



THE OECD/CERI 'INNOVATIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS' PROJECT (ILE)

THE ILE INVENTORY CASE STUDIES: STRUCTURE, METHODS, QUESTIONS & GUIDELINES

The OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) is conducting an international study of Innovative Learning Environments (ILE). These are reconfigurations of the way that learning is organised for young people (in any age band between 3 and 19 years), combining activities and approaches into whole 'full-time' arrangements designed to be more effective or more ambitious than traditional schooling. Hence, we understand an 'environment' as a more holistic, inclusive set of opportunities and arrangements than as only the setting – educational, social, or technological - in which learning might take place for a short time such as a lesson period or a field trip.

We are particularly focused on innovations relating to the core enterprise of learning and teaching – the “micro” level or, for some, the “black box”. The innovative learning environments might be distinctive because they have a particular approach to pedagogy, curriculum, teaching or assessment; they might address learners who conventionally do not succeed well or bring together learners who conventionally would not share the same learning space; they might have distinctive uses of space and technology for learning. Normally, they will combine a number of such elements and innovations within their rich and complex environments, each with their own particular context.

It is to capture this richness and complexity that the ILE project is investigating particularly interesting, inspiring ILE cases. All countries participating in the study will facilitate and fund one or more case studies for the Inventory of innovative learning environments. Each completed case study will feature in the final Inventory report. The full-length case studies will be posted on the OECD website, and they will be synthesised in a report for publication.

We expect that the work will be done by researchers qualified to the doctoral or masters level, under the supervision of the national or regional team. In this respect, they differ in kind as well as in analytic detail from the self-report information provided when the ILE was originally submitted to the OECD project.

This note provides the common framework, the methods to be adopted, and the protocols to be followed. As the ILEs differ significantly in their location and approach, the protocol is intended to be used as a set of guidelines to be adapted to context rather than as a rigid framework for uniform application. All completed case studies should be structured around the key components A – D, but which particular dimensions should be focused on and questions asked may differ.

The **distinctiveness** of the ILE offers an over-arching lens through which to prioritise the research and analysis. In gathering the evidence and in writing up, we want the case studies above all to reveal what is special in the approach taken and how it works.

Please review all documentation before beginning your research.

Guidelines for Observation, Data-gathering, Analysis and Writing the Case Study

Time needed

There is no fixed time to conduct the studies but the work should begin immediately the agreement has been reached between the OECD and the system's teams that an ILE has been selected. Agreement of the ILE to take part will need to be secured and the researcher identified and recruited. The terms of access will need to be agreed with the ILE in question with the coordinating team and/or the researcher. Preparation will need to be made for the full visit in terms of it organising the interviews and gathering documentary material and this may well require a preliminary visit to the ILE by the researcher, with the additional purpose of familiarising him- or herself with the case.

The visits themselves should ideally take place over at least a two-day period. Where logbooks will be used to record patterns of learning time, sufficient time needs to be allowed for these to be completed.

We expect that each case study will need approximately 3-5 days for write-up.

Therefore, each case study might need the equivalent of 2 weeks full-time equivalent for an individual researcher. Where more than one researcher is involved, the overall time needed will accordingly be reduced.

Structure of the Case Studies

The case studies conducted for the inventory of innovative learning environments address the following *four* key areas.

- A. The *aims of the ILE and the nature and history of the innovation*, including relevant details on socio-cultural context and population served, broad approach taken, origins and development, age of learners, and situation within the broader educational system.
- B. The *structured patterns and characteristics of the learning environment*: the way that learning is organised and structured, including over time. These structures include such matters as how learners are grouped, use of teachers/facilitators, particular combinations of knowledge and content, pedagogies and sequencing of learning, assessments; and the use made of facilities and space, technologies, and community resources.
- C. The *nature and quality of the learning* taking place in classrooms, workshops, laboratories, and in the non-formal and other settings. Given the brief nature of the research visit, direct observation will necessarily be limited only to particular occasions judged most illustrative of the distinctive approach of the ILE so that insights on this will need to be inferred from the other sources of information and methods.
- D. The *impact and effectiveness* of the ILE: compiling the documentary and other research evidence as it exists on such outcomes as those conventionally used in education (achievement and attainment levels, drop-out, graduation, etc.), those specific to the ILE's own aims and philosophy, attitudinal and motivational indicators, and the so-called 21st century competences (see below).

This organisation of the study components A-D defines **the structure of the final report** for each Inventory case study. We recognise that these components are closely related, including in the blurred boundaries between B and C. The important point to bear in mind is that we are particularly concerned by the **organisation of learning**, rather than by a description of the institutional parameters of a school.

