

# **Studies of Society and Environment (2000)**

## **Years 1 to 10 Sourcebook Guidelines (Part 3 of 9)**

*Note:* The PDF version of this document has been split into sections for easier download. This file is Part 3 of 9.

---

# Learners and learning in Studies of Society and Environment

The Studies of Society and Environment key learning area involves social and environmental inquiry during which students learn in, through and about social and environmental contexts. When planning learning experiences and assessment opportunities, teachers should consider the varying cultural, social, geographic, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of their students. Students may communicate in various ways to demonstrate their knowledge and understandings of learning in Studies of Society and Environment.

---

## Characteristics of learners

The general physical, emotional and intellectual characteristics described below are included to enhance understanding of learners at the different bands of schooling and to provide the framework for the developmental sequence of learning outcomes.

Teachers need to consider that individuals develop at different rates and that this may influence how they learn in relation to the Studies of Society and Environment key learning area.

### Early primary students

These students have a natural enthusiasm for learning, curiosity and a sense of wonder. They are interested in investigating their world and are confident of their abilities. They have a strong interest in their families and communities and in developing friendships. Students are generally individualistic and egocentric, although they gradually become more eager to please and care for others. They have an intense interest in self-chosen tasks where they can explore ideas in purposeful contexts. They tend to use themselves and their familiar environments as a point of reference when trying to understand their world. Play is an important vehicle for learning, although they are also interested in exploring symbolisation processes. Although they depend on adults for guidance and support, they are starting to work and play in small groups and are beginning to develop some of the skills required for such situations. They demonstrate an emerging sense of right and wrong, good and bad and negative and positive consequences.

### Middle primary students

These students are taking tentative steps towards operating in a world of adults and peers with less scaffolding than has been provided by familiar and school structures during their earlier years. They can relate to wider social and environmental contexts and work cooperatively with peers to make simple responsible decisions. They can respond to several variables, but may be unable to perceive a relationship between them. Learning is still occurring predominantly by direct experience, with thinking processes dependent upon sensory input. There is a gradual increase in attention span and intellectual curiosity. Students are starting to become less egocentric, to see other perspectives and to express empathy in situations to which they can relate. Students have developed a respect for other people's belongings and have a grasp of the rules within their immediate environment. They can identify their own weaknesses and strengths in different contexts.

### Upper primary students

These students will be encountering the physical and emotional challenges brought on by puberty. Growth rates start to differ between boys and girls. Students are beginning to solve problems by thinking rather than doing and can engage in increasingly complex and challenging tasks. Peers and the media become increasingly influential, with peer-group acceptance being very important. Students are seeking increased independence and are gaining control over their emotions. Although they continue to want support and encouragement, they are beginning to question previously accepted control and rules and want to be involved in decision making. They can verbalise other people's perspectives and are more interested in culturally shared skills and information. Students have a strong sense of right and wrong and are increasingly interested in the outside world and social and environmental issues. They are able to negotiate learning based on self-reflection.

### Lower secondary students

These students are aware of their developing sexuality and growth as they move toward adulthood. They enjoy an increasing ability to deal with abstract concepts and challenges and can reason hypothetically. Students are able to see other people's points of view and are beginning to question rules imposed by authority figures. They find that family, school and peer groups often pull in different directions. They enjoy being with their peers and are often influenced by peer behaviours, but they are seeking greater independence. These tensions and physical changes often result in mood changes. They are beginning to realise that important life choices are looming and some have casual employment. They recognise the value of other people having rights and opinions and have a growing sense of moral awareness and beliefs about social justice. Many students at this stage begin to challenge social control and values. They are also aware of a wider range of strategies for learning and they are able to reflect upon their own learning with less guidance.

## Using a learner-centred approach

---

In the learner-centred approach to learning and teaching, learning is viewed as the active construction of meaning and teaching as the act of guiding and facilitating learning. This approach sees knowledge as ever-changing and deepening; built on prior experience and emerging perspectives and evidence; and underpinned by an understanding of learners' development, interests, needs, talents and cultural and social background.

Teachers are encouraged to make learning meaningful to students. This can be promoted by:

- encouraging students to be active constructors of meaning
- developing the processes of social and environmental inquiries
- emphasising the process of metacognition
- involving students in cooperative learning
- adopting inclusive curriculum practices.

### Active construction of meaning

A starting-point for the active construction of meaning is determining what students already know and can do. Students of Studies of Society and Environment bring to any learning experience knowledge, beliefs, values and attitudes that reflect their own experiences and their social and cultural backgrounds.

Teachers should acknowledge, value and accommodate these experiences and this prior knowledge when planning activities. This involves building on prior knowledge to assist students to understand that a range of values, beliefs and perspectives exist in society.

