



e-Inclusion

Building capacity for inclusive
education in digital environments

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Summary of the e-Inclusion pilot course



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Summary of the e-Inclusion Pilot Course

The e-Inclusion pilot course was designed to develop knowledge and capabilities to work against social reproduction in virtual educational settings. The course had 3 ECTS credits of workload and it was planned and implemented within the project Building capacity for inclusive education in digital environments (e-Inclusion), co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

The pilot course was intended to enhance the expertise in building and nurturing meaningful e-learning experiences for a diverse range of university students – regardless of their socio-economic, occupational and health backgrounds. I sought to facilitate higher education institutions to adopt organisational cultures that promote virtual environments which are inclusive, academically challenging and of a high quality.

The pilot course was aimed at educators, as architects, implementers, and mediators of student experiences in higher education institutions. The course focused on preparing and equipping to teach in digital settings inclusively from many different perspectives.

Three different challenges were provided to work on. As an overview, these challenges took participants on a journey of personal reflection about their own background and needs as educators, as well as those of their students. They learned how to apply the principles of inclusive education in virtual settings and create truly engaging learning environments, with a strong sense of social virtual presence.

Learning strategy used in the e-Inclusion – The Challenge-NIU model

The eInclusion pilot course was planned and implemented according to the UOC's Challenge-NIU model. This is an innovative methodology for designing online courses, developed by the UOC, which let participants achieve educational competencies goals. Based on the Challenge-NIU model, an online course is structured as a sequence made up of activities and presented with challenges.

The Challenge-NIU's main objectives are the following:

- To ensure that a competency-based design model is properly integrated in participants' learning activities.
- To contextualise learning activities using challenges and real situations related to participants' professional or daily lives, by applying the principles of situated learning.

- To closely connect the teaching endeavours and a resource management system, based on content curation, with learning processes.

A Challenge-NIU informed-online course is organised to ensure the achievement of set of competencies. This is done by conceiving the learning process as a sequence made up of what the UOC calls *Challenge-NIU activities*. Challenge-NIU activities are learning scenarios structured around challenges and based on competencies. They put each continuous assessment activity at the centre of the course and provide a specific selection of learning resources for each Challenge-NIU activity.

Therefore, the participants' learning process is inspired by activities they should perform. Accordingly, participants are guided by a professional or training situation (i.e. a challenge statement) in order to obtain a learning outcome related to a challenge. The aim of an activity is for the participant to reach the skills, knowledge, attitudes and values associated to the course's competencies.

The challenges are displayed in the classroom, either in text format or as video. They are not simply learning content and are conceived to reflect real education needs: they offer context-based learning. Each activity provides participants with information about the meaning and usefulness of what they will be working on, and should help to engage participants and construct their knowledge.

Consequently, the assessment of the learning process is rooted on competency-based activities. Teachers have to ensure that participants effectively work on the competencies defined in the course plan. In addition, the competencies are expressed as learning results (or outcomes), providing participants with information about how these competencies embedded in the activity will be useful to them in their professional life.

Each activity also includes an estimation about the time required. The time depends on the weighted importance of the activities and the number of ECTS credits for the course. This means the courses have to be consistent with the anticipated workload.

The NIU (*nest* in Catalan language) refers to the diverse collection of learning resources selected specifically for each one of activities. So that, all the training resources and content required to carry out the activity successfully have to be included into the NIU. This content selection enables guidance on the use of each resource to aids to understanding and recommended minimum time indications for each activity to help participants to plan their studies. In addition, the NIU resource collections respond to diverse learning styles, and their digital format has to be in line with current pedagogical trends and resources.

The course design also comprises a course plan that serves as a teaching guide. This course plan offers a detailed the description of the course, a list of the main professional fields it is linked to, the objectives and competencies to meet, information about the challenges and the learning resources linked to them. It also informs about the learning methodology, provide guidelines about the assessment model and the key dates of the course are also included. All this information, accompanied by an interactive calendar, is integrated in the online classroom.

Regarding the definition of competencies and learning outcomes, the competencies are capacities that a participant puts into practice in their personal or professional life, and they combine knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. We need to reveal what the participant will be able to do, display or prove and the participants should know what we are expecting of them to do, what they will learn, and why they will learn it.

The competencies must also be action-oriented, stated from the participants' perspective, verifiable and expressed as a capacity for doing something – or as an active verb that shows an action and generates an assessable outcome.

Learning outcomes are statements describing the knowledge, skills or attitudes that participants should acquire by the end of the learning process. So, they are necessary to put into practice the competence. They reveal that the acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes are applied and integrated. They also have to be stated from the participants' perspective, be specific and non-ambiguous, observable and measurable. In addition, they should be expressed as actions performed or accomplished by the participants.

How this learning model has been applied to the pilot course is detailed below.

Challenge 1 | Educating (to) different perspectives

This challenge dealt with some of the core concepts of inclusive education, where the focus is put on the practice of continuous self-reflection on positionality. Participants were introduced to the concepts of colour braveness, learned the different ways in which they can establish a *space* for dialogue and reflection in the classroom and were familiarised with some online resources for further learning.

