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## 18 The practicalities of negotiation

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### Introduction

As we detailed in Chapter 1, the rationale for introducing what we have termed ‘procedural negotiation’ into classroom work has come from many quarters. These have included influences from humanistic conceptions of society, a role for education in fostering the development of democratic citizenship, and a view of human psychology that emphasises the socially constructed nature of learning and the learner as an active participant, not merely a recipient of transmitted knowledge. Specifically within the field of language education, the purposes of classroom work which aim to develop the communicative capacities of the learners have given further impetus for incorporating communication about learning as a beneficial part of classroom interaction.

In addition to these philosophical and theoretical views, many of the writers in this volume have revealed immediate, practical considerations which suggest negotiation as the logical, indeed at times, the only viable, way forward in decisions about course design and in their implementation. Among the imperatives for negotiated work, we can list the following familiar situations:

- when the teacher does not share the background of the students and, of necessity, must therefore share decisions about course contents (Nikolov, Martyn, Newstetter);
- when a limited number of teaching hours on short courses make teacher-determined choices of contents arbitrary (Slembrouck);
- when there is a heterogeneous student body and there is a need to find a common ground (Norris and Spencer);
- when it is difficult to identify the varied nature of learner achievements (MacKay);
- when there is an absence of published course materials (Edmundson and Fitzpatrick);
- when there is an explicit need to take into account the experiences of students (Irujo, Ivanič);
- when the course itself is open-ended and exploratory in nature (McCarthy and Makosch).

While the rationale for negotiation is strong at both a theoretical and practical level, each of the previous chapters has also stressed the need to consider factors which can directly affect the success or otherwise of efforts at introducing negotiation directly into classroom work. Negotiation is clearly not a straightforward undertaking. The extent and the focus of negotiation will be influenced by the context in which teachers and students work and they may require abilities and sensitivities not conventionally expected of teachers and

learners in their work together. The purpose of the present chapter, therefore, is to draw together aspects of practice and to set out some of the lessons which can be learned from the accounts provided in this volume. With the intention of supporting teachers in experimenting with the development of Process Syllabuses in their own classrooms, the chapter also provides a practical framework for negotiation.

### **Some practical considerations**

The variety of contexts described in the preceding chapters affords us a detailed examination of the numerous factors which need to be borne in mind when developing classroom work involving negotiation. These range from external factors such as the existence of pre-specified curriculum plans, time constraints and class size to the personal responses of teachers and students, the background of the students and the wider cultural context in which negotiation is to take place.

#### *An externally determined curriculum*

A number of chapters in this volume (Smith, Linder, and Serrano-Sampedro) discuss the implications that an externally determined curriculum, required by a Ministry of Education for example, may have on the possibilities of negotiation. Whilst it is obviously the case that a detailed external curriculum will place limitations on what can be negotiated, each of those chapters also

argues that the existence of an external curriculum may help to frame or delineate the boundaries for negotiation. As Serrano-Sampedro explains:

All the apparently limiting factors, such as the existence of an official syllabus, or the need for final year students to prepare for a university entry test, have actually had a positive influence upon the negotiation process. Apart from providing the learners with a sense of guidance, a map in which they could draw their own learning route and a checklist for self-evaluation, they have contributed valuable learning opportunities for both the learners and myself. These were derived, for example, from the attempt to solve conflicts between the aims and content of the curriculum and the needs and interests of particular learners at a given time.

In these situations, whilst the aims or content may be prescribed, it is less frequently the case that aspects of methodology are equally detailed. Teachers with their classes *can* determine their classroom procedures such as the pace of the work, the selection of types of tasks, or when to evaluate on-going learning. And teachers can, for example, suggest varied approaches to prescribed materials, and add supplementary materials of their own choice. (See *Guidelines for practice*, below)

## *Time*

Some writers in this collection make the point that negotiation can be a time-consuming process (see, for example, Smith and Sokolik). On the surface, this may suggest that it is far easier and quicker for the teacher or some other external authority to make decisions about course contents, the way of working and evaluation. While considerations of time do need to be borne in mind as a factor which may constrain the scope of negotiation which it is feasible to undertake and which may limit the stages through which negotiation is taken, there are at least two further important points to be brought out here, however.

The first is that we cannot equate like with like here. The rationale and purposes of introducing negotiation extend beyond the rationale and aims of 'conventional' transmission-based course decisions. We cannot, therefore, claim that one mode of working is more or less 'efficient' than another.

Indeed, without exception, all of the teachers' accounts in this book indicate that negotiated modes of working achieve a wider range of learning outcomes, including confidence, motivation, quality and richness of learning, quality of students' work, abilities to work independently and with responsibility, and so on. Linder for example, observed

the positive impact in terms of increased participation, increased use of the target language, and generally more satisfactory assignments submitted which were higher in quantity and quality.

Serrano-Sampedro similarly, found a positive impact on the students' initiative and effort:

The learners' self-confidence increases. They show more initiative in communication and in organising their work. ...

They learn to learn a foreign language. They solve problems, foresee them, identify advantages and disadvantages of alternatives, take into account contextual limitations (e.g. suitability of available recorded material) and act to overcome them. They work harder and more effectively (which usually results in better learning).

The second point about time as a constraint, as we argued in Chapter 1, is that, in a context where the teacher makes most of the decisions regarding classroom work, learners' on-going understandings and misunderstandings may for the most part be hidden and, because of this, may inhibit, disrupt or delay the learning process for individual members of the group. Misunderstandings may actually slow down the process of learning for many students and, therefore, work against the time we may have available with them. MacKay, Oates and Haig for example, found that when students are encouraged to set their own goals, these are "sometimes more realistic than those of the teacher" and that students become highly motivated to achieve those goals. One immediate result of this is that students therefore approach learning tasks knowing what to expect and what is expected of them, and that since teachers' expectations are negotiated, they become better understood by the students. Smith provides a

revealing comment from a student in this regard who had been involved in negotiating her grade. She had become more aware of her strengths and weaknesses:

I know that I was okay in English, but I never really knew where I had to put in more work in order to improve my grade. After knowing how the grade is formed and being asked to give myself a grade, I realized that much more work had to be put into my compositions. I have to structure them more and see to that my spelling improves.

