

# PART 1



## Debating the teaching and learning of humanities and social sciences

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# CHAPTER 1



## Humanities and social sciences in the Australian Curriculum

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### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- LO 1.1** Describe the aims and structure of the Australian Curriculum: Humanities and Social Sciences learning area.
- LO 1.2** Explain the current shift in education to disciplinary or knowledge-led curriculum.
- LO 1.3** Identify the types of knowledge required to teach the humanities and social sciences effectively.
- LO 1.4** List the principles that underpin effective practice in the humanities and social sciences.

### INTRODUCTION

The Australian Curriculum: Humanities and Social Sciences has introduced a national approach to social education in primary and secondary schools, a move that endorses disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning about human behaviour in social, cultural, environmental, economic and political contexts across place and time. For former teachers of Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE) and Human Society and its Environment (HSIE), the change signals a shift in thinking about the purposes and nature of social education. Similarly, the innovation has implications for pre-service teacher education courses, which must now equip new teachers with the subject-matter knowledge and pedagogy to function effectively as teachers of geography, history, civics and citizenship, and economic and business. This text aims to support teachers as they face these professional challenges. To achieve this end, *Place and time: Explorations in teaching geography and history* addresses these key questions associated with teaching and learning within this area of the Australian Curriculum:

- ▶ What is entailed in disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to teaching the humanities and social sciences?
- ▶ How do children and adolescents learn effectively in the humanities and social sciences? What are the implications for curriculum planning and professional practice?

## ► How are the humanities and social sciences structured in the Australian Curriculum?

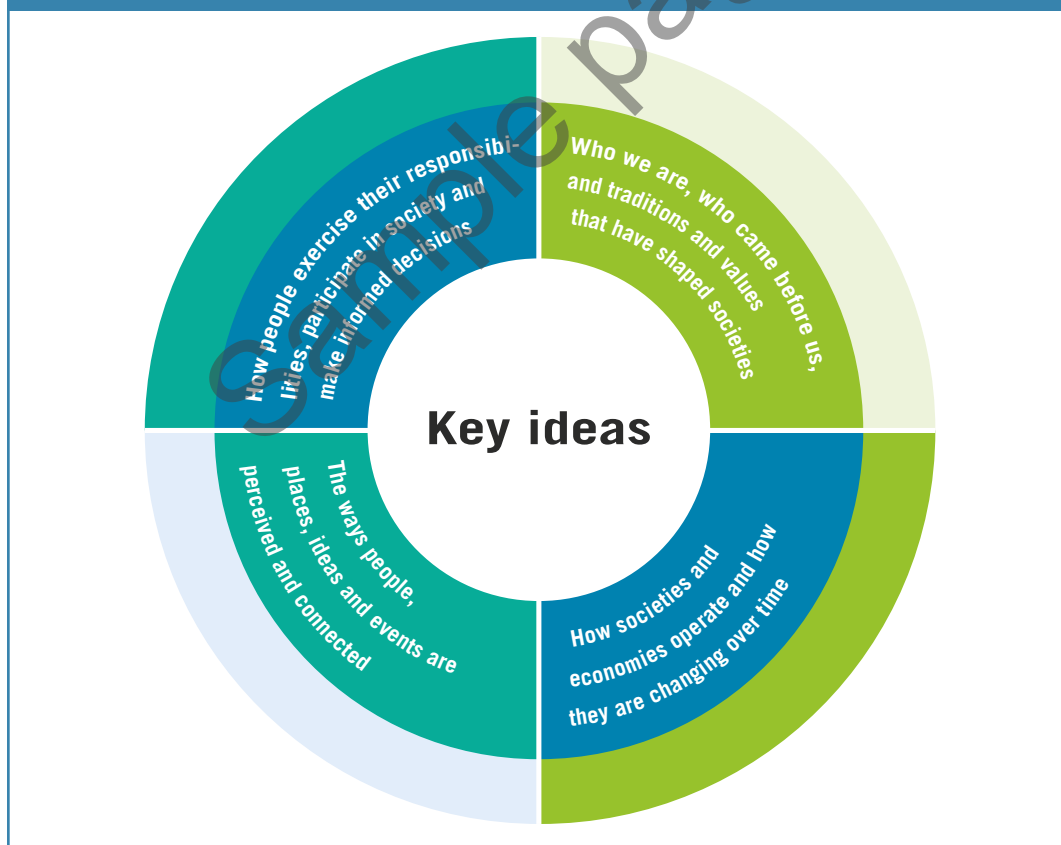
The Australian Curriculum defines the humanities and the social sciences as ‘the study of human activity and interaction in social, cultural, environmental, economic and political contexts’. Subject-based studies within the learning area encompass the historical and contemporary, range in treatment from the personal to the global and consider the potential outcomes of present circumstances for the future.

