

Course
SST-5101-2
Contemporary World
Problems and Issues I

Contemporary World



INTRODUCTION

The goal of the course *Contemporary World Problems and Issues I* is to help adult learners understand the nature of the relationships that form among societies and the way in which these relationships shape the organization of the world today, through the study of three themes.

The themes studied are: *Environment, Population* and *Wealth*. Each theme is defined by a designated focus, objects of learning related to the subject-specific competencies, concepts, specific theme-related knowledge and cultural references.

At the end of this course, adult learners will be able to interpret a contemporary world problem and take a position on an issue for each of the themes studied.

SUBJECT-SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES

The course *Contemporary World Problems and Issues I* targets the development of the two subject-specific competencies described in Appendix 3:

1. *Interprets a contemporary world problem*
2. *Takes a position on a contemporary world issue*

When interpreting a problem related to the themes studied, adult learners use facts, establish connections among these facts in their explanation of the problem and use concepts appropriately. They develop a clearer overview of the problem by identifying similarities and differences in the forms the problem takes in the world, by making connections between the elements of the problem and by identifying global trends.

When taking a position on a contemporary world issue and taking into account their interpretation, adult learners establish a critical distance by making connections between the viewpoints, interests and values of the actors involved, and by identifying the advantages and disadvantages of the solutions proposed. They then express a well-founded opinion, taking into account the influence of the actors on their opinion, using cogent arguments, and suggesting possible solutions.

RESEARCH PROCESS

When adult learners interpret a contemporary world problem or take a position on an issue, they use a research process.

To do this, they consider a problem or issue, become familiar with it, plan their research, gather and organize information, process and analyze the information, and lastly, communicate their findings. At any point, they may return to one of the steps of the process described in Appendix 4.

CROSS-CURRICULAR COMPETENCIES

All the cross-curricular competencies in the program may be required, to varying degrees, in the different learning situations. It is important to determine those that best match the requirements of the tasks for each situation. The cross-curricular competencies are presented in Appendix 1.

In the learning situation *Looking for a Job*, presented further on, the cross-curricular competency *Exercises critical judgment* can help adult learners go beyond stereotypes, prejudices, preconceived ideas and intuitive assumptions to examine issues, consider facts and evaluate their accuracy and put this information in perspective in order to support their position.

SUBJECT-SPECIFIC CONTENT

The subject-specific content of the course *Contemporary World Problems and Issues I* addresses the following themes:

1. *Environment*
2. *Population*
3. *Wealth*

A. Knowledge

Each of the themes is introduced by a short text and the prescribed elements of the subject-specific content, illustrated in Table 6.

Table 6
Prescribed Elements of the Course
Contemporary World Problems and Issues I

Prescribed Elements		Environment	Population	Wealth
Designated focus		Environmental management	The increase in migration	The distribution of wealth
Topic to be interpreted (contemporary world problem)		Economic, political and social choices in environmental management	Economic and social changes related to the increase in migration	The disparity in the distribution of wealth
Position to be taken (contemporary world issue)		The use and consumption of resources OR The harmonization of environmental standards	The management of urban expansion OR Migration and the world of work	Balancing social justice and economic development OR The control of resources
Concepts	Common	Interdependence – Globalization – Power	Interdependence – Globalization – Power	Interdependence – Globalization – Power
	Central	Sustainable development	Migration	Disparity
	Specific	Consumption – Dependence – Regulation – Responsibility	Culture – Relocation – Diaspora – Network – Urbanization	Concentration – Economic development – Flows – Social justice – Resource
Theme-related knowledge		International agreements – Climate change – Environmental groups – Measures taken by states – International organizations	Demographic change – Parallel economies – Migration flow – Urban organization – Labour policies – Immigration policies – International networks	International trade – Wealth creation – Debts and obligations of states – Social gaps – Emerging economies – Influence of colonization, decolonization and neocolonialism – International organizations – North-South relations – Power of multinational firms

Cultural references

Enable adult learners to broaden their world view by considering social phenomena or important cultural trends.

