Developing key skills:

Ideas for the Politics and Society classroom

NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnta Curaclaim agus Measúnachta
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Contents

Politics and Society Developing key skills

Introduction

This material offers ideas and methodologies for teaching the 5 key skills that are central to teaching and learning across the senior cycle curriculum, with particular reference to how these skills can be embedded within teaching and learning of Politics and Society. Each key skill has associated elements and learning outcomes and these are set out in the Key Skills Framework. This resource is not intended to be a comprehensive course in all the elements and learning outcomes of each key skill. Please consult the Key Skills Framework for full details.

Research with teachers has found that developing key skills can improve learning.   In particular, teachers who have adopted a key skills approach to teaching and learning reported the following results:

- ▶ The lessons became more learner centred
- ▶ Student motivation and engagement in learning improved
- ▶ More positive classroom relationships were in evidence
- ▶ More effective learning took place

Embedding key skills in teaching and learning also leads to a more democratic learning environment in which students are actively participating in their learning and have a voice which is central to Politics and Society.

Throughout the course students need to be given opportunities to develop the key skills in an integrated way. It is also important that the skills are consciously taught and students are given opportunities to review and reflect on the skills they are developing through their learning and are facilitated to consider the skills they need to improve.

The 5 key skills are embedded within the learning outcomes of the specification and provide the basis for assessment as part of ongoing learning and in the final examination.

1

Information Processing

Developing in students the skills of analysing and interpreting data is an important objective of Politics and Society. The following ideas and methodologies are chosen to support students in developing the specific skills of accessing, selecting, evaluating and recording information and data from different sources (not just the internet) and to enable them to judge the usefulness and relevance of information for their studies in Politics and Society.

Research:

The BBC's *Top Tips for Research* is a good starting point. There are three sections: Using books and journals, using the internet and sorting your information.

Available online, click the image to the right.

WHERE DO I BEGIN?

Before students begin to research a question, they should ask some questions. These will help narrow their search parameters. Here are some questions and tips to discuss with your students.

WHAT KIND OF INFORMATION ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

Do you want to find facts, opinions, news reports, research studies, academic analyses, personal stories or case studies? Or do you want to trace the history or development of the idea/topic? Remember that in Politics and Society, opinions are not enough! Student need to be able to cite hard evidence and data from credible academic sources to back up their opinions.

WHERE WOULD BE A LIKELY PLACE TO LOOK?

Which sources are likely to be most useful to you - libraries, the Internet, academic journals, newspapers, government records? If, for example, you are searching for information on some current event, then reputable newspapers will be a useful source. Are you searching for statistics? Then, start with documents such as CSO data or ESRI reports. Do you want some scholarly perspectives? If so, academic periodicals and books are likely to have what you're looking for. Googlescholar can be very helpful too. Are you searching for local data or information? Then a county library, government office, census website, or local newspaper archive is likely to be the most useful.

HOW MUCH INFORMATION DO YOU NEED?

How many sources of information are you looking for? Students need to view multiple perspectives on the issue. While it's important to look at different sources of information, be careful not to get bogged down in too many documents and end up feeling overwhelmed.

Remind students to keep a comprehensive record of the different types and sources of information they have gathered so that they can cite it later, as needed.

Further tips on conducting research and evaluating sources of information are available online here.

Evaluating sources of information

SOME POINTERS TO HELP IN EVALUATING MATERIAL DURING READING

▸ Read the preface/executive summary - what does the author want to accomplish? Browse through the table of contents and the index. This will give you an overview of what you can expect to be covered and you can decide if it is helpful before wasting too much time.

▸ Check the bibliography for a list of references or web links that look as if they will lead you to related material that would be good sources.

▸ Determine the intended audience. Are you the intended audience? Consider the tone, style, level of information, and assumptions the author makes about the reader. Are they appropriate for your needs?

▸ Try to determine if the content is fact, opinion, or propaganda. If you think the source is offering facts, are the sources for those facts clearly indicated?

▸ Do you think there's enough evidence offered? Is the coverage comprehensive? (As you learn more and more about your topic, you will notice that this gets easier as you become more of an expert.)

▸ Are there broad generalizations that aren't backed up with evidence or that overstate or oversimplify the matter?

▸ How up- to-date is the information? Is the source 20 years out of date? Some information becomes dated when new research is available, but some ideas and sources of information can be quite sound 50 or 100 years later.

SOME NEWSPAPER WEBSITES

Students will find links to thousands of newspapers around the world at www.onlinenewspapers.com or depending on your class you may wish to suggest specific newspapers, for example:

New York Times newspaper

News and analysis from the Middle East and worldwide

The Guardian newspaper published in London

Critical use of the Internet

CLASS ACTIVITY

Click on this link for Google's search education lessons which are designed to support students in using the internet effectively for education purposes.

This short youtube video also offers helpful tips on how to search the internet

In small groups or as a whole class, brainstorm a list of top news stories from the past month from television, radio and newspapers. Google Trends might be helpful

Then ask students to choose one event or issue that is relevant to the course and conduct an Internet search for articles on that topic using different sources.

When students are reading the information on each site ask them to keep in mind the following questions:

▸ What, if any, differences are there in how the facts are presented?

▸ What different opinions are expressed?

▸ How can you separate fact from opinion?

▸ Which site(s) are more reliable and accurate? How do you know?

▸ How do you know the difference between a reliable web site and one that's less

Scanning and Skimming – Fast reading techniques*

Fast reading techniques help you to browse text and extract the key points in a short time.

Skimming – handy when you're looking for particular things within a text, or trying to find out whether a text will be useful.

Scanning – a useful first step before reading more deeply.

HOW IS 'SKIMMING' DIFFERENT TO 'SCANNING'?

The term skimming is often confused with scanning.

Skimming is used to obtain the gist (the overall sense) of a piece of text. Skimming is 3-4 times faster than normal reading. E.g. Use skimming to get the gist of a page or a text to decide whether it is useful and should therefore be read more slowly and in more detail.

Scanning is used to obtain specific information from a piece of text. E.g. Use scanning to find a particular statistic or fact.

Sometimes you can use **both** reading methods. After you have skimmed a piece of text to decide whether the text is of interest, you may wish to use scanning techniques to locate specific information.

SCANNING

Read quickly to get an overview prior to in-depth reading. Run your eyes down the page to

- spot new concepts or terminology so you can check the meaning before you start reading
- look for key words to give an indication of the scope of the text
- read the first and last paragraphs to get the main points
- look at the first sentence of each paragraph to get a feel for the content
- note the key points in the summaries.

Also, skim the charts and figures, for they usually summarize in graphic form the major ideas, facts or data of the chapter.

SKIMMING

Locate specific information, for example,

- who produced it?
- when it was produced (is it dated or still relevant?)
- what is the main thrust or focus of the document?
- what are the key facts and arguments?
- Is this information relevant to my needs?

This overview will help you decide whether you should read further, and how useful the document might be for your study.

* Adapted from Open University website - Fast reading techniques, Skimming

SAMPLE WORKSHEET TO HELP STUDENTS GATHER DATA WHEN SKIMMING AND SCANNING DOCUMENTS:

CLASS ACTIVITY

TO PRACTICE SCANNING

1. Circulate a set of questions related to a topic currently of relevance to the students' programme of study

2. Remind students that scanning means reading very fast to find specific pieces of information.

3. Explain that you will be showing a series of paragraphs on PPT slides. The paragraphs contain the answers to the questions which have been circulated.

