Making a difference
TOY for Inclusion
TOYs to Share, Play to Care

Insights from the Impact Evaluation,
Implications and Policy Recommendations

17 November 2020

To evaluate the potential impact of TOY to Share, Play to Care
from the point of view of project participants

The impact evaluation is an integral part of the evaluation and monitoring framework of the TOY for Inclusion / TOYs to Share, Play to Care project

The overall evaluation framework consists of three interconnected elements

1. Comprehensive data collection, monitoring and reporting structure, set up and operated by Open Academy Step by Step (OASbS)

2. *Impact evaluation carried out by Dublin City University, Early Childhood Research Centre (ECRC)*

3. External evaluation of project activities, conducted by an external evaluator

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To evaluate the potential impact of TOYs to Share, Play to Care from the point of view of project participants

1. What does *making a difference* mean to your locality in relation to inclusive early years community initiatives i.e. this project?

   How do you know?

   For whom?

2. What helps you make a difference to your locality in relation to inclusive early years community initiatives?

3. What makes it difficult?

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Methodology and data collection

Body of qualitative data:

Semi-structured interviews

Focus groups

Task-based interviews with participants

Observations

Fieldnotes

To increase reliability of the interview data, **interviews were audio-recorded** and conducted by the same researcher with a note-taker present.

Recordings were **transcribed** and examined and **verified** against written notes in order to ensure validity of participants' responses. This was particularly important, due to English being the medium through which the interviews were conducted, and many of the participants having English as an Additional Language.

Note-takers were present in all focus groups and the data was examined immediately after the focus groups, to **assure accuracy** of representation of the **responses**.

Task-based interviews and activities were conducted to examine the stakeholder mapping, peer mentoring and monitoring paperwork. This data was organised immediately after the activities, in order to increase its reliability.

Observation data was collected by all researchers through **fieldnotes** during the training event.

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Data analysis

Thematic analysis:

Initial coding of all data (transcriptions, written notes, post its…)

Condensed to 109 pages for second coding

Contents

Step 1: Detailed Thematic Analysis

Code	What does impact/making a difference mean to your locality *in relation to inclusive early years community initiatives i.e. this project?* How do you know? For whom?	What do you envisage will help you make a difference to your locality *in relation to inclusive early years community initiatives?*	What do you envisage will make it difficult to make a difference *in relation to inclusive early years community initiatives?*
Infrastructure: Headlines: Having a Place Outreach Sustainability Governance/municipality Local needs assessment Online templates HR/Training/Roma Med	Having a 'place': the place where somebody will look for the child; they have a place to talk' 'play hubs a good place. A meeting place where for example comes different professionals from social dept., they help to fill documents' Croatia 'in this 2ⁿᵈ phase, the physical space of the Play Hub, and the concept of the kind of relationships we like to have here' 'you can do TFI approach in a mobile Play hub for example' M	Outreach: 'they went to Roma settlement, which is a few kms away, we didn't want to do that too often' because Roma settlement is a few kms away, we are always thinking about how to bring them here without car for example now city of Sisak offer that they will pay a bus to bus them from the roma settlement to play hub once a week' 'for first time just give information that play hub exists' Croatia Some LATs have [redacted] and that is significant bridge. Starting from what you	Outreach: 'they don't know about project' Croatia 'There are many areas that are difficult to reach' 'unidirectional' – rain can get in the way! 'winter was a bit more quiet because of the weather, but by the spring is coming the number of visitors are increasing' 'Non-communication between the two groups, if [redacted]

What does impact/making a difference mean to your locality in relation to inclusive early years community initiatives i.e. this project?

Social cohesion
Political impact and policy discourse
Educational outcomes / school readiness / transition
Various degrees of formality
Play as informal context for learning and development
Community led / local community involvement
Recognition of communities' identity
Empowering communities
Providing community space
Strengthening family relationships
Safe space
Sustainability of project

"Parents are spending time and playing together with their children. But we don't use internet, we play together, talk together"

"A meeting place where for example, comes different professionals. They meet with families, with parents. They help for example, to fill different documents"

"So many more Roma children were registered in primary school this year or staying in school"

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What do you envisage will help you make a difference to your locality in relation to inclusive early years community initiatives?

Outreach
Empowerment
Trusting relationships
Local needs assessment / stakeholder mapping
Breakdown of stereotypes
Language
Event providers
Engagement
Integration with community services / municipality
Association with educational settings
'Social standing' of professional ('seen as 'professionals')
Professional development
Influencing local politics (decision making, resourcing)
Flexibility of operations and local decision making
Monitoring templates useful

"We will go to the Roma village with this lady which is with us and they will come to the library with Roma kids"

"When you do something at local level, the municipality is more or less involved somehow, the local government"

"Some LATs have people who are Roma and that is a significant bridge. Starting from what you have and who is involved"

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What do you envisage will make it difficult to make a difference in relation to inclusive early years community initiatives?

