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UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE

Eastern Cape Education Department

Distance Education Project

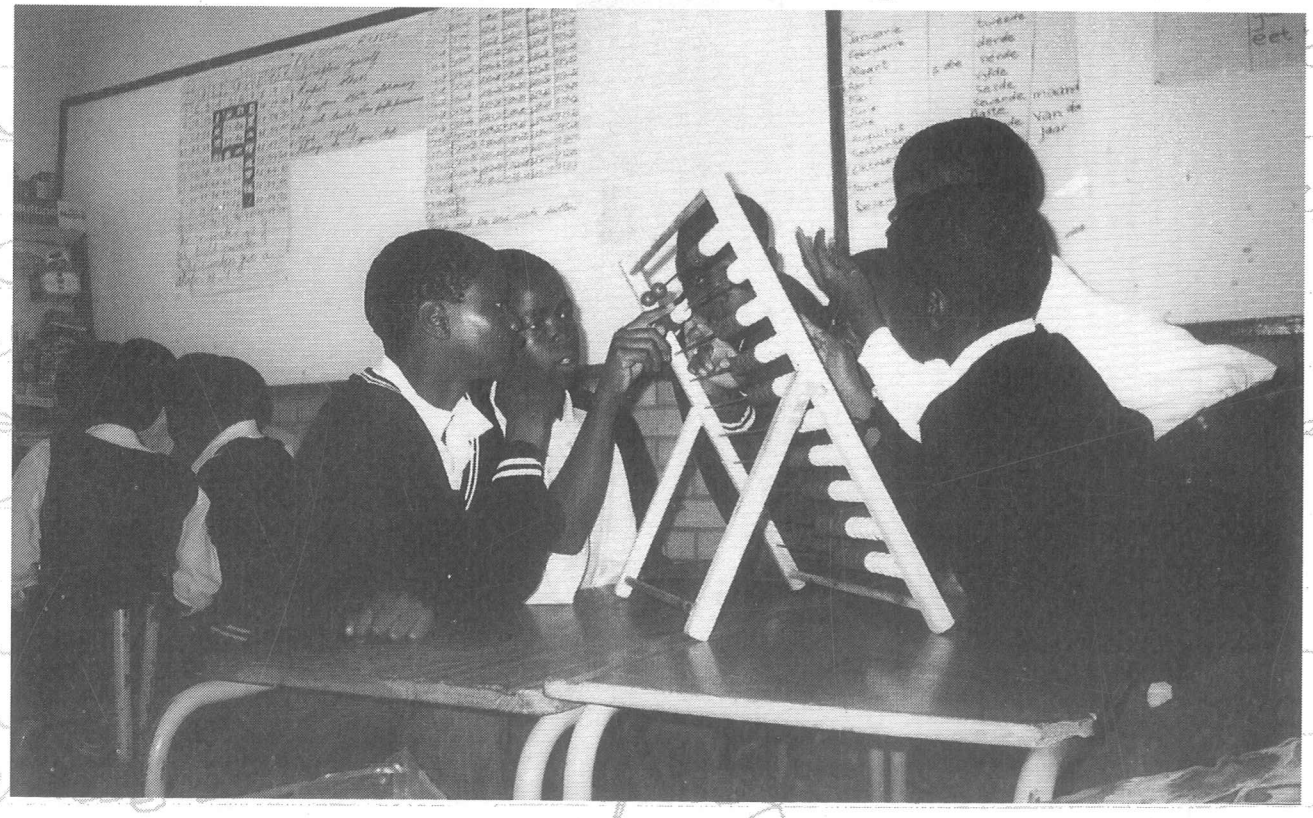
Core Education Studies Course

Helping Learners Learn

5th Umthamo

Negotiating the Curriculum

Pilot Edition – October 2000



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Umthamo 36: Negotiating the Curriculum

Introduction

This umthamo is the fifth in the series of imithamo in the *Helping Learners Learn* strand. You will find that this umthamo connects with and expands upon the imithamo on Curriculum and also on many other imithamo in other strands of the course. We will think about these connections as we work through the umthamo. We believe that this umthamo will consolidate and integrate the learnings of many previous imithamo, as well as carrying you forward into something new.

In Umthamo 24 and Umthamo 32 *(Learning in the World)*, we tried to understand what curriculum is. We found that there are many different ways of looking at curriculum, and a number of different parts of the curriculum 'tree'.

However, both of these imithamo left us believing that curriculum is the actual day-to-day activities of learners and teachers constructing knowledge together. This takes place within their specific context, based on certain values, beliefs and principles. It may be guided by certain 'Curriculum documents', but these only have life and bear fruit in the context of the classroom.

For learners and teachers, then, the curriculum is:

- The daily activities in the classroom (and even outside);
- What is learned;
- How it is learned;
- The resources and materials that are used in these activities;
- The way teachers mediate these for the benefit of learning;
- The time that is spent;
- The context within which the learning takes place;
- What is assessed, and
- How it is assessed.

We could therefore call teacher and learners "co-creators of the curriculum". In this umthamo, we would like to give you an opportunity to co-create curriculum with your learners. (You have already been doing this, in various ways.)

We would like to invite you to *negotiate the curriculum* with your learners. In other words, you will give your learners a say in the elements of the curriculum mentioned above. We will ask you to give your learners the space to say what they would like to learn, and how they would like to learn it. You will also offer them choices in terms of what resources they

use, how much time is spent, how their work will be assessed, etc. We would like you to plan together how to follow up their interests and their questions. This is, of course, true learner-centredness.

You will need to listen very carefully to your learners. You will need to remain very aware of where your learners come from, of their backgrounds, their culture, the things which have meaning for them, the things they feel strongly about. In other words, you will need to be aware of what they bring with them into the classroom.

You will need, too, to keep in mind the multiple intelligences which your learners have – their differences; their special talents; their individual learning styles and interests and difficulties. These differences are something to celebrate – strengths, rather than weaknesses.

While you listen to your learners, you will need to keep an eye on the aims and purposes of education, and the requirements of the new curriculum. You will need to try to fit them together with the needs and interests of the learners.

Expect the best from your learners, and trust that they will give you quality. Learner independence, initiative and imagination will gradually grow through co-operation and sharing with you and each other. Learners will begin to 'own' the learning that takes place in your classroom.

What do we know about negotiating?

This umthamo will assist you in *helping learners learn* by letting you experience how the curriculum can be negotiated. It may be helpful if we start by thinking about the kind of negotiations which we are involved with every day.

Conversation 1

Child: Mama, uzovuma? (Mom, will you agree?)

Mom: Intoni? (On what?)

Child: Uba ndicrayonishe la Humpty Dumpty? (that I must colour in that Humpty Dumpty?)

Mom: Where is that Humpty Dumpty?

Child: There in that box of cornflakes.

Mom: Oh! Yes, of course, but what are we going to do with the cornflakes?

Child: You will put them in a jar. Can you do it Mom? Please!

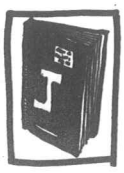
Conversation 2

Mom: I do not like this crying when you play. Why do you cry now and then?

Child: It's because Neza takes our crayons and dolls by force.

Mom: You know, it's time we sit down and discuss about the wrong things that people do to others.

Child: Yes, Mom, but can we draw it. (They started with drawing people breaking flowers, playing with a candle, playing with a radio and breaking trays and even ones who were still thinking of the wrongs that they intended to do.)



Journal write

Think of some occasions where you have negotiated with children at home. Record one of these 'negotiations'. Now think about your negotiation and the ones you have just read above.

What do you think is involved in negotiating? What makes for a successful negotiation? Think about, and write about the following:

- What values and attitudes are necessary for successful negotiation?
- What kind of thinking and talking is involved?
- What part does each of the participants play?
- Who dominates, and who is the winner in a successful negotiation?
- Any other thoughts about successful negotiation?

Share these ideas with your colleagues at a face-to-face session.

Negotiations in your classroom

Does the experience below sound familiar?

"Please take out your books. I'd like you to write something today."

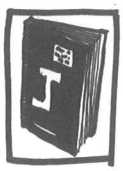
"Aw, Ma'am, can't we do a drama again, like we did yesterday?"

If you have had interactions similar to this, how did they end?

Did you get your way? Did they get their way? Or did you manage to negotiate?

Maybe your class is one where this kind of thing doesn't happen because you have very strict discipline, and the learners know that they must always do as you say.

Or maybe this kind of thing doesn't need to happen in your class, because there is always an element of negotiation in what you do in your class.



Journal write

Think about your classroom. How do you feel about the possibility of negotiating the curriculum with your learners? Write down your attitudes and your feelings. Can it be done? Why?/ Why not?

Share these ideas with your colleagues at the face-to-face session. Was it scary - or exciting - to think of letting learners in to the process of deciding what is learned? Or do you feel that this is something that you have been doing all along?

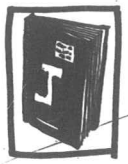
Looking back over the B.Prim.Ed.

Think of the learning experiences you have been through with your class as part of the B.Prim.Ed. Can you think of any of them in which your learners played a part in "negotiating" what was learned?

For instance, any learning experience in which learners ask their own questions becomes a "negotiated" learning experience.

- In Umthamo 9, where you invited learners to think up questions about the half-told intsomi, their questions changed the course of the lesson.
- In Umthamo 19 *Investigation and Inquiry-based Science,* you conducted an investigation on a topic which was, in most cases, 'chosen' by your learners. It was suggested that you base it on a question that a learners had asked, or a topic someone had shown interest in. Here was a 'negotiated curriculum'.

- In Umthamo 20, where learners asked their own questions about 'floating and sinking', their questions may have led you in a direction which you had not personally planned.



Journal write

Try to think of one or two more B.Prim. learning experiences which have involved 'negotiation' with the learners, or even with parents as well, about what is learned. Discuss this with other teacher-learners and pool your ideas.

Intended outcomes

When you have worked through this umthamo and done the Key Activity with your learners, you will have:

- Consolidated some of the important learnings from previous imithamo;
- Thought about what it means to negotiate the curriculum;
- Read a rationale for negotiating the curriculum, and some examples of learning units which were negotiated with the learners;
- Reflected on some learning units, thought about how much negotiation is taking place, and asked yourself whether more negotiation would lead to more effective learning;
- Planned, implemented and reflected on a learning unit in which you negotiated the curriculum with your own learners.

In the introduction, we have thought about negotiation, and what it is. We have looked at the kinds of negotiations which take place in our homes and classrooms.

In Unit 1, we will think about reasons for negotiating the curriculum. We will read a passage which discusses negotiating the curriculum, and look at ways in which other imithamo have prepared the way for this one.

In Unit 2, we will look at a number of different ways of negotiating the curriculum. We will read descriptions of four different learning experiences which involve negotiation.

In Unit 3, you will read descriptions of learning units which were presented in the Eastern and Western Cape. You will reflect on the negotiation which took place in them.

Finally, in Unit 4, you will plan, present and reflect on a learning unit in which you will negotiate the curriculum with your class.

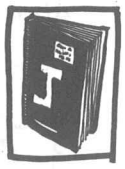
Unit 1: Why negotiate the Curriculum?

You have already thought about and written down your ideas and feelings about *negotiating the curriculum*, and about what is involved in negotiation. You have probably also discussed them in the face-to-face session with your umkhwezeli. In your discussions, you probably found that, in a successful negotiation,

- There is two-way communication;
- Neither party dominates;
- The people involved in the negotiation respect one another;
- There is no loser (It is a win-win situation).

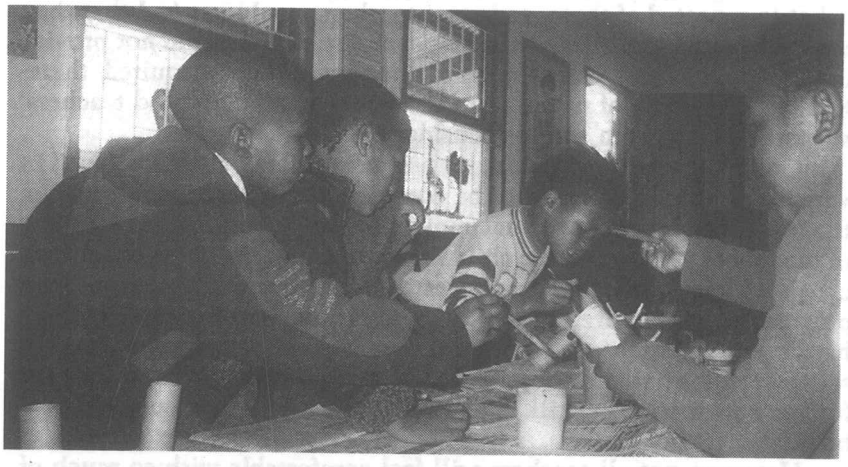
I am sure there were other thoughts that you came up with.

