

Course
SST-5102-2
Contemporary World
Problems and Issues II

Contemporary World



INTRODUCTION

The goal of the course *Contemporary World Problems and Issues II* 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 two themes.

The themes studied are: *Power* and *Tensions and Conflicts*. 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 II* 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 *More Than 145 Canadian Soldiers Die in Afghanistan (May 2010)*, presented further on, the cross-curricular competency *Uses information* can help adult learners use a set of resources effectively. They must not only find and compare information and determine its value or relevance, but also learn to organize and synthesize it in order to make use of it.

SUBJECT-SPECIFIC CONTENT

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

1. *Power*
2. *Tensions and conflicts*

A. Knowledge

Each of the themes is introduced by a short text and a diagram of the prescribed elements of the subject-specific content, illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7
Prescribed Elements of the Course
Contemporary World Problems and Issues II

| Prescribed Elements | | Power | Tensions and Conflicts |
|--|----------|--|--|
| Designated focus | | The powers of states | External intervention in a sovereign territory |
| Topic to be interpreted (contemporary world problem) | | The redefinition of the powers of states | The legitimacy of external intervention in areas of tension and conflict |
| Position to be taken (contemporary world issue) | | The capacity of states to take action OR The sovereignty of states and economic or political associations | Application of the principle of humanitarian assistance OR The interests of intervening parties versus those of populations |
| Concepts | Common | Interdependence – Globalization – Power | Interdependence – Globalization – Power |
| | Central | State | Intervention |
| | Specific | International law – Governance – Integration – Sovereignty – Standardization | Diplomacy – Human rights – Ideology – Interference – Demand |
| Theme-related knowledge | | International and multilateral agreements – Multinational firms – Pressure groups – International institutions – Globalization of markets – Cultural, economic and environmental policies – Political alliances – Economic zones | International alliances – Political autonomy – Control of resources – Exercise of rights and freedoms – International institutions – Peacekeeping missions – Peace process – Questions related to cultural identity (ethnicity, religion, etc.) |

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

Power

The development of worldwide political, economic and cultural relations and exchanges that characterizes globalization has had an impact on the powers of states. All areas of state intervention are affected by the introduction of standards resulting from international agreements. Some states see their power to act being redefined, or reduced.

States that sign agreements accept certain constraints, such as objectives and deadlines. In this respect, some international institutions exercise certain pressures on state actions. For example, in the area of culture, there is a trend toward standardization, particularly as regards films, and in the area of international law, tribunals have been established. In addition, because they extend beyond the country in which they are based, the activities of multinational firms are subject to international regulations, which also call into question the powers of states.