### *Class size and diversity of student abilities*

It is perhaps an irony that larger class sizes may appear to make negotiation more difficult whilst, at the same time, making more urgent the need for negotiation to take place. The phenomena of students 'learning alone in a crowd' is frequent and very real. Larger class sizes inevitably give individual students reduced possibilities of personally contributing to their lessons, and encourage the taking on of the role of a spectator of teaching. Similarly, wide variations in student abilities may imply that more time needs to be devoted to support specific students and to relate classroom work more directly to their needs. In both these respects, therefore, there is a strong argument in favour of incorporating negotiated work. As Serrano-Sampedro argues

The advantages of working within the framework of negotiation are acknowledged by the clear majority of the learners and by fellow

teachers who have tried to apply it. Those that have been identified include:

- It allows learners to work in different ways and at different rhythms in accordance with their needs and interests. As a consequence, their sense of progress and achievement increases and so does their motivation.
- While learners work in groups the teacher can give more individual attention. This facilitates the attention to learner diversity: learning styles, rhythms, needs, interests etc.

Yet, wide variations in student abilities and large class sizes may make it difficult to seek a class-based consensus in the work to be done or to provide feedback and opportunities to support individual students or groups of students working simultaneously on different contents and in different ways. To this end, Serrano-Sampedro provides a number of practical strategies which she has developed in response to the problem of class size and student variation in ability. Her aim is to maximise the use of class time so that it is still possible, if not easy, to keep a balance between self direction, support and control:

One such way is involving learners in the development of class norms aimed at a more effective use of time and resources, for example peer correction or not calling the teacher every time they have a doubt, but trying to solve it by consulting reference books or asking other learners; if it is still unresolved, to take a note of it and carry on working till they have accumulated several doubts or have finished their work. Another

way is developing more effective and economic follow up techniques on the part of the teacher, such as group analysis of work or carrying around the class all the original group plans and writing quick notes on the process and performance of each group and its members on the back of those plans.

Serrano-Sampedro provides therefore a good example of how the imperative to include negotiated work can lead teachers to identify ways to achieve what is practically possible in the given circumstances.

### *Teacher response*

A number of the contributors to this collection report on the anxiety for the teacher which can result from introducing negotiation. Smith, for example, points out that

Teachers often feel the need to use the authority they have been given, and if they give up on it, they feel they are in danger of losing control.

Clearly, any redistribution of power and decision-making within the classroom will bring with it a redefinition of both teacher and learner roles. For teachers who are most used to attempting to exercise full control over classroom events or who believe they can actually achieve this, a move towards involving learners in decision-making may make new demands for flexibility, tolerance, risk-taking and a strong faith in the capacity of learners. Such teachers may need to come to see their own plans for classroom work as simply proposals, as

did the writers in this book, which learners have the right to reformulate, elaborate upon, or even reject. At the same time, such teachers may need to be willing to suspend their own judgement over the suitability or value of suggestions for classroom work made by learners, in the spirit of drawing out and building upon the learners' own capacity to review and evaluate the work they have done. As Serrano-Sampedro, Irujo, Wolfe-Quintero and others report, the ability to work successfully through negotiation is one which gradually develops with practice over time. Wolfe-Quintero, for example, speaking of how her teaching approach has changed, reports:

Through this experience, my eyes were irrevocably opened to new possibilities, new ways of conceptualizing the classroom. This experience changed how I have approached every class since, although I have not repeated this experience in any of them. This happened to be the second time I taught this particular writing methodology course. The first time I had taught it, I controlled the content, the timing, the requirements, the dialogue. By the time I taught this course a third time a year later, I was a different teacher. I neither completely controlled the class nor abdicated control, but I used my inherent control to foster a dialogue...

I gained the ability and understanding to allow the course to develop in this way only because the earlier process of negotiation had deconstructed my traditional views and new possibilities had risen in their place.

From what those teachers who have initiated negotiation with their students say, it appears, therefore, that the experience is an educative one also for the teacher, whilst inevitably evolving at its own pace and in its own particular way.

### *Learner response*

A clear message from the writers in this collection is that shifts in teacher attitude may be required for negotiation to be successfully implemented, and that this shift takes place over time. It is equally clear from the teachers' accounts that significant shifts in attitude may be required on the part of learners and that such changes in attitude will also require time to develop. The requirement for risk-taking, flexibility and tolerance which negotiation places upon teachers is at least equally matched by similar demands upon the learners, as they are expected to redefine their views of appropriate behaviour in the classroom. In fact, without the background which the professional discussion of applied linguistics affords teachers, the demands upon learners may be even more significant. Learners may have experienced years of classroom work in which they have learned that their role is to behave as if following the path laid down by a teacher rather than sharing in negotiating the route. Such learners may have abdicated their own responsibility for learning and may not be ready to believe the teacher who calls upon it through negotiative work. Newstetter, for example, reports that one of greatest difficulties is "getting them

to hear”, to understand and make use of the opportunities that negotiation may provide.

...as we neared the due date for the proposals, one student sheepishly asked in class, *"You mean we can decide what we want to do for reports 4 and 5?"* The way he asked the question indicated that he was sure he was asking an impossibly idiotic question. Clearly for this student the idea that he could decide what to write for an assignment was bordering on lunacy.

Undoubtedly, this stems from past experience - from “years of disenfranchisement” as Newstetter puts it - and beliefs about what “the teacher’s job” is, what the relative responsibilities of teachers and learners are in the classroom, and, indeed, how languages are to be learned. As Slembrouck reminds us in Chapter 8, there is often an educational culture which encourages students to focus on achieving the immediate targets and hurdles set by the educational institution and which may appear to be in conflict with any attempts to engage the students in meaningful negotiation about the process of learning in the class. In this case, students may perceive negotiation as simply one more course requirement, and initially try to find the best way (as they see it) to successfully cope with negotiation so that it is not too demanding a change from how they have previously been expected to work. Ivanič in Chapter 16 similarly discusses the gap, typically revealed as the due date for assignments approaches, between the value the students and the tutors variously ascribe to negotiation - some of the students wanting some tangible evidence of

making progress, of learning something, of getting somewhere, while the tutors see learning also in the process of negotiation itself.

