

- 
- The curriculum
  - negotiation method

Tool on Student Voice

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Student Voice  
the BRIDGE to Learning

Tool	The curriculum negotiation method
Aim/Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Involve students in decision-making about their curriculum.</li> <li>- Increase the relevance of the curriculum from a student perspective</li> <li>- Develop democratic qualities</li> </ul>
Short instruction	The tool helps organising student participation in decision-making about their classroom curriculum. Students work individually and in small groups on expressing prior knowledge and develop questions for learning about a topic. In the last stage, student input is discussed at the classroom level and is related to (external) curriculum requirements.
Time duration	Two lesson hours
Needed materials	Student prompt sheet (attached)
Role teacher	The teacher facilitates the process and safeguards that (external) curriculum requirements are met.
Role student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reflect on prior knowledge, develop learning questions</li> <li>- Communicate cooperate and negotiate in small groups</li> </ul>
References	<p>Bron, J., Bovill, C., Vliet, E van &amp; Veugelers, W. (2016). Negotiating the curriculum: Realizing student voice. <i>The social educator</i>. 34(1) 39-54</p> <p>Bron, J., Bovill, C. &amp; Veugelers, W. (2018) Distributed curriculum leadership: How negotiation between student and teacher improves the curriculum. <i>Journal of Ethical Educational Leadership; special issue 1 student voice and school leadership</i>. pp.76-98</p>

### Context

Young people today have increased economic power, social maturity, access to information and knowledge derived from the ever-increasing media culture surrounding them. Yet many schools still provide few opportunities for young people to express their views constructively and to contribute meaningfully to shaping learning and school life. Since the ratification of the Convention of the Rights of the child and the introduction of Citizenship education in many democratic countries, addressing and stimulating democratic principles and attitudes have increased. The notion that democracy is important and should be nurtured in our society and schools is widespread. The emphasis is not restricted to introducing more knowledge of formal democratic procedures and institutions, but has shifted towards acting in the democratic process and practising fundamental democratic ideas. These include expressing and exchanging viewpoints based on equality, cooperation and negotiation, participating in decision-making processes, accepting decisions made collectively.

### Summary of the tool

The tool consists of a prompt sheet, which enables students to develop learning questions that function as input into the micro-curriculum, such as a scheme of work or sequence of lessons. As the students fill out the prompt sheet individually (step 1), knowledge on a specific topic can be awakened.

The next step in the process is that small groups of students develop questions they consider worth exploring regarding a topic (step 2 en 3). Once this stage is completed, the entire class meets and discusses the various perspectives in a conversation (step 4) that can be regarded as 'negotiating the curriculum' (Boomer, 1978). The teacher is leading this discussion. It is during this phase that the teacher puts forth the curriculum requirements as formulated in the formal curriculum. This results in a set of questions that form the core of the forthcoming lessons. The selected questions are divided over the groups (step 5). Teachers can vary in the way they do this by simply dividing the questions to make a distinction between compulsory questions for all students to answer and questions to choose from.

Table 1 outlines the different steps that are taken. The tool itself strongly focuses on producing both content and conceptual understanding. The process the students go through incorporates numerous skills and attitudes related to citizenship education and 21st century skills. The prompt sheet with the steps that students use in their lessons is included as an attachment. Table 1 is the version for the teacher that describes each of the five steps.

Table 1 *The Four Steps of the Curriculum Negotiating Process*

Steps	Activity	Skills
1. Individual assignment	List all items related to the general topic. List the questions you have regarding the topic.	Brainstorm, associate, awaken previous knowledge and prior learning.
2 and 3 Group assignment	Develop a word web/mindmap around the topic, using the different lists from step one. Decide on a set of questions your group finds most relevant and interesting about the topic.	Share, discuss, explain, convince, negotiate, decide.
4. Class assignment	Groups of students share questions. The class decides on priorities and a distinction between mandatory and optional questions. The teacher makes sure that certain curriculum requirements are met.	Share, discuss, explain, convince, negotiate, decide.
5. Distributing questions back to groups	The selected questions are distributed amongst groups. Groups plan how best to answer them.	Discuss, explain, convince, negotiate, decide. Choose information collection method, locate sources.

Result: The negotiation process offers students an opportunity to have a voice in their education and to participate in decision making in small and larger groups. This an example of a democratic practice, not only because of the participation in decision-making, but also because of the diversity within the class that becomes apparent as each student gets the opportunity to relate learning to their own background. The structured prompt sheet is to be used within a class setting and is not restricted to a selected group, enabling all students to participate, learn from each other and execute their right to participate and develop democratic qualities in the process. Therefore curriculum negotiation is, with the use of the student prompt sheet, an example of democratic education.

