

Designing for Guided Inquiry: Why Partnerships are Important

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Guided Inquiry is an instructional framework designed to support students while engaging in inquiry learning tasks. The new Australian Curriculum <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au> requires students to develop skills and understandings as critical inquirers of their world across a number of learning areas. In other words, inquiry underpins disciplinary thinking.

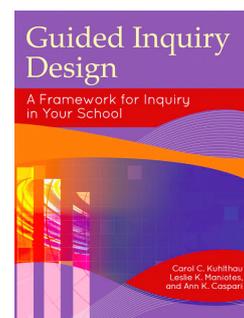
Inquiry in the Australian Curriculum

Some examples of inquiry in the new curriculum include History, where students are expected to engage in historical inquiry to develop an informed explanation about the past. In Science, they are expected to develop scientific inquiry skills and 'think like a scientist'. In Geography, they are expected to apply geographical inquiry skills as they explore the impact of natural and human forces on the world. In Mathematics, students are expected to respond to familiar and unfamiliar situations by employing mathematical strategies to make informed decisions and solve problems efficiently. In English, students develop language and literacy skills to become effective communicators and inquirers of spoken, written and multimodal texts, as they develop their capacity as literary learners.

While each curriculum area expects students to develop inquiry skills and understanding of the discipline, how are schools helping students consolidate this learning across subject areas? Many inquiry skills are common across the curriculum. For example, the ability to construct questions or propose hypotheses, locating relevant sources, analysing sources for accuracy and bias, collecting and analysing data, using evidence from sources to develop an informed opinion, evaluating results to draw evidence-based conclusions, presenting ideas to others via appropriate and creative means, and collaborating and communicating effectively with others. These skills are embedded in each of the learning areas of the Australian Curriculum mentioned above, just to name a few.

The Guided Inquiry process

By introducing the Guided Inquiry process as a whole school inquiry model, teachers and students can explore the world through inquiry across a range of discipline areas using a common inquiry process, which consists of eight phases: Open, Immerse, Explore, Identify, Gather, Create, Share, and Evaluate. According to the authors of *Guided Inquiry Design* (Kuhlthau, Maniotes & Caspari, 2013), employing a GI approach helps students "gain deep understanding of curriculum content and also internalize an inquiry process that they can use in academic settings, the work world, and everyday life as they apply the same inquiry strategies" (Ch.1, para 1), and by "consistently learning through the phases of the Guided Inquiry process, students gain



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competence and independence for taking responsibility for their own learning process” (Ch. 12). This also ensures that teachers within a school use a common language of inquiry to assist students in making their own connections between what they have learned through inquiry in one subject with other subjects, and from year to year as they progress through school.

Building Guided Inquiry teams

For this approach to successfully ‘guide inquiry’ as a way of learning across curriculum areas and year levels, schools need to have established a collaborative culture that encourages instructional teaming. It requires the building of collaborative teaching partnerships between classroom teachers and specialist teachers, such as the teacher librarian, reading/literacy teacher, elearning facilitator, ESL/EAL teacher, and careers/pathways teacher. The configuration of each instructional team is dependent upon the scope of the inquiry unit, the disciplinary expertise of the classroom teacher, and the learning needs of the students.

For example, a Year 6 teacher might team with the teacher librarian, ICT teacher, and specialist drama teacher to design a guided inquiry unit where students work in groups to complete a Media Arts project (addressing one or more of these content description ACAMAM062, ACAMAM063, ACAMAM064, ACAMAM065 <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/TheArts/Curriculum/F-10?u=ma&y=5-6&layout=1>)

Inquiry projects are often interdisciplinary in nature, however, few schools encourage the design and teaching of interdisciplinary units of work. The new Australian Curriculum’s cross curriculum priorities (<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/CrossCurriculumPriorities>) provide schools with an opportunity to explore the design of such units.

For example in a secondary school, the Year 8 Geography teachers might team with the Year 8 Science teachers and the teacher librarian to design a guided inquiry unit where students explore environmental issues and impacts as part of a four (4) week sustainability project. Collectively, this GI unit can address the content descriptions of ACHGK051, ACHGK052, ACHGS061 and ACHGS062 for geography <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/humanitiesandsocialsciences/geography/Curriculum/F-10?y=8&s=GKU&s=GIS&p=3&layout=1> and ACSHE135 and ACSHE136 for science <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/science/Curriculum/F-10?y=8&s=SU&s=HE&s=IS&p=3&layout=1>), where students work on this project during the timetabled science and geography periods for those 4 weeks, with the teacher librarian being the consistent presence of the instructional team working with students across all periods.