A key demand upon learners when they are engaged in negotiated work is a redefinition of how they see the classroom and, with it, the development of abilities for working in groups, analysing, designing and evaluating classroom tasks, and sharing decision-making. Perhaps we need to further explore whether such a shift in perception and the drawing out of such abilities might need to precede a negotiated course (as Ivanič suggests) or whether such changes can be facilitated *during* a negotiated course. It is however important to see these changes not as difficulties inherent in negotiation, but as part of the process of achieving the wider educational purposes of negotiated work. Changes in the learners' ability to successfully participate in shared decision-making can be seen as stages in the development of the learners' abilities in the management of learning, alongside other stages in the language learning process.

### ***Learner voice***

As Ivanič points out in Chapter 16, there may be a tension between an aim of engaging students in negotiating the curriculum and the simple fact that they may not always be very good at negotiating. A central feature of a Process Syllabus is that decision-making is *shared*, that is, that everyone in the classroom group has an equal right to influence the decisions which are made.

The danger for any negotiated course, however, is that at these crucial decision-making stages it is the views of the most vocal that predominate, and that those who - for whatever reason - do not voice their opinions do not get heard. For this reason, Ivani<sup>1</sup> suggests the possibility of some kind of training course for negotiation or induction phase, fearful that embarking on a fully negotiated course without preparing the students first may result in a 'sink or swim' for some students.

One of the roles of the tutor in each sub-group is to support the group members through this experience, to intervene where necessary to ensure that everyone's voice is heard, and to bring discussion about the negotiation process itself out into the open. But this may not be enough. The fact that students do not always seem to benefit fully from the experience of negotiation on this course has led us to consider introducing an extra component on the course, possibly as a course within the M.A. programme as a whole, on how to work in small group situations, and how to learn from them. It is something we need to explore further in the future.

Useful though such an induction phase might be, however, it is unlikely over a short period of time to prompt significant changes in students' preferred strategies in learning (such as silence and observation), in character traits (such as shyness), in temporary conditions (such as tiredness), or in deeply held beliefs about the roles of teachers, learners, and the classroom. Such

pre-existing factors do represent genuine challenges to shared decision making, which require continued efforts to find ways to draw out students' views. As the range of experiences reported in this book demonstrates, however, and as we summarise below (see *Tools for Process Syllabuses*, below) there is much that can be done in this respect in the design of questionnaires, elicitation devices, one-to-one consultations and, crucially, evaluation procedures. These factors also suggest that, in many cases, a gradualist approach to the introduction of negotiated ways of working may be appropriate, something which we will explore further shortly (see *Guidelines for practice*, below).

### ***Cultural considerations***

A number of writers remark on issues deriving from the cultural background and assumptions of their students when faced with the requirements of classroom negotiation. Sokolik for example, found that cultural factors

...can present resistance to this method in certain students. These students may feel uncomfortable with taking on the role of evaluator.

As one student informed me, "That's your job". Also, some students may feel it inappropriate to give themselves high marks, or to write positive comments about their own work.

While it is highly likely that cultural factors have a role play in the determining the potential of classroom negotiation, it is possible, however, to overstate the culture specific nature of student reaction. Just as it may be inappropriate to assert that shared decision making is feasible in *any* educational context, it may

also be inappropriate to assume from the outset that it is not feasible in certain cultural settings. This is a matter for teachers who are most familiar with a particular context, and more experiments in a range of cultural contexts of the kind described in this book need to be undertaken rather than rely on speculation or opinion. As the accounts provided in this volume suggest, both the potential for successful implementation and the existence of student or teacher resistance to negotiated work is widely evident across a range of cultural settings. There appears to be little evidence that negotiation is 'more appropriate' in some cultures or 'unsuitable' for other cultures. Rather, the requirement to take into account the specific backgrounds of teachers and learners is common to all teaching-learning settings, and the development of negotiated work in the classroom must always depart from that point.

In this respect, Norris and Spencer provide a revealing perspective on the nature of cultural difference - and indeed whether we look for difference or similarity and take that as the point of departure.

In general, Indonesian philosophy is based on creating a sense of unity from diversity, harmony, cooperation, self-reliance and national esteem. ... We, the course organisers, had been trained and educated in the British primary school philosophy of the 1970's - that of small group activities, learner choice of activity, freedom of movement throughout the class, individual help and class project work which was displayed, published or recorded in some way. Although the Indonesian teachers and ourselves thus came from different ideological and pedagogic

backgrounds, underlying both sets of value systems were strong similarities. These were the importance of creating self-esteem and self-reliance, cooperation, freedom of choice and mutual respect of the individual.

Once this “common ground”, as they term it, had been identified and the significance of learning from each other in the classroom group had been established through a “skills swap” activity, Norris and Spencer found a reference point from which negotiated work could then successfully depart. Much then, would seem to depend on *how* negotiated work is approached, rather than on a general factor of appropriacy or otherwise to specific cultural contexts.

### **Guidelines for practice**

So far we have suggested a number of contextual factors which may affect the extent to which negotiation is possible or likely to succeed. Factors such as the existence of external curriculum plans, constraints on time, class size and diversity of student abilities, the prior experiences of teachers and learners and the wider cultural context background may all have a bearing on the potential of shared decision-making. While it is clear that these factors need to be borne in mind when introducing negotiation, the experiences described in this volume also show that a key aspect is a desire to identify what is possible. It appears that teachers’ initial willingness to share classroom decisions and their persistence in trying different ways of engaging student involvement in

decision-making may be the decisive factor in any teaching context.

Sometimes we may be more held back by our own imagination or assumptions than by any other constraints. The aim of this section, therefore, is to draw from the accounts provided in this book and set out some practical guidelines for implementing negotiation and to provide a framework to guide teachers' experimentation.

