

NVL Competence project & case description form

Name of the project/case/training programme: Prisma - a cross disciplinary diploma programme based on creative and critical thinking (16 units ECTS).
Organisation in charge
Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>The Iceland Academy of the Arts and Bifröst University</u> are responsible for the organisation and implementation of Prisma.• <u>The Directorate of Labour</u>: People receiving unemployment benefits are allowed to study without a cut in their benefit. They can also apply for a study grant from the Directorate of Labour, for up to half of the fees.• <u>Various unions and trade unions</u> have contributed grants towards school fees for students (employed and on leave from work or unemployed members).• <u>The Ministry of Education</u>: with grants. <p><u>Other parties involved:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Eimskip, Air Atlanta, House of Ideas, InnX, The National Theatre, Gufuneschurkyard, Kjaran, individuals, and others:</u>• Eimskip provided a free housing for the first two diploma programmes in 2009.• Air Atlanta rented out furniture at a very low price.• The project manager had her office (for free) in the House of Ideas from September to January 2010 while preparing for Prisma 2010.• The National Theatre lent dozens of comfortable chairs.• Gufunes Churchyard provided for various furniture and furnishing.• The Kjaran company initially provided a free copying machine and later for low rent.• Various individuals lent furniture, decorative, practical and technical items.• In 2010, Prisma is located at Frikkirkjuvegi 11, 101 Reykjavík. The universities only pay minimum rent.
The Idea: (Where did it come from / How did it all start) <p>Prisma is an attempt to combine rational thinking with creative thinking in a university education. It respects rigorous academic research methods whilst facilitating and encouraging a constant creative search and thought processing. These two lines of thinking, acting, exploring and existing constitute different rhythms, which are not generally encouraged or acknowledged in the work place. "Rational thinking rhythm" is mainstreamed in education and the labour market and has been for decades and even centuries. It calls and allows for set of rules, structures, processes and human skills that to a large extent exclude creative potentials, innovation and transformation. It is this statement that defines the starting point for a study programme like Prisma. In essence, it is the believe that the world we live in desperately needs more creative and innovative approach to life on earth.</p> <p>This ideology on which Prisma is based, was relatively well developed by the author of Prisma when she met with the representatives of the Academy of the Arts, University of Bifröst first met to discuss the creation of a new, joint study programme, which, about 2-3 weeks later, became Prisma.</p> <p>These two universities had for some time shared interest in creating an interdisciplinary study programme. Prisma is a good example of how the recession in Iceland opened up new opportunities for innovation, new thinking and new partnerships. The schools expertise, the arts and philosophy, form the bulk disciplines in Prisma. Around 15-30 other disciplines or fields of expertise are then woven into the programme each time. All assignments, workshops and seminars are based on the aforementioned methodology, which constantly draws forth creative, critical and rational thinking in the students.</p> <p>Intuition and venturing into the unknown are the core elements of creativity. The students themselves – their awareness, their attitudes, knowledge and intuition form the core in handling and examining the curriculum. The students are offered cross-sector education and assignments to broaden their knowledge base,</p>

sharpen their creative and critical ability and thus enabling them to connect various professions, fields of study, ideas, discussions and objects.

While Prisma encourages creative and critical thinking, it is in itself an innovation in university education.

Description of the problem or challenge the case is trying to solve (eg. unemployment, lack of skills, societal problems...)

Prisma is for students with matriculation examination or equivalent.

The organisation of Prisma is done with the needs of unemployed individuals in mind.

- It is taught intensively for 8 weeks, which gives the students a chance to continue their search for jobs whilst studying. It enables them to accept jobs with relatively short notice. Hence, it does not engage them long term financially either.
- School fees are relatively low. Partnerships, housing etc. is largely based on good will and all costs are held at a minimum.
- Grants are easily accessible. In some cases labour organisations made already existing grants bigger for their unemployed members accepted into Prisma.
- The state budget requires universities to join forces and meet the requirements of students and labour market and this they did in Prisma.
- Prisma is for people with advance education and very little education, people with little experience or a lot of experience. Apart from the educational value of Prisma, the programme provides its students with a feeling of possibilities. Many of the students have succeeded in starting their own projects, businesses, found their study path or simply kept a positive outlook on life and Icelandic society.
- Prisma has increased the potential of its students to be accepted into higher level studies or their ability to get jobs.
- A lot of the students remark that they found their passion in life in Prisma.
- Prisma is not only an effective reaction to recession and its challenges, but an innovation in education in a longer term perspective.
- Prisma enables students to become more flexible and multi-skilled in the labour market.