Environment

This theme concerns the economic, political and social choices regarding the environment made by states or other actors, such as organizations or citizens' groups, as well as the effort to establish international agreements recognizing environmental problems and seeking solutions.

The expression "Only One Earth"³ highlights the importance of international cooperation regarding the environment by establishing the principle that every state is responsible for ensuring that activities within its jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment beyond its own borders. Some environmental problems—such as global warming—are too big to be dealt with by good neighbour practices and require an active search for global solutions. To this end, actions are based on agreements or international conventions, which raise questions regarding their application or their real significance.

Environmental concerns are leading societies to rethink their relationship with the environment. Consumption habits differ from one culture to the next, and are based largely on societal choices. It is thus not possible to hold states entirely responsible for these choices, which are also made by individuals, businesses and social groups, whose consumption, production patterns and use of resources all affect the environment.

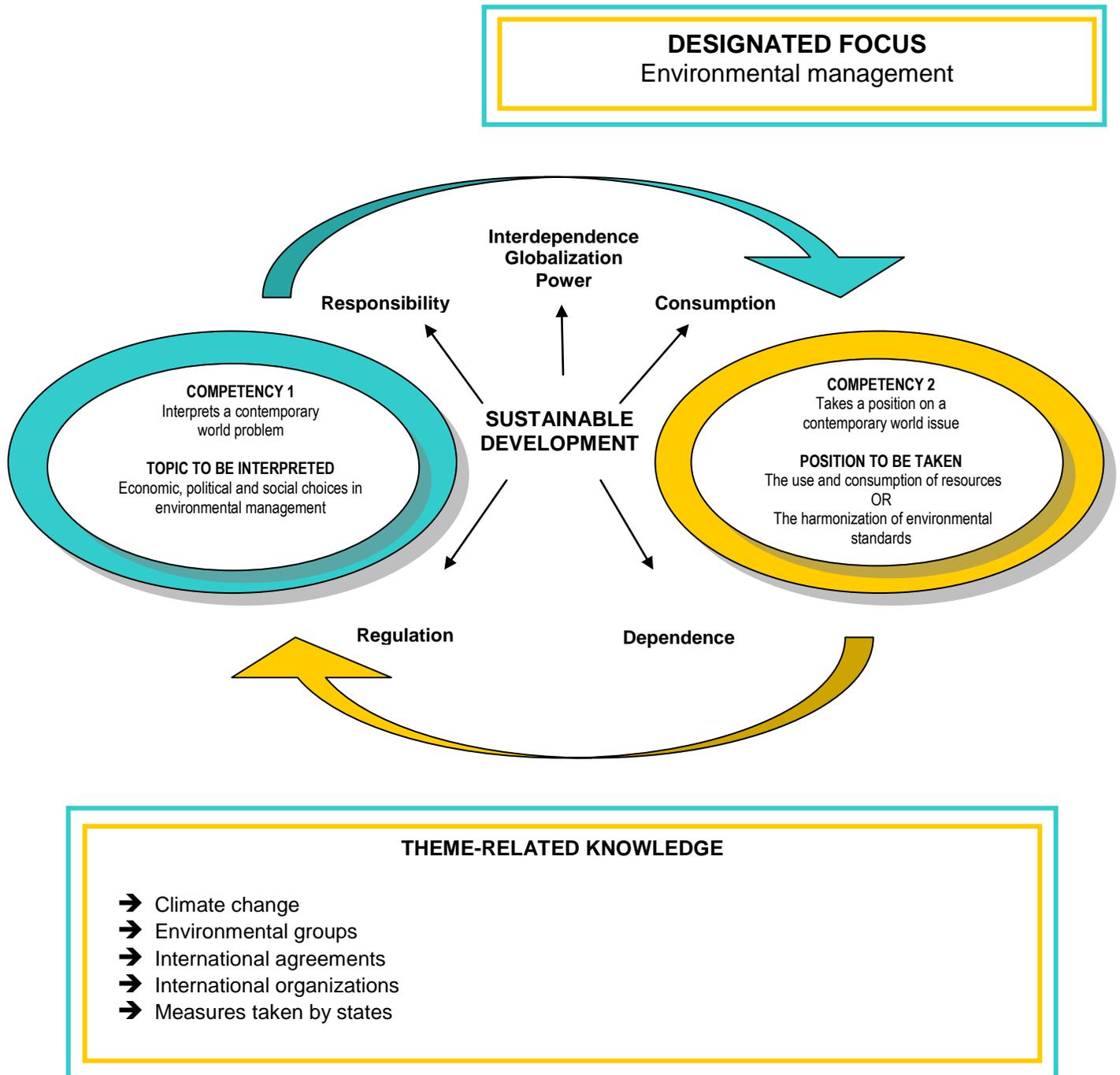
Given the Earth's limited capacity to support economic development, societies face the question of how to regulate environmental practices effectively by establishing global management standards and mechanisms. The overexploitation or scarcity—and uneven distribution—of certain resources (hydrocarbons, drinking water, forest, etc.) call for the reevaluation of choices regarding resource use.