4. Students have 3 minutes to read all the slides, which will be moving quite rapidly.

Their task is to scan the text and locate all the answers to the questions. When the first slide appears the clock starts ticking.

TO PRACTICE SKIMMING

1. Remind students that skimming means reading very fast to find only the main ideas of a text.

2. Circulate an article or a chapter from a text (containing at least 5-6 solid paragraphs). Students will have a short time to skim read the text and in doing so they must identify the main idea in each paragraph.

3. At the end of the agreed time (say 3 minutes) students must turn to each other and take turns summarising the key ideas in each paragraph. The first student says what was the main idea in paragraph one, the second student says what was the main idea in paragraph two, then the first student takes paragraph three, and so on until they have completed the text.

My research question...		
Is the right to education enjoyed equally by all in Ireland?		
Topic	Data/facts	Sources
Gender		
Social class		
Minority groups		
On balance judgement:		

Useful website links

Students can test and improve their skimming and scanning skills with online tests such as the following:

Using hypothesis testing with technology

Hypothesis testing is a great way to get students to learn from the web and multimedia resources.

1. Give students a hypothesis such as

    a. 'Ireland is a patriarchal society'.

    b. 'School uniforms reduce the incidence of bullying and teasing.'

    c. 'Technology will solve our environmental problems.'

2. Students consider the hypothesis and study data, articles, websites, etc. to find:

    a. evidence in favour of the hypothesis

    b. evidence against the hypothesis

    c. draw a final conclusion.

Developing note making skills

CLASS ACTIVITY

Let's look at some strategies to help when making notes from different sources.

THINK, PAIR, SHARE AND SQUARE

In class, ask students to think about ways that they can make notes more effectively when reading through lots of information from different sources.

- First allow time for each person to jot down some ideas.

- Then with a partner, share ideas and try to come up with a joint list of tips.

- Each pair might then pair up with another pair to form a square and see how they can improve on their list.

Here are some tips to help prompt the discussion:

- Get organised. Begin each note-making session on a fresh page. Always carefully record the topic and the source from which you are taking notes (including article or book title, author, publisher, page number or ulr link and date of access in the case of an internet source)

- Use key words, phrases and short sentences to note ideas as succinctly as possible.

- Take notes in your own words.

- Develop your own short-hand system. For example, Ed = education w/ (with), w/o (without), etc.

- Don't cram too much on a page. Leave spaces between different points or leave a wide margin in case you need to come back and add additional information or comments later.

- Use diagrams, mind maps, or visual drawings to summarise ideas where possible.

- Use different note making methods for different purposes, for example flowcharts for tracing the sequence of something or for process planning, tables for comparisons, bullet points to summarise key points, etc.

- Use different coloured pens or highlighters to mark different points.

- Use labels or post-its to mark key ideas when reading from library books.

- Avoid cutting and pasting, or copying huge chunks from books or articles – you risk committing plagiarism by accident

- Try using electronic notemaking by using an app such as iNotes

Some methods for sorting and organising information

MIND MAPS

A mind map is a useful tool to help students organise information and make sense of complex topics. Mind maps show not only facts, but also the overall structure of a topic and the relative importance of individual parts of it. They help associate ideas and make connections that you might not otherwise make.

The teacher can model the process but every student must create their own mind map. It is a personal learning document. No one can map another person's mind!
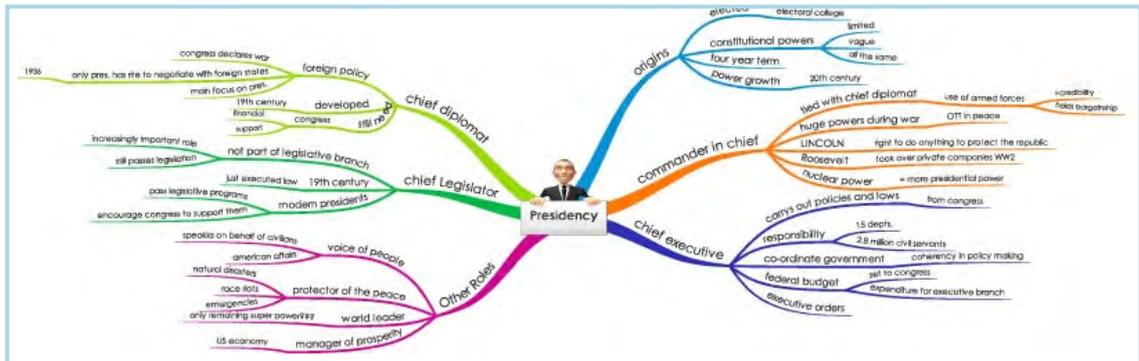
Sample mind map on the role of the President in the USA.

While drawing Mind Maps by hand works best in many cases, software tools such as these are also useful tools:

MindGenius: imindmap.com

Coggle

CONCEPT MAPS

Concept maps are a type of graphic organizer that can help students in organizing and representing knowledge. They begin with a main idea or concept, and then map out the related concepts usually enclosed in circles or boxes of some type. The relationship between concepts is indicated by a connecting line linking two or more concepts. Words on the line, referred to as linking words or linking phrases, specify the relationship between the two concepts.

To get started, ask students to list the key concepts related to the topic they have been studying. So for topic 1 they might come up with a list of concepts such as this – Human Rights, Social Contract, Absolute Authority, State of War, State of Nature, Freedom, Rules, etc. Transfer each one to a post- it. Then organise the post-its on a page, with related concepts close to each other. Draw a line between the concepts to describe the nature of the relationship.
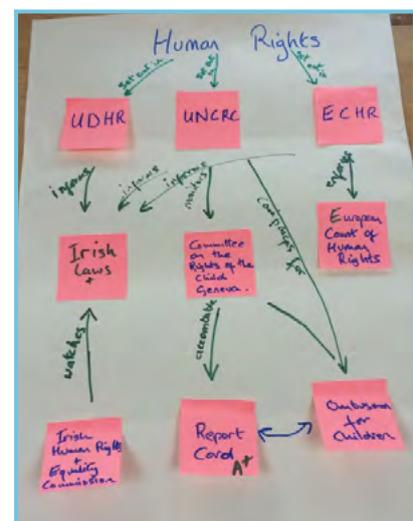
GRAPHIC ORGANISERS

A graphic organiser is usually a one-page template with blank areas for the student to fill in with ideas or information. If you are using graphic organisers for the first time, it might be helpful to have a sample drawn on the white board and talk through how it might be filled in together.

These links provide lots of great ideas for how you can use graphic organisers:
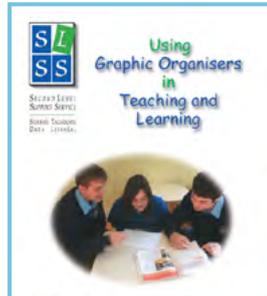
Some ideas on how graphic organisers might be useful in the Politics and Society classroom

CROSS CLASSIFICATION CHART

AUTHOR	IDEAS	ARGUMENTS	EVIDENCE	CONCLUSION	MY OPINIONS
Author A					
Author B					
Author C					
Author D					

CONSIDERING DIFFERENT POSITIONS

Evidence for school uniforms

Evidence against school uniforms

List arguments and references arguing for the position

List arguments and references arguing against the position

What's your position and why?

