

Shaping questions for inquiry

In this activity, you can work alone or with colleagues. Its purpose is to shape fruitful questions you could explore through focused inquiry or field study activities.

Fruitful questions for inquiry have some common characteristics:

- Relevant to our educational work
- Connect with something we are concerned or curious about
- Indicate the territory of investigation
- Express something we are trying to figure out
- Are open-ended (i.e., does not lead to a “yes” or “no” answer)
- Involve personal investigation (i.e., uses words such as I, we, our, my, etc.)
- Specific enough to provide a focus, but general enough to invite exploration
- Have no easy answer
- Are likely to lead to worthwhile learning
- Are connected in some way with “big ideas” of education
- Make the heart sing

Part 1 — brainstorm

Think of an area of your educational work that you might want to investigate. Then make a list of all the questions you have, big and small. At this stage, all questions are appropriate.

Part 2 — cluster

Cluster your questions into themes, e.g., by colour coding, webbing or listing questions in different categories.

Part 3 — shape

For each theme, create a few key questions that include some of the smaller ones.

Part 4 — evaluate and select

Review the questions using the criteria above. Discard or re-write questions that do not seem fruitful. Then choose one or more questions that beckon you toward learning through inquiry.