# Inquiry learning in the HSIE KLA

The intent of this article is to start, or enhance, the discussions about what is inquiry learning in the humanities and social sciences K–10. This discussion has particular relevance to teachers of more than one subject that has an inquiry focus.

When teaching the history K–10 and geography K–10 NSW syllabuses, the most significant change in pedagogy is around the use of inquiry learning that is now disciplined based for each subject. For many teachers, the subject matter of the syllabus is not unfamiliar, even though some of it has changed stages and some of the organisation of the subject matter is also a little different. There are consequences for these changes, no matter how small, for the organisation of learning sequences. This begins with the clarification of what skills are required for HSIE inquiry learning for history and geography.

A section of the ACARA ‘The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship’ documented by Professor Murray Print is worthy of discussion and has been adapted for NSW, below. Even though NSW does not have a separate syllabus for Civics and Citizenship it has been referenced as it continues to have a place in HSIE, through its substantial referencing as a learning across the curriculum (LAC) aspect in history and geography.

**Clarification of the discipline based skill set for historical and geographical inquiry**

| **History**  | **Geography** | **Civics and Citizenship** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Comprehension: chronology, terms and concepts | Observing, questioning, planning and collecting | Questioning and research |
| Historical questions and research |
| Analysis and use of sources | Evaluating, processing and analysing | Analysis and synthesis |
| Perspectives and interpretations | Interpreting and concluding  | Interpretation |
| Explanation and communication | Communicating | Communication |
| Reflecting and responding | Collaborative problem solving and decision-making |

[The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship](http://www.acara.edu.au/_resources/Shape_of_the_Australian_Curriculum__Civics_and_Citizenship_251012.pdf) ACARA, October 2012 adapted, p.10

Dr Mandy Lupton also looks at the inquiry skills included in the Australian Curriculum, in her paper Inquiry Skills in the Australian Curriculum (2012) where she provides the following comparison:

| **History**  | **Geography** | **Civics and Citizenship** | **Science \*** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Historical questions and research | Questioning and observing | Inquiry and research | Questioning and predicting |
| Planning, conducting and evaluating | Planning and conducting |
| Analysis and use of sources | Processing, analysing, interpreting and concludingReflecting and responding | Analysis and synthesis | Processing and analysing data and information |
| Perspectives and interpretations |  |  | Evaluating |
| Explanation and communication | Communicating | Communication | Communicating |
| *Comprehension: chronology, terms and concepts* |  | *Collaborative problem solving and decision-making* |  |
|  |  |  | \* not inclusive of the NSW Technology subject. |

[Access journal, Australian School Library Association](http://eprints.qut.edu.au/78451/1/Lupton_ACCESS_Nov_2014_2pg.pdf), November 2014, adapted

## Geographical inquiry

Geographical inquiry involves posing questions, gathering data and information, analysing and interpreting data and information and reaching conclusions. A geographical inquiry assumes that the outcome of the inquiry is an action, at a scale that is relevant; personal, local, national or global.

Geographical inquiry is distinct from historical and scientific inquiry in the questions that are asked. These questions can be summarised into What is where? Why there? Why care? Geographical question types will address a range of perspectives which cover the spatial, human, environmental management, cartographic, global and political components of this subject.

## Historical inquiry

Historical inquiry is about asking historical questions, which use the language of time, gathering and evaluating evidence from the past and drawing conclusions from this evidence. Historical questions are shaped around Why then? Why there? Historical research is constantly asking why certain events happened when and where they did; What is the historical context that led to this event or situation? Why did it happen at this time and place?

Historical inquiry is underpinned by primary and secondary sources which are collected, evaluated and triangulated for accuracy, context and perspective. The outcome of an historical inquiry is a response or account that explains the past; the ‘history’ (his story) of the event(s) through the historical narrative with reference to the sources and evidence.

## Questioning

Questions can be ‘big questions’ such as the key inquiry questions included in the syllabuses. These questions can be broken down into essential questions; critical questions; questions which guide the evaluation of sources or data, disciplinary questions specific to the knowledge base of the subject, or process questions related to the specific step in the subjects’ inquiry process which support student learning and engagement.

## Planning consequences

What are the consequences for planning and programming history and geography K–10?

Traditional units of work must be reassessed in light of the emphasis in inquiry learning in the new syllabuses (history and geography). Scope and sequence plans which reference only topics do not support this new emphasis. Inquiries will vary greatly in length, rarely will these fit a terms worth of work. Geography provides learning for students to examine their place in the world whilst history supports students learning to locate themselves in time. Teachers should shape transitions lessons from one inquiry to the next.

## Ideas for a way forward

HSIE planning teams are encouraged to be very familiar with the new syllabus and program with an inquiry focus using the syllabus concepts and skills which engage learning. Syllabus focus areas (named for each stage) are guides to engage with the inquiry process. Most importantly, the syllabus content provides a curriculum guarantee for students that when combined with skills and concepts, through the process of inquiry, will support the achievement of course staged outcomes.

Programming inquiry learning K–10 requires a rethink of traditional programming strategies. Some suggestions include:

* referencing the DoE historical inquiry model and the scope for each stage K–10. A similar model is under development for geography
* downloading and annotating a Word version of the relevant sections of the syllabus, cross referencing across the syllabus focus areas for each stage as needed. This will form part of a course program
* identifying the case study/context/learning vignette to organise student learning
* listing learning and teaching in your program behind the annotated syllabus section
* spending your formal programming time preparing quality learning inquiry for students
* collaborating and sharing support materials with colleagues
* reviewing and analysing the syllabus annotations and learning activities, their effectiveness and correlation.

The knowledge, skills and understandings developed through inquiry learning in all HSIE subjects can be applied to further education, work and everyday life. This will enable students to participate effectively in maintaining and improving the quality of our changing world.

## Discussion question

How does the pedagogy of historical and geographical inquiry impact on your planning, programming and teaching for the development of your students’ knowledge, skills and understandings in HSIE, history and geography?