

Establishing Curriculum Acuerdos: Classroom Agreements for Democratizing Learning Processes

What are acuerdos?

Acuerdos, or **agreements**, were first introduced by Chicago educator, Cynthia Nambo, as a collective and democratic alternative to traditional “rule setting.” Instead of the person in authority creating “rules” that others must “follow,” the entire group develops their acuerdos that they promise to respect and implement together. These statements become powerful expectations meant to build a respectful and productive environment for everyone to thrive within, not a top-down mandate forced upon you and your peers.

What do we mean by “curriculum acuerdos”?

Using Nambo’s acuerdos as a starting point, **curriculum acuerdos** refers to our agreed upon statements related to the learning processes – especially for involving student voices in deciding what should be learned and how learning should take place. You’ll help establish acuerdos for yourself and all students in the class as well as for the educator(s).

Why should we draft curriculum acuerdos?

As you know too well, the adults (i.e., the teacher, textbook writers, Board of Education) usually set the curriculum you must learn. Sometimes this curriculum is interesting, worthwhile or beneficial – and sometimes it is irrelevant and useless in relation to real-world situations. Most of the time, students think the books, tests, and topics are..._____ (fill in the blank). Students are rarely asked what they want or feel they need to learn, how they learn best, and why they should learn about one topic over another. As a result of both situations described above, students are left in the dark and often know very little about curriculum development processes and choices.

While transferring more decision-making power into students’ hands, it is vital that guiding agreements are established so that everyone’s knowledge and experiences are valued, respected, and heard in an organized and logical manner. Sometimes the teacher may have “insider knowledge” about a curricular decision that may need to be shared – and sometimes a student may have strong opinions about a curricular topic or instructional approach that s/he must share. Acuerdos help to make these discussions and decisions more organized, collaborative, and productive so students get to help shape their own learning.

What are some important things to keep in mind to effectively draft and implement curriculum acuerdos?

- Keep the overall purpose in mind (e.g., to constructively involve students in curriculum decisions)
- Less is more – decide upon the most important & essential acuerdos that speak to your entire class (less than 10)
- Draft curriculum acuerdos for the teacher (e.g., the teacher will inform students of school or district mandates)
- Draft curriculum acuerdos for the students (e.g., students will express curricular opinions and offer viable solutions)
- Post the new acuerdos in a central classroom location – large enough for everyone to read them

What are the steps to creating strong curriculum acuerdos?

1. Bring everyone together – preferably in a circle.
2. Review this document and clarify the purpose of curriculum acuerdos.
3. Consider breaking into small groups (4 to 6 students) for steps 4 and 5 – coming back together at step 6.
4. Brainstorm problems, issues, sticking points, worries, etc. that people have regarding content, learning and assessments (curriculum) – keeping both students and the teacher in mind.
5. Address items in the brainstorm by crafting positive / pro-active statements saying what someone should do instead of negative / reactive statements saying what people should not do.
6. Present potential acuerdos to each other for discussion and merge similar acuerdos with each other.
7. Once a paired-down list is reached, seek consensus while making tweaks when necessary.
8. Agree to follow the new acuerdos – keeping them open for continual improvement.