

Euro-Education: Employability for all (EEE4all) Design and implementation of an international course for future health-care professionals

Annika Lindh Falk, Jan Sandqvist and Gunilla Liedberg

Linköping University Post Print

N.B.: When citing this work, cite the original article.

diva2:526310

Original Publication:

Annika Lindh Falk, Jan Sandqvist and Gunilla Liedberg, Euro-Education: Employability for all (EEE4all) Design and implementation of an international course for future health-care professionals, 2012, Work: A journal of Prevention, Assesment and rehabilitation, (41), 4, 433-438.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.3233/WOR-2012-1311>

Copyright: IOS Press

<http://www.iospress.nl/>

Postprint available at: Linköping University Electronic Press

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-77343>

1. Introduction

Work is high on the agenda for governments across Europe, and employment has been made an absolute priority under the revised Lisbon Strategy [1, 2]. There is no single or universal definition of employability; however there is a general agreement that the concept is centred on work and the ability to be employed. A person's capability to gain employment is defined as employability, and depends on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of this person. Further, rules and regulations on the labour market have a significant impact on the possibilities for an individual to gain employment. Therefore, a person's specific knowledge and skills might result in different opportunities in various national or regional labour markets. [3]

Named as one of the key areas within the objectives of the EU commission there has been a call for countries within the European Union to address the needs of individuals who are excluded from the labour market and disadvantaged on grounds of ethnicity, age, gender or disability [4]. There is a need to develop innovative strategies to increase the opportunities afforded to these groups in relation to accessing employment. The Council of the European Union recognize the critical role of for instance national organisations in increasing gender equality and the need to strengthen resources in order to insure that a gender perspective is integrated in all policies. Further, the Council emphasize the importance of equal access of women for instance to employment, education and vocational training in order to advance the empowerment of women [5]. Gender equality perspectives analysed from the interests of women and men respectively, to obtain gender disaggregated data and to perform gender analysis in investigating differences between women and men in a given context, should according to the EU Plan of Action and Gender Equality and

Women's Empowerment in Development [6] be integrated in for instance education. About 10% of the active population across Europe are unemployed today and the EU has set out 13 key actions aimed at reforming labour markets, upgrading skills and matching them with market demand. This is intended to boost employability and make it easier to move jobs, to improve working conditions and job quality, and to create jobs [7]. Estimates show that by 2015, the EU will lack 2.7 million skilled workers in the IT, health and research sectors.

Gender equality may be one of the factors supporting women's increased participation in the labour market and employability assuming that the policy environment favours more equal shares between men and women in paid work, as well as care work, and equal income [4]. The relationship between men and women can be seen as a part of a larger pattern of gender relationships in all sectors in society - the so-called gender order present at individual, organizational, and cultural levels - and may be one of the structural factors impacting on the ability to gain employment [8]. The gender order means the structurally organized relationships between men and women in society, in relation to the distribution of work and resources as well as power. The gender order permeates the labour market in different ways. For instance, occupations become gendered as they are characterized by qualities, attributes and behaviours assigned to men and women. In most societies women as a group have been less successful in negotiating their place in the gender order [8]. Women and men, as a consequence of the gender order, live under different conditions, have different experiences, and use different strategies because of social, cultural, ethnic, and political circumstances, as well as biology [8]. Women have been shown to have a higher total workload as a

consequence of their greater responsibility for taking care of children and performing unpaid work, which results in greater overall exposure to physically demanding activities and psychosocial strain. It has been shown that a large part of the total physical load and psychosocial strain derives from activities outside work, and that is more common for women than men [9]. Pascall and Lewis [10] suggest a model from a wider European perspective in which paid and unpaid work are equally valued, and equally shared between men and women. They also emphasize that such obligations concerning paid and unpaid work must be underpinned by social rights in order to achieve gender equality, and the breadwinner model should be discarded.

Further, in studying differences between men's and women's occupational and non-occupational risk factors for mental health [11] it is demonstrated that non-occupational risk factors are more common amongst women. These include, for instance, poor quality of social contacts, physical inactivity, and high perceived physical load outside work. Occupational factors such as shift work, job strain, and low occupational pride were related to poor mental health among women. The authors conclude that these patterns can partly be explained by the gender-segregated labour market, and partly by other explanations. It is likely that occupational and non-occupational factors interact and contribute, and must therefore be considered [11]. Women's less privileged living conditions have been shown to be associated with ill health of different kinds [11-13]. Studies have shown higher sickness absence among women than men, especially in gender-segregated occupations [14].