### *Some initial considerations*

Meaningful negotiation implies the genuine sharing of decisions, but this decision-making needs to be based on *informed* choices, that is, to be about something with which teachers and learners are familiar. Informed choice requires all participants in negotiation to have previous experience of the course aspects to be negotiated (such as types of tasks or content which are relevant to their purposes in learning) and the opportunity to evaluate this prior experience.

A second significant consideration is something to which we have already referred - the participants' capacity to effectively engage in classroom negotiation and their knowledge of what this may entail. In most situations, classroom negotiation, although drawing on experiences of negotiation in our day to day lives, may be unfamiliar to students, as the accounts in this collection have shown.

Given these considerations, it may be fruitful initially to think of either a selective focus for negotiation, where only a particular aspect of the curriculum is negotiated - such as assessment or allocation of time - or a gradualist approach, where negotiation gradually encompasses deeper levels of curriculum

decisions - such as moving from the negotiation how a task will be done to negotiation of which tasks in future will be selected. Working towards the implementation of a Process Syllabus in this way is not incompatible with the purposes and spirit of negotiated work but a practical means by which experience in classroom negotiation may be gained for both the teacher and the students.

The teachers' accounts in this book provide detailed experience of successes and difficulties in negotiated work. Most accounts, in fact, document either a selective or gradualist approach to negotiated work and can therefore provide many lessons for us in implementing negotiation in other contexts. Much can therefore be gained by reviewing the experiences of each writer and examining how they approached negotiation. In order to do this, however, it is necessary first to retrace some of the ideas which we discussed in Chapter 1.

### *A framework for Process Syllabuses*

At this point, it is useful to return to the framework for Process Syllabuses, in order to identify the range of curriculum decisions which may be open to negotiation in any particular context and to identify examples in each of the teacher accounts provided in this book.

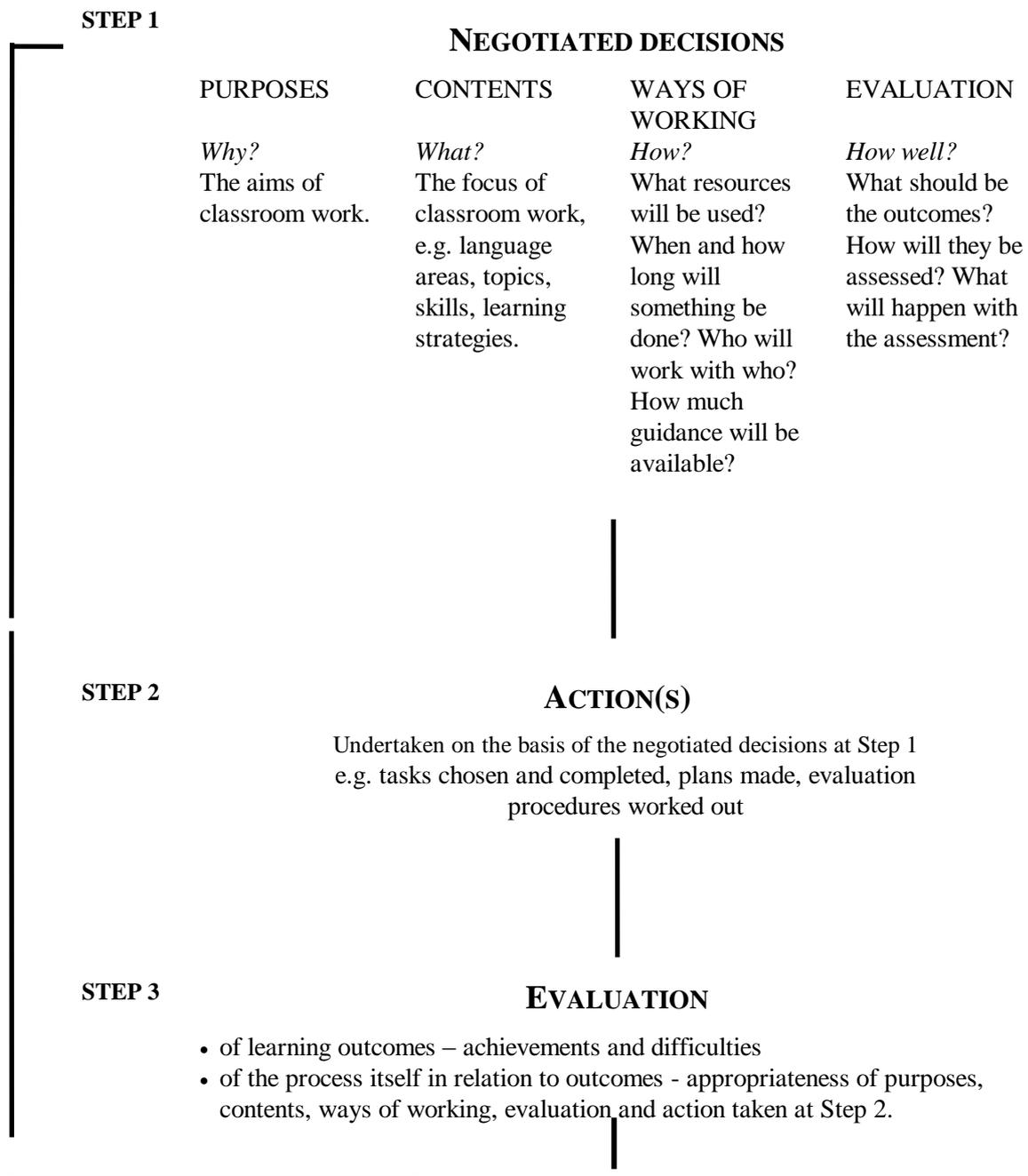
In practical terms, in order for any educational undertaking to become possible, decisions will need to be made in relation to a number of key areas.

These are:

- the **purposes** of language learning (*Why*);

- the **contents** or subject matter which learners will work upon (*What*);
- **ways of working** in the classroom (*How*);
- means of **evaluation** of the efficiency and quality of work and its outcomes (*How well*).

