



# Case Study: Replicating Doodle Den Literacy Programme





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Mary Rafferty and Anne Colgan  
September 2013



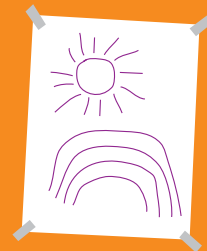
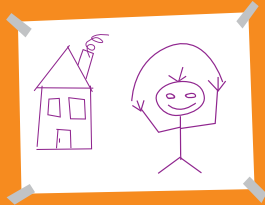
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## How to cite this report

Any citation of this report should use the following reference:

Rafferty, M. and Colgan, A. (2013) Case Study – Replicating Doodle Den Literacy Programme.  
Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative (CDI).



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Published by Childhood Development Initiative, Dublin

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# Acknowledgements and appreciation

The authors wish to acknowledge the significant support they received from all stakeholders in the course of this work.

The CEO and staff members of the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) were generous with their time, thoughtful in their responses and open to challenge. The Quality Specialist was endlessly patient in making arrangements for Limerick meetings.

In Limerick, principals and teacher facilitators tolerated interruptions to their school day and shared their experience of Doodle Den with insight and enthusiasm. All the staff of the School Completion Programme service were open and generous in their reflection.

All facilitators put up with yet another meeting in their own time and contributed to the accurate capture and learning from the experience of replicating Doodle Den in their schools.

In all our contacts, the emphasis on the benefits to children was consistent. Any issues of inconvenience or frustration that were identified were always qualified as insignificant compared to the benefits for children taking part in the programme. The authors were impressed by the sense of energy and commitment to children that characterised all the reports by facilitators, managers and programme designers.





Even when pushed to identify aspects of the programme, organisation, delivery or supports that could be improved, those involved could only identify relatively minor details that could be improved. For the most part, those involved were entirely positive about all aspects of the programme. At the time of meeting, their primary concern was that the programme should continue to be available in their schools.

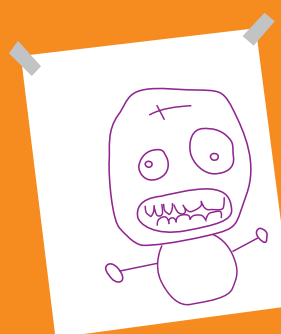
The authors appreciate the open and welcoming response they received from CDI and those involved in Doodle Den in Limerick.

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# The Background to the Limerick Replication of Doodle Den

## The Childhood Development Initiative

CDI is funded under the Government's Area Based Childhood Programme (ABC), which builds on the learning to date from Prevention and Early Intervention Programmes. The initiative aims to break the cycle of child poverty in areas where it is most deeply entrenched and to improve the outcomes for children and young people where these are currently significantly poorer than they are for children and young people living elsewhere in the State.

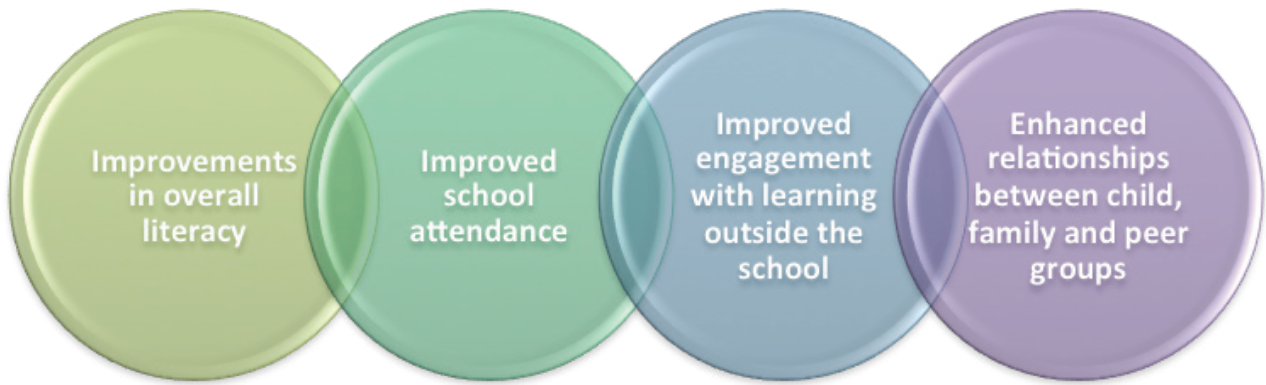
Based in Tallaght West, CDI is the result of the professionalism, passion and persistence of a consortium of 23 concerned individuals and organisations in the community, who had a vision of a better place for children. Through innovative partnerships, they brought together the science of evidenced-based practice and rigorous evaluation, with the spirit of an approach focused on the identified needs of children and families.

CDI has been funded through a partnership between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and The Atlantic Philanthropies (AP), under the PEIP, which was set up with "the objective of testing innovative ways of delivering services and early interventions for children and young people, including the wider family and community settings," (DCYA, 2011).

CDI designed, delivered and evaluated a suite of programmes across a spectrum of local needs including language, literacy, health, early years, conflict management and community safety. All CDI programmes are evidence-informed and manualised, and are delivered through existing structures and services.

## What is Doodle Den?

Doodle Den (DD) is an after-school programme that aims to improve children's overall literacy skills. The programme has been proven to achieve this objective and also to bring about an improvement in child school attendance, improved engagement with learning outside of the school and improved relationships with both their parents and with their peers.



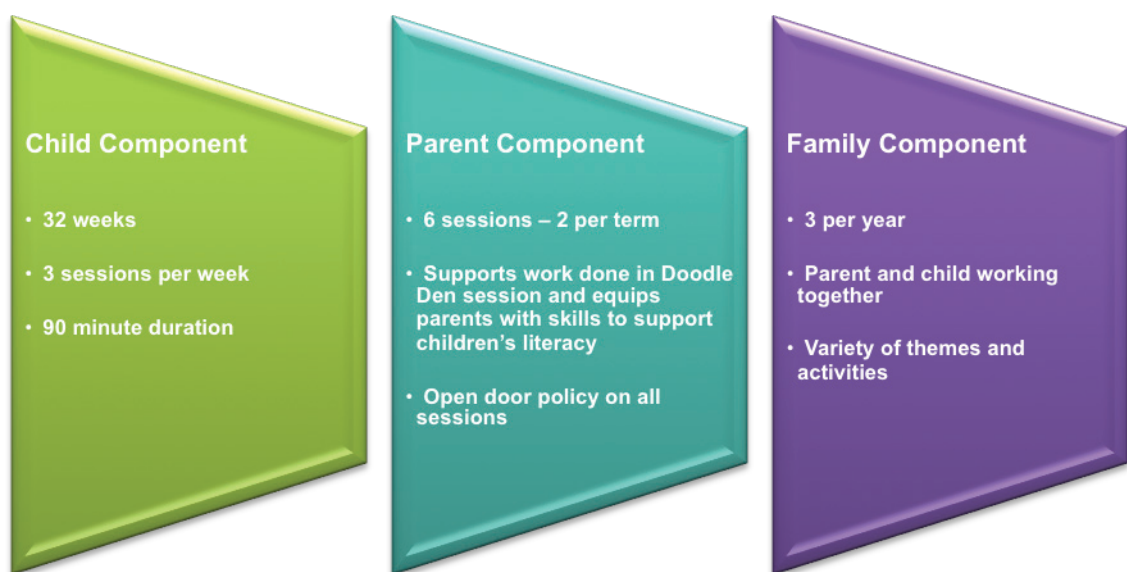
**Figure 1: Doodle Den Programme Objectives**  
(From draft Doodle Den Implementation Guide, 2013)