Table 2 presents specific aims applied to the structured student prompt sheet. This consists of steps the students take in negotiating the curriculum. These steps guide the students from awakening previously acquired insights towards building a coherent set of relevant questions for learning. These steps can be used to formulate students' activities in terms of aims.

In Table 2, there is a distinction between aims and operationalization. Operationalization constitutes descriptions of possible student behaviour and activities.

Table 2 Aims Related to Steps in Prompt Sheet

<b>Aims related to prompt sheet Steps 1 – 4</b>	<b>Aims</b>	<b>Examples of operationalization</b>
Step 1: <i>What I know and want to find out</i>	<p>Reflect on prior knowledge;</p> <p>Draw conclusions about one's own prior knowledge to formulate questions for learning.</p>	<p>Reflect on prior (learning) experiences, use introspection, retrospection, and brainstorm.</p> <p>Take one's own identity (background, interests, and values) as a point of departure.</p> <p>Try to be original and think creatively.</p>
Step 2: <i>Exchange of prior knowledge in groups</i>	<p>Communicate one's findings with others (voice).</p> <p>Relate knowledge put forward by others to one's own (experience diversity).</p> <p>Be responsible for the cooperative development of a group outcome (democracy).</p>	<p>Express and clarify ones prior knowledge.</p> <p>Interpret, stimulate and take seriously others' perspectives.</p> <p>Make sure everyone's contribution is taken into account.</p>
Step 3: <i>Negotiation and formulation of group questions</i>	<p>Actively participate in negotiations and decision making in small groups.</p> <p>Monitor and influence the group dynamics.</p>	<p>Explain, convince, and give arguments.</p> <p>Listen, ask for clarifications or arguments.</p> <p>Weigh arguments and interests, discuss differences of opinion.</p> <p>Decide together and accept group decisions.</p> <p>Reflect on one's own questions for learning and reformulate if necessary.</p> <p>Be sensitive to the wellbeing of group members during the process.</p> <p>Express discomfort or feelings of unfairness.</p>
Step 4: <i>Negotiation of a common set of agreed questions with peers and teacher</i>	<p>Actively participate in negotiations and decision making in larger groups.</p> <p>Negotiate what the teacher considers non-negotiable (Who says this? Why should we believe this? Who benefits if we act upon it?) In addition, accept the outcome.</p> <p>Prioritize and determine class questions for learning.</p>	<p>Weigh teacher's arguments</p> <p>Express group positions and one's own.</p> <p>Apply insight in roles and responsibilities of students, teachers, school leaders and government.</p> <p>Accept decisions and temporarily regard these as final</p>

## Appendix 1: Principles of student voice

Allowing students to have a voice in the classroom curriculum is based on a number of principles.

1. As educators, we have a responsibility to ensure that education leads to further democratic qualities (as part of the aims for citizenship education). These democratic qualities are developed by interpersonal practices such as discussion, cooperation and decision-making (educational benefit).
2. All students are entitled to practice their democratic rights and have a voice in their education (the universal right to participate).
3. Students can offer unique perspectives and can have a valuable contribution to their education (student voice).
4. Learning is a social process involving peers and adults (social learning).
5. The curriculum is not a fixed but a dynamic entity that is open for discussion and improvement (curriculum as process).

Seeing the curriculum as process is a prerequisite for inviting students into the process of curriculum development. Figure one is an illustration of the curriculum negotiation process between the teacher and the students. The negotiation process is at the heart of the model. Teachers use external requirements and materials such as national curriculum frameworks and textbooks to make decisions about their *operational curriculum*, along with other factors such as their *professional knowledge and experience* and the *characteristics of their school*. This is presented on the left side of the curriculum intentions model in figure one. On the right side are the students whose intentions are based on *prior learning experiences* (both in and out of school), *socio-cultural backgrounds* and their *interests and ambitions*. In the central curriculum negotiations, box intentions are awakened, developed and integrated. The *operational curriculum* is the result of the curriculum negotiation between teacher and students and after the teacher has made the final decisions on what questions to be used.

