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SUII Knowledge Exchange Programmes

Agents of Change: a toolkit for schools and teachers

Final Report

December 2021



Main objectives and context

Schools and teachers are recognised as key players for accelerating progress towards the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but can often feel unprepared for dealing with these challenges. For example, schools and educators face a number of challenges when they work to address inequalities or try to meet the wellbeing indicators for all students, such as a lack of time or structural barriers for meaningful and productive collaboration with students and their families, with each other, and with other professionals who could bring relevant expertise. The project, therefore, aimed to develop a toolkit that would facilitate teachers and schools acting as agents of change for the achievement of the SDGs, with a particular focus on SDG4 (inclusive quality education for all). The objectives included hosting two seminars (one on research surrounding teacher agency for change and one on the educational potential of game-based learning) and four workshops to co-design with various stakeholders a research-informed toolkit with a range of visually attractive games that would engage school staff in the planning, implementing, and evaluating of change towards the achievement of the SDGs.

An account of the insights resulting from the programme (including lessons around the theme of the Sustainable Development Goals)

During the two seminars and four workshops we held online, participants shared their knowledge and experiences. Participants comprised of primary and secondary school teachers, school leadership, out-of-school educators, educational authorities, researchers, and game designers. We listened to what teachers and educators wanted and what they identified as the challenges and changes needed to improve education around the SDGs. Participants highlighted a range of topics they wished to address, which were integrated into the games and toolkit. The project used co-design methods to identify these priorities for change; participants contributed thoughts and ideas at workshop 1 which were categorised and analysed to establish six priority areas for change:

1. Communication and building relationships (with pupils, parents, other schools, and external organisations, and with high priority groups).
2. Capturing and representing diverse perspectives on what needs to change and how.
3. Addressing the perception of change as 'too risky'.
4. Acting as agents of change within the confines of existing heavy workloads.
5. Techniques, tools, and training for remote communication.
6. Evaluating success and/or using evaluation frameworks.

Working with a variety of stakeholders helped us understand how best to develop the toolkit to make it relevant and accessible to those who would use it. We worked with representatives from education authorities and the General Teaching Council for Scotland to ensure that the toolkit mapped onto the key crosscutting themes of the Professional Standards, including Learning for Sustainability and equality and diversity. From this work, we established four key themes within the toolkit: sustainability, inclusion and equality, Covid renewal, and migrant integration, but the toolkit is flexible enough for educators to use it in any change project they have identified. We heard from participants that the most effective tool would be something that could be built into their workload, so the toolkit's 5-step change model can be embedded into educators' everyday planning and workload as they identify issues to address. The games can be incorporated into school/staff sessions or student lessons as part of routine work or learning. Using this co-design process resulted in a



practical toolkit for schools and educators to engage with change projects through playful activities that facilitate whole-school approaches, which can be initiated by individuals, groups of staff, or groups of staff and students. Using a whole-school approach will aid collective action towards achieving the SDGs and build staff and students' awareness and knowledge of SDGs. Education professionals can also use the toolkit in their individual and collective professional inquiry projects and to evidence their career-long professional learning and contribute to Professional Update.

Main outcomes and (expected) impact

The seminars and workshops were attended by 78 people. Participants heard about the research background to the project and how the ACToolkit model and games were to be developed. Over the course of these events, the ACToolkit and games were co-designed with participants in parallel with knowledge exchange activities.

The outputs of the project are:

- ACToolkit – a toolkit for schools and educators to:
 - a) build SDG-related improvements into their local plans;
 - b) identify relevant expertise and work with other players within and beyond schools to implement change projects; and
 - c) evaluate the impact of change processes and outcomes.

The toolkit and information on working through each step can be accessed on our website (<https://www.agentsofchangetoolkit.org/>). We expect schools and educators all over the world to make use of the toolkit to plan and evaluate change projects and create impact. A figure displaying the 5 steps of the change model can be seen below.



- Eight minigames/playful activities for staff and/or students to use in educational settings. Each addresses a specific priority area and is suited for use in a particular step (or multiple steps) of the ACToolkit change process. Each game has accompanying documents including information on the game's purpose and instructions, who the game is for, where it could be used, how long the game takes, and materials/resources needed. We expect the games to be used by teachers, educators, and pupils all over the world to learn about the SDGs and build them into their curriculum and targets. The eight games can be accessed via our website and comprise:

1. Tricky Conversations Toolkit - To overcome reluctance to engage in conversations that challenge issues of equality and diversity.



