



Embracing interdisciplinary learning: the course unit 'Interprofessional collaboration'

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Abstract In collaboration with the study programmes Occupational therapy, Social work, Sports & Movement, Applied health sciences, Applied psychology and Nursing, the ICF-Lab developed the course unit 'Interprofessional collaboration'. In this course unit, the students of the different study programmes form an interprofessional team. The use of ICF is central in this project, in mapping the functioning, the professional reasoning, the interprofessional team meeting and the design of the support plan. Students are introduced to the ICF in a theoretical, practical and experiential way.

Introduction

The ICF-Lab was developed in 2014 following a two-year research project as part of the Social Work program. The ICF-Lab is an expertise-, advice- and training center to support professionals in the use and implementation of ICF¹. As many sectors in Flanders show an interest in the ICF and experience obstacles in the implementation and use of the ICF, it felt important to support organizations according to their needs. In collaboration with the ICF-Platform, the ICF-Lab provides this customised support in Flanders. As the use of ICF in different sectors increases, it becomes more important to train students in the use of the ICF. Research shows that it is not so obvious that students apply ICF if they only have received theoretical courses^{2,4,5,6}. In order to being able to apply the skill within the professional field, it is crucial that students during their training learn how to work interdisciplinary. That is why we opted for the development of an interdisciplinary course unit in which ICF remains the central focus. An active collaboration with organizations in the field is also a valuable part of the course unit.

Methods & Materials

The ICF-Lab has conducted an exploratory study in the sector of ambulatory rehabilitation^{4,5}. It charted how this sector uses ICF: which instruments they have developed to implement ICF in the operation, how they use ICF as a structure for their consultation and reporting, etc. The research was added by a literature study concerning the use of the ICF and by an exploration of specifically developed tools, such as those of the Swiss paraplegic research institute³. In addition, information was gathered about the incorporation of the ICF in education.

References

¹ Desnerck, G., & Veys, J. (2015). The design of the ICF-Lab in Flanders. *Poster booklet WHO-FIC Network Annual Meeting 17-23 October 2015* (p. 110). Manchester: WHO-FIC.; ² Frenk, J., Chen, L., Bhutta, Z., Cohen, J., Crisp, N., Evans, T., ... Zurayk, H. (2010, December 4). Health professionals for a new century: transforming education to strengthen health systems in an interdependent world. *The Lancet* (376), 1924-1958.; ³ Swiss Paraplegic Research. (2015). *ICF Case Studies: Translating interventions into real-life gains – A Rehab-Cycle approach*. Opgeroepen op September 2018, van <https://www.icf-research-branch.org/download/send/17-icf-based-case-studies/191-introduction-to-the-icf-case-studies>; ⁴ Veys, J., & Desnerck, G. (2017). *Verkenndend onderzoek met betrekking tot het gebruik en de implementatie van de ICF in de sector van de ambulante revalidatie in Vlaanderen*. Brugge: ICF-Lab Howest.; ⁵ Veys, J., Desnerck, G., & Mestdagh, C. (2017). *Verkenndend onderzoek naar het gebruik en de implementatie van de ICF in de ambulante revalidatie in Vlaanderen*. *Signaal*, 22-36.; ⁶ Vyt, A. (2017). *Interprofessioneel en interdisciplinair samenwerken in gezondheid en welzijn*. Antwerpen: Garant.

Results

Based on this research, the course unit 'Interprofessional collaboration' was developed. Since 2015, the following study programmes have participated: Occupational therapy, Social Work, Sports & Movement, Applied health sciences and Applied Psychology. The study programme Nursing has, since the start of this academic year, joined the collaboration. On average 340 students are yearly being trained. Customized instruments were developed, based on the research and the literature study. During their education, students receive on average eight hours of lessons, consisting of lectures and workshops, in which the programme and ICF are explained. Subsequently, a three-day project takes place in which students learn about each other's discipline through exercises. Each team goes to an organization (such as a hospital or residential care center) and interviews a client or person from the social or professional context of that client. Several interviews take place for each person. The acquired information is organized by the students within the ICF framework. Then there is an interdisciplinary meeting per team in which they draw up an action plan. Another group of students and the lecturer observe and provide feedback. Both for the interview and the support plan, they use tools developed on the basis of the ICF. In addition to a bundle with practice exercises, they produce a video-based reflection in which they look back on the three-day event.



Figure 1: students interview a client with support of a topic list that is based on the ICF

Conclusions

Both the professionals and students are positive about the course unit. It has an added value on their training programme. Students find the application of theory and collaboration with students from other disciplines valuable. Through the use of the ICF they learned to formulate common objectives. In the first instance they experienced these objectives as discipline-bound. During the three-day event they experienced the added value of the ICF. They believe it is a clear structure and language to go through the various steps in the provision of assistance, to work together from a broad perspective and common purpose. Students find it positive that this project is very practice-orientated. Learning based upon a real case motivates students. They learn how to use the ICF throughout the care and support process of a client. Practitioners, who through the assignments of the students became acquainted with the ICF in a low-threshold way, also show an interest in the ICF. Study programmes have to invest more in interprofessional learning. It is essential that ICF is offered not only in a theoretical but also in an experiential way in the curricula.



Figure 2: students have an interdisciplinary team meeting in which the ICF scheme and the support plan based on the ICF are projected.

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