

## Motivating Health and Social Care students to choose a career in Gerontology through innovative education”.

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### Introduction

Throughout Europe populations are ageing rapidly. This demographic trend presents society with enormous challenges including a growing demand for care and caregivers with specific competencies in caring for older adults. Since nowadays caring for older people can be considered as a bottleneck professional activity and the situation in the future might become worse, attention should be paid on how more professionals can be attracted towards a career in the care for older people. One possible course of action is to motivate students to choose a career in gerontology. Research suggests that students’ attitudes towards older people are shaped during their education (Coffey et al., 2015). That implies that learning experiences can be one important factor that might contribute to their willingness to choose a professional career within Gerontology.

It is unlikely that students with experiences in poor learning environments choose a career in gerontology (Coffey et al., 2015; Haron, Levy, Albagli, Rotstein, & Riba, 2013; Brown, Nolan, Davies, Nolan, & Keady, 2008; Nolan, Brown, Davies, Nolan, Keady, 2006). Enriched learning experiences not only focus on knowledge and skills, but also make the students aware about how challenging and rewarding the care for older people can be. Nolan (2006) describes in a Six Senses Framework what students need during their education to have positive learning experiences and Koh (2012) claims that innovation during the education is important to improve the overall learning satisfaction.

### Aim and research question

Because education can be an important contributing factor for undergraduates’ willingness to choose for a career in gerontology, the aim for this research was to formulate an answer on following question: “Which innovative learning/training methods in education can contribute to the willingness of students to work with older people?”. To achieve this goal, the literature was consulted to gain insight in students’ needs and to retrieve criteria for innovation in education. Good practices for teaching and learning for gerontology, used in Belgium, Ireland, Austria, Greece and Croatia were collected and analysed using the criteria found in the literature. Those good practices, which comply with the criteria, will be called innovative best practices.

### Methodology

Qualitative research was conducted to discover innovative good practices for teaching and learning methods for gerontology, used in Belgium, Ireland, Austria, Greece and Croatia, which can positively influence students’ ideas about a professional career in gerontology. The literature was consulted to find criteria to decide whether the

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learning or training method could be called an innovative good practice. These criteria were found in Nolan's (2006) six senses model and in the description for innovation in education by Murray (2013).

A template, based on previous mentioned criteria, was distributed to higher educational institutions in partner countries; Belgium, Ireland, Greece, Croatia and Austria, in order to collect possible innovative best practices. The completed templates were analysed in a deductive way and the results were presented using the educational model of Miller (1990), which is a model for competence-based learning. Only those practices that according to Nolan (2006) can lead to rich learning experiences and that were assessed as innovative were included.

## Results

Twenty-three good practices has been reported and contained items from the Nolan's Six Senses Framework (2006) and therefore can be seen as good examples of best practices for educating future health and social care professionals.

After subjecting the twenty-three best practices to the criteria for innovation, twenty best practices were maintained and are considered to be innovative best practices.

In order to better understand the retrieved results, the model of Miller was used to structure the innovative best practices according to the four competences levels.

However, based on these findings it is not possible to appreciate one innovative best practice above the other, because the six senses model is not developed to be used in that way. Nevertheless the conducted analyses can be used to draw the attention to some missing links concerning the Senses Framework. Innovative best practices can be improved by paying extra considerations at those parts of the definition for the different senses that are not covered.

The innovative best practices can be found as an addendum in the research report and can be consulted on the ELLAN website <http://ellan.savonia.fi/index.php/news>

## Conclusion

According to the literature, education is one possible way for adjusting students' perceptions about working with older people and to motivate them towards a professional career in this domain. Rich learning environments and innovation in education on ageing, with special attention for knowledge, skills, challenges and rewards, could increase interest in working with older people.

Twenty examples of innovative best practices for educating undergraduate health care students were found after performing a qualitative research. Each of these innovative best practices has the potential to provide the students with positive learning experiences and to strengthen the belief that a career in gerontology requires special skills, can be challenging and rewarding.

The innovative best practices reported in this study can be implemented in different levels of competence based learning. This research shows possible methods not only to prepare undergraduates but also to stimulate them to choose a professional career in gerontology. However because of the limitation of time and resources in this project, the effectiveness of the innovative best practices could not be assessed.

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