Let us now think about reasons for negotiating the curriculum.



Journal write

What good reasons can you think of for allowing learners to help decide what is to be learned? Why should we negotiate the curriculum? Write down your ideas in your journal.



Reading task

The reading which follows, on "Collaborative Learning and Teaching", is taken from a very important book written by Gordon Wells, called *"The Meaning Makers"*. It gives an account of some research which was done into the way in which children learn language, and later, into the way in which they learn at school.

Read the passage with a pencil in your hand. Try to find out whether Gordon Wells speaks about negotiating the curriculum. Underline any sections in which he gives reasons for negotiating the curriculum. Underline or make margin notes on <u>any</u> points in the reading which strike you, or which you feel are important.

Towards a collaborative style of learning and teaching

from Wells, Gordon. 1987. *The Meaning Makers: Children Learning Language and Using Language to Learn.* Hodder & Stoughton.

From observations outside school, we know that children are innately predisposed to make sense of their experience, to pose problems for themselves, and actively to search for and achieve solutions. There is every reason to believe, therefore, that, given the opportunity, they will continue to bring these characteristics to bear inside the school as well, provided that the tasks that they engage in are ones that they have been able to make their own. All of us—adults and children alike—function most effectively when we are working on a task or problem to which we have a personal commitment, either because the goal is one that we are determined to achieve (balancing the family budget, repairing a machine) or because the activity is one that we find intrinsically satisfying (writing a poem, building a model), or both. In these circumstances, as the extracts concerning Colin and his model camera show, discussion with someone more skilled or knowledgeable takes on real purpose and significance, as progress to date is reviewed and alternative plans for further work are considered in terms of their feasibility and appropriateness. This is perhaps the teacher's most vital contribution: as a master providing guidance to an apprentice, who utilizes that guidance in the pursuit of his or her chosen goal, the value of which is appreciated by both of them.

The extracts concerning Colin occur earlier in the book. You will find this book in your Centre library.

For children to achieve this active involvement in their own learning, it is important to find ways of enabling them to share in the responsibility for deciding what tasks to undertake and how to set about them. This does not mean that the teacher should abnegate responsibility or tolerate a free-for-all in which children do exactly as they choose when they choose. Few children can work productively without the support of an understood framework and clear ideas about what is expected of them, and most teachers would not feel that they were adequately fulfilling their responsibilities if they did not provide both guidelines and a clear sense of direction. What is required, therefore, is some form of negotiation in which both pupils' and teachers' suggestions are given serious consideration.

Colin's teacher had devised what were called "choice books," in which the agenda of tasks to be completed was negotiated between the teacher and each individual pupil once each week. At the beginning of the school year, when the children were new to the class, the agenda consisted largely of activities suggested by the teacher. But, as the year progressed, the children began to add their own suggestions and, perhaps more important, to note when they had not yet completed a task satisfactorily or where they needed to make another attempt or gain further information or skill. Figure 6-1 shows a page from such a choice book.

See page 10.

However, not all teachers will feel comfortable with so much of the curriculum open for negotiation—at least, not initially. It is important to emphasize, therefore, that there is no one correct way to proceed. Indeed, different methods will probably work best for different teachers or for the same teachers with different classes of children. What is important is that, for at least a substantial part of the curriculum, there be genuine negotiation that enables pupils to feel that they have initiated some of their activities and have taken on others and made them their own. "Ownership" is the word that Donald Graves uses to make the same point about children's writing,[9] and it applies equally to other activities, right across the curriculum.

When children have a feeling of ownership and share the responsibility for the tasks that they engage in, teachers find that their relationships with the children change. Given responsibility, children behave responsibly and no longer have to be closely supervised every moment of the day. With an agreed agenda, they know what has to be achieved and spend their time productively, using resources appropriately, asking for the teacher's assistance only when other sources have

proved inadequate, and moving on to a new task when the present one is completed. As a result, freed from the demands of managing resources, answering trivial questions about procedure, and continually monitoring classroom behavior, teachers are able to spend considerable periods of time with individual children, giving assistance when it is really needed and helping them to reflect on what they are doing and to see how to extend it in various directions.

This, then, is the goal, and these are some of the benefits that are likely to result. But how can it be achieved? Here again, there is no one formula for success, but classroom management—how time, space and other resources are allocated—is one important ingredient. Having the classroom divided into different areas appropriately organized for different activities is an essential preliminary, as is arranging resources—paper, glue, scissors, apparatus, reference books, etc.—so that children can gain access to them without disturbing each other or the teacher. Equally important is the organization of time. Children should have long periods of time to work on the same task, with as few interruptions as possible; and, as has already been implied, they should not all be expected to engage in the same activity at the same time. With individual agendas, there is little danger of this happening, but it will be necessary to ensure an equitable rotation of access to popular work areas and to scarce resources.

These are some of the organizational prerequisites. But perhaps the most difficult question is how to get started. From talking to teachers who have successfully changed their method of working, it is clear that there are many different starting points, ranging from encouraging individual children to pursue a topic that has particularly interested them to proposing a very general theme that individual children are invited to explore in a variety of different ways. Some teachers have made such a theme the center of all curricular activity over a period of one or two weeks; others have developed a theme in the area of social or environmental studies while maintaining their normal pattern of work in the rest of the curriculum. Some teachers have used a work of literature—a story, song, or poem—as the starting point for a wide range of individual activities; one first-grade teacher used the book *Watership Down* in this way, and a teacher of 10-year-olds started with the Prologue to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

The advantage of a broad theme within which all—or a majority—of the children choose topics to pursue is that there is an overall coherence to the variety of their activities. This is reassuring to the teacher, as it reduces the feeling of being pulled in too many different directions at once. It also has advantages for the children, in that they can more readily work together in groups, collaborating with each other and learning from each other's efforts. Whole-class activities, too, such as visits, reading stories related to the theme, and—most important of all—sharing what each individual or group has created or discovered, have more significance when the theme is one in which all are equally involved.

To teach in this way—collaborating in the pupils' learning and negotiating the curriculum with them—is not easy, of course. It requires a considerable degree of flexibility and an ability and readiness to meet the demands for resources of information and materials that are called for by the interests that the children wish to pursue. It also demands a constant state of open receptiveness to children's ideas and a willingness to take them seriously, even when, from an adult point of view, they seem naive or immature. At the same time, it requires clear thinking and planning in relation to broad, long-term goals and imagination in finding specific themes, activities, and materials that will spark fresh interests and make connections between those that have already been developed.

Some teachers may feel that they are simply unable to meet such demands: that the breadth of their general knowledge is insufficient or that they lack some of the necessary skills. Such doubts are understandable and very real, but they are probably also unnecessary. To teach collaboratively, it is not necessary to know all the answers to pupils' questions or to be already competent in all the skills that an open curriculum may call for. Indeed, a teacher who is universally knowledgeable and competent may actually make it more difficult for pupils to gain confidence in their ability to learn on their own. Learning is first and foremost a *process*—a continuous making and remaking of meanings in the lifelong enterprise of constructing a progressively more and more effective mental model of the world in which one lives. Learning is never complete. Furthermore, since this process is essentially interactive, it is more helpful for the apprentice learner to work with teachers who are themselves still actively engaged in learning and willing to engage with their pupils in doing so than it is to be instructed and evaluated by those who apparently no longer have the need to engage in such processes themselves.

It is important to emphasize, therefore, that there is no one correct way to proceed. The only really satisfactory solution is the one that each teacher works out for him- or herself, taking into account the particular children concerned, their parents, the school, and its resources and environment.[10]

FIGURE 6-1 A Page from a Child's Choice Book

January 15th Toni

1) Weaving
2) Woodwork. Could you make a loom exactly the same size as ours?
3) Study stories. Please use the books to learn about the different types of stone.
4) Perhaps you and Mandy would like to make a book about our plants and seeds.

1) Work at improving your timing game.
2) Clay. The books show you different ways to make a cup
3) Work at your sand village.
4) Story writing.

Wednesday January 17th

To-day I done a Sand village with Mandy and I made a cup and my handall came of and I done a Story and Weaving. it was good. and my Story is going to be long and we tried to make a loom but it fell a prat

Can I do

clay I want to make a ashtray and avase For my mum. and the Sand village and a dolls house.

January 22nd.

1) Try your loom again but with stronger wood.
2) Improve your timing game. Ask Kim about hers, it may give you some ideas.
3) Create your sand village or could you make a model of the school?
4) Begin to make a diary about things you have been doing.

1) Work on your story, so far I think it's promising. Please talk to me about it again.
2) Work with clay on Monday afternoon. I particularly want you to do your story today. Would you make our model display shelves beautiful
3) work on your house collage.
4) Shop.

Source: Reproduced from *Extending Literacy* (London: Centre for Language in Primary Education, Inner London Education Authority, 1980), p. 25.

Journal write

Write down your thoughts once again. Why should we bring learners into the process of deciding what should be learned? Do not repeat what you have already written. Write any new thoughts which you have gained from the reading, and from reflecting on it.

Also write your thoughts on the following:

- How much influence should they should have on the curriculum?
- How can they be brought into the decision-making?

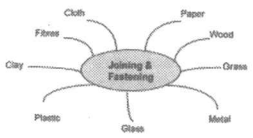
Discuss what you have written in your journal with a colleague, or at the face-to-face session.

***Negotiating the Curriculum* builds on other concepts in the B.Prim.Ed.**

When we speak of *Negotiating the Curriculum*, we are not introducing anything which is very new to the B.Prim.Ed. learner:

1. ***Learner-centredness***
   We are acknowledging that the learner and his/her needs and interests, and his/her learning, need to be the most important focus of what we do in the classroom. (Umthamo 12, and others)

2. ***Building on prior knowledge***
   We are speaking of building on what the learner already knows, what is interesting him/her currently, what s/he has questions about. (Umthamo 2, and others)



3. ***Learners 'construct knowledge' and 'make sense' for themselves***
   We are asserting that each learner 'constructs' knowledge for him/herself, building it into the 'theory of the world' which s/he has in his/her head. Each learner 'makes sense' for him/herself. (Umthamo 2, Umthamo 34, and others)

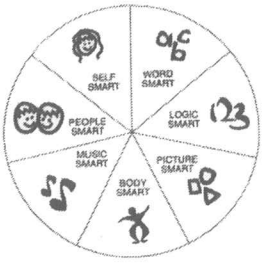
4. ***Interactive learning (Talking and learning)***
   We are affirming that this 'construction' process is an interactive one. It happens as learners talk, share ideas, work co-operatively, interact with the teacher. In other words, it happens in negotiation with others. (Umthamo 18, 20 and others)

5. ***Respecting children's questions***
   We are seeing children's questions as an important starting point for learning, for the process of 'constructing knowledge'. *Reading 2* in Umthamo 19 talked about how important it is to respect childrens' questions. (Revisit that reading by Ellen Doris before you embark on this

umthamo's Key Activity.) Umthamo 9 and Umthamo 20 also emphasise the importance of children's questions.

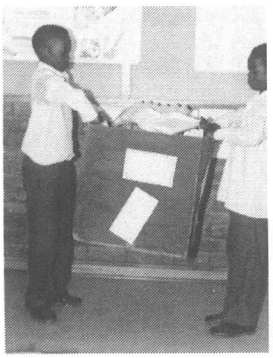
6. ***Multiple Intelligences***

   We are acknowledging that each learner is unique. S/He has a unique learning style, and may be 'intelligent' in a number of different ways. Page 14 in Umthamo 26 has a summary of seven different learning styles. In our classrooms, we need to accommodate everybody. We need to give each learner the space to learn in his/her own way, and use the special intelligences which are his/her strengths. This means that each learner should ideally have some choice in what s/he learns, and how s/he learns it. You also need to expand your range of teaching styles to match the learning styles of your learners.



7. ***Independent learning in a 'resourceful' classroom***

   One of the ways to make space for different intelligences and learning styles is to allow individuals or groups to learn independently. In order to do this, you need to have a number of different resources with which they can work. You have already done some work on providing for independent learning in your classroom. Umthamo 28 and Umthamo 33 have helped with this.



8. ***ZPD***

   We are also underlining the fact that the teacher has a role to play in the negotiation, together with other older learners, who may have more experience or knowledge in some areas. In negotiation with more experienced 'others', learners are drawn forward, able to do things which they could not do on their own. Later, having done them, or thought about them, with someone more experienced, they can try to do them, and succeed in doing them, independently. (Remember the 'Zone of Proximal Development, in Umthamo 31, also mentioned in other imithamo.)

All these are principles which we have emphasised in past imithamo. And all of them are reasons for negotiating the curriculum. Here is another point which has not been an emphasis in any past umthamo, but which has been mentioned. It is very important in this umthamo. You will find that it is very much in harmony with the other principles.