My position
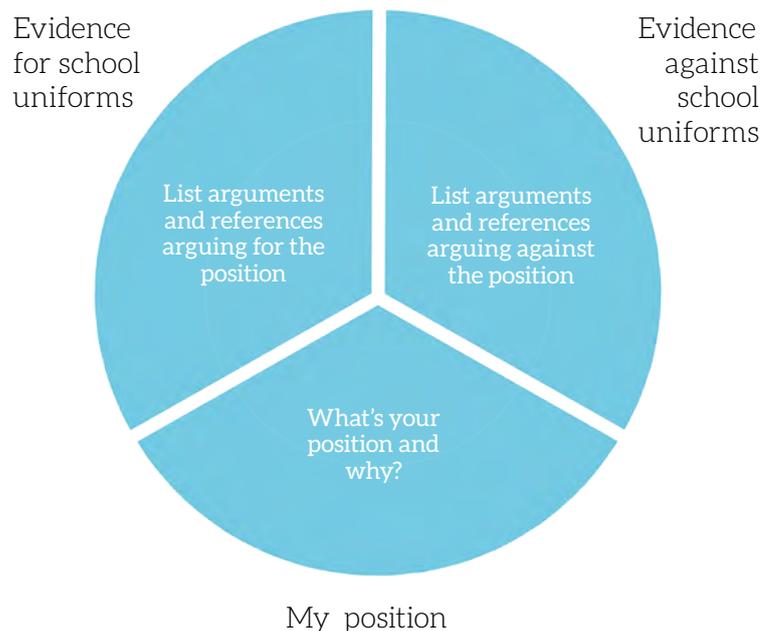
Comparing John Locke and Thomas Hobbes
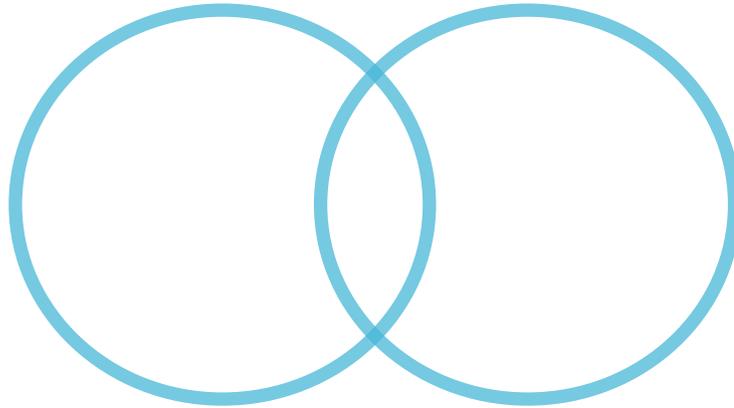
Consider a venn diagram when comparing the differences and similarities between two thinkers

MAPPING THEORISTS ACROSS THE LEFT-RIGHT WING SPECTRUM

Broadly politically left-wing

Broadly politically right-wing

Broadly politically determinist

Need for limits to state power over subjects and for them to have rights (Locke)

Need for strong, intelligent political authority to ensure security (Plato, Hobbes)

Broadly economically determinist

Social life is essentially characterised by class conflict. The State works in the interests of the bourgeoisie. The reality is obscured by ideology. (Marx)

Political and social freedom can best be achieved by limiting the role of government in a free market (Friedman, Nozick)

Broadly culturally determinist

Social life is essentially characterised by a conflict of the sexes hidden by ideology (Millet)

Social order is based on a shared culture rather than a political 'context' (Durkheim)

Reading activities

RECIPROCAL READING

This is a very effective strategy when students are faced with a difficult or lengthy text. It involves students working in groups of three to help each other in coming to an understanding of the key ideas in a text. There are 3 roles and the students rotate these roles after each paragraph. So one student might begin as the summarizer, then take on the role of questioner and then become the clarifier.

The teacher provides a text, broken down into sections (with at least 3 sections so that each person gets to play each role at least once).

THE ROLES

1. Clarifier: Helps the group to identify confusing words, sentences and ideas. They s/he encourages the group to reach a shared understanding of the text. This is a key social role in that they must try to ensure that all the students understand everything in the text. It is important that students feel confident that they will be helped. One strategy is to get all the students in the group to highlight confusing terms, sentences or sections for discussion and then the clarifier can help tease these out.

2. The Questioner: Develops a series of questions that will enable other participants to test their knowledge and understanding of the text. These should be questions which focus on

   a. Facts/recall of text

   b. Understanding – explaining key ideas in their own words

   c. 'Application – asking how the ideas might apply to different situations in their own lives and beyond

3. Summarizer: Identifies the most important idea in the text. For example, s/he might say 'I think the main ideas were, the main points were…'

READ AND EXPLAIN PAIRS

This is another useful strategy when students are faced with a difficult or lengthy text. Students take turns reading and orally summarising paragraphs. To begin with, both skim read the entire text to get the gist of it. Then both students read the first paragraph. One student tries to summarize it (without looking at the text) while the other checks the paragraph for accuracy and offers prompts to help if anything is left out. Then they read the next paragraph and change roles (one summarizing and the other checking) until they have completed the text. At the end of the process they can make a note of anything that they are still struggling to understand and seek help with this. It's surprising how much they understand when two heads work together!

USEFUL WEBLINKS

Google Scholar is a freely accessible web search engine that indexes the full text or metadata of scholarly literature across an array of publishing formats and disciplines

Encyclopedia Britannica Online provides articles from the famous encyclopedia

Infoplease has a complete encyclopedia, dictionary, and almanacs for research as well as information organized by subject matter.

Libraryspot.com is one of the most comprehensive sites you'll find on the Web for links to libraries across the world

Ask Oxford is a very comprehensive site produced by the editors of the Oxford English Dictionary that has answers to questions on English grammar, spelling, and usage and access to searchable dictionaries

Writer's Free Reference is an extensive list of free information on the Internet that could be useful to writers (or anyone doing research online)

This links to a section on searching World Wide Web. It includes information about search engines, etc.

WAYS TO ORGANIZE AND PRESENT IDEAS USING TECHNOLOGY:

OneNote
Microsoft OneNote is like a 3-ring binder in a digital form. You and your students can use it as a digital notebook to organise to capture ideas, to-do lists, learning resources, and help manage content for each topic and lesson.

Animoto
Animoto can create presentations incorporating images, video clips, music and text

Explain Everything
Explain Everything is a unique interactive whiteboard and screencasting app that lets you annotate, animate, narrate, import and export almost anything to and from almost anywhere. It can be dowanloaded as an app for student devices.

2 Communicating

Dialogue is vitally important in the Politics and Society classroom. Students usually need help in understanding the differences between dialogue and debate. Dialogue aims for understanding, enlargement of view, complicating one's thinking, and is characterised by an openness to change. Dialogue requires real listening. It also requires humility.

> *How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I dialogue if I am closed to, and even offended by, the contribution of others?*
>
> Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Crucial to engaging in dialogue and discussion is an atmosphere of trust and support. Students need to feel they can speak their mind and change their mind. When challenged by different opinions, this is done in such a way that they are affirmed as a person, while their views are challenged. While debates can be valuable for developing communication skills and appreciation of differing points of view, the development of these skills will be dependent upon the way in which the debate is structured and upon the broader classroom environment within which debates happen. It is sometimes valuable to point out to students its end goal.

