



## Example 10: Social Sciences, Levels 2-3 - School election

FROM THE ONLINE RESOURCE *INCLUSIVE PRACTICE AND THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM*

This example shows how a year 3-6 syndicate at a multicultural, urban primary school designed and carried out a 10-week unit focused on civics education, which involved learning about and participating in a democratic process. A school election provided a rich context for teaching and learning at multiple levels of the curriculum and for developing literacy skills to meet the demands of reading and writing in the social sciences. Teachers focused on specific adaptations and differentiations to ensure students with additional learning needs participated and learned alongside their peers.

### Task

The unit drew on tasks in *Your Voice, Your Choice: Have Your Say*, a teaching resource provided by the Electoral Commission. The students in Year 5 and 6 classes were divided into political parties and the Year 3 and 4 students were the 'voting public'. Over the term, each party elected a leader and developed their 'policies' for improving lunchtimes at the school, using a \$100 budget. The parties developed election campaigns and created a range of texts for communicating their ideas to the voters. The unit culminated in an election day. Ballot papers were provided, and a polling booth was set up in the school hall. By casting a vote for one of the parties, students had their say on decisions that would improve lunchtimes at the school.



© ChameleonsEye/Shutterstock.com

### New Zealand Curriculum achievement objectives

#### Level 1

- Understand that people have different roles and responsibilities as part of their participation in groups.

#### Level 2

- Understand how people make choices to meet their needs and wants.

#### Level 3

- Understand how groups make and implement rules and laws.
- Understand how people make decisions about access to and use of resources.

#### Level 4

- Understand different aspects of leadership and the consequences these can have (simplified version).
- Understand how people participate individually and collectively in response to community challenges.

## Opportunities to use and develop key competencies

Students were *thinking* as they made sense of information, experiences, and ideas related to an election in order to develop their understanding of the process and make decisions. The election context helped develop their intellectual curiosity and problem solving as they asked questions and challenged assumptions and perceptions. Students were *relating to others* as they listened actively to recognise different points of view and share ideas. They had opportunities to take on different roles and increase their awareness of how their words and actions affect others. The students developed collaborative and leadership skills as they *participated and contributed* to the school election.

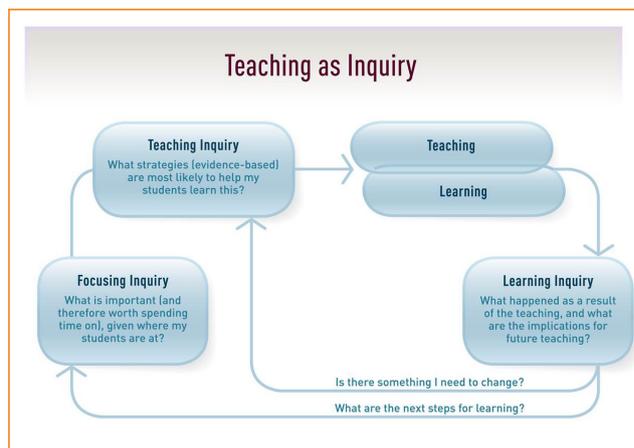
## Syndicate description

This task was undertaken across a syndicate that covers years 3–6 and is highly diverse, with 22 cultures including Māori, Samoan, Indian, Somalian, Chinese, and Filipino. The teachers in the syndicate shared responsibility for meeting the special needs of particular students.

