

Introducing Challenge Based Learning at master level: how to link theory and practice

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Abstract: Complex societal problems- also discussed in the literature as wicked problems (Head 2022)- require a strong combination of skills from recent graduates. They are expected to conduct thorough research and integrate different categories of expertise, as well as develop creative solutions which are pre-tested before the implementation. Such a development of dynamic competencies requires a highly contextualized but thoroughly streamlined approach. New teaching and learning methodological approaches are necessary in order to prepare students for the transition from an academic-based learning to the professional life. One such example of a educational model is Challenge-Based Learning. Teaching students with a Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) educational model presumes a higher level of attention to the form and format of assessment, specifically due to the open-ended character of the solution developed by the students. The teacher does not have the “ultimate answer” to the research problem, and needs to pay attention to the preservation of the open character of the learning process of the students. Striking a suitable balance in terms of a) steering of the learning process, b) creating the space for the students to fail and -hopefully- recover, and c) still make sure that at the end of the allocated time for the course (i.e. ten weeks) there is a product that can be assessed according to the learning goal requires careful attention from an educational design point of view. Formative feedback and assessments are an integral part of a CBL approach, and they need a different type of approach than formative assessment in setting where the “correct result” is known. This provides both the challenge and the reward for the work put into such a process. The assumption for this transformation is that learning in a CBL setting yields higher returns on the long term for the students. Achieving the full potential of learning for the students on the long term represents the ambition that shapes the educational problem in the case of the current project, that is “How to develop and provide formative assessments and feedback for students in such a way that the students learn to reflect on the way they incorporate formative feedback within a CBL master level course?”