

ERASMUS +
KA2: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices - Sector Skills
Alliances



EISEN

Building the **implementation workforce**
for health and social care

Project acronym: EISEN
Project full title: Building the implementation workforce for health and social care
Project Number: 2018-1-NO01-KA203-038834
October 2021
By Professor Christine Øye, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences

Report on the master course (IO3)

This is a report on the experiences of the EISEN master group after arranging for an international online master course on implementation targeting health and social care staff during the winter of 2021. The title of the course is: Implementation Science in health and social care.

Short introduction

Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL) was responsible for the one 7,5 ECTS online course at master level. The Eisen group had by the outset planned to recruit five students from each partner to the master course. That is, 25 students all in all, but due to the covid-19 situation we did not succeed to recruit students from the two Swedish partners or the Portuguese partner. Most of the students we planned to recruit were health and social care professionals being caught up in clinical work, and often in covid related work. For instance, Karolinska Institutet had to put many of their master courses on hold during the pandemic since most of their students are part time master students. Nevertheless, we managed to recruit students through our international networks outside the partner organisations. All in all, 13 students from six different countries participated with different professional backgrounds and working experiences. HVL were the only partner who succeeded to recruit the agreed amount of students. However, only 10 of the 13 students who started the master course completed the exam. This was due to heavy workload due to covid-19 and other work related commitments.

Teachers from all participating partners planned the course together, and teachers from three different nations and four different partners ran the course by their expertise and skills. The group behind the master course was:

Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL)

Professor Christine Øye (leader)

Associate Professor Tone Elin Mekki

Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU)

Professor Kim Manley

Professor Chris Burton

Associate Professor Sarah Crouch

Assistant Professor Mary Brown

Karolinska Institutet

Associate Professor Hanna Augustson

Associate Professor Anna Bergstöm

Dalarna University

Associate Professor Malin Thistad

Professor Lars Wallin

Associate Professor Lena Dafgård

Natalia Ringblom

Escola Superior De Enfermagem de Coimbra

Associate Professor Antonio Amaral

Introduction to the objectives of the master course

Based on the initial stakeholder involvement learning outcomes were decided in joint partner collaboration. The master team decided a focus on *doing implementation* to achieve the objective of professional relevance in health and social care (see report IO1). Therefore, skills in facilitation were highlighted throughout the course with a focus on differences in contextual and cultural conditions (*see flyer*). Accordingly, the following learning Outcomes were formulated as:

- *Knowledge:*
The students will:
 - have thorough understanding of how contextual conditions at micro-, meso- and macro level in health and social services influence facilitation and implementation
- *Skills:*
The students will:
 - be able to analyze and evaluate how organizations as complex systems influence their implementation practice within the health and care services
 - be able to develop strategies to involve stakeholders from different levels and settings in the implementation process
 - be able to critically reflect on their own facilitation skills in the process of implementation
- *General qualifications:*
The students will:
 - be able to evaluate how different facilitation approaches influence the process of implementation

We build on the students' previous qualifications from education and work experiences. Therefore, we planned the course to start with group work for students to share their experiences with implementation and facilitation. Moreover, we encouraged students to build on these shared experiences when working with the core topics of the course evident in assignments and exam, see fish figure:



Accordingly, we planned for the students to reflect individually and collectively with the aim of enabling:

- personal facilitation skills to enhance the impacts of their own implementation work
- facilitation and evaluation strategies in reflective learning with other students and stakeholders
- cross-national teams to compare and critique facilitation cases from health and social care services
- strengths and weaknesses of the facilitation and evaluation approaches used

These reflections were presented in their core groups as well as in discussions in plenary with fellow students and teachers.

Planning, teaching and assessment phase

The team of teachers and pedagogical experts from Dalarna TEL-team (see names above) started the planning eight months prior to the beginning of the course. In line with the overall aim for EISEN, the group discussed how to get students engaged and active using the TEL-concept. As a result, the group decided to use Zoom as the media for running the communication and lecturing, and Padlet as a whiteboard during the course days. Since HVL already used Canvas as the learning platform, we also discussed how to use this platform in a pedagogical way (see film by Dalarna University). The group also discussed the content of the three different modules, and which partners to

be responsible for each module. We ended up with Dalarna/KI to be responsible for the first module, HVL for the second module and CCCU and Coimbra for the last module. HVL had the overall responsibility of the whole course including the exam.

The students had access to the learning platform, Canvas a bit more than a week before the course started. On Canvas students and teachers made a short presentation of themselves for others to comment on in order to get to know each other before the first module started (see film by Dalarna University). The first module was arranged mid January 2021 for two days, with the mid module of two days in the beginning of February and the last module of two days in the beginning of March. The exam was handed in in the beginning of April.