> *In Politics and Society debate will involve different learners in forming arguments that are supported by data, listening to and critiquing the arguments of others and responding to those arguments constructively.* **The end goal should be for everyone to move towards a more reflective and informed conclusion (rather than for one side to 'win' and for the other side to 'lose').**
>
> Politics and Society Specification p. 15

Creating an active listening space

Developing the skills needed for active listening takes times and frequently these skills need to be taught.

One useful exercise is to ask the students to discuss what active listening looks like. Then based on this discussion they might draw up their own ground rules for active listening within the classroom such as

- ‣ One person talks at a time
- ‣ Show respect for the views of others
- ‣ Challenge the ideas not the person
- ‣ Ensure everyone has a chance to express his/her view
- ‣ Be prepared to give reasons to back up your viewpoint
- ‣ Use appropriate language (see below useful phrases)

I think…. because (evidence)

I agree/disagree because…

I know others have thought this too because (reference to other thinker/theorist)…

I know some people might say … but my response to this is… (counter argument)

Do I understand you correctly, are you saying….?

I'm not sure what you mean. Can you say a bit more about that?

How can we back-up this idea with evidence?

Let's look at the other side of the argument for a minute.

Let's summarise our main ideas so far

Let's take turns to make sure that everyone has a chance to speak.

Let's check to see if everyone has aired their view or is there another perspective on this?

Let's hear from someone who hasn't had a chance to speak yet.

I think that's an interesting point but we'd better stick with the question we're working on right now.

DEALING WITH CONTROVERSIAL AND CONTESTED ISSUES

Many of the topics studied in Politics and Society are controversial and require thoughtful facilitation. A controversial issue is defined as an area of academic inquiry about which people can hold sincere conflicting points of view. When controversial issues are discussed they are likely to challenge not only students' opinions, but also their values, beliefs and world-views.

> *When dealing with controversial issues, teachers should adopt strategies that teach students how to recognise bias, how to evaluate evidence put before them and how to look for alternative interpretations, viewpoints and sources of evidence, above all to give reason for everything they say or do, and to expect good reasons to be given by others.'*
>
> Richard Bailey, Teaching Values and Citizenship across the Curriculum

There are a number of resources which provide guidance and methodologies on teaching controversial issues such as
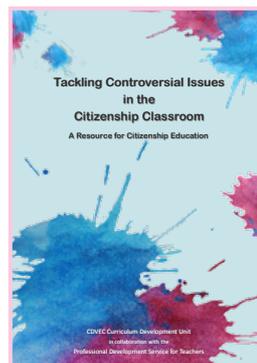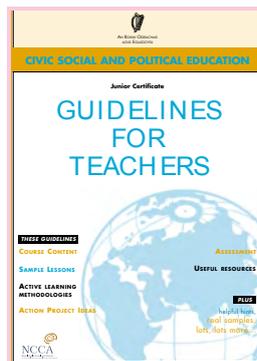
CLASS ACTIVITIES

BRAINSTORMING

Brainstorming is a technique which involves generating a list of ideas in a creative, unstructured manner. The goal of brainstorming is to generate as many ideas as possible in a short period of time. The key tool in brainstorming is "piggybacking," or using one idea to stimulate other ideas. During the brainstorming process, ALL ideas are recorded, and no idea is disregarded or criticised. After a long list of ideas is generated, these can be prioritised as most/least important, most/least helpful, plus/minus, etc. They can also be ranked 1-5 in order of importance or in the order in which they might be useful in planning a response.

Carousel brainstorming is another useful technique.

1. The class is arranged into small groups. Each group has a different colour marker.

2. The teacher poses a question on a flip chart, e.g. Why are school rules needed?

3. The flipchart question is passed from group to group. (To speed up the process you may have a number of pages going around)

4. Each group must add two original suggestions.

5. The flipchart page(s) are displayed for all to see.

6. You can see which group has suggested each idea (by colour) and ask them more about their idea.

THINK-PAIR-SHARE-SQUARE

This is an activity to encourage higher-order thinking that involves students thinking individually, then pairing with a partner, then sharing ideas with the wider group. The sequence generally begins with the teacher posing an open-ended question, to which there may be a range of responses. Think time or wait time is followed by discussion with a partner. The pair may then pair up to form a square and build on each other's ideas.

THINK, COMMIT, JUSTIFY, REFLECT

This methodology is used in P4C (Philosophy for Children) classrooms and involves these steps:

Think about a question that has competing reasonable answers

Commit to an answer publicly (e.g. by moving oneself/something)

Justify you answer the good reasons or evidence

Reflect on what's been said and show if it's changed your mind.

WALKING DEBATE

This is a well know methodology that can be used and adapted for the Politics and Society classroom.

At one end of the room, place an 'I agree' sign on the wall, and on the other end an 'I disagree' sign. Place 'I'm not sure' in the middle of the room and ask the students to stand in this space. Call out statements and as the students consider each one they move to the position that reflects their opinion. The closer they move towards each sign, the more they agree or disagree. Emphasise that is it okay to stay in the middle and it is also okay to move position according as students hear different views.

In the Politics and Society class the teacher can show the complexity of an issue by airing as many different perspectives as possible. The teacher can also push students to explain and justify their position with evidence by asking questions such as 'Can you give an example of that?' 'What is the evidence to support that view?' 'Are you expressing an opinion or a fact?' 'What is the source of your information on this topic and can it be trusted?' etc.

Many websites provide the opportunity to engage in online debating such as www.debate.org

THE POWER OF PERSUASION

Another strategy to get students thinking is to pose a question which has more than one correct answer, such as *Why school uniforms are a good idea?* Or *Why don't more women go forward for political office?* Then get the class to generate four possible answers to a question and vote on their preferred answer.

Count the votes for each answer. Ask the students to sit with their preferred answer groups. Now the job of each group is to persuade others from different answer groups to come over to their group. Give them some time to formulate their campaign strategy. The following questions may be useful to prompt debate:

- Who is going to speak? What argument will they use? What evidence can they
- provide to support their argument?
- Are they going to have a campaign slogan?
- Which other group will they target?
- Will they focus on the strengths of their own argument, or on the weakness of the
- opposition?

During the 'campaign' the teacher acts as chairperson, although this role may also be assigned, especially as the class becomes familiar with the strategy. In the course of the lesson, learners may change sides, or revert to original positions. Leave enough time at the end of the lesson to think about the campaign and the tactics used. A good follow-up homework task for further learning is for students to generate a paragraph or a statement beginning with *I was persuaded because....* or, *Answer A won because.....*

ACADEMIC CONTROVERSY

This is another highly effect method which can be used for a topic where there are two points of view, e.g. Is underdevelopment caused by our life-style? Is it ever justified to take away a person's human rights?

- ▸ Students are allocated one of the points of view. They research and prepare their arguments to support that viewpoint.

- ▸ Students are arranged in pairs with opposing points of view, or put in groups of four containing two students with each point of view. Each side presents their position in as persuasive a manner as possible.

- ▸ Students engage in discussion and argue their position.

- ▸ Students swap positions and present each others position as accurately and persuasively as theya can. It's best to tell students this is coming up so that they will listen carefully to the opposing view!

IN THE HOT SEAT

You may be familiar with the strategy of putting a learner in a HOT seat, taking the role of a character from fiction or from history, or of a person from another part of the world or facing a particular challenge.

In the Politics and Society class, students might think of questions to ask a key thinker or political theorist, and the occupant of the HOT seat answers the questions from the character's perspective. You might even have a number of people in the HOT seat, and conduct panel discussion with different characters who have diverse or opposing views (e.g. left-wing, right-wing). All students can be involved by preparing questions in advance, or by turning the spotlight and putting the whole class in the HOT seat.