The humanities and social sciences learning area consists of five subjects: F–6/7 humanities and social sciences (HASS) and Years 7–10 history, geography, civics and citizenship, and economics and business. Learning across subjects in this area is organised around four key ideas detailed in Figure 1.1. Each idea is explored through subject-specific events and issues within an inquiry framework, which draws on subject-specific skills including: questioning; researching; analysing; evaluating and reflecting; and communicating.

### LO 1.1

**Describe the aims and structure of the Australian Curriculum: Humanities and Social Sciences learning area.**

**Figure 1.1** Key ideas underpinning knowledge and understanding in the Australian Curriculum: Humanities and Social Sciences learning area



Students are introduced to history and geography from Foundation Year, civics and citizenship in Year 3 and economics and business in Year 5. In the F–6/7 HASS curriculum, history, geography, civics and citizenship, and economics and business are presented as sub-strands of the knowledge and understanding strand. The Years 7–10 Humanities and Social Sciences curriculum is organised by subjects (see Table 1.1).

**Table 1.1** Humanities and social sciences in the Years F–10 curriculum

	Foundation Year–2	Years 3–4	Years 5–6/7	Years 7–10
History	Humanities and social sciences	Humanities and social sciences	Humanities and social sciences	History
Geography				Geography
Civics and citizenship	N/A			Civics and citizenship
Economics and business	N/A	N/A		Economics and business

Source: © Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) 2018.

## PLANNING

Subjects within the humanities and social sciences learning area may be programmed using either discrete subjects-based or **interdisciplinary** approaches. The use of either approach or combination of approaches will depend on the goals driving the topic or unit of study in question. However, in undertaking interdisciplinary inquiries it is essential that students are aware of the disciplinary concepts and skills that are being used, and that teachers and students fully understand the disciplinary elements of the inquiry in order to understand the interdisciplinary whole. Without such understandings, integration runs the risk of reverting to the thematic approaches popular in Australia in the 1980s.

### ► What is the benefit of moving to disciplinary teaching and learning?

In the past, social education curricula across Australia varied in intent and structure, reflecting differing government policies and stakeholders' views about what constitutes essential learning in the humanities and social sciences. In the main, models ranged from integrationist approaches built around key themes and inquiry questions to discrete subject offerings modelled on parent **disciplines**, such as history and geography. As such, the embedding of discrete subjects, particularly history and geography, in the Australian Curriculum: Humanities and Social Sciences marks a significant shift not only in curriculum design but also in delivery. A number of theoretical breakthroughs are responsible for this growing commitment to the disciplines as a conduit for social learning:

#### LO 1.2

Explain the current shift in education to disciplinary or knowledge-led curriculum.

1. *Conceptualising the disciplines as unique 'forms of knowledge'*. British academic Paul Hirst (1973) and others (Shemilt, 1983; Shulman & Quinlan, 1996; Stevens, Wineburg, Herrenkohl & Bell, 2005) have argued that disciplines such as history,

geography and economics comprise: (1) distinctive concepts; (2) unique procedures for gathering evidence to construct and validate theories; and (3) distinctive ways of carrying out investigations. This ‘form of knowledge’ approach to defining, unpacking and delivering knowledge has become influential in curriculum design and approaches to teaching and learning over the last three decades – evident in the UK National Curriculum in its various manifestations, the US National History Standards and, more recently, the Canadian Benchmarks of Historical Thinking.

