Key Skills of Social Inquiry

Skills of social inquiry underpin studies and assessment in this subject and provide a framework for the investigation of societies and cultures. Systematic investigation, active participation, and a variety of experience-based learning methods are particularly relevant in enabling students to explore the difference between lived reality and social constructions.

Inquiry skills involve learning by asking questions. The focus is on learning how to learn rather than on acquiring information for its own sake. Inquiry and resource-based learning are most effective when both teachers and students feel free to admit that they do not know all the answers.

Students consider the following questions:

* What aspect or issue do you want to focus on?
* What questions do you need to ask when investigating a contemporary social issue?
* How are you going to conduct your inquiry?
* What type of information do you need, and how will you find and collect it?
* How reliable/relevant/useful/accurate/biased are your sources?
* What are the limitations of using statistical data?
* What or whose point of view is reflected or omitted?
* How might you sort out your information?
* What similarities, differences, and connections can you see?
* What inferences or conclusions can you draw?
* How does the information change your point of view?
* What evidence do you have to support different points of view?
* What remains unanswered and uncertain?
* In what ways could you present your evidence?
* What does the evidence suggest could be done about this issue, now and in the future?
* Who might benefit from and who might be disadvantaged by what is done?
* How can you contribute to or influence the community and society, now and in the future?

The following questions could provide a focus for exploring contemporary societies and social issues:

* How can societies and cultures be studied?
* How are societies and cultures structured?
* How do you know when societies fail to work?
* How are individuals, societies, and cultures linked?
* How do values and beliefs shape societies and cultures?
* What forces in societies affect an individual’s choices and behaviour?
* What is socialisation?
* What commonalities and differences do individuals in communities share with individuals in societies?
* What causes social and cultural change in contemporary societies?
* What strategies are, or could be, used to identify and address particular contemporary social issues?
* How does the social construction of power, prejudice, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and class affect various individuals, groups, societies, and cultures?
* How does racism affect various groups, societies, and cultures?
* How do societies (local, national, and global) ensure that the basic needs and human rights of their members are met?

SACE Board of SA, 2016 Society and Culture Subject Outline, pp. 22-23.