

CONCEPTUAL THINKING & DIFFERENTIATION IN THE SOCIETY & CULTURE CLASSROOM

Differentiation in the Core made easy

HSC Core Continuity & Change

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Syllabus Content

Students develop knowledge and understanding of social and cultural continuity and change by examining:

- the nature of continuity and change:
 - change is a complex process
 - ‘evolutionary’ change
 - ‘transformative’ change
 - resistance to change
- the influence that continuity and change have on the development of society at the micro, meso and macro levels

Syllabus Outcomes

- H1 evaluates and effectively applies social and cultural concepts
- H3 analyses relationships and interactions within and between social and cultural groups
- H5 analyses continuity and change and their influence on personal and social futures

Related concepts

- continuity and change
- tradition
- beliefs and values

Rationale

Society and Culture offers many opportunities for differentiation that are particularly useful for Gifted and Talented students to access content at a higher level. The PIP is an exceptional Inquiry Learning tool already embedded into the course. When GAT training includes directions for teachers to offer choice and inquiry-based learning to enrich the GAT learner’s experience, my mind always goes back to the fact Society and Culture naturally embodies all of these aspects.

The PIP itself is an excellent example of conceptual thinking and a tool for differentiation in the Society & Culture classroom as students are able to:

- have autonomy in selecting a topic
- apply course concepts
- adjust the difficulty of the question to suit their ability
- go into the depth that best challenges them and their skills
- “stretch” themselves. There is significant opportunity for “stretch” for GAT learners who can expand on their primary and secondary research. Likewise students who are struggling can “stretch” to a comfortable spot within the task for them to move beyond where they are currently.

But – how do we differentiate when the end goal is ultimately the HSC exam? The following article makes a range of mindful recommendations and employs examples which successfully illustrate how teachers can employ best practice when differentiating within the Society & Culture classroom.

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Conceptual Thinking

Concept-based instruction is driven by ‘big ideas’ rather than subject-specific content. This makes it a perfect fit for Society and Culture’s concept driven nature, with students expected to integrate concepts into their responses. This necessitates students understanding the concept and being able to use it correctly in their writing. Students are encouraged to “consider the context in which they will use their understanding, concept-based learning brings “real world” meaning to content knowledge and skills. Students become critical thinkers which is essential to their ability to creatively solve problems in the 21st century.”¹

Conceptual thinking requires and builds the ability to:

- critically examine factual information
- relate to prior knowledge
- creates relevance to student learning
- observe patterns and connections
- draw out significant understanding at the conceptual level, facilitating a deeper understanding of the subject content
- evaluate the truth based on supporting evidence
- transfer understanding across situations
- use the conceptual understanding to creatively solve a problem or create a new product, process or idea, thus acting as a springboard for students to respond to their learning with action.²

All of these are skills and competencies developed within Society and Culture. Indeed, Society and Culture is the perfect subject for a Gifted and Talented student looking to expand their critical thinking skills and “stretch” their research and writing skills. Conceptual based learning assists students to gain more depth of understanding and promotes higher level thinking.

Examples of concepts suggested for framing conceptual based thinking and learning:

Systems	Structure	Identity	Perspective	Sustainability	Symbolism
Change	Force (Institutional Power)	Hope (Empowerment, Philosophy)	Communication	Aesthetics (Social Construct)	Conflict
Relationship	Power	Order and chaos (Cohesion)	Oppression (Authority)	Pattern (Continuity)	Communities

There are a number of our course concepts included above as well as conceptual ideas that are embedded within topics. Indeed, even the boxes left uncoloured if the language were shifted slightly could be aligned to a SOC concept.

Core: Social & Cultural Continuity & Change Concepts

Continuity	Change	Modernisation	Sustainability	Tradition	Empowerment
Beliefs	Values	Westernisation	Cooperation	Conflict	

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Step 1: Generalisations

Create a generalisation about the concept. A generalisation should be a universally true statement regardless of the subject. Thus, it would be as true in SOC as it is in English or Science. Begin with the concept word. For example:

- Change has consequences
- Change can be positive or negative
- Change can be fast or slow
- Change is always occurring
- Change can be evolutionary or revolutionary
- Change can be evolutionary or transformative
- Change is unavoidable
- Change is development
- Change comes from conflict
- Change impacts everyone
- Change is resisted
- Change is progress
- Change is a complex process

Step 2: Develop Inquiry questions

Choose three generalisations and frame inquiry questions around these:

- Change can be evolutionary or transformative: Is evolutionary change more stable than transformational change?
- Change is progress: How does change create progress for a country?
- Change can be positive or negative: Which groups in society benefit most and least from change?
- You may choose to have an overarching question for the entire unit: How does change affect society?