2. *New emphasis on subject knowledge worldwide and a reassessment of the role of disciplines as the basis of the curriculum.*

The most recent manifestation of this new emphasis on disciplines is the **powerful knowledge** movement, which has arisen as a result of policy debates in the UK around the role of schools in the twenty-first century. Its chief advocate, British sociologist Michael Young, defines powerful knowledge as disciplinary and multidisciplinary, situated within communities of specialists, conceptual in nature and independent of context. In the life of schools, it appears as subjects or **reconceptualised disciplines**, such as history, geography and economics. Young (2008) argues that disciplinary knowledge is powerful because: its concepts are systematically related to one another, accessible and can be used to support and assess progression; those working in the field share rules about what constitutes valid knowledge, and debate questions, methods and material used to generate new knowledge; and because the knowledge is not context dependent, it provides a reliable basis for sound generalisations that can be acted upon. All these capacities, Schleicher (2012) suggests, matter in a twenty-first-century curriculum because expanding students’ capacity to be independent thinkers enables them to flourish in a complex, rapidly changing world.

3. *The growth of cognitive and sociocultural research into how students learn in general and within a disciplinary framework.*

This research supports constructivist approaches to teaching and learning, and advocates a systematic treatment of disciplinary concepts and skills while acknowledging that the circumstances in which teaching and learning occur are critical in determining outcomes for learners. The National Research Council in the US has pioneered work in this field (refer to Branford et.al in the reference section at the end of this chapter).

4. *Mapping mental operations that engender authentic reasoning within the disciplines.*

Here, research argues that critical thinking and information processing are not generic, but are subject-specific because they involve distinctive problems, ways of thinking and methodologies (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000).

This growing research base underlines the educative advantages of a discipline-led curriculum. First, the disciplines provide an explicit conceptual framework around which to organise content, formulate questions, undertake inquiry, generate theory and communicate outcomes using methods, reasoning and language that are particular to a field of knowledge. Second, learners benefit from this approach by revisiting and deepening their understandings, while connecting with big ideas in the humanities and social sciences at increasing levels of sophistication. Third, this approach aligns pedagogy with the ways disciplinary experts think and work to ensure that learners engage in authentic learning experiences that promote progression in disciplinary

understanding and skills. These breakthroughs have shifted curriculum away from concerns over content to capacity building grounded in inquiry, problem solving and deep conceptual learning. Finally, the disciplines offer one further advantage: their capacity to integrate knowledge from other fields generates not only new questions about the physical world and the past, but also new solutions to recurrent problems. For example, moves to reposition national histories in a global context highlight the complementarity of geography, history and the social sciences as analytical constructs ideally suited to capturing and representing the interplay between regional, national and international circumstances over time. Similarly, environmental history, with its mapping of the impact of climate and location on human activity, underlines the collective contribution that geography, history and the sciences, such as archaeology, make to explaining the rise and decline of civilisations, changing patterns of settlement and the unique configuration of historical events and geographical phenomena.

## ► What is the knowledge base for teaching in the humanities and social sciences?

As theorising about the disciplines has intensified, so research into the knowledge base that teachers need to function effectively within disciplinary and interdisciplinary frameworks has expanded. Four categories of knowledge have been identified (Shulman, 1986, 1987). Each is essential to the effective implementation of the Australian Curriculum: Humanities and Social Sciences learning area.

### LO 1.3

Identify the types of knowledge required to teach the humanities and social sciences effectively.

- *Subject knowledge.* This includes content knowledge, an understanding of disciplinary methodologies and language, and an awareness of debates related to both the discipline and school subject. In addition, it entails an understanding of disciplinary and interdisciplinary concepts that organise content, structure inquiry and give form and meaning to content. Subject knowledge also includes the types of questions, information, evidence and analysis appropriate to each subject area.
- *Knowledge of learners.* This involves knowing how children and adolescents think and learn within a given field of knowledge. These understandings inform teachers' decisions about what and how pedagogies enhance learning.
- *Knowledge of teaching strategies.* This involves knowing about strategies that transform content and make it accessible to learners with differing abilities and at different year levels. In addition, it requires teachers to understand how concept acquisition helps learners to organise knowledge and grasp big ideas, because within the humanities and social sciences, disciplinary and interdisciplinary concepts provide the building blocks for further learning.
- *Curricular knowledge.* This entails knowledge about curriculum and teaching resources, together with a capacity to critique, interpret and utilise these professional materials to accommodate learners' needs. This category has clear implications for the successful implementation of the Australian Curriculum – its aims, knowledge and skills, learning across the curriculum (cross-curriculum priorities, general capabilities and other learning across the curriculum areas) and achievement standards.