As said before, the bulk disciplines are the arts and philosophy. Many related subjects are interwoven into the curriculum, such as; image theory, cultural theory & management, entrepreneurship, design and contemporary style, history of music and communication, creative writing, methodology of visual art and theatre, architecture and city planning, development studies, astrology, physics, history, international relations, communication theory, anthropology, and marketing. In addition, expert guest lecturers visit once a week to inform about the current strategy, research and innovation in Iceland and abroad.

Students gather insight in new and unknown fields, strengthen their ability to work in these fields and become more flexible towards changes in society and towards innovation.

The students are provided with necessary tools, knowledge, experience and support in enhancing their situation, as constructive, creative and critical doers in society, doers who are able to change innovative ideas in to real projects.

Upon completion the students are awarded a Diploma valued at 16 credits, (ECTS) on university level. In many cases, students may have 12 credits (ECTS) assigned towards baccalaureate studies and 6 credits (ECTS) towards a masters degree at Bifröst University and masters degree at the Iceland Academy of the Arts.

The key term in the studies is transformation. The students have a chance to examine changes in society with regard to various aspects under the guidance of experts. In such an environment problems turn into possibilities, hindrances into watersheds and ideological collapse marks a new beginning.

Target group:

Prisma is for people from all parts of society, of all ages and professions; the only prerequisite is that they have passed matriculation examinations or the equivalent. The students come from diverse jobs and

professions, such as finance, business, services, commerce, healthcare, architecture, visual arts, recent graduation from upper secondary school, education, singing and theatre, and the public sector and so on. As said before, the target group is unemployed individuals, although not all students of Prisma belong to that category.

Objectives:

Prisma is a new cross sectoral diploma study programme established by the Iceland Academy of the Arts and Bifröst University in cooperation with the Reykjavik Academy as a reaction to the Icelandic bank collapse in the fall of 2008, increasing unemployment rate and the need and will of people to revise and rethink the current situation, themselves and society in general.

1. Students get or enhance their cross disciplinary knowledge. This enables them to put different disciplines, theories, spheres and tools into context and be more flexible in the labour market as a whole.
2. Increased number of tools. Students are provided with the tools, knowledge, experience and support needed to empower them as constructive, creative and critical participants and doers in society.
3. University education. Students graduate with 16 units (ECTS) which they can also have accepted as part of undergraduate and graduate education in the universities behind Prisma (see section above).
4. Transformation is a key word in Prisma. Students get the chance to observe closely and constructively the changes occurring in society (and in themselves) from various points of views under the guidance of excellent teachers and professionals.

Cooperation: (type, diversity, character, quality, innovation)

- Low budget and flexible project.
- Built on getting support – funding, and through physical objects, such as furniture etc. loaned or donated from various institutions.
- Two educational institutions and a research centre.
- The joining of 123 students and 70-80 highly qualified lecturers and professionals with very different backgrounds, political views, economic stand in a dynamic, creative and critical context.
- The programme seems to have been pushed on by personal commitment of the project manager and designer of Prisma.

Scope (how big, how many people were potentially touched by the project, budget and type of funding)

123 learners
50-60 lecturers
appr. 20 guest speakers
4 facilitators (key teachers in Prisma)

Description of activities / structures / procedures (what was done and how):

1. The first steps in preparation.

The Academy of Arts and Bifröst University assigned Hrund Gunnsteinsdóttur at Krád Consulting, Inc. to draft a new interdisciplinary study programme and a plan of action at the end of October 2008. In the planning stage numerous people were asked for their input, feedback and recommendations of lecturers and facilitators. These were mostly teachers and staff members from the universities and the Reykjavik Academy. Others were specialists known for their insight.