FISH BOWL

Fishbowl activities encourage students to listen actively to their peers. How does it work?

1.   Divide the class up into small groups. Each group writes down their thoughts and views on the particular question or topic on a piece of flip chart paper for about 10-15 minutes.

2.   The whole room then re-groups, moving their chairs into 2 circles: one circle is a large "fish-bowl" round the outside of the room and the other small circle is the "fish" in the middle of the room.

3.   The small circle contains the fish, and one person from each original group should sit in this small circle. The fish discuss the question/topic which has been posed. The fish are the only ones who can talk at this stage. One person from the fish group volunteers to facilitate the discussion amongst the fish.

4.   Students in the large outer circle are the fish-bowl and they are the listeners – they must listen very carefully to what the fish are saying. The students in the outer circle listen to the discussion, noting what they agree with or disagree with but do not contribute until the inner group has finished their discussion.

5.   After some time a listener who disagrees with what is being said or wants to add something to the discussion, can go up and tap a fish gently on the shoulder. This means that they will swap places.

6.   Finally, the discussion is opened up to the whole class informing them that they can comment on or ask questions about the discussion points given.

3 Critical and creative thinking

How do we teach students to not just think, but to think skilfully, critically and creatively? How do we teach students the skills needed for engaging in the critical analysis of different texts and data within the Politics and Society classroom? This section of the resource presents a range of classroom strategies to stimulate more critical and creative thinking with particular reference to developing skills of critical questioning, examining different arguments, exploring complexities and connections, and examining causes and relationships.
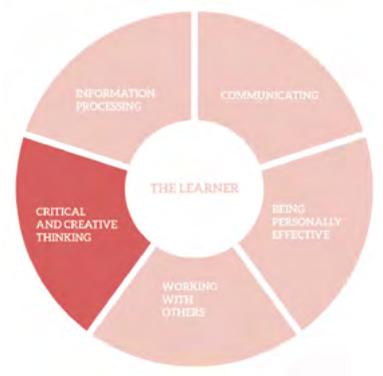
CLASS ACTIVITIES

QUESTIONING

Use questions that require students to use their imaginations: Such as

What would happen if …?

Is there another way of seeing this?

Can you imagine an alternative way of seeing this? What might it be like?

Imagine…Suppose…

What are some possible consequences…?

What if you were…imagine yourself as…

Questions that probe assumptions

What are you assuming?

What could we assume instead?

Where have your perceptions and assumptions come from?

All of your reasoning depends on the idea that _____. Why have you based your reasoning on _____ instead of _____?

Why would someone make that assumption?

Questions that probe reasons and evidence

What would be an example?

How do you know?

What led you to that opinion?

What are your reasons for saying that? Could you explain your reasons? Are these reasons adequate?

Do you have any evidence for that?

What other information do you need?

What would you say to someone who said that ____?

Can someone else give counter evidence or a counter example?

Questions about viewpoints or perspectives

You seem to be approaching this issue from a _____ perspective. (e.g. gender perspective)

Why have you chosen this rather than that perspective?

How would someone from a different perspective respond? Why? What would influence them?

What would someone who disagrees say?

What is an alternative viewpoint?

How are x and y's ideas alike? How are they different?

Questions about implications and consequences

What are you implying by that?

When you say _____, are you implying _____?

What follows on from what you say?

But, if that happened, what else would happen as a result? Why?

What effect would that have?

How could you test to see if that were true?

THE SOCRATIC QUESTIONING TECHNIQUE*

The Socratic questioning technique is based on the practice of disciplined, thoughtful dialogue. Socrates, the early Greek philosopher/teacher, believed that disciplined practice of thoughtful questioning enabled the student to examine ideas logically and to determine the validity of those ideas. In this technique, the teacher professes ignorance of the topic in order to engage in dialogue with the students.

Tips for Using Socratic Questioning:

- Plan significant questions that provide meaning and direction to the dialogue
- Use wait time: Allow at least thirty seconds for students to respond
- Follow up on students' responses
- Ask probing questions
- Periodically summarize in writing key points that have been discussed
- Draw as many students as possible into the discussion
- Let students discover knowledge on their own through the probing questions the teacher poses

Here's an example:

Teacher: What is happening to our global climate?

Stan: It's getting warmer.

Teacher: How do you know it's getting warmer? What evidence do you have to support your answer?

Stan: It's in the news all of the time. They are always saying that it's not as cold as it used to be. We have all of these record heat days.

Teacher: Has anyone else heard of this kind of news?

Denise: Yeah. I have read about it the newspaper. They call it climate change, I think.

Teacher: Are you saying that you learned about climate change from newscasters? Are you assuming they know that it's occurring?

Heidi: I heard it too. It's terrible. The ice caps in the Arctic are melting. The animals are losing their homes. I think the newscasters hear it from the scientists that are studying the issue.

Teacher: If that is the case and the scientists are telling the newscasters, how do the scientists know?

Chris: They have instruments to measure climate. They conduct research that measures the Earth's temperature.

Teacher: How long do you think scientists have been doing this?

Grant: Probably 100 years.

Candace: Maybe a little more than that.

Teacher: Actually, it's been studied for about 140 years. Since about 1860.

Heidi: We were close.

Teacher: Yes. How did you know that?

Grant: I just figured that seems like when instruments were available and scientists had the means to measure climate like that.

Teacher: So, looking at the last 100 year's climate on this graph, what can we say about the earth's climate?

Raja: The 20th century has become much warmer than previous centuries.

Teacher: Can we hypothesize why?

Raja: One word: pollution.

Teacher: What are you assuming when you say that pollution is the cause for the temperatures to rise?

Heidi: Carbon dioxide from cars causes pollution and chemicals from factories.

Frank: Hair spray causes dangerous chemicals to get into the atmosphere.

Teacher: Okay. Let's take a minute to review what we've discussed so far

*Credit: This section adapted from the Intel teach project - Socratic Questioning

For lots of ideas on effective questioning go to -

Effective Questioning

CREATING ALTERNATIVE ANSWERS *

This methodology can be used to enable students to generate and extend ideas, and to look for alternative answers rather than just settling for the first answer that comes up. The aim of this activity is for students to work cooperatively to analyse a text while encouraging more flexible and critical thinking.

Materials needed: Copy of text with questions – one for each student and a set of role cards per group Group size: 3 or 4 depending on roles used (The first three roles are essential)

1. Assign students to groups with roles as follows:

   ‣ Reader – Reads the text aloud to the group

   ‣ Checker for understanding – Reads the questions to make sure that all group members understands how to answer each question

   ‣ Recorder – Records 3 or more good answers to each question and circles the one the group likes best. Makes sure that the group members agree with the one that is circled.

   ‣ Reporter - Reports back on behalf of the group to the class

   ‣ Observer – Listens carefully and watches to see how the group is working together.

2. Explain the task – each group is to read the text, and then discuss the questions and come up with not one but at least three good answers to each question.

3. When the groups are finished they can compare answers with a nearby group or the teacher can take feedback from the Reporter or ask random students from each group to explain their group's answers. Agree which of the answers are most creative, most critical and show divergent thinking.

*Adapted from Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, *Advanced Cooperative Learning*

EXAMINING AN ISSUE FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

The development compass rose is a useful tool for exploring issues from different perspectives. The compass rose can be applied to any locality, topic, photograph or case study. It raises issues about people and their relationship to their environment, social, cultural, economic and political context.