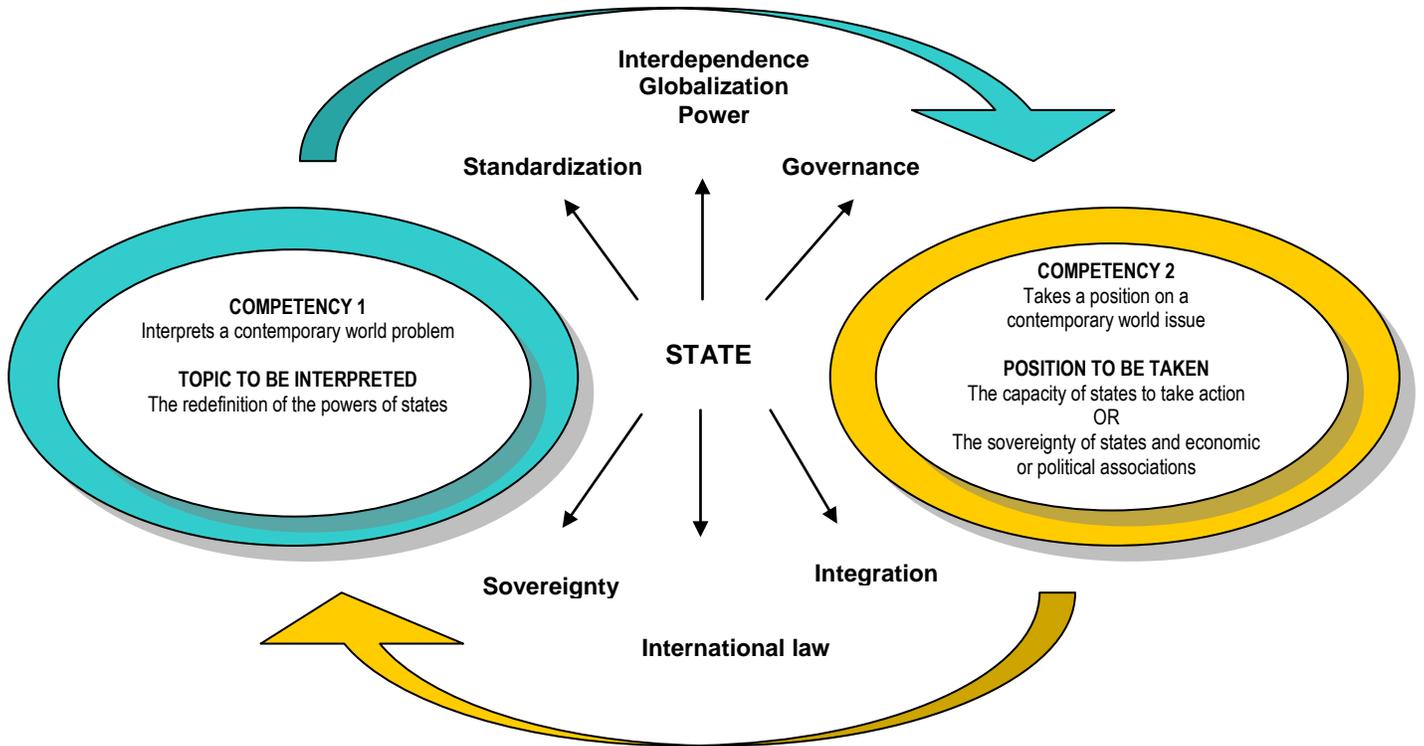
The above text provides an overview of the theme. The diagram on the following page illustrates the relationship between the competencies and the subject-specific content for this theme. Adult learners are expected to interpret the problem *The redefinition of the powers of states*. They also have to take a position on one of the following issues: *The capacity of states to take action* OR *The sovereignty of states and economic or political associations*.

Given the globalization of markets, states tend to establish agreements or even to form economic associations, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), or political associations, such as the European Union (EU). Although membership in such associations enables states to intervene more effectively in several areas, it may affect their sovereignty.

Power sharing involves negotiation, sometimes creates tensions and raises questions about the sovereignty of states, which must necessarily share governance more than they used to. Who makes the decisions in the world? Why do states accept or refuse to sign international agreements? Who establishes international consumption standards?

POWER

DESIGNATED FOCUS
The powers of states



- THEME-RELATED KNOWLEDGE**
- ➔ Cultural, economic and environmental policies
 - ➔ Economic zones
 - ➔ Globalization of markets
 - ➔ International and multilateral agreements
 - ➔ International institutions
 - ➔ Multinational firms
 - ➔ Political alliances
 - ➔ Pressure groups

Cultural references: United Nations (1945) – G6 Summit (1975) – Maastricht Treaty (1992) – Dongjiang Free Trade Port Zone (2006) – Other references to be chosen by the teacher

Tensions and Conflicts

The existence of divergent interests in a region may give rise to tension between peoples or states. The tension may culminate in a diplomatic crisis or an armed conflict. This may lead to external intervention, which may take the form of peace forces, humanitarian operations, economic sanctions or military action by third states. Such tension and conflict are part of a broader context involving the international situation, diplomacy and power relations.

Although there has been much tension and conflict in the course of human history, most of the international institutions that intervene in conflicts such as wars and genocides were founded in the second half of the 20th century. Despite the existence of these institutions and the establishment of conflict resolution arrangements, the contemporary world is still the theatre of tension and conflict among peoples or states.