9. ***A sense of ownership and responsibility will lead to effective learning***

   If learners can have a sense of ownership of and responsibility for what they learn, they behave more responsibly and learn more productively. This umthamo will give you an opportunity to test this principle.

Unit 2: Different ways of 'negotiating the curriculum'

In Unit 1 we have seen that 'negotiating the curriculum' is a logical outcome and an integral part of being a learner-centred educator. Learner needs, interests and questions need to be the springboard from which the learning in your classroom begins.

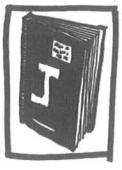
Of course, you as an educator are also representing other interests. You need to bear in mind **the purposes of education**, and the **curriculum documents** which have been drawn up as a framework for the learning which takes place in our schools. You are also an adult with **a breadth of knowledge, experience and training** far greater than that of the learners in your class. As such you have a major role to play in the negotiation process, and in the learning/ teaching process.

You will have seen as you read **Reading 1,** that Gordon Wells feels that there are many different ways of 'collaborating' with learners over what is learned, and how it is learned. Here are a few of them:

1. **Organisation of time, space and resources**
2. **Proposing a broad theme within which most of the children choose topics to pursue**
3. **Using a story, song or poem as a starting point**
4. **Encouraging, or allowing, individual children to pursue topics that interest them.**

Let us look at some examples of these ways of giving learners a say in what they learn. As you read these descriptions of lessons, we would like you to write your reflections in your journal.

This umthamo will give you a great deal of practice in **reflection.** We are going to ask you to reflect on other peoples' lessons, and on your own. You will share **your reflections** with **the reflections of your colleagues** at face-to-face sessions.



Journal write

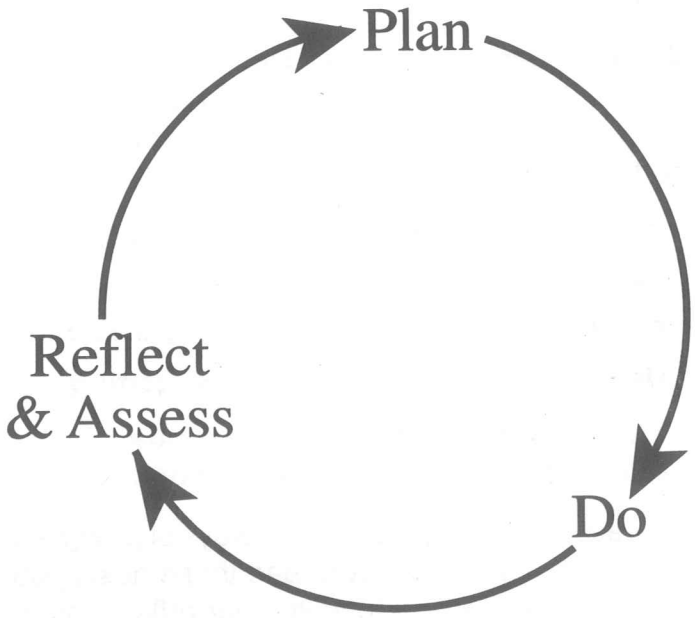
As you reflect on the lessons described below, think particularly about the following:

- How did the learners decide what they would learn? How did they exercise their choices?
- What was the teacher's role? What part did s/he play in the negotiation of what would be learned?

- Did the parents have any role in this? What part did they play, if any?
- Did the formal curriculum play any part here, that you can see, or think of?
- Was there successful negotiation between teacher and learners? (refer back to page 3).

Think and write also about the "Plan – Do - Reflect and Assess" cycle.

- How was planning done?
- What signs are there that teacher and learners reflected on what they had done?
- How was the work assessed?
- Did new planning follow on after the reflection and assessment?



1. ***Organising classroom space into different areas*** is one way of giving learners choices. In addition to organising classroom space, one needs to give learners enough time to work on different projects. Learners also need to be free to move from one activity to another. You have been introduced to this idea in other imithamo (e.g. Umthamo 28 and Umthamo 31).

Example 1:

Reading 1, on the next page, describes a classroom in Leicestershire in England, where the teacher is using organisation of space, resources and time to give her learners a wide range of choices in what they learn.

Introduction

Leicestershire was one of the first places where learner-centredness and 'open learning' became an accepted part of teaching and learning practice in public (government) schools. Educators in this part of England began experimenting with 'open learning' in the early 1960's, and in 1966 the Plowden Report recommended this kind of education for all British primary schools. Here are some quotes from this report:

The child is the agent in his own learning....

The intense interest shown by young children in the world around them, their powers of concentration on whatever is occupying their attention or serving their immediate purposes, are apparent to both teachers and parents.... There is, therefore good reason for allowing young children to choose within a carefully prepared environment in which choices and interest are supported by the teachers, who will have in mind the potentialities for further learning....

At every stage of learning children need rich and varied materials and situations, though the pace at which they should be introduced may vary according to the children. *(Central Advisory Council for Education: 1966)*

An Infant Class at Hillside County Primary School, England

During the autumn term of 1963 I spent several hours a week observing, and working informally with children in Miss Smith's class at Hillside.

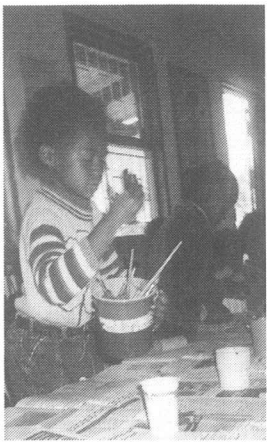
Miss Smith was a first-year teacher, just out of the Froebel Educational Institute in London; this was her first class. The children in the class, one of three parallel infant classes in the school, came from families living in the school district, a prosperous suburb in the Midlands of England.

The children in the class ranged in age, at the beginning of the year, from four years ten months to six years nine months. That is, it was a vertically grouped class comprising children of all the ages covered by the term "infant". During the period I was with the class, it numbered about thirty, perhaps one or two more.

The room was attractive but crowded. On the far side were windows and a French door leading to the grassy playing field. The main entrance led off a corridor, which was also used as a makeshift activity area; part of the corridor was enclosed and part open on one side. In the building were the other two infant

classes and a junior class, the headmaster's office, a small library, and the girls' and boys' lavatories, the latter also housing the woodworking bench and tools.

There were no desks in the classroom but rather four or five groups of trapezoidal tables in pairs or in threes. Each group was associated not with specific children but with activities. Some of the tables were mainly for writing, others for number work, still others for arts and crafts, and so forth. In the back of the room next to the corridor was a Wendy (play) house equipped with toy furniture, dolls, tableware, and so forth. Next to this was a table on which the children's writing books were kept. Under the windows were tables for number apparatus, a sand table, and a water table. Along the front wall was the library, partially screened from the rest of the room by a divider; the books were in racks on the wall, and there were several chairs turned to face the wall. Next to the library were two double painting easels. Interspersed among all these pieces of equipment were several storage units. A table along the corridor wall was used part of the morning for a milk bar.



The school day at Hillside began at nine o'clock and continued until three-forty-five, with a meal break from noon until one-thirty. The day usually began with a short religious service (required by law), which was held in one of the three infant rooms. Following this, the children returned to their own classroom, and Miss Smith marked the register and took the names of the children staying for lunch. She then went through a list of the various activities available in the room and asked children to raise their hands for the one they wanted to start the day with; for each activity there was a maximum permissible number of children. Among the choices would be painting, building with blocks, reading, writing, woodwork, sand and water play, Wendy house, clay or model-making, and any special activities Miss Smith might have set up. When all the children had chosen, they went off and started to work.

Their choices were only starting points in some cases, and during the course of the morning children might move from one part of the room to another as they finished what they were doing. Conversely, a child might choose to spend the entire morning, or even the whole day working at a single project. As space became available in one place (for example, a child might leave the Wendy house), other children could move in. Aside from the initial choice, the process of selecting the activity was informal. Miss Smith might, on occasion, ask a particular child or a small group to do something she had in mind, but the children were largely left to make their own choices, within the limitations of space and equipment. The afternoon was

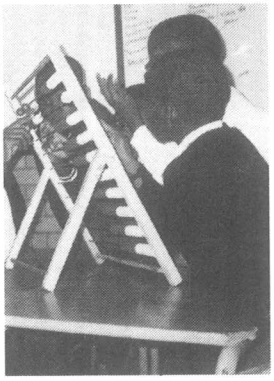
organised in much the same way, and at the end of the day Miss Smith would call the class together for a period of discussion, or she might read aloud to them.

Considering the number of things going on and the number of children in the room, the atmosphere in Miss Smith's class was generally calm and collected. (I should point out that seldom were all the children in the room at the same time. There would be one or two in the corridor, one or two in the library around the corner, where more "advanced" books were kept and which was open to both infants and juniors, and one or two at the woodworking bench in the boys' lavatory.) Most of the children in the classroom would be moving about, talking quietly, and doing a good job of keeping out of each other's way; only rarely did Miss Smith have to request that the noise level be kept down. The sheer density of children and apparatus meant that now and a tower of blocks would come crashing down or someone's paints would be upset or water would slosh onto the floor, but this caused little confusion; the child involved picked up the pieces or mopped up and went on working.

In this classroom, reading, writing, and mathematics were not treated as separate "subjects", and it took me quite a while to discover just how, for example, a child learned to read. An important element, I am sure, was that reading was "in the air". There were always older children reading and writing, and I often saw a little one sitting near a big one to imitate his activity. Upon entering the class in his first term, each child was given a large, unlined "free writing book" with his name on the cover. He was free to do what he liked in this book. Part of the "free" in "free writing" stemmed from the child's growing awareness that what he put in this book was his own and would not be corrected by the teacher – save in cases of complete incomprehensibility. At first most children drew pictures with pencil or crayon. Now and then Miss Smith might discuss what the child was doing with his book and perhaps write a sentence or two in it, which the child was to trace or copy. Soon he would be given a small notebook to serve as his personal dictionary, to supplement word cards on the wall and a homemade class dictionary. He might, when he asked for a word, be requested to guess what the first sound was, or later Miss Smith would ask him what letter he thought the word began with. Phonetic skills were developed, but the process was informal. (There was, however, nothing informal about the detailed records Miss Smith kept of representative examples of each child's work throughout the year.)

There was, as I have said, a library corner and a library room nearby. The children, perhaps at first mainly they saw older

ones doing it, would go over and take a book to look at. Miss Smith would come by now and then and read with someone or listen to someone read. There seemed to be little anxiety about reading. Children were encouraged to read and to write as they wished, and a considerable number of them wished to, often. Books the children wrote would be prominently displayed and read by other children, which may also have been an important source of motivation. Perhaps in part as a result of the low anxiety level Miss Smith appeared to have about reading and writing, there seemed to me to be only one or two of the older children who were not reading at a level one might deem appropriate for their age, and the mass of free writing these fives and sixes and sevens turned out was astonishing.



There was little formal number work in this infant class although, since the room was full of material with mathematical potential, much of which was attractive, a fair number of children were using some sort of number equipment almost all the time. Among the available apparatus were Cuisenaire rods, Dienes' multi-base blocks, geometric sorting sets, attribute blocks, counting apparatus including beads and abaci, scales, liquid measures and so forth.

Painting, model-making, clay, collage, paper cutting and folding, all these were, it seemed to me, accorded as high a status in the scheme of things as reading and writing and mathematics; I felt the amount of time Miss Smith spent on the arts in the course of a morning was about equal to that she spent on "the R's". There was invariably a quartet of children at the easels, someone working with clay, someone else out at the woodworking bench. The Wendy house was in continuous use – was, indeed, perhaps the most popular single activity for the younger children and some of the older ones. An adjunct to play in the Wendy house was a fine collection of dress-up clothes, and it was not at all unusual for a child, boy or girl, to put on an outlandish costume and traipse around the room, or down the corridor, to show it to his or her friends. There always seemed to be laughter and high spirits in the Wendy corner, which at times infected much of the rest of the room to good advantage.

In the midst of all of this, Miss Smith might one moment be discussing a model rocket with two or three boys and the next be listening to a seven-year-old read, and perhaps she would simply stand for a minute or two and watch a child building a tower with some blocks, asking a question, making a comment or not as the situation seemed to warrant. She never seemed rushed or harried, and her calm most often communicated itself to the children, whose general enthusiasm and high spirits

seldom got away from them. The range of matters to which Miss Smith attended in the course of the day was as varied as the number of things going on in the room and yet, with all this, she was able to keep fairly well in mind, I felt, the general direction of each child's activities not, perhaps, minute by minute or even day by day, but certainly over a longer and possibly more meaningful span of time. Her training in observation and recording of specifics seemed to stand her in very good stead, indeed, in this complex situation.

An important element of Miss Smith's approach to teaching seemed to me that she did not readily label children as "problems". She seemed aware that thinking in terms of "problems" often helped to create them, and she was willing and able to accept a fairly wide range of behaviour and achievements as falling within a "normal" range.