Guided Inquiry involves “close supervision, ongoing assessment, and targeted intervention by the instructional team... through the inquiry process that gradually leads students toward independent learning” (Kuhlthau, Maniotes & Caspari, 2007, p. 3). This scaffolding needs to be developed as part of curriculum unit design. The expertise and roles of each of the instructional team also need to be clearly defined as part of design process.

Teacher-TL partnerships are essential in making Guided Inquiry happen

Studies examining the impact of school libraries on student achievement have shown when teacher librarians collaboratively plan, teach and evaluate with classroom teachers, students learn more, get better grades, and score higher on standardised test scores than those students without access to the resourcing and instructional expertise of a teacher librarian (Kahn & Valence, 2012; Montiel-Overall, 2008; School Libraries Worldwide, 2008; Todd, 2008a, 2008b; Lance, Rodney & Russell, 2007; Haycock, 2007; Lance, Rodney & Hamilton-Pennell, 2005; Lindsay, 2005).

Classroom teachers benefit from this collaboration because team teaching reduces the teacher/student ratio in a class, and allows greater opportunity to provide individualised instruction for each student each lesson. This instructional partnership also provides greater support for at-risk students (Gavigan & Kurttis, 2010). Furthermore, recent studies have identified the important role the teacher librarian can

plays in supporting the development of teachers' and students' digital literacy skills (Lance & Schwarz, 2012; Todd, Gordon & Lu, 2011; Duke & Ward, 2009; Asselin, & Dorion, 2008). With ICT as one of the Australian Curriculum's seven general capabilities, we are seeing the design of inquiry units that involve the integration of digital technologies within different phases of the Guided Inquiry process. Teachers and students need support in testing and trialing new digital tools and apps. Often it is the school's TL who provides this support.

A Guided Inquiry team needs professional development

Introducing Guided Inquiry into a school requires professional development of classroom teachers, teacher librarians, and specialist teachers. It is also important for a school's leadership team to understand how Guided Inquiry can contribute to building a collaborative inquiry community, and the ways they can nurture interdisciplinary collaboration and support the development of GI units that address Australian Curriculum outcomes.

Our experience with hosting seminars and workshops on Guided Inquiry over the past seven years has found those schools who support the professional learning of a school-based GI instructional team achieve the greatest results in successfully implementing a Guided Inquiry approach. Each of these teams has had the school's teacher librarian as a member of the instructional team, along with one or two teachers (at a minimum).

Some primary school teams have involved the TL, principal or assistant principal, and one or two classroom teachers (often teaching classes of the same year level or band, e.g. Year 4 or Year 5/6). Teams from secondary schools have often included the TL and one or two teachers from the same learning area, with some schools involving the school's curriculum and/or elearning coordinators as part of the GI team.

This team approach to professional learning encourages the formation of a school-based 'community of practice' in Guided Inquiry, which begins while attending their first GI seminar or workshop. The programs for our two seminars on Guided Inquiry for 2014 are designed to support the professional needs of school-based instructional teams. Details for each seminar can be found at:

The Australian Curriculum: Developing a Guided Inquiry and Web 2.0 Approach (Adelaide)
<https://syba.worldsecuresystems.com/BookingRetrieve.aspx?ID=254111>

The Australian Curriculum: Developing a Guided Inquiry and Web 2.0 Approach (Melbourne)
<https://syba.worldsecuresystems.com/BookingRetrieve.aspx?ID=254109>

Guided Inquiry Design for the Australian Curriculum: Putting it into Practice (Sydney)
<https://syba.worldsecuresystems.com/BookingRetrieve.aspx?ID=260874>

Interested in reading more about Guided Inquiry Design and GI teams?

The following articles outline the design of Guided Inquiry units and provide examples of the work of successful GI instructional teams in Australian primary and secondary schools. These authors are also presenting at Syba Academy's Guided Inquiry Design for the Australian Curriculum: Putting it into Practice in Sydney on 26-May-2014.

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