ILE's "Learning Principles" and 21st Skills/ Competences

The strand of the ILE project focused on learning science research has developed a set of "principles" of what an effective learning environment is. These offer a framework for interpreting the nature and quality of learning, and may be used as markers through which to organise observation and analysis in the case study. It will be very useful to know how the ILE interprets and realises them.

The "principles" suggest that an effective learning environment:

- Makes learning central, encourages engagement, and develops an understanding of their own activity as learners;
- Is where learning is social and often collaborative;
- Is highly attuned to the learners' motivations and the key role of emotions;
- Is acutely sensitive to the individual differences among the learners including their prior knowledge,
- Is demanding for each learner but without excessive overload;
- Uses assessments that are consistent with its aims, with strong emphasis on formative feedback;
- Promotes horizontal connectedness across activities and subjects, in- and out-of-school.

"21st century skills/competences" offer another lens through which to interpret the ILE, this time focused on outcomes rather than process. Hence, they are particularly relevant to D. (Impact and Effectiveness), though equally they offer a lens through which to look at the aims and methods of the ILE.

There is no single defined list of such competences, and arguably some of these were just as relevant in the previous century as to this one. Nevertheless the rapidly-changing and mobile nature of contemporary society places particular premium on such competence areas as: *teamwork and collaboration, creativity, capacity for problem-solving, knowledge transfer to new problems, and digital and media literacy.*

Length and language of completed case study

These case studies should be approximately 15-20 pages in length, and they may also include links to more extensive web-based material or additional annexes (including film if available). We particularly welcome the addition of digital photographs of the learning setting and relevant features to help to make the ILE “come alive”.

We expect that all interviews and original analysis will be in the language of each country but the main study needs to be submitted in English.

Overview of Methods and Relation to Structures

The case studies will use a mix of methods. Some methods are especially appropriate for particular core elements of the case study but potentially may be relevant for all of them. Primarily, the methods will include:

- i. Document review
- ii. Interviews with leaders and facilitators
- iii. Observations of learning and resources
- iv. Interviews and focus groups with learners
- v. Interviews with other stakeholders

The table combines the structured case study components, on the one hand, and methods, on the other. It indicates how they relate in practice. While all the methods may shed light on any element of the study we expect that some will be particularly appropriate to some rather than others.

		STRUCTURED CASE STUDY COMPONENTS			
		A. ILE Aims & History	B. ILE Patterned Features	C. Nature of Learning	D. Impact & Effectiveness
METHODS	i. Document review	XX	XX	x	XX
	ii. Interviews with leaders & facilitators	XX	XX	X	X
	iii. Observations of learning & resources	X	XX	XX	X
	iv. Interviews/ focus groups with learners	x	X	XX	XX
	v. Interviews with other stakeholders	XX	X	x	X

Looking down a column (such as *A. ILE Aims and History*) indicates that we expect the most important sources of information for this part of the study will come from documentary review and interviews with leaders and other stakeholders, with less from learner interviews; this is

a very different distribution from the expected sources of information relating, for example, to the *Nature of Learning* (column C).

Reading across the rows indicates which aspects of the study will be most illuminated by that particular method: using *i) Documentary Review* will shed light particularly on aims, how the ILE works, and evidence of effectiveness, and less on the nature of learning, while *Interviews with Learners (iii)* we see as informative most on the nature of learning and impact (as perceived by learners) and least on the ILE aims and history.

Detailed Questions to be Addressed

Observation and analysis will need to gain a holistic picture of the organisation, layout, sequencing and mix of learning activities. They will pay close attention to how these interact with the physical and social context of the learning environment, including the community setting. As part of this, the use of space and facilities will need to be recorded, including the details of learning materials and technologies. The role and nature of professionalism of teachers/facilitators are clearly central.

The observation and analysis should be particularly mindful of the 'learning day', 'learning week' and 'learning year'. To make this more robust, selected learners and facilitators could be asked to keep logbooks to record experiences, use of time, and schedules.

Certain questions will cut across the documentary reviews, interviews and observations e.g.:

- Numbers of learners in the ILE and group composition (gender, age, race, abilities, personalities, socio-economic background)
- mixes of groupings in different activities or at different times, including size of groupings
- use of time and sequencing of activities over time
- overall use of teacher/facilitator resources, including team and individual teaching
- links to other learning environments/schools, including those in other communities and countries
- physical set-up of the ILE and locations of learning with their respective rationales
- rationale for design of the physical environment in the light of learning aims and needs of target group.