Instead of North, South, East and West, the four main compass points represent:

Natural/ecological questions

Social and cultural questions

Economic questions

Who decides? Who benefits? Who has power? (i.e political questions)

The diagonal points highlight the relationship between the four main points. For instance, NE raises questions about how economic activity has an impact on the natural world; SE raises questions about the relationship between economic activity and people's lives. Questions that relate to all four compass points can be placed around the picture as illustrated below.
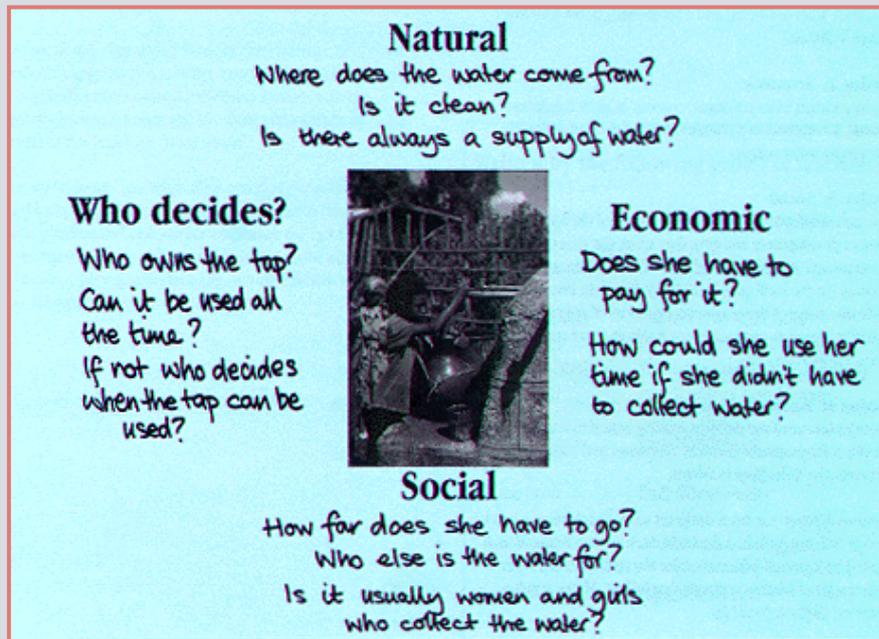
Steps

1.	Use newspapers, magazines or the internet to collect a range of images that depict different issues and problems both locally and globally

2.	Explain, using examples, how the compass rose can be helpful in analysing a problem or looking at an issue from different perspectives.

3.	Ask the students to form groups of three or four. Distribute the images, giving a different image to each small group. Ask each group to place their image on a large page and then to come up with questions using the compass rose.

4.	Facilitate feedback on what the students have learned through this activity.

EXAMINING ROOT CAUSES

Problem Tree

A problem tree helps students to explore the causes, effects and possible solutions of an issue. Each group draws a fruit tree in outline on a large sheet of paper. They begin by labelling the trunk with the chosen question or problem. They use their new knowledge about the issue to label the roots with the causes of the problem, then they write the effects of the problem on the branches and finally they can add the fruit as possible solutions to the problem.
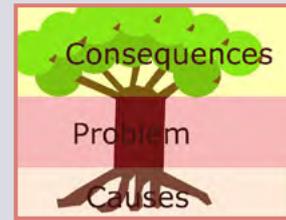

See the oxfam website for an example of how to use use this approach in the classroom

CONSIDERING DIFFERENT POSSIBLE REASONS OR CAUSES USING DIAMOND RANKING

Diamond ranking is a thinking tool that gets students to consider alternatives, make judgments and be able to give reasons for their judgment. This involves taking an issue and asking your students to come up with a range of judgments. For example, they might consider the reasons *why poverty persists in Ireland* or *the factors influencing the formation of a person's cultural identity*. It's important that there is no single right answer but a range of possible responses. All the different responses are put on cards and the students then work in groups to arrange the answers in order of priority and they must do this by consensus.

They should arrange the cards to form a diamond, ranking the most important on the top and the least important on the bottom.
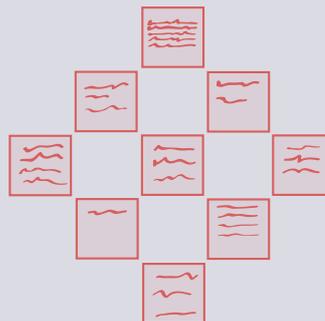
In debriefing, it is easier if you focus on the groups' top and bottom choices, asking students questions such as

▸ How did you decide what was most important/least important?

▸ What evidence convinced you?

▸ Was it sometimes difficult to agree on what was a cause or a consequence? e.g. lack of education – is this a cause or a consequence of poverty?

Adapted from Anne de A'Echevarria and Ian Patience, *Teaching Thinking Pocketbook*

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN FACT, OPINION AND REASONED JUDGEMENT

As students engage in discussion and read texts from different sources, they need to be able to distinguish between facts, opinions and reasoned judgements. One of the distinguishing features of Politics and Society is that students are required to move from merely expressing opinions, to arriving at reasoned judgment, i.e. to offer opinions backed up with evidence. To do this they must learn to distinguish between:

Fact – 100% true and empirically verifiable

Reasoned judgement – an opinion that has some evidence to back it up

Opinion – varies from person to person and is based on personal views/experiences or prejudices.

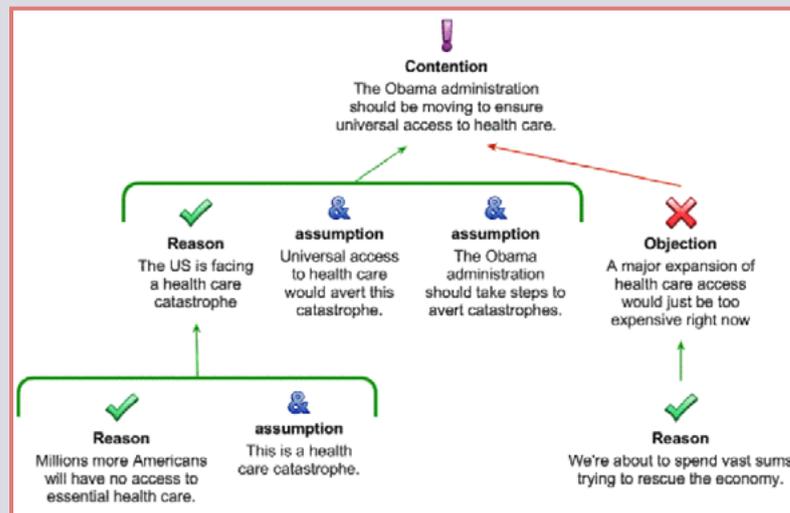Here's an activity you can use with your students.

Ask the students to work in pairs and agree whether the following statements are a fact, opinion or reasoned judgement. Encourage the students to look for evidence that could back up some of these statements and thereby move a statement from being an opinion to a reasoned judgement.

1. African countries are the poorest in the world.

2. Old people in Ireland are more likely to experience food poverty than younger people.

3. Over the past four decades, the global increase in women's education has prevented more than four million child deaths

4. 1 in 10 children in Ireland leave school with literacy problems, rising to 1 child in 3 in disadvantaged communities

5. Countries whose debts are too high should still have to repay them because it's their own fault for getting into debt in the first place

6. It is the people in poorer countries who have done least to cause climate change who are the worst affected.

7. Ireland is one of the worst places in Europe to be a child

Students can use various online activities to see if they know how to distinguish between facts and opinions.

