

The Beane/Brodhagen Model of Negotiated Integrated Curriculum

A Curriculum Model for the Middle
Years of Schooling

Two key themes emerge from many of the reviews of middle years curriculum

Coherence

Developing curriculum that presents a coherent and holistic picture, rather than a set of fragmented, unrelated topics.

Permeability

Providing room for student voice and choice.

The Negotiated, Integrated Curriculum Model developed by James Beane and Barbara Brodhagen addresses both these issues fully.

- It is “permeable” as it is based on students’ own questions about themselves and about the world and on teachers’ understandings of questions the “world poses to students”. It is a negotiated curriculum model.
- It is “coherent” as it is not bounded by subject divisions, but reflects the natural relationship between different disciplines of knowledge. It is an integrated curriculum model.

The process involves ten stages:

Stage one involves students brainstorming a list of questions about themselves. This is an individual activity. We have found it helpful to alert students to this question a day or two beforehand, so they can reflect on their response.

Some typical questions include:

- Will I go to university?
- What jobs will I have in the future?
- Why do people get divorced?
- When will I die?

This last question comes up quite often and is usually a response to a young adolescent's growing sense of self and grappling with the concept of personal mortality for the first time – rather than something more sinister.

- Stage two involves students in small groups sharing their questions about themselves and deciding which of these are common questions. A common question is one that more than one student had written down or that when raised other students say they are interested in that question too. The purpose here is to develop a “common curriculum of interest to more than one individual.

Each of the rest of the stages are described on the following slides, with photographs from Wales Street Primary School, which in 1996 used this process to develop the years’ integrated curriculum for grades 5 & 6.

STAGE THREE WORLD CONCERNS

Students brainstorm a list of questions they have about their world.

STAGE FOUR FINDING COMMON WORLD QUESTIONS

Students in small groups share their questions about their world and decide which of these are common questions – i.e. of interest to a number of the group members.

It is valuable, but not essential, to have an adult or older student to help with this stage of the process.



STAGE FIVE FINDING THEMES

Small groups (with adult support if possible) consider ways in which some of their personal and social questions may be connected. The words or ideas used to connect these ideas become possible themes.



A number of small groups can be combined for this part of the process to maximise use of adult support. This is the stage of the process that students find the most challenging

STAGE SIX SHARING THEMES

Small groups come together to share their ideas of themes for study. Themes are rationalised to remove repetition and overlap.



STAGE SEVEN SELECTING THEMES

Students vote on themes. They may vote for as many themes as they like as long as they feel strongly about including that theme in the curriculum. The most popular themes are identified and terms/semesters are negotiated for working on the themes.



In this case, the most popular theme was “relationships”. However, as the teachers had already booked the “life education program” for term three, this theme was put off till then. The schedule was negotiated rather than dictated by student voting.

STAGE EIGHT CONNECTING QUESTIONS TO THEMES

A small committee of students look over all the questions, deciding which questions belong with which themes.



The questions have been cut into strips (with one question per strip) to enable them to be bundled more easily.

These are some of the student questions that were included in a unit called “RELATIONSHIPS”

- Why are people homeless?
- Why do people commit crimes?
- How do we help people around the world who suffer from hunger?
- Will all the countries of the world make peace?
- Will there ever be peace around the world?
- Will there always be famine in the world?
- How can we help homeless people?
- Why is Australia so wealthy and Rwanda isn't?
- Why are people violent? and will violence ever stop?
- Why do other countries fight one another?
- How many children will I have?
- Why are boys and girls treated differently?
- Will my personality change?
- How will looks change as I grow up?
- Why do people call it “a man's world”?
- Will I be respected by others when I'm older?
- Will my friends be my best friends in 20 years time?
- Will I still have the same friends at high school?
- What will happen to other members of my family?
- Will my parents' relationship ever be the same as it was before?
- Can your brother/sister affect your life?

STAGE NINE SELECTING ACTIVITIES

Each question relating to the current theme is written on the top of a separate piece of butcher's paper. Students in pairs and groups of three walk around the room looking at each question and adding ideas for activities.



These are some of the suggested activities for the question, “Can we save endangered species?”, which was part of the unit on the environment.

- Find out on the computer, and do research and find how many animals are in danger.
- Draw or find a map of the world and then label where animals are endangered and extinct.
- Sponsor a dolphin.
- Time lines.
- Write to greenpeace and see if they can send some pamphlets about it.
- Make games eg. board games.
- Make a mobile about an endangered animal with info.
- Do a project on whales.
- Make a live animal model.
- Do a project on extinct animals or lots of extinct animals and find out how those animals got extinct.
- Go to the zoo.
- Go to Healesville Sanctuary and find information about endangered species.
- We could go out and catch bugs and see which bug we catch most
- Go to the Museum
- Have guest speakers eg. environmental guest speakers.
- Watch videos and then have a discussion.
- Read books and make a graph on the animals that are extinct.
- Make some pamphlets fliers, poster and hand to people.
- Research in the library about the endangered species.
- Make a model of the ozone layer.
- Find the rarest animal from water, air and land.

STAGE TEN UNIT PLANNING

Students' suggested activities (and teacher chosen ones) are used as the basis for unit planning (the unit being around the theme chosen by students)



Student suggested activities were plotted onto a Bloom's Taxonomy and Multiple Intelligences grid to make sure that all intelligences and all levels of cognitive functioning were effectively catered for in the curriculum.

Activities were also audited against the CSF to ensure an appropriate coverage of outcomes. Activities were added by the teachers on the basis of this audit.