

SOUTH AUSTRALIA



Government of South Australia

Department for Education and
Child Development

Prepared by Dr Susanne Owen,
Principal Officer Strategic Research and Innovation Leader, Innovative Learning Environment (ILE) project,
Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) Policy and Communications Directorate

Introduction

In late 2010, the South Australian Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) became an invited education system within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Innovative Learning Environment (ILE) project. Seven South Australian public education sites provided evidence of meeting the ILE innovation criteria and were accepted for the 150 Universe cases. One DECD senior secondary school underwent academic research and was selected as part of the ILE Inventory of the 30 most innovative sites across the 26 countries involved.

Throughout 2011, various approaches were implemented by a small team to build the innovation momentum beyond individual sites in DECD. Strategies included conferences, establishing a website and newsletters to share innovative practices, undertaking research and creating a community of practice involving the most innovative schools coming together for school visits and sharing. DECD innovation leaders also travelled overseas as conference presenters and participants. Additionally, a Research and Innovation framework was developed, and a cross-department governance body established. By late 2011, innovation became part of the DECD Strategic Plan 2012-2016, with a focus on equity, excellence and sustainability. Identifying and up-

scaling innovation, as well as establishing system-wide directions for innovation has become an increasingly significant focus for the future.

The broader government context has also been transformed through a structural reorganisation which provides an increased emphasis on children's education and welfare through the provision of more integrated services.

1. Aims

Throughout 2011 and 2012, the DECD innovation team involved in the ILE project has been engaged in an organically-driven 'grassroots' approach to innovation. The DECD initiative aims to build the innovation momentum and culture across DECD schooling and early childhood care sites through sharing effective innovative educational practices while also exploring approaches to dissemination and systems up-scaling.

The innovation vision statement for the schooling and early childhood care sections is about moving beyond individual innovative sites:

Innovation Vision Statement

Our vision is to (re) build the South Australian public education system's reputation as a leader in innovative education through promoting and supporting a culture which constantly questions, adapts and transforms education and care services to prepare for global, technological and environmental challenges and a range of possible futures.

Through provision of high quality and futures-oriented education and care opportunities, all children and young people will build individual skills and understandings to lead rich and productive lives, prepare for modern labour market occupations and play active and constructive roles in democratic life.

2. Leadership and Partners

The systems initiative which is the focus of this submission is driven by the DECD Policy and Communications Innovations team which is responsible for forming wider links with other departmental sections. These sections include workforce planning, curriculum and pedagogy, school improvement, early childhood, schools, indigenous education, technology, national partnerships and educational facilities. During 2012, two key DECD committees have overseen the innovation work.

The Research and Innovation Committee provides the governance for research and innovation across the department and the Innovation sub-committee has a specific focus on innovation. These committees include representatives of the newly-integrated department in relation to providing early support for children and families and incorporating relevant sections from the Families SA and Health services sectors of the government.

Partnerships with regional directors for education, principals' associations and professional bodies have been established, with formal and informal agreements in place with universities for various aspects of the innovation project.

3. Strategies and activities

2012 strategies and activities to build the innovation momentum across South Australian government early childhood facilities, schools and preschools, include:

- Building the momentum towards up scaling across DECD through establishing networks and nurturing an innovation culture and changing mindsets about the importance of innovation for improving educational outcomes
- Increasing the research evidence regarding SA innovation and building research skills through provision of practitioner grants to innovative sites (with academic support), and linking with a local university through the supervision of Honours education research students
- Providing resources to support sites involved in innovation through key principals working in a part-time advisory capacity and commissioning a literature review about innovation within the international and South Australian context
- Building partnerships at local and state levels, including with the business community, schools, governing councils and teacher education leaders
- Facilitating conferences, workshops and forums for SA sites and regional leaders to share innovation approaches and to build systems knowledge and innovation capacity (focused on leadership, communities of practice, and research), while also establishing an innovative community of practice for ongoing learning and site visits
- Establishing links with key innovation and educational leaders nationally and internationally e.g. Valerie Hannon providing a series of intensive workshops and presentations to a wide range of education and cross-government leaders during late August 2012 and Dylan Wiliam delivering workshop sessions on assessment in late 2012.