Specific instances of negotiated classroom work can therefore be conceived of as addressing some or all of these decision areas. The Negotiation Cycle in Figure 18.1 (discussed in Chapter 1) shows how each area may be the starting point for a cyclical sequence which can inform future decision-making. At Step 1, teacher and students focus on a decision area and jointly make decisions. These may for example be decisions about tasks they will do or topics they will focus on, or when and how they will be assessed. At Step 2, decisions are acted upon and become the actual experience of the students. At Step 3, the outcomes of these actions are evaluated. This final step is thus of central importance as it is at that point that decisions previously taken and implemented can be reviewed as a means of shaping future action through *informed* choice - thereby initiating the cycle once again.



*Figure 18.1: The Negotiation Cycle*

Evaluation at Step 3 may relate to two aspects: *what* (learning achievements, weaknesses and strengths); and *how* (the process followed, types of tasks, modes of behaviour and so on). Thus, the Negotiation Cycle may relate to evaluation of both attained language abilities and the classroom experience itself. Table 18.1 summarises some example areas which each kind of evaluation may involve. Logically, of course, each kind of evaluation can be subject to evaluation from the alternative perspective - evaluation of *what* the students have learned, for example, may be subject to discussion over the *how* this evaluation was carried out.

Focus of evaluation	Example areas
<p><b>What</b>            What has been achieved?            What has not been achieved? What has been difficult?            What should be the next point of focus?</p>	<p>knowledge of language forms (such as grammar, spelling, pronunciation, intonation) and language use (such as language functions, appropriacy, discourse structures, genre); vocabulary; abilities in speaking, reading, writing, listening; communication strategies; study and reference skills; cultural awareness</p>
<p><b>How</b>            How was the process carried out?            Was it appropriate/ effective/ useful?            How might it be improved?</p>	<p>who does what when: task types used; classroom participation; effectiveness of groupwork; modes of evaluating learning; timetabling; how feedback is given; how and what guidance is given; allocation of time; homework; sequence of tasks; rights and responsibilities of classroom participants; the decision-making process itself.</p>

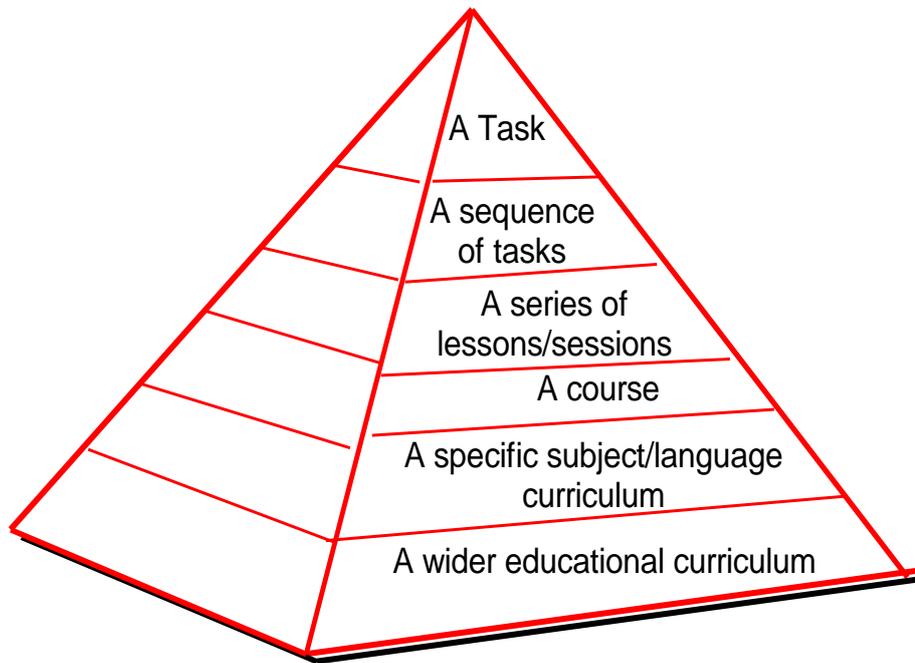
*Table 18.1 Examples areas for the evaluation step in the Negotiation Cycle*

In reality, such explicit evaluation is unlikely to take place after every decision is implemented - this would be a cumbersome and most likely extremely tedious. Rather, evaluation may take places at specific moments - for example at the mid-point in a course, after a large scale activity or the end of a 'block' of work. Evaluation may also not be a separate step but in practice be built

directly into the decision-making in Step 1 - various alternatives being rejected or selected based on previous experience.

Any decisions that are taken will manifest themselves in the actions taken in the classroom. These may range from the immediate, moment-by-moment decisions made while learners are engaged in a task (e.g. whether they are to work in groups or alone), to the more long term planning of a language course (e.g. what will be the focus of each lessons), and through to the planning of the wider educational curriculum (e.g. links between foreign language teaching/learning and other subject areas.) To capture these different levels, the Curriculum Pyramid in Figure 18.2 shows an increasing breadth of decisions (see also Chapter 1).

At the top of the pyramid we have a *task* - how and on what students will be working at any particular moment in the class. Below that, the levels of *a sequence of tasks*, *a series of lessons*, and *a course* cover increasing frames of time over which more decisions and planning will be relevant. A specific subject/language curriculum relates to a wider level of planning in which aims, content, working procedures and evaluation will be set out which the course is to address. The 'deepest' level of the pyramid, the wider educational curriculum, refers to the links that the course is to have to other educational subject areas and aims.



*Figure 18.2 The Curriculum Pyramid: Levels of Focus for the Negotiation Cycle*

Together, the Negotiation Cycle and the Curriculum Pyramid allow us to conceptualise a Process Syllabus as negotiation at specific levels of curriculum planning. Figure 18.3 (see Chapter 1 for further detail) illustrates this, with the negotiation cycle being potentially applied to a particular decision area (purposes, contents, ways of working, evaluation) at each of the different levels in the pyramid.

