

Using key and related concepts

Since key and related concepts describe the most important ideas for teaching in the subject, teachers can use them as a framework for vertically articulating the curriculum. For example, teachers can begin by identifying the key and related concepts that will be addressed in each year of the programme, and then map the development of those concepts with respect to MYP subject-group objectives. Alternatively, teachers can begin by developing their understanding of subject-group objectives over the years of the programme, then identify key and related concepts for specific units.

When planning a unit of work and determining the conceptual understandings for students to explore through the unit, it is important to note the following.

- Students need multiple opportunities to explore the concepts defined for each subject or discipline. Students should have meaningful inquiry into all of the key and related concepts for each relevant subject group at least once over the course of the MYP.
- Over the course of the programme, students need to develop an understanding of the key and related concepts at increasing levels of sophistication and abstraction.
- Summative assessments should offer students opportunities to reach the highest levels of achievement with regard to their conceptual knowledge and understanding.
- Related concepts can have different levels of abstraction and disciplinary specificity (Erickson 2008). In some cases, key concepts can function like related concepts. For example, in a unit entitled “Balance in complex organisms requires the effective interaction of systems”, the related concepts balance and interaction bring disciplinary depth to the key concept of systems—and also deepen understanding of the subject.

Global contexts

Teaching and learning in the MYP involves understanding concepts in context. Global contexts provide a common language for powerful contextual learning, identifying specific settings, events or circumstances that provide more concrete perspectives for teaching and learning. When teachers select a global context for learning, they are answering the following questions.

- Why are we engaged in this inquiry?
- Why are these concepts important?
- Why is it important for me to understand?
- Why do people care about this topic?

MYP global contexts, illustrated in figure 9, provide common points of entry for inquiries into what it means to be internationally minded, framing a curriculum that promotes multilingualism, intercultural understanding and global engagement. These contexts build on the powerful themes of global significance that structure teaching and learning in the PYP, creating relevance for adolescent learners.

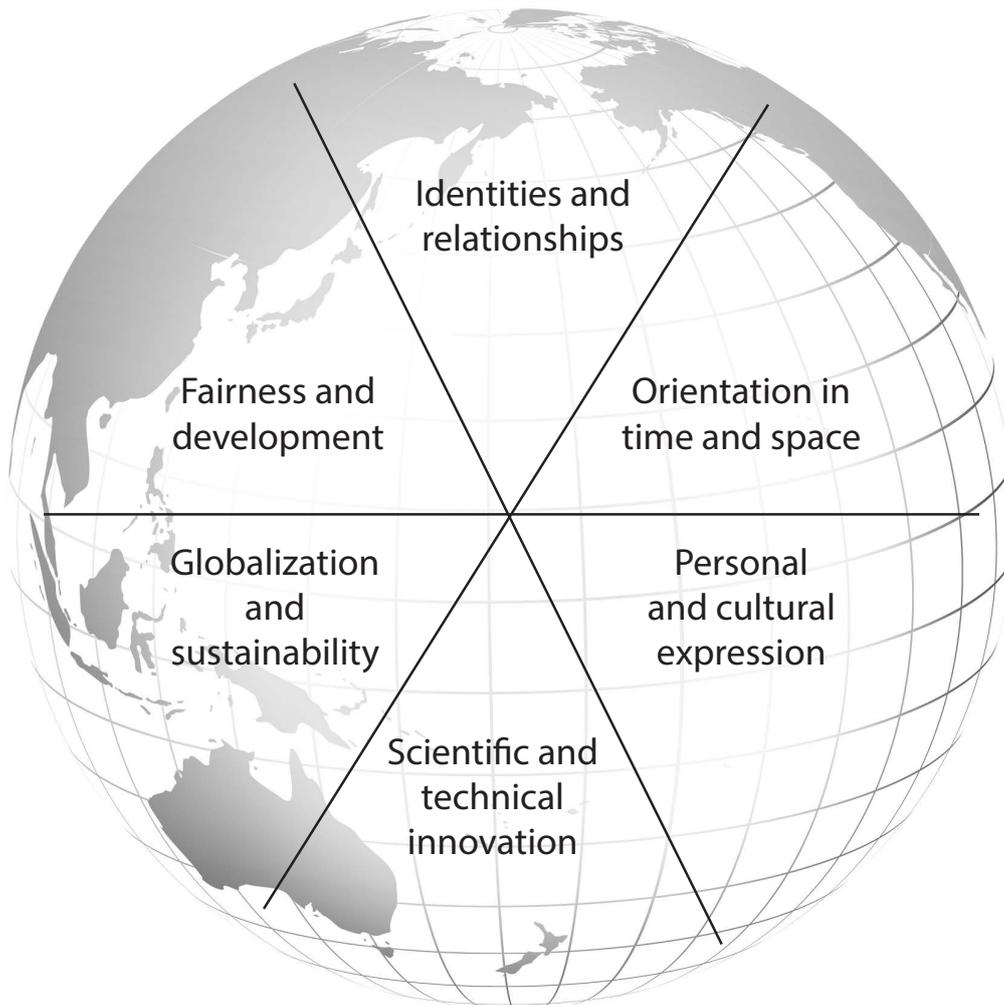


Figure 9
MYP global contexts

These and other contexts for teaching and learning inspire explorations of our common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet. They invite reflection on local, national and global communities, as well as the real-life issues and concerns of 11- to 16-year-old students. For each MYP unit, teachers should identify one global context that establishes a focus for meaningful teaching and learning in a programme of international education. Over the course of their study, students should encounter all six global contexts.

