

INNOVATIVE TEACHING PROJECT

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INTRODUCTON

Partners

- **Australian College of Education (ACE)**
- **Australian Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) and**
- **Dusseldorp Skills Forum (DSF)**

Task

To identify and document examples of innovative teaching practice in Australian secondary schools through case study research.

Identified teachers

- seven teachers
- short listed from nominated practitioners
- managed to 'break the mould' of the isolated, classroom-bound teacher
- stepped beyond the comfort zone of their own subject/discipline area.

Product

- an educational resource to be published
- describes, analyses and synthesises the key elements and features of innovative teaching in contemporary contexts
- to be used in multiple ways by educational and community groups in professional development, training and related activities

METHOD

- on-site case study research conducted between February and September 2000
- semi-structured interviews conducted with selected teachers, colleagues, students and community representatives
- subjects involved in the validation of case study material

Focus

Questions to assist in identifying a number of emerging themes, issues and reflections

- What are some of the most effective strategies employed by innovative teachers?
- How have innovative teachers overcome typical barriers and impediments?
- What are the conditions required for innovative teachers to be successful?
- What are the implications of this research for teachers, teacher educators, systems etc?
- How does this research contribute to contemporary work on professional teaching standards?
- Are there any messages from this study for those involved in change processes generally, and educational reform in particular?
- What are the next steps associated with the redefinition/reconceptualisation of learning and teaching processes beyond the Year 2000?

Context

- teachers are often in the news these days
- negative stories frequently reported
 - low levels of teacher morale
 - high levels of teacher burnout/stress
 - impending teacher shortages
 - ageing teacher workforce that is poorly paid
 - downsizing and resource rationalizing
- good news stories infrequently reported
 - acknowledging the value of teachers (e.g. through prestigious awards)
 - highlighting the difference that a teacher can make in the face of adversity (e.g. through a targeted project)
 - contemporary, innovative teaching practices

RATIONALE

- considerable research conducted on key aspects of teacher effectiveness such as 'teaching and learning', 'interaction', 'personal characteristics'.
- little known about new and emerging strategies being used by teachers to respond creatively to major economic, social and technological - as well as educational - changes
- the community perception of a teacher tends to be one of an individual who instructs 20-30 students in a conventional classroom environment
- range of staffing positions created (e.g. school-industry liaison officers, careers education teachers, community education officers etc) to promote innovative approaches to learning and teaching
- the impact on mainstream teachers does not appear to have been high.

OUTCOMES

The case studies document a range of innovative practices and the three to be elaborated on in this paper include; establishing genuine partnerships with individuals and organisations beyond the school; introducing new ways of learning and teaching through matching goals; and using collaborative learning to inspire improved practice.

METHODOLOGY

Management

A small Management Committee and Reference Group have been established to guide and monitor the project. Members developed the following criteria to identify potential candidates for case study research.

"Ideally, each of these innovative educators will have:

1. established effective relationships with students, staff and community;
2. created productive partnerships with local organisations and groups;
3. facilitated genuine student participation and engagement; and
4. developed/adapted innovative teaching strategies in response to identified needs."

Following the identification of potential candidates, a shortlist was determined. Selected case study teachers were required to obtain the necessary approval to participate in this research. Draft reports have been prepared following the completed visits and referred to the case study personnel for verification. Once completed, possibilities for further research and development will be explored. For example, case study teachers acting as mentors/advisers/presenters; making productive links with other projects; promoting the outcomes of this project (e.g. through newsletters and websites); identifying practical resources to promote innovative learning and teaching; identifying ideas and resources for follow-up projects etc.

Site Visits

- Jim Cumming, Executive Director and/or Christine Owen, Project Manager with the Australian College of Education
- teachers from ACT, NSW and SA, Tasmania, WA and Victoria with an addition where the subject works across ACT and NSW and is not a trained teacher
- prior to site visits researchers were provided with contextual information about the work of the case study teachers e.g. copies or extracts from project reports, articles, media coverage, journals, evaluations etc
- evidence gathered through in-depth semi-structured *individual* interviews with selected teachers and specific individuals as well other *small group* interviews (e.g. principals, parents, students, other teachers, community representatives, mentors etc) were conducted to gather evidence
- each site visit taken place over one or two days. Case study teachers negotiated and arranged a series of interview situations that enabled the researchers to talk at some length with individuals and groups who were very familiar with the innovative aspects of the subject's practices.
- teachers reflecting critically on their work - for example, their objectives, strategies, programs, outcomes etc - before, during and after the site visits, to ensure that:
 - this experience is mutually beneficial;
 - case study teachers have the opportunity to focus as much on where they might direct their efforts in future, as on their former achievements; and
 - the data collected might be used as part of a personal portfolio that could be used as part of a process of professional recognition.

A framework for consideration

1. What are you doing that is 'different'?
2. Why are you doing this?
3. Which of your strategies are most effective? Why?
4. What impact are you having, and where is this most clearly demonstrated? What evidence is there to support this?
5. What advice could you give to an educator who is striving to be more effective?

CASE STUDIES

- **Sandra Wilson, Berkeley Vale Community School, NSW**

Plan-It Youth Mentoring Project

- **Nigel Howard, Norwood-Morialta High School, SA**

Community based learning

- **Jenifer Murdock, Hawker College, ACT**

Series of innovative projects that link students with the community providing "real" assignments and externally recognised credit

- **Melissa Hughes, Shelford Anglican Girls' School, VIC**

Computer-assisted language learning

- **John Eaton and Gemma Lawlor, Bridgetown High School, WA**

Improved practice through professional learning

- **Mandy West, Queechy High School, TAS**

Teaching through demonstration and fun

- **Randall Clinch, NSW**

Associated learning through emotional responses

EMERGING TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENT

Evidence emerging about innovative teachers and teaching in contemporary contexts:

- very effective communicators
- able to engage with a wide variety of audiences
- exhibit a love of learning and teaching and

- are exemplary life-long learners
- able to articulate a philosophy of education that is clear and unambiguous
- feel comfortable with supporting their students to realise their own potential
- are not hesitant when it comes to putting in long hours
- cleverly garner resources and advocates to support the innovations they bring to their classrooms, schools and communities
- skilled problem solvers
- have the ability to empower others to be involved and
- share the benefits associated with success.

IMPLICATIONS

- For education departments, schools, principals and school leaders, pre-service teacher institutions and professional and community groups
- Are innovative teachers born or made?
- To what extent are innovative skills readily transferable?
- What level and what kind of resources are required to support these accomplished teachers in meeting the demands of the knowledge society?
- How is innovation nurtured and developed?

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