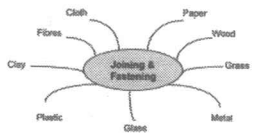
(from: *Open Education: the Informal Classroom.* Charles H. Rathbone (ed.) 1971. Citation Press.)

Example 2:

In case you think that this kind of thing only happens in England, we have included an additional reading at the end of this umthamo which tells of a pre-school called ***Jay Dee***. ***Jay Dee*** is a pre-school in Queenstown where a very similar approach to learning has been adopted. (See page 47)

2. Proposing a broad theme within which most of the children choose topics to pursue

If you think back to Umthamo 31: Joining and Fastening, you will see that this is what you did with your learners in this umthamo.



- You had a general class brainstorm on Joining and Fastening;
- You made a plan for the research and the presentation;

- "Mixed-ability" groups chose an aspect of the topic which they wished to research;
- They conducted the research independently, with the teacher facilitating, guiding and mediating;
- The teacher monitored the work at intervals, helping them to move through the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD);

- Groups presented their research findings;
- They assessed their own work, and their peers and their teacher also assessed it.

3. *Using a story, song or poem as a starting point*

A book called *"Integrating Learning through Story: The Narrative Curriculum"* explores this possibility in depth. Here is an account of the first part of an extended series of learning experiences based on a story.

from Lauritzen, C. & Jaeger, M. 1997. *Integrating Learning through Story: The Narrative Curriculum.* Delmar Publishers.

To open the unit, Carol and Michael welcomed the group of 8- to 12-year-old students to a cozy spot on the carpet so that they could interact with the picture book Carol brought to share with them. Their comments follow:

Vanessa: It's a story.
Holly: It's named *Very Last First Time.*
Carol: What do you notice about the cover of the book?
Steve: He's digging a hole.
Kristen: Eskimos!
Debra: He's in the north.
Travis: It looks like a desert with some snow there.
Steve: It looks like he's ice fishing.
Carol: This story is written by Jan Andrews. She lives in Ottawa, Canada. The illustrations are by Ian Wallace. I hope you'll talk about the book and share what you are thinking.

Carol began reading the story:

This picture book is by Jan Andrews. It was published in 1985 by Atheneum Press in New York.

> Eva Padlyat lived in a village on Ungava Bay in Northern Canada. She was Inuit. And ever since she could remember she had walked with her mother on the bottom of the sea. It was something the people of her village did in winter when they wanted mussels to eat. Today, something very special was going to happen. Today, for the very first time in her life Eva would walk on the bottom of the sea alone. (Andrews, 1985, unpaged)

Karl: She's like... not gonna like it, maybe.
Doug: It's gonna be cold.
Jennifer: It is a very strange custom. People don't need to walk on the bottom of the sea, especially in the winter.
John: She doesn't want to do it. It is the first time and she might not know where to go.
Douglas: And I don't think she should go. She might drown. If you go to the bottom it's really dark down there.
Jennifer: It would be the last time she does it!
Travis: Her first and last time.

As Carol continued with the story she encouraged the students to interact with the text and pictures. The students posed many questions and made many comments and observations during the next twenty minutes. For example:

John: I think there are no trees because it is too cold and it's above the tree line.
Doug: The village looks really isolated.
Jennifer: It looks old but it's not because there are modern things too.
Mike: What if the tide comes back?
Steve: What if they can't find the hole?
Jake: Why don't they have a flashlight?
Sara: What are those rocks? It looks like rock totem poles.
Elizabeth: Why don't they have a lamp?
Jennifer: Maybe it is a custom.
Kristen: It looks like a cave.
Elizabeth: Are the shadows real?
Jacob: I don't see how she can get to the bottom of the ocean.

Carol: How deep is it under there?
Sarah: How can you light a candle under water?
Jake: What if the tide comes in and washes her out?
Sarah: Where did those pictures on the ice come from? Maybe some people went down there and carved them.

During the reading of the book, Michael had been recording the students' questions. When the interactive read-aloud was complete, Michael focused the students' attention on the list he had made. He asked, "What would you like to know more about?" The students added other ideas to their list. In all, they compiled over three dozen questions about what they had seen or heard in the book.

The list appears on page 23.

Michael then circled one of the questions and said, "One of the things you wanted to know was 'Where do Eva and her mother live? What is it like there?'" Students responded with speculations and suggestions about where the story took place. Michael then asked, "How could we find out about this place?" The students brainstormed means of pursuing their inquiry about the geographic area that the story depicted. They offered many possible resources: encyclopedias, books about Eskimos and Inuits, a letter to the author, atlases, *National Geographic*, a telephone call to someone in the region, and the story itself.

A student named Karl reread to the whole group the section of *Very Last First Time* that gave the place name: Ungava Bay, Northern Canada. With this information and an invitation to find out, children used all of the available resources to explore the question: "Where was this place and what did it look like?" Students examined maps and atlases and globes. They found Ungava Bay on the 60th parallel, about the same latitude as St. Petersburg, Stockholm, and Anchorage. Travis found the tree line on a *National Geographic* map and deduced that since the setting was tundra, the story must have occurred on the upper regions of Ungava Bay, north of the tree line. Vanessa made a linguistic discovery about the words "Inuit," "Inuuk," and "Inuk" which she recorded in her journal (fig. 1.1). Doug and John found a map that showed where each subgroup of the Inuit was located. Elizabeth and Sara paged through many resource texts and showed others a picture of an Inuit village that resembled the illustrations in the book. Several students watched all or part of a documentary video about the Netsilik Eskimo group.

"Inuit" is another word for "Eskimo". It is the name of the ethnic group of people who live in the far north of Canada and Alaska.

The first day of the unit concluded with all students recording their findings in their learning logs so that they could recall what they and others had discovered. Kristen found and noted the explanation for the rock piles we had observed in the book illustrations (fig 1.2). Elizabeth's entry

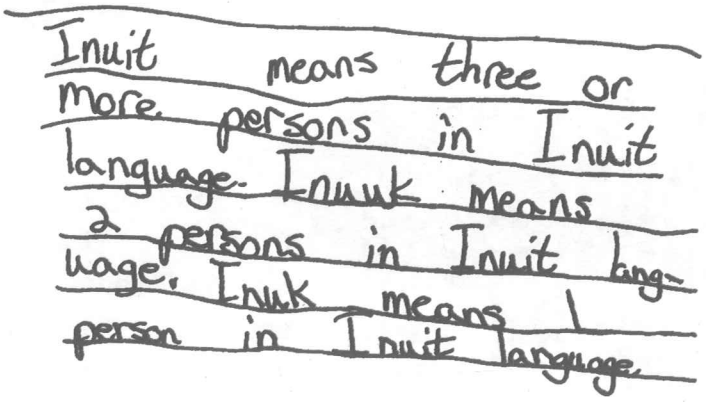


FIGURE 1.1 Vanessa's journal entry about vocabulary

reflects her strong interest in the video and the information she gained from it (fig. 1.3).

After the first day of working together, a comprehensive list of the students' questions had been compiled and organized as shown in figure 1.4. On the following day, Carol focused the students on these questions as a way of directing their explorations.

She asked students how they might pursue each of these sets of questions. They responded by brainstorming sources of informative print materials to study, experiments or experiences that might give insights, and contacts to make. When the students had exhausted their wealth of information, Carol and Michael introduced other possibilities that were not part of the children's prior knowledge. All these ideas were recorded on a large chart, which included a column for recording possible end products. Again the children provided all the ideas they had and the teachers introduced additional ideas. Finally, the students helped design a scoring guide by which their work would be assessed. This scoring guide included assessment of both process and products.

Students were introduced to the materials and resources that we had collected to support their inquiries: an extensive set of textbooks, journals, and other print media, a videotape of an Inuit family, a telephone contact of the mayor of a town in the Ungava district, materials that could be assembled into a model demonstrating the action of ice forming on the bay, seashore books, sets of preserved life from coastal areas, candles, tide tables, measurement devices, and calculators. (See resource list at the end of the chapter.) All of these materials were assembled according to the questions posed and study areas were established so that students could group themselves according to their interests.

Each subsequent day of the unit began with the students and teachers meeting together in circle. The students made a commitment to the explorations they would be completing that day and what they intended to accomplish. On each workshop day, each group reported the status of their studies and agreed to complete a particular aspect of their work.

A child consulting a map of northern Canada.

FIGURE 1.4 Organized listing of student inquiries generated by *Very Last First Time*

What are the customs of the Inuit?

- Is it a custom to go under the ice?
- Will she do it again?
- Do the pictures in the book show a true picture of Eva's culture?
- Why would they do this in winter and not summer?
- What else do these people do?

What is it like under ice? (What could Eva really see?)

- Was the author realistic with the pictures?
- What were the images in the rocks or ice?
- Was that Eva's imagination?
- What were the snow/rock men in the pictures?

How does the ice freeze?

- Is it salt water that freezes?
- How could the water freeze with the waves crashing?
- Why was the ice yellow colored?
- What was the thickness of the ice?

How much time did she have under the ice?

- How did she light the candles?
- How much time would she have using a candle?
- When would the tides return?

How do living things survive under the ice?

- What are mussels and why would they eat them?
- What are other examples of tide pool life there?
- How do tide pool animals live under the ice without water?

How do people in this area get food, electricity, and other materials for living?

- Where would they buy groceries?
- Where did the electricity come from?
- Why snowmobiles and snowshoes at the same time?
- Why didn't she use a flashlight?

What would it be like to be under the ice?

- How light was it?
- What would it smell like?
- What would the depth of the ocean be?
- What would it sound like?

4. *Encouraging, or allowing, individual children to pursue topics that interest them*

In Umthamo 12: Creating a Learner-centred Environment, we read several extracts from Carl Rogers' book *Freedom to Learn for the 80's.* Here is a longer extract from the same book. It gives extracts from the diary of a Grade 6 teacher who decided to change the learning style in her classroom to a very learner-centred style. I am sure that you will feel that this was a very brave teacher, and that you will be interested in what happened in her classroom.

from Rogers, Carl. 1983. *Freedom to Learn for the 80's.* Charles Merril.

A Teacher's Diary: Barbara J. Shiel

This past year was my thirteenth year of teaching elementary school. I have taught all six elementary grades. The class mentioned in the document (originally intended only as a kind of personal diary) was one of the most difficult I had ever worked with in terms of discipline, lack of interest, and parental problems. There were thirty-six in the group, with an I.Q. range of 82 to 135. There were many who were "socially maladjusted," "underachievers," or "emotionally disturbed."

I had exhausted my resources in an attempt to cope with the situation, but had made very little progress. The many discipline problems were notorious: they were constantly in the office or "on the bench" for varied offenses; their attitude and behavior kept them in constant trouble. Several were suspended for short periods. In addition, the parents were uncooperative and/or defensive. Most of them had a history of blaming the teachers or the school for the child's problems.

MARCH 5, WE BEGIN:

A week ago, I decided to initiate a new program in my sixth grade classroom, based on student-centered teaching—an unstructured or nondirective approach.

I began by telling the class that we were going to try an "experiment." I explained that for one day I would let them do anything they wanted to do—they did not have to do anything if they did not want to.

Many started with art projects. Some drew or painted most of the day. Others read or did work in math and other subjects. There was an air of excitement all day. Many were so interested in what they were doing that they did not want to go out at recess or noon!

At the end of the day, I asked the class to evaluate the experiment. The comments were most interesting. Some were "confused," distressed without the teacher telling them what to do, without specific assignments to complete.

The majority of the class thought the day was "great," but some expressed concern over the noise level and the fact that a few "goofed off" all day. Most felt that they had accomplished as much work as we usually do, and they enjoyed being able to work at a task until it was completed without the pressure of a time limit. They liked doing things without being "forced" to do them and liked deciding what to do. They begged to continue the "experiment," so it was decided to do so, for two more days. We would then reevaluate the plan.

The next morning I implemented the idea of a "work contract." Each child was to write his contract for the day—choosing the areas in which he would work and planning specifically what he would do. Upon completion of any exercise, each student was to check and correct his own work, using the teacher's manual. The work was to be kept in a folder with the contract. Resource materials were provided, suggestions made, and drill materials made available to use when needed.

I met with each child to discuss plans. Some completed theirs in a very short time. We discussed as a group what this might mean, and what to do about it. It was suggested that the plan might not be challenging enough, that an adjustment should be made—perhaps going on or adding another area to the day's plan.

I found I had much more time, so I worked, talked, and spent the time with individuals and groups. At the end of the third day, I evaluated the work folder with each child. To solve the problem of grades, I had each child tell me what grade had been earned.

Also at this time, the group wrote a second evaluation of the experiment, adding comments their parents had made. All but four were excited and enthusiastic about the plan and thought school was much more fun. The four still felt insecure and wanted specific assignments. I talked with them about giving the experiment time—sometimes it took time to adjust to new situations. They agreed to try. The rest of the class was thrilled at the prospect of continuing the rest of the year.