Since all states do not have the same capacities, objectives or interests, negotiations are complex, all the more so in that they are based essentially on a voluntary approach. Although the legitimacy of international organizations active in the environmental field is increasingly recognized, there remain questions concerning their authority. Who ensures the application of international environmental standards? Who arbitrates environmental conflicts? Given the global nature of the problems in question, the lack of uniformity and consistency in the actions taken represents a major obstacle facing the contemporary world in its quest for sustainable development.

³ This expression comes from the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, held in Stockholm in 1972.

The above text provides an overview of the theme. The diagram on the following page illustrates the relationship between the competencies and the subject-specific content for this theme. Adult learners are expected to interpret the problem *Economic, political and social choices in environmental management* in the world today. They also have to take a position on one of the following issues: *The use and consumption of resources* OR *The harmonization of environmental standards*.

ENVIRONMENT



Cultural references: *Our Common Future* (Brundtland Report, 1987) – *Action 21* (1992) – *Kyoto Protocol* (1998) – *An Inconvenient Truth*, Al Gore (2006) – Other references to be chosen by the teacher

Population

The growth of trade and cultural exchanges in the context of globalization, and the rapid development of means of communication in the areas of transportation and information networks, have greatly increased population mobility and fostered the development of international networks.

Population movement usually occurs for economic reasons. There are also humanitarian reasons, related to political situations or climate issues. Demographic changes, such as aging populations and natural population growth, also lead to increased migration in some societies. These migration movements contribute to the creation of diasporas, that is, the dispersion of members of a community throughout the world.