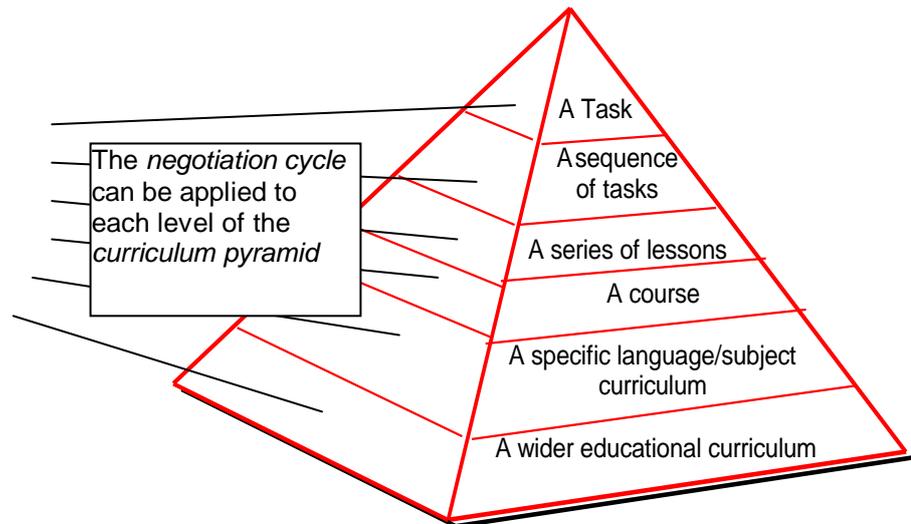


Figure 18.3 A Process Syllabus

If we see a Process Syllabus as the application of a negotiation cycle at particular levels of a curriculum pyramid, this makes possible a working perspective on where negotiation can potentially be introduced in practice. Any teaching situation will inevitably imply constraints and these can be located in the pyramid. In situations where externally determined syllabus plans exist, for example, this may imply that the deeper levels of the pyramid - a specific language curriculum and a wider educational curriculum - are simply not available for classroom negotiation. In other cases, particular teaching/learning materials may have already been specified, and perhaps even the pace by which teachers are to cover the materials with their classes. Clearly, situations such as these do narrow the possibilities for negotiation, but Figure 18.3 helpfully indicates that much may still be available for classroom decision-making by applying the negotiation cycle at the higher levels of the pyramid.

The diagram also shows how a Process Syllabus itself is not incompatible with either externally determined decisions or external evaluation. Neither is it incompatible with decisions or proposals made by the teacher - the teacher is a leading participant in the negotiation. The implementation of a Process Syllabus is never, in other words, an “all or nothing” situation. In any teaching situation, predetermined decisions can always form a crucial point of reference for future negotiation and guide the areas around which shared decision-making at higher levels of the Curriculum Pyramid can take place (as Serrano-Sampedro argues).

The negotiation cycle and the curriculum pyramid together also indicate how a gradualist or selective focus for negotiation may be introduced, particularly where factors such as those we outlined earlier (an external curriculum, time constraints, class size, etc) apparently limit the potential for negotiated work. Making negotiation available at the higher levels of the pyramid (for example at the level of how students are to work on a chosen task) can offer initial experience for both teachers and students in managing shared decision-making, without jeopardising the structure of the course as a whole. It would then be possible, as circumstances permit, to move to progressively deeper levels of the pyramid as experience is gained and *informed* decisions can be made. Table 18.2 summarises some example areas of decision-making that may be available for negotiation at each level.

Levels in the “curriculum pyramid”	Decision areas for the negotiation cycle
1 The task	Who is to work with whom? In pairs, groups, or alone? For how long? What is to be judged as successful? How shall the task be corrected/monitored? Who shall correct/monitor it? What guidance/support will be available?
2 A sequence of tasks	Which tasks will be done? In what order? Which tasks (if any) will be omitted? Should tasks be adapted in any way?
3 A series of lessons/sessions	In what order will tasks, activities and topics be covered? Should certain tasks/activities/topics be omitted? Do any materials need to be adapted or supplemented?
4 A course	What additional tasks/contents/abilities will the course address? What instances of revision should be included? Which is the most appropriate set of materials for the specified purposes of the course?
5 A specific subject/language curriculum	What content areas should the course focus on? What areas of language knowledge? What specific content should be included? What topics? What abilities in reading, writing, listening or speaking should be developed?
6 A wider educational curriculum	What wider educational aims (such as the development of autonomy, critical thinking, and so on) should be addressed? What links should be made between other curriculum areas (such as science, nature, geography, and so on)?

*Table 18.2: Examples of decision areas at each level of the curriculum pyramid*

### ***Process syllabuses in practice: teacher accounts***

This brief review of a framework for Process Syllabuses and how a gradualist and selective focus might operate now allows us to locate each of the accounts presented in this book in terms of how they each variously illustrate negotiation at different levels in the curriculum pyramid and with respect to different decision areas. Table 18.3 provides an overview of each account.

**Part 1: In primary and secondary schools**

Chapter		Context	Level	Decision area
2	<i>Anne MacKay, Kaye Oates, Yvonne Haig</i>	Primary school, ESL in Australia	Specific language curriculum	Purposes Evaluation
3	<i>Kari Smith</i>	Secondary school students in Israel	Course	Evaluation
4	<i>Ramon Ribé</i>	Secondary school students in Spain	A series of lessons	Contents Ways of working
5	<i>Marianne Nikolov</i>	Primary school in Hungary	Specific language curriculum	Contents Ways of working Evaluation
6	<i>Pnina Linder</i>	Secondary school students in Israel	Specific language curriculum	Purposes Contents Ways of working Evaluation
7	<i>Isabel Serrano-Sampedro</i>	Secondary school in Spain	Specific language curriculum	Purposes Contents Ways of working Evaluation