An interesting project has developed. I noticed that some of the boys were drawing and designing automobiles. I put up a big piece of paper for them to use as they wished. They discussed their plans and proceeded to do a mural on the history of cars, incorporating their designs of cars of the future. I was delighted. They used the encyclopedia as a reference, as well as books on cars they brought in. They worked together, and some began models and scrapbooks, boys who had produced very little, if anything, so far this year.

Other ideas began to appear in other areas. The seed of initiative and creativity had germinated and began to grow.

Many children are doing some interesting research in related (and unrelated) areas of interest. Some have completed the year's "required" work in a few areas, such as spelling.

Most important, to me, is the evidence of initiative and self-responsibility manifested.

MARCH 12, PROGRESS REPORT:

Our "experiment" has, in fact, become our program—with some adjustments.

Some children continued to be frustrated and felt insecure without teacher direction. Discipline also continued to be a problem with some, and I began to realize that although the children involved may need the program more than the others, I was expecting too much from them, too soon—they were not ready to assume self-direction *yet*. Perhaps a gradual weaning from the spoon-fed procedures was necessary.

I regrouped the class—creating two groups. The largest group is the non-directed group. The smallest is teacher directed, made up of children who wanted to return to the former teacher-directed method, and those who, for varied reasons, were unable to function in the self-directed situation.

I would like to have waited longer to see what would have happened, but the situation for some disintegrated a little more each day—penalizing the whole class. The disrupting factor kept everyone upset and limited those who wanted to study and work. So it seemed to me best for the group as a whole as well as the program to modify the plan.

Those who continued the "experiment" have forged ahead. I showed them how to program their work, using their texts as a basic guide. They have learned that they can teach themselves (and each other) and that I am available when a step is not clear or advice is needed.

At the end of the week, they evaluate themselves in each area—in terms of work accomplished, accuracy, etc. We have learned that the number of errors is not a criterion of failure or success. Errors can and should be a part of the learning process. We learn through out mistakes. We also discussed the fact that consistently perfect scores may mean that the work is not challenging enough and perhaps means we should move on.

After self-evaluation, each child brings the evaluation sheet and work folder to discuss them with me.

Some of the members of the group working with me are most anxious to become "independent" students. Each week we will evaluate their progress toward that goal.

I have only experienced one parental objection so far. A parent thought her child was not able to function without direction.

A Sample Day in the Class

Each day began informally; the first task of each individual was to design his or her work plan, or "contract." Sometimes children planned with one or two others. There was constant self-grouping and regrouping, withdrawal from a group for independent work.

As soon as the contract was made, the child began to study or work on his plan. He could work as long as he needed or wanted to. Because I was not free to discard the state-devised curriculum time schedule, I explained the weekly time-subject blocks to the children. This was to be a consideration in their planning. We also discussed sequential learning, especially in math, mastering a skill before proceeding to the next level of learning. They discovered that the text provided an introduction to a skill, demonstrated the skill, and provided exercises to master it and tests to check achievement. When they felt they were ready to go on, they were free to do so. They set their own pace, began at their own level, and went as far as they were able or self-motivated to go.

I have been constantly challenged, "But how did you teach the facts and new concepts?" The individuals inquiring apparently assume that unless the teacher is dictating, directing, or explaining, there can be no learning. My answer is that I did not "teach." The children taught themselves and each other.

When individuals or groups wished to share their projects, learnings, or research with the class, or when there were audiovisual materials of general interest to the class, it was announced on the board and incorporated into the individual planning. For example, if we had a film on South America, the entire class viewed it; but what they did with the film was up to the individual. They could outline it, summarize it, draw pictures of it—or ignore it if they chose.

Whenever the children felt the need to discuss individual, group, or class "problems," we arranged our desks in a seminar circle and had a "general semantics" session. We also functioned as one group in music (singing) and in physical education.

Since evaluation was self-initiated and respected by the teacher, there was no need for cheating to achieve success. We discovered that "failure" is only a word, that there is a difference between failure and making a mistake, and that mistakes are a part of the learning process.

In art, the children were free to explore with materials: paper, paints, crayons, chalk, clay, etc., as well as with books and ideas. They discovered for themselves, through manipulation and experimentation, new techniques and new uses of media. No two "products" were alike—although there was considerable dependency on the discoveries of others in the beginning. In time, individuals developed confidence and openness to experimentation. The results were far more exciting than those achieved in teacher-directed lessons in spite of the fact that I consider art my greatest strength, or talent!

The children developed a working discipline that respected the individual need for isolation or quiet study, yet allowed pupil interaction. There was no need for passing of notes or "subversive" interaction. There was respect for meditation and contemplation as well as for overt productivity. There were opportunities to get to *know* one another. The children learned to communicate *by communicating.*

How much negotiation?

You will have seen, as you worked through these readings, and reflected on them, that in some of the classrooms a lot more of the curriculum was open for negotiation than in others:

- In the "Joining and Fastening" experience, the teacher provided the topic, and a great deal of supportive information. S/He probably made suggestions as to which group should deal with which topic. S/He gave quite structured guidance on how the learners should go about their research. S/He provided a framework for assessment. However, the learners did choose which topic they would explore, and made a lot of decisions themselves on how they would research their topic.
- At Hillside school, learners had very wide choices available to them, but the teacher had made these choices available. She had probably made most of the decisions about what kinds of resources and activity centres to create and offer, but was influenced by learner interests and responses.
- The story "The very last first time" was chosen by the teacher, although many of the questions and topics for exploration were chosen by the learners. The teacher provided a great deal of resources and knowledge to make those explorations possible.
- Barbara Shiel, the Grade 6 teacher, seems to have offered her learners completely open choice about what they did, at first. That seemed very scary to me, when I read it! However, as I read on, I realised that these learners must also have been choosing from an already-existing range of options, e.g. painting. Later I found that various planning and assessing strategies became part of the process, and that even formal curriculum requirements were built in to the programme.

Gordon Wells suggests that the teacher's feelings will determine how much of the curriculum is negotiated. At the beginning, he says, most teachers will not "feel comfortable with so much of the curriculum open for negotiation". They may start by doing their lesson planning much as usual. As time goes on, they may gradually allow learners' questions and interests play a larger role in how learning experiences develop.

Here is what the writers of *"Integrating Learning through Story"* say about the teacher's role in the explorations stimulated by "The very last first time":

"In curriculum negotiation students are engaged by a context, and they offer the inquiries they find interesting. Teachers may call attention to certain aspects of the context that the students have overlooked. In Very Last First Time, *for example, we inserted our own questions to serve as models of inquiry... and to intiate explorations where students failed to see the potential. The inquiries from both students and teachers were then arranged into groupings of similar items...*

Teachers can help students articulate possibilities and can also add substantially to the possibilities. As we investigated inquiries and explorations with the children, they selected items that they thought sounded interesting. However, some aspects that we found vital to the understanding of the story – the geography of the arctic and the nature of the mussel – went unloved. Since we believed that these two areas provided excellent opportunities to practise map skills and observation techniques, we invited children to their exploration. We showed them how to use the index of an atlas, flat maps and globes to find latitudes and longitudes ... We provided live mussels to observe. Students probed their anatomy, plopped them into steaming water, and finally tasted the cooked meat. Through these endeavors, children learned new skills and gained knowledge while having an enjoyable time.

We believe that teachers are responsible for bringing to the curriculum-negotiation process many of the explorations. The proportion will depend on how the inquiries and explorations are carried out, the extent of the children's prior knowledge, and the degree to which students have previously been involved in curriculum planning.

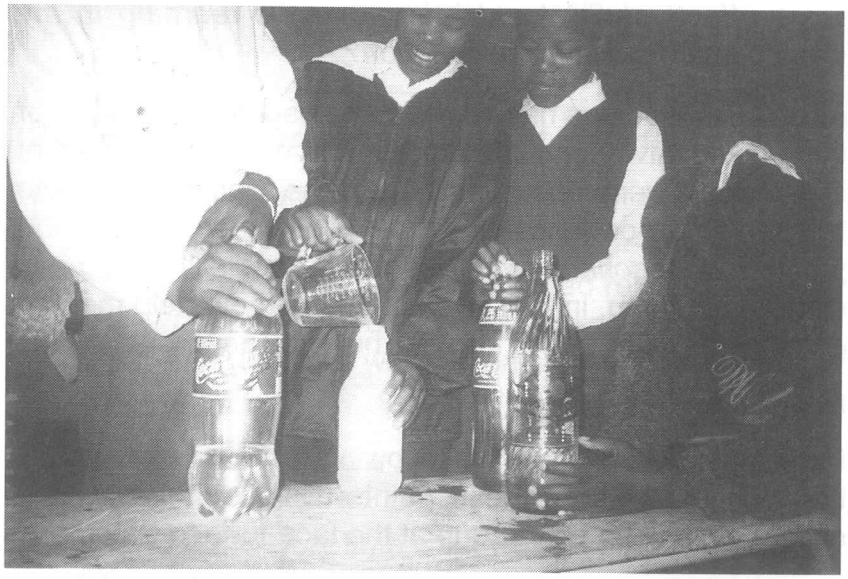
As we complete the negotiated planning process with students, we look at the results of learning... "How will you (and others) know what you have learned?" Again, we believe that ... this is a negotiated process. This is the time to help students see the relationship between the inquiry and the possible results of exploration. Students were keenly interested in the culture of the Inuits. How would they report their findings? Reports were the only form they could think of at the moment. We suggested that they might recreate some of the cultural artefacts of the people and demonstrate their use. Could they recreate or dramatise a family setting? Could they prepare a script or dialogue that would communicate how these people lived? ...Our interests here are to think about possibilities they might not have considered and that may be a best match for the resolution of an inquiry."

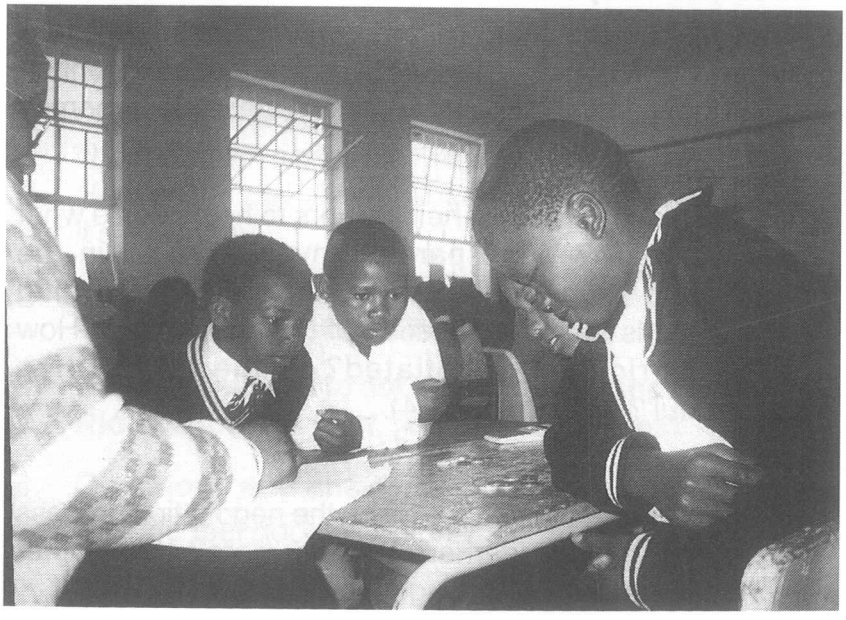
The same writers suggest that the 'balance of power' changes as learners move up through the school. In the early years, teachers will take most of the responsibility for planning the curriculum, but will be informed by learners' interests and responses. In the intermediate phase, planning will

become a shared process, "where students and teachers together create learning opportunities". In high school, they maintain, students should be able to plan their own curriculum.

Of course, in most of our schools it is the pre-school and Foundation Phase learners who are the most open to negotiating the curriculum. As learners move up through the school, they become more closed and 'conformist', wanting to be told what to do. It is this tendency that we need to fight against by the way we negotiate the curriculum, at every level.

In the next unit, we will explore further the teacher's role and the learners' roles in the negotiated curriculum. We will look at some examples of lessons from the Eastern and Western Cape as we do this.





Unit 3: How much negotiation? - Reflecting on practice

In the last unit, we discussed the different degrees, and kinds, of negotiation which were involved in the four classroom descriptions that we read. We have also thought quite carefully about the important roles played by the teacher in the whole process of negotiation and learning.

We will now invite you into three classrooms in the Eastern and Western Cape. We would like you to help the teachers of these classes to **reflect on their work with the learners**. They would like to know what went well, and what could be improved. In particular, they would like to think about the question:

"To what extent am I negotiating the curriculum with my learners (and perhaps with parents)? How can I negotiate more effectively? Would it improve the learning in my classroom if I did more negotiation?"