Innovation Research Projects

Based on the Department's Research and Innovation framework, funds for small-scale practitioner-led research were provided to twelve innovative schools and preschools. The aim of the 2012 practitioner-led innovative research grants project has been encouraging and supporting practitioner-led research into innovation aspects currently underway; building research knowledge and skills and sharing innovation outcomes, as well as contributing to policy and to the Department's strategic directions.

An initial training session was conducted by academics to update the research skills of thirty practitioners and to support them in preparing their research proposals. In their presentations, the academic presenters outlined a six step model of research. Some questions that were posed to the practitioners researchers to consider included: What are you intending to research? What specific practices will you examine at your school/preschool? Where and how will you collect data? What is the setting? Why and how many participants will there be and why? What are the ethical considerations? What analytical processes will be used?

At the workshop session, practitioner researchers worked in collaborative groups and were individually supported to write their research proposals. Following finalisation of the research proposals with others in

individual sites, each researcher was assigned a specialist academic as a critical friend to support the specific research work during a twelve month period. Progress reports and facilitating presentations at innovation conferences and workshops are part of the grant agreements.

Innovation questions being researched by practitioners in various schools and preschools include:

- What impact has personalised learning had in a digital and creative environment in terms of the engagement and wellbeing of students?
- How do teacher personal pedagogies within a whole of school initiative influence student learning outcomes in mathematics?
- What are the learning opportunities that open up through the use of digital gaming technologies?
- What does it mean for a student to ‘flourish’? Are rates/levels of ‘flourishing’ different for the Academy students compared to those in the Junior High section of the school? What is it that we do in the Year 9 Academy of Innovative Learning that makes the teaching and learning personalised? How does this differ from the Junior High model?
- How effective is a mentor program in developing enhanced technology skills and understandings that enable 21st century pedagogies to be developed amongst teaching teams?

Other research aspects in the innovation project include establishing a partnership with a South Australian university in which several Honours education research students are undertaking research in DECD innovation sites and being supervised by the DECD ILE leader. The research topics underway relate to investigating the impact of the cross-school children’s parliament operating in one low socio-economic innovative school. The other Honours student researcher is examining a departmental program called ‘Learning Together’ at one site. The focus is about researching the impacts for young parents attending early childhood centres with their children and undertaking formal South Australian Certificate of Education study courses in which there is a focus on child development and learning. Both of the research proposals have been developed collaboratively with the school and early childhood site involved.

To support other research proposals, an additional aspect has involved a review of literature in relation to innovation. The literature review was prepared to provide research evidence for further consideration about successful innovation practice, dissemination and building the innovation momentum wider across the DECD education system. Aspects covered include definitions of innovation, the reasons for engaging in education innovation, education in Australia and strategic directions, and the OECD innovation context and research evidence in relation to learners, teachers, resources, organisation of learning and content.

Innovation Leadership Workshop Event

The third key workshop in the 2011-2012 innovation project series has focused on Leading Culture Building and Professional Learning Communities for Sustainable Innovation. Typifying the innovation workshops/conferences to date, interest-based groups were established and led by early childhood, school and preschool leaders and teachers. The innovative approach of ‘speed dating’ was used to introduce the choices for group work. ‘Speed dating’ involves facilitators in visiting small groups for two minutes to introduce their topic and then rotating through all conference attendees. This provides attendees with a ‘taste’ of all options before spending a longer period of time engaging in discussion with the facilitator about a particular topic of interest. Similar to the previously-held events, relevant plenary sessions included brief formal presentations,

short provocations, and panels with questions. Also reflecting other innovation workshops was the focus on technology (previously including Twitter and videoconference for remote location access). The current innovation leadership and communities of practice event included school/preschool video clips for the small group sessions and filming of attendee feedback interviews from group work. Student film crews attending are creating a multimedia presentation about the event for the DECD innovation website.

One part of the day's program also involved a workshop considering innovation achievements and future directions for the Department, including systems up scaling.

Biennial Forum

DECD is a significant contributor to the third national Biennial Education Forum overseen by The Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood (SCSEEC). The national forum is an initiative under the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians which showcases innovation, excellence, equity and best practice in schooling across the country. The Forum includes synchronous meetings in each capital city and online keynote speeches, panel sessions and presentations of innovative practice and teacher interviews. Online (web-based) access maximises participation and engagement of schools, teachers and parents, with Twitter promoting two-way involvement. International presentations and keynotes from Australian state and territory Chief Executives and Directors-General, are the focus in the areas of Curriculum and Assessment, Learners and the Learning Environment and Teacher Quality and Leadership. Several of the DECD innovative schools feature among the fifteen most innovative practices and programs selected for the national event, with pre-recorded video clips inserted into the overall keynote presentations.