During all the modules we used the TEL-concept focusing on active learning when we planned and ran the course. This was done by the following:

- Students worked individually and collectively. To enable transnational learning, the course utilized a Technology Enabled Learning (TEL) strategy (see report IO2).
- Lectures, seminars and peer reviews
- Students were expected to undertake self-directed learning, which included reading from the reading list, critical analysis and assignments
- Work in core groups with assignments
- Use of different learning tools, e.g Padlet

During the first module the head of the master course gave a short information about the course since we knew that some of the students had not gone thoroughly through the information on Canvas. The logic of the Canvas set-up and the expectations during the course was outlined and explained.



The whole EISEN-project had an aim to enable cross national and professional learning. Therefore, the students were set-up in three different mandatory core groups beyond own contextual, national and professional borders in order to learn from each other before and during assignments. However, since we had students from three different continents (Asia, Africa and Europe) with different time zones, working hours and shifts, we ended up arranging for two core groups after the first module.

We arranged for two mandatory assignments were the students worked both individually and in groups. The group work was presented during the modules and was

an integrated part of their exam preparations. Fellow students as well as teachers gave response after the assignment presentations, thereafter, being approved by teachers. The exam was handed in as an individual action plan describing an implementation project they were familiar with in relation to their current work or experience. The teachers had agreed on the assessment criteria on beforehand, and these criteria were known to the students.

Evaluation

The experiences from the students were captured in an evaluation after each module, at the end of the course and in a focus group interview. At the end of each module, the students were asked to write their evaluation on Padlet based on two or three questions. This feedback was used to amend the planned course activity for the next module. For instance, we got feedback after the first module that the information in relation to the assignment for the group work had been unclear presented. Therefore, we put more effort and time at the next module to explain the assignment more in detail and teachers checking-in during the group work in break out rooms. Checking-in was done to ensure that the assignment was understood and went well. Moreover, we arranged for ad hoc flipped class room whenever student`s expressed learning needs after group work or lectures.

After the exam day a group of four students voluntarily participated in a focus group interview with the aim to make an overall evaluation of the course. The focus group interview was led by two persons from the EISEN group who had not participated in this course as teachers.

Students` experiences from the course

The focus group interviews were executed by two EISEN-project members, the teacher responsible for the PhD-course at Karolinska Institutet and a teacher from Canterbury Christ Church University. All in all, three students participated sharing their experiences in relation to the following spines:

- experience of learning across professional, geographical, and service boundaries
- use of technology and TEL-concept enabling learning
- learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes
- anticipated future career opportunities after course participation
- students` active participation and influence
- COVID-19 impact on participation and learning

The students participating in the course were all very well experienced in health and social care practices, and quite a few had leadership roles being responsible for implementation projects. However, few students were on beforehand familiar with implementation sciences and facilitation as a field within implementation. Nevertheless, based on their experiences in practice doing improvement work the students shared their waste experiences from different health and social care settings throughout the curriculum. On the positive side the students experienced:

- Extensive learning across national, professional and service borders, especially during group work
- Understanding the importance of facilitation
- Understanding the importance of culture when doing implementation
- High relevance for future career, including running improvement projects in health and social care settings
- Safe core group environment
- Being able to influence the course

Sharing their experiences across nations and professional backgrounds were very well appreciated, as one student said: *“One of the very good things about working like this was that you really understood the meaning of context and how much you need to know each other’s culture and living and everything, to understand how to work with facilitation and implementation.”* In addition, the students highlighted the importance of the typical implementation topics being introduced in the course, as one student said: *“I think what I learnt most was how important it is to actually understand the people you are going to facilitate or the organisation. Just a little big thing like behaviour. I think that was very interesting. I liked, it was very very good, the lesson about behaviour and culture and to understand all of these things. And also to break it down to the context again, to understand infrastructure and how important is that. It made you go in depth of the facilitation and to understand how deep you actually have to dig to do a good implementation kind of thing.”*

Moreover, using the Technology Enabling Learning (TEL) concept and principles by focusing on interactive learning online, the students learned from each other and became aware of the importance of culture when facilitating change. The students illustrated their experiences by working with assignments alone and together with fellow students using implementation frameworks and literature to further reflect on their experiences. The students experienced a connectedness they wanted to uphold: *“We all felt so connected to each other. We made groups where we could text each other if we were struggling with anything, so I think that was really good.”*

The students expressed being able to influence the delivery of course, rather than the content of the course. The constant dialogue with the teachers, who were flexible, helped in solving any problems that came up. Despite the workload being heavy for a 7.5 Credit course, it helped that the syllabus had literature references so there was no time spent on searching for relevant literature. The exam required a lot of readings and not being fulltime students, it was quite a challenge to finalize the assignments and exams in due time. Also, the students talked about the trustful environment in the core groups, and staying in one group throughout the course allowed students to know each other and work closely together. In that way they were also able to respond to each other's learning needs.

