



School of  
Education



## PARENT/CARER INFORMATION SHEET

### Negotiating the Essentials for Education in Democratic Societies (NEEDS)

Dear Parent/Carer,

Your child(ren) are participating in a Junior Cycle Short Course (SC) entitled “Negotiated Learning” in their school. The University of Limerick is leading a research project (NEEDS) to investigate the effects of this SC on student learning.

#### What is the study about?

Building on previous work on curriculum negotiation in Limerick schools, students will collaborate with their teachers to define a focus for their SC on an issue that really matters to them. NEEDS will examine the long-term effects of this SC with a particular focus on student and teacher voice and agency. Findings will be related to Democratic Education and Global Citizenship Education (GCE). This work is supported by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the National Association for Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD).

#### What will I have to do?

Over a period of 2 years, your child(ren) will be periodically invited to participate in a maximum of 6 40-minute focus group discussions with their classmates about their agency, the Competencies for Democratic Culture (CDC) and incidental learning after something interesting has happened in class. Agency focus groups will occur at the start of the 1st school term, and at the end of each subsequent term (5 total), CDC focus groups will occur only at the end of each year (2 total), and incidental focus groups will occur after a period of interesting learning (4 total). Of these 11 total focus groups, your child(ren) may be invited to take part in a maximum of 6 out of 11 discussions. These will take place during free periods or spare time with minimal disruption. Volunteers will be requested for the focus groups which will be audio-recorded, transcribed and pseudonymised before being analysed. Your child(ren) will also be asked to complete questionnaires that examine their wellbeing, self-direction, participation and voice. These activities will take place in September of 1<sup>st</sup> year and at end of each school term during your child(ren)’s Negotiated Learning Short Course class and will take no more than 30 minutes each time. We are seeking your consent for your child(ren) to be involved in some or all of these activities.

#### What are the benefits?

Previous findings have indicated that NEEDS can have a significant impact on student engagement, agency, self-direction and wellbeing through learning that really matters to them. The research will track these developments in students over time and allow their teachers to be responsive to their ideas, concerns, and voice. This reflective work will likely support the Principles and Key Skills of the Junior Cycle and prepare them for reforms at Senior Cycle based on competency frameworks. It will also allow your child(ren) to take a leadership role in demonstrating the practical realisation of authentic student voice and Democratic Education for other schools to learn from.

**What are the risks?**

Sensitive issues may arise during focus groups but NEEDS researchers are experienced in creating a supportive and respectful environment for discussion, something that will be supported by the ongoing work in their Short Course. Students will never be obliged to answer any question.

**What if I do not want my child(ren) to take part?**

Participation in this study is voluntary and you can choose for your child(ren) not to take part or to stop your child(ren)'s involvement in this study at any time, up until the time that data is analysed. We are seeking the consent of parents/guardians and your child(ren) to take part in the study. You have the right and opportunity to indicate your consent for your child(ren) to engage with any or all aspects of the data collection on the consent form provided. If you or your child(ren) do not wish to take part, your child(ren) will not be involved in data collection. This will not impact your child(ren)'s ability to engage in their Negotiated Learning SC class. Your child(ren) can continue to engage with normal classroom practices without engaging in the research.

**What happens to the information?**

The information that is collected will be kept private and stored securely and safely on the researchers' UL GDPR compliant password-protected OneDrive. Fictitious names will be used in any reports. The information that is gathered in the study will be kept for seven years, after which, it will be destroyed.

**Who else is taking part?**

Four schools will take part in NEEDS with at least one 1<sup>st</sup> Year class per school engaging in the Negotiated Learning SC. At the end of each school year, a NEEDS conference will be held at the University of Limerick, where students and teachers involved in this study will be able to share their learning and showcase their work.

**What if something goes wrong?**

The work of NEEDS is within the regular life of schools, coherent with the JC and routine professional practice. The full-time researcher will develop a strong relationship with your child(ren)'s school over time and in the unlikely event that something goes wrong, focus groups will be halted and only recommenced if and when students and/or staff are comfortable and satisfied to do so. NEEDS researchers will work closely with the school care team throughout this study in order to ensure the comfort and safety of all students engaging in NEEDS.

**What happens at the end of the study?**

Findings from this research will be included in a PhD thesis, and in peer-reviewed literature submissions and on the NEEDS website, ensuring the anonymity of all participants. All data gathered from the research will be stored securely and safely by the researchers in a locked filing cabinet or on a UL GDPR compliant password-protected OneDrive for a period of 7 years, after which it will be destroyed. Learning will be shared with teacher professional development organisations to enable other schools to negotiate SCs with their students.

**What if I have more questions or do not understand something?**

If you have any questions about the study you may contact either of the researchers. It is important that you feel that all your questions have been answered.

**What happens if I change my mind during the study?**

At any stage should you feel that you want your child(ren) to stop taking part in the study, you may withdraw your child(ren) from the study. You may withdraw your child(ren)'s data up to a period of 2 weeks after the data collection is completed, the point at which data analysis will begin. At that stage,

we may not be able to identify your child(ren)'s data from that of other participants. There are no consequences for changing your mind about your child(ren) being in the study.

**Contact name and number of Project Investigators.**

**Principal Investigator**

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**Other investigator**

Éabha Hughes, PhD Researcher, School of Education, University of Limerick, Tel (087) 151 7323

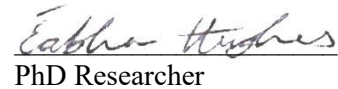
Email: [eabha.hughes@ul.ie](mailto:eabha.hughes@ul.ie)

Thank you for taking the time to read this. I would be grateful if you would consider participating in this study.

Yours sincerely,

  
Faculty Member

  
Faculty Member

  
PhD Researcher

***This research study has received Ethics approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (2024\_05\_07\_EHS).***

***If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact:***

***Chair Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee***

***EHS Faculty Office***

***University of Limerick***

***Tel (061) 234101***