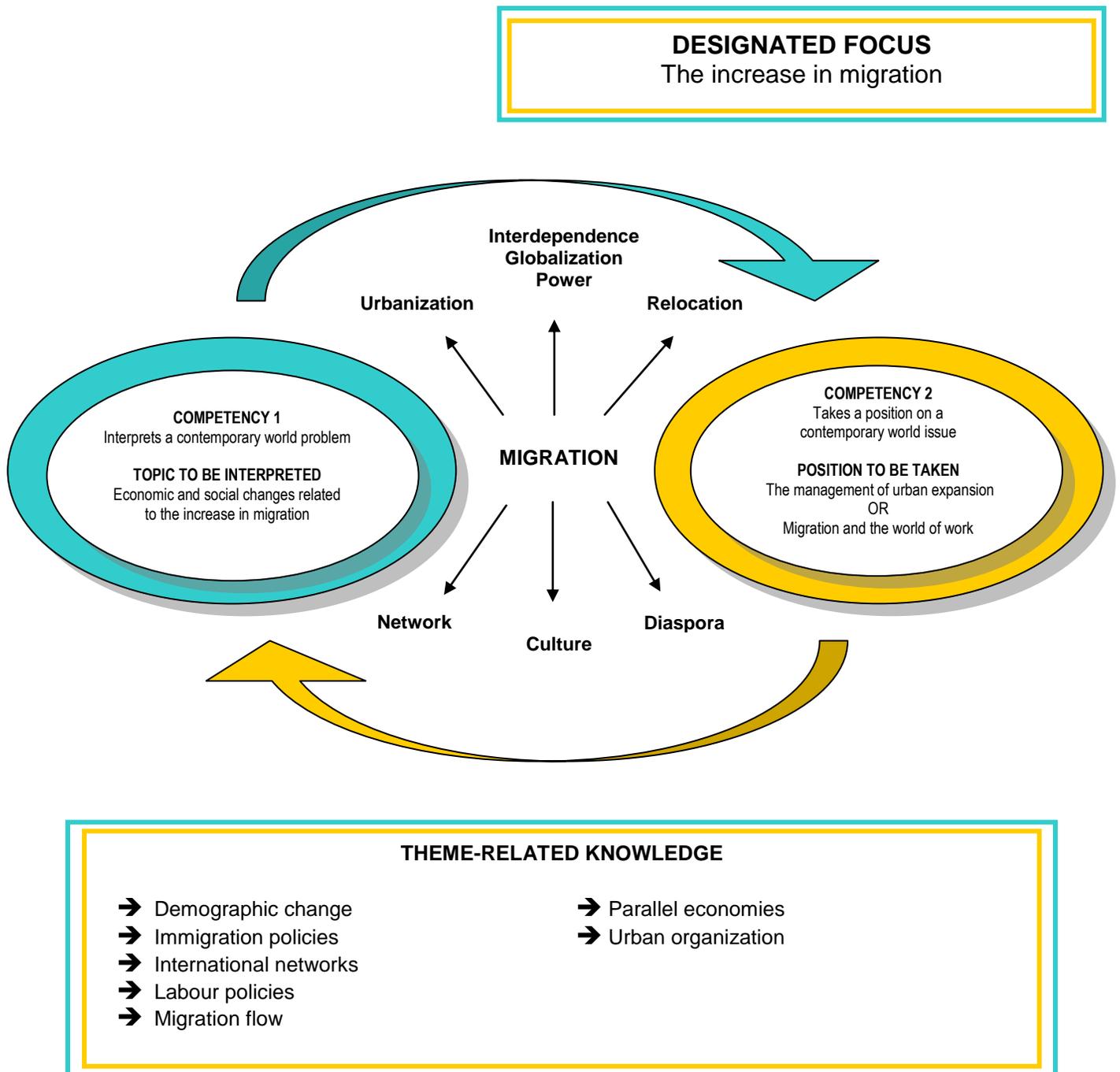
Migration may be permanent or temporary; it may take place within a legal framework or be clandestine. Much of it targets big cities, whether the migrants come from within the country or outside it. The majority of the world's population is now urban. The

concentration of migrants in cities accelerates the phenomenon of urbanization and the problems associated with it. In some parts of the world, these problems have grown to worrisome proportions. Cities have difficulty absorbing the flow of new arrivals. Infrastructures do not always develop in proportion to the needs created by the migrants. How can cities take into account the culture of these new arrivals, whether they are the result of internal or external migration? How do societies handle the intensification of migration flows, whether national or international?

Changes in the world of work are increasing the mobility of both jobs and workers. These changes pose a major challenge for host societies, which must, for example, both facilitate the integration of immigrants by seeing that they find jobs and address the increase in unemployment caused by the phenomenon of relocation. Other societies experience a net migration loss and try to make up for a shortage of skilled labour. How can societies cope with these changes?

The above text provides an overview of the theme. The diagram on the following page illustrates the relationship between the competencies and the subject-specific content for this theme. Adult learners are expected to interpret the problem *Economic and social changes related to the increase in migration* in the world today. They also have to take a position on one of the following issues: *The management of urban expansion* OR *Migration and the world of work*.