- **Brigitte** (year 4) has a learning disability. She can participate in most learning tasks, but requires frequent support to stay on task; otherwise she drifts into her own world of singing or reciting favourite stories. Brigitte is reading at reading year level 2 and is challenged with comprehension. She is generally positive and cheerful, though can become anxious if familiar routines or activities are changed. Brigitte's teacher is Mr Fareh. A Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour (RTL) has provided strategies for supporting Brigitte to cope with change. Working with the RTL, Mr Fareh has also identified individual literacy goals for her: to talk about books she has read and make meaning from them, and to write and shape ideas in her own words.
- **Elliot** (year 5) has ASD. To communicate, he uses some simple sentences and longer learned scripts that are appropriate to the activity he is doing. Elliot uses 'self talk' to help stay calm and on task. Routine, repetition, and consistency are extremely important to reduce his anxiety. He is reading at reading year level 2. Elliot's teacher is Mrs Jebb. Elliot receives support through ORS, which includes teacher's aide time and specialist services from the local Ministry of Education office. An occupational therapist has worked with Mrs Jebb and provided a range of strategies to meet Elliot's sensory processing needs. He has an individual education plan (IEP); his priority learning goal is to manage his sensory processing needs, identifying when he needs to take a break.
- **Charles** (year 5) is a gifted and talented student with ASD. He is highly interested in alternative theories of evolution and science fiction and is constantly trying to work out how society and rules work. Charles has difficulties interacting socially with other children. Many aspects of school life make him feel anxious, such as new learning activities and tasks that involve choice and ambiguity. Sometimes when very anxious, Charles responds by shouting, throwing things, and hitting. To get some 'down time', Charles takes regular breaks from the classroom. The RTL has supported Charles's teacher, Mrs Jebb, to manage these breaks by setting a time limit and negotiating with Charles what he does during this time. This has been documented in a Collaborative Action Plan.
- **Amira** (year 6) has recently come from Syria and began the school year with no English. She is shy and has taken several months to feel comfortable with others in the class and to start to build friendships. Her teacher is Mr Melvin. Amira takes part in daily oral language lessons that include other children throughout the school and that are run by the ESOL teacher. She has also spent time in the 'Writing Club', which has helped unpack writing tasks that are set in the classroom. Amira's priority learning goals are to speak confidently and fluently, leading to initiating speech in class, and to increase her vocabulary.

## Teaching as inquiry

The idea to conduct a school-based election was ignited by the New Zealand elections taking place at the time and the ideas in the educational resource *Your Voice, Your Choice*. This unit was developed across four classes. Two classes were the political parties and two were the public who voted. The political parties focused on how they would persuade and influence the other classes and what information they would need to gather and produce to do this. The 'public' classes focused on the ways in which they were persuaded and influenced by text and visual representations in the election campaign.



The learning activities were designed to promote students' critical thinking and their knowledge of citizens' rights and responsibilities to participate in decision-making. Students also learned about past events as they researched and shared information about New Zealand political personalities and leaders and discussed the impact they had had on New Zealand. This was a key element that teachers differentiated across literacy levels, by selecting historical figures and information about them to match the interest and maturity of their students. This unit of work was integrated into the literacy programme across all classes; students read texts related to the election topic, and they used a range of oral and writing skills to communicate their understanding or persuade others of their policies.

The teachers designed a range of activities that allowed the students to experience and understand the democratic process. The culmination of these activities was 'voting day'.

This example focuses on two aspects of this 10-week unit: the literacy tasks associated with the context and the day of the election. The example shows how tasks were adapted and differentiated to ensure students with additional learning needs participated and learned alongside their peers.



Read more about how [shared planning](#) can support effective teaching and learning for students with additional learning needs.

### Focusing inquiry

*What was important (and therefore worth spending time on), given where the students were at?*

Earlier in the year, teachers had identified that their senior students had limited ability to work collaboratively and to provide leadership that contributes to the well-being of others. They had targeted these areas at camp, and the election provided an opportunity to further develop collaboration and leadership.

During the initial planning stage, the teachers suggested activities based on their knowledge of the students in their classes. They identified students' strengths and weaknesses in relation to the social sciences achievement objectives and planned the unit accordingly. Because the students in the syndicate included several with ASD and a number of English language learners, they focused on specific strategies to help the students understand the concepts involved in an election. The teachers emphasised learning activities that were active and participatory as they knew the most powerful vehicle for embedding learning is experience. They collaborated with the learning support coordinator (LSC) to provide a high level of predictability and structured routines to support the students with ASD to participate.

The teachers knew the literacy demands of this topic would be high, so they employed specific strategies to enable the students to understand the necessary concepts. From observations, running records, writing samples, and e-asTTle, they knew that reading and writing year levels within the syndicate ranged from level 1 to 8. They ensured there was a range of visual and written tasks that could be adapted to suit this range.

## Teaching inquiry

*What teaching strategies (evidence-based) helped the students learn?*

### Personalising the context and differentiating the task

- Each class researched and shared biographies of New Zealand politicians and leaders appropriate to the literacy levels of the students. They discussed the impact these figures had had on New Zealand. The biographies also became a context for literacy learning as students navigated the structures, language, and literary features of biographical texts in hard copy and online.
- Ms Laidlaw wanted to make the task as concrete as possible for her year 3 class. She decided to use well-known leaders on New Zealand bank notes.
- The LSC and Mr Fareh worked together to differentiate the biographies task for Brigitte. They developed a simple writing frame to help her understand the concept of biographies and to write one. To keep the task concrete and relevant for Brigitte, the teacher suggested she create a biography about her mum, starting with the qualities she admired.
- The year 5 and 6 classes looked at historical New Zealand politicians, drawing on information from books and online resources. Elliot's teacher had him look at the bank-note leaders instead to make the context concrete for him.
- The students all identified qualities that they thought were important in a leader. They could then transfer this thinking to the leaders in the school election to help them make a choice.