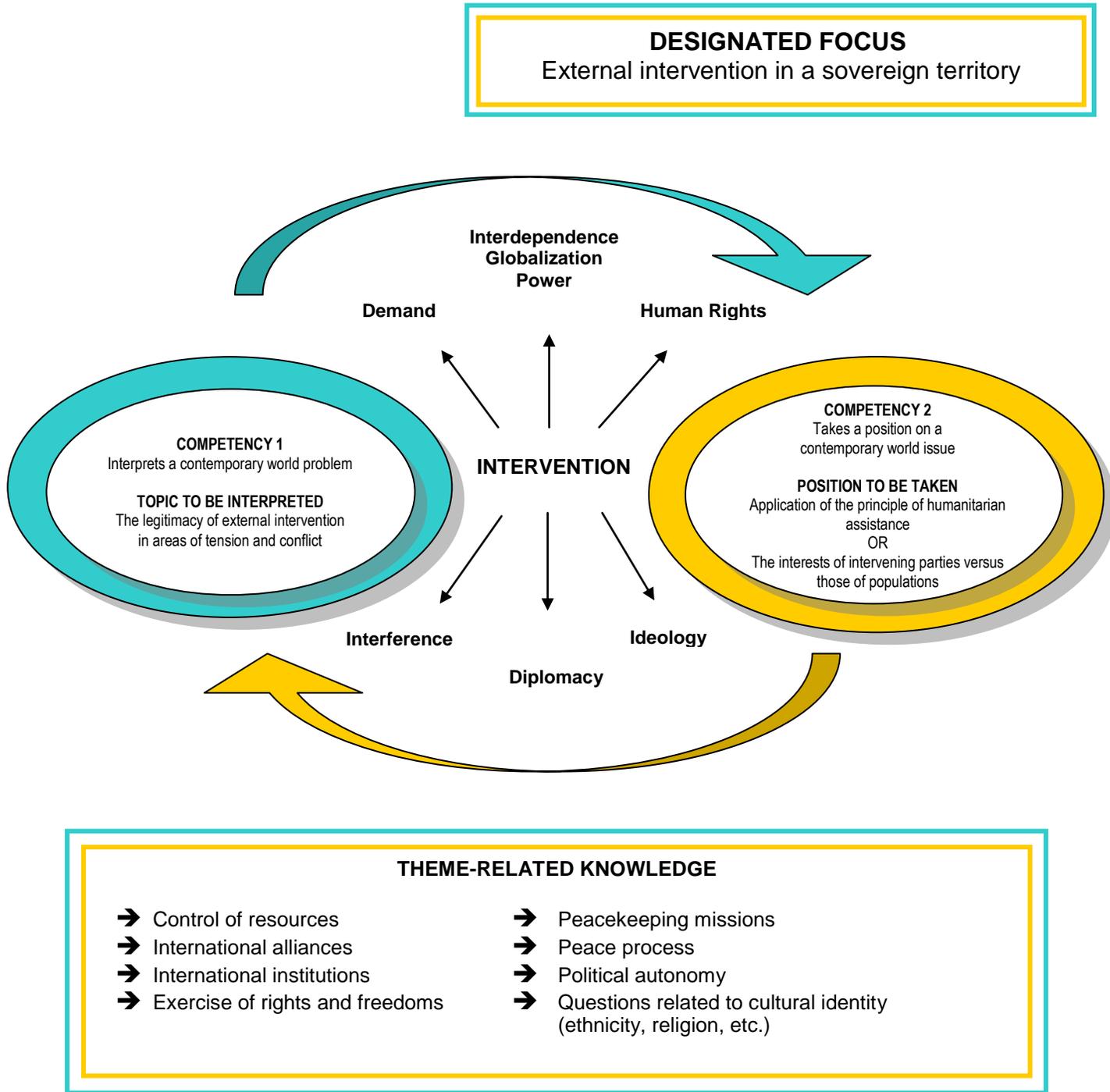
Most tensions and conflicts arise out of explicit demands, which take different forms and are

experienced differently depending on the case. They may, for example, involve questions related to rights and freedoms, territory, the control of resources, political autonomy and cultural identity (ethnicity, religion, etc.). In addition to explicit demands, there may be deeper causes, such as ideological differences or previous tensions and conflicts.

Sometimes, the intervention of third states or international institutions raises questions about respect for the sovereignty of states. To legitimize some of their actions, intervening parties seek the approval of the General Assembly or Security Council of the United Nations (UN), for example, citing humanitarian reasons for their actions. Sometimes they are criticized for promoting their own interests rather than those of the populations concerned. Whose interests and what principles underlie external intervention in areas of tension and conflict? And why does intervention occur in some areas and not others?

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 legitimacy of external intervention in areas of tension and conflict*. They also have to take a position on one of the following issues: *Application of the principle of humanitarian assistance* OR *The interests of intervening parties versus those of populations*.

TENSIONS AND CONFLICTS



Cultural references: Blue Helmets (1948) – Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) – Doctors Without Borders (1971) – Reporters Without Borders (1985) – Other references to be chosen by the teacher

B. Cultural References

The cultural references suggested in this course refer to the themes *Power* and *Tensions and Conflicts*. 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 them 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 guide the choice of references:

- 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

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Power | United Nations (1945) – G6 Summit (1975) – Maastricht Treaty (1992) – Dongjiang Free Trade Port Zone (2006) – Other references to be chosen by the teacher |
| Tensions and conflicts | Blue Helmets (1948) – Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) – Doctors Without Borders (1971) – Reporters Without Borders (1985) – 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 *Citizenship and Community Life*, raises issues and questions that can be used to develop learning situations.

The educational aim of the broad area of learning *Citizenship and Community Life* is to encourage adult learners to take part in democratic life and develop an attitude of openness to the world and a respect for diversity. Its focus of development *Adoption of a culture of peace* enables adult learners to become aware of the interdependence of individuals, generations and peoples. The example that follows, *More than 145 Canadian Soldiers Die in Afghanistan (May 2010)*, 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, the learning situation *More Than 145 Canadian Soldiers Die in Afghanistan (May 2010)* should be accompanied by a document file that includes texts, time lines, graphs, caricatures, etc.

More Than 145 Canadian Soldiers Die in Afghanistan (May 2010)

The current situation in Afghanistan can be discussed under the theme *Tensions and Conflicts*. Every day, media sources report on the conflict in this area and the many Canadians who play an active role on the battlefield. These soldiers leave behind family and friends who live with uncertainty as to whether these soldiers will come home safe and sound. Adult learners are encouraged to reflect on the presence of Canada in Afghanistan. How do they interpret the legitimacy of external intervention in areas of tension and conflict? What position do they take on the interests of intervening parties versus those of the people?

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

- They could locate on a world map the main areas of tension and conflict, and identify the areas in the world that are most affected.
- They could read short texts on different conflicts in the world and identify the similarities and differences that characterize them.
- They could read texts on the legitimacy of external intervention in Afghanistan in order to identify the causes of interference.

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

- They could identify, using various sources, humanitarian actions in Afghanistan and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used.
- They could determine the points of view of various actors (e.g. the UN, Taliban, Afghan government, Canadian government) to identify the points of convergence and divergence regarding this issue.
- They could participate in a round-table discussion on the interests of intervening parties versus those of populations in order to express their point of view on the issue.

END-OF-COURSE OUTCOMES

By examining the two 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 *Power*, adult learners are able to observe that the powers of states are being redefined as a result of globalization. By interpreting a problem and taking a position on an issue, adult learners become aware of the powers of states with respect to sovereignty and the sharing of governance in the world today.

Once they have examined the theme *Tensions and Conflicts*, adult learners are able to observe that, in the world economy, areas of tensions and conflicts exist. By interpreting a problem and taking a position on an issue, adult learners become aware that the intervention of third states or international institutions raises questions about respect for the sovereignty of states in areas of tensions and conflicts and the legitimacy of intervention in sovereign nations.

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 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 |