Competencies linked to the activity

- Challenge your own perspectives and practice self-reflection
- Recognize and cater to diversity in digital classrooms

Learning outcomes derived from the activity

- Critically reflect on your own specific biases and position, and the way in which these affect digital learning
- Develop and integrate an inclusive language for digital learning purposes
- Recognise the specificities of digital learning for social action and community building
- Analyse and value your students' backgrounds, perspectives, and learning journeys
- Devise digital learning initiatives that empower students to express their perspectives
- Design digital learning initiatives that value and integrate the different perspectives to personalise the learning experience of the students

Learning resources to address the challenge

- Ahenkorah, Elise (2020). "Safe and brave spaces don't work (and what you can do instead)". *Medium [online]*. Available at <https://medium.com/@elise.k.ahen/safe-and-brave-spaces-dont-work-and-what-you-can-do-instead-f265aa339aff>.
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- Hobson, Mellody (2014). "Colorblind or colorbrave? ". *TED2014 [online]*. Available at https://www.ted.com/talks/mellody_hobson_color_blind_or_color_brave?language=en.
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- Newhouse, Maria R. (2013). "Remembering the 'T' in LGBT: recruiting and supporting transgender students". *Journal of College Admissions (Summer) [online]*. Available at <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1011703.pdf>
- Newton, Thandiwe (2011). "Embracing otherness, embracing myself". *TedGlobal 2011 [online]*. Available at https://www.ted.com/talks/thandiwe_newton_embracing_otherness_embracing_myself?language=en.
- UOC's eLearn Center (2022). The gender perspective in teaching. *Universitat Oberta de Catalunya*. Available at: http://materials.cv.uoc.edu/cdocent/PID_00276996/
- van Marlen, Josefien; Mesman, Judi; Laurente, Dew; Madgulka, Shivalika (2021) . "S01A03 S4S". Students-4-Students Podcast. *Echo and Leiden University College*. Available at: <https://anchor.fm/echo52/episodes/S01A03-S4S-Podcast--Students-4-Students-x-LUC-Leiden-University-College-e166gpy>

Complementary learning resources

- Echo (2022). "Kaders & definitives" [online]. Available at <https://www.tlcenter.nl/kaders/>.

Challenge 2 | Moving from diversity to inclusion in the digital arena

To address this challenge, participants learned to create an inclusive online learning environment. The design, learning objectives, resources, learning environment and feedback/evaluation were viewed through the lens of inclusion with the power of online learning possibilities. They found opportunities and inspiration to see this and be able to work with it.

Competencies linked to the activity

- Design effective and engaging digital learning strategies for diverse learners
- Create and make use of diverse, meaningful digital learning content
- Build alliances for digital inclusive education

Learning outcomes derived from the activity

- Find and choose inclusive digital tools for learning purposes
- Recognise digital learning approaches that fit your students' different needs
- Design your digital course so it is accessible, activating and challenging
- Find and make use of a diverse range of non-mainstream topics and perspectives for your digital course
- Find and make use of multimedia learning resources from academic and alternative sources
- Identify learning methodologies and digital tools that let students collaboratively co-create content
- Identify digital inclusion catalysts within your university and find strategies to collaborate with them
- Identify external key players in digital inclusive education and find strategies to collaborate with them

Learning resources to address the challenge

- Bates, Anthony William (Tony) (2019). "Culture and learning environments". In: Bates, Anthony William (Tony). *Teaching in a digital age: guidelines for designing teaching and learning (2nd edition)*, pp. 518-521. Vancouver (BC): Tony Bates Associates Ltd. Available on <https://opentextbc.ca/teachinginadigitalage/>
- De Leersnyder, Jozefien; Gündemir, Seval; Agirdag, Orhan (2021). "Diversity approaches matter in international classrooms: how a multicultural approach buffers against cultural misunderstandings and encourages inclusion and psychological safety". *Studies in Higher Education*, 47 (9): 1903-1920. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03075079.2021.1983534>
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- Griful-Freixenet, Júlia; Struyven, Katrien; Verstichele, Meggie; Andries, Caroline (2017). "Higher education students with disabilities speaking out: perceived barriers and opportunities of the Universal Design for Learning framework". *Disability & Society* 32(10), pp. 1627-1649. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09687599.2017.1365695>
- Ngozi Adichie, Chimamanda (2009). "The danger of a single story". *TED channel on YouTube* [online]. Available at <https://youtu.be/D9Ihs241zeg?t=12>
- Rapha Films (2020). "Rapha Women's 100". *Rapha Films's channel on YouTube* [online]. Available at <https://youtu.be/ergcbm-kaVk>

- Uerz, Dana; van Zanten, Manon; Kral, Marijke; Gorissen, Pierre; van der; Neut, Irma; Tondeur, Jo; Nackaerts, Ulrike; Howard, Sarah (2021). "A framework for digital competencies of lecturers". *Acceleration Plan Education Innovation with IT* [online]. Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359064682_A_framework_for_digital_competencies_of_lecturers

Complementary learning resource for challenge 2:

- Rubens, Wilfred (2022). "Wijze lessen: twaalf bouwstenen voor effectieve didactiek versterkt met behulp van leertechnologie". *Wilfren Rubens.com* [online]. Available at <https://www.te-learning.nl/blog/activeer-relevante-voorkennis-met-leertechnologie-wijze-lessen/>

Challenge 3 | How can I engage my online students?