Teachers can nurture students' constructions of meaning by providing them with ongoing opportunities to apply the knowledge, skills and understandings they bring to new learning.

Some strategies that promote an active construction of meaning in Studies of Society and Environment include:

- providing developmentally appropriate activities
- bringing the community and its resources into the school and taking the classroom out into the community
- involving students in community texts, popular culture, excursions, community service, enterprise and environmental projects to provide them with a range of new experiences and alternative perspectives
- acknowledging young students' fascination with the unfamiliar and their exposure to the 'dissimilar' via telecommunications by assisting them to make meaningful connections to familiar times and places
- providing opportunities for students to reflect on their own or others' knowledge, values, attitudes or behaviours
- providing activities which have practical and real-life meaning and application for students, where students recognise that they are part of the society and environments that they are studying
- using inquiry approaches that support students' constructions of meaning
- providing opportunities for students to solve problems and make judgments in relation to information or contexts which are new to them.

### **Social and environmental inquiries**

The Studies of Society and Environment key learning area promotes social and environmental inquiry into topics of relevance to students and enables students to practise critical and creative thinking, problem solving and decision making in real-life and lifelike contexts. These problem-solving and decision-making techniques draw from various traditions of inquiry.

Social and environmental inquiry is reflective in that inquiries occur over a time period in phases that are known to the investigator; involve introspection and reconsideration of values, processes and concepts; and encourage student action and evaluation of consequences and outcomes.

Social and environmental inquiry offers students both a meaningful context for learning and meaningful content for learning. The key learning area focuses on relationships among people, how groups operate and how people can work together to promote social and environmental values. This has important implications for the way in which students learn about society and environment.

Some strategies that promote social and environmental inquiry include:

- modelling processes associated with the phases of inquiry — for example, framing questions and analysing evidence
- providing access to a range of human and material resources
- providing a supportive and challenging environment in which students can discuss controversial issues, come to different conclusions based on similar experiences and data, justify their own views and make up and change their minds on issues
- encouraging personal and collective action regarding issues of relevance
- exposing students to a range of perspectives about topics and issues.

Social and environmental inquiry assists students to deal with different perspectives, which in turn develops the valid and reliable knowledge that is required to make decisions and take action.

## Metacognition

Learning is a lifelong process. Students need to learn how to learn, to develop an awareness of their knowledge and thinking processes and to take control of this thinking. It is impossible for students to learn at school all they will need to know to effectively participate in social and environmental contexts. It is becoming increasingly important for students to gain skills that will allow them to cope with the inevitable changes they will face in knowledge, technology and the marketplace.

Reflection is an interrelated part of the learning process, occurring before, during and after the learning experience. This reflection activates students' metacognition. Reflection is one of the key processes highlighted in the learning outcomes of Studies of Society and Environment.

Some strategies that promote metacognition include teacher modelling of metacognitive strategies — for example, modelling how to frame questions by thinking aloud and encouraging students to think aloud by asking open-ended questions.

In Studies of Society and Environment, students might:

- be assisted to reflect on behaviour and attitudes — for example, providing a self-reflection sheet for cooperative behaviour or an attitude continuum
- identify, at any point, the stage of the process in which they are working and the effectiveness of their actions in terms of reaching the final goal
- plan and monitor their learning — for example, students should plan what they are going to do and be able to identify the stage they have reached in their plan
- reflect on what has been done and learned
- choose consciously — for example, prior to making a choice, students should explore the consequences of different options. After making a decision and taking action, students should see the link between the choice, the action and the results.

## Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning has long been recognised as a powerful learning and teaching strategy in social and environmental studies. Cooperative learning in Studies of Society and Environment is a valuable strategy for maximising students' learning from each other. It is also a means of practising effective participation in society by developing skills which assist students to participate effectively in their present social contexts as well as those of their future.

Cooperative learning supports the notion that each member of a group can succeed and that each member has something to offer. When students work cooperatively with peers, they can help each other understand information, help each other to achieve their goals and give each other ideas and encouragement. When students work cooperatively with parents, caregivers, teachers, peers and school and community members, they access the diverse knowledge and skills, including direct and vicarious experiences, of a range of social and cultural groups.

Some strategies that promote cooperative learning include:

- cultivating a learning environment which supports cooperative attitudes and collaborative practices
- providing opportunities for group problem solving, investigating and decision making

- scaffolding students' ability to work in groups of different sizes and membership characteristics
- promoting self-reflection on personal development of cooperative attitudes and practices
- encouraging peer assessment.

### **Inclusive curriculum practices**

An inclusive curriculum ensures that the learning process is accessible and meaningful to all students. This involves identifying and overcoming barriers that limit students' participation in, construction of meanings and benefits from schooling.