Step 3: Tiered Questions

Now you have your Generalisations turned into questions, you can adjust these for students to access at a level that best suits where they are currently sitting.

Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
What is the difference between evolutionary change and transformational change?	What are the strengths and weaknesses of evolutionary and transformational change?	To what extent has an event led to transformative change in your selected country's society and has this led to instability?
How has change made things better for the country studied?	Explain the ways change has led to social, cultural and political progress in the country studied?	Assess the extent to which change has led to social, cultural and political progress for the country studied

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Who has benefited from change in your country studied? How have things changed for them?	In what ways have women benefited from change in the country studied?	Evaluate the ways life has improved or not improved for women in the country you have studied
How has change affected the country you have studied at the macro or micro level of society?	In what ways has change affected the country you have studied at the macro and micro levels of society?	Assess the ways change has affected the country you have studied at the macro, meso and micro levels of society.

Tiering Past HSC Exam Questions

While students will be required to deal with the question posed in the HSC exam, Tiering them will allow weaker students to access the question at a comfortable level, with the overall aim being to stretch over time and use their skills from Tier 1 to apply to the next two Tiers. At the very least it will demystify the exam a little for them and they will see they can access the questions that seem overwhelming at first. Sometimes the HSC Questions are more or less complex and it allows students the opportunity to access more difficult questions.

Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
<p>Identify the key points of a social theory.</p> <p>Find an example for ONE of the key points.</p> <p>Sketch general ideas about how that example is an example of the social theory.</p>	<p>2019 HSC: How does ONE theory explain social and cultural continuity?</p>	<p>Adapted from HSC 2019, 2015 and 2017</p> <p>For a country you have studied, evaluate how well ONE social theory explains Continuity and Change in ONE of the following aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Beliefs, values and lifestyles – Education – Family and population – Gender roles and the status of men and women – The legal system and political processes

Tiered Questions

Tiered Questions allow student autonomy to complete the question they feel best addresses their learning needs. The Pre-Test will help you to guide certain students to the option you may like them to do. Or you may reduce their choice to 2 for example a student not as far along you may suggest they choose from Tier 1 and 2. For students needing stretch, you may direct them to Tier 2 or 3. This will depend on your context and how your individual students are tracking.

Pre Test

The Pre-Test will let you see areas of the content you may be able to move through faster as they have brought excellent knowledge from the Preliminary Course. Likewise, it will show you which concepts and information they are bringing over from the Preliminary course that require revision. You will also

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be able to assert which students need the greatest “stretch” in their classroom activities. Often the content in Society and Culture for some kids is intuitive and this allows you to assess the background understanding they are bringing to each Core topic or Depth Study. You can also assess their baseline Social and Cultural Literacy levels which is helpful in pitching the work. It is suggested that the Pre Test be completed about 2 weeks prior to the unit of work commencing. For the first topic in the HSC course this is harder, however, you can buy some time by administering it then introducing the PIP for a week or so and then beginning the Core.

Pre Test Idea 1:

The NESA website lets students create their own unique quiz from the bank of HSC multiple choice questions: <https://quiz.nesa.nsw.edu.au/home>. Before starting The Core: Continuity and Change have students either create their own unique quiz using the past questions OR you can build one using past Trial and HSC questions in a Form using Office365. You can also add some Year 11 questions to further assess the knowledge they are bringing over from the Preliminary Course. Through Forms you can set it up to mark the pre-test for you which helps you collect data easily and is probably the better, though more time consuming, option. You can also do a Post Test or use the formal assessment of multiple choice and short answer questions to back up the Value Added by the teaching and learning cycle.

Obviously prior to completing the content students will not have all the available knowledge to complete questions, however, you’ll be able to gauge by which “wrong” answer they select, the extent to which they are on the way to understanding the concept. I like to know which option they thought was correct because there tends to be one that is almost right and there will be a nuance in the language that makes it incorrect. This lets you know which students need to develop the skills to deep read the question to avoid making an oversight.