## What does the Doodle Den programme involve?

The programme involves 90 minute sessions, three times a week, after school, for 32 weeks over a school year. Each session covers key literacy learning objectives that are taught through games, arts and crafts activities, drama and PE.

It is delivered by teams of two facilitators, one teacher facilitator and one facilitator from a youth work, childcare or social care background. This co-facilitation approach adds to the overall experience for children and families engaged with the programme. It also helps children to distinguish between school and Doodle Den.

There is a strong emphasis on the involvement of parents in the programme. As well as the work with children, the facilitators deliver parent sessions that help parents to understand the work done by their children in Doodle Den, help them to encourage the literacy work at home and build links with the local library.



**Figure 2: Doodle Den Programme Components**  
(From draft Doodle Den Implementation Guide, 2013)

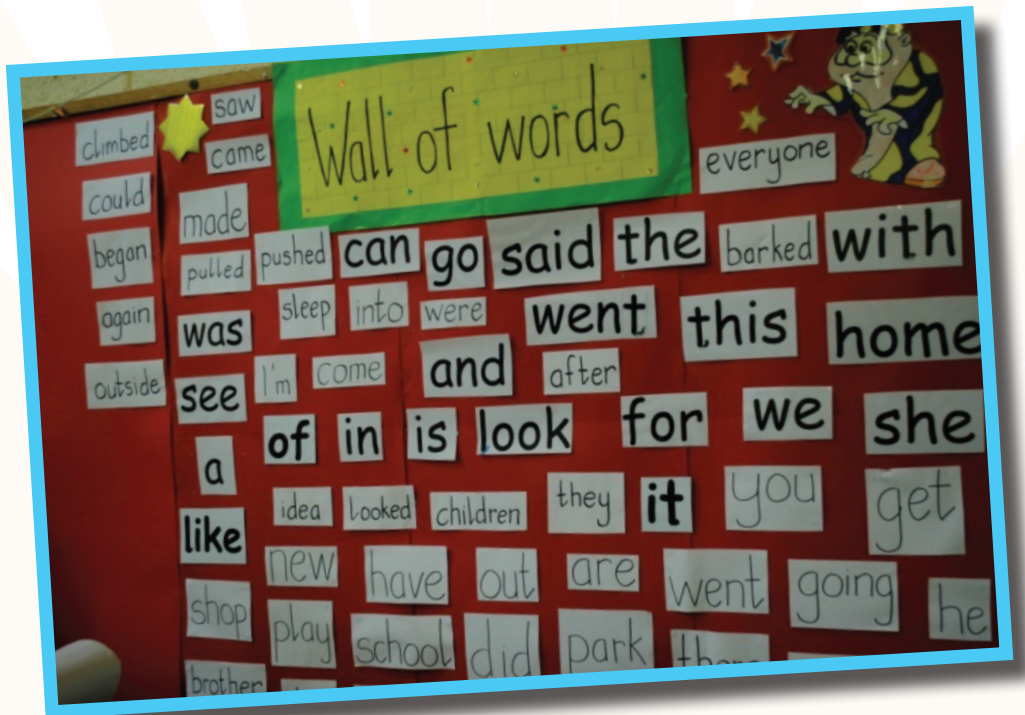


## The evidence for Doodle Den

Doodle Den has been evaluated through a Randomised Controlled Trial that was carried out by a research team from the Centre for Effective Education in Queens University, Belfast. This is recognised as the 'gold standard' in research methods. The research team completed standardised tests with the children as well as interviewing parents, teachers, facilitators and school principals. The team found that participation in the Doodle Den programme led to moderate improvements in the children's overall literacy with particular gains seen in sentence structure, word choice and word recognition. The evaluation also found that children's behaviour improved, that their reading at home increased and that the families used the local libraries more frequently (Biggart, Kerr, O'Hare & Connolly, 2012).

## Replicating Doodle Den

When the results of the evaluation of Doodle Den were known, CDI began to explore options for replication and mainstreaming. Following a series of negotiations at departmental level around funding to continue and for replication, and following a series of discussions and negotiations with potential partners, there was agreement to replicate the Doodle Den programme in three schools in Limerick.





# The Focus and Approach of this Case Study

## Learning about replication and mainstreaming

As CDI moves beyond development, implementation and dissemination of programmes to replication and mainstreaming, it is concerned to understand and document the influences and learning about these processes. CDI has asked the authors of this case study to examine the experience of replicating Doodle Den to learn how best to replicate not only this programme, but to identify any learning in relation to influencing other kinds of services of value to children and families.

## The concepts of implementation, mainstreaming, replication

The task of mainstreaming a successful evidence-based programme is an implementation task. Implementation is the carrying out of a systematic plan to introduce any innovation. For example, in the case of a specific programme, implementation refers to 'a purposeful set of activities undertaken to incorporate the distinct components of that programme into a service or community setting'<sup>1</sup>. Implementation is generally accepted to be a challenging process that involves changing structures, practices, and behaviour. There is a growing body of knowledge about effective implementation, which draws on organisation development, change management, and general management theory.

While there is no definitive theory of implementation, there are several frameworks offered in the literature on implementation. The research on implementation in practice settings<sup>2</sup> highlights the importance of individual characteristics such as practitioner education, experience of similar programmes, and attitudes; organisational factors, such as climate, planning skills and supports for implementation; and community factors such as community readiness, competence and empowerment. The research also suggests that there are key steps in effective implementation regardless of the type of innovation, and multiple activities such as assessment, collaboration, monitoring, and self-reflection.

