GUIDED INQUIRY IN STAGE 4 HISTORY:

COLLABORATION BETWEEN TEACHER-LIBRARIANS AND CLASSROOM TEACHERS

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Inquiry Based Learning provides a scaffold to use in single subjects or cross-curricular projects. It lends itself very nicely to collaboration between classroom teachers and teacher-librarians (TLs) as well as between subjects. It is also a good base upon which to support ACARA's General Capabilities[1] and help students develop their information literacy skills.

Introduction

"*In the original Greek, ἱστορία, historia is an inquiry. By affording our students the opportunity to participate authentically in a guided inquiry, we are giving them agency to direct their learning and to share their findings with the community. This project has been a valuable exercise in discovery learning and an engaging way to finish the Stage 4 History course.*"
Peter Hartman, Acting Head Teacher, HSIE.

In 2017, myself and fellow TL (Coni Halder), and a History teacher (Peter Hartman) began developing a unit of work for Year 8 History – The Spanish Conquest of the Americas. The initial program was based on the work of a presentation by Lee Fitzgerald I had attended, two books[2] [3] and a blog[4] about Guided Inquiry and assistance from TL colleagues Wendy Quarmby and Kate Mathews. The outcomes of the unit were based on the Stage 4 History Syllabus and the ACARA General Capabilities.

The model

Guided Inquiry (GI) is one of a number of models for an inquiry based learning approach. The key aspects of inquiry based learning include:

* Authentic task/audience

* Student choice

* Curiosity

* Questioning

* Reflection

There are 7 stages in a full GI unit – open, immerse, explore, identify, gather, share, create and evaluate.[5] Due to time constraints, our Guided Inquiry units were condensed and stages merged. In response to consultation with the teachers we worked with as well as recognition of the student feedback we received, later iterations of the units focused on developing in students the key skills of effective note-taking and synthesising information.

It worked so well with Year 8 that we also developed a unit on Ancient China for Year 7 History students.

Image: The Lotus scaffold supports to structure their notes

Image: The guided inquiry process is supported by scaffolds

How it worked for us

All lessons for the classes undertaking the Guided Inquiry units were held in the library where the TLs were available to direct the project, in conjunction with the subject teachers as the content experts. This allowed for the curation of hardcopy resources for the duration of the project that the students could access during and outside of class time. The school's Learning Management System was used to host curated online research resources, outlines of each lesson with directions for students, and worksheets. For each new stage, the lesson opened with explicit teaching of the skill required to successfully complete that stage.

Open/Immerse

Both projects began with students exploring a variety of resources that covered various aspects of the civilisations they were working on. The Year 8 classes were provided with laminated images and snippets of texts to pique their interest. The students worked in groups to categorise under the topic headings they were given, whichever aspects of the civilisations they came across.

The Year 7 classes were given a slightly more prescriptive introduction, being required to answer questions about Ancient China to give them an overarching view and basic understanding of the civilisation. They still used a variety of books and images to do this.

Our school has recently purchased some Virtual Reality goggles for use in the classroom. It is planned to incorporate these into the next iteration of the Open/Immerse stages of the units.
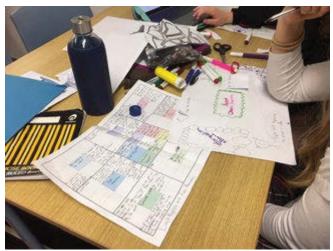
Explore/Identify/Gather

Following these introductory lessons, each student provided a list of ideas/topics/people that they were interested in pursuing further. These were collated by the classroom teacher and provided the basis of the groups they would work with for the remainder of the project.

Using curated resources, students followed the Cornell notetaking method to record relevant information over several lessons. Following this, each group collated their notes and used a Lotus Chart to synthesise the information. This provided the basis from which to create their projects.

Share/Create/Evaluate

Year 8 students created picture books that they read to Stage 2 students at one of our feeder primary schools. Topics explored include Aztec and Inca religion, war and warriors, social hierarchy, lifestyle, cities, everyday life and the Conquistadors.

Year 7 students created a project of their choice. These have ranged from paintings to models and posters and were presented to the class prior to being displayed in the library. Topics explored include Chinese religion and philosophies, Terracotta Warriors, the Great Wall, social hierarchy and the role of women.

At the conclusion of the project students were asked to evaluate their learning both as individuals and groups, as well as evaluating the program itself.

Conclusion

The two units have both been very successful and we have continued to run them each semester with minor adjustments based on the feedback received from participating staff and students. The two focus skills

Image: The scaffold allows deep thinking to develop

Image: Collaboration using varying mediums

of effective note-taking and synthesising information are ones which we want the students to continue to use as they progress through high school and beyond. These are two skills that as TLs we focus on when we are given the opportunity to work with other classes and year groups on their various research projects with the idea that that they become embedded within the school culture.

Benefits of collaboration

The Year 8 unit in particular has provided our students with an authentic audience who don't pull any punches when providing feedback. It has also strengthened ties between our two schools. The topic of colonisation and conquest was one that Year 3 students had explored prior to our visit and they were able to make connections between their learning and the books our students read to them.

Collaboration between teacher-librarians and classroom teachers brings together a wealth of knowledge and expertise that can only benefit student outcomes.

Acknowledgements

A big thank you to our colleague, Acting Head Teacher of HSIE, Peter Hartman whose enthusiasm for working with us on this project is much appreciated. Thank you also to Teacher-Librarians, Wendy Quarmby (Girraween High School) and Kate Mathews (Castle Hill High School) who generously provided sample units and resources of their Guided Inquiry Units when we were beginning the development of this project. Many thanks to Stephanie Salazar, Deputy Principal, and Teacher David Kerrigan, of John Purchase Public School for their willingness to enable our Year 8 students to share their work with the Stage 2 students.

References

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Endnotes

1   Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). *General capabilities*. www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/ (Accessed 8 May 2019).
2   Kuhlthau, C., Maniotes, L. and Caspari, A. *Guided inquiry design*. Santa Barbara, 2012.
3   Kuhlthau, C., Maniotes, L. and Caspari, A. *Guided inquiry*. Westport, 2007.
4   Fitzeragld, L., *Guided Inquiry in Australia | Sharing the theory and practice of Guided Inquiry*. https://guidedinquiryoz.edublogs.org/ (Accessed 6 May 2019).
5   Kuhlthau, loc. cit., pp.1-6.