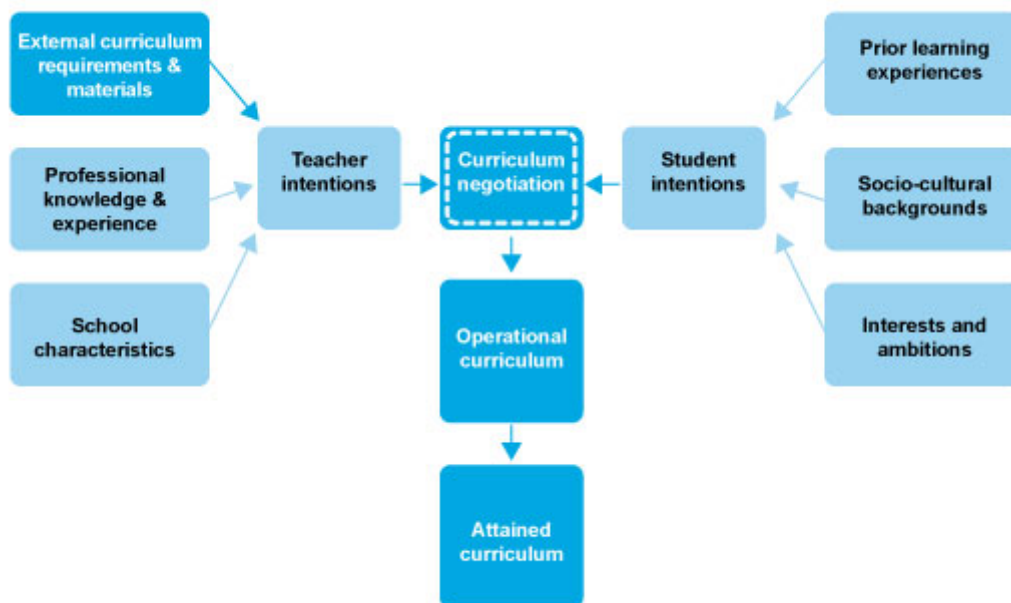


Figure 1. The curriculum intentions model.

**Appendix 2: Comprised version of student worksheet 'What we want to learn'**

**Step one: Things you already know** (individual assignment)

The topic of the assignment is: .....(provided by teacher)

The topic might bring up some thoughts and ideas you might have. Such as:

- Things you already know about the topic, or
- Questions you might have regarding the topic.

Table 1 (underneath) gives you the opportunity to write down what you already know (left column) or what questions you have (right column). It is not just about what you have learned in school, but also what you have learned outside school.

**Write down as much as you can.**

Remember that you have a unique perspective on the topic: you already know certain things and you have specific question that only you can think of.

**Therefore: Do not forget to write down those things and questions that only you could think of!**

Table 1. *Things you already know*

<b>This I know already</b>	<b>These are questions I have</b>
[write down what you already know about the topic]	[write down any question you might have about the topic]

**Step two: prior knowledge** (small group assignment)

Work in groups of 3 to 4 students.

Exchange the things you have written down in table 1. Start with what you know already.

Fill in table 2. Start with 'this we know already'. Make sure that all group members can explain what is written under 'this we already know'.

Make a list or try to integrate the words and concepts into a word web.

**Step 3: Negotiate relevant questions** (small group assignment)

Proceed as follows:

1. Compare all questions from table 1.
2. If questions overlap, re-phrase as one question.
3. Write down the questions in order of interest. Put the most interesting questions on top. Try to convince each other what questions are most interesting.
4. If possible, make a distinction between questions that are close by and far away. Close by questions concern yourself, your life, your friends and family. Far away questions are about 'bigger' issues such as your city, country, the world, the future.
5. If a question remains that you find interesting, but your group-members do not, you can write it in the right-bottom cell.

Table 2. *Your choice*

<b>These are questions we find interesting:</b>
<b>These are questions I find interesting myself:</b>



**Step 4: Our class selection** (with whole class)

When all groups have finished table 2, we are taking it to the class-level. The teacher has an important role now: he/she writes down the group results on the (black-, white- or smart)board and the teacher introduces questions that must be answered. Proceed as follows:

1. Compare all questions from table 2.
2. If questions overlap, re-phrase as one question.
3. Decide if a question is 'close by' or 'far away'.
4. Write down the question in order of interest. Put the most interesting questions on top. Try to convince each other what questions are most interesting or vote.
5. The teacher also has some questions that must be covered. He checks if these questions are already mentioned. If not he can write the 'must do' questions on the board.
6. If a question remains that you find interesting, but your classmates do not, you can write it in the right-bottom cell.

Table 3: *Our class selection*

<b>These questions we must answer:</b>
<b>This question(s) I want to answer myself:</b>

**Step 5: Work plan** (in small groups)

Return to your small groups of 3-4.

In table 3 all the questions that we want and must answer are collected. The next step is to decide if it is possible to actually answer all these questions. Not everything is possible at school and time is limited. Therefore we must consider the following questions:

1. How can the question be answered?
2. How much time do we want to devote to answering the question?
3. Is there enough time available to find answers to all questions?
4. What are questions that need to be answered before we can find answers to other questions?
5. What to do with our individual question(s)?

Table 4: *Work plan*

Question	way to find the answer	time
<b>own question</b>		
<b>total time</b>		

SLO is the Netherlands institute for curriculum development in primary, secondary and special education. We work with teachers, school leadership and other stakeholders in designing the national curriculum framework, enabling individual schools to implement their own curriculum.

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