

Students' perspectives on the 'Twents Onderwijs Model'

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“Shape the experiences of the young so that instead of reproducing current habits, better habits shall be performed, and thus the future adult society be an improvement on their own”

-

John Dewey

Abstract

Background

The 'Twents Onderwijs Model' (TOM) is the new educational system of the University of Twente and divides the minds concerning its suitability. It builds upon problem-based and project oriented learning which comes back especially in the central aspect of project work. The TOM has been evaluated and monitored by the university throughout its first academic year of 2013/2014. These evaluation studies used quantitative and qualitative research methods to investigate the staff's views on the educational systems and quantitative methods in the form of questionnaires to examine the students' views. This study contributes to the evaluation of the TOM by using qualitative research methods to explore the students' perspectives on the 'Twents Onderwijs Model'.

Objective

The present study was designed firstly, to explore how the students learn and develop and secondly, to indicate areas for general improvement.

Methods & results

The study is based on a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with 15 TOM-students. Major findings indicate the experience of a high workload, the presence of stress and occasional adverse effects on personal wellbeing, a prevailing result-directed character of learning, a lack of support of personal development, a successful support of academic development, and an appreciation towards providing structure primarily in the form of partial tests. Furthermore it comes to the fore that the experience of stress is related to the experienced workload and certain regulations.

Conclusion

The preceding findings indicate great room for improvement and especially point out a need for improvement regarding the experience of stress and the character of learning. It is discussed that intrinsic motivation plays a major role in the context of problem-based learning and could accordingly be an adequate way to advance the character of learning.

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Introduction

The ‘Twents Onderwijs Model’ (TOM) is the new educational system of the University of Twente. It is an often addressed topic and evokes different opinions within the university. In some places it divides the minds and polarizes from supporting to opposing (University of Twente, 2012; Elferdink, 2013; Meijer, 2012). It has been introduced mainly for two reasons: On the one hand as a reaction on the shift in our society regarding changing working contexts and on the other hand due to financial pressure from the government bound to dropout rate and long-term students (University of Twente, 2012). The overall implementation of the TOM in September 2013 was preceded by two pilot studies within ‘Bio-medical Technology’ and ‘Electrical Engineering’ over 2 years (Steens & van den Berg, 2013).

The roots of the TOM reach back 30 years to the University of Aalborg which introduced a project-oriented and problem based education system in 1974. It became a source of inspiration for many other universities which followed the layout of their educational system (Kolmos, Fink, & Krogh, 2006). Also the University of Twente drew on the idea of project-oriented and problem based education which comes back in the central concept of project work (University of Twente, 2012). It constitutes one of the five key ideas which consist of (1) education in thematic modules, (2) working in projects, (3) being self-responsible, (4) learning in social context and (5) helping students quickly to the right study (University of Twente, 2015). Furthermore partial tests instead of a final exam, mark an important change in the trimestrial educational system, as well as the binding study advice (BSA)¹ combined with 15 EC modules.

Regarding the topicality and the social relevance of this topic, research on the Twents Onderwijs Model is of major importance. Earlier evaluation studies contained qualitative research methods as well as quantitative research methods to examine the staff’s perspectives and opinions. Furthermore the students’ views are investigated with the help of quantitative methods in the form of the university-internal Student Experience Questionnaire (SEQ). Regarding the situation of the students, one of the main topics for improvement which comes to the fore is that many students experience a high workload. On the one hand rated by the students themselves and on the other hand mentioned by the staff (Steens & Oude Alink, 2014a, p. 15; Steens & Oude Alink, 2014d, p. 17;). It is mentioned that one of the causes for the high workload is that students have to pass every component of the module. Together with the

¹ The binding study advice requires the students to earn 45 of 60 EC points in the first year, which means passing three of the four modules

binding study advice of 45 EC Points, it seems to evoke fear of failure under students. This in turn can lead students to learn from test to test, with the focus on passing, which ends up in learning the knowledge fragmented, instead of integrated (Steens & Oude Alink, 2014a, p. 15). In line with this, the SEQ indicates that on average more than 30 percent of the students rated the workload as too high within the first year. Additionally between 40 and 50 percent of the students stated that they do not have enough time to prepare for the tests (Steens & Oude Alink, 2014d, p. 65).

Concerning inconsistencies between the findings that on the one hand the students rate their overall satisfaction with an average of only 6.0 on a scale to 10 and on the other hand that about 75 percent of the students would recommend others their study, Steens and Oude Alink indicate shortcomings of the overall satisfaction ratings (Steens & Oude Alink, 2014d, p. 44). Accordingly Steens and Oude Alink recommend to conduct further evaluations to portray the students' experiences as precisely as possible (Steens & Oude Alink, 2014d, p. 8).