## Learning inquiry

*What happened as a result of the teaching, and what were the implications for future teaching?*

Ms Laidlaw: *The students got really engaged in the people and the money! Because of the students' high interest, I decided to do some work on place value in maths, using money.*

Brigitte's mum: *Brigitte came home and asked all sorts of questions about me. She seems very motivated because she's writing a biography about me.*

Mrs Jebb: *Planning at multiple levels across the syndicate made it so easy to differentiate this task for Elliot. I used the activities and resources Ms Laidlaw had developed for her year 3 class. They were really visual, which worked well for Elliot. The other students were interested in what he was doing with the money, so there were some nice interactions happening with his peers too.*

Mr Melvin: *The students worked in groups to make mind map posters about leadership qualities. The ESOL teacher had done the same activity with Amira the week before. (They use mind maps a lot in the ESOL classes.) Amira was 'scribe' in her group - this is a big step up for her. I'm sure this was due to the pre-teaching and being familiar with mind maps.*

The teachers established the context through reading and research tasks.

Read more about ways to [differentiate the classroom programme](#).

**With your colleagues,** discuss: How can you select contexts that are relevant to **all** students and engage and connect with the real world?

## Teaching inquiry

*What teaching strategies (evidence-based) helped the students learn?*

### Allowing for multiple ways of understanding and responding

All classes participated in a range of literacy-related activities to increase students' understanding of the election issues and the topic:

- Two classes produced promotional videos about their political party. They posted them on the school's YouTube channel so the 'public' classes could watch them several times and discuss them.
- Each political party created a campaign poster and pamphlet to communicate their main ideas, which the 'public' then read and responded to.
- To ensure that students in the 'public' classes understood what each party was promising, they were asked to record questions they wanted to ask each candidate in a Q&A forum.
- Brigitte's teacher supported her to write questions using a writing frame with these starters:
  - I would like to know ...
  - How will you ...
  - Why are you ...
- In the forum, candidates answered the questions the 'public' classes had written. Two local politicians also attended the forum to talk to the students and answer their questions about politics in New Zealand.

## Learning inquiry

*What happened as a result of the teaching, and what were the implications for future teaching?*

Mr Fareh: *Brigitte responded well to the visual nature of this task – the videos really engaged her.*

Mrs Jebb: *I showed the class some commercial posters that use visuals to represent ideas. Then I had the teacher's aide show the class how to search for images on Google. The speech-language therapist had suggested that I incorporate more visual information in my classroom and teaching to support Elliot. I noticed he was much more engaged in this activity and I think it was due to it being so visual. It worked really well because all the students were using visual information.*

Ms Laidlaw: *Having the posters to refer to really helped the year 3 and 4 students to come up with questions before the forum.*

Mr Fareh: *Reading the posters and thinking of questions to find out more information were challenging for Brigitte. With the support of a writing frame she could write some simple questions that showed she was making meaning from the posters, which relates to her identified learning goal for literacy.*

Mr Melvin: *Students were highly motivated and interested in asking questions, sharing opinions, and being actively involved in the process. It's good to consider what's relevant to our students and what topics will encourage them to make sense of the world.*

Mrs Jebb: *Charles had written a very interesting question about world government (a concept he learned about from science fiction). During the forum, he got too anxious to ask the question, so afterwards I suggested he message the question to one of the politicians via their Facebook page, and she responded.*

The teachers integrated a range of literacy tasks in the activities leading up to the election.

**With your colleagues,** discuss:

What opportunities can you provide so that there are multiple ways in which students can respond?



## Teaching inquiry

*What teaching strategies (evidence-based) helped the students learn?*

### Using oral and visual language to support understanding

Throughout the topic, there was strong use of visual and oral language so all students could be involved in learning.

