired by the work of Dr John O'Reilly and Dr Joanne Fitzpatrick (UL).