



Support units: Geographical inquiry

Illustration 1: Developing questions for inquiry – Year 6

Developing questions

Spence and Blades (1993), two lecturers in psychology, discuss various forms of knowledge that can assist teachers to understand the different types of questions students might ask when studying a topic. These forms include declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge and configural knowledge.

Declarative knowledge

Declarative knowledge is knowing 'that' something is the case, a fact. When studying the Asia region, this would include an inventory of information about the countries of the Asia region, its boundary lines and surface areas. Questions that relate to this kind of knowledge often tend to be uninspiring and fail to excite the student's geographical imaginations. Geographical questions need to 'see the ground beneath our feet', to focus on the realities of existence seen from above whether it is through an aircraft window, from a thematic map or a satellite image.

Procedural knowledge

Procedural knowledge is knowing 'how' to do something or 'how' it is done. This includes the rules for linking acquired separate elements of place knowledge into interconnected elements. This is accomplished through thinking geographically (and asking geographical questions) which is a distinctive procedure as opposed to thinking scientifically or mathematically. The teacher can model geographical thinking by example, but it will have also been learned in the process of geographical inquiry as it has been developing during Years Foundation to 6.

Configural knowledge

Procedural knowledge is enhanced by, what Spencer and Blades call, configural knowledge – understanding how all the elements are interrelated. Just as historians have a broad overview of events occurring during a particular period of time, so too geographers take on a relational approach to inquiries as they identify the relationships between features depicted on maps, aerial photographs and spatial technologies.

In order to develop configural knowledge geographers use globes, atlases and maps in digital or print forms to examine data. They communicate and analyse spatially located phenomena at a variety of scales. In so doing they take into account both human and biophysical factors and the links between local events and worldwide processes. They form holistic questions that permit students to engage mentally with the geographical diversity that, for example, exists within and between the countries of the Asia region.

Students should be given opportunities to test these questions by providing their own answers and then reflecting on what they mean. They should demonstrate abilities to write descriptively about places, space and environments in the countries of the Asia region. They should construct further questions and challenging arguments about geographical diversity.

These approaches to developing configural knowledge can be applied to other aspects of the Year 6 curriculum. For example, in relation to the world's cultural diversity (including the diversity of the world's Indigenous peoples) they may consider the events that connect places throughout the world and the connections Australia has with other countries, and the changes these connections are making to places.