

TEACHING AND LEARNING CASE STUDY	
Name of Institution/ Organisation	South East Technological University
Who led the initiative?	John Balfe, Department of Humanities.
Date and timeframe of the initiative	Academic year 2024 – 2025 and ongoing.
What was the reach of the initiative?	How many students, staff or others did the initiative target/ reach.
Initiative Title	"Cultivating Inclusive Playgrounds: A Collaborative Educational Initiative for Early Childhood Development"
Aims/ Objectives	<p>Aim: The project seeks to foster innovation in teaching and learning in higher education by promoting inclusive education, embracing digital transformation, and upholding academic integrity.</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promote Inclusive Education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Apply Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles by having tertiary students collaborate with primary school children to redesign playgrounds for inclusivity and universal accessibility. ○ Utilize interdisciplinary approaches combining outdoor play, psychology, and sociology to demonstrate transformative pedagogies. 2. Drive Digital Transformation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Integrate digital storytelling through podcasts to document learning experiences. ○ Employ AI tools like ChatGPT for peer reviews and grading, equipping students with skills for the evolving digital landscape in education. 3. Uphold Academic Integrity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop creative assessments (podcasts, AI-assisted peer evaluations, and seminar presentations) to encourage ethical academic practices. ○ Assess theoretical knowledge application and ethical collaboration to mitigate academic misconduct.