- Copies of the posters were put in each class and around the school to reinforce what each party was promising. Some year 6 students used the Comic Life webtool to make a poster with a photo of each candidate and a symbol for one of the promises they were making beside them. Elliot accessed the poster on the computer and iPad in their class.
- As well as watching the speeches several times on YouTube, the candidates repeated them on election day in front of the whole syndicate to reinforce the main ideas and to support all students in their decision making.
- Before the students voted, the teachers verbally recapped on the process up to now and how everyone had a role. They reminded the students of what the result would contribute to.

### Using adaptations to support participation and learning

- On the day of the election, before the syndicate voted, two teachers' aides showed Elliot, Charles, and Brigitte the 'polling station'. Elliot practised the voting process with a senior buddy – they lined up, collected a form, and walked to the voting booth. Charles and Brigitte watched and a teachers' aide explained the sequence to them.

## Learning inquiry

*What happened as a result of the teaching, and what were the implications for future teaching?*

*Amira: I like the speeches of the party leaders. I can choose a party.*

*Mr Melvin: Students listened and watched intently during the speeches. The difference between the recorded speeches and the ones on election day was very noticeable – the 'party leaders' gave the speeches with so much feeling on election day!*

*Mr Fareh: Many students later discussed and recorded in their reflection what they were thinking and feeling as the time came closer. The majority understood the implication of their one vote.*

*They knew the political parties needed them to vote, and they could explain that their say would make a difference in their school community.*

*Mrs Jebb: The preparation and rehearsal really helped Charles. It reminded me to be aware of what triggers his anxiety and to manage this when possible.*

*Ms Laidlaw: We realised in the lead-up that election day would be a totally new and possibly stressful experience for some of our students, particularly those with ASD. Doing a practice prepared these students and reduced their anxiety. Sometimes it's necessary to remove the environmental stress so that it's not a barrier that stops students being part of the experience.*

Teachers supported students' use of oral and visual language to communicate their key messages.

### With your colleagues,

discuss:  
How can you use oral and visual language to scaffold new learning?



Peer support and simple visual representations were used to support some students' participation and learning.

<b>Teaching inquiry</b> <i>What teaching strategies (evidence-based) helped the students learn?</i>	<b>Learning inquiry</b> <i>What happened as a result of the teaching, and what were the implications for future teaching?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When the classes were lining up to vote, Elliot queued with his buddy. Once they had their voting form, the buddy showed Elliot the e-poster of the candidates and their 'promises'. They were then ready to cast their vote.</li> </ul>	<p>Elliot's mum: <i>Elliot sometimes doesn't take part in whole-school activities because they are too overwhelming for him, so I was so excited to see the photo of him casting his vote with all the other kids. I've kept that photo on my phone. I talked about it with Elliott, and I'm going to use it when Elliott comes with me when I go to vote in the elections next week.</i></p>
<p><b>Assessing to recognise learning</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers formatively assessed students' teamwork and participation during the election and their thinking as expressed through discussions and questioning.</li> <li>They assessed students' literacy learning by reviewing the year 5 and 6 students' presentation skills in making posters and videos of the party policies and by looking at the written reflections of all students after the voting.</li> </ul>	<p>Mr Fareh: <i>This journey has been very powerful for our students. They were so serious as they went to vote and listened carefully to the speeches. They truly had a sense of the power of their vote and that it counts. They each had meaningful roles so they owned the process and outcome.</i></p> <p>Charles: <i>I liked that it was a secret who I voted for. I learnt that you can't always get the party you want to win. Everyone took voting seriously because their vote might have an impact on the school. I liked that I was able to vote because now I know what it feels like. I want to watch Mum and Dad on their election day.</i></p> <p>Charles's mum: <i>This was an excellent learning opportunity for Charles. He had a chance to practise making choices. He understood he needed to choose based on what was most important to him. It didn't cause anxiety for him because the purpose of the activity and follow-through of the result was clear.</i></p>

**With your colleagues,** discuss: How can you manage or remove barriers in order for **all** students to be part of the learning?

Teachers formatively assessed learning during the activity.

**With your colleagues,** discuss: How can you provide opportunities for **all** your students to 'experience' a topic (rather than just reading or hearing about it)?

## Next steps

Now that you have explored this example, work with colleagues to:

- consider the challenges and opportunities in relation to inclusion for *your* students
- decide on the next steps in your social sciences teaching to ensure *all* your students are participating, learning, and achieving
- plan for a future meeting to review the impact of your next steps and what *now* needs to happen.

## Recommended resources



Your Voice, Your Choice: Have your say can be found on the Electoral Commission website.