**Adam Brodie-McKenzie -** Good day, and welcome to the presentation of the Characteristics of the Study of VCE Politics. My name's Adam Brodie-McKenzie, and I'm the Curriculum Manager for VCE Politics at the VCAA. In this presentation, I'll be explaining the characteristics of the study and their importance to thinking politically that are now the foundation of VCE Politics.

The characteristics of the study introduce the central concepts and skills that underpin the study of VCE Politics. They're an essential part of teaching, learning, and assessing VCE Politics. While the political landscape is subject to constant change, students must be able to develop skills of political understanding, reasoning, and civic and civil discourse, all of which form the basis of thinking politically. Thinking politically refers to the concepts and skills that are the foundation of disciplinary thinking and which students will use in the process of political inquiry.

To develop political thinking, students need to develop an understanding of concepts, perspectives, and political debates, and recognize their own capacity to contribute to political stability and change. Political thinking requires informed analysis of political phenomena in the society, region, and the world. The characteristics provide a framework for the study of VCE Politics and should be explicitly taught. They're detailed in the VCE Politics Study Design on pages 12 to 14, and describe what it means to think politically, analyse political issues, and evaluate political significance.

The characteristics of the study should underpin the teaching of the key knowledge and key skills. The characteristics align directly with the key skills in each area of study and are embedded in the outcomes and the key knowledge. Eight characteristics underpin the study of VCE Politics. Teachers should ensure that when undertaking the units, students develop the ability to use and apply the following concepts to assist in their investigations into and understandings of political phenomena. These political thinking concepts are referred to throughout Units 1-4 and are made explicit in the outcomes key knowledge and key skills.

Notably, the key skills for all the units directly fall from the characteristics of the study. You can see how this is represented in this table. The key skills for each outcome for each unit. This table and the one relating to Units 1 and 2 are in the VCE Politics Study Design, as well as a brief explanation of each of the characteristics. The support materials also significantly unpack these characteristics. The first characteristics of thinking politically is undertaking political inquiry. The study of politics engages students' curiosity and cultivates their thinking about contemporary political issues and political actors.

Through student-centred, teacher-directed political inquiry, students develop their knowledge and understanding of politics by investigating contemporary issues and crises. Students interpret and analyse various sources of media and examine the issue of information, misinformation and disinformation, so they can make evidence-informed arguments. Political inquiry entails investigating contemporary issues, asking political questions, and analysing and interpreting sources of information. The VCE Politics Study Design provides a number of ways in which political inquiry can occur.

For example, teachers may choose a case study for investigation in any of the Units 1 to 4 as a vehicle for introducing students to key political concepts and political knowledge. In Unit 2, teachers could encourage students to create and convert their own inquiry questions into the options provided by using the typical stages of either inquiry learning or problem-based learning, as can be seen in this table of the stages of inquiry process. In Unit 3 and 4, a class could undertake a guided inquiry across the whole of each unit as a means of addressing key knowledge and key skills. See the detailed example of a group research task in the teaching and learning activities for Unit 4, Outcome 2 in the support materials.

Assessment of individual student achievement could be via either stage four or five or six, or all three combined of the inquiry process. Alternatively, students could create their own case studies of issues or analyse a number of existing case studies to construct their own inquiry. This stage of the inquiry process offers a general guide which teachers and students can adapt to suit their own context throughout any of the units of study. It's also worth noting that the stages, while in some sense linear, are also concurrent, as student researchers will frequently revisit and revise each part of the process. These tables can be found in the supporting materials to the VCE Politics on the VCAA website.

Teachers are reminded that a political inquiry is one of the mandated assessment tasks to be undertaken at some point throughout Units 3 and 4. An inquiry is a REACH assessment task, as it can incorporate other assessment task types, such as an analysis of sources or an essay, and it can be both formative and summative. It's best suited to the assessment of the whole area of study, rather than a few key knowledge points. The essential characteristics of an inquiry is that there must be substantial elements of student-controlled research.

For examples of this, see the assessment section of the supporting materials to VC Politics on the VCAA website. The next characteristic of the study is applying political concepts. Certain concepts, ideas, and theoretical models essential to the discipline of politics. Students' ability to apply these concepts and their understanding of how these concepts connect with one another allow them to develop the ability to think politically. Students' application of political concepts allow them to demonstrate their understanding of the complexity of political issues. Teachers are advised to encourage students to investigate political issues by framing questions using these key concepts.

For example, in relation to power, which actors have power in this issue? What kinds of power do they possess, and how have they used it? What's the basis of legitimacy of this actor's exercise of power? Here's a non-exhaustive list of important political concepts in the study of VCE Politics. Students won't be required to learn definitions, but they must have a clear understanding of political concepts. The analysis of causes and consequences of political issues and crises requires students to consider the factors that produce and drive the issues or crisis, as well as the impacts of actions taken in response. Causes and consequences are complex, and often include combinations of historical, social, political, economic, cultural, technological, and environmental factors.

For VCE Politics, a broad understanding of historical causes, as in more than 10 years ago, is appropriate, but a deeper analysis of more immediate and short term causes within the last 10 years is required. These causes must focus on their contribution to the contemporary issue or crisis. Students should recognize that the causes and consequences may be both intended and unintended. Causes precede the issue and consequences succeed the issue. In between, the actions of political actors produce further consequences, which could either exacerbate or alleviate the issue. Students must be able to explain and analyse the dynamic relationship between causes and consequences as a way of understanding conflict and cooperation and evaluating political significance. It may be that the consequence of one issue is the cause of another, such as climate change leading to more climate refugees and causing an influx of people movement to a particular part of the world. Political interests motivate political action. They may be concealed and changeable, as well as being publicly stated.