2. The A-ha Moment - For improving staff relationships and networking, empowering feelings of individual initiative and collective action.
 3. Evaluation Busters - Evaluation is prioritised as a circular, continuous, and positive process.
 4. Take Memories, Leave Footprints - To have health and wellbeing connected to outdoor learning be an integral and valued part of school community life.
 5. What Am I? - To develop teacher confidence in leading activities about empathy and to develop empathy in pupils.
 6. Pass the Cake - For rebuilding connections to reduce social isolation and reduce the inequity gap.
 7. 1.5 Max - To enable as many people as possible to engage with COP26 even though we are still concentrating on recovering from the lockdown.
 8. Sustainability Subject Swap - To persuade colleagues in school and beyond to engage with sustainability no matter what their subject or what age of pupil they teach.
- A website for the ACT project (<https://www.agentsofchangetoolkit.org/>) including background information on the development of the toolkit and games, case study examples to show the toolkit being used for others to be inspired and to use as instruction, the games and accompanying materials, information on past events, and blog posts. Over time, this will help document impact as case studies of schools and educators using the toolkit will be added to the site.
 - Two animated videos are currently being created to explain the project and how to use the toolkit, they will be added to the ACT website when ready. The videos will help introduce the toolkit to potential users in an accessible way, which may encourage them then read more about the toolkit and games.
 - A Twitter account (with 97 followers) to promote the project: <https://twitter.com/AoCtoolkit>. This has helped us promote events, network with others, and disseminate the toolkit, games, and resources.
 - A poster for the SUII conference. This helped us promote the project to others interested in SDG work.
 - Five presentations at conferences/professional days, three workshops at conferences, and an academic publication. These helped us promote the toolkit and games to a wide, international, audience, including schools and educators, which created interest in the project and resources.
 - European Conference on Educational Research: Inclusive Education: Communities, Families and Schooling in Educational Research. *Teachers as Agents of Change: development of a toolkit for teachers and schools for addressing the UN Sustainable Development Goals*. 6 - 10 September 2021. <https://eera-ecer.de/ecer-programmes/conference/26/network/679/>.
 - British Educational Research Association Conference. *Accelerating progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals: serious games for teachers as agents of change*. 13 - 16 September 2021.
 - Games and Learning Alliance conference. *Serious Game Rapid Online Co-design to Facilitate Change Within Education*. 1 - 2 December 2021.
 - Scottish Professional Learning Network. *Teachers as Agents of Change: Introducing the Agents of Change Toolkit project*. 29 September 2021.
 - British Educational Research Association Conference: Social Justice, Inclusive Education. *Teachers as Agents of Change: a toolkit for teachers and schools addressing the UN Sustainable Development Goals*. 13 - 16 September 2021.
 - Ada Festival. *Change your School with Serious Games*. 20 October 2021. <https://ada.scot/2021/09/07/change-your-school-with-serious-games-with-act-agents-of-change-toolkits/>.
 - University of Dundee School of Education and Social Work Annual Conference. *Adaptability and Resilience: Re-imagining Changing Times*. 12 November 2021.



- 12th Global RCE Conference. Serious games for accelerating progress towards UN Sustainable Development Goals. 17 November 2021. <https://www.rcenetwork.org/portal/12th-global-rce-conference> and <https://padlet.com/LfSScotland/nc3cwyjhxoypxvf>.
- Abbott, D., Chatzifoti, O. and Craven, J. (2021). Serious Game Rapid Online Co-design to Facilitate Change Within Education. In: Proceedings of Games and Learning Alliance, 10th International Conference, GaLA 2021. Springer.
- An article in the General Teaching Council for Scotland's magazine, which is sent to all teachers in Scotland, <https://readymag.com/gtcscotland/TeachingScotlandIssue90/10/>.
- Included in Glasgow City Council's Getting Ready for COP26 online booklet, which will be accessed by people interested in working towards the SDGs. See page 24: <https://www.stemglasgow.co.uk/Resources/DownloadResourceDocument/113>.
- Included in Learning for a Sustainable Future, an online course by the University of Edinburgh with 2530 people enrolled: <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/learning-for-sustainable-future>.
- Included in Edinburgh Futures Institute course on Education, Data and Change: <https://efi.ed.ac.uk/education-futures/>.

Carrying out the seminars and workshops online was an unexpected opportunity as it meant more individuals from all over Scotland could attend the events. We had a lot of positive feedback after the workshops and believe the programme had an impact on those involved, which should translate to those who use the toolkit and games. Participant 1 commented after workshop 2, *"It's rare to come across something that is so different, refreshing and practical and I learned an awful lot."* and after workshop 3 they said, *"Thanks again for an inspiring and very practical session."* Participant 2 stated during the workshops, *"I thoroughly enjoyed the two workshops that I took part in with Agents of Change and I think this kind of approach could be really beneficial for schools in integrating the SDGs into what they do."* Participant 2 also wrote to us after the last workshop to provide extended feedback: *"As a small, remote primary school, getting involved with the ACT workshops was so important to us in terms of connecting with others, sharing experiences and being part of a process where we could bring our experiences of learners being true agents of change to the group. It was amazing to link with so many different professionals and hear their experiences of change and how staff and pupils can share the leadership and ownership of the processes and results. I have recently moved on to a new school, in a very different kind of remote location, and already I am using some of the mini games to scaffold pupil focus groups to let them drive some real change in a school that is benefitting from a refocus in terms of learner ownership across all aspects of school life. I cannot recommend the ACT Minigames and resource enough to anyone, any school, any organisation who are looking for lasting, inclusive, and impactful change – it really does work!"*

Key recommendations for end user / policy communities

A key recommendation is for schools, educators, and leadership to move towards building SDG-related improvements into their local plans as part of their everyday work. Using the toolkit during change projects will make it easier to routinely follow the change process steps, for example, when identifying issues to address, locating relevant expertise, working with others to implement change projects, and using data to evaluate change. The toolkit process of evaluating change and impact should help users' future planning, including potentially planning a new change project based on the findings. Adopting whole-school approaches via using the toolkit will help raise awareness of SDGs and help build far-reaching impact.



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Planned follow up activities

An ESRC Impact Acceleration Award grant for £19,740 has been awarded to work closely with schools as they work through change projects using the toolkit. At least two more conference presentations are being planned for 2021. Further dissemination to schools locally, nationally and internationally is in progress and more case study examples will be produced and added to the website when ready. We are creating an animated video of a concrete example of the toolkit being used to provide inspiration and instruction to others. Further dissemination via educational organisations and networks are being planned for 2021 and into 2022. In 2022, the team plans to make connections with local and national organisations to discuss the possibility of including the toolkit in local and national programmes, such as for teacher leadership. The ACT team are also planning to write a journal article for publication in 2022.