Cultivating Inclusive Playgrounds: A Collaborative Educational Initiative for Early Childhood Development

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.

Frameworks, Policies, or Strategies Aligned (internal, local or national)

Internal Frameworks (Institutional Level):
1. University Policies on Inclusion and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
2. Digital Transformation in Education Strategies

Local Frameworks (Ireland):
1. National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (2015-2020)
2. Irish National Framework for Universal Design for Learning (2021)
3. Policy on Special Education and Social Inclusion

National and International Frameworks
1. UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Framework
2. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
3. Lundy Model of Child Participation
National Digital Strategy for Education in Ireland (2022-2027)

SETU Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta an Oirdheiscirt
South East Technologica University

Aims/Objectives

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.
Objectives:
1. Promote Inclusive Education:
- 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:
- 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:
- 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.

Rationale and Identified Needs

1. Addressing Inclusive Education Gaps
- **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.

2. Embracing Digital Transformation
- **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.

3. Enhancing Academic Integrity and Ethical Collaboration
- 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.

Categories	Elements	Topics	Target Groups
Commit	Leadership, Strategy & Governance		Students
			Staff
Consult	Personal & Professional Development	Mental Health & Wellbeing	
Create			
		Artificial Intelligence	