By addressing this challenge, participants learned the significance of some essential concepts, as critical incident techniques, inclusive education, inclusive online learning environment, sense of belonging, social presence, and hot moments in digital learning activities. The combination of learning resources and activities included a step-based reflective approach to evaluate unexpected situations that participants reacted to and had unexpected outcomes, tools for making education accessible and engaging for every student, regardless of their social background, identities and/or disabilities, a learning setting where every student feels safe to learn and participate, where students feel they belong as a member of the learning community and where they feel their contributions matter, experiences when individuals feel that they are acknowledged as full-fledged members of a community, skills for creating social and emotional connections and to present oneself as a *real person* to group members in online contexts, strategies for managing emotion-laden moments of conflict or tension that threaten to derail the teaching process and finally the design of learning activities that are supported by digital tools.

Competencies linked to the activity

- Cultivate an inclusive online learning climate
- Build alliances for digital inclusive education

Learning outcomes derived from the activity

- Recognize and articulate the characteristics of, and requirements for, an inclusive online learning climate
- Design learning activities that strengthen an inclusive online climate, with students as co-participants
- Identify and describe didactical approaches to make online discussions and hot moments into moments of learning

- Design an interactive activity with peers to evaluate the created didactical approaches

Learning resources to address the challenge

- Korthals Altes, Tisja; Slooman, Marieke; Müftügil Yalçın, Seda (2022). "Student engagement and belonging in online classrooms", *Research Report*. Amsterdam: VU Amsterdam. Available at: <https://protected-content.ftp.uoc.edu/biblioteca/prestatgeries/DG002/110212.pdf>
- Cordeiro, Ellen (2016). "Critical incident technique". *Ellen Cordeiro channel on YouTube* [online]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-oezn8lVU>
- Greenler, Robin (2020). "Teaching inclusively online". *CIRTL Network channel on YouTube* [online]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAWaJbn1oTk&list=PLJSYKbO0r9fnAlJ68JhrFqpciFrXM Yq40&index=5>
- Ramdas, Siema; Das, Amrita; Slooman, Marieke (2022). "The mixed classroom educational model in blended learning: how to foster inclusivity in blended education". Amsterdam: VU Amsterdam. Available at: <https://protected-content.ftp.uoc.edu/biblioteca/prestatgeries/DG002/110213.pdf>
- Sedlovskaya, Alexandra (2021). "How to create an inclusive virtual learning environment". *UOC channel on YouTube* [online]. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0grDeQHuh8&t=803s>
- Slooman, Marieke; Altes, Tisja Korthals; Wenko, Mary Tupan; van Halewijn, Erik; Stanojev, Ivana; Domagala-Zysk, Ewa; Rodríguez-Ardura, Inma; Reijnders, Kathia; Nielandt, Bie (2022). "An introduction to e-inclusion: building capacity for inclusive education in digital environments", *Research Report*. European Union, Erasmus+ Programme. Available at: <https://einclusion.net/project-outputs/handbook-for-inclusive-digital-education/>

Complementary learning resources

- Baboeram, Pravini; Meeuwisse, Marieke; Wolff, Rick (2021). "Team teacher reflection manual" [online]. Available at <https://ibelong.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2022/06/IBelong-TTR-2022-v2-1.pdf>
- Brodksy, Nicole Willner; Slooman, Marieke; Das, Amrita; Ramdas, Siema (2021). "Hot moments in class: VU mixed classroom" [online]. Amsterdam: VU Amsterdam. Available at <https://assets.vu.nl/d8b6f1f5-816c-005b-1dc1-e363dd7ce9a5/9672b05a-f7d6-419e-97f4-cb562de37ac1/VU%20Mixed%20Classroom%20Hot%20Moments%20in%20Class.pdf>
- Farrell, Orna; Brunton, James. (2020). "A balancing act: a window into online student engagement experiences". *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* 17(1), pp. 1-19. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-020-00199-x>
- Moore, Robert L.; Miller, Courtney N. (2022). "Fostering cognitive presence in online courses: a systematic review (2008-2020)". *Online Learning Journal* 26(1), pp. 130-149. Available at: <https://olj.onlinelearningconsortium.org/index.php/olj/article/view/3071>
- van Valkenburg, Willem; Dijkstra, Wiebe; de los Arcos, B.; Goeman, Katie; van Rompaey,

Veerle; Poelmans, Stephan (2020). European maturity model for blended education [online]. *European Union, Erasmus+ Programme*. Available at <https://embed.eadtu.eu/>