<p>Rationale and Identified Needs</p>	<p>1. Addressing Inclusive Education Gaps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified Need: Traditional teaching often lacks opportunities for students to apply inclusive education principles in real-world contexts. • Rationale: By involving tertiary students in redesigning playgrounds with primary school children, the project bridges the gap between theory and practice. It aligns with the UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Framework, promoting equity and accessibility in education and community spaces. <p>2. Embracing Digital Transformation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified Need: Higher education must better prepare students for a digital-first landscape, integrating technology into teaching and assessment. • Rationale: The project incorporates innovative digital methodologies, such as AI tools like ChatGPT for peer reviews and grading. This approach provides students with hands-on experience in blending traditional and digital learning techniques, enhancing their digital literacy and adaptability. <p>3. Enhancing Academic Integrity and Ethical Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified Need: There is a growing challenge of academic misconduct and a lack of engagement with creative, authentic assessments. • Rationale: Creative assessments AI-assisted reviews, and seminar presentations promote ethical academic practices. They foster deeper student engagement with content and collaboration, addressing the limitations of traditional assessment methods.
<p>Frameworks, Policies, or Strategies Aligned (internal, local or national)</p>	<p>Internal Frameworks (Institutional Level):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. University Policies on Inclusion and Universal Design for Learning (UDL): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Aligns with institutional commitments to inclusive education, accessibility, and Universal Design principles in teaching and learning. 2. Digital Transformation in Education Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Supports initiatives to integrate digital tools like AI and podcasting into curricula, fostering innovation in teaching and assessment. <p>Local Frameworks (Ireland):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making (2015-2020): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Published by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, this strategy emphasizes involving children in decision-making processes, directly aligning with the project's inclusion of primary school children in playground design.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Irish National Framework for Universal Design for Learning (2021): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promotes accessibility and inclusion in educational settings, reflecting the UDL principles applied in this project. 3. Policy on Special Education and Social Inclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Emphasizes the need for inclusive educational practices, particularly for children with disabilities or special educational needs, as supported by the work of Holt (2007) and Jay (2023). <p>National and International Frameworks:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Framework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guides the project’s emphasis on inclusive education, transformative pedagogies, and sustainable practices in the design of universally accessible playgrounds. 2. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Article 12 emphasizes children’s rights to have their voices heard in matters affecting them, as conceptualized in Lundy’s (2007) model of child participation. 3. Lundy Model of Child Participation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This model highlights Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence in ensuring meaningful child participation. The project aligns with this by creating spaces for children’s input (playground design), amplifying their voices (collaboration and design workshops), ensuring an audience (students and educators), and applying their input in real-world outcomes (inclusive playgrounds). 4. National Digital Strategy for Education in Ireland (2022-2027): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Encourages the integration of digital tools and methods in teaching and learning, such as podcasting and AI, central to this project.
<p>Summary</p>	<p>The "Cultivating Inclusive Playgrounds" project represents a transformative approach to education, bringing together third level students and primary school children to collaboratively redesign playgrounds. The initiative aims to promote inclusivity, integrate digital learning, and uphold academic integrity. Through a combination of innovative pedagogies and practical applications, the project has made significant progress while highlighting areas still to be completed.</p> <p>Key Learnings and Achievements</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inclusivity and Collaboration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A central achievement has been fostering collaboration between third level students and children to ensure playground designs meet diverse needs, including accessibility for children with disabilities.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ This approach has deepened students’ understanding of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles and their practical implications in educational and social settings. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Child Participation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The project successfully employed methodologies like the Mosaic Approach and Lundy’s Model of Child Participation, ensuring children had meaningful input in design decisions. These frameworks allowed the children’s voices to influence real-world outcomes, fulfilling rights-based participation principles. 3. Integration of Digital Learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students have utilized digital tools such as the use of AI, enhancing their digital literacy and reflective skills. ○ AI tools like ChatGPT have been used for peer reviews, offering innovative approaches to assessment and promoting ethical academic practices. 4. Interdisciplinary Learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Combining modules in sociology, psychology, and outdoor play has allowed students to approach playground design from multiple perspectives, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and problem-solving skills. 5. Community Engagement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The project strengthened university-community ties by involving local primary schools, creating a shared sense of purpose and contribution, realising the real impact of higher education in our communities.
<p>Did you collaborate with internal and/or external stakeholders to deliver?</p>	<p>Internal Stakeholders:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. University Faculties and Disciplines: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Faculty members across SETU Carlow and SETU Wexford campuses coordinated efforts, ensuring geographic diversity and shared learning experiences. 2. Students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Third level Early Childhood Education and Care students were directly involved in research, design, and feedback on collecting the data and working with the children, serving as both participants and co-creators in the initiative. <hr/> <p>External Stakeholders:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community Groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Men’s Sheds: Members of the Men’s Shed network were consulted to build bespoke playground materials, offering a community-driven approach to construction and design. 2. Specialized Playground Companies:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Partnerships with private-sector playground design companies ensured that designs adhered to safety standards and accessibility guidelines, providing technical expertise and resources. <p>3. Primary School Teachers and Staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Teachers were pivotal in connecting children to the project, facilitating workshops, and integrating the project into classroom activities to enrich the educational experience. <p>4. Parents and Families:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Parents provided valuable feedback on design concepts, sharing their perspectives on inclusivity and the needs of children with disabilities or other unique requirements. <p>5. Primary School Children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Children were central stakeholders, contributing ideas, drawings, and feedback on playground designs, ensuring that the spaces reflect their needs and imaginations.
Organisation and Planning	Please see Appendix 1 below for full details.
What resources did you need?	The project requires a budget of €5,000 and extensive collaboration among faculty, students, community groups, and private-sector partners. Financial resources cover mostly materials, while human resources ensure expertise, creativity, and on-the-ground implementation. Effective coordination of these resources will be crucial to delivering the final playground design.
Has it been evaluated? How successful has it been?	<p>1. Impact on Children</p> <p>Successes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empowerment and Inclusion: Primary school children actively participated in playground design through workshops, embodying the principles of the Lundy Model and the Mosaic Approach. Their voices have been heard and respected, fostering a sense of ownership and agency. ● Skill Development: Activities encouraged creativity, problem-solving, and teamwork, while exposing children to new ideas about inclusivity and accessibility. <p>2. Impact on Third-Level Students</p> <p>Successes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interdisciplinary Learning: Students gained practical experience in applying Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles across sociology, psychology, and outdoor play disciplines. ● Digital Literacy: The integration of AI tools provided hands-on digital skills, enhancing their employability and adaptability in a rapidly changing digital landscape. ● Community Engagement: Collaborating with children and community groups fostered a deeper understanding of social responsibility and the real-world application of academic concepts.

	<p>3. Impact on Teachers</p> <p>Successes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced Collaboration: Teachers appreciated the opportunity to work with university students and faculty, creating a bridge between primary and tertiary education. • Inclusive Education Insights: Teachers gained exposure to new methodologies for involving children in decision-making, potentially influencing their classroom practices. <p>4. Impact on the University</p> <p>Successes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community and Institutional Collaboration: The project strengthened ties with local schools, community groups, and private-sector companies, enhancing the university’s reputation for civic engagement. • Innovative Teaching Practices: The integration of digital technologies and interdisciplinary collaboration positioned the university as a leader in innovative education practices. • Alignment with Strategic Goals: The project aligns with institutional commitments to inclusivity, sustainability (UNESCO ESD Framework), and academic integrity.
<p>Any future plans, including the sustainability of the initiative?</p>	<p>The "Cultivating Inclusive Playgrounds" project has strong potential for long-term sustainability and expansion. Future plans include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Scaling the Project: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ An application has been submitted for an Impact Award of €25,000, which would enable the project to expand to other schools and early years settings, fostering inclusivity and accessibility in more communities. 2. Enhancing the Digital Aspect: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The additional funding would support further development of the digital components, such as advanced podcasting tools, interactive digital storytelling, and AI-driven assessments, strengthening the integration of digital methodologies in teaching and learning. 3. Student Development Opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Plans to bring participating students to national conferences to present their work and showcase the project’s impact. 4. Disseminating Knowledge: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The project aims to publish an academic journal article to share findings and best practices with the wider academic community. 5. Long-Term Sustainability: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ By building strong community partnerships and embedding inclusive education principles in curricula, the project aims