All of these teachers have done some negotiating, and all of them could have negotiated more. This does not mean that their lessons were "unsuccessful". On the contrary, they have taught very good lessons. What it does mean is that the process of *negotiating with the learners* is still in its early stages with them, in most cases. Let us try to help them to go further with it. This, in turn, will help you as you negotiate.

Reflect and discuss

In reflecting on each of the following lessons, we suggest that you think about these points. Discuss them with a colleague, or with your group at the face-to-face session.

- ***Successful aspects:***

  What makes the learning experience described here 'successful'? Which of the features mentioned in Unit 1, and in the margin box do you notice in these classrooms?

- ***Negotiation:***

  Has this teacher allowed her learners to help decide what they will learn? Were parents involved at all in the negotiation process? In which parts of the learning experience is there 'negotiation of the curriculum'? How is the curriculum negotiated? Is the negotiation 'successful'? (refer to page 4).

- ***Improving negotiation and learning:***

  How could this teacher have taken the negotiation process further, so that the learners learned more? What other improvements can you suggest for this learning unit?

Learner-centredness;
Building on Prior Knowledge;
Learners construct their own knowledge;
Interactive learning;
Respect for children's questions;
Multiple intelligences and styles;
Independent learning;
A 'resourceful' classroom;
ZPD;
Ownership of the learning process

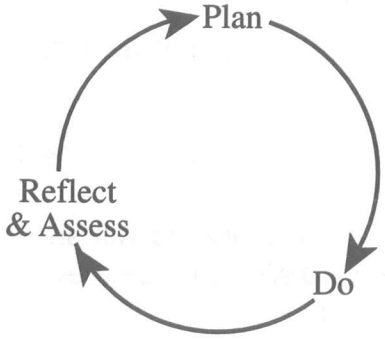
- ***"Plan – Do - Reflect and Assess" cycle.***

  Reflect also on how successful the teacher, learners and parents were in:

  - Planning;
  - Reflecting on what they had done;
  - Assessing the work done.

  Did new planning follow on after the reflection and assessment?

  You need to think about aspects of the cycle which were successful, and aspects which could have been improved.



Classroom 1: A pre-school class at Flagstaff

1. **Topic selection:** A story

   Title: Red Riding Hood

   Specific outcome: To know the bad results of playing while you are sent. To train listening skills and memory skills. To enjoy group work. To enlarge/ broaden learners' vocabulary.

2. **Brainstorm what the learners know and what they would like to know:**

   Now that it is story time what would you like to know?

   We would like to listen to a story.

   We would like to watch a story on TV.

   We would like to act a story. Yes, yes, yes, act a story.

   OK. I will first narrate a story for you so that you can choose which part to play. Who has an old lady at home? How do we call old grey-headed mothers? Yes, Nandi, it's a Granny.

   Is it going to be a frightening story, teacher?

   Oh, no, Linda, it is not, it is interesting.

3. **Call out children to act as Mother, Grandmother, Red Riding Hood, A wolf, A man in the forest**

4. **Questions and answers about the story**

   Did you feel good as actors?

   Did you enjoy observing the actors?

5. **What questions do they have?**

   Is a wolf a dog, teacher?

   Does it stay in the forest?

   Can you change the actors so that we also have a turn?

   Does a wolf have hands?

   Was it going to eat the girl?

6. **Resources:**

   Mask improvised to represent wolf

   A doek, spectacles for Granny

   Apron for Mother

   A red coat for the girl, a basket, an axe, a hat (improvised)

   A bed and blanket for Grandmother

7. **Working with peers: How will they show what they have found?**

   By dramatising the story we will show what we have achieved. We will also dramatise the story for the parents on graduation day.

8. **Review and revise plans**

   Call the actors to check if they still feel OK in their roles. e.g. The girl who volunteered to be the wolf wanted to be changed, saying she feared to be chopped by an axe. Another boy willingly took that part, saying, "This is not a real axe. It makes no harm."

9. **Reflection and outcome analysis**

   Discussion of how the story acting went:

   It was nice to be a mother.

   It was frightening to be a wolf.

   This acting of a story is nice.

   It makes us not to forget the story.

   I don't want the actors to be changed.

   I want this to be played even tomorrow.

10. **What went well**

    Learners were listening with enjoyment.

    Actors were free in their positions.

    Many children wanted actors to be changed so that they can also have a turn.

    All the learners paid attention.

    They changed their voices according to the actors.

11. **What did they learn**

    Dramatisation is another way of story telling.

    New words: wolf, chopper, flowers, etc.

Classroom 2: A Grade 5 class in Khayalitsha

This teacher chose "Rape" as her topic. She believed that it was important for her children that they work with the realities of life in the township, rather than "cows and things that they have no experience of". She based her unit of learning on a true story which had been written by one of her learners in 1996. Here is the original story, and a picture drawn by another of her learners.

"Ngenye imini sasihleli ekhaya wafika utata sisahleli njalo wathi,"

"thulani, mamelani, umntwana kaMafthadebe eHerare uswelekile namhlanje. Uthe xa evela kusa uNontle lo uminyaka mine ekrishi u Zoliswa, kwabe kungekho mntu mdala endlwini kwangena enye indoda yabe sele imbeka phezu kwebhedi yamdlwengula. Ithe yakuggiba yamnqumla umqala, yamqhawula iingalo, yamnqunga. Ikhuphe ingubo entsha ebekiweyo nempahla eyayilapho yamogquma ngaso. Emva kwexesha kwedlula uMdlamini oye wamangaliswa kukubona ucango luvulekile, esazi okokuba kumelwe okokuba kutshixiwe kulo Zoliswa. Unkqonkqozile, waphinda. Ubonile okokuba akukho mntu watsho phakathi. Wathuswe ligazi phantsi nasezindongeni. Ulandele umzila wegazi ovela kwigumbi lokulala, atyhile phezu kwebhedi, umbono, "iyhuu! wakhala wathwala izandla entloko wasitsho esofelweyo beza abamdlwane. Babona esi simanga. Ngethamsanga ubhuti lo uboniwe ephuma ekhawulezile ngomnye ummelwane. Amapolisa aphathelela aya kwikhaya lalo mfo. Ekuthe xa kumpampathwa iipokotho zebhatyi yakhe lo bhuti kwafunyanwa iipentana yomntwana izele ligazi. Ukhanyele unina wathi yeyakhe uye wayifaka ngempazamo empokotweni yonyana wakhe. Ubhuti lowo watsiba wabaleka. Usabhacile. Ndimana ndilila xa ndicinga ngo Zoliswa umntwana ka dadobawo kuba sikhula kunye singamafumanana nkundleni. Xa ndilele ndiyamphupha uZoliswa ndikhale kube ngathi ndizakumbona. Besifunda kunye isigaba sesi 5 kodwa yena ebefunda eHarare kwalapha eKhayelitsha."

The unit of learning

- The process began with the telling of the story, followed by individual work, group work, pair work, dramatisation of a court scene, spelling, and homework looking up phone numbers of emergency services.
- Next, the learners played a board game called 'the safety game'.
- They prepared questions to ask of a police representative whom the teacher had invited to speak to them about rape. The discussion with the police person took place and gave opportunities for learners to open up about experiences which they may have had of abuse. The police person promised to take them later to the special court where abused children testify.
- They did Maths on statistics about rape, working with graphs.
- As part of Health Education they discussed illnesses arising from rape, body parts, general knowledge and word games relating to drugs.
- In Life Skills they made up some commandments for themselves, and discussed the jobs of certain people in court.
- In English, they discussed 'ubuntu', and did a comprehension test on a news article about the rape. They wrote a letter to the local clinic to invite the school nurse to address them about sexually transmitted diseases.
- In History, they interviewed an elderly person about crime in the old days. They compared the past with the present.

On the next page you will find some extracts from the lesson and from learners' work.

NGABABINI (IN PAIRS)

1. Ningaze nihlale naye lobhuti kubaliswa ngaye apha? Ngoba kutheni? (chazelani iklasi emva kwengxoxo).

2. Xoxani ngendlela ekhuselekileyo esimelwe kukizigcina ngayo xa sisele sedwa emakhaya (chazelani iklasi emva kwengxoxo

3. Okokuba lomfana akafundi, abenokwenza ntoni ukuzigcina?

Isimemo

Ndimeme ipolisa elizakuncokola nani ngayo yonke into enxulumene nokudlwengula. Bhala phantsi yonke imibuzo ozakuyibuza kulo.

HEALTH EDUC

Let us discuss.

What types of illneses can one from being raped? From your local newspaper, bring in cuttings about rape and make a class poster.

Prepare questions to be asked from the SCHOOL NURSE who will visit.

In your groups.

Discuss anything you know about AIDS for 20 minutes. Choose the speaker from your group to give feed back to the class.

LIFE SKILLS

In the Bible we have 10 commandment, what commandments can you formulate?

Safety Rules

1. Kufuneka xana uwela utshonge imoto uwele
2. akufuneki uwele ungazitshonganga imoto
3. akufuneki uhlale endleleni ngoba uzakutshayiswa yimoto
4. kufuneka ugande umntana angadlali endleleni
5. kufuneka umntu omdala aze atshonge imoto
6. nokuba ngumntu omdala unokungomcici ewtshonga imoto
7. ekhaya esitixo oca bangetho abantu abadala sisilebo efeilileni

Classroom 3: Grade 4, Mtyintyini and Mtebele schools (Northern Region)

I had my own reservations and questions about the concept of negotiating the curriculum. I could see it working with Science, but could it work with Maths? And Maths, according to parents of learners at the schools where I was working, was a very important learning area. I therefore felt I should find a stimulus that would lead in the direction of Maths (as well as other learning areas, perhaps).

The stimulus I found was a story entitled *"Seventeen Horses"*. Here is the beginning of the story:

Seventeen Horses

Many years ago, in the country called Arabia, there lived a man who had three sons and seventeen horses.

In those days, horses were very valuable. So valuable that only rich people had horses. So valuable that if you had only one horse you were rich. But this man had seventeen! He was very, very rich.

But he was old and it was nearly time for him to die. His three sons were called to the side of his bed.

"We are all here, Father," said the oldest son. "We are listening. What is it you want to say to us?"

"My sons," said the old man, "you can see that I'm dying. When I'm dead, my seventeen horses belong to you. I've written a letter. The letter tells you how you must share the horses. You must open the letter when I'm dead. You must do as the letter tells you. Promise to obey me."

"We promise, Father," said the three sons. "We'll obey you. We'll share the horses in the way you tell us to."

The next day the old man died. Soon after, his sons met together. The oldest son opened his father's letter. He read it to his brothers. This is what it said.

My dear sons

I give you my seventeen horses. You must share them this way:

You, my oldest son, must take half the horses.

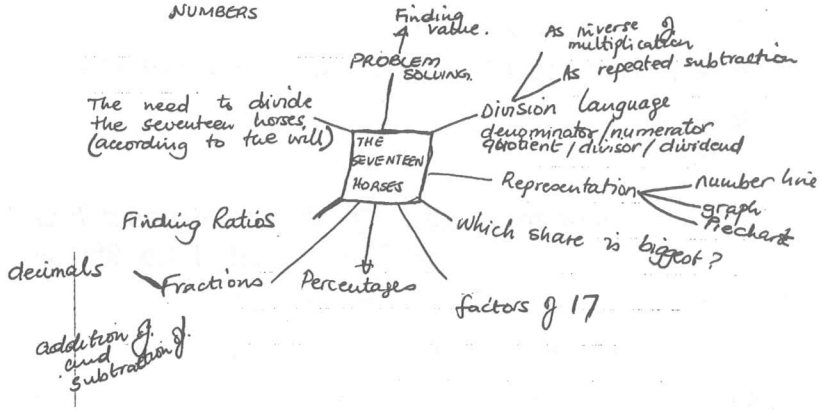
You, my second son, must have one-third of the horses.

You, my youngest son, must have one-ninth of the horses.

That is how you must share the horses. Do as I tell you.

Your father

I sat down and brainstormed alone as to what questions/ topics might come up from the learners. (I knew, though, that I had to genuinely follow the wishes of the learners, not simply paying their interests 'lip-service'.) Here is my brainstorm:



I went to the classroom prepared in this way. It was a class of fourth graders who were allegedly 'dull'. None of the educators in the school liked going to this class. The process described below was spread over several days.

I told the class that I had a story to tell, but wanted to hear whether they wanted to hear a story, or not. They said that they wanted to. I told them that the story was in English, but that I could tell it in any language they preferred. They suggested that we try English first, and use Xhosa to explain if they did not understand. We talked about my position for telling the story, i.e. Should I be seated or standing, in front, behind or sideways. It seemed that everyone wanted me to be near him/her, so I agreed to move from A to B to C and then to D.

The story started. We discussed the meanings of words, and worked them out together. I asked learners to listen so that they could ask questions that were geared to knowing more.