It is useful to acknowledge the overlap in meaning and usage between terms. Implementation, replication, scaling up and mainstreaming are often used together and sometimes interchangeably. The CEO of CDI makes some useful distinctions, relevant to these settings, which were helpful in maintaining an appropriate focus in this study:

**Implementation** is an element of all of the others; you can't replicate, mainstream or scale up without implementing. So implementation is simply about delivery. 'What's it going to take?', which incorporates the logistical pieces like 'Where's it going to happen?' [It involves] practice issues like[...] the trainers but also the quality issues like 'How will we monitor fidelity?', 'How will we ensure it's a quality service?' etc. [...] Implementation covers all of those elements and is part of the others and then [...] the others overlap.

<sup>1</sup> Burke, Katie; Morris, Kate and McGarrigle, Leona (2012) 'An Introductory Guide to Implementation: Terms, Concepts and Frameworks'. CES, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Fixen et al. (2005); Wandersman et al. (2008, 2012) in CES Guide, 2012.

**Replication** is about getting it delivered in other places. [...] Replication is about 'Let's just get Doodle Den in another location'.

**Scaling up** is about addressing some of the structural and support issues within those structures and that's where you start going into the mainstreaming bit which is [...] 'How do we get this embedded into existing provision?' So when we're replicating and scaling up it's with a view to that being done [...] in a mainstreaming strategy which doesn't mean it shouldn't be in every school or every community. It means the proven programme should be available to every school and every community.

## The Stages of Implementation

A framework of Implementation Stages is suggested by the Centre for Effective Services (CES) (Burke, Morris and McGarrigle, 2012). This framework describes four stages of implementation. The first two stages involve exploratory and planning activities. After this, the innovation or change is implemented (stage 3) before it is embedded in the system (stage 4). The CES framework emphasises that each stage is essential and no stage can be skipped. However, it acknowledges that the process of implementation is rarely linear and that the process may require those involved to revisit earlier stages, to anticipate and respond to emerging challenges and new information and to make use of opportunities when they present, rather than when they are planned. Crucially, the stages of implementation overlap: they are not separate and distinct. This intersection is represented in Figure 3.



Source: Adapted by CES from Fixsen et al. (2005)

**Figure 3: Stages of Implementation**  
(Burke et al., 2012)

## The design and approach to this study

The case study sets out to capture the experience of replicating Doodle Den in a second setting and to document this phase of the programme over the course of the year September 2012 – August 2013. Doodle Den ran in three primary schools in disadvantaged settings in Limerick in this school year. There is an interest in learning about the organisational capacities required to plan, undertake and support replication of established programmes, including the relevant management and development capacities, resourcing and on-going monitoring, the relative investment and ownership of different kinds of stakeholders and the transfer of learning from initial experience to new settings and contexts.

The authors reviewed implementation documentation related to the original Doodle Den programme. This included plans, agreements, resource material, schedules, background, set-up material and some on-going records. The DD manual was reviewed and the evaluation report was considered.

Having agreed on an overall focus for the case study, detailed summative and descriptive interviews were held with key CDI personnel. The roles of CEO and Quality Specialist were especially important. Facilitated by the CDI Quality Specialist for the DD programme, the authors met with all key personnel in Limerick:

- The principals of all three primary schools;
- The teacher facilitators and youth work facilitators from the School Completion Programme (SCP);
- The Coordinator of the SCP and the SCP personnel who acted as managers of the Doodle Den programme.

All of these were face-to-face meetings, held in Limerick. Some were individual interviews, some were small group meetings and there was one large group meeting with all facilitators and substitute facilitators. The focus and aim of the meetings was communicated in writing, before the meetings. The broad framework for gathering information was shared with participants.

Meetings with personnel from the local DES office and Education Centre were sought but did not take place. Since the focus of the study was to learn about replication, primarily involving those who organised, managed and delivered the programme, it did not seek to capture the experience of children or parents.

## The organising framework

The framework of Implementation Stages proposed by CES is used as a basic organising framework for the learning emerging from this study. We have also paid attention to the set of Implementation Enablers that have been found in implementation research to support effective implementation.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Burke, Katie; Morris, Kate and McGarrigle, Leona (2012) 'An Introductory Guide to Implementation: Terms, Concepts and Frameworks'. CES, 2012, p9.

Implementation Enablers	Stages of Implementation			
	1. Exploring & Preparing	2. Planning & Resourcing	3. Implementing & Operationalising	4. Business as Usual
Stakeholder consultation and buy-in				
Leadership				
Resources				
Implementation teams				
Implementation plan				
Staff capacity				
Organisational support				
Supportive organisational culture				
Communication				
Monitoring and evaluation				
Learning from experience				

**Figure 3: Implementation Enablers and Stages**  
(Burke et al., 2012)

While the CES framework of stages and enablers was a useful approach, it was not an exact fit for a replication process. The stage of ‘business as usual’, in particular, is not elaborated in the description of the Limerick replication process, since this case study looks only at the programme as it was introduced and operated for the first time in a single school year.

There is learning from the experience of replicating Doodle Den in Limerick that does not fit neatly into the categories of the Implementation Enablers. Key learning from the stages of the replication project is captured. The learning is drawn from the participants’ experience of what went well, and their experience of what could be improved.

# Replicating Doodle Den in Limerick: The Story and the Learning

1. EXPLORING AND PREPARING
2. PLANNING AND RESOURCING
3. IMPLEMENTING AND OPERATIONALISING
4. BUSINESS AS USUAL
5. THE BENEFITS OF DOODLE DEN

## 1. EXPLORING AND PREPARING

### 'Docking' the Doodle Den programme

When the results of the evaluation of Doodle Den in Tallaght were known, but before the publication of the evaluation report, CDI had already begun to explore options for replication and mainstreaming. The CEO of CDI describes the process of exploration as a search for a secure base and on-going location and sponsor for the programme:

*When we begin to identify the elements of work that are proven to be effective, what we needed to do is to identify where they can be docked. That was the phrase that was used, where do they get 'docked'? What are the mainstream services, the statutory services particularly, that could and should appropriately be utilising these proven programmes...?*

The exploration involved identifying services that were a match for an after-school programme with a core literacy focus. When the evaluation of Doodle Den demonstrated an impact on school attendance as well as literacy, it seemed that the School Completion Programme<sup>4</sup> would be a good service within which to locate Doodle Den. SCP has a wide remit in terms of helping to maximise school attendance, participation and retention of children from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. It uses a range of evidence-informed and evidence-based programmes and projects in the course of its work with schools, students and communities, and is strongly rooted in local communities.