	<p>to create a replicable model that can be sustained and adapted by future cohorts of students and schools.</p>
<p>Key Learning Points</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Empowering Child Participation: <p>Incorporating children’s voices through the Lundy Model and Mosaic Approach highlighted the importance of meaningful engagement in decision-making processes, ensuring designs met their needs and preferences.</p> 2. Promoting Inclusivity: <p>The project underscored the value of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in creating environments accessible to all, particularly children with disabilities, fostering equity and inclusion.</p> 3. Interdisciplinary Collaboration: <p>Combining insights from sociology, psychology, and outdoor play demonstrated the effectiveness of interdisciplinary approaches in addressing complex, real-world challenges.</p> 4. Integrating Digital Tools: <p>The use of podcasting and AI for peer assessment showcased how digital methodologies enhance student learning, reflection, and skill development.</p> 5. Community and Institutional Engagement: <p>Partnerships with schools, community groups (e.g., Men’s Sheds), and private-sector experts reinforced the importance of collaborative, community-driven solutions.</p> 6. Innovative Pedagogy: <p>Creative assessments and experiential learning activities provided students with practical experience, deepening their understanding of theoretical concepts while fostering ethical academic practices.</p> 7. Real-World Impact:

	<p>The project highlighted the potential for academic initiatives to have tangible, positive effects on local communities, strengthening ties between universities and schools.</p> <p>8. Scalability and Sustainability:</p> <p>The project demonstrated the feasibility of scaling inclusive education practices to other settings, with opportunities for further growth and impact through additional funding and dissemination efforts.</p>
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Teaching and Learning Focus Areas (please tick all that apply)

Categories	Elements	Topics	Target Groups
Commit <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Leadership, Strategy & Governance <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Digital Transformation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Students <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Coordinate <input type="checkbox"/>	Curriculum and Assessment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Education for Sustainable Development <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Staff <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Consult <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Innovation in Teaching <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Academic Integrity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wider community <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Create <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Professional Development <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Inclusive and Equitable Teaching Practices <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>
Celebrate & Continue <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Research and Evaluation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Innovations in Assessment and Feedback <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
		Student Engagement and Partnership <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
		Collaborative and Interdisciplinary Approaches <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
		Artificial Intelligence <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

		Other <input type="checkbox"/>	

Contact Details

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Links	Website under construction at the moment.

Appendix 1 – Action planning and Implementation timeline.

Phase	Activities	Stakeholders Involved	Timeframe	Status
1. Project Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Defined project scope, aims, and objectives. - Established partnerships with schools, community groups, and private-sector companies. - Ethics approval sought and approved 	University faculty, school staff, private-sector partners.	January - March 2024	Completed
2. Committee Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Held interdisciplinary committee meetings to finalize project design. - Integrated input from science, sociology, psychology, and outdoor play experts. 	Academic and administrative staff, external advisors.	April - May 2024	Completed
3. Pilot Phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducted pilot workshops with third level students and primary school children to explore playground design ideas. - Implemented the Mosaic Approach and Lundy's Model to capture children's voices. 	Students, teachers, children, and community groups.	April - May 2024	Completed
4. Assessment and Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refining playground designs based on children and teacher feedback. 	University team, children, private-sector specialists.	September 2024	Completed

	- Engaged private-sector specialists to evaluate cost, safety and feasibility of designs.			
5. Procurement Stage	- Initiated procurement for materials. - Coordinated with Men's Shed and private companies	Procurement team, Men's Shed, private companies.	October - December 2024	In Progress – Materials being ordered within 6 weeks.
6. Infrastructure Build	- Construction and installation of playground equipment and features.	Men's Shed, contractors, and school staff.	January - February 2025	Pending
7. Final Launch	- Final inspection and opening of playgrounds. - Evaluation of project outcomes.	All stakeholders, including local community and university leadership.	March 2025	Pending