

U1L1A6 | The Inquiry Process: A New Model For Sustainability

overview

In this activity you will ACT on your learning about the inquiry process and sustainability from Activity 3 by analyzing a current initiative to effect societal change in Canada. Finally, you will use your learning to redesign the old sustainability model toward one that better represents the Earth's need for protection.

learning goal

- To identify and understand the steps in the inquiry process.
- To think critically about each stage, particularly with respect to evaluating sources of information.
- To use the inquiry process to investigate the concept of sustainability.
- To determine the key ideas for themes of sustainability.

success criteria

- Analyze a current issue using sustainability criteria co-constructed by the class.
- Create a new (and better!) model of sustainability.

Inquiry Question

- What is the inquiry process, and how can it be used to understand the concept of sustainability?

Task

Understanding sustainability allows you to analyze current issues through a sustainability framework. Below is a summary of the research you conducted to determine the factors that lead to more sustainable society. The research has been reworded to allow it to be compiled into a checklist.

Use the checklist and the article that follows to evaluate a current sustainability initiative.

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sustainability checklist

Environmental Sustainability needs: Planet

- Healthy and intact ecosystems
- Government policy that puts the environment first
- Educated citizens who put the environment first
- Responsible business that puts the environment first
- A forward-thinking, long-term vision

Economic Sustainability needs: Profit

- A healthy environment
- Partnership between government, industry and communities
- Sustainable communities with a high level of social capital to attract and retain strong businesses
- A wide variety of meaningful employment for people
- Responsible, efficient use of natural resources
- A forward-thinking, long-term vision

Social Sustainability needs: People

- A healthy environment
- Communities with secure and high-quality housing, education, health care, food systems to encourage people to invest and engage in the social fabric of their communities
- Communities with a high level of social capital that allows people to fully participate in the following activities:
 - Cultural—arts, heritage, active citizenship, embrace diversity
 - Political—good governance, democratic engagement, social development
 - Economic—employment, economic development, tourism, infrastructure, agriculture
 - Environmental—protection, conservation, experiences, governance
- A forward-thinking, long-term vision

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Part 1: Issue analysis

Read the article titled ‘Every Canadian’s eco-rights need Charter protection.’

If our right to a healthy environment was added to Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which of the criteria from the ‘Sustainability Checklist’ would be met by this action?

1. Complete the Sustainability Checklist by checking each box that would apply if the government were to make a law to add environmental protection to our Charter. When completing the checklist, try to think about how business and society might function differently as a result.
2. Would making our right to a healthy environment a Charter right be an activity that will improve sustainability in Canada? Explain, providing at least three reasons from the article to support your answer.

Part 2: A new model for sustainability

Use your learning over the last week to design a new model for sustainability. Remember, the current models (from the United Nations and the three-sphere model) are not working effectively in their current states. How could you rework (or completely redesign) it to help address your new learning reflected in the Sustainability checklist? Feel free to change:

- The size and shape of all or some of the spheres.
- The number of themes they address.
- Which themes you think are important.
- How the spheres interact with each other.
- Anything else that occurs to you!

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Every Canadian's eco-rights need Charter protection

DEVON PAGE AND PETER ROBINSON

Contributed to the *Globe and Mail*

Published Wednesday, April 18, 2012, 2:00 AM EDT

Every Canadian should have the right to clean air, water, food and land. In fact, most of us think we do.

We don't.

Canadians enjoy freedom of expression, equal protection from discrimination and the right to life, liberty and security under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This makes the Charter, which turns 30 this week, one of Canada's most powerful laws for protecting our human rights and collective quality of life. But the Constitution is silent on safeguarding our air, water and food, which are the very elements of our survival.

In an era of global warming and mass industrial pollution, this means Canadians' rights – which are supposed to be guaranteed by the Charter – are increasingly threatened without recognition of our right to a healthy environment.

Many nations are grappling with the challenge. Canada stands in stark contrast to more than 140 countries that have added environmental protections to their constitutions. Ninety of these, including Norway and France, now explicitly recognize the right to a healthy environment. The result? These nations rank higher than others on environmental performance, leave smaller ecological footprints and have reduced toxic emissions that impact the health of their citizens.

For example, a million Argentines living near the Riachuelo-Matanza, one of South America's most polluted rivers, now have access to clean drinking water after citizens used their right to a healthy environment to sue laggard governments and polluting industries. Some companies have shut down their operations; the government has committed to monitoring water, air and soil quality.

With our abundant wilderness and fresh water, it's easy for Canadians to assume that we all have access to the things we need to survive. But in 2000, seven people died in Walkerton, Ont., after drinking water tainted by E. coli. Twelve years later, the federal government has yet to develop national water standards that would ensure access to clean drinking water for all Canadians. That's a problem for first nations such as Attawapiskat – and hundreds of other small and rural communities where government advisories warn residents to boil their water before drinking it.

Last fall, the World Health Organization found that the people of Sarnia, Ont., breathe the most polluted air in Canada. Sarnia is home to Chemical Valley, a place where a petrochemical company spews toxic pollutants across the street from where children play basketball. It's also home to Ron Plain and Ada Lockridge. Ron and Ada are suing the Ontario government for failing to consider the effects on their health before approving more pollution in their community.

Recognizing every Canadian's right to a healthy environment in the Charter would do several things to help protect us from these kinds of problems, according to David Boyd, one of Canada's leading experts on environmental rights. It would oblige our governments to respect this right by creating and enforcing stronger environmental laws. A constitutional right that applies to all Canadians equally and is enforceable by the courts also holds decision-makers accountable at the highest level for protecting human health and the

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environment. This new right would dovetail with other Charter rights that promote a democratic society by empowering citizens and civil society to participate in decisions that affect our shared resources.

Our country and its abundant natural resources are like a village well. Government, industry, individuals and communities all draw from it. If pollutants poison the well and make one of us sick, we're all at risk.

In 2001, the Supreme Court reached the same conclusion about the bond between health and the environment. After upholding a municipality's right to restrict the use of harmful pesticides in Hudson, Que., the court said, "Our common future, and that of every Canadian community, depends on a healthy environment."

Devon Page is Executive Director of Ecojustice. Peter Robinson is CEO of the David Suzuki Foundation.

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Evaluation (for use in any Canadian and World Studies geography course)

Criteria	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
<p>Knowledge A1. Geographic Inquiry: use the geographic inquiry process and the concepts of geographic thinking when investigating issues relating to Canadian geography</p>	To a high degree	To a considerable degree	To a moderate degree	To a limited degree
<p>Did I complete the inquiry process on sustainability? Did my work demonstrate understanding of the five steps of this inquiry process? Does my model of sustainability reflect understanding of the factors that contribute to sustainability?</p>				
<p>Thinking A1. Geographic Inquiry: use the geographic inquiry process and the concepts of geographic thinking when investigating issues relating to Canadian geography</p>	To a high degree	To a considerable degree	To a moderate degree	To a limited degree
<p>Did I demonstrate thinking skills when applying the checklist to the issue of environmental protection in the Charter? Does my new model of sustainability reflect thinking on the topic of sustainability?</p>				
<p>Application A1. Geographic Inquiry: use the geographic inquiry process and the concepts of geographic thinking when investigating issues relating to Canadian geography</p>	To a high degree	To a considerable degree	To a moderate degree	To a limited degree
<p>Did I support my decision on the sustainability of enshrining rights to a healthy environment in the Charter with three relevant reasons using evidence from the checklist and the article?</p>				