



SOCIAL CONNECTIONS: Trainers for E-social work

IO3 E-learning course for C-VET in digital social work
Lessons Learnt and Recommendations Report

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Aim of the report

The aim of this report is to collect the lessons learnt and recommendations gathered by each partner after piloting the MOOC in their country. Moreover, the document supports the transferability of the course and presents the further recommendations for future implementation of the MOOC.

The MOOC was tested in 4 countries: Italy, Portugal, Spain and Denmark.

The **main objectives** of the piloting phase were:

- to build on materials developed in IO2 as results of the project work of SWTs to develop a MOOC for social professionals and to pilot it with end-users
- to understand the meaning of reflective practice in digital pedagogy and what online challenges can be encountered
- to provide relevant and adequate information about online safety
- to use technologies to give targeted and timely feedback to the target groups they work with
- to recognize the principles of a person-centered feedback approach
- to understand the concept of digital psychosocial intervention, its challenges, and identify practical examples
- to select and adapt the most suitable digital resources for the target group they work with

National Data

Denmark

6 participants were involved in the MOOC piloting in Denmark. The demographic details show us that the participants were all females, aged between 36 and 64 years old. Moreover, the profiles of the participants were: occupational therapists and nurses.

The piloting was performed in January 2023 at SOSU Ostjylland, DK, as a group session with all 6 participants attending.

The participants were recruited at SOSU Ostjylland VET college, training social- and healthcare helpers and social- and healthcare assistants (EQF 3+4) to work primarily in nursing homes, in home care and in hospitals and in psychiatry.

The IO3 piloting was promoted as a relevant input to the trainers' teaching experience, adding new perspectives to their teaching in terms of how to apply an online approach to engage vulnerable groups in meaningful activities promoting and enhancing digital creative skills, when restricted from physical attendance.

Due to a tight training schedule, the participants were asked to prioritize what MOOCS to pilot, as it was not possible to pilot all 4 MOOCS/workshops within the scheduled timeframe. The selection of MOOCS was an open choice for the participants.

MOOCS selected by participants:

- Blackout Poetry
- Digital Art Workshop

All the participants got a "hand on" experience piloting the MOOCS. The feedback was positive regarding the selected MOOCS/workshops and what to be aware of when delivering training with the target group/end users.

All trainers liked the voiceover function, improving the user experience for illiterate users.

No difficulties as such, however, the number of exercises in the MOOCS and the time needed to perform all of them, exceeded the time schedule available for the piloting. This should be considered when planning training sessions, especially dealing with vulnerable groups exposed to fatigue, anxiety or higher stress levels, as might be the case with some in the target group. Attention was raised on the fact that if a trainer is planning a workshop including all four MOOCS, the number of attending participants should be limited. The feedback from trainers was a potential decreased ability to provide digital support for a larger group working with different workshops.

Participants' recommendations

The time needed for performing the MOOCS/workshops and the potential need for digital support was an issue all participants commented on as an important aspect to consider when planning training sessions. The size of the group for the workshops is an important aspect to consider, in order to establish a positive user experience from the beginning, making digital support available when needed.

Trainers' recommendations

From a practical point of view, when planning a workshop for end users, it might be a good idea to have a limited selection of MOOCS/workshops and to inform end users of the selection in advance.

Initially we discovered that the SWTs found it difficult to choose which MOOCS/Workshops to work with/pilot.

From a trainer's point of view, a limited selection of MOOCS/workshops will be a benefit too, as time spent on digital support might decrease with fewer MOOCS/workshops in action.

Spain

7 participants were involved in the MOOC piloting in Spain. The demographic details show us that there were 5 females and 2 males, aged between 25 and 45 years old. Moreover, the profiles of the participants were: psychologists and social workers.

The participants were recruited within the INTRAS resources, where the Social Connections materials can be applied both in Personal Assistance, as in Residences, as in Rehabilitation Center or Day Center, depending on the profile and situation of the users. The session was held online, since we brought together 7 interested parties from 4 different centres. Two of them had previously participated in the first Social Connections pilot, so they were familiar with the subject. The others were introduced to the theoretical framework and the 4 methodologies and tools developed by the Consortium were explained. In a second part of practical application, we focus on one of the modules to review in depth.

The participants were given a choice and, depending on the profile of their users, it was decided by the majority to approach the training of game-based learning. All the participants valued both the audio-visual material and the ease of use of the platform very positively. On the other hand, regarding the content, they were very positively surprised by the learning objectives that can be achieved with this methodology and they all followed the instructions to comply with the proposed activity through the Minecraft game.