So, it might be difficult for students to identify these interests with complete certainty. Students and teachers should be guided, in this case, by a range of expert commentary, which can then form the basis for identification and analysis of political interests. This also provides a number of opportunities for students to assess the reliability of source material, comparing fact with opinion as far as possible. Students should also examine opposing interests in the issue as a further way of assessing the significance of the political actions taken and the reliability and validity of the stated interests.

For example, the Australian government may identify its national interest as maintaining regional stability, which may act as a motivation for strengthening the American alliance or forming closer economic relationships with states in the Indo-Pacific region. But these stated interests may mask other perceived interests, such as containing the rise of China. Students should be encouraged to see and discuss political interests as fluid, often unreliable, and dependent on circumstance. Students must be able to identify these motivating interests in order to explain and analyse the causes and consequences of political action, the impact on political stability and change, and the political significance of the actors and their actions.

In contrast to political interests, political actors' perspectives are more easily identified as they are a public representation of their values, norms, or worldviews. In the case of many non-state actors, regional organizations or institutions of global governance, their perspectives are outlined in a set of unifying aims, a vision, a charter, or other founding document. The perspectives underlying state action, on the other hand, closely tied to the leadership of the state and the type of political system involved, and may be expressed in white papers, legislation, or other policy documents. Perspectives can be highly contested within political systems.

Political parties and politicians will have distinct political perspectives that distinguish them from other politicians or political parties. It's vital that students identify and analyse the different perspectives of political actors involved in an issue, the significance of the relationship between them and the implications of those perspectives in order to understand the political dynamics of that issue and to determine the logic and reasonableness of information provided. Although political perspectives are potentially more based on opinion than fact, students need to show evidence that supports that a political actor has a particular political perspective. The concept of political stability and political change requires students to analyse how and why political actors, processes and crises change over time or why they remain the same.

Politics is often found in the tension between political stability and change. There are forces working to maintain the status quo, and forces working to achieve change to the status quo in any human situation. These forces can be created or harnessed by any of the range of political actors who have their own interests to pursue. It's through discussion that students learn to appreciate the wide range of perspectives on various issues and to listen respectively to opposing views. Importantly, students mustn't confuse political stability and change with the political ideologies of conservatism and progressivism.

For example, the USA saw significant political change when the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in the Dobbs decision, removing a woman's right to an abortion federally. This political change moved the US back to more traditional values or a conservative ideology. It's better to think of political stability as a status quo and political change as a destruction to that status quo. A key skill for students of politics is to disentangle the forces that are maintaining stability and those striving to disrupt the status quo, and so achieve change. Or in the case of an unforeseen event or crisis, students must be able to identify the causes and the consequences of the event to assess the subsequent degree of stability or change.

For example, how much has the pandemic, arguably the most significant global event of the 21st century, caused political change, domestically or globally? A discussion of political stability or change in a political issue also requires students to identify the arguments and evidence used to persuade others to change or remain the same.

This characteristic really brings together and requires using all the other characteristic. It is central to thinking politically and political inquiry. Establishing political significance requires students to develop and use criteria to make judgements about political actors, issues or crises. To reach a judgment, students analyse political stability and change and cause and consequence, analyse competing interests and differing perspectives, evaluate the effectiveness of responses and their impacts and outcomes, and assess the degree to which the interests of political actors involved in an issue were achieved. It requires students to think through the possible criteria for assessing significance, and then come to a judgment and provide supporting arguments.

There are a number of ways in which an event, issue or actor could be judged to be politically significant or important. To establish relevant criteria, students should ask questions about the event, issue or actor such as those on this slide. Students need to investigate the actor's concerns, their power, and where their power comes from, whether the use of power is legitimate, what the interest and perspectives are in the issue, what justifications or rationalizations they put forward, and what the immediate and longer-term consequences are or might be. Are they working for political change or to maintain the status quo? Answers to these questions will enable students to make a judgment about the political significance of the issue and the actions taken.

Once the student has identified the causes and consequences, interests and perspectives, and supporting evidence on both sides, they should be able to mount an argument that something is or is not politically significant. As the study of politics is all about power, conflict, political interests and perspectives, the achievement of civility and change in political significance, it's evident that there's nothing hard and fast or right and wrong in terms of opinions or judgments. What is necessary is for the students to be able to identify the strengths and weaknesses of various political perspectives and actions and be able to assign a weighting to these positions through evidence, reasoning, and a consideration of underlying values.

For example, a student may decide that methods used by political actors to achieve their interests are indefensible, but only on the basis of democratic principles or the value of human rights. Whereas there may be other justifications for these methods. Students' own arguments or contentions must also be supported by factual evidence or persuasive expert opinions. Their analysis and evaluations should demonstrate an understanding of the relative weight of the evidence used and the strength of any opposing arguments. Sources of political information should be used to develop an appreciation of the diverse political perspectives taken by different actors with different interests on contemporary issues.

Students should also be aware of the differences between reliable and unreliable information, even invalid information, and the impacts of misinformation and disinformation in influencing politics. Only then can students evaluate the usefulness and reliability of sources as evidence in constructing and communicating a sound political and evidence-informed argument.

So that concludes this presentation on the characteristics of the study of VCE Politics. I hope this has clarified these important aspects to thinking politically. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me. All the best, and I hope you enjoy teaching and learning this important subject.

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