"There are many areas that are difficult to reach […] rain can get in the way!"

There is a struggle for space"

"Stakeholders aims is different to the community; there should be more focus on the relationships and communication between the stakeholders"

"If I think only to this project, it will be one year of Play Hub. But if you think on a longer perspective, beyond this project. Which I hope they will do because otherwise it was like a lot of wasted resources for me"

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The pandemic has compounded existing inequalities
(beyond early childhood development, education and care)**:**

Structural inequalities:

- Access to services, money, food, water…

Digital inequalities

- Access to meaningful online learning and support programmes for young children and their families

The pandemic has underlined the potential of *situated approaches* (like TOY for Inclusion):

Being embedded in local communities, and guided by shared values, play hubs were well-placed

- to identify urgent needs and prioritise where necessary
- to quickly develop creative, flexible and effective support for children and families
- to coordinate support with other services and professionals

This has been more effective where local structures (municipalities) proactively sought LAT expertise

It has been made difficult where municipal support was withdrawn

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Making a difference is **situated** and **contextualised** (always)

Making a difference varies according to local specifics but follows identifiable dimensions

Values
- Social cohesion
- Empowerment
- Identity

Relationships
- *Within* (children, families …)
- *Between* (Schools, municipality…)

Structures
- Profession
- Position in relation to formal education system (school)

TOY for Inclusion is *making a difference* through shared values and orientations interpreted and put into practice in diverse ways in diverse contexts

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Making a difference requires

- Shared **values**
- Focus on **relationships**
- **Professionalism**
- **Political thinking** and skills
- **Practical skills and tools**

Making a difference is made difficult by

- **Lack of trust**
- **Lack of clarity of aims** e.g. between the specific (local) and the general
- **Lack of access**
- **Lack of resources**

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Implications for policy recommendations

The challenge and the possibility:

How to develop shared values, knowledge(s), practices while embracing, enabling, empowering diverse local (situated) creative (re)inventions?

Double loop learning:

Learn from (evaluate!) local inventions to critically question and recalibrate the whole

Shift focus from implementation to interpretation and local meaning making

Grassroots Competent Systems

Policy implications:

Governance to be conceptualised as distributed and intrinsic to the system, rather than top-down

Implementation to be based on trust in the creative powers (and competence and professionalism) of all involved

Resourcing of reflective cycles and critical reflection at all levels

From linear to cyclical policies

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At local level:

- Ensure early childhood development, education and care is recognised as priority across municipal departments and agencies

Provide spaces for systematic, dialogic, cross-sectoral encounters between stakeholders: community members, professionals from a wide range of backgrounds, policy- and decision makers

- Consider developing a municipal early childhood strategy, based on local implementation of children's rights and sustainable development goals

- Prioritise, facilitate, resource, and document these processes as integral part of mandatory local (municipal) planning

Grassroots
Competent Systems

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Policy recommendations: national

At national level:

- Ensure early childhood development, education and care is recognised as priority across government departments and agencies

- Consider developing a national, whole-of-government, early childhood strategy based on UNCRC, SDG's, and 'progressive universalism'

Combine national guidance (policy frameworks, strategies etc.) with equally strong support for regional and local democracy

- Resource local processes and local capability building as part of a national strategy

- Introduce and maintain data collection, monitoring and evaluation system that ensures all stakeholders are heard

- Ensure local experiences and solutions are not only documented but systematically evaluated and used for continuous policy and strategy review at national level ('double-loop learning' / cyclical policy-making)

Grassroots
Competent Systems

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Policy recommendations: EU

At EU level:

- Focus on integrating fragmented early childhood policy responsibilities (e.g. across DGs): children's rights and well-being, social cohesion, ECD, ECEC, infrastructure etc.

Assume initiative and leadership – internally, towards member states and externally, towards international organisations and forums (OECD, G20...)

- Prioritise an integrated EU early childhood development, education and care strategy

- Refocus funding streams on shared learning across sectoral, disciplinary, professional boundaries: E.g. multi-dimensional networks of community representatives, local and regional decision makers, practitioners, researchers

- Encourage and resource (fund!) systems research

Grassroots Competent Systems

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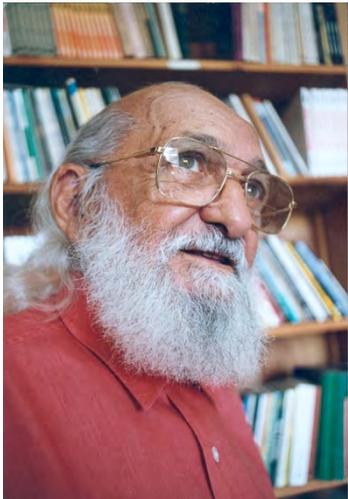
Different tomorrows are possible. The struggle is no longer reduced to either delaying what is to come or ensuring its arrival; it is necessary to reinvent the future. Education is indispensable for this reinvention

Paulo Freire

Thank you!

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