

Projects and investigations



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What's the idea?

Extended projects or investigations can be motivating and productive learning experiences when included as part of a student's overall curriculum.

What does it mean?

An extended project is where students do a deep dive into a particular area of the curriculum at a scale and in a timeframe that normal lessons don't allow for.

Projects allow for various lines of enquiry to be pursued, taking students into the hinterland of the curriculum. They can either deepen knowledge or extend learning beyond the material covered in lessons. Investigations typically involve establishing a key question or hypothesis that students seek to answer.

There are risks: you might get shallow responses; students might copy information without understanding it; and there is always a problem of assuming students have resources

outside the classroom when they might not. It's important to mitigate these by structuring the project well, setting explicit standards and ensuring resources are provided. This investment can yield fabulous results.

What are the implications for teachers?

Projects should be designed so that students have clear guidance on: the depth of enquiry you expect; the quality and scale of the response you want; and the necessary prior knowledge they need. It helps to frame projects as a series of questions, with scaffolding for those who need it.

Examples include:

» **Meanwhile elsewhere:** Finding out about events and leading cultural figures in other parts of the world, not covered in the scheme of work but contemporaneous with events studied in class; investigating the literature or number systems from other parts of the world.

» **Case studies:** Students choose a subject – such as cosmic objects, species and habitats, people from history, rituals and natural phenomena – then write detailed reports about them

» **Museum or gallery visits:** Students could write reports on artefacts, artists or artworks seen on visits. This brings knowledge gathered outside school back into the classroom.

Top tip: It's powerful to offer choices for the form of the response: essay, scrapbook, presentation, booklet, video, website, artefact. This level of open-endedness can be challenging but also hugely rewarding.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- » Myatt M (2018) *The Curriculum: Gallimaufry to Coherence*. Woodbridge: John Catt Educational Ltd.
- » Roberts H (2012) *Oops! Making children learn accidentally*. Carmarthen: Independent Thinking Ltd.
- » Sherrington T (2017) Exploring the possibilities. In: *The Learning Rainforest: Great Teaching in Real Classrooms*. Woodbridge: John Catt Educational Ltd, pp. 229–268.