### Securing funding

Despite the strong evidence of the effectiveness of DD, the difficulty in securing funding meant that it was unlikely that the programme would be continued, much less replicated. Persistent communication and effective negotiation, alongside flexibility and creative planning, led to agreement with CDI's funders that CDI would secure enough savings in other areas of work to pay for the programme to be delivered in Limerick as well as continuing the programme in the original settings in Tallaght.

### Getting stakeholder buy-in

Interest in Doodle Den had already been created through presentations at conferences. This interest was built on through detailed discussion and information sharing led by CDI. The CEO of CDI emphasises the value of solid, careful communication with potential champions and end-users:

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.sdpi.ie/sdpi\\_deis\\_docs/scp\\_guidelines\\_towards\\_best\\_practice.pdf](http://www.sdpi.ie/sdpi_deis_docs/scp_guidelines_towards_best_practice.pdf)

*I would be very careful about explaining to people that this works and how we know it works. That's part of the convincing. It's part of the sell. I'd be very careful about talking to people about the context of their work, how Doodle Den fits with their overall objectives, how it draws on their expertise, this is a natural fit. It's complementary...*

The CEO of CDI acknowledges the importance of the leadership role in advocating for the programme with potential partners; a key leadership task was to engage local and regional leaders who would themselves advocate at local level:

*There is huge value in people seeing Doodle Den as something that a school has as opposed to something that CDI has...who is behind it doesn't matter, and taking us out of the equation is actually helpful because otherwise you might just get the whole thing, 'ah sure what would they know?'*

Local interest and informal linkages ultimately proved more influential than national negotiations in securing agreement to participate. The buy-in from SCP at local level was particularly important because of their strong ethos that initiatives should be 'bottom up'. Strategically, it was important that the Senior Manager, NEWB (SCP) knew about the programme and was convinced, not just of its effectiveness, but of its fit with the SCP programme. For SCP, literacy is a sine qua non for school attendance, participation and retention; the belief is that if literacy is not developed early, there is a lifelong loss.

SCP personnel were convinced by several facets of the programme, not all of which would be captured in an evaluation. For them, the evidence of effectiveness was a key decider, but not the only factor. They were attracted by the opportunity to work in a youth worker/teacher partnership, by the chance to work with younger children, by the opportunity to engage in a well-funded Irish programme with a solid international evidence base, and by the availability of proper funding to do something new, at a time of cutbacks. Also, in the view of SCP, an already well-established relationship of trust with school personnel was a key factor in the decision to get involved.

According to CDI's quality specialist, securing the buy-in of school principals was key, and the quality of the information about the programme on the CDI website was an important influence. Principals would only commit where there was clear, rigorous evidence that the programme had substance and had been shown to work in a disadvantaged community. One of the important strategies in engaging with principals was to involve a principal who had already hosted the programme and who could share his experience in the language of the school and the classroom.

For school principals and teachers, the decision making also centred on the 'fit' with the mainstream school curriculum; the Doodle Den programme operated within the context of a school's regular work, so the need for coherence was a big consideration. The opportunity to have another means of engaging parents was attractive, given the challenge that parents in that community face in maintaining their energy and commitment to their children's education. Another positive influence for one school was the fact that a local partner pre-school was well disposed to Doodle Den. One of the factors that played a strong role in the decision to go ahead, according to school personnel, was a well-established school culture of trying new things and taking a risk, where there was the possibility of a benefit for the children.

For principals, the decision to commit to DD was not without question or challenge. Even when they were convinced by the evidence, they had to attend to their own stakeholders; they had concerns about how young children would manage the length of the day; they had practical issues and questions about teacher hours, and



how their involvement would fit with their general classroom work; they had to address teachers' apprehensions about working with a non-teaching partner on a classroom based literacy programme; they needed to convince parents. The task of getting the approval of DES and the local inspectorate, who had many questions about the programme, fell to the principals. In Limerick, principals felt that these processes were quite pressurised and would have benefitted from more time.

All of these stakeholder issues and concerns were addressed successfully and the programme went ahead. Having done the groundwork and created an openness and interest in DD, CDI was ready to move as soon as funding was agreed. Instead of the many months of lead-in time that would be required in ideal circumstances, there was less than one month between agreement on funding and delivery of training to the group of new facilitators in Limerick. Two weeks later, the first DD sessions were delivered in schools. This was only possible because CDI had detailed knowledge of the requirements for delivery, materials and documentation were prepared and available, and manuals and training programmes could be delivered at very short notice. Nonetheless, the CEO of CDI recognises that a formal process of stakeholder mapping would have been helpful in ensuring that all key stakeholders were consulted and engaged in an appropriate way:

*I think there is definitely a lesson about mapping your stakeholders and talking to everybody. And also [...] being very transparent about all of that.*

### **Capacity and responsiveness at all levels in Limerick: corporate, school level, front line**

Although those involved in Limerick were reluctant to suggest that they were exceptional in any way, it should be acknowledged that there were existing capacities that were mobilised at very short notice. The relevant capacities included:

- General awareness and understanding of the DD programme and the expertise to interpret the findings; from the evaluation; this was available in the form of the Regional Coordinator of the SCP and later, by school principals;
- Effective communication: between SCP Regional Coordinator and her staff; between SCP coordinators; between school principals and their staff; between school staff and the SCP programme;
- Good existing relationships;
- Willingness to take risks;
- High levels of trust between school principals and their staff: high levels of esteem for the skill and expertise of staff.

All those involved made an assessment of their overall capacity to undertake this new programme. One school which recognised the potential value did not undertake the programme because, having lost a teacher, the principal was now a teaching principal and was not confident that she would have the time and other resources needed to support the implementation of the programme for the first time. The insight to understand the additional capacities required and to evaluate their likely availability is an important dimension of making a decision to run the programme.

## KEY LEARNING FOR REPLICATION

- In a replication process, the key leadership role of the project sponsor must be strong; they must act as a charismatic advocate and be ready to engage actively with the potential partners;
- It is essential to do a comprehensive mapping of all the local and national stakeholders at the outset to ensure they are consulted and engaged;
- Buy-in from local stakeholders is essential at the exploration stage of a replication process;
- Involve a 'champion' who has first-hand knowledge of using the programme in a similar setting and who has credibility with your target groups;
- The evidence about outcomes is not the only driver for potential partners; the fit with existing programmes, the alignment with the ethos of those programmes, and the capacity to address a range of local programme goals will also matter;
- The organisational culture of the potential partner organisations, the readiness for the roles expected in the programme, and the strength of existing relationships need to be assessed as part of the exploration process.

