

Chapter 8

The Virtual Environmental Challenge: The Professionalization of Student Experience

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is a review of the Masters-level educational project the Virtual Environmental Challenge (VEC). In this chapter, the authors would like to assess the impact of the VEC as an educational experiment in the upskilling and professionalization of students who are part of a two-year Master of Language Education (MLE) program and also international students who partake as learner-participants. This chapter presents the processes and learning outcomes of the VEC experiment and identifies critical factors that contributed to its enhancement and future perspective. The VEC project seeks to demonstrate that it integrated the essential criteria of a teaching-training program while also aiding students to professionalize.

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INTRODUCTION

The VEC is a for ECTS credit course which aids MLE teachers-in-training to learn in a hands-on way about teaching, being a teacher (and a learner), and what it entails in terms of teacher tasks from class planning to time- and stress-management, for example. The MLE students' gain valuable transversal skills without resorting to having to gain those skills in an internship or a first job. Hence, students can hit the ground running once they have completed their course of learning. The project sets the foundation for these teachers-in-training not only to gain professionally advantageous experience but to learn about ultramodern educational methodologies such as flipping the classroom and educational tools like HTML5, Kahoot, Jamboard, padlet, Miro, and on. The course runs for a full semester and the teachers work with groups of VEC participant students who also professionalize across six intermediary steps.

In evaluating the professionalization and mentoring experience of the teachers-in-training and the participants, the authors will be reviewing fresh data collected from a post-VEC 2023 questionnaire.

Description of VEC

As aforementioned, the VEC is part of an MLE but is also currently (2022/24) part of an ERASMUS+ a Key Action 2 (KA2) funded project called "Training and realising innovations in internationalisation at home Pedagogies" or simply TRIP. TRIP is a consortium of five European universities whose aim is to focus on the United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in particular on Goal 4 which is to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UN General Assembly 2015, p. 17). Goal four is no meagre task, containing 10 recommendations in total. However, TRIP's target is to support TRIP partners, associate partners, and other institutions to demonstrate the development of Goal 4 through inclusive Internationalization at Home (IaH). IaH can be understood as "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" (Beelen & Jones 2015, p. 69). IaH is an extension of ERASMUS+ in that it wishes to bring home the goods, so to speak, of an Erasmus experience without the student having to leave the home campus. Currently, according to the literature, there is "no recognized strategy, formula or approach" (Robson, Almeida, & Schartner 2018, p. 20) to implementing IaH. The VEC is currently related to TRIP's Project Result 2 (PR2) which focuses on the micro level of the student and aims to provide an opportunity for the acquisition of transversal skills and competencies. This part of the TRIP project is achieved

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