

Moving past exemplars and templates

AIF (Activating Identities & Futures)

Anonymised

Before Activating Identities and Futures (AIF), Research Project (RP) was intrinsically taught in a formulaic way— based on best practice— which enabled students to secure the highest grade possible.

Additionally, the school held RP expos to showcase the process of the best projects for future students and their families.

With AIF, there were no exemplars of best practice, which meant that the teacher and students were very much working in the unknown. This required a shift in approach, which, initially, students struggled with as they sought previous RP guidance and instructions.

The teacher used themselves as an example to provide context to the students and, in the very first lesson, explained what they (the teacher) would choose to explore and provided a strong rationale as to why they would do this. Additionally, they emphasised that the work undertaken needed to be entirely self-driven.

Throughout the subject, the students wanted to know how to get 'As' and 'A+s' and were uncertain how to achieve this, unlike with RP, which had more precise parameters. At first, students struggled and kept looking to the teacher to provide solutions, who had to navigate guiding them instead. The teacher took this as an opportunity to build trust working side-by-side with students to take risks.

The students impressively moved past the discomfort of not having exemplars and templates and enjoyed ownership of their topic. Additionally, they learned to focus on the process and not the final output.

Due to lower intensity and a more manageable workload, the teacher believed this was more realistic subject content for a 10 credit subject than RP.

Going forward, the teacher will provide further teaching to their students on the discovery methods and skills. They are enthusiastic to build up a bank of different enquiry methods central to the students' independent enquiry whilst fostering agency over their own learning.

A recommendation to help students get the most out of this subject in the future is the requirement for teachers and schools to prepare for agency in the younger years so they are equipped when they enter Year 12.