## 2. PLANNING AND RESOURCING

### Putting the building blocks in place

The main planning and resourcing tasks included putting the administrative and funding structures in place, selecting the teams with the right skillsets for the programme, determining which children would participate, and getting parental support for their child's involvement. This planning and resourcing phase was a mix of CDI work and tasks undertaken locally by school principals and SCP coordinators.

### The start-up work

The initial tasks for the replication process included the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding, selection of personnel, training, and putting the various administrative processes in place. These tasks had to be accomplished in a very short period, and under pressure to be in place for the beginning of the school year. While the CEO of CDI notes that there was no formal implementation plan and that these matters were handled informally, nonetheless, the experience of having rolled out the programme three times in Tallaght West meant that it was possible to give clear direction to the local participants about the key tasks.

One of the important planning tasks was to be very clear with participants about the focus and ethos of the Doodle Den programme. The programme is not an extension of the school day. It has a different dynamic on account of the involvement of both teacher and youth/community worker, requiring a shift from the more familiar processes of classroom teaching or SCP work.

### Mobilising the right capacities and resources

Each school team for Doodle Den was comprised of a class teacher and an SCP facilitator team, while the coordination of the programme was provided by SCP. In some instances, the SCP coordinator was also a facilitator.

The task of recruiting these teams was core to the success of the programme. The main objective of principals was to nominate teachers who saw the benefit of the programme. Principals had a clear picture of what they were looking for in terms of energy and motivation, but they also had to be pragmatic, in terms of availability. They had to balance the needs of Doodle Den with the general management of school staffing.





There was a strong general consensus that building the partnership of teacher and SCP worker was essential for the programme to work. SCP personnel brought experience of replicating evidence-based programmes, reflective practice and the community perspective, and their experience of capacity building with young people. Their links with families and their role in supporting and empowering families was seen as especially valuable. Teachers play a crucial and essential role in the learning environment. Alongside their teaching experience, they were seen to bring huge understanding of the children and their needs. Some of the teacher participants brought additional experience from previous roles in the Home School Community Liaison service, or from having been involved in the Incredible Years programme, another evidence-based programme.<sup>5</sup> Many teachers in DEIS schools have experience of team teaching, which was helpful in getting to grips with the basic Doodle Den process of co-facilitation. The teacher/SCP team was seen as providing mutually supportive roles and perspectives.

Once the teams were recruited, practical planning was done at local level – signing of contracts, planning of clusters to share resources, gathering materials and getting organised for the start-up.

### Recruiting the children and families

There was a range of approaches to deciding which children would take part in the programme. In one school, many children in the relevant age group were already in an after-school club. For this reason, it wasn't possible to use any recruitment criteria, but rather to offer the programme to those who were not already involved in other programmes. In another school, the programme was offered to every child in the relevant age group, and this was seen as important in an area where all children had significant needs.

Principals noted that initially, parents were prepared to involve their child because the programme offered some extra time in school. For many parents, this motivation shifted over time to a more positive support for the content and benefits of the programme. In hindsight, participants feel that more training and development work with parents would have been valuable, and could have helped to secure their strong commitment from the start.

### Training

Team members found the initial training very helpful, even if the Dublin venue was inconvenient for many. There was particular praise for the programme folder: participants felt they were able at that early point to picture the programme activities and to see the potential benefits. Some participants found language and terminology challenging, especially for people who did not have a teaching background. The volume of material, along with the language, could be overwhelming at the start. The CEO of CDI notes that additional capacity building for the SCP facilitators taking up roles in a classroom situation would probably have been needed to strengthen their engagement with literacy development.

Some facilitators note that more practical exposure to video material on 'how to' undertake particular facets of the programme would have been helpful later, when they were immersed in doing the work, although it is also noted that further training was on offer but participants didn't feel they needed to take up that offer.

### Time

All participants found the time for this key stage of the replication process to have been too tight. They recognise that the success of the project depends on good planning, and needs investment to ensure success. While the problems of squeezing this stage into a few short weeks was managed effectively, it is clear to them that, in a project that involves schools, planning work would need to start in April at least.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ijirelandstudy.ie/>



## KEY LEARNING FOR REPLICATION

- Invest enough time in the planning stage of replication;
- Ensure all key stakeholders have the exposure to the induction and training they need in order to commit to the programme;
- Match the training to the needs and background of the participants;
- Consider the balance between front loading of training and on-going training opportunities;
- Pick the right teams using the right criteria.

## 3. IMPLEMENTING AND OPERATIONALISING

### Putting the programme into practice

Putting the programme into practice involved a complex mix of administrative tasks, programme delivery in the classroom, managing parental involvement and engagement, on-going support from CDI, sharing the learning from delivering the programme, and monitoring the work of the programme.

### Managing the administration

The task of managing the day-to-day administration 'on the ground' was the role of the SCP coordinators for the programme. The coordinators experienced this work as challenging at the start. There was a significant workload in terms of contracts, record keeping, managing payments to teachers, and ensuring the supplies of materials and books were available at the right time. Coordinators felt that this aspect of the programme could benefit from more streamlining, with pro-forma contracts, a list of all requirements at the beginning of the year, and possibly a Doodle Den pack that schools could borrow. The challenge of managing the project as well as acting as a facilitator was noted by the person who had these joint roles.

Principals felt that this administrative support from the SCP coordinators was essential to enabling the programme to happen at all, as it would not be feasible for principals or school staff to take up the role of managing the administrative work. There was praise for the efficiency of the coordinators who undertook this role.

### Delivering the programme

#### Fidelity

One of the core principles in the delivery of an evidence based programme such as Doodle Den is the need for fidelity to the programme design and content. CDI's quality expert emphasises the importance of helping people to understand the importance of fidelity as the programme is rolled out. The concept can be difficult for groups who may see it as taking away their creativity. In Limerick, the structured approach was generally seen as helpful.

SCP facilitators noted that an initial looseness changed in time to a rigorous adherence, as the teams became more familiar with the programme. They emphasise that the importance of fidelity isn't only a concern for those delivering the programme, but also has to be understood by all stakeholders, including parents, who, for example, may want to take a child out early:

*"...all of those people, you know, who can affect the delivery of the programme and the reception of the programme, they need to have bought into all of those surrounding concepts like fidelity."*

[SCP team member]



Some facilitators reported finding the level of prescriptiveness hard to cope with initially. Teachers who had been involved in other evidence-based programmes such as Incredible Years found fidelity a familiar concept; according to one teacher, the detail of the written programme made the programme much easier to deliver, and hard to picture how it could be done without following the programme with fidelity. One principal felt that fidelity was easier because of the clear fit with the needs of the children in this area.