Regarding the actual workshops, all the participants had potential candidates for their application. The audio-visual environment among all of them was very welcome. The end users were familiar with using phones and tablets, so following the instructions was easy.

To be able to test all the modules in depth, several days would have to be dedicated, especially to detect the profiles that fit each methodology, program it and match the availability of the end user in each of the resources. Due to the diversity of users and the idiosyncrasies of the resources, it is necessary to select the appropriate profiles for the methodologies. In addition, there is a lot of user turnover, so monitoring is more complex.

Computer skills and facing the methodologies for the first time, but with the explanations they ended up feeling more secure in this environment. All of them improved their knowledge in e-social work. To be able to test all the modules in depth, several days would have to be dedicated, especially to detect the profiles that fit each methodology, program it and match the availability of the end user in each of the resources. The explanations of the lessons, being able to dedicate time to rewind and repeat, support from the Project Manager.

Participants' recommendations

The course has been of great interest to all participants. The four digital tools have been evaluated, as well as the result of the online platform and the audio-visual format of the lessons. They have also really liked the fact that they are available to be able to dedicate the necessary time to learning. Due to the diversity of users and the idiosyncrasies of the resources, it is necessary to select the appropriate profiles for the methodologies. More thought is given to the individualized application to the selected candidates. *"With this methodology you can work cognitive stimulation and also motivation"*. The importance of the figure of the social worker has been highlighted when the end user makes good use of the technologies. *"You have to take into account the dangerous part of the online community. The professional should always be aware of this aspect."*

Trainers' recommendations

From the facilitator's point of view, a long-term pilot that is part of a psychoeducational program would yield relevant feedback from end users. However, being able to transmit the training to trainers and see that all of them visualize the benefit that the materials can have in their current jobs is a representative feedback for the sustainability of the project.

Portugal

In total, 14 participants attended at least one session of the MOOC piloting in Portugal.

The training was divided into two parts: a training component, in an online format, with asynchronous and synchronous sessions; and a practical application component of, at least, one of the digital techniques, followed by a final autoscopic session.

In this final session, participants had the opportunity to present the digital technique(s) they applied in their professional context and share experiences between them. It is important to highlight that we had the internal decision to pilot not only the content that was predicted for IO3 but also the content that was developed for IO2 (theoretical content). In total, the training had 21 hours divided into 6 sessions of 2:30h each.

From the 14 participants who attended at least one session, 5 implemented one digital technique in their professional context.

- 2 implemented an activity related to Digital Art
- 2 implemented an activity related to Blackout Poetry
- 1 implemented an activity related to Game-based learning

In general, participants revealed that it would be important to have more time to implement an activity with digital techniques – not only to implement the activity itself but also to present and explain how the techniques/tools work.

Participants mentioned that it was important, independently of the target group and/or technique implemented, to support users in simplifying the process of using a new digital tool and praising their achievements during the activity.

The participant who works with elderly people preferred to implement the activity (through 3 sessions) in a face-to-face format, due to the digital skills of participants and the effective time to implement the technique. In Sketchpad, participants found it difficult to choose specific images they wanted (e.g., flowers, trees) as there was not much variety. The participant who mentioned this challenge reinforced that she decided to not teach how to download images from the internet to ensure a safer and more restrictive environment. In terms of challenges directly linked with users, as they were elderly people, they found some difficulty related to dexterity (e.g., difficulty using the mouse or placing an image, which ended up being in the "wrong" place/where they didn't want it).

The participant who implemented the activity with offenders and used the technique "Blackout poetry" mentioned that the context where she works (inside the prison) it is a challenge itself in relation to the use of ICTs and digital resources/activities, so the Blackout Poetry was the technique she found easier to adapt and implement in her professional context. In terms of practical application and challenges for users, both participants who implemented the technique "Blackout Poetry" mentioned that users had some challenges in

choosing the words included in the poem. The participant who works with people with disabilities also mentioned that some of the challenges she found in implementing the exercise were related to the presence of distraction traits related to the cognitive ability of the user(s).

For Sketchpad, and in relation to the lack of images available on this platform, the participant helped the users by using words in English (they did not have the skill to talk/speak in English) to have more options. Another strategy from this participant was to motivate users by defining, with them, the theme they would work on during the activity – to be something they are interested in, as they were a little resistant at the beginning.

The participant who works inside a prison mentioned that she chose a poem before the session and paste it in a word file. In this way, she did not need to have the computer connected to the internet. In terms of choosing the words from the poems (Blackout poetry), participants mentioned that it was important to stimulate the creativity of users and use words in the first-person plural instead of the second-person singular ("we" instead of "you"). In the case of the participant who works with people with disabilities, the theme of the poem was linked to what is being worked on in individual intervention – the blackout poetry was also implemented on an individual basis. Also, she mentioned that it was important to ask open and closed questions to support users in choosing the words that make more sense to them, and to provide examples of how they can choose the words.