**Part 2: In tertiary education**

8	<i>Stefaan Slembrouck</i>	University in Belgium	Specific language curriculum	Purposes Contents Ways of working
9	<i>Elaine Martyn</i>	School of Nursing in Pakistan	Specific language curriculum.	Purposes Contents
10	<i>Eddie Edmundson and Steve Fitzpatrick</i>	Language school in Brazil	Specific language curriculum.	Purposes Contents
11	<i>Wendy Newstetter</i>	Institute of higher education in USA	Course.	Evaluation (of assignments)
12	<i>Margaret Sokolik</i>	University writing class in the USA	Course	Evaluation (of assignments)
13	<i>Lucy Norris and Susan Spencer.</i>	Pre-departure course in Indonesia.	Specific language curriculum	Contents Ways of working

**Part 3: In teacher education**

14	<i>Suzanne Irujo</i>	Teacher education in a university in the USA.	Specific subject curriculum	Contents
15	<i>Mike McCarthy and Mike Makosch</i>	Teachers on a 2 week residential seminar in the UK.	A series of lessons/sessions	Contents Ways of working
16	<i>Roz Ivani □</i>	MA students in a university in the UK	Wider educational curriculum	Purposes Contents Ways of working Evaluation
17	<i>Kate Wolfe-Quintero</i>	Teaching of Writing course, university in the USA	Specific subject curriculum	Contents Ways of working Evaluation

Table 18.4 : Overview of negotiation in the teachers' accounts

As the table shows, the chapters provide accounts of negotiated work at a variety of different levels in the Curriculum Pyramid. Two chapters (4 and 15) provide accounts at the level of *a series of lessons or sessions*, within a course where wider decisions concerning contents and ways of working have been previously determined. By implication, each of these accounts will also cover negotiation at the levels of *a task* and *a sequence of tasks*. Three chapters (3, 11, 12) provide accounts at the level of *a course*, where the specifications of the language curriculum has been previously determined, while a further nine chapters (2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14) address the specification of the subject curriculum itself. One account (16) details work at the deepest level in the curriculum pyramid in which the wider educational aims and nature of a course are negotiated, as well decisions at the higher levels of the pyramid.

While the accounts each focus on a particular level of decision making, many are also selective with the range of decision areas available. Some accounts refer to one or two decision areas (such as evaluation or selection of contents), while other accounts cover all four of the decisions areas: identification of purposes, contents, ways of working and evaluation.

Most of the accounts appear to document largely successful experiences in classroom negotiation, whilst noting contextual constraints and difficulties as we discussed earlier in this chapter. Each of the accounts can therefore provide us with practical guidance in applying a Process Syllabus in other

teaching contexts. We may also, however, learn much from accounts which document problematic instances of negotiation. Slembrouck's account in Chapter 8, for example, describes a troubled experience of introducing negotiation in the context of a university language course in Belgium. Erratic student attendance, decision-making dominated by one or two vocal students and a sense of distrust as to the "real" motivation for classroom decision-making all conspired to produce unsatisfactory results for both the teacher and the students such that the course design was abandoned in subsequent years.

What went wrong? Slembrouck himself provides a detailed analysis of the institutional culture which appeared to work against the spirit of negotiated work - a "cramming" culture, characterised by exams and learned classroom behaviour that effectively silences students and encourages them to take on a passive role in their learning. The result was that students appeared to look for ways to cope with the new challenge to negotiate so that it was not too demanding a change from how they had previously been expected to work. As Slembrouck says:

My suspicion is that they did not interpret negotiation as a device for transforming classroom culture and practice, but looked at it more as a way of adjusting classroom activities to what they felt like doing at a particular moment.

He ends with a question which appears to encapsulate a major challenge for procedural negotiation in the classroom:

one rather urgent question which we need to address is: What is required in a negotiated syllabus to avoid the trap of reinforcing the existing speech/silence regime and, with it, students' preconceived views of classroom behaviour?

Yet, the negative experience which Slembrouck documents does not seem to be evident in most of the other accounts in this book. His account is therefore particularly valuable in alerting us to potential difficulties. There were undoubtedly many different factors at work here but one of the key problems may have been the scope of negotiation itself. As the summary table shows, the focus of negotiation covered the decisions areas of purposes, contents and ways of working but, significantly, did not address the area which Slembrouck describes as a key characteristic of the educational culture: evaluation. In the institutional context in which the course was conducted, the key area of evaluation appeared to be predetermined and thus non-negotiable. In this respect, a clear account at the start of the course of the requirements of the final examination may have helped to delineate for students the limits of negotiation and how they may have influenced the structure of the course so that it more accurately addressed their own purposes in taking the course, these limits then being raised for discussion.

An alternative explanation may, however, be that the scope of negotiation went too far, too quickly for those particular students and that such negotiation that was introduced was so very different from what the students had previously been used to that the “leap” they were required to make was too great. In this case a gradual or selective approach to the introduction of negotiation may have produced different results and enabled over time the development of mutual trust, confidence and responsibility upon which negotiated work depends. In this respect, the account by Irujo in Chapter 14 shows how the approach to negotiation must be tuned to the background and expectation of the students.

Forced by circumstances to abandon her plan for a course in teacher education due to its lack of relevance to the enrolled students, Irujo initially found the experience of negotiating course contents a highly successful one. When she tried to repeat the experience a year later, however, with a different intake of students, problems began to emerge:

It soon became apparent, however, that many of my international students were uncomfortable with the results of the negotiation process. Several of them wanted me to tell them what to read and which assignments to do. One wanted a list of readings for all the topics that would have been on the syllabus if we had not negotiated the content. They all resisted having to give themselves grades.

The following year more problems emerged when she provided a list of potential topics for student selection:

This procedure did not work well. Almost everybody wanted to cover everything, they all agreed with my suggestions for assignments and activities, and they wanted to do all of the options that were listed. ...The syllabus that emerged was almost exactly the same as one I would have developed myself, and there were complaints that the negotiation process took too long and was a waste of time.