It is important to understand gender as a variable, influenced by culture and constructed by daily human interaction. The concept of 'doing gender' is based on an understanding of gender as a social construction, and according to Courtenay [15] gender is not inborn, but shaped/constructed through notions, meetings, negotiations and behaviour in social life [15]. Men and women are actors/doers in these socially constructed relationships, and are in that way 'doing gender'. The awareness of the impact of the structural gender order in society which has a focus on 'doing gender' has been investigated previously amongst health professions [16, 17]. The results have shown that the professionals were 'doing gender' in their encounters with clients, and a lack of knowledge concerning gender aspects was obvious. For example, they focused their questions on different areas in their assessment of the client: for female clients, household and family; for male clients, their paid work situation [17]. A qualitative study [18] also showed these gendered structures in the rehabilitation system. The authors conclude *"men's behaviour and goals seem to be more in line with structures in the rehabilitation system, and when clients, doctors, and social security officers act the way they usually do, men are favoured. In order to improve rehabilitation for women, both doctors and social security officers should be aware of how gender is constructed in the consultation"* [18, p 94].

Therefore, there is a need for increased knowledge and education for health and social professionals regarding employability and how gender can have an impact on opportunities to participate in the labour market. Gender-related factors might be decisive for, or contribute to, women's difficulties in the labour market, and should be considered seriously in order to increase possibilities for employability. To be unaware, as a professional, of your values, thoughts and previous experiences can lead to a situation in which the professionals reproduce a non-reflective approach,

including stereotypical expectations, communication and treatment, which can be considered as an adaptation to the gender order existing in the culture as a whole [19]. The EU Plan of Action and Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development [5] emphasize that specific action is needed to support the advocacy capacity of stakeholders, and to increase knowledge and establish a deeper understanding of the influence of the existing gender order for men as well as for women may be a first step to improve gender equality. Therefore gender equality perspective should be integrated in higher education [6].

2. The project: Euro-Education: Employability for all (EEE4all).

The role of higher education is to equip students with knowledge, attitudes and behaviours needed in the workplace, along with the ability to gain initial employment, to maintain employment, and to be able to move around within the labour market. In an effort to meet the need of increased knowledge of the aspects; gender, age, disability and ethnicity, in relation to employability, an European project group with partners from five institutions (Table 1) initiated a project, the EEE4all during the period 2008-2010 in which the partners worked together to develop and implement new and innovative course modules. In addition to the four participating universities, ENOTHE (European Network of Occupational Therapy Education), which is a network consisting of over 200 occupational therapy educational institutions, professional associations, employers and client organizations across Europe. The role of ENOTHE in this project was to assure that the TUNING methodology [20] was implemented in a correct way in different modules, and to maintain quality and assure compatibility with EU directions. The TUNING process is an approach intended to

(re-)design, develops, implement, evaluate and enhance quality in education, and includes a methodology supporting course modules designed to find a common language and structure [20]. It was used by the university partners involved in the project. The project was funded through the European Lifelong Learning Programme [21] and focused on the development of a European course module aimed at equipping future practitioners with the skills to meet the present and future needs of those furthest removed from the labour market, which are discriminated against on grounds such as disability, age, gender or ethnicity. The intention was to provide students on Bachelor and Master level with the opportunity to work alongside other students across Europe in order to draw on a greater wealth of resources and provide the students with the opportunity to both reflect on and share learning on an international platform. In addition, they were able to develop greater cultural sensitivity and understand the national and European policy documents and literature. Further, the TUNING process [20] has been the key in this process of harmonizing the course modules, representing a unique opportunity for occupational therapists and other professions in Europe to describe their professional education following common reference points in terms of level, competences, learning outcomes, workload, and profile. The project group decided to develop four course modules, each relating to employability but with a different focus (Table 1). The modules were aimed at students with an interest in employability, with a focus on gender, age, disability or ethnicity (e.g. occupational therapy, physiotherapy, social work, nursing, public health on different academic levels). The overall and common aim of the course modules was that students should be able to design and/or implement interventions that would promote employability of groups disadvantaged in the labour market on grounds such as disability, age, gender or ethnicity.