## ► What is effective teaching and learning in the humanities and social sciences?

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As noted earlier in this chapter, a significant body of cognitive and sociocultural research now exists that documents principles of effective teaching and learning across the disciplines. Findings from the *How People Learn* project undertaken by the US National Research Council of the National Academies (2000) propose that effective teaching and learning is:

- *Learner focused.* Students come to the classroom with preconceptions about how the world works. If their initial understandings remain unchallenged, then many cling to ‘old’ ideas and patterns of thinking and working. To ensure progression, teaching and learning must begin with what learners already know and can do.
- *Knowledge focused.* To develop disciplinary capabilities in a subject area, learners must gain mastery over the acquisition, retrieval and application of knowledge. This requires teachers to adopt a metacognitive approach to teaching and learning that encourages learners to assume responsibility for the learning process by defining their own goals and monitoring their own progress. Equally, it requires teachers to make transparent what is being taught, why it is being taught and what proficiency in the subject area entails.
- *Assessment focused.* To assess the development and quality of young people’s disciplinary and interdisciplinary reasoning, their thinking processes and learning preferences must be visible. Formative and summative assessment ensures this visibility. Information of this type is crucial when tailoring practice to accommodate different learning styles and abilities.
- *Community focused.* Critical learning occurs in a culture of problem posing and solving, where questioning is valued, views are exchanged and outcomes provide both teachers and learners with opportunities to monitor teaching effectiveness and learner understanding.

### LO 1.4

List the principles that underpin effective practice in the humanities and social sciences.

## ► About this book

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As noted above, the arrival of the Australian Curriculum: Humanities and Social Sciences foreshadowed significant change in curriculum design, teachers’ knowledge base and notions of effective practice. For beginning and experienced teachers alike, the Australian Curriculum has presented an opportunity for professional growth around the acquisition of subject-matter knowledge and ways of thinking about and framing pedagogy in subject areas that may be unfamiliar. Consequently, the purpose of this textbook is to support teachers as they address change.

Coverage addresses current core requirements of the Australian Curriculum: Humanities and Social Sciences, integrates research undertaken internationally and in Australia over the last 30 years into child and adolescent learning in the humanities and social sciences and surveys the professional knowledge necessary to practice effectively in various subject areas. In addition, the text models approaches and strategies for planning and delivering rich and differentiated teaching and learning tasks built around inquiry learning aimed at progressing conceptual understandings and refining learners’ skills. Each chapter features learning objectives linked to chapter sections

and provides activities that address substantive concerns raised in topic coverage. These activities are intended to stimulate discussion and reflection and provide opportunities to apply ideas and strategies presented in each chapter to particular year levels and topics covered in the Australian Curriculum: Humanities and Social Sciences.

This book is divided into four parts, each organised around a key topic of relevance to the teaching and learning of the humanities and social sciences in primary and secondary school classrooms. As the second edition, this text addresses recent changes in this learning area of the Australian Curriculum with the addition of two new chapters: ‘Why civics and citizenship education matter’ and ‘Why economics and business matter’ (Chapters 4 and 5).

Part 1, ‘Debating the teaching and learning of humanities and social sciences’, comprises six chapters. Chapters 2 and 3 examine current and past debates about history and geography as disciplines and school subjects. Treatment focuses on their educative purposes, features as discrete fields of knowledge and characteristic modes of working and communicating. Chapters 4 and 5 cover the recent inclusion of civics and citizenship and economics and business to the subject offerings in the humanities and social sciences learning area. Chapter 6 surveys approaches to integrating Indigenous perspectives when planning for and delivering social learning experiences.

Part 2, ‘Understanding the teaching and learning of humanities and social sciences’, comprises 10 chapters. Chapters 7, 8 and 9 map recent cognitive and sociocultural research into how children and adolescents learn and make sense of history and geography in primary and secondary school contexts. Findings are used to model effective approaches and strategies for teaching and learning in both subject areas, with emphasis on diverse learning styles and differentiated tasks to extend learners’ capabilities. Chapters 10, 11 and 12 examine the theoretical foundations of inquiry learning and model disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to problem solving in primary and secondary contexts by focusing on active questioning, analysis and interpretation of data, on drawing conclusions from the evidence and on communicating findings. Chapter 13 focuses on devising lessons and units of work around big ideas and problem solving using the backward planning design approach. Planning models outlined in the chapter demonstrate how to present knowledge, skills and research methodologies to children and adolescents using disciplinary and interdisciplinary planning approaches. Chapters 14 and 15 deal with issues of progression and understanding in geography and history. Chapter 16 provides an overview of current approaches to assessment in the humanities and social sciences. Guidelines for devising tasks to capture, describe and assess progression in core understandings and skills are presented, together with strategies for gathering evidence about the quality of learners’ thinking in the humanities and social sciences.

Part 3, ‘Beyond the classroom: Exploring wider pedagogies in the teaching and learning of humanities and social sciences’, comprises two chapters and deals with two important elements in social learning: (1) learning through built and natural environments; and (2) new technologies. The historical component of Chapter 17 presents museums, historical sites and other spaces as opportunities to connect with material culture and investigate the interactivity between people, place and time. Treatment of local area studies draws on geographical and historical understandings and skills, demonstrates how to involve learners in their community and shows how participation sharpens local, individual and collective identities. Chapter 18 demonstrates how information and communications technologies (ICT) can work as effective tools for learners to gather, transform and present information. The chapter explores the various uses of the Web through



online learning resources and databases (particularly digitised source materials) and highlights the benefits that spatial and visual data (geographic information systems, satellite imagery, online maps, film and music) bring to teaching and learning.

Part 4, 'Investigating perspectives in the teaching and learning of the humanities and social sciences', comprises three chapters and examines current issues and controversies surrounding values education, globalisation and sustainability. Chapter 19 surveys current thinking about the purpose of values education in primary and secondary classrooms by underlining the contributions that the humanities and social sciences make to addressing ethical concerns around global justice and human rights. Chapter 20 maps spatial and temporal dimensions of global education in the Australian Curriculum, linking these with civics and citizenship education and initiatives underway in studies of Asia. Finally, Chapter 21 deals with the highly topical and important goal of educating for sustainability.

## SUMMARY

Clearly, no text can offer comprehensive coverage of all the issues relevant to the Australian Curriculum: Humanities and Social Sciences. However, this text unpacks those essential competencies required to teach this area effectively in primary and secondary classrooms. As such, it provides a fresh approach to disciplinary and interdisciplinary social learning and practice in the Australian context.

## REFLECTION

1. Explain the recent resurgence of discipline or knowledge-led curricula in Australia and internationally.
2. Justify the four categories in Shulman's knowledge base for teaching model. What further categories would you add for practitioners teaching in the twenty-first century?
3. Working in pairs, mind map what you think the features of effective teaching and learning in the humanities and social sciences should entail.

## GLOSSARY

**discipline** – a discrete area of knowledge with distinctive concepts and unique procedures for gathering evidence to construct and validate theories.

**interdisciplinary** – refers to curriculum structured around concepts, ways of thinking or research skills common to and drawn from a number of disciplines.

**powerful knowledge** – disciplinary or multidisciplinary knowledge situated in a community of specialists, conceptual in nature and independent of context. This type of knowledge allows the user to generate sustainable generalisations about the world and apply them critically.

**reconceptualised disciplines** – areas of knowledge, traditionally known as school subjects, that have been reshaped to meet the needs of children and adolescent learners in primary and secondary classrooms. Examples in the humanities and social sciences include history, geography and economics.

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## GOING FURTHER

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