

Maastricht, 23 October 2018

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the UM Management Team, I have been asked to respond to the EDview findings which have just been presented to you. At the opening session of the ITK visit yesterday, Cees van Vleuten, Professor of Education at FHML, explained how more than 40 years ago, the UM chose for Problem Based Learning as its central pedagogic method. It was a choice that was made with conviction and enthusiasm; a choice that set us apart from other universities and it was a choice that had key implications for the way we organise our teaching and education more broadly.

The staff involved at the time set about investigating how this method from Canada could best be implemented in Maastricht. Nothing was set in stone yet, and slowly but surely, the fledgling relationship between UM and PBL took shape. PBL has given this university, its employees, its students and alumni a lot and it continues to be an important reason in students' choice for Maastricht.

Still, to keep the PBL spirit alive, it is, -as in any relationship-, important not to simply take PBL for granted, to continue to invest in it and once in while take stock and critically ask whether this is still

what we want. This is exactly what the EDview project has been doing. Does Maastricht University want to continue with PBL in the future? And if so, how can we best do so?

The answer of the exercise is a resounding yes. It is good to see that the support for PBL and its different dimensions of self-direction, collaboration, interdisciplinarity, professional relevance remain very high. PBL still remains one of our key distinguishing characteristics and students and staff are conscious of its added value.

At the same time the students and staff who have participated in the survey and focus groups also indicate that there is work to be done. The success of PBL cannot be taken for granted but asks for a continuous reflection about what can be done better and it requires hard work.

Allow me to develop a couple of issues put forward by the analysis that has just been presented and that need further attention. Firstly, PBL is – and should be – more than just the seven steps. The seven steps are an important instrument to translate the principles of PBL into practice and are very helpful, especially for starting students, but PBL is more than that. It is not a mere party trick. It is important that our teaching staff can experiment with alternative forms and many do so already. It is also important to recognise that there are differences between disciplines and to create room to explore forms that do justice to the challenges and particularities of a particular

field while at the same time respecting the PBL philosophy. We want to nurture an open atmosphere, in which tutors can talk freely about the modifications they deem necessary to make PBL work for their subject matter. We realise that giving tutors this kind of autonomy is very important and motivating. At the same time, we need to avoid the kind of 'anything goes' attitude that would threaten the distinctive character of PBL as it is used at UM.

Keeping the PBL discussion alive also means engaging students: their views and experiences will be indispensable in the future development of PBL. We are dealing with new generations that have grown up in a digital age and it is important to reflect how this affects the activities in the classroom and beyond. Some faculties have already experimented with involving students in the creation of teaching material and make students think about various forms of assessment. This type of interaction creates co-ownership and has proven to be very motivating. We therefore sincerely hope that, moving forward, students will continue to put their hands up as what we call 'experience experts'.

Thirdly, it is also important that we continue to think creatively about the PBL training itself. Here advanced tutor training with more attention for group dynamics could be further explored. Seen the emphasis of PBL on self-study, it may also be a good idea to pay

further attention to how students can better be supported in reflecting on their learning and study process.

Finally, the EDview report shows how important it is to share experiences with one another: within programmes, within faculties, but also across the borders of different faculties. We need to throw our doors and windows wide open – and EDLAB, of course, is a great platform for this. Their ‘Teach Meet’ workshops bringing together staff from all faculties to discuss innovative approaches and best practices in the classroom are a great initiative as it provides a way to keep the discussion about PBL and its concrete implementation going.

Summarising: PBL is more than just small-scale education, which many universities these days claim to provide. Here in Maastricht it’s about a didactic method, a pedagogical philosophy, and it is up to us to continue to develop this philosophy in the classroom. Building on what we have learned over the course of forty years, it can only get more interesting and, in a word, better.

It is up to us as Management Team, together with our vice deans of education, to facilitate this. We realise that we have a crucial responsibility in this respect and we are committed to play our role. At FASoS for example, the findings and recommendations of the EDview report will serve as the starting point for a broader exchange

of views on PBL and its future development. Also the other deans have indicated that they are planning initiatives along the same lines.

And now, all that remains for me is to offer my sincere thanks to the EDview project team: Janneke Frambach, Stella Wasenitz and Sebastian Hühne. We truly appreciate your important work! Also a word of thanks to Harm Hospers, our vice rector of education who played an important role in facilitating this project. And of course, a heartfelt thank you to the many staff members and students who participated in this research. Together we will make PBL in Maastricht even better.

Prof. Sophie Vanhoonacker, on behalf of the UM Management Team