



Support units: Geographical inquiry

Illustration 1: Developing questions for inquiry – Year 6

## Planning the inquiry

The sorts of questions described in this illustration's 'Framing the questions' document can lead to more instrumental questions of how to plan an inquiry. Rather than just following a formulaic scheme, planning and inquiry should also be student-centred – 'As a class, group the questions, choose the most relevant questions to investigate and decide where to start' (Catling and Willey 2009, p. 67).

There are a number of resources for older students that indicate how the inquiry process might proceed and these have been reproduced in textbooks, geography syllabuses and overseas publications. For example, the document **Asking geographic questions** <[http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/socstud/frame\\_found\\_sr2/tns/tn-11.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/socstud/frame_found_sr2/tns/tn-11.pdf)> (PDF, 54.33 KB) which states, 'Students need to be able to pose questions about their surroundings: Where is something located? Why is it there? With what is it associated? What are the consequences of its location and associations? What is this place like?' (Canadian Council for Geographic Education, 2001). Refer to this document to examine this approach in more detail.

However, such questions can reduce geography to a rather sterile study of space and place. It is a much better practice to assist students to generate their own lines of inquiry, to generate a real sense of curiosity about their world. Unless this is done, inquiry learning may be reduced to an 'answer culture' rather than a 'culture of argument', to a set of teacher-determined key questions with the provision of some selected data and then steering the students towards some preordained conclusion (Lambert 2004, p. 80).

Halocha (2004) proposes that if the curriculum takes into account what children wish to find out, it may then be able to offer experiences that children can see the point of pursuing. This is supported by Catling (2003) who argues that the notion of starting from the child's perspective may help teachers avoid taking for granted the more stereotypical approaches to geographical inquiry.

Spencer states, 'Asking questions about the world, investigating and exploring it directly and discussing one's discoveries with one's peers, are surely survival skills programmed into the young of our species' (Spencer 2003, p. 233).