This study contributes to the evaluation of the TOM and in specific to the students' perspectives by means of a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews. Hereby it is possible to explore the students' views in-depth in order to unveil eventual undetected perspectives. Also this approach will shed light on the students' thoughts, feelings and ideas, through which a deeper understanding of the 'how' and 'why' can be achieved, regarding the students' experience of their study. The results can then be used as a source of input for both improvement of the educational system and improvement of the SEQ.

Since the layout of the Aalborg model was primarily focused on studies within the technical field, it is an interesting perspective to shed light on the suitability for studies with definitely less technical learning contents (Kolmos, 2009, p. 261). Accordingly, the focus of the present study lies within the faculty of behavioral sciences, in specific the study psychology, because it is also interesting how project-oriented and problem based learning is compatible with a study that originates in the Humanities.

Finally, the most important issues regarding education are the students' learning process and their development, for these are the essences of higher education. Therefore these two aspects will receive special attention in this research. According to the preceding aspects, the present study was designed to (1) explore how the students learn and develop and (2) indicate areas for general improvement.

Methods

The method of this research is a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with a length between 30 and 60 minutes. It was chosen for a semi-structured interview scheme to compare various statements on same topics which makes the interviews comparable. But this interview form also grants the participants more freedom within the conversation, which enables to gather new opinions and perspectives that were not mentioned earlier.

Participants

15 participants were interviewed of which 8 female and 7 male students and 3 students of Dutch ethnicity and 12 students of German ethnicity. 12 of these psychology students studied in the second year, whereas 2 students were from the first year. One of these first-year students decided to quit the study within the next weeks. Additionally the 15th participant is a former student who changed the university after his first year in the TOM. After the first interviews, it was noticed that the second-year students were already more reflected upon the topic compared to the first-year students. This led to the decision to further recruit primarily the more experienced and reflected group of second year students, although this did further exclude students who would not pass the first year or students who would decide on their own to quit.

The participants were selected by snowball and convenience sampling while paying attention to involve a diversity of students, ranging from TOM-supporting to TOM-disapproving students. In the end, the researcher categorized 3 students as TOM-supporting, 4 students as TOM-disapproving and 8 students as standing between these two poles.

Prior to the interview the participants signed an informed consent brochure which informed them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, the respectful dealing with their privacy, the guarantee of anonymity and the reward of 1 point for Sona Systems.

Furthermore, at the beginning of the interview the participants were instructed that they do not need to represent a certain opinion, but that the research is about their personal experience and their personal point of view.

Apparatus

The interviews were recorded with the handheld audio recorder 'Zoom H1' and afterwards transcribed for the analysis.

Procedure

At first, the researcher's reflection on personal prejudices towards the situation was important to prevent possible failures concerning confirmation bias. This attitude should have come back in all parts of the study, especially in conducting the interview and analyzing the data. The initial interview framework was oriented alongside a few central topics and key ideas within the TOM and the two concepts learning and development. It was refined by two pilot interviews, through which many points were implemented into the interview framework². The transcribed interviews were analyzed in 'Atlas.ti' without an existing coding frame, which resulted in 153 codes that represent recurring statements or views. These 153 codes were classified into thematic topics which led to 16 code families. Subsequently this coding frame was revised, translated into English and redundancy was minimized, which produced the final coding frame containing 90 codes within 15 code families. In the end all interviews were analyzed a second time using the final coding frame to improve the dependability.

Results

The main themes which come to the fore through the analysis of the interviews are 'project work', 'partial tests', 'workload', 'psychological aspects', 'learning', 'development', 'regulations' and 'organization'. Accordingly this chapter is divided into subchapters following the main topics. Besides there are some less extensive themes which are presented altogether in the additional subchapter 'miscellaneous'. The overall chapter is completed with a view on the noticeable relations between findings on 'workload', 'regulations' and 'psychological aspects'. Furthermore every subchapter begins with an overview over the various perspectives regarding the theme. The perspectives are presented without the precise quantities of participants who mentioned the statements to underline the qualitative character of the study. Otherwise the numbers could create the impression of being an instrument to claim representativeness.

² The interview framework can be found in the appendix

Project work

Table 1. Overview over the perspectives on project work

Deepening of academic skills through application within project
Psychological knowledge comes back only slightly
Prepares for later work situations – working in a team
Role-taking
Time consuming
Self-responsibility and freedom in working process
Instructions too vague
Feedback sometimes unhelpful / bad
Main theme sometimes too technological
Quality of project work suffers under time pressure.

Generally all participants valued the concept of the project as positive and support the method of applying the theoretical learning material within project work. The idea of deepening the theory through putting it into practice seems promising for all participants, however the views differ regarding the success of this idea. Most respondents think that competence-based learning material, like statistics and academic skills, like academic writing comes back in the project work to a great extent. But the application of theoretical