

An Australian Perspective: CoSN 2024 International Education Delegation to Spain

The CoSN 2024 International Education Delegation to Spain offered a valuable opportunity to engage with diverse aspects of the Spanish education system. Through visits to schools, regional Departments of Education, the national Ministry of Education, EduTech clusters, and the Global Education Forum, delegates gained a deep understanding of Spain's approach to education within its broader cultural context, especially in the cities of Barcelona and Madrid.

As the only Australian and non-American member of the delegation, I gained a unique perspective, observing both parallels and differences between the Spanish and Australian education systems.



Structural Similarities

One of the most striking observations was the overarching structural resemblance between the two systems. The Spanish education system is governed by the national Ministry of Education, which defines national curricula and policies. Implementation, however, is decentralized, with each of the 17 semi-autonomous regions responsible for curriculum variation and policy application. This mirrors Australia's system, where the national Department of Education provides strategic oversight, but the states and territories are responsible for implementing education policies, including local curriculum variations.

In terms of scale, Spain's education system serves approximately 8 million students across 22,000 schools, while Australia supports around 4 million students across 9,600 schools. In both countries, around two-thirds of schools are government-operated, and a significant portion of non-government schools also receive government funding alongside private fees.

Curriculum Flexibility

Both countries share a multidimensional and flexible approach to curriculum design. In Australia, the curriculum is built around learning areas, general capabilities, and cross-curriculum priorities. Similarly, Spain's recently redesigned 2022 curriculum includes objectives, knowledge, competencies, and pedagogical strategies. Both systems support individualized learning paths, allowing for teacher autonomy and professional judgment in curriculum implementation. In both Spain and Australia, schools and teachers are given considerable freedom to interpret and implement these frameworks to best suit their student populations.

Assessment Differences

One surprising insight from the delegation's visits was the absence of national standardized testing in Spain, apart from the final year of secondary school. In contrast, Australia has the well-established NAPLAN test, which assesses literacy and numeracy at key stages in years 3, 5, 7, and 9. During discussions with Spanish educators, it became clear that formative, ongoing, and observational assessments are more common in Spain, with less emphasis on formal summative assessments. This approach fosters a less test-driven education environment, which differs greatly from the Australian reliance on standardized testing.



Salvador Medina introduces the Global Education forum participants to Emily, an AI avatar used in planning the conference and translating multiple languages in each of the conference sessions.



Catalonian Ministry of Education shares their Digital Education Plan with the CoSN Education Delegation.

Language and Regional Diversity

Spain's linguistic and cultural diversity presents another contrast. While Australia is predominantly English-speaking, Spain is home to multiple languages, particularly in regions like Catalonia, where Catalan is widely spoken alongside Spanish. This multilingual environment adds complexity to the education system, with regions often tailoring educational content to reflect their linguistic and cultural heritage, an aspect that is less pronounced in Australia's more homogenous education landscape.

Digital Competency and AI

Spain's focus on digital competency, driven by the European Commission's broader agenda, extends beyond students to include teachers and citizens. This emphasis aligns with Australia's increasing focus on digital literacy, though the European commitment to developing these competencies through school-level initiatives appears more systemic. Additionally, both countries are exploring the potential of AI in education, though discussions at the Global Education Forum highlighted that Spain and Australia, along with much of the world, are still in the early stages of defining the role of AI in schools.

Conclusion

The delegation offered profound insights into the similarities and differences between the Spanish and Australian education systems. Both countries emphasize teacher autonomy, flexible curricula, and the strategic integration of technology, yet differ in their approaches to standardized assessment and linguistic diversity. Spain's holistic focus on digital competency and regional autonomy provides valuable lessons for Australian educators looking to navigate the evolving global education landscape.

About CoSN – The Consortium for School Networking

CoSN, the world-class professional association for K-12 EdTech leaders, stands at the forefront of education innovation. We are driven by a mission to equip current and aspiring K-12 education technology leaders, their teams, and school districts with the community, knowledge, and professional development they need to cultivate engaging learning environments. Our vision is rooted in a future where every learner reaches their unique potential, guided by our community. CoSN represents over 14 million students and continues to grow as a powerful and influential voice in K-12 education

CoSN also provides opportunities for companies that support the K-12 EdTech community to participate as corporate members.

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