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Eighteenth Issue of the Journal of Problem Based Learning in Higher Education

*Bettina Dahl Søndergaard and Patrik Kjærdsdam Telléus **

EDITORIAL

We are very happy to present volume 11, issue 3 of the Journal of Problem Based Learning in Higher Education. This year, we have already published two special issues, and this is our annual issue. It contains three papers and seven cases. Our number of full papers is smaller compared to what we normally publish but the two special issues have probably taken a few papers that might otherwise have found their way into the annual issue in more normal years. But this does not diminish the fact that we are very proud of this issue communicating essential studies and cases about PBL.

The three papers in this issue are all empirical papers looking into the effects and attitudes of implementing PBL approaches and techniques. They cover three different disciplines: project management in economics, early childhood teacher education, and sex therapy in psychology education, across five different countries, as well as they work with both quantitative and qualitative methods. These varieties in application of PBL and in the scientific research about it, some might consider a weakness. Believing that a less rigor systematics and lack of a dominating theory might produce less solid and equivalent results, thereby weaken the creation of a stronger common understanding of the field. But we believe it is a strength. We do not strive for a PBL unity in terms of well-defined beliefs and exercises. But rather see PBL as an inspiration to develop, test, and support different forms of student centered and contextually anchored pedagogical theories and practices. For that reason, we welcome the varieties, and the encouragement they bring.

Our seven cases, demonstrate the same palette of range and variety, as they come from all over the world – Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Turkey – and from a wide range of disciplines. They show different and very interesting cases of PBL being applied within areas of mathematical modelling, the role of the problem-analysis in PBL, how to use PBL in ergonomics courses, PBL in Global Health Education, PBL in sustainable waste

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management, using PBL to teach an open online Scratch programming course, and PBL compared to lectures in medical education.

We would like to raise a conversation with the readers and reviewers about the reviewing situation. We are extremely grateful for the time and effort each one of our reviewers put into the thoughtful reviews that are so essential for the quality of the journal. Thank you! Without your work, nothing would be published. This is also why we, each year, at the end of the final issue, publish the names of all the reviewers of this year's issues. We wish to show our appreciation, but we also hope that by naming the reviewers, they can get some kind of credit and recognition, or "proof", of their effort. We cannot pay reviewers or promise discounts from our university publishers; something which other and larger publishers sometimes use as a token of appreciation.

However, we, like so many other academic journals, find it increasingly difficult to recruit reviewers. In a recent newsletter from the Danish network *ForskerForum* (Research Forum), it was stated: "Classic peer review is under pressure. In the publishing system, the greatly increased publishing activity makes it difficult for journal editors to recruit peers" (*our translation*; [Forskningsevaluering: På vej tilbage til ansvarlig praksis? - Forskerforum \(dm.dk\)](#)). In our journal, we spend weeks and weeks sending out requests to review, asking a continuously growing mass of researchers, stretching the extent of our knowledge of the researchers we ask, and the specificness of the research field. Given each request adequate time to respond adds even more time between submission and review, to the frustration of us as editors and to the authors awaiting a response to their submission. We also experience that some reviewers have accepted to do a review, but later appear to be unable to perform this task, and must withdraw their acceptance, starting the whole process over again.

We think that a major reason for the difficulty in recruiting reviewers is the abovementioned increased production of scientific papers, hence the increase in demand of finding reviewers. At the same time, researchers need to conform to various benchmarks of which, to our knowledge, doing reviews each year is not included, while publishing papers is included as one of the foremost criteria for academic success and progress. This creates an imbalance between the two activities – submitting papers and reviewing papers – while the two remain interdependent. So, the incentives to submit are explicit and clear, and at the same time, each paper submission requires two reviewers. Nonetheless there are no obvious and visible incentives and therefore likely less motivation to review. This imbalance is something that we as a research community need to address, as the difficulty for journal editors – like us – to find capable reviewers increases literary from issue to issue.

Another matter concerning reviews is the question of language. We have experienced an incidence of some arrogance, at least this is how we have perceived the situation. One person wrote, as part of the explanation as to why this person declined doing a review for

us: “The fact that there are multiple grammatical issues in the abstract is concerning to me”. The issue was, as far as the editorial board could see, that the abstract suffered from two incidences of singular verbs without an s added in the present tense. This strikes at another nerve in publishing. The dominating international language of research is English, of which the person we quoted above, is a native speaker. The board members and most of the authors in our journal, and most researchers in the world are not native English speakers. We have English as minimum our second language, to some it might be the third language. In the light of these facts, we find it important to state that at the stage of review, proper English should not be considered as a necessary obligation if the text is understandable. In the early stages from submission to publication, we believe the focus should be on the issues and studies the authors present, perceiving the authors as multinational and multilingual colleagues. Naturally, the reviews need to be critical and require a high level of quality from the papers, but a review is also part of an ongoing communication and discussion about the research. Hence, feedback to a paper is also a feed-forward; giving advice to a colleague about how to move forward. At the later stages, as a paper comes closer to acceptance, linguistic proofreads are compulsory and a proper scientific English is an essential requirement. Therefore, as a reviewer, we welcome you to comment on language and ask for better language, but please do not make it a prior obligation.

Like always, we would like to thank all the reviewers who have donated their time and wisdom to help improve the papers and cases in this issue:

Stine Bylin Bundgaard, Denmark

Robert Lawlor, Ireland

Barbara Rita Constantinidis, Argentina

Olga Timcenko, Denmark

Nikolaj Johansson, Denmark

Stefan Reinsch, Germany

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Susanne Dau, Denmark

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