### How the programme 'bedded in'

The facilitators were agreed that although some found the culture of the programme difficult at the start, and a little overwhelming, the rhythm of the work developed, and became automatic. Time was an issue, especially at the start-up phase, which had to happen under a good deal of time pressure. However, it was noted that as familiarity grows, tasks take less time. A key learning for the facilitators was that time management is essential for delivering the programme successfully, and that, as they became more attuned to the pace and the work, time management was 'like clockwork'. The pace of adjustment differed, but generally everyone found their rhythm, planning work speeded up, and principals were reassured that there would be continuity and that the programme would run seamlessly.

The DD 'fit' with the demographic meant that there was no need to create readiness among the children. Teachers reported that having new children in a new space brought a new energy - like starting the day again. Facilitators reported that, like the adults, children found the programme confusing initially, but they too became familiar and settled in to the routines. Children loved the games, and having the chance to do things that wouldn't be part of the regular classroom routine.

One of the core concerns for teacher facilitators was to ensure coherence between the DD programme and the classroom programme, and this coherence was confirmed as the programme rolled out.

A significant piece of learning for all participants was that the belief that young children would not be able to sustain their engagement for 90 minutes was dispelled:

*"I myself had major reservations about the capacity of a five year old to do ninety minutes contact at the end of the school day and we were very pleasantly surprised to find that they actually had more capacity than we thought. So that was a very good positive. [...] it probably gave us a bit of food for thought ourselves with regards to an after-school for infants that perhaps they are capable of having a literacy component at the end of their day."*

[School Principal]

### The SCP/teacher partnership

There was a consensus among the facilitators that the partnership evolved well over the course of the programme; the complementary skills and roles of each partner generated what one principal referred to as a 'symbiotic relationship that worked seamlessly'. Roles evolved, and the SCP role moved to become more centrally and confidently involved in delivery. The consistent presence of both facilitators allowed for work to be managed in a collaborative way, including joint planning and joint reviews at the end of each session. The facilitators recognise that the programme would not be possible without the partnership.

Notwithstanding the positive view of the partnership in the Limerick situation, there was recognition that in a Doodle Den replication, the relationship could be problematic, especially if the teacher was not comfortable with the other facilitator's way of working. While classroom culture has changed, and teachers are now quite accustomed to other adults in the classroom, there is not generally the equality of professional roles that underpins Doodle Den, and this ethos could be challenging for some teachers.

One principal also noted that a key learning was that SCP could not, over time, take over the running of the programme, as had been this principal's expectation at the start. Had that development been possible, the programme would be more sustainable, in that principal's view. However, it became clear in the course of the work that the essential teaching role could not be substituted for another role. The core capacities of the teacher to manage behaviour, have deep knowledge of each learner's grasp of material, and their instructional skills make the role indispensable in the partnership.

### Time

Most facilitators and SCP coordinators managing the programme identified the additional time needed as a central issue in running Doodle Den. The programme managers particularly experienced a pressure of time and thought that the training and preparation did not adequately stress how much additional time was needed for overall administration, planning, coordination and record keeping, apart from the delivery of the programme. Teacher facilitators were aware of how much work was done outside the sessions by the SCP facilitators and they considered that it would not be possible for a teacher facilitator to undertake this work. Time was experienced as quite a pressure, especially early in the programme and the capacity to manage time well was seen as an important skill. Timing of elements within the sessions was also mentioned by most facilitators, echoing the finding in the formal evaluation of the programme that the programme did not adequately allow for the time required for things like toileting, behaviour problems and transition between activities.

### A supportive organisational culture

Participants in Doodle Den in Limerick note how important a supportive culture among the wider school community is for the success of the programme. The links with other teachers were especially important; they would flag any difficulties a child might have had during the day; similarly, the DD teacher could pass on insights they gained about individual children to the class teacher. Teachers helped with initial assessments, and with talking to parents about the programme. This mutuality of exchange was especially helpful where the Doodle Den teacher was not teaching children from their own regular class.

Facilitators also note that all teachers and students were aware of Doodle Den, and knew it was important; they became familiar with the routines of Doodle Den and the need for quiet in the corridors when the programme was beginning; the children involved were seen as an 'elite' in the school; junior infants expect the programme, and see it as a natural progression for them next year, because it is 'what Senior Infants do'. There was a generous readiness to accommodate the needs of the programme in the use of the kitchen.

*"...where the Doodle Den is, the children all have to pass it on their way out so there was a huge necessity in the early days for us to be more strict about the ...noise levels of the children leaving the school because it's down near the exit and normally they'd be free enough to be shouting ...going down the corridor. So everybody is aware that Doodle Den is something that happens with the little ones in the afternoon. So that raises that awareness for very practical reasons. It has become part of the school vernacular, Doodle Den [...]. It's kind of mentioned, the Doodle Deners, you know, by the kids and the kids use it. And like the infants were, say if their teacher [...] 'are you going to Doodle Den today?' ...you know, so she was saying well, they just see it as a natural progression for them next year then because it's something that the Senior Infants do."*

[School Principal]

One principal underlined the importance of embedding this kind of understanding and acceptance of the programme in the whole school and especially at the junior end.

### Parent engagement

Parent engagement, and building strong school and home links, is at the heart of the ethos of the schools participating in Doodle Den in Limerick, and is also central to the DD programme. This aspect of the programme proved quite challenging.

An early challenge was some level of drop-out of children from the programme, which was disappointing for schools and for the facilitators; there was disappointment that parents did not encourage children to stick with the programme, when they were inclined to opt out at an early stage. There were problems with parents collecting children from the programme early. There was also strong empathy with the challenges faced by many of the parents, and the culture of disadvantage that may account for the reluctance to be more insistent with young children about attending the programme:

*"...for some of these parents because they've such huge hang ups about literacy and numeracy because of their own educational experiences that you give them something that's ... I suppose you reel them in slowly and it's brought them in. They've seen the gains that the kids are making. They've seen the positive experiences that the kids are having as well and it's definitely helped with our levels of engagement with the parents as well, you know. It's a win-win situation."*

[School Principal]

At a more practical level, people recognised that the finish time (35 minutes after the normal school finishing time) was awkward for parents – not long enough for shopping, for example, but too long to wait around – and that this practical problem for parents could be thought through more fully.

One of the questions prompted by the drop-out rate and issues about school finishing time was whether the programme should be presented to parents as a compulsory programme. This possibility was raised by several participants, as a way of managing early drop-out, and sending a signal to parents about the importance of the programme.

