

Title	The Sociological Detective
Time	Open-ended
Preparation	It may be helpful, to stimulate brainstorming aspects of the exercise, for teachers to prepare: a. A list of possible “questions” on which to base the detective exercise. b. A list of possible theories / explanations related to the question chosen.
Materials	Students will need access to a range of resources (textbooks, magazines such as Sociology Review, the Internet etc.).
Prior Knowledge	None. However, teachers might find it useful to provide an overview of the area (theories / explanations etc.) the students have chosen to investigate.
Objectives	Putting together a pack of Notes under the rubric of the Sociological Detective enables students to: a. Research a Specification topic in some depth, using their own resources and initiatives. b. Identify and use all of the required Skill Domains (Knowledge and Understanding; Interpretation and Analysis; Evaluation). c. Cover all of the Communication Level 3 Key Skills requirements (Discussion, Presentation, Note-making, Essay / Report). d. Contribute evidence towards Key Skills I.T. (and can be used as the basis for publishing on a school / college Intranet or on my site) ,if the information collected by students is word-processed.

The Exercise

This is an exercise that's best-done as a class, since this involves everyone in the initial planning stages. Once the Pack has been planned, students can split into smaller groups (2 – 4 students) to study an area in depth. Once all the required information has been collected, students can then collate and share their individual / group efforts to provide a solid overview of a topic.

The basic format for putting together a Sociological Detective pack is as follows:

1. As a class, students should decide on a topic to research and "question" to investigate. This can be a brainstorming session, with the objective of:

a. Deciding upon an agreed Specification area

This can be any area of the Specifications (e.g. Family Life). However, it can be particularly effective if a synoptic module is used (at A2). Questions such as "Who's to blame for poverty?" or "Why are people criminals?" could be used. Detective work in terms of the synoptic module is particularly appropriate because it encourages students to make connections between different parts of the AS / A2 specifications. Crime, for example, can throw-up suspects relating to Family, Education, Culture and Identity etc., while Social Inequality questions (on poverty, for example) are likely to produce explanations that are similarly wide-ranging.

For AS students some detective work on methods / methodology can be an interesting way of teaching something that can be very dry. The "suspects" in this instance might be Positivists / Interpretivists / Realists / Feminists, for example.

b. Producing an open-ended "question" that can be answered by gathering and analysing evidence (for example the question "Is the family a dying institution?" is open-ended enough to enable students to explore a wide variety of family-related questions under this general rubric). The actual question used is relatively unimportant – it's just there to focus the process.

2. Once a question has been agreed, a list of possible "suspects" needs to be brainstormed. The suspect list forms the basis of the inquiry and evidence collection / analysis (in this instance, "suspects" could range from Parents and Children (different family types, diversity, etc.); Work (how changes in the workplace have affected family life); Politicians (how political changes such as divorce have affected family life) etc.

3. The class is then split into smaller groups, each group taking responsibility for researching the evidence relating to various suspects. In basic terms, each group brainstorms / researches possible theories / explanations and then takes responsibility for researching each in more depth (textbooks, magazines, internet, teacher as resource etc.).

Alternatively, a list of prepared theories / explanations could be devised by the teacher. Each could be basically introduced etc.

4. For each theory / explanation, the group (or individual assigned to research this by the group) must research evidence for and against the theory / explanation. This forms the basis of the "Evidence" section.

The format for this section might be something like:

- a. What does the theory / explanation mean? (Interpretation)
- b. What is the theory arguing? (analysis)
- c. What is the evidence for and against the theory (evaluation)

If students are encouraged to see the latter section as a type of dialogue (between two police officers...) this may help them to master the skill of evaluation.

Students should be encouraged to keep their research short, to-the-point and clearly focused on the explanation they are researching. The objective is to outline the main points / evidence rather than to indulge in elaborate and lengthy descriptions.

4. Once all the evidence has been collected by each group, there are a variety of ways it can be arranged, presented and distributed. For example:

- a. As a series of class presentations by each group with notes, handouts, questions as appropriate.
- b. As a PowerPoint presentation / web site for inclusion on a school / college Intranet.
- c. Sent to me so that I can put it on Sociology Central (I'll do all the html stuff if required). In this instance the school / college / students would receive a copyright credit etc. and students would see their work on the Web...

5. The "Solution" form is simply an attempt to get students to write-up the information collected in "essay / report" form.