ARGUMENT MAPPING

Argument mapping allows students to graphically display the structure of their reasoning and argumentation. The technique is useful in the Politics and Society classroom where students need to be able to look at an argument from different angles, looking at reasons and assumptions which underpin an argument and possible counter-arguments. See the next page for some examples.

Contention
The main issue or topic under consideration.

because

but

Reason
Information which directly supports the contention.

Objection
Information which directly refutes the contention.

because

but

because

however

Reason
Information which backs up the reason above.

Objection
Information which goes against the reason above.

Reason
Information which provides a reason to believe the objection above.

Rebuttal
Information which provides a counter objection to the above.

Contention
The Obama administration should be moving to ensure universal access to health care.

Reason
The US is facing a health care catastrophe

assumption
Universal access to health care would avert this catastrophe.

assumption
The Obama administration should take steps to avert catastrophes.

Objection
A major expansion of health care access would just be too expensive right now

Reason
Millions more Americans will have no access to essential health care.

assumption
This is a health care catastrophe.

Reason
We're about to spend vast sums trying to rescue the economy.

For more on argument mapping go to

4 Working with others

We cannot take for granted that students have the necessary skills to be able to engage in genuine dialogue and debate and to work collaboratively and effectively with each other. Skills of listening, summarising, encouraging, criticising ideas (and not people), negotiating differences of opinions, etc. all need to be taught. They also need to be reflected upon through group processing. The ideas in this section of the resource will help develop some of these skills.

Ensuring successful groupwork

Here are some ideas on how to set up and encourage effective groups.

Heterogenous members	Avoid friendship groups. At the start student may object to being separated from their friends. Explain that the groups will change regularly.
Keep groups small to begin with.	Teachers must teach the skills needed for group work, such as listening skills, leadership skills (shared and rotated), conflict resolution skills, how to give feedback, how to encourage each other, etc.
Social skills need to be taught	Teachers can ensure that the group is accountable while at the same time making sure that there is individual accountability, for example by randomly selecting one student to explain the group's answer.
Ensure everyone feels accountable for their own work and for the work of the group	The teacher structures work in such a way that students need each other in order to complete the task.
Create positive interdependence	Students know that they 'sink or swim together'.

Create positive interdependence — This can be achieved

  ▸ when the teacher sets a shared task or goal explain that at the end, all the group members must be able explain how it was arrived at

  ▸ when resources are shared (one worksheet between each pair/small group)

  ▸ when group members have complementary roles

  ▸ when the teacher requests one end product and there is a shared reward or shared grade for the group.

Both the task and relationships are important	Cooperative learning groups try to increase students' learning and maintain good working relationships. Students need to be reminded to observe how they are succeeding with both.
Make time for group reflection/evaluation	The students need time to discuss how well they are achieving their goals and how they are working together. Questions such as 'What worked well in the group today?' and ' How can you work better next time? are useful.

Adapted from Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, *Cooperation in the Classroom*, revised 1991

ASSIGNING STUDENTS TO GROUPS – HINTS FOR SUCCESS

▸ Assign the groups yourself. Each group should have a mix of abilities, gender, motivation levels, etc.

▸ Start out with small groups (2 or 3) until students become skilful in group work.

▸ The shorter the time available, the smaller the learning group should be.

▸ Assign each student a job or role but rotate them frequently.

▸ Graduate the tasks so that there are some tasks that everyone can do with ease and some more challenging tasks or questions. That way, everyone can contribute something to the group.

▸ Make your expectations clear so that students know what you want them to do and how to behave.

▸ Agree ground rules.

▸ Observe and monitor students working.

▸ Teacher's role is to set the task, to keep students focused on the task, support students if they get stuck on the task and give positive feedback.

COOPERATIVE READING

Summarising pairs

1. Students take turns reading and orally summarising paragraphs. To begin with, both skim read the entire text to get the gist of it.

2. Then both read the first paragraph.

3. One person summarises it (without looking at the text) while the other checks the paragraph for accuracy and offers prompts to help if anything is left out.

4. They then read the next paragraph and change roles until they have completed the text.

Cooperative threesomes

This can be used to answer a set of questions or solve a set of problems.

Each student is assigned a role. For example, you could have a Reader (reads the problem aloud to the group), Recorder (summarises and records the agreed answers), Checker (checks to make sure that all group members understand the text and questions, and agree on the answers).

The group must work together to agree the answers and produce **one set of answers.** When the group is finished they can compare their answers with those of another group and discuss.

COOPERATIVE WRITING

1. Assign students to pairs. The essay title is given. Students describe to each other what they plan to write. They probe and discuss each other's ideas.

2. The students go away and think about their own essay.

3. Next day, the two students work together to write the first paragraph of each essay to ensure that they both have a good start.

4. Then they go away and draft their essays. When completed, the students proofread each others essay, making corrections and suggestions for revision.

5. The students redraft their essays, making the revisions.

6. The two students then reread each other essays and sign their names on each essay.

Credit: Irish Times

PROBLEM BASED LEARNING

Problem based learning offers many benefits. When students are centrally involved in working out what the problem is, and coming to their own understanding of the problem, they will have a deeper understanding of the issue. In problem based learning, it is important that the problem chosen drives the learning rather than providing an example of concepts or theories already taught in class. To be effective problems 'should not be over circumscribed' and instead should be 'ill defined or ill structured so that aspects of the problem are emergent and definable by the learners' (Jonassen 1999, 219).

The characteristics of good problem based learning are

- multiple criteria for evaluating solutions can be used;

- uncertainty about which concepts, rules, and principles are necessary for the solution or how they are organized;

- an absence of prescribed rules or principles for describing or predicting the outcome

- a necessity for learners to make judgements about the problem, defend their judgements, and express personal opinions or beliefs.

A trigger is the starting point of problem based learning and that trigger can sometimes be a photo. In the example, students were presented with a problem, represented visually by the photo and asked to consider it from one of a number of different perspectives – public officials, community dwellers, local elected representatives, etc.

JIGSAW LEARNING

Jigsaw groups are a very effective way of organising group work. In this scenario, students are arranged into groups and each group is given a different subtopic related to the one topic. For example, the overarching topic might be *'how the executive branch of government is selected'* (Topic 2 LO 2.2) and students might be put in groups and given examples to research (Ireland, N. Ireland, European Commission and Parliament, etc) They must become 'expert' on their topic and agree how they are going to teach it to their classmates. When they are ready, the groups are mixed up so that there is now one expert on each subtopic in each group. They take turns 'teaching' their subtopic to each person in the group.
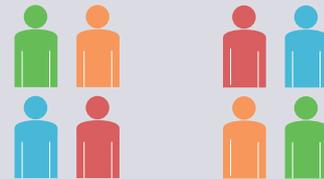
Jigsaw Technique
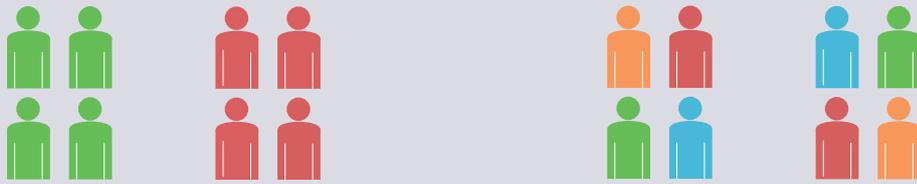
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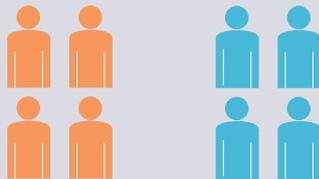
Step 2

PLACEMATS

Place mat is a form of collaborative learning that combines writing and dialogue to ensure accountability and involvement of all students. It involves groups of students working both alone and together around a single piece of paper to simultaneously come up with lots of alternative ideas.