Facilitators report that parents rarely took up the invitation to observe the programme in the classroom (though there was a degree of apprehension about whether their presence might have changed the classroom dynamic in an unhelpful way), and that this reality now means that facilitators meet parents at the end of the session. Again, the reality of parents' own poor literacy levels were seen as a possible barrier to them in attending sessions. On the other hand, there was a report of eager involvement in a library trip that involved parents, and good participation in the library event.

There were suggestions about doing more induction work with parents before the programme begins, where the issues around the time and involvement would be covered; work could be done with individual parents, it was suggested, and parents offered times throughout the year to be involved and observe.



## Supports

Supports were offered for the programme at a number of levels. CDI was available for on-going support, building on the programme manual and the initial training; SCP provided administrative support as an integral part of the programme and this support was seen as really essential for the programme and the principals. Principals themselves provided informal support for teachers in a range of ways – by visiting the classroom, giving awards, being available, and generally reinforcing the status of the programme in the school.

There was a general consensus among the facilitators and principals that the support offered by CDI was excellent; it was not intrusive, but the CDI personnel were available by phone or email to respond as needs arose. Questions from SCP were mainly about administrative matters, and providing support to assist facilitators in understanding their role in quality assurance as well as on site delivery. For schools, the focus was on practical information, and just knowing the help was available if needed.

The CDI quality specialist describes how they were able to develop good processes for sharing responses to queries among the full group. The website was developed as a resource, where facilitators can log on, share experiences, access templates, blogs, and use an ideas sharing section. These developments arose out of the feedback in the training sessions. This was a new development at the time the interviews were undertaken and it was not yet clear how this resource would be used. Booster training was offered by CDI but facilitators did not wish to avail of it.

One of the key supports put in place to help to capture and share learning and offer peer support opportunities was the regular Community of Practice (CoP) meetings, where facilitators could explore issues and problems in a structured way. This is a key tool for quality assurance with a focus on fidelity and an opportunity to share practice issues with other facilitators. CDI notes that the experience from initial implementation in Tallaght reinforced the importance of enabling participants in CoPs to shape the agenda; they also suggested videoing practice and getting feedback.

The feedback about the value of the CoPs was mixed, with some facilitators finding the CoP extremely helpful and valuable, while others did not find them useful at all. Those supportive of the CoP process spoke about the value of hearing from others about commonalities, things that they struggled with, and the opportunity to talk about practicalities. The practice of sharing video clips of the work appears to have worked very well for those who did that, and who had experience of this approach from the Incredible Years programme.

One observation from CDI's quality specialist about the reluctance to make use of the CoPs structure was that this approach of peer support may be quite alien to the professional practice of some facilitators; people may be slow to share views and feelings in a group; there may be a need to develop the group and for people to know each other better before they would participate fully in a CoP. Another issue is the participation of substitute facilitators. This helps the substitutes to stay connected with and maintain awareness of the programme and issues related to delivery but it may be less helpful for facilitators to have others who are not involved in delivery in the on-going group.

CDI would favour more onsite visits and onsite support in any future rollouts. Work is under way to develop a Doodle Den mentoring role in Tallaght, and thought is being given to ways of strengthening the network of Doodle Den practitioners as a sustainable resource of expertise, support and knowledge, that would not be dependent on CDI and could be embedded in the wider system.

## Monitoring and evaluation

CDI describes the system of on-going monitoring through linkages with the facilitators. Professional issues would have emerged in the course of training, or would have been fed back by coordinators or principals if problems arose. Facilitators submitted progress reports under key headings to do with delivery issues, policy and procedures being developed over time, their analysis of attendance figures, and any emerging training needs. Progress summaries were followed up in more detail at meetings.

Teachers reported finding the reporting template somewhat repetitive, with little new coming up. There was a view that assessments later in the programme could be more challenging. They also note that, while progress might seem to be slow over a long period, they could see change when they look back over a longer time period.

Principals note that good records were kept and testing was done, but also seem unclear about how the programme was monitored. One principal would like to see rigorous measurement at the end of the programme, but acknowledges the difficulty in attributing gains to Doodle Den, given the other initiatives happening in the classroom. Classroom tests have provided evidence that the children are working at a higher level in the classrooms. They note the importance of the qualitative evidence of the impact of the programme including the feedback from parents who see children wanting to read books at home, wanting someone to listen to their reading and generally demonstrating their enjoyment of reading.

### KEY LEARNING FOR REPLICATION

- The concept of fidelity needs to be introduced, in an accessible way, to all those who can have an impact on delivery;
- The 'fit' of the programme with the local demographic and profile of need is important for effective implementation;
- Children will surprise adults with their stamina and capacity – don't underestimate them;
- In a Doodle Den replication, ensure that both teacher and community facilitator are open to the challenge of this unique and equal partnership;
- In Doodle Den, the partnership of the complementary roles in delivery is non-negotiable;
- Good implementation depends on buy-in from wider group of colleagues whose support is essential;
- Work may be needed to reduce parental unease about coming into classrooms to observe;
- Work may be needed to lay the groundwork for a Community of Practice, where this is a new and unfamiliar process for some members of the group;
- Time management is an essential skill for effective implementation.

## 4. BUSINESS AS USUAL

As noted in the introduction, the stage of 'business as usual' is regarded as a key stage in the implementation of an evidence-based programme. This is the stage when the programme becomes culturally embedded, when the core components are in place, and time and resources have been invested:

*This stage provides the opportunity to reflect upon the overall process and learn from the experience so as to inform future organisational and policy decisions. On-going monitoring is maintained throughout the system<sup>6</sup>*

[Burke et al, 2012]

This stage of implementation does not yet fully apply to the Doodle Den replication in Limerick, since it had been in place for just one school year at the time of this case study. However, it is still possible to point to elements of the programme that have become part of the school systems where it was introduced. For the period of the programme, it is the experience of the participants that it became culturally embedded in the system; a strongly supportive organisational culture was built around the programme among teachers, parents and children, and there was an expectation and wish for it to continue. New capacities and partnerships were developed, which are likely to be retained. New materials and resources were brought into use. The evidence of readiness for 'business as usual' is the interest in continuing the programme:

*"...you say to yourself well if this is available next year like will I go with it again? And the answer would be yes, definitely. You know so... I think that's always a good sign. I... you know ... and say it without hesitation even."*

[School Principal]

School principals are clear, however, that the scope for continuing the programme depends on getting the extra funding it needs, and that it could not be absorbed into a school without that funding, and without the SCP commitment and engagement. They are hopeful that it will be able to continue:

*"Shame if it was [just] another pilot."*

[School Principal]

It is important to acknowledge that the first year of implementation is almost certainly the most difficult: Limerick stakeholders anticipated that the second and subsequent years would be easier. Everything is new and strange to everyone in the first year; facilitators talk about it taking up to the end of the first term to really get into the rhythm of DD. The coordinators felt that they would have a much better handle on planning and organising, buying and looking ahead in the second year.