It was clear that the Ministry of Education could not grant funding in order to subsidise the studies. A number of unions were approached to discuss grants to Prisma students and the course was presented to union representatives from The Iceland Confederation of Labour, VR, The Icelandic Journalist Association, SSF, the Icelandic Association of Architects, BSRB and others. The parties expressed their interest and motivation. In the middle of November the draft was approved and a decision reached on implementation.

2. Next steps

Among the goals of the organisers of Prisma was to offer a course that was inexpensive and that made it possible for the unemployed to carry on with their search for a job along with the pursuit of a challenging study programme. Lectures were organised in such a manner that between 40 and 50 lecturers gave lectures on each programme, teaching typically for between 1 and 2 hours. Lecturers provided their expertise in a way that did not require a lot of preparation and nothing more was demanded from them. This arrangement has kept wages at a minimum without having an impact on the quality of the teaching.

The next steps included finding housing suitable for approximately 80 students, furniture and other necessary items cheaply or at no cost at all. A partnership had to be established with the Directorate of Labour in order for unemployed students (cf. 4.5 above) to maintain their benefits. An agreement was also made with the DL and other unions with regards to financial support through grants and subsidies for school fees. Lecturers were approached from various sectors of society, (businesses, organisations, free-lance) and other universities, such as the University of Iceland and Reykjavik University. Four facilitators were hired to maintain their respective group of students and guide them through wide-ranging curricula and original project work. This was e.g. done with 6 hours of seminars each week.

All in all, Prisma consists of between 150-160 hours of lectures and seminars during the period of 8 weeks. This includes 2 individual assignments and 3 group assignments, of which the final grade consists of.

...fish in water...

Initially it was considered that 70 – 80 students had to enrol to break even in the budget. Experience has shown that it is almost impossible to predict the exact number of students, and well in advance Prisma has applied for and received grants from the Ministry of Education to cover most of the differences. It should also be mentioned that in order to implement a programme like Prisma the organisers have had to be like a fish in water, adjusting to constant changes in Iceland, the prevailing uncertainty since the fall of 2008, the situation in the labour market, insecurities in the real estate market and financial instability among students and the universities.

Methods

Pedagogical approach (Detailed description of what kind of learning theories and pedagogical models are used):

While Prisma consists of well known university disciplines, is implemented by universities and fulfils all requirements, rules and regulations of universities, it is impossible to categorise it into any pedagogical approach or method.

Prisma is based on a methodology initially developed through a very personal and a relatively broad based experience and background of the author.

Its dynamism comes from the constant attempt to widen the horizon on the one hand, and from the conflict and convergence between rational and creative thinking and working methods on the other. On top of this, there are highly skilled professionals many of who challenge their own comfort zone in the topic of their own lectures.

If the above is the dynamic aspect, then the magic lies in trust. Prisma is committed to exploring and trusting the intuition of its students, lecturers and facilitators. Passion, intuitive sense of the world and the courage to discover what *could be*, instead of looking only at *what is already there*, are examples of what is important in Prisma. It is important to stress, that this applies not only to students, but also lecturers, facilitators and Prisma's director. Without the trust, creativity cannot flourish. And it is creativity that needs most pampering in universities, not rational thinking. Prisma tries to combine the two together in a solid, harmonious way.

For a cross-disciplinary and critical view-point, an obvious example is philosophy and the arts. Another not as obvious example is anthropology. An anthropologist will provide the students with two tools. The tools are cultural relativism and ethnocentrism. Why? Because they provide us with two highly contradictory, often times politically charged and yet mundane tools with which to see and assess the world around us. The students get familiar with these tools from the lecture and reading material. They then apply on yet another lecture, issue, colleague or an assignment.