An inclusive curriculum also makes learning meaningful to students by including and valuing the diversity of perspectives and experiences that students bring to learning experiences. This diversity should be considered in terms of the interrelated and cumulative impacts of social, cultural, linguistic, geographic and economic circumstances as well as students' abilities, needs and interests.

Students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including Indigenous students, bring valuable perspectives and experiences to the classroom. Contexts, content and language used to construct meaning need to be selected carefully when planning and implementing learning experiences in Studies of Society and Environment. Consideration and accommodation of particular cultural, religious and spiritual beliefs and practices must also occur. These can also be incorporated into the learning for all students.

Standard Australian English may not be the first or second language of some Aboriginal students, Torres Strait Islander students and students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Students for whom English is their second or subsequent language bring varied prior experiences to the classroom, some of which support and enhance their learning in Studies of Society and Environment and others that inhibit it. Teachers must recognise the significance of prior experiences and the ways in which first languages serve to construct a range of meanings when translated by students into Standard Australian English. Learning experiences must be designed accordingly.

Most students with disabilities will demonstrate progress through the levels at a rate similar to that of their peers. However, the nature of a student's disability may influence the way in which the student engages with and demonstrates particular learning outcomes. Consequently, it is possible that students will demonstrate learning outcomes at different levels in different strands. For further advice on the needs of students with disabilities and students with learning difficulties see Appendix 1.

Constructions of masculinities and femininities in various social and cultural groups, as well as society generally, influences student choices, attitudes, perspectives and participation in Studies of Society and Environment. Selection and balance of concepts, contexts, content, learning activities and assessment needs to accommodate and build upon the experiences, interests and learning styles of a diverse range of girls and boys if meaningful learning is to occur.

Some strategies that promote inclusive curriculum practices, by recognising and addressing the advantages and disadvantages experienced by some individuals and groups, include:

- providing learning environments which are supportive of students' involvement
- creating physical and social conditions which support the wellbeing of students and others while they are participating in learning experiences and demonstrating learning outcomes
- recognising and valuing prior learnings and experiences

- using real-life and lifelike learning experiences
- being sensitive to personal, spiritual, religious and cultural beliefs when dealing with issues in social and environmental activities
- providing technology to enable students to participate in learning activities
- establishing peer buddy systems that enable students to receive assistance from other students
- providing engaging experiences to ensure that students experience success
- taking into account the student, the class, the school and the wider community when planning, implementing and assessing learning
- encouraging consultation, interaction and cooperation between schools and the wider community to ensure that learning experiences are inclusive
- providing assessment procedures that take account of students' strengths and abilities
- providing opportunities for students to demonstrate learning outcomes in a variety of contexts and through a variety of methods.

## Equity in curriculum

---

The Studies of Society and Environment key learning area supports and promotes the principles of equity. Equity can be enhanced through curriculum that challenges inequities by:

- acknowledging and minimising unequal outcomes of schooling for different groups of students
- dealing with barriers to access, participation, active engagement, construction of knowledge and demonstration of outcomes
- using the knowledge, skills and experiences of all students as a basis for their learning and for enhancing the learning of others in the community
- developing understanding of, and respect for, diversity within and among groups
- making explicit the fact that knowledge is historically, socially and culturally constructed
- making the relationship between valued knowledge and power relations explicit
- identifying and promoting the capacity of Studies of Society and Environment to develop knowledge, practices and dispositions that challenge injustice and inequity and empower students.

Studies of Society and Environment learning experiences can promote students' knowledges, practices and dispositions regarding equity. Studies of Society and Environment uses the unique and diverse cultures, histories, languages and communities within Australian societies as a basis for learning about equity. This enables students to critically analyse organisations and power relations that have the potential to work for or against individuals, cultures or societies. This, in turn, empowers students to explore and challenge values based on misinformation or stereotypes.

Learning about equity issues through Studies of Society and Environment involves:

- developing the knowledges, practices and dispositions necessary to:
  - question disadvantage, its development and current existence in social structures
  - challenge rather than accept or simply know about social injustice
  - empower people to participate as equals

- encouraging tolerance of and sensitivity to individual difference
- ensuring that Studies of Society and Environment learning experiences encourage a climate of respect, valuing and understanding, both within and beyond the school community
- exploring contemporary social issues and critiquing and challenging narrow and stereotypic constructions
- exploring and critiquing the historical, social and cultural constructions of knowledges
- understanding how valued knowledge and power relations affect individuals, groups, communities and societies
- exploring differing values, morals, ethics and views on personal roles and relationships.

For further information about equity considerations in the development of curriculum refer to the Curriculum section of the Queensland School Curriculum Council website ([www.qscc.qld.edu.au](http://www.qscc.qld.edu.au)).