At the linked South Australian Biennial Forum event, as well as accessing the national presentations, there are student-developed video clips and panels. There will also be presentations from South Australian innovative schools and projects, in addition to accessing the national program and participating in the interactive discussions using Twitter.

Valerie Hannon up scaling Innovation and Road mapping Sessions

A key strategy for DECD in up scaling innovation across the education system involves a specially-convened two day intensive visit from Ms Valerie Hannon (UK Innovations Unit) to South Australia in August 2012. At the Alberta ILE conference in October 2011, Ms Hannon impressed the SA delegation with her address - 'Designing Innovative Systems: Is Moving to Scale Our Challenge?'

In South Australia, Ms Hannon will provide a series of keynotes and workshops for various department, wider government leadership groups and professional bodies. The purpose of the meetings/workshop will be to support DEC work in up scaling, particular given the wider child development and integrated services context. Key session are meetings with the senior leadership team of DECD, state office and school/preschool meetings and workshops examining South Australia's current situation, reasons for innovation, creating a culture which is supportive of constructive innovation and moving forward toward more systemic innovation while also continuing with school improvement approaches. A half day workshop regarding systems up scaling and developing a roadmap for innovation will occur.

October 26 Research Conference

Building on research and assessment in relation to innovation, the October conference provides opportunities for participating in keynotes and workshops from the highly-acclaimed Dylan Wiliam, while also engaging in discussions with practitioner researchers and other academics about the topic of innovation.

The conference focus topic is: *Innovation and Learning from Research: Turning Schooling on its Head and Moving into the Future with Learners at the Centre.*

Dylan Wiliam – internationally renowned for in-depth research into formative assessment as a key to innovation.

Flinders University Educational Futures conference

The final significant innovation event for 2012 has involved the DECD innovation team in working cooperatively with the Flinders University Educational Futures Research Institute (FEFRI) (an independent research body carrying out evidence-based for future educational action). DECD will facilitate a key session within the conference program in relation to practitioner research regarding innovation.

The DECD seminar topic is: *Building the research culture: Practitioner-led research in innovative DECD schools and preschools.* The seminar is related to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Innovative Learning Environment (ILE) project, and DECD's 2011-2012 work in sharing and disseminating innovation across South Australian education. The particular seminar focus is about the practitioner research grants and the progress of the innovative research. The session will involve practitioner researchers in presenting and exploring issues relevant to researching innovative practices in topics such as the impact of reconceptualised learning environments, personalised learning, co-constructed curricula, technology mentors for teachers, and documentation of children's learning stories. Honours research students will also present their work.

4. Context

South Australia is one of the six states and two internal territories which comprise the Australian educational context. Each state and territory includes government, catholic and independent schools and also early childhood services. While the Australian Government has a role in education across the nation and for all sectors, the South Australian Department for Education and Child Development has primary responsibility for its 180,000 children and students. Learning and care happens within about 1000 early childhood centres, preschools, primary and secondary schools and also special schools and area schools.

The recently-restructured Department includes early childhood development and wellbeing as well as public education, with some services previously linked to the Families SA and Health sectors now being included. The Department's revitalised vision is that children and young people are at the centre of everything we do. A key focus is supporting families when children are young, and when problems first arise, with a particular emphasis on those who are most at risk of leaving school early or becoming disengaged. Through forging partnerships with families, the Australian Government, community sector and local government and integrating services, the goal is that every child leaves school with strong skills, a positive outlook and achieves their potential to lead rich, fulfilling and productive lives. Site leaders and their governing boards

and communities also have some degree of autonomy. Innovative educational approaches have been developed to meet the increasingly diverse range of student needs and to build success and create pathways to a broader range of employment and future lifestyle options.