I cut the story immediately after the will of the dying man was read (as above). I invited questions, but none were forthcoming. I asked whether they wanted to work out what belonged to the eldest son, the second son and the youngest son. When they agreed, I gave them counters to work it out. Some requested to use their own calculators. After working for a while, they started to show signs of being miserable. Asked why, they said there were remainders.

Learners raised the question: *"How do we solve this problem?"* I threw the question back to them as: "What skills do we need to be able to solve this problem? What kind of knowledge do we need?" They said, "We need to know Maths".

Asked "What exactly do you need to know?" they came up with:

- Fractions
- What kind of number is 17?
- What are the factors of 17?
- How can we divide 17 so as not to have a remainder?
- Division
- "Problem"

They kept on saying there was a *"problem", "it was difficult", "difficulty needed Maths skills".* They restated the difficulty:

- They could not get 1/2 of 17 – Remainder 1
- They could not get 1/3 of 17 – Remainder 2
- They could not get 1/9 of 17 – Remainder 8.

Asked what we should deal with first, they said:

- Division first
- Characteristics of 17

Then we read the rest of the story, as follows:

"Well," said the oldest son. "That's what the letter says. Now we must obey our father. We must share the horses in the way he told us to. Let me see. I must take half the horses."

"How are you going to do that?" asked the youngest son.

"How? Why, I'll divide the number of horses by two," said the oldest son.

"Go on," said the youngest son. "If you divide by two, what does that come to?"

"That's easy," said his brother. "Seventeen divided by two is – is – Hm! I see what you mean. There's one horse left over. What do we do with that? It's not easy. It's difficult."

"It's more difficult for me," said the second son. "I must take a third of the horses. But if you divide seventeen by three there are *two* horses left over!"

"It's most difficult for me," said the youngest son. "I must take a ninth of the horses. I must divide seventeen by nine. But then there are EIGHT horses left over!"

Then all the brothers shouted together, "You can't divide seventeen horses by two *or* three *or* nine! But we must obey our father. What are we going to do?"

Living near them was a wise man. The three brothers went to see him. They told him their story and asked what they should do.

The wise man thought hard. Then he added, "It's not really difficult. I'll give you my horse. Take it home. Add it to your horses and do as your father told you."

The three brothers said, "Thank you" to the wise man. They took his horse, went home, and added the horse to their seventeen horses. Now they had eighteen horses.

The oldest brother took a half. That was nine horses.

The second brother took a third. That was six horses.

The youngest brother took a ninth. That was two horses.

Add nine and six and two together. How many horses? Seventeen horses.

"But now there's one horse left over!" cried the oldest brother. "Whose horse is that?"

That's the wise man's horse," said the youngest brother. "We must give it back to him."

And that is what those three brothers did.

We then started finding the differences between 18 and 17. The main difference was that 17 could be divided by 17 and 1 only, whereas 18 was divisible by 2, 3, 6, 9, 1 and 18.

We got an answer to the question, "What kind of number is 17?":

It is a prime number. Further, the learners asked if 17 had any relatives.

After a heavy day of manual calculation, we found that 3, 5, 7 and 13 were also Prime Numbers, i.e. *"They are odd (ngumuqakathi) and can only be divided by 1 and themselves."* A rule was therefore established.

At the end of this day, learners reminded me that we had not learned fractions. Therefore we had not solved the "horses problem". I also realised at the end of this day that we had not negotiated a method of assessment.

The next day, I started by negotiating assessment: "How are we going to show/tell people that we know fractions?" They said:

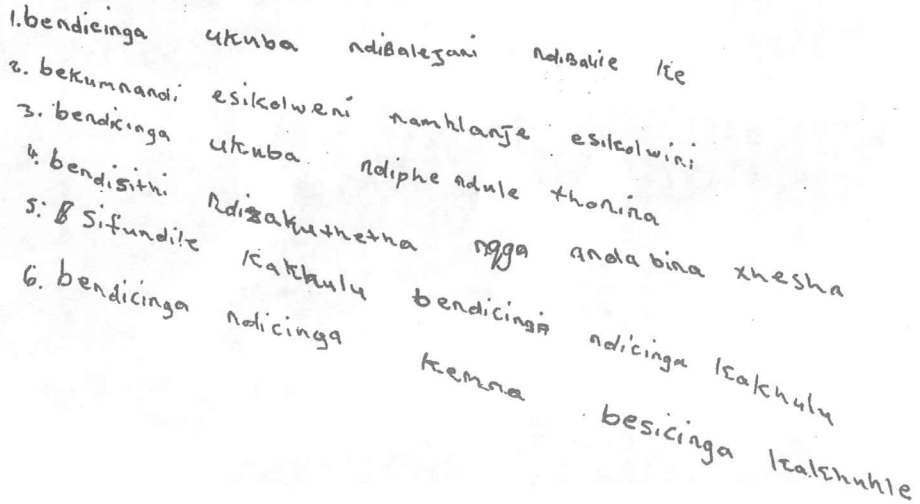
"When asked about fractions, we will give the correct answers."

"We will find the value of the shares of the 3 sons of the 17 horses."

I brought a range of resources to work out 1/2. These included different sizes of bottles: 2 litre, 1,5 litre, 1 litre, 500ml, 600ml, 250ml, a tape measure, some play money, pieces of paper and a calendar.

What an exciting day, with exploration, adventure and discovery. Learners started to think about 1/2 in a meaningful way. Windows, floors, desks, chalkboards were measured, and half of each was established.

Here are some of their statements about how they felt about their learning:



Key Activity, Part 1: Reflective Report on one of the above learning units

(Please note that the Key Activity report for this umthamo will be assessed by yourself and your peers, and then be handed in for Umkhwezeli assessment.)

For the first part of the Key Activity, please write a detailed reflection on **one** of the learning experiences described in this unit.

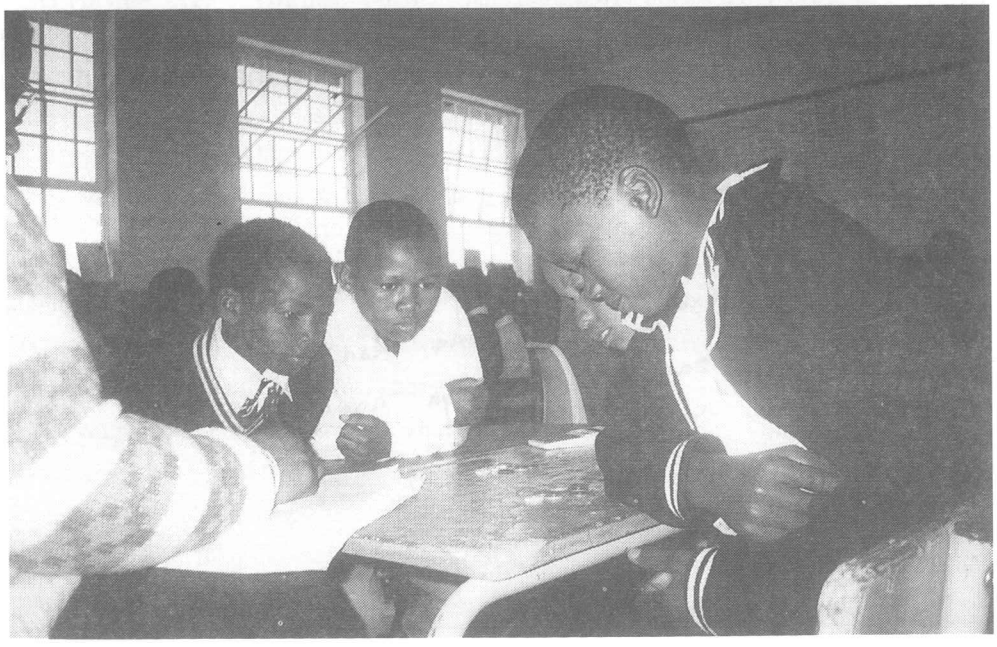
Structure your reflective report according to the points appearing under **Reflect and discuss** on page 30 and 31. (Note that there will be 4 main sections to your report.)

Criteria for Assessment

An excellent report will have most of the following characteristics:

It should be deeply reflective. Description is not sufficient.

- *The report should show that the teacher-learner has thought deeply about the lesson, has recognised where negotiation took place, and where effective learning took place.*
- *It should also show the teacher-learner is able to be critical in a constructive way about what happened in the learning unit. S/He needs to have noted the aspects of the lesson where improvement is possible/ necessary. In particular, s/he needs to have noted the aspects of the lesson where more negotiation could have led to better learning outcomes.*
- ***Reflection and critique should have taken place in relation to the planning, the doing, the reflecting and the assessing.***



Unit 4: Negotiation in your own classroom and school

Key Activity, Part 2: A negotiated unit of learning

Plan and carry out a "unit of learning" in your class, negotiating as many aspects of it as you can with your learners. Try also to include parents in the negotiation if you can*. Reflect on what is happening as you go along, and at the end.

*On page 45 you will find some ideas for involving parents.

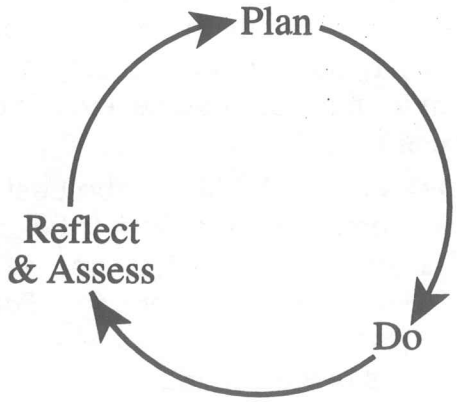
The work that you report on at the end of the umthamo should be completed within one or two weeks. Of course, the work that the learners do may have spin-offs which continue for much longer. In deciding how much time to spend on this unit of learning, you need to be flexible. However, it is also important to keep an eye on the bigger picture of the kinds of learning outcomes which you are aiming for in the year.

We would like to give you the freedom to do this Key Activity in one of a number of different ways:

1. You could emulate (imitate, or follow the example of) one of the teachers you have read about in the readings (Unit 2).
2. You could present the learning experience from Unit 3 which you reflected on in Key Activity, Part 1. You should try to carry the negotiation and the learning further in the ways you have suggested in your reflective report.
3. You could try your own way of negotiating the curriculum.

   OR
4. You could follow the steps which are laid out on the next page.

Note that whichever choice of learning experience you make, you will need to go through the "Plan – Do – Reflect/ Assess" cycle.



Suggested Steps (Option 4, above)

Here are the suggested steps, which you could choose to follow, if you wish:

1. Plan

Topic selection

The first stage of planning is to decide (together with your learners, as much as possible) on a topic or theme for the next unit of work. You may also choose to involve parents in some way* (see suggestions on page 45).

- You might let your learners choose the topic on their own.
- You and/or the parents might play quite a strong role in selecting the topic.
- You may select a topic suggested in the Curriculum Documents.
- You might suggest a broad topic by presenting some stimulus to the learners, e.g. a story with many interesting aspects to explore, an object from nature, e.g. an insect, a rock, a plant.

Brainstorm the details

Next, you will need to open up discussion with the learners. This may take some time. You and the learners should decide all the following things together, if possible. (Again, it may be possible to involve parents as well.)

- *What do learners know already* about the topic?/ story?/ object?
- *What would the learners like to know* about the topic?/ story?/ object? What questions do they have? What do they think about it?
- *How will they find out* what they want to know? (Ask people?/ Carry out explorations and observations?/ Look it up in books?)
- *What resources will they need* to do the work? Where will they get them? (You, the teacher, will probably play a role here. This is also the place where parents and other community members could play a role. Try to involve them as much as possible, even in other steps of the process.)
- *Who will they work with?* (It may be best to work in groups, or for some individual work to be done. It may be better if all groups work on the same task, or it may be better if different groups work on different tasks. There may be tasks which can be done with parents*, or with members of the community.)

- *How will they show others* what they have found out? How will they show that they have achieved what they planned to achieve? i.e. How will they assess their learning? (At the end of their work, they may have written a story, or a report. They may have drawn, or created something. They may have a presentation or a play to present to the class.)

2. Do

Learners implement the plans they have made in negotiation with you. Note that you need to reflect and assess while the activities are in progress, as well as at the end (see 3, below).

3. Reflect/ Assess

Review and revise plans

While the activities are in progress, it is important to talk about how things are going. Are there any plans the learners, or you, would like to change? This could happen quite informally, e.g. with the small groups one at a time, or it could happen more formally with the whole class.