Pre Test Idea 2:

A set of true or false questions based around the concepts and content they will be exposed to within the Core or Depth Study can be a great and simple pre-test option. For example, the Generalisation Statements in the Conceptual Thinking Sequence can be the basis of initially true or false statements a Form or movement activity around the room where the left side is TRUE and the right side is FALSE. This will offer insights into where students conceptual understanding is as a baseline.

Pre-Test Idea 3:

Present scenarios from the contemporary world and have students predict how this set of events or ideas may influence the world in the next 5 to 10 Years.

Scenario Ideas for The Core – Continuity & Change

Nearly 25,000 same sex marriages (23,914) were counted in the 2021 Census.³

Do you predict this will continue to increase?
Why/Why not?

2,933,646 Australians were doing unpaid voluntary work. This is a 19 per cent decrease from 2016.⁴

Does this mean Australians are becoming less generous?
What factors may have contributed to the drop?
Do you think the downward trend will continue?
Why/Why not?

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Surging prices are making it more expensive to wine and dine a love interest, causing daters to reassess their priorities.

*Among 3,000 users on the popular dating app **Hinge**, almost 41% said they were more concerned with the cost of dates now versus a year ago, with Gen Z respondents more likely to feel the pressure.⁵*

How will this impact the future marriage rate and/or birth rate?

How might people adapt their dating behaviours adjust to the economic changes?

Data from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency released on Friday shows women typically earn about \$25,000 less than men.

The overall gender pay gap continued its downward trend for the 2020-21 financial year, pegged at 22.8%, meaning that for every \$10 a man earned a woman made about \$7.72.⁶

Do you think the gender pay gap will ever totally close?

Why/Why not?

OR use scenarios that are relevant to your Country Study. I examine East Timor, however, the following scenarios will be easily adaptable for other decolonised countries which have faced instability and conflict. Predict what the micro, meso and macro level responses may have been.

Scenario
<p><i>It's 1975. You've been under colonial rule by European colonisers since the 16th Century. The colonial occupier decides to leave. You are looking forward to finally declaring an independent state. You are located in the South China Sea between Australia and Indonesia.</i></p> <p>What is the best-case scenario for this country? What has historically happened to countries that have decolonised?</p>
<p><i>You declare independence. This makes the closest Westernised country (Australia) nervous. They've just been fighting communism non-stop for decades. Your "freedom fighters" feel like they may be communist guerrillas by another name.</i></p> <p>What is the (macro) global response?</p>
<p><i>The western world is worried.</i></p> <p>Will they let you have independence? Why/Why not?</p>
<p><i>The Western side of your island is already under Indonesian rule.</i></p> <p>What do you think is the most obvious/convenient result for the global community?</p>
<p><i>Indonesian militia spill over from the Western side. Some of your neighbours decide to side with the Indonesians because it will secure their future if the Indonesians are successful. Your family stay firm on their desire for a free country.</i></p> <p>How does this impact communities at the micro level?</p>
<p><i>After many years of Indonesian occupation, the UN finally organises elections.</i></p> <p>How do the Indonesians and your countrymen who support Indonesia react? What is the impact at the micro level for individual communities?</p>

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Election results end in freedom.

What happens as Indonesia leaves?

Indonesia is gone. You are the newest and youngest country.

How are people reacting at a community micro level?

What are some issues you have as a young, newly declared state?

Endnotes

- 1 SEMIS Coalition., *Getting the Big Idea: Concept-Based Teaching and Learning* (2013) <https://semiscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/Getting-the-Big-Idea-Handout.pdf>
- 2 Erickson, H. (2008). *Concept-based curriculum and instruction*. Thousand Oaks, Calif. Corwin Press.
- 3 Australian Bureau of Statistics <https://www.abs.gov.au/>
- 4 Ibid
- 5 Cachero, P., (July 2022) *It's Not You, It's Inflation: How Soaring Prices Are Changing the Dating Game* <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-07-21/cheap-dates-how-inflation-is-making-it-more-expensive-to-find-love>
- 6 Australian Associated Press., (February 2022) *Gender pay gap narrows but Australian men still twice as likely as women to earn more than \$120,000 a year* <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/feb/11/women-in-australia-typically-earn-25000-less-a-year-than-men-gender-pay-gap-report-shows#:~:text=Data%20from%20the%20Workplace%20Gender%20Equality%20Agency%20released%20on%20Friday,a%20woman%20made%20about%20%247.72.>