POPULATION



Cultural references: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (1951) – Migrinter (1985) – International Labour Organization, *Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work* (1998) – Jane Jacobs (1916-2006) – Other references to be chosen by the teacher

Wealth

Wealth is the result of the economic activity of a community—of the processes involved in the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Despite the sustained growth of the world economy in the second half of the 20th century, the distribution of wealth remains unequal. It favours the countries of the North over those of the South. There is also a disparity in the distribution of wealth within societies. The gap between rich and poor is growing wider in many countries.

Inequalities in the areas of employment and remuneration have increased in many developed countries, especially since the mid-1980s. The economic development experienced by some emerging countries, notably in Asia and South America, has widened the gap between living conditions in the city and those in the country. As for the African continent, much of it is characterized by generalized poverty.

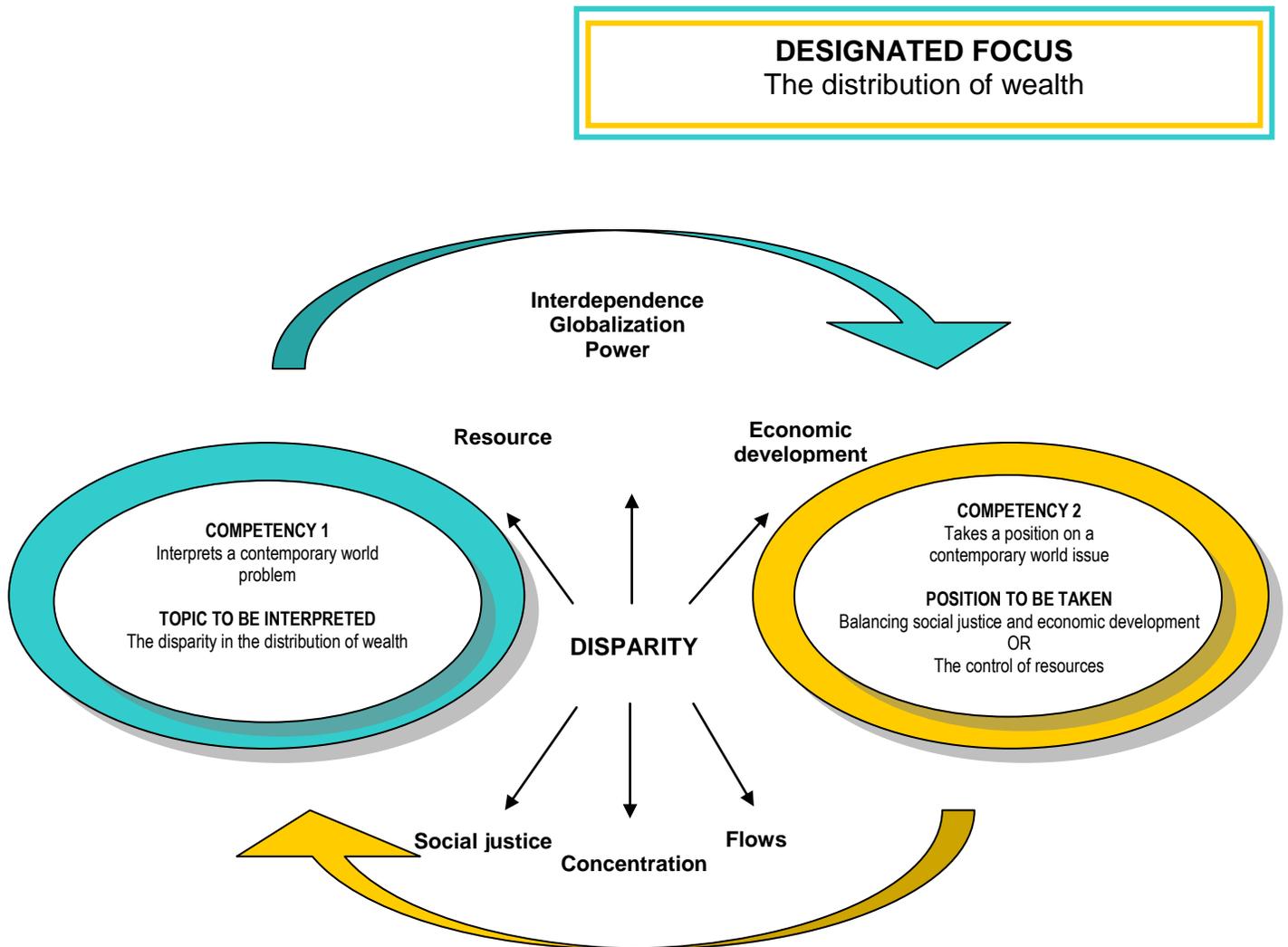
Notwithstanding the worldwide increase in productivity, measures taken by states to redistribute wealth and efforts by various actors to regulate the world market, disparities