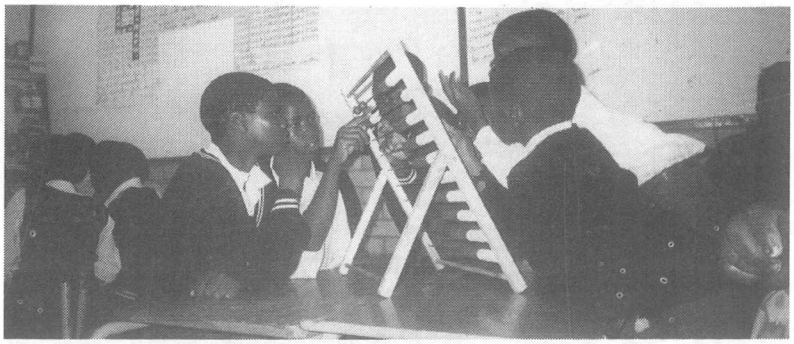
Presentation and Assessment

What did they learn?/ achieve? (What outcomes did they achieve?) You will have made plans together for presentation and assessment. These need to be put into practice. Self, peers and teacher should play a part in this.

Reflection

Once the process is over, discuss with the learners how this unit of learning went.

- Did they enjoy this way of learning? What went well? What didn't go so well? What would they have liked to be different?
- What do they want to learn about next? **(Back to planning)**



Reporting

Write an account of what happened **and** a reflective report on it. Include your learners' reflections in your report. You might even like to include some of the final products of their work with your report.

Follow the same plan for your reflective report which you used in Key Activity, Part 1. Here it is again.

- ***Successful aspects:***

  What made the learning experience 'successful'? Which of the features mentioned in Unit 1, and in the margin box did this learning unit have?

- ***Negotiation:***

  Did you allow your learners to help decide what they would learn? Were parents involved at all in the negotiation? In which parts of the learning experience was there 'negotiation of the curriculum'? How was the curriculum negotiated? Was the negotiation 'successful'? (refer to page 3).

- ***Improving negotiation and learning:***

  How could you have taken the negotiation process further, so that the learners learned more?

- ***The "Plan – Do – Reflect/ Assess" cycle***

  Reflect also on the "Plan – Do - Reflect and Assess" cycle. How successful were you and the learners, and perhaps the parents, in:

  - planning?
  - reflecting together on what you had done?
  - assessing the work done, together?

  Did new planning follow on after the reflection and assessment?

(The Criteria for Assessment are on the inside back cover)

Learner-centredness;
Building on Prior Knowledge;
Learners construct their own knowledge;
Interactive learning;
Respect for children's questions;
Multiple intelligences and styles;
Independent learning;
A 'resourceful' classroom;
ZPD;
Ownership of the learning process

Some ideas for involving parents

(Please note that these are just ideas. You may have your own way of doing it.)

1. You could invite parents and community members to come to school and negotiate the curriculum with you and the learners. You might like to invite other Grade or Phase teachers in order to make the input richer. Here is a report on what happened at Van Coller School when the teacher did this.

Grade 1 learners and their parents negotiate the curriculum (Van Coller Primary School, Northern Region)

On the 4th October 2000, we, Van Coller Grade 1 educators, invited parents of the learners that are in Grade R.

The aim of inviting the parents was to negotiate the curriculum with them and the learners. We gave the children the topic "my family", and we asked them what it is that they wanted to learn about their families and this was their response:

- There must be no violence in their homes
- To respect elderly people
- Go to church
- Be educated
- Live happily in their homes, having customary events

Then we asked the parents what it is that they want us to teach their children about their families, and they responded by saying:

- The family must always work together
- They must also know their culture
- They must respect elderly people
- They must learn to economise

2. You could negotiate the curriculum with your learners in class and then ask learners to go and carry on the same negotiations at home with the entire family (not necessarily parents only). One family member could write down the ideas and give it back to the learner to take it to the class teacher.

   Perhaps the instructions to parents about what you would like them to do could be written by learners in the senior grades. Here is an example of the kind of letter that could be written:

Bazali/Mzali,

Malungu efemeli yakulo_____ niyacelwa yiklasi yethu ukuba nithabathe inxaxheba ekucingeni nokubhala izinto esinokuthi ninqwenele ukuba sizifunde ngalo mba_____, indlela esinokuzifunda ngazo, izinto esinokuzenza ukuqinisekisa ukuba senza kanye izinto ebesithe sinqwenela ukuzazi ngokuthe phucu, izixhobo esinokuzi sebenzisa, kunye nezinto esinokuzivavanya, apha endleleni, ukuqinisekisa ukuba sihamba kanye emkhondweni onguwo. Abazali okanye amalungu efemeli anakho ukuthabatha inxaxheba ekufundiseni izinto makasazise ngokunjalo. Ngokunjalo nabo basebenza kwiinkampani zamashishini okanye oozimele bamashishini, mabeze ngaphambili ukuze bancedise kwizifundo abanobuchule nolwazi ngazo.

Enkosi ngentsebenziswano.

The background of the inside and outside covers show letters written in response to this kind of request by parents in Khayalitsha.

This is another way of getting to know the families of your learners. It is an important opportunity to involve the parents in the life of the school, so that they can play a role in more and more aspects of school improvement.

Conclusion

Our new education policy urges us to *negotiate the curriculum* and to encourage learners to take responsibility for their own learning. The following extract from a description of teacher roles is evidence of this.

- A learning initiator, teaching through negotiations, coach, facilitator, stimulator, mediator, supporter and listener in a manner which is sensitive to diverse interests and needs of learners including those with special educational needs…
- A leader, organiser, administrator and manager of a teaching learning situation which supports learners, increases the desire to learn, creates opportunities for inquiry, explanation and responsibility for own learning.

This umthamo has given you a chance to try out a learning unit based on negotiation of what is to be learned, and how.

It has also offered you readings about the efforts of other teachers, both here and abroad, to negotiate the curriculum. You have been able to reflect on these, and perhaps emulate them, or improve on them.

In this way, you have penetrated more deeply into an experience of learner-centredness, and learning-centredness.

Additional Reading: Jay Dee (Queenstown)

Here is a description of a visit by Xoliswa Njaba to a preschool in Queenstown.

Jay Dee is a preschool, with ± 50 learners. It is attached to a Child Welfare centre, and used to cater for homeless children. I visited this school because it is piloting the High Scope Preschool Programme which is known for its success in preventing underachievement. An important feature of this programme is the involvement of learners in deciding what they have to learn for the day. I was interested to see how this happens.

When I reached the classroom, I found that it has various areas: the Sand area; the Water area; the Puzzles; the Block area; the Home area and the Art area. The Art area seemed to be the favourite for most learners.

Also catching my eye was the daily plan which was on the wall. I had thought that if learners decided on the activities for the day there would be no structure, but the daily plan seemed to indicate the opposite.

Daily Plan

07h00-08h30: Arrival and hand wash
08h30-09h00: Breakfast
09h00-09h15: Circle time/ Morning ring
09h15-09h30: Planning time
09h30-10h15: Work time
10h15-10h30: Clean-up time
10h30-10h45: Recall time
10h45-11h00: Small group time
11h00-11h15: Story time
11h15-11h30: Hand wash
11h30-12h00: Lunch
12h00-12h15: Music Movement
12h15-14h00: Rest
14h00-14h30: Snack
14h30-15h15: Outdoor Play
15h15-16h00: Depart

The programme is planned so that it focuses on developing specific skills. This informs the assessment, which of course is continuous.

Circle time/ Morning ring

A typical day starts off with a circle time or morning ring, which is characterised by little stories from home and reminding one another about good behaviour and good working relations. A song is sung at the end of this session, with the following lyrics:

"It's planning time, it's planning time,

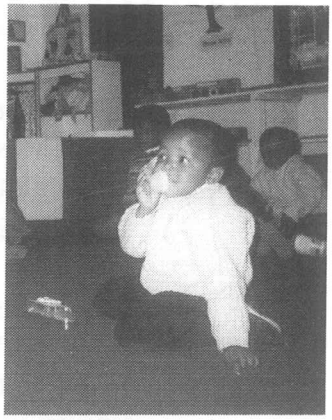
Where will you work today?"

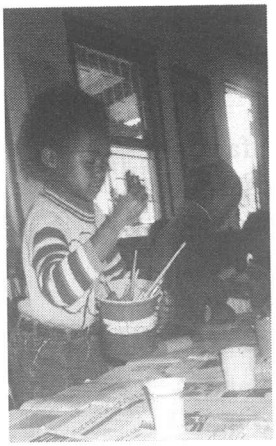
This song shows that learning is seen as work. Learners see themselves as workers, while educators are monitors of learning.

Planning time

Two toy phones are used during planning time, one by the learner and one by the educator. The educator uses English, but switches to the primary language when the child does not understand. A typical communication is like this:

Teacher: In which area are you going to work today?
Child: Art Area
Teacher: What are you going to do there?
Child: I will make a robot.
Teacher: Do you remember what it looks like?
Child: Yes.
Teacher: Do you remember how many colours it has?
Child: Yes. Three.
Teacher: Can you name them for me?
Child: Yes. Green, Orange, Red.
Teacher: What are you going to use?
Child: Paint, paper
Teacher: Why are you using these?
Child: Because I am going to paint on the paper with the paint.





And so it would go with others. One wanted to go to the Art area to make a house by cutting and pasting. When asked why, she said it was for mommy and daddy. The youngest chose to go to the Blocks area to build a house for Equia and Sihle. (I noticed later that he forgot to do the house; he did other things.)

Recall time

During recall time, the two toy phones were used again. In a typical conversation, the teacher asks where the child worked, what s/he did, and what s/he used to do it. Some of the points were explored in more detail.

I was interested to know what Luve would report. He was the one who promised to build a house for Equia. He reported that he remembered building the house. He said that he simply went to the blocks area, took the blocks and built a house. Thereafter he sang a rhyme for me.

A 7-year-old who is a slow learner chose to play in the Puzzles area. She was doing a self-correcting puzzle. She recalled what she did, but it took her time. She could not easily identify the numbers up to 10, but could recite them fairly well. She seemed to be picking up slowly, though.

Small group time

In small group time, the teacher brought scrap materials, paints and toilet paper rolls and brushes. She asked the question: "What do you think we can do with these materials?" They named different things until a "robot" was settled on as the main activity for the day. Everybody was busy on a robot. Younger ones had their own turn. Each older child had a younger one to tutor. There were children who were specifically looking at whether everyone was being helped well. They would ask, "Let me see. What have you done? Who's helping you?" and then other questions would go to the tutor: "Why are you not helping the child? Do you see now what she has done?"

Story time

In story time, they sat round the teacher, as they had during Circle time. The teacher used a home-made flannel board to illustrate the story.

After the story, they were asked to decide what they would like to sing. It was easy at this stage because they were in the second year of the pilot.

Teachers said that it was difficult for them to teach in this way, but they were trying their best. One problem is that their subsidies keep on being cut by the Department of Welfare. They are being trained by Khululeka. The Welfare lives on donations from willing people in the community. This money fails to meet their needs, especially those of educator salaries. They are determined to breathe although the air is full of impurities.

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Criteria for Assessment

An excellent report will have most of the following characteristics:

1. *It will begin by giving a good picture of the learning experience, so that the reader knows what happened, how the teacher managed and facilitated the learning experience, and especially how the learners responded and participated. In particular, it should make it clear where and how negotiation took place.*
2. *It should be deeply reflective. Description is not sufficient.*
   - *The report should show that the teacher-learner has thought deeply about the lesson, has recognised where negotiation took place, and where effective learning took place.*
   - *It should also show the teacher-learner is able to be critical in a constructive way about what happened in the learning unit. S/He needs to have noted the aspects of the lesson where improvement is possible/ necessary. In particular, s/he needs to have noted the aspects of the lesson where more negotiation could have led to better learning outcomes.*
   - *Reflection and critique should have taken place in relation to the planning, the doing, the reflecting and the assessing aspects of the lesson.*

A NEW TYPE OF CLASSROOM

Why am I telling you all this personal experience? Because I think that, from what I have been saying, you and your students might invent a way to develop a climate of free and creative learning in your class. You are not me, nor are your students the ones I have had, so the laying down of rules, or telling you this is the way a class should be, is no answer. I am simply suggesting that if students and instructor discuss the issue openly, ways might be found in which all could be whole human beings in the classroom. Occasionally, I have known "miracles" to follow from such discussions, but much more often, it is painful, growthful struggles that ensue – in the instructor, in each student, in the interactions of the whole group. It is only at the end of the course, or even afterward, that individuals may disclose how valuable it has been to attempt to be a whole human being in a classroom interaction.

(Carl Rogers. 1983. *Freedom to Learn for the 80's.* Charles Merril.)

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UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE

DISTANCE EDUCATION PROJECT

CORE EDUCATION STUDIES COURSE

Helping Learners Learn

Umthamo 5 Negotiating the Curriculum

First Pilot Edition – 2000

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and with contributions from Eunice Dweba and Tiny Ndunge Qabazi

Co-ordinated and edited by Liz Botha, logos by Alan Kenyon

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