Inquiry Approach

This component is intended to guide student inquiry and may be adapted to respond to student needs, interests, and new or emerging issues of global significance.

Inquiry is a complex process that grows out of constructivist pedagogy. It begins with the selection of a topic and the design of powerful questions that guide students as they select resources, gather and interpret information, build relevant knowledge and understanding, and share their findings and conclusions. Inquiry relies upon critical and divergent thinking. During the inquiry process, the role of a teacher shifts from covering content to becoming a guide and facilitator. Students are given the opportunity to generate their own questions, to set learning goals, to acquire and share enduring understandings, and to develop the decision-making skills that are part of active citizenship.

Areas of inquiry and issue selection

If students are to achieve a balance of breadth and depth in their understanding of global issues, they need to focus on a minimum of three areas of inquiry over the length of this course. The choice of issues within each area of inquiry is flexible. (Refer to the backgrounders on each area of inquiry for a broad list of suggestions of specific issues.)

Areas of Inquiry

- Media
- Consumerism
- Environment
- Poverty, Wealth, and Power
- Indigenous Peoples
- Oppression and Genocide
- Health and Biotechnology
- Gender Politics
- Social Justice and Human Rights
- Peace and Conflict

At the beginning of the course, teachers may choose to model the inquiry process through the collective study of one issue. Students will then conduct individual or group research in a minimum of three areas of inquiry. All students do not need to study the same issues but should have frequent opportunities to exchange new understandings and insights throughout the process. Each student or group of students will select one issue for their Take Action project.
Guidelines for Student Inquiry

- Cultivate an open, democratic learning environment, where students are encouraged to be curious and independent and to take risks.

- Use student-centred learning strategies such as brainstorming, discussion, concept maps, and graphic organizers, and observe student progress through classroom-based assessment techniques. These strategies will provide ongoing opportunities for teachers to assess prior knowledge, to deal with student misconceptions and difficulties, and to assess progress.

- Help students develop strong inquiry questions that move beyond the accumulation of facts to the investigation of issues, conceptual understanding, and the exploration of diverse perspectives.

- Encourage students to consult a variety of sources, to consider diverse perspectives, and to use critical-thinking skills in the selection and interpretation of information.

- Strive to address issues that have local, national, and global implications. Whatever the issue, provide opportunities for students to engage in learning at the local community level. Experiential understanding of issues through local engagement will help students understand broader, more abstract systemic global issues.

- Determine whether an inquiry will involve the whole class, small groups, or individual students. If the inquiry process is new to students, begin by having all students collaborate on one topic. This approach will allow teachers to model and guide the inquiry process. As well, students will learn from each other as they share their research, discuss their findings and conclusions, and are exposed to healthy dissent and diverse perspectives.

- Encourage students to think critically and engage in reflection throughout the learning process and to maintain a learning log or journal. This record could include conceptual maps, inquiry questions, information sources, reflections, interview notes, and details of their learning journey.

- Use multiple resources, including primary source material, and encourage academic rigour. Students should be exposed to multiple and contradictory viewpoints, and encouraged to seek their own position based on reliable information. Sources could include community members, specialists and academics, newspapers and journals, web-based sources, governmental and non-governmental agencies and organizations, business and industry, environmental and social action groups, and others.

- Encourage creativity and diversity in the methods of presentation.

- Assessment needs to be ongoing and take multiple forms including self- and peer assessment. Student progress should be monitored and tracked through the use of ongoing observation and discussion, and with anecdotal records and checklists.
Suggested Guiding Questions for Exploring an Issue

Significance and Scope
- Why does this issue matter? To whom?
- Who/what is affected by the issue? Who benefits? Who is harmed?
- When/where/how did this issue begin?

Evidence
- Have I used a variety of sources, including primary sources?
- How reliable are my sources?
- How do the media treat this issue?

Perspective
- How do perspectives differ on this issue (e.g., environmental, economic, political, social...)?
- Which perspectives are most defensible and why? Whose voices are not heard?
- What role do media play creating/perpetuating this issue?

Impact: Environmental, Social, Political, Economic
- What is happening at the local, national, and global level?
- What actions are being taken by citizens, governments, businesses, and other groups?
- What might be some of the short- and long-term consequences of these actions?

Connections
- How has this issue changed over time? What might be future concerns?
- How is this issue connected to other environmental, social, or economic concerns?
- Is this issue part of a larger trend or problem?
- How does this issue affect the environment? Economy? Society? Quality of life?
- Why does this issue continue to be a problem and for whom?

Reflection
- How do you feel about the issue now that you know more about it?
- How might this issue have been prevented? What could have been done differently?
- What questions do you still have?

Action/Praxis
- Who needs to do what? What can and should we do?
- What are the challenges/barriers/risks to action?
- What do I have to offer? How can I take action?
- How can I get others involved?