

Defining innovative learning environments

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How could innovative learning environments be defined in the context of the ILETC project?

What are we looking for?

The ILETC team collectively set out to define the concept of an *innovative learning environment* through a literature-based reflection about the issues central to our project. The aim was to map out a common research landscape that the large multidisciplinary research team could navigate across, as well as to frame the study and provide a scope to respond to the project's key research question.

What did we find out?

There are multiple terms used in the literature to denote learning environments, including 'Innovative', 'Open', 'Configurable', 'Modern', and 'New Generation'. The terminology and definitions have evolved over time and span a variety of geographical and educational contexts and stakeholders. As yet, there is no consensus as to what constitutes an ILE.

Triangulating a review of literature with results of a survey and teachers' insights from workshops, it would seem that built educational space forms only one integral component of a learning environment.

An innovative learning environment requires leveraging the application of design principles and linking these to pedagogical outcomes and spatial affordances. This is what makes innovative learning environments capable of evolving and adapting as educational practices continue to transform.

In the context of the ILETC project, an ILE can be defined as the product of innovative design of space and innovative teaching and learning practices. Innovative learning spaces are physical educational facilities designed and built to facilitate the widest array

of flexibility in teaching, learning, and social educational activity while innovative teaching and learning practices are the sum of teaching and learning activities that in combination assist in the best possible learning outcomes and learning skills of students required in the 21st century. An ILE is produced when these two phenomena are successfully merged.

"An ILE is the successful merging of an innovative space design including furniture, technology and other infrastructure with innovative teaching and learning practices."

What does this mean for the project?

Innovative designs of physical spaces can represent a set of ideal principles of pedagogy, but it is the interplay between these principles and the physical entities that embody them that is most important. The role of the teacher (with leadership support) in establishing and utilising design affordances is inherently central to the definition. This highlights the importance and relevance of the ILETC project whose primary aim is to provide teachers and leaders with evidence-based research to inform their professional development and practice.



Stonefields School, Jasmax architecture, Alex de Freitas photography.



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