continue to grow. The geographic distribution of natural resources on the planet, the control of those resources, the organization of production as well as the effects of colonization, decolonization and neo-colonialism must all be taken into account in explaining this disparity.

There is a consensus on the need to reduce poverty in the world, but the way to achieve this is a matter of debate. Is it possible for economic development to ensure greater social justice on a world scale? Can it benefit all populations, providing every person with adequate living conditions and access to education and health care? Another challenge is to find a way to make the exploitation of natural and human resources, particularly by multinational firms, generate more economic benefits for local populations, particularly in the less-developed countries. To what extent is a fair distribution of wealth possible? How can this objective be attained? Does economic growth increase disparity or reduce it?

The above text provides an overview of the theme. The diagram on the following page illustrates the relationship between the competencies and the subject-specific content for this theme. Adult learners are expected to interpret the problem *The disparity in the distribution of wealth* in the world today. They also have to take a position on one of the following issues: *Balancing social justice and economic development* OR *The control of resources*.

WEALTH



- THEME-RELATED KNOWLEDGE**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ Creation of wealth ➔ Debts and obligations of states ➔ Emerging economies ➔ Influence of colonization, decolonization and neocolonialism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➔ International trade ➔ International organizations ➔ North-South relations ➔ Power of multinational firms ➔ Social gaps
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Cultural references: Oxfam (1942) – *We Are the World* (1985) – Fair Trade/Transfair Canada (1997) – Muhammad Yunus (1940 -) – Other references to be chosen by the teacher

B. Cultural References

The cultural references suggested in this course refer to the themes *Environment*, *Population* and *Wealth*. They were selected on the basis of the designated focus to be used in a learning situation.

Cultural references may take different forms—international agreements, events, media products—and concern a person, a work of art, a territory, a literary work, a scientific discovery, a way of thinking and so on. Using cultural references enables adult learners to broaden their world-view by considering significant social phenomena or cultural trends.

Although the use of cultural references in the classroom is prescribed, the examples provided in the program are not.

The cultural references are chosen by the teacher, with the help of adult learners, if applicable. Three selection criteria must be met:

- conformity with the designated focus
- consideration of several aspects of society
- potential use in the development of the two subject-specific competencies

Suggested Cultural References

Environment	<i>Our Common Future</i> (Brundtland Report, 1987) – <i>Action 21</i> (1992) – <i>Kyoto Protocol</i> (1998) – <i>An Inconvenient Truth</i> , Al Gore (2006) – Other references to be chosen by the teacher
Population	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (1951) – Migrinter (1985) – International Labour Organization, <i>Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work</i> (1998) – Jane Jacobs (1916-2006) – Other references to be chosen by the teacher
Wealth	Oxfam (1942) – <i>We Are the World</i> (1985) – Fair Trade/Transfair Canada (1997) – Muhammad Yunus (1940 -) – Other references to be chosen by the teacher

C. Techniques

To study the themes associated with this course, adult learners must use different techniques.

These techniques, presented in Appendix 2, involve interpreting and creating a map, interpreting a written document, interpreting and creating a time line, interpreting a picture, interpreting and creating a graph, and interpreting and constructing a contingency table.

FAMILIES OF LEARNING SITUATIONS

Families of learning situations consist of situations of varying degrees of complexity that are related. They provide specific learning contexts that help give meaning to learning.