The lessons that Irujo drew from these years of experimentation have lead her to develop an approach which has as its starting point the expectations and previous experiences of the students. In this, she provides a course plan but stresses to the students that this is a proposal, a “first draft” which can be reworked and refined, much as pieces of written work can be in a process writing approach. The outcome was a much more positive experience for all concerned:

The negotiation process that year was easier than it had ever been. Students understood immediately the concept of the syllabus as a draft that could be changed as we worked with it. ...At the end of the third class, it was obvious to me that we needed more time to discuss the teaching of oral skills, and the students agreed. I asked them to decide what other topic to take the time from, and a short negotiation produced a decision to eliminate the “games and activities” topic, incorporating

part of that into a second class on teaching oral skills. As we went along, they began to take ownership of the course content.

Irujo's conclusion is that this approach to syllabus negotiation is more suited to the context in which she works and meets the expectations of a range of students, allowing her to fulfil her "multiple roles of facilitator, expert, and gatekeeper with less tension and fewer contradictions." Her account is useful in showing how a gradualist approach may work in practice, and how it allows for the possibility of developing negotiated work such that it takes as a point of departure the previous experiences of the students.

### *Tools for Process Syllabuses*

As we argued earlier, the expression of student views or 'learner voice' as we have termed it, lies at the heart of a Process Syllabus, particularly in the decision and evaluation stages. The identification of ways of drawing out these views is thus of prime importance in the development of Process Syllabuses. Therefore each of the accounts presented in this book therefore is particularly helpfully in detailing the various resources used in enabling shared decision-making to occur. Since the very purpose of a Process Syllabus is to draw out the unique contributions, wants, needs and preferred ways of learning of students, it is unrealistic to think that 'off the shelf' resources are likely to be relevant to individual students or groups of students. Nevertheless, each of the accounts gives examples which may be adaptable to other situations. Table 18.5

provides an overview of the uses of these resources and the chapter in this book where further details may be found.

<p><b>Establishing purposes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an initial questionnaire to students</li> <li>• teacher draft proposals for syllabus items</li> <li>• weekly planning of sessions</li> <li>• Negotiation with stakeholders</li> <li>• pictures to identify learning preferences and priorities</li> <li>• eliciting the students' personal syllabus to develop a group syllabus</li> </ul>	<p>Linder, Irujo Slembrouck, Irujo, Wolfe-Quintero Slembrouck, Norris and Spencer Martyn Edmundson and Fitzpatrick Ivani □</p>
<p><b>Decisions concerning contents and ways of working</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discussion to decide who should do what</li> <li>• discussion to establish alternative ways of working through a unit</li> <li>• discussion to establish 'rules' for the conduct of a task</li> <li>• discussion to establish ways to revise material previously covered</li> <li>• a learning plan developed jointly by a teacher and learners</li> <li>• learner-designed activities</li> <li>• syllabus plans presented as a "first draft"</li> </ul>	<p>Nikolov, Ribé, Ivani □, McCarthy and Makosch Linder Linder Linder Serrano-Sampedro Serrano-Sampedro, Norris and Spencer Irujo</p>
<p><b>Evaluation of outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom record sheets, for teacher and student to record achievements. Reports to stakeholders parents)</li> <li>• Brainstorming what has been learned, identifying a focus for assessment, voting to choose a scale of assessment, agreed assessments between teacher and student..</li> <li>• a self-assessment questionnaire for negotiated grading</li> <li>• a self-assessment procedure</li> <li>• student determined focus of assessment</li> <li>• establishing criteria for grading and agreeing grades</li> <li>• retrospective accounts of work covered</li> <li>• journals for student evaluation of process</li> <li>• learner reflection charts</li> <li>• one-to-one consultations</li> </ul>	<p>MacKay Smith Linder, Ribé Nikolov Newstetter, Ivani □ Sokolik, Ivani □ Edmundson and Fitzpatrick, Irujo Ribé, Serrano-Sampedro, Wolfe-Quintero, Norris and Spencer Edmundson and Fitzpatrick Norris and Spencer</p>

*Table 18.5 Examples of devices used in Process Syllabuses.*

## Conclusion

The purpose of this book has *not* been to argue that classroom decision-making based upon negotiation between teachers and students should replace teacher decision-making. Teachers are at the very heart of the process and, as the

accounts have shown, a teacher's recognition of the potentials of shared decision-making and a teacher's will to initiate it in the classroom are the two primary conditions for its likely benefit to a student's language learning experience. Nor is procedural negotiation an 'approach' or a particular 'method' which can be claimed to directly enhance the learning of a language. It is hard enough to prove that any aspect of language pedagogy in the classroom has a direct effect upon a student's learning. The introduction of negotiated decision-making and the gradual development of particular process syllabuses rather serve to complement and enrich the teacher's difficult task of enabling language learning. While incorporating heightened learner responsibility in classroom work, the introduction of process syllabuses leads to the sharing of the task with those whom it most affects.

This is not to ignore the fact that that the application of a Process Syllabus is a challenging and sometimes difficult undertaking for teachers and students. There is no doubt that further practical experimentation is much needed in this area in order to widen our understanding of the nature of classroom negotiation. It is from detailed accounts of negotiated work such as those provided in this book that we can learn more about the complex nature of procedural negotiation, the influence of contextual factors and successful ways of engaging learners in responsible decisions about their work. To contribute to further experimentation, the aim of this chapter has been to offer some practical guidelines for initiating negotiation with students and to support teacher

development of process syllabuses that evolve from their own working situations. For teachers and learners new to the practicalities of negotiated work, we have also aimed to show that a selective focus for negotiation and a gradual increase in its scope is a feasible venture, as is more wide-ranging negotiation in appropriate circumstances.

As the chapters in this book have shown, the potential for negotiated classroom work seems considerable. It appears that the implementation of procedural negotiation can be a highly practical alternative to the direct, non-negotiated implementation of a pre-planned syllabus or curriculum. - indeed, at times and in certain circumstances, the only viable course of action - which may offer considerable gains in terms of enhanced learning outcomes. The range of types of institutions, class sizes, student ages, levels of proficiency in the foreign language and cultural backgrounds presented in the accounts in this book also suggest that the potential for negotiated decision-making can be realised across a wide range of teaching-learning contexts. As such, Process Syllabuses and shared classroom decision-making represent one of the most important practical and theoretical developments in language teaching in recent years.