Materials: Flip chart paper is preferable, but not necessary.

The paper is divided up into sections based on the number of member in the group with a central square or circle. (See samples on next page)

Steps

1. Carefully construct the task or question.

2. Assign students into small groups (3-4 works best)

3. Hand out the task/question with the flip chart page.

4. Students work alone first, using their section of the place mat to record their ideas.

5. Then students share their ideas with the group

6. Then they prioritize the 2-3 big ideas that have emerged from the group and these go on the centre placemat.

7. Sharing then takes place between groups.

This page shows different ways of designing your placemats depending on the number of students in each group. A large poster or flip chart paper works well.
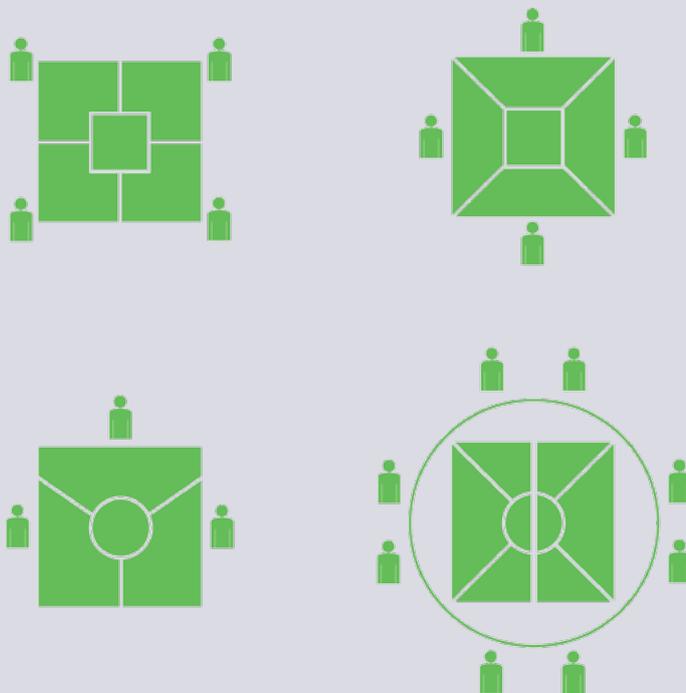
Adapted from Barrie Bennett, *Beyond Monet*

PEER TEACHING

Peer-to-peer presentation is a methodology that involves students teaching each other. This is very effective as students must understand a topic in order to teach it to their peers. This type of activity boosts understanding and also builds strong communication and information processing skills as students must think how best to transmit the information.

A sample lesson

1. Give students different topics to research and let them know they will have to teach/present their topic to a small group using a peer teaching method.

2. You may provide the basic background information for each topic to the students. Students then plan how they will present their information individually or in small groups to other students.

3. Alternatively, you could allow the students to collect the background information by researching the topic in groups, using weblinks provided by the teacher. Explain to them that every member of the group must present in some way.

4. Encourage different methods of presentation. Visual aids will help students to present. This will remove some of the anxiety of public-speaking and help students think about how to structure the information so it makes sense to themselves and to their peers.

5. Alternatively consider using digital technology, such as podcasting, videoing, Audacity, Prezi or PowerPoint.

REVIEWING MY WORKING TOGETHER SKILLS - STUDENT CHECKLIST

	Always	A lot	Hardly ever
I shared my ideas and information			
I listened carefully to other peoples' ideas			
I summarised our ideas and information			
I asked for help when I needed it			
I helped the other members of my group learn			
I checked to made sure everyone in my group understood			
I helped keep the group on task			
I encouraged and showed support to others			

Three things I learned about working in groups today....

Next time I work in a group I will...

5 Being personally effective

Being personally effective is a skill that involves many diverse elements. It is about students taking more responsibility for their learning and so becoming more autonomous as learners. It is about being able to plan, set goals and regularly review progress towards achieving those goals. It is about being able to reflect on their own learning, both within the classroom and beyond. While this skill will be developed and practiced throughout the learning in Politics and Society, it will be particularly important in planning and evaluating their learning as part of the citizenship action project.

Teachers can help students to develop their skills of personal effectiveness in a number of ways.

For example, through building up the practice of

1. Giving students opportunities to support each other in their learning through reviewing their own work and their peers' work and giving and receiving feedback.

2. Encouraging students to record their goals and review their progress, for example, through a journal/blog or the use of student reflection sheets. This helps them to understand their achievements, identify the areas they need to improve upon and plan for future learning.

Click the booklets to download or go here for further resources

Sample questions for reflective journal/blogging

▸ What I learned from studying this topic...

▸ What I found difficult/challenging was...

▸ One important thing I discovered...

▸ I was challenged to change my opinion when...

▸ The skills I'm developing are...

▸ One thing I learned about myself...

Sample questions for self-reflection on classroom participation

On a scale of 1-10 I would rate my participation ...	
I expressed my opinions openly	
I was able to back up my opinions with evidence	
I listened carefully to other points of view	
I was willing to change my mind	
I asked critical questions	
I tried to look at things from different perspectives	
I tried to recognise the power of emotions as well as logic in my own judgments and other students'	
I helped others feel included	

Sample end of class reflection worksheet

Reviewing my learning today

One thing I learned today …	I felt challenged by …
A question I'm left with...	For my next class I will...

Signed:

Date

A rucksack reflection

This creative approach to reflecting on learning is derived from *Compass: Manual for Human Rights Education with Young People*, Council of Europe It involves the following steps

1. Ask students to imagine themselves going home with a rucksack on their back. The rucksack contains all the things they would like to carry with them from their learning in a topic they have been studying or an action they have taken.

2. They should consider everything they have learnt and want to keep – knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, experiences. These will be packed in the rucksack

3. They should also then imagine all the thing they want to leave behind – old ideas, misconceptions, attitudes, beliefs or difficult moments.

Self-assessment for written work in Politics and Society

Think about each aspect carefully and assess how well you think you did. Then score each one as follows:

Red: Needs improving
Amber: Average/okay
Green: Good.

	Red	Amber	Green
Presentation, correct spelling and grammar			
Have you written it in your own words?			
Structure Does your work have an introduction, a middle and conclusion? Did you find a logical way to group your ideas? For example, ▸ strengths and weaknesses ▸ arguments for, and against, etc,			
Giving evidence and drawing conclusions Did you ▸ give evidence or data for each argument? ▸ summarise your main conclusions? ▸ give evidence for each of your conclusions? ▸ refer to relevant thinkers?			
Where you use other people's ideas, do you always acknowledge this?			
Did you keep a record of sources of information e.g. book titles, internet sites, etc. and refer to these?			
Did you ask a friend to read your work and offer suggestions on how it might be improved? Did you proof read your finished assignment and make changes before handing it up?			
Did you hand in the work on time?			

Adapted from www.geoffpetty.com