The learning situations in the Contemporary World program are divided into two families:

- *Interpreting a contemporary world problem*
- *Taking a position on a contemporary world issue*

BROAD AREAS OF LEARNING

Each of the five broad areas of learning, including *Media Literacy*, raises issues and questions that can be used to develop learning situations.

The educational aim of the broad area of learning *Media Literacy* is to encourage adult learners to exercise critical, ethical and aesthetic judgment with respect to the media and produce media documents that respect individual and collective rights. Its focus of development *Understanding of media representations of reality* enables adult learners to make comparisons between facts and opinions. The example that follows, *Looking for a Job*, is consistent with both the educational aim and the focus of development.

EXAMPLE OF A LEARNING SITUATION

Learning situations place adult learners at the heart of the action. To enable adult learners to develop competencies, construct and effectively apply knowledge, and mobilize a variety of resources, a learning situation must be meaningful, open-ended and complex and require various steps and different tasks, as suggested in the example below. To enable adult learners to carry out the different tasks, this situation *Looking for a Job* should be accompanied by a document file that includes texts, time lines, graphs, caricatures, etc.

Looking for a Job

Through the media, adult learners are able to see that globalization, the growth of trade and cultural exchanges and the rapid development of means of communication have redefined the world of work. Québec's workforce is now made up of individuals of many different origins who are seeking to improve their economic situation. Adult learners looking for a job must become aware of these new realities, including the cultural diversity that characterizes today's workforce. They must consider the place they will hold in the working world.

How can adults interpret the fact that economic and social changes are related to the increase in migration on a global scale? What arguments can they use to support their opinions on migration and its effects on jobs? What possible actions can they suggest?

Various tasks would give adult learners an opportunity to interpret this problem:

- They could analyze a map illustrating international migration patterns to assess the importance of population mobility.
- They could write a fact sheet to establish a portrait of different types of migrants today and identify the causes of population movements.
- They could analyze the social effects of the current brain drain and determine its impact on developing countries.

Various tasks would give adult learners an opportunity to develop arguments in order to take a position on this issue:

- They could read short texts to identify different points of view on the issue and identify the values and interests that underlie them.
- They could write reading reports on the media treatment of the issue in order to recognize the choices that some media have made.
- They could write a short text to demonstrate whether workforce mobility is beneficial for Québec.

END-OF-COURSE OUTCOMES

By examining the three themes, adults learn to apply their knowledge appropriately, develop a rigorous reasoning process and express a well-founded opinion.

Once they have examined the theme *Environment*, adult learners are able to observe that environmental management goes hand in hand with the establishment of international agreements in recognizing problems and seeking solutions. By interpreting a problem and taking a position on an

issue, adult learners become aware of the global scale of the issue of sustainable development and of the importance of taking consistent actions at an international level.

Once they have examined the theme *Population*, adult learners are able to observe that increased migration is related to globalization, increased population movements, changes in the world of work and the mobility of jobs and workers. By interpreting a problem and taking a position on an issue, adult learners become aware of the major changes in the world of work and the need to take into account migration movements when considering the urbanization of societies at the world level.

Once they have examined the theme *Wealth*, adult learners are able to observe that, despite global economic growth, inequalities and disparity remain a reality both within and among countries. By interpreting a problem and taking a position on an issue, adult learners become aware that disparity continues to grow in spite of increased productivity, and try to explain why.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

To evaluate the development of subject-specific competencies with respect to the acquisition of theme-related knowledge and its effective application, teachers base their judgment on the two evaluation criteria.

The criterion ***Appropriate use of knowledge*** applies to both competencies. The criterion ***Use of a rigorous reasoning process*** is related to the competency *Interprets a contemporary world problem*. The criterion ***Expression of a well-founded opinion*** is related to the competency *Takes a position on a contemporary world issue*.

The table below shows the links between the competencies and evaluation criteria.

Competency	Evaluation criteria
Competency 1 Interprets a contemporary world problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appropriate use of knowledge - Use of a rigorous reasoning process
Competency 2 Takes a position on a contemporary world issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appropriate use of knowledge - Expression of a well-founded opinion