2.1. Course design: Enabling employability for all- focus on gender

In the following text the course module with a focus on gender, as implemented by the Occupational Therapy Programme at Linköping University is described. A national organisation, The Swedish Public Employment Services (stakeholder) and expert in social medicine and gender theory took an active part in the development and implementation process. The course module consisted of 15 European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), and required full-time study over a ten-week period. ECTS is a standard for comparing the study attainment and performance of students of higher education across the European Union and other collaborating European countries [22]. Students from the four partner institutions studying at bachelor or masters' level were invited to participate. A total of nine students took part in the gender module (2 Swedish, 2 German, 3 Dutch and 2 English students) at Linköping University, Sweden. The module consisted of tutorial groups, lectures, tasks and seminars [table 2]. The initial three tasks during the first eight weeks were related to the learning outcome concerning evaluation of key concepts, principles, evidence, theories and/or social policy impacting on employability on a national and European level. The students performed a critical overview regarding laws and regulations that govern the labour market as well as identifying actors at the labour market responsible for unemployment services and vocational rehabilitation. The following tasks focused on a gender perspective in relation to the labour market. Initially the students conducted a literature review on the distribution of men and women on the labour market in each country (e.g. full-time and part-time work, educational level, age, wages, activity patterns, sick leave). Then an analysis of the review was

performed in order to identify the gendered order for men and women in the labour market. The final two weeks comprised an exchange (face-to-face) period at the Occupational Therapy programme at Linköping University where students had the opportunity to apply the new skills and knowledge in practice in real contexts in another country or in the home country. In order to facilitate the students own reflection upon values and opinions on diversity they participated at a seminar on equal opportunities with an expert from Linköping university. As preparation before the face-to-face period started, the students collected data from a stakeholder by interview to be used in the final assignment. The students' final assignment was to design a detailed course outline (i.e. specific content, pedagogical approaches, economical aspects, marketing) for employees within the stakeholder organisation, aimed to increase their knowledge about gender impact on employability for men and women. The students worked in their tutorial groups and at a final seminar they presented the course outline for tutors, gender experts and a representative from the stakeholder organization. The presentation also included a critical reflection of the implementation of the course outline in their respective country.

2.2. E-learning applications

During the initial eight weeks, different information and communication systems were used in which students shared experiences, and undertook specific enquiries within their own countries. They could then share these with each other. E-learning comprises all forms of electronically supported teaching and learning activities and is essentially the computer and network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge [23]. The action plan for E-learning from 2001-2004 [24] explains how E-learning fits into

the context of Europe, i.e. how the use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet can improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services as well as exchanges and collaboration. The participants in this course module used different E-learning applications for communication (Figure 2). In the tutorial group work the students used Adobe Connect Pro as a web communication tool, and combined this with programs for presentation such as PowerPoint while presenting their assignments. The Blackboard E-learning platform was used to distribute course materials of different kinds. E-lectures, recorded in advance, and uploaded on the learning platform were given to the students during the course module and were available during the period of the course. The software platform, Skype, was used by students to communicate with each other. Further, the web-based application Xtranormal was used to create short 3D animated movies from simple text-based movie-scripts for an assignment.

3. Student and teacher evaluation and overall assessment by the EU Commission

3.1 Evaluation - Enabling employability for all- focus on gender

A continuous evaluation was performed in tutorial groups, tasks and seminars where students and tutors were involved in the feedback process. The final evaluation of the course module consisted of an oral feedback from the nine students. Further, a questionnaire, common for all four modules, focusing on the students' expectations, the international dimension, the e-learning environment and the interaction with tutors and students was used.

The students' evaluation highlighted the importance of being aware of their own assumptions in relation to their future profession. The students also reported that they had increased their awareness and knowledge about gender theory and its application in relation to employability and the client-centred approach. All students mentioned that they had developed new skills when working in groups containing people from different countries. The students as well as the teachers evaluated the E-learning applications as a prerequisite for managing the course but they were also a challenge as there was sometimes difficult to fulfil the technical requirements and the technical support was crucial for the realisation of the course module.

The teachers' evaluation resulted in a recommendation that a future course module should be decreased in length for easier adaptation into a regular curriculum. This would facilitate the students' possibilities to fully concentrate on the course module. The preparation for students as well as lecturers could be improved by providing a basic introduction on the possibilities and how to handle the E-learning applications.

3.2 Overall assessment by the EU Commission

The overall assessment of the EEE4all project by the EU commission showed that the project had succeeded in creating innovative educational models that may be of great assistance to institutions and practitioners throughout Europe. Therefore the project received a global score of 8 out of 10 from the Commission.

Acknowledgements

The project was funded by Erasmus Programme: Multilateral projects: Curriculum development: Teaching module under the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in EU.

We thank the Project group:

Barbara Piskur, Claire Craig, Elke Kraus and Hanneke van Bruggen

and our participating stakeholders for their valuable input in the project.

References

- [1] Europe: Gateway to the European union [homepage on the Internet][cited 2011, Feb, 14] Available from: http://europa.eu/pol/socio/index_en.htm
- [2] Official Journal of European Union. Decision No 1672/2006/EC of the European parliament and of the council.
- [3] Council of Europe: Committee on Equal Opportunities for women and men. Discrimination against women in the workforce and the workplace. [Cited 2011, May 02] Available from <http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc05/EDOC10484.htm>
- [4] Council of the European Union. Gender equality and Women's empowerment in development cooperation- conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the member states meeting within the Council. Brussels 2007.
- [5] European Commission. EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development. 2010-2015. Brussels 2010.
- [6] European commission [homepage on the Internet] [cited 2011, Jan,25] Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm
- [7] European Commission Education & Training [homepage on the Internet] [cited 2011, Jan, 14] Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/report08/emploi_en.pdf
- [8] Connell R.W. Gender. Cambridge: Malden, Blackwell Publishers, 2002.
- [9] Berntsson L., Lumdberg U., Krantz G. Gender-differences in work-home interplay and symptom perception among Swedish white-collar employees. J Epidemiol Community Health 2006; (12):1070-1076.

- [10] Pascall G., Lewis J. Emerging gender regimes and policies for gender equality in a wider Europe. *J Soc Pol* 2004; (33) 373-394
- [11] Bildt C., Michélsen H. Gender differences in the effects from working conditions on mental health: a 4-year follow-up, *Intern Archives Occup Environ Health*, 2007; (75) 252-258.
- [12] Ostlund G, Cedersund E., Hensing G., Alexanderson K. Domestic strain: a hindrance in rehabilitation? *Scand J Caring Sci* 2004; (1): 49-56.
- [13] Staland-Nyman C., Alexanderson K., Hensing G. Associations between strain in domestic work and self-rated health: a study of employed women in sweden. *Scand J Public Health* 2008; (1): 21-27.
- [14] Laaksonen M., Mastekaasa A., Martikainen P., Rahkonen P., Piha K., Lahelma E. Gender differences in sickness absence – the contribution of occupation and workplace. *Scand J Work Environ Health*. 2010; (5):394-403.
- [15] Courtenay W.H. Constructions of masculinity and their influence on men's well-being: A theory of gender and health, *Soc Sci Med* 2000; (50) 1385-1401.
- [16] Kullberg C. Paid work, education and competence. Social workers' interviews with male and female clients applying for income support. *Europ J Soc Work* 2006; (9): 339-355.
- [17] Liedberg GM., Björk M., Hensing G. Occupational therapists' perceptions of gender – a focus group study. *Austr J Occup Ther* 2010; (57) 331-338.
- [18] Ahlgren C., Hammarstrom A. Back to work? Gendered experiences of rehabilitation. *Scand J Publ Health* 2000; (28) 88-94.
- [19] Valian V. Why so slow? The advancement of women. Cambridge,1999 MA: M.I.T. Press

[20] TUNING. Reference points for the design and delivery of degree programmes in Occupational Therapy, TUNING project. Printed in Spain.

[21] European Commission Education & Training [homepage on the Internet] [cited 2011, Jan, 15] Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc78_en.htm

[22] European Commission Education & Training. European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. Available from: http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc48_en.htm

[23] Wikipedia [homepage on the Internet] [cited 2011, Feb 15] Available from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-learning>.

[24]. Commission of the European communities. The eLearning Action Plan- Designing tomorrow's education. Brussels, 2001.

Legends to figures

Figure 1. *An overview of the modules, the core content, and the relation between different factors in the project.*

Figure 2: *E-learning applications utilized in the first eight weeks of the course (distance learning part).*

Figures

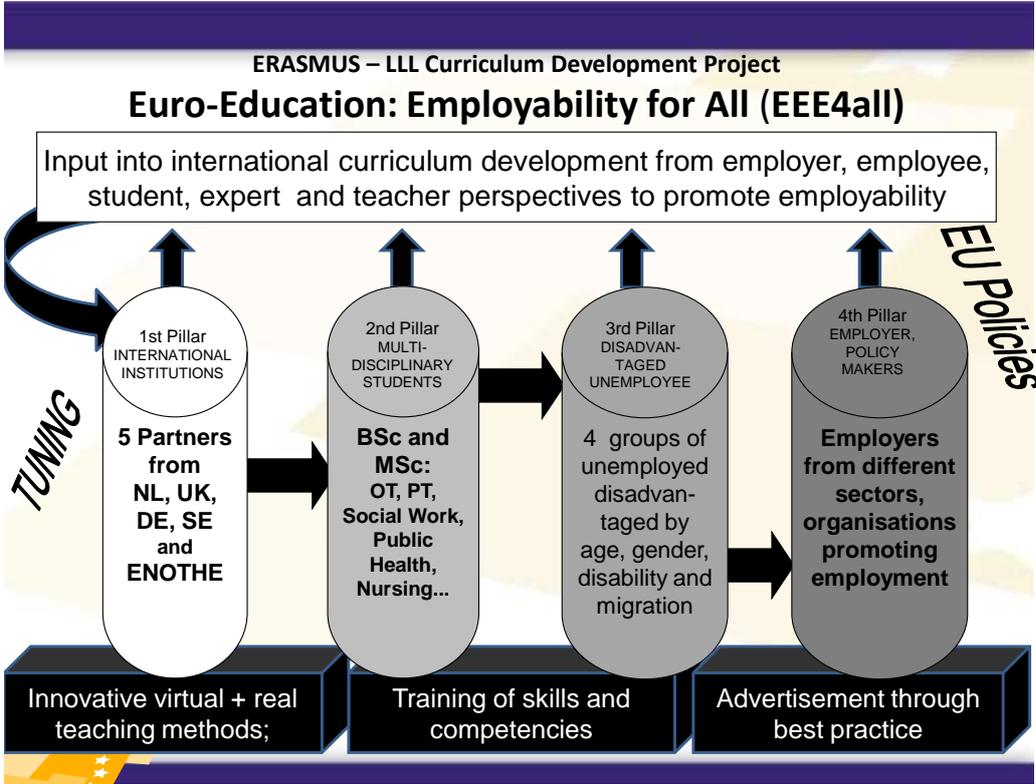


Figure 1

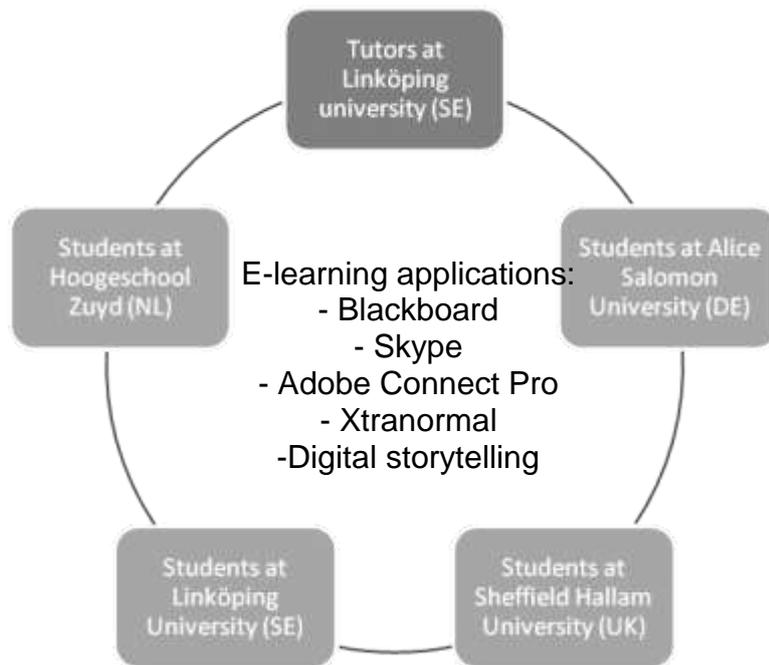


Figure 2

Table 1. An overview of EEE4all partners

Collaborating partners:	
Linköping University, Sweden	Focus on gender in relation to employability
Hoogeschool Zuyd University of Applied Sciences Heerlen, The Netherlands	Focus on disability in relation to employability
Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences Berlin, Germany	Focus on ethnicity in relation to employability
Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom	Focus on age in relation to employability
European Network of Occupational Therapists in Higher Education (ENOTHE)	

Table 2. An overview of the course content and structure during 10 weeks.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
E-learning period								Face-to-face period	
Tutorial group session	Tutorial group								
	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4		Task 5		Face to face group work	Task 6 Final assignment
Reflection in portfolio				Reflection in portfolio					Reflection in portfolio
E- Lectures			Lectures						