The impact of the course will extend into the students' future careers, when actually working in the field of implementation, as one student said: *"I think that actually I'm going to take out the full potential when I start working with the different implementation"*. Moreover, one student planned to use this knowledge in her current work: *"In my setting and for my context now I am thinking to apply these matters to make my work more like practical, more pragmatic and to see more visual impact in future"*.

On the negative side the students uphold the following as challenges and suggestions for improvements:

- Sharing complex experiences in English were experienced as a challenge by none-native English speaking students
- Covid-19 made the students less flexible to attend to group work between modules and finalize the exam
- Easy accessible learning platforms for information, e.g use the social media platforms that the students already use such as Facebook/Messenger, WhatsApp etc.
- Information and instructions to group work should be clear and repeated to ensure that students comprehend the messages given.

The students suggested that Canvas was not as available as other communication platforms in relation to instant information, as one student said: *"We're not used to using Canvas. So probably if you think that it should, because I tried with this introduction. You had to write an introduction to the course and things like that, to show you how to use Canvas. But I think my problem is that you actually have to log in to check if there's activity on Canvas. That's the difference to Messenger that actually just pings, and you get a notification that something's happening in your group."*

Therefore, in the future teachers and administrators should consider to use student friendly social media platforms for instant messages. This is especially important for the master student group since these students usually are working half time in practice trying to fit their professional life with a master career. Moreover, the students suggested that we as teachers should be more aware of our teaching instruction to assignments and group work since the course is ran online. It seems that students have more problems comprehending messages and instructions when the information given is overwhelming. Despite, that some students had problems meeting up with each other for group work due to heavy clinical workload, partly because of Covid-19, they also found it easy to participate online since they were already familiar with online learning. Students were already using online technology, so it was easy: *“we were so familiar with the virtual work anyway.”*

Teachers` experiences

The teachers` experiences were collected at several points in time, during the planning, implementation process and at the end. We shared our teaching and research experiences during the whole EISEN-project period, with an increased intensity during the planning phase where one teacher from each partner institution joined extensively. Regular meetings were held online discussing objectives, content in detail at each module, teaching methods including the TEL-concept and skills required in IO2 (see link), time-span and online set-up, assignments, exams etc. We had especially extensive discussions around the pedagogical aspects of online learning, including Canvas and Padlet set-up. All the teachers were experienced in the field of implementation science, but with different professional backgrounds. Most of the teachers in the Master course were in the field of nursing, but at the master course had a social anthropologist (leader) with a specialty in health and social care service research, a physiotherapist and a teacher with specialty in global health and implementation. The teachers with IT and pedagogical online learning expertise supported the planning of the master course with as special attention to active learning and use of the TEL-concept. Furthermore, they supervised on the development of the learning platform and set-up in Canvas. Based on their expertise they recommended that we started the course with an informal ice-breaking exercise both on Canvas and during the first day to create a safe learning environment. Overall, the teachers were satisfied in how the course was accomplished, despite experiencing some misunderstandings inside the teacher team in all phases of the course. In hindsight, we could have had more time to listen to the discussions that the groups were having and also to have had an opportunity to follow a few of them more closely witnessing what was discussed.

Lessons learned

Overall, we have learned that students on master level can profit extensively by sharing experiences across professional, national and service borders online. However, to

succeed gathering students across borders, ice-breaking exercises and intensive group work is necessary. Lectures should not be too long, and be followed by discussions in break out rooms for students to relate the “new” knowledge to their professional and working experiences. By upholding their different experiences across borders, a new light was shed on each students` understandings – and as such learning were enabled individually and collectively. Students sharing working experiences and “using” knowledge and concepts from the field of implementation science, they would be prepared for a future career in implementation work with a special expertise in facilitation. Therefore, the practicing of flipped classroom was especially useful to reach higher level understanding in the field of implementation. Moreover, we have learned that a focus on facilitation in doing implementation was experiences useful in their current work and future career.

In hindsight, we have learned that being able to reach the students between the modules other platforms than Canvas should be used, e.g Messenger, WhatsApp, etc. In addition, instructions to assignments for group work online must be clear and followed-up by teachers closely to avoid misunderstandings. This is especially important having students who are not fluent in English.

Further developments and plans

The master course will be run autumn 2022 by Canterbury Crist Church University and are planned to be held spring 2023 by Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL) as part of two different master programs. Furthermore, HVL collaborate closely with the European Implementation Collaborative (EIC) for development of the course and recruitment of students to sustain the international and inter-professional profile of the course. Judging by the nationalities across different continents it is clear that there is a need for basic courses of this type beyond the borders of Europe and it has been good to see the EISEN group taking responsibility to contribute to the use of best practices by sharing what we know and enabling learning from people also outside of Europe.

Therefore, HVL have plans to integrate this master course in a master program called: “Healthy Ageing and Rehabilitation” which recruit students from Europe, Asia and Africa in the field of health and social care.