## 5. THE BENEFITS OF DOODLE DEN

The participants involved in Doodle Den in Limerick spoke about the benefits of the programme for the children, the parents, and the school. Their core focus was on the educational benefits to children. The programme succeeded in embedding a love of books and of reading. Reading became an enjoyable activity, not a chore. Children didn't see themselves as 'doing literacy'. An additional benefit was a new relationship between the children, the parents and the local library, with parents joining the library as a result of a school trip. Teachers were very encouraged by the difference the programme made to children:

<sup>6</sup> Burke, Katie; Morris, Kate and McGarrigle, Leona (2012). 'An Introductory Guide to Implementation: Terms, Concepts and Frameworks'. CES Guide. Centre for Effective Services, Dublin, August 2012, p21.



*"For the weaker ones....a little girl....and she has just blossomed, I mean, she's just... 'Can I write now' and ...even looking at her face listening to the story and, you know, she's all questions and she's using vocabulary that I would never have seen her use and you know, it's such an intensive... it's 90 minutes three days a week, It's just fantastic for the children..."*

[Teacher]

*"I think it's a no brainer. You have to go with it because like when you look at what you want [...] improved outcomes, education for the children and you want to increase parental involvement and you're getting it, all those things and you're [...] planting that seed that's enabling children to get that love of reading... and they're beginning to link, [...] the enjoyable experience with the reading. I think that's key as well that children don't see reading as a chore and the kids involved in Doodle Den certainly don't see it as a chore."*

[School Principal]

Notwithstanding the problems that had presented around parental engagement, principals welcomed the huge level of parental involvement, and noted the phenomenon of parents talking about literacy outside the school setting, which they saw as a particularly useful cascade effect from the programme:

*"...I think it's had a knock on effect in the homes. [...]I suppose you're planting the seeds that will hopefully lead to these kids becoming lifelong readers but I think it's starting now and you can see in the homes that parents are beginning to realise that, you know, this is having a very positive effect on my child and we need to go with this, you know. Like the key part of it is the parental involvement."*

[School Principal]

*"...for the parents [...]we went to the library last week now and [...] we asked the parents would they come along... we got a bus up ...a community bus but we couldn't fit the parents in the bus as well so we brought the bus up from school and we'd ask the parents to meet us up there so you know from experience [...]a lot of times you need to nearly hold their hands to bring them up but no, they were all up there."*

[Teacher]

Teachers and principals also found the materials and games to be a valuable addition to their resources. The change for the children from the regular classroom routine, offering more freedom and opportunity for independent reading, was considered a strong benefit. Both teachers and SCP facilitators felt that they gained new skills and capacities in the course of the programme.

The insight gained into the capacity of young children to sustain their interest and engagement after their school day for 90 minutes has been very beneficial, and has prompted new thinking about what supports can be offered after the regular school day to this age group:

*"...they're prepared to stay back, four and a half hours a week engaging in literacy and some of these parents have been blown away by it."*

[School Principal]

A key benefit for schools was that the programme fed into other interventions in the school in a coherent way.

# SUMMARY OF KEY LEARNING FOR REPLICATION

Key learning about each stage in the implementation process is summarised at the end of the overview of each stage. In this section, this learning will be examined to distil insights from the experience of replication in Limerick, to identify high-level generic learning and to offer guidance for replication relevant to other programmes and other settings. The aim is to offer practical and tangible recommendations for effective practice in replication, based on the learning from this case study.

## EXPLORING AND PREPARING

1. In a replication process, the key leadership role of the project sponsor must be strong; they must act as a charismatic advocate and be ready to engage actively with the potential partners;
2. It is essential to do a comprehensive mapping of all the local and national stakeholders at the outset to ensure they are consulted and engaged;
3. Buy-in from local stakeholders is essential at the exploration stage of a replication process;
4. Involve a 'champion' who has first-hand knowledge of using the programme in a similar setting and credibility with your target group;
5. The evidence about outcomes is not the only driver for potential partners; the fit with existing programmes, the alignment with the ethos of those programmes, and the capacity to address a range of local programme goals will also matter;
6. The organisational culture of the potential partner organisations, the readiness for the roles expected in the programme, and the strength of existing relationships need to be assessed as part of the exploration process;
7. 'Docking' the Doodle Den programme – a requirement for ownership and advocacy.

## PLANNING AND RESOURCING

1. Invest enough time in the planning stage of replication;
2. Ensure all key stakeholders have the exposure to the induction and training they need in order to commit to the programme;
3. Match the training to the needs and background of the participants;
4. Consider the balance between front loading of training and on-going training opportunities;
5. Pick the right teams using the right criteria.



## IMPLEMENTING AND OPERATIONALISING

1. The concept of fidelity needs to be introduced, in an accessible way, to all those who can have an impact on delivery;
2. The 'fit' of the programme with the local demographic and profile of need is an important way of ensuring effective implementation;
3. Children will surprise adults with their stamina and capacity – don't underestimate them;
4. In a Doodle Den replication, ensure that both teacher and community facilitator are open to the challenge of this unique and equal partnership;
5. In Doodle Den, the partnership of the complementary roles in delivery is non-negotiable;
6. Good implementation depends on buy-in from a wider group of colleagues;
7. Use a range of strategies to encourage and support direct parental involvement;
8. Work may be needed to lay the groundwork for a Community of Practice, where this is a new and unfamiliar process for some members of the group;
9. Time management is an essential skill for effective implementation;
10. Streamline paperwork. Where possible, ensure that the monitoring data is meaningful and useful to those who have to gather and document it.

## Business as Usual

The programme is mainstreamed when it becomes routine and embedded in the local system. This will happen when the core components are in place and when the necessary resources of time, support and systems have been invested. It is important to maintain attention to the core elements of the programme and to programme fidelity: it may be necessary to introduce variety in the ways you measure and help maintain a focus on fidelity. Changing personnel and supporting original personnel to be a resource and advocate for the programme is a way of maintaining freshness and motivation. Providing opportunities for those involved to showcase their work also helps to celebrate and acknowledge the range of contributions as well as promoting the programme.



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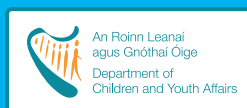


# Doodle Den



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