Historical background

During the 1970s and 1980s, South Australian education was widely-recognised for its innovative approaches in relation to social justice, child-centred learning, open-space classrooms, building partnerships with industry and middle schooling. In the past decade, the Learning to Learn project focused on constructivist learning models and building teacher skills generally to support deep learning and student engagement. The follow-up intensive program, Teaching for Effective Learning (TfEL) (involving about half of the state's public schools) has been highly-acclaimed, both nationally and internationally. Steeped in research, the key elements of the framework are Learning for Effective Teaching, Create Safe Conditions for Rigorous Learning, Develop Expert Learners and Personalise and Connect Learning. Since the late 1990s, South Australia has led the Australian nation in its focus on early childhood as the most significant period in setting all children up for success in all aspects of their lives.

Additionally, in the past decade, the South Australian government's 'joined up services' and social action work has resulted in the establishment of ground-breaking programs to meet the needs of those who are most disengaged from education and at risk of leaving school. For example, Innovative Community Action Networks (ICAN) bring together young people, families, schools, community groups, businesses and different levels of government to take action, build joined up solutions and re-engage 6-19 year old individuals and establish a pathway to employment, further education or community participation.

The Department's strategic plan is important in driving innovation across the department through its focus on innovation in terms of Excellence in Education and Care and Building a Successful and Sustainable Organisation. Specifically, the DECD Strategic Directions 2012-2016 are focused on:

- developing a culture supporting innovation, creativity and diverse education and care approaches;
- transforming the learning environment to make best use of emerging technology, building student capabilities and unlocking student potential;
- building a sustainable organisation through nurturing an innovative and adaptive culture to address new challenges and work across boundaries.

5. Resources

The innovation work within the Policy and Communications section of DECD has only a few staff. Additional resourcing is achieved through coordinating with other sections of the department, building networks and linking into national opportunities and funding when available.

6. Development over Time

Various DECD projects and programs such as TfEL and ICANs, as previously outlined, are part of the overall context for innovation over time.

Additionally from about 2003, DECD has been exploring innovation building design for education. At that time, the Australian Science and Mathematics School (ASMS) was co-located at Flinders University and the new buildings were designed specifically to support world class quality pedagogy appropriate to senior science and mathematics education, while also increasing student interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics careers.

Building redesign and improving education and other outcomes for low socio-economic students has been a focus in recent years and several education and childcare facilities have been closed with community support. New multi-age, integrated services and technology-rich facilities have been built including Birth to year 12, Birth to year 7 and Years 8 to 12.

A key development was that in late 2010, the invitation from the OECD for DECD to join the Innovative Learning Environment project provided a significant impetus to recognise the achievements of individual sites. During 2011, the innovations project achieved the following:

Seven sites successfully supported in their OECD submissions, with detailed case study research undertaken in regard to the Australian Science and Mathematics School;

March and November conferences/workshops receiving very positive feedback, with 100 attendees from a wide range of backgrounds and locations coming together for the November event;

- Innovations Website re-established, upgraded and with sites submitting their innovations;
- Innovative schools meeting regularly and involved in site visits;
- Innovation newsletters produced quarterly and widely disseminated;
- Overseas presentations and conferences occurring, including a funded invitation for principals/DECD innovation coordinator to visit Ohio, USA and five DECD officers/principals attending the Alberta ILE conference in October 2011;
- Networking and building of innovation awareness occurring in state office, with officers included in innovation site visits and involved in innovation conferences;
- Stronger links established with innovation teams in other Australian states.

7. Evidence of effectiveness and efficiency

Considering achievements to date, the specific DECD Innovation Journey 2012 Building the Momentum initiatives to reculture for innovation across early childhood, preschools and schools (and more widely throughout the Department) is still at a relatively early stage. Quantitative and qualitative data is being collected as various events are conducted to gauge the more immediate impact. Some indicators of early success in relation to various innovation events are as follows:

Practitioner Research Grants:

Multiple attendees came to the workshop training session from individual sites, and then completed and finalised research proposals. Highly positive feedback was received regarding the training process including over 90%-100% agreement regarding the usefulness of the plenary session introducing research approaches and collaborative group work, and satisfaction with the individual support received in writing the research proposal. There was also 100% intention to share workshop information and issues arising with school colleagues and with other relevant organisations. Specific comments included:

‘As a novice to research, I am returning to school with new directions and possibilities, with a clear and powerful framework with which to work’

‘We appreciate this opportunity to participate.... The opportunity to be involved with supportive, professional mentors also sounds great’

‘Very helpful. Appreciated the different perspectives shared by the professionals’.