Another example is the lecture and seminar about devised theatre methods. Why? Because they provide

the students with tools from a certain strand of doing theatre which can be highly valuable in a strategic planning in a bank or a firm. It is another way of doing compromises, drawing out the best in people and ideas, than what is conventionally taught or conceived of as proper group work in business schools. At the same time, the students gain insight into theatre, often for the first time.

The programme is taught in 3 sessions. During the first session, students do both an individual assignment and a group assignment. During session 2 there is one group assignment and during the last session, there is the third group assignment and the last individual assignment. The group assignment is called Fisher man.

A representative from each of the 3 to 4 groups of students (each with facilitator, they rotate before each new session starts) draw 4-5 tickets from a ball. On one ticket there is a name of a feeling (love, hate, fright, etc). On the second one there is a name of a theory (communism, capitalism, string theory, structuralism etc). On the third one there is a name of a well known person in history (Winston Churchill, Mother Mary, Jane Fonda, Einstein etc.). On the fourth and fifth ticket there can be a name of a well known art creation, one of the elements or a concept. The contents vary, but what happens in that each group has 4-5 "catches" which at first sight have nothing in common. They explore the content of their catch and slowly they begin to see a cosmos from what was first chaotic and made no sense.

They then use their catch as a lens in their group assignment. A lens through which other lectures, seminar, workshops, diary writings and sketches are filtered. During the period of 2-3 weeks they develop their product, which can take any shape or form they choose. It can be a film, an essay, a play, a painting, video, performance, product or design. Whatever the creative work process delivers. They then show/present their product to all the groups and Prisma staff (facilitators and director, and lecturers are also invited) at the end of the session. The day after, they hand in their thesis, which explains in detail the creative work process.

This can be very challenging since creativity is often difficult to observe while happening or put into words. This deepens their understanding of how creativity works. In the thesis they also explain the logic and thought behind their product and in this text they are required to refer rigorously to the reading material, theories and assumptions they have based their research on. One of the requirements is that they know the reading material well enough to be able to use it skilfully to advance their own creative and critical take. They are therefore not asked to give a summary of the reading material or repeat what is said in it, but rather to explain the way it shaped them, analyse and criticise it through their own product.

They are then graded for their thesis and product.

Obstacles to overcome

Outcomes

Prisma has been completed three times in the spring term 2009 (February to June) and in February 2010. The students are aged 19-70, from a variety of backgrounds and varying in education and experience. A total of 123 students have graduated with a Diploma in Prisma.

Statistics on attendance and other matters connected to the results and the resulting benefits.

An evaluation was carried out among all 2009 graduates from Prisma, in October 2009. Fifty-one out of 85 graduated students responded or 60%.

The conclusions show that 84% of respondents are active after graduation, either studying or working. This must be seen as a high proportion considering that most of those graduating were unemployed at the time they started their study in Prisma. About 94% of the students perceived Prisma as being motivating and challenging. The same number would recommend Prisma to others and almost 90% of the respondents found the teaching to be in accordance with the goal and study plan. It should also be mentioned that students' interest in the curriculum grew as the course progressed, from 88% at the start to 94% at the end of the course.

Measurement (How was success measured?)

A teaching survey was submitted during the course of the programmes and at the end of them.

A student at Bifröst University did her masters' thesis on Prisma, her instructor was Gauti Sigþórsson, university lecturer at Greenwich University in England.

Success factors (What made the project successful)

- Personal engagement of the project manager/director
- Pedagogical design
- Multidisciplinary approach
- Commitment of staff members, partnering universities and the Reykjavik Academia.
- A lot of good will from all the partners and collaborators.

Interesting / surprising**Links to additional information and references** (website, publications etc.):

In English: One of the presentations about Prisma and the ideology behind it on:

www.nordvux.net/download/5177/20090910_critical.pdf

In Icelandic:

About Prisma at University of Bifröst website: <http://www.bifrost.is/islenska/namsleidir/prisma-nytt-diplomanam/> - At the bottom of the page you can find the curriculum/description of the programme, click "Hér".

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There are also several links if you google “Prisma diplómanám”, but most of them are in Icelandic.

Contact person (name, email, telephone):

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