The questions under the different methods below are suggestions, to be adjusted to the ILE and circumstances.

i) Document review

Relevant documents may include the written profile, programme and aims of the ILE; administrative materials relating to scheduling, grouping or assessment; brochures or website information or video materials; materials produced/used by the learners and by teachers or other professionals; feedback and portfolio evidence. The relevant documents may address all core elements of the study A-D (Aims, Organisation, Nature of Learning, and Effectiveness).

There may well be additional internal and external documentary evidence to be pulled together from a variety of sources, particularly relating to impact and effectiveness, including monitoring reports, independent research and evaluations, quality control processes, and, in some countries, official inspection reports. Documentary evidence may also deepen the understanding of the community and social context of the ILE, and links to related ILEs with a similar approach.

ii) Interviews with leaders and facilitators

These may take the form of individual and group interviews, though the key leaders at least should be interviewed individually. These group and individual interviews will be central to all the different elements of the study. Questions may include:

- facilitator's/leader's professional background/training
- description of typical day/week of work in ILE, sequencing of learning activities over time (days/weeks/months/school year)
- mix of professional roles of facilitators/leaders, including typical interactions with the learner(s), other staff, parents, others
- understanding of the facilitator/leader role guiding professional behaviour
- types of resources available and the strategies for using them
- types and strategies of learner assessment and their rationale; perceived effectiveness of assessment methods used
- main strengths and limitations of the ILE; differences between it and other school settings known to the facilitator/leader
- goals in the learning process, strategies for accomplishing them; longer-term aims, and intended outcomes of the learning process
- professional development strategies, communication structures and knowledge management among professionals in the ILE
- availability of evidence on effectiveness of ILE strategies; reference to evidence-based research or "best practices" in explanation of strategies
- incentives/disincentives for innovation and systemic practice across the organisation.

Additional questions for leaders:

- origins and aims of the ILE, nature of community support
- Individual ILE or part of network? Issues arising
- policy support for ILE, limits/challenges with regard to policy support
- funding of the ILE, accountability structures – key issues arising
- implementation, sustainability and development issues, including assessment and professional development of facilitators and leaders
- understanding of the leadership roles and typical interaction with staff
- (self-)evaluation and research on the ILE, tracking of learning outcomes, and evidence of effectiveness
- next steps in further development of ILE

iii) *The direct observation of learning and resources*

Observations should pay particular attention to: learner engagement; the degree to which learners co-operate and engage in self-directed activity; pedagogies and the role of teachers/facilitators in supporting and enhancing learning; and the feedback and assessment strategies being applied. Observation of use of resources will also be important to complement the interview information.

A checklist to guide observation is:

- the activities and strategies used by teachers/facilitators; the mix and sequencing of approaches and methods
- learner behaviour in the group (commitment, motivation etc.) and the quality of interaction between and among students and teachers/facilitators (e.g. co-operation, empathy, trust)
- signs of motivation or lack of it; motivational strategies used by teachers/facilitators
- the tools and strategies used to assess and track the quality of the learning, and how learning aims and assessment criteria are explained
- the provision of feedback to individual learners; the time given and used for self-correction and reflection
- how the physical learning environment, space, and community resources are used, including for individual study
- the nature and use of materials and resources (ICT, other materials), and how important these are to the learning

iv) *Interviews and focus groups with learners*

Learners will be key sources of information and can provide important insights into their learning experience in the ILE, whether this be about how learning is organised or about perceptions of effectiveness and motivation.

The interviews may take the form of focus groups of different sections of the ILE learner population, supplemented if possible (and respecting the codes of conduct required) with interviews with individual learners.

- description of typical day/week at ILE
- perceived opportunities for linking formal and informal learning, including how effective, how valued, how assessed
- perceptions of the positive advantages of the ILE; weaknesses/limitations and potential barriers to learning
- key differences between the ILE and other learning settings known to the learner(s)
- learner perceptions on typical interaction with facilitators and with other learners
- descriptions of motivation and perceptions on how well learner interests, opinions and needs are taken into account
- learner perceptions of the types and strategies of assessment used – how well understood, how fair, how effective
- learner expectations and ambitions, regarding educational achievement, professional outcomes etc.

v) Interviews with other stakeholders

If possible and appropriate, the case studies should include input not only from learners and facilitators, but also from other key stakeholders, such as parents, outside experts, and community partners. Stakeholder judgements regarding the effectiveness of the ILE and learner outcomes will be important.

- the rationale for choosing the ILE and involvement (if at all) in establishing the ILE
- the roles of parents and other stakeholders in the ILE and typical interactions with facilitators and leaders
- perceptions of the distinctive nature of the ILE compared with other school settings
- involvement of parents or others in decision-making and quality assurance
- perceptions of the ILE's main strengths and weaknesses, with examples.