Participants' recommendations

The participant who implemented the technique with the elderly mentioned that this is a target group that requires a lot of attention and care, so if these sessions are continuous and focused on consolidating the knowledge acquired, the results will certainly be very positive.

The participant who implemented the technique with people with disabilities also reinforced that, at least for this specific target group, it is important to choose poems with a “greater presence of characters from the physical world” so it will be easier for users to assimilate the meaning that words can have.

Trainers' recommendations

We believe that the implementation not only of MOCCs but also the content delivered in IO2, was important to provide a deeper understanding and awareness about the utility and benefits of using digital tools and resources in social intervention.

As we were making a pilot activity, the time was reduced but thinking about the sustainability of the project, it would be pertinent to have a continuity of the sessions that participants implement with end-users, especially when we are talking about people with fewer abilities (e.g. digital, cognitive).

Italy

6 participants were involved in the MOOC piloting in Italy. The demographic details show us that all the participants were females, recruited within the ANS network and with experience of training of social workers.

Piloting was performed in January 2023 and participants were recruited from within the ANS network, to make it possible to apply the tools with the diverse user base they interface with (Social workers, caregivers, elderly people, health care workers...). After an initial presentation of the e-course, time was allowed for participants to complete it. They were given the opportunity to choose which tool might be most suitable based on the profile of their users to elaborate on it. The majority of participants selected Blackout Poetry and the application of Blackout Bard as their theme for further study. The MOOC has been promoted as a useful tool to have new skills and input to put into practice with users and in training contexts, opening up a new perspective on social work that also includes the use of technological tools.

Most of the participants had the opportunity to apply the tools presented by the MOOC with their users. All participants left positive feedback with respect to the selected tools and their use. They were able to observe what aspects should be taken into consideration when delivering training with final users.

Specifically, 4 participants got to implement the techniques learned from MOOCs:

- Three participants tested Blackout poetry and Blackout Bard in three different target groups:
 - During a training with care workers;
 - With an online group of informal caregivers;
 - During an online training with educators, psychologists, social workers and students.
- One participant tested Sketchpad during an online training with educators, psychologists, social workers and students.

The main challenge encountered by participants, especially imagining using the tools with their own users, is the need for technological skills, not only to take the course, but also to use the techniques. During the implementation of the techniques with end users, some participants noted how some tools (including Blackout Bard) are only available in English, and others do not allow synchronous work (such as Sketchpad). All of these could be a barrier to using the tools presented.

Participants found the MOOC clear, inclusive and easy to use thanks to audio-descriptions, this element also helped end users in using technological tools with which they were unfamiliar. Allowing time for explanation and practice with digital tools was another important aspect of overcoming the difficulties encountered.

Participants' recommendations

Here are some additional recommendations that participants left behind after using the tools presented by MOOCs with end users:

- Use Sketchpad in a hybrid way, either by doing the work in paper copy and then taking photos and placing them on Sketchpad as a digital collage or by creating the work on Sketchpad and then downloading, printing and creating a hard copy collage.
- For good use of Blackout Bard, it is useful to have already selected an open-source text from the web to copy part of it and paste it into the application. Instructions should be provided very slowly, step-by-step and ensuring that each participant managed to fulfil a step before moving to the next one.

Trainers' recommendations

Facilitators emphasized the importance of disseminating MOOCs and knowledge of the different tools among trainers of trainers, to improve awareness among more social workers of the importance of using technology in their work, with the goal of arriving at long-term training programs on these materials.

Conclusions

As a general remark, all participants who were present in the piloting phase of the MOOC positively evaluated the Social Connections initiative and the materials developed along the project.

From the participants' perspective, the course and the four digital tools were found useful for their professional activities. They underlined two main aspects:

- There should be given close attention to the size of the work group in order for the facilitator to be able to provide a positive and qualitative user experience.
- In some cases, there should be an individualized application of the tools.

From the trainers' perspective, the MOOC and the application of the digital tools were very well received. Some of the participants already implemented some of the tools and provided specific feedback, as it can be seen in the report. Moreover, the trainers underlined the following aspects:

- Future dissemination of the MOOC and the knowledge related to the tool with other trainers is really important.
- A continuity of the sessions that participants implement with end-users is desired.
- It would be more practical to have a selection of the MOOCs.



Project Partners



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