Innovation Community of Practice:

Increasing numbers of educators are becoming involved in the community of practice quarterly discussion meetings and school/preschool visits. Initial representatives from the seven ILE pre/schools in the OECD project have been increasingly joined by multiple representatives from their own sites and there has been a doubling of sites becoming recognised as significantly innovative and joining the network.

Leadership and Communities of Practice Workshop:

There were fifty per cent more attendees at the June 2012 conference/workshop (150 people) and they represented a wider range of schools/preschools/state and regional office locations. Written surveys indicated 95-100% positive written response to increased learning about leadership and communities of practice. Comments indicating this include:

‘When I arrived I felt I had a pretty strong understanding in this area; this was strengthened. All examples from today relied on the whole community working together, rather than one person along as single problem solver. Building capacity within a school and developing school culture are keys’.

Significantly in relation to building the innovation momentum, 95%-100% indicated presentations of particular interest and also an intention of undertaking various actions following the event. Follow up actions included ‘connect to like schools or professional conversations’, ‘research a number of recommendations by other educators and leaders’, ‘find examples of innovation that are working...learn from them’, ‘contact a couple of presenters to find out more detail about their innovations’, ‘work out how to raise with teachers that they must embrace enabling technologies’, and ‘articulate innovative programs and communicate that to school community’.

Future Directions for Innovation and Systems Up scaling Workshop Session: There was a reasonably positive response to surveys and discussions about the Departmental culture becoming more innovative and school leaders feeling more supported, especially for schools and preschools which have been involved in significant innovation.

8. Success Factors

A key success factor at this early stage is the inclusion of innovation on the DECD Strategic Plan 2012-2016 and the visible support of the new Chief Executive in his regular presentations to groups at all levels of the Department and across government. Those closely involved in innovation at the site level for many years have indicated that they are now feeling 'it's OK to be innovative' and there is a 'collective view of innovation', with schools making connections with others and more support occurring through central and regional offices. A key comment is about the organisation's 'increased willingness to take risks'.

The innovation work also builds on some highly acclaimed programs which have been operating for nearly a decade such as TfEL, Learning Together, ICANs, Social Justice and the DECD Improvement and Accountability Framework (DiAF). However the 2011-2012 innovation work to date has been focused on grassroots innovation at an individual site level and recognises the achievement of leaders, teachers, students, parents and community who have 'pushed the boundaries' to ensure the particular needs of children and students can be met.

Through providing some coordination through state office, establishing an innovation Community of Practice, a website, newsletter, conferences and workshops, there have been more opportunities for recognition of individual sites and for discussion and site visits. Research, evaluation and managing the communication process and forging links with other national groups have been key aspects of the ILE Coordinator role. The state office innovation team, although small in number, has been able to establish international links especially with the OECD Innovative Learning Environment project. Through this coordination, teachers and leaders have had the opportunity to present and to attend significant innovation events which may not have been possible in the past.

The future DECD directions for innovation are about bringing together the grassroots individual site approaches and the system directions and developing a roadmap with the new Department focused on integrated services and our vision that 'children and young people are at the centre of everything we do'.

9. Tensions and impediments

Entrenched models of schooling constrained in single 'box-like' classrooms, disciplinary-focused curriculum silos and standardized testing which potentially disrupt rather than support formative learning, are aspects of challenge for South Australian education, as they are for many other systems. In regard to moving forward, Fullan (2011) cautions an over-emphasis on the wrong drivers. He highlights the learning-instruction-assessment nexus; social capital and establishing collaborative cultures to build the profession; pedagogy matching technology through focusing on engagement, entertainment and ease of accessing information, as well as systems synergy.

A key feature of DECD's structures is the mix of locally-managed schools, preschools and children's centres working in partnership with their local communities, combined with the support of regional and state education offices, as well as other key government and non-government agencies. The centrally developed DECD Improvement and Accountability Framework has traditionally supported individual sites and the

organisation generally to achieve and sustain high performance through continuous improvement. The innovation focus supplements this, encouraging sites to also consider radical transformation, to start with the future in mind and work backwards, swim against the tide and to make significant breakthrough representing a major shift in design (Valerie Hannon, UK Innovation Unit material).

10. Sources

Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) Innovations website. www.innovations.sa.edu.au

Fullan, M. (2011). *Choosing the Wrong Drivers for Whole System Reform*. Centre for Strategic Education

Valerie Hannon, UK Innovation Unit