Table 3 contains explanations of the MYP global contexts and some of the many explorations that they can inspire.

Global context	Focus question(s) and description	Example explorations
Identities and relationships	<p>Who am I? Who are we?</p> <p>Students will explore identity; beliefs and values; personal, physical, mental, social and spiritual health; human relationships including families, friends, communities and cultures; what it means to be human.</p>	<p>Possible explorations to develop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition and cooperation; teams, affiliation and leadership • Identity formation; self-esteem; status; roles and role models • Personal efficacy and agency; attitudes, motivation, independence; happiness and the good life • Physical, psychological and social development; transitions; health and well-being; lifestyle choices • Human nature and human dignity; moral reasoning and ethical judgment; consciousness and mind
Orientation in space and time	<p>What is the meaning of “where” and “when”?</p> <p>Students will explore personal histories; homes and journeys; turning points in humankind; discoveries; explorations and migrations of humankind; the relationships between, and the interconnectedness of, individuals and civilizations, from personal, local and global perspectives.</p>	<p>Possible explorations to develop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civilizations and social histories, heritage, pilgrimage, migration, displacement and exchange • Epochs, eras, turning points and “big history” • Scale, duration, frequency and variability • Peoples, boundaries, exchange and interaction • Natural and human landscapes and resources • Evolution, constraints and adaptation

Global context	Focus question(s) and description	Example explorations
Personal and cultural expression	<p>What is the nature and purpose of creative expression?</p> <p>Students will explore the ways in which we discover and express ideas, feelings, nature, culture, beliefs and values; the ways in which we reflect on, extend and enjoy our creativity; our appreciation of the aesthetic.</p>	Possible explorations to develop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artistry, craft, creation, beauty • Products, systems and institutions • Social constructions of reality; philosophies and ways of life; belief systems; ritual and play • Critical literacy, languages and linguistic systems; histories of ideas, fields and disciplines; analysis and argument • Metacognition and abstract thinking • Entrepreneurship, practice and competency
Scientific and technical innovation	<p>How do we understand the world in which we live?</p> <p>Students will explore the natural world and its laws; the interaction between people and the natural world; how humans use their understanding of scientific principles; the impact of scientific and technological advances on communities and environments; the impact of environments on human activity; how humans adapt environments to their needs.</p>	Possible explorations to develop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems, models, methods; products, processes and solutions • Adaptation, ingenuity and progress • Opportunity, risk, consequences and responsibility • Modernization, industrialization and engineering • Digital life, virtual environments and the Information Age • The biological revolution • Mathematical puzzles, principles and discoveries
Globalization and sustainability	<p>How is everything connected?</p> <p>Students will explore the interconnectedness of human-made systems and communities; the relationship between local and global processes; how local experiences mediate the global; the opportunities and tensions provided by world-interconnectedness; the impact of decision-making on humankind and the environment.</p>	Possible explorations to develop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Markets, commodities and commercialization • Human impact on the environment • Commonality, diversity and interconnection • Consumption, conservation, natural resources and public goods • Population and demography • Urban planning, strategy and infrastructure

Global context	Focus question(s) and description	Example explorations
Fairness and development	<p>What are the consequences of our common humanity?</p> <p>Students will explore rights and responsibilities; the relationship between communities; sharing finite resources with other people and with other living things; access to equal opportunities; peace and conflict resolution.</p>	<p>Possible explorations to develop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democracy, politics, government and civil society • Inequality, difference and inclusion • Human capability and development; social entrepreneurs • Rights, law, civic responsibility and the public sphere • Justice, peace and conflict management • Power and privilege • Authority, security and freedom • Imagining a hopeful future

Table 3
Global contexts and explorations

The selected global context will inform the questions that teachers and students ask throughout the unit. However, many explorations of global contexts are closely related and, in the course of the unit, questions that relate to other global contexts may also be encouraged, developed and considered.

Inquiring into subject content through a global context enables students to develop a deeper understanding of both the subject and its application in the real world. Repeated cycles of inquiry, action and reflection can lead students from academic knowledge towards practical understanding, developing positive attitudes towards learning as well as a sense of personal and social responsibility.

Statement of inquiry

Teachers construct the statement of inquiry for a unit by combining a key concept, one or more related concepts, and a global context for the unit into a meaningful statement that students can understand. This statement expresses the relationship between concepts and context; it represents a transferable idea supported by factual content. Statements of inquiry facilitate synergistic thinking, synthesizing factual and conceptual levels of mental processing and creating a greater impact on cognitive development than either level of thinking by itself (Erickson 2007; Marzano 2009).

The statement of inquiry:

- represents a contextualized, conceptual understanding
- describes a complex relationship that is worthy of inquiry
- explains clearly **what** students should understand and **why** that understanding is meaningful
- can be qualified (using phrases such as “often”, “may” and “can”) if it is not true in all situations, but is still an important idea
- can be formulated at different levels of specificity.