



MAPPEN the curriculum

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Anyone who teaches in a primary school setting knows that the maths of curriculum is suspended in a delicate balance between giving priority to the basics of literacy and numeracy and ensuring adequate coverage of the multitude of other requirements teachers are accountable for. Planning to ensure that the 'musts' of mandated content from the Australian Curriculum across all subject areas are taken care of can be time consuming and challenging; if you have ever, as I have done, sat down with the Humanities and Science curriculum content descriptors and a pair of scissors in an effort to organise requisite subject matter into meaningful themes that offer a cohesive program of study in which students will be interested, then you are going to appreciate what MAPPEN can do for you.

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program that promises to address the Australian Curriculum standards across the subject areas of science, history, geography, economics and civics and citizenship, while simultaneously providing built in professional development for teachers. The units are organised under eight overarching themes and are designed to cover

a two-year teaching cycle. The throughlines include concepts such as necessity, creativity, sustainability and change, and are ideally implemented school wide, allowing for a community focus on what the students are learning.

The program's creators, Amanda McCallum and Karen Green, both experienced teachers, were working as successful education consultants when they took time off to develop MAPPEN in 2010. Originally, the idea was to devise a two-year scope and sequence to give teachers back time to focus on practice. However as work progressed, it became apparent that more was needed. "There is no way I could write a task that didn't have a collaborative tool in it or didn't use a graphic organiser or something, so we found then that in actual fact what we ended up doing was writing and designing professional

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development and the curriculum almost became secondary ... because we guaranteed to cover all the content, but in covering the content we were focusing much more on the skills and dispositions," McCallum explains.

What was supposed to be a one-year project ended up taking closer to four and a half years. Green's strength in curriculum design complemented McCallum's knowledge of best practice teaching strategies and the pair drew on their understanding of the needs of schools and teachers gleaned from their professional interactions to build an offering that not only incorporates curriculum content, but more vitally is sustainable because of the professional development (PD) embedded within it. Indeed, the pair was so successful in this undertaking that the Victorian Institute of Teaching accredited the program as 160 hours worth of PD for teachers over the two-year cycle.

To put this into context, it is useful to have an understanding of what MAPPEN is and how it works. For each of the eight themes, there are four guided inquiry units – one for foundation level, one for Years 1 and 2, one for Years 3 and 4 and one for Years 5 and 6. As an example, the Community units, which are recommended as the starting point for schools to lay the foundations in terms of skills and routines for subsequent units, offer the following:

Foundation – Classroom Communities Care

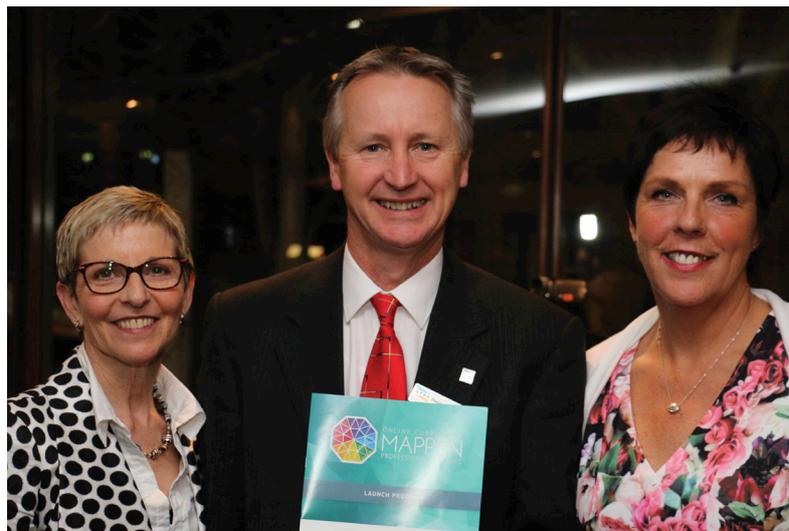
Years 1 & 2 – Connected Communities

Years 3 & 4 – Indigenous Inspirations

Years 5 & 6 – Government – Get It? Got It? Good!

A member website is the vehicle through which teachers access MAPPEN and all it has to offer. The units are structured in a way designed to help teachers easily navigate to the information that they need to successfully deliver the content. This includes a rationale, summary, essential questions and details of the future action the unit is likely to lead to on the opening page, with links to the tasks students will undertake, teacher preparation and other useful information such as the Australian Curriculum standards that the unit covers listed down the left of the page.

The teaching sequences follow a guided inquiry model. Although this



Left to right: Karen Green, APPA president Dennis Yarrington, Amanda McCallum

may appear contrary to the popular ideal of student-led learning, it is an approach supported by John Hattie's analysis of teaching and learning strategies that found that 'Student control over learning' had a negligible impact on outcomes (Hattie, 2009). According to McCallum, the guided versus student-led inquiry issue is one that clients often raise. "It's probably the question that comes up the most frequently and the original rationale behind student-led inquiry is that students learn best through their interests and passions. The problem with that is that they don't know what they don't know. So they don't know what they're going to be interested in, they don't know what they're going to be passionate about unless we guide them to investigate those areas. And the most important skill associated with student inquiry is the skill of questioning and so what we do through the MAPPEN units, in every unit students are given the opportunity in different ways each term to generate questions around the main areas of inquiry."

An awareness of current research and integration of evidence-based practices is a hallmark of MAPPEN. Each unit is linked to two of Costa and Kallick's (2009) Habits of Mind, ensuring that all 16 are covered over a two-year cycle. The spiralled nature of the program also allows students to revisit and consolidate concepts and learning several times throughout their primary school careers. If schools follow the recommended order of units, this means that for example students will explore Habits of Mind



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There are also plans to explore other enhancements driven by MAPPEN's strong IT team such as a student application that would make the graphic organisers currently available to teachers immediately accessible on iPad or laptop

such as persisting and taking responsible risks at least three times from different perspectives depending on the year level and inquiry topic. Other pedagogical highlights include links to Bloom's Taxonomy, considered use of cooperative learning strategies and incorporation of Gardner's multiple Intelligences.

MAPPEN also emphasises reflective practice with comprehensive reflective journals provided for students to use in every unit. As the website suggests, "Reflective practice in the context of the school and classroom is the capacity to reflect on our actions and behaviours in order to engage in a process of continuous learning. Students benefit from thinking about what they did, and what happened, and deciding from that what they would do differently next time" (MAPPEN website). The journals link with the featured Habits of Mind and provide a structured and age-appropriate way for students to develop meta-cognitive skills.

Assessment has not been forgotten either. Teachers are given the opportunity to pre-assess students' knowledge of an upcoming unit with pre-tests and immersion activities designed to be undertaken at the end of the prior term. This has the added benefit of piquing students' curiosity for upcoming learning. To round things out, Rich Assessment Tasks and rubrics are used as assessment of learning.

The robust approach to assessment was enabled by the backward design approach that Green and McCallum took to developing MAPPEN. "Those rich, summative, real life, taking action, making a difference, whatever we want to call it, tasks that sit at the end of the unit are designed

really thoroughly and checked to make sure that they actually address the standards and then we go back and do the scaffolding tasks to provide the students with this learning experience and this learning experience so that they can be successful," McCallum asserts.

For leadership teams, one of the big advantages of whole school implementation of MAPPEN is that it produces a consistency that McCallum observes is often absent in schools that have high teacher autonomy. "Around that whole push for instructional leadership, [it's] very difficult for school leaders to get a real handle on what's happening in the classroom; very difficult to provide them with a vehicle for the types of professional conversations they want to have with their staff," she says. Recent research by John Hattie suggests that one of the biggest barriers to school improvement is "the effect of within-school variability on learning ...there are many causes of this variance within schools, but I would argue that the most important (and one that we have some influence to reduce) is the variability in the effectiveness of teachers" (Hattie, 2015). Although MAPPEN does allow for customisation of units to meet the needs of specific classes, by working from the program, teaching staff are able to speak a common language and come to meetings with a shared understanding of many of the practices embedded in MAPPEN, leading to fruitful professional dialogue.

The shift in focus from what to teach also frees up precious teacher time to consider how students are responding to the learning opportunities offered. McCallum recounts that one principal at the MAPPEN launch commented, "I employ my teachers to teach, not to write curriculum which takes away from their core job of developing those children to be the best they can be."

The response to MAPPEN so far has been extremely positive. Initially launched as Inter@ct on an editor platform known as Unit Hero, the new iteration of the program is more streamlined and user-friendly, and incorporates extra resources such as 'Consultant on your shoulder' videos that support teachers to deepen their understanding of tasks and teaching strategies. The premise, McCallum explains, is that the in-built nature of the PD will have a greater impact than sending teachers out to isolated PD days and expecting them to disseminate their learning to the whole school. In that sense, MAPPEN is designed to allow schools to be as self-sufficient as possible, or as McCallum puts it, "...from the newest graduate to the most experienced teacher and all ranges in between, they get what they need from within the program without constantly having to call someone in to support them."

But the MAPPEN team are not planning to rest on their laurels. The new platform was designed to more easily facilitate collaboration within and between schools, and provides teacher support in the form of more videos that allow professional development for teachers while they teach. There are also plans to explore other enhancements driven by MAPPEN's strong IT team such as a student application that would make the graphic organisers currently available to teachers immediately accessible on iPad or laptop.

While around 60 schools are on board with MAPPEN, mainly in Victoria where McCallum and Green are based but also in Darwin, Canberra, Perth and Adelaide, the recent announcement of a partnership with the Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) has positioned MAPPEN to become truly national. Indeed it is a testament to the experience and hard graft that McCallum and Green brought to the project that APPA President Dennis Yarrington said of the program: "MAPPEN, quite simply, is the long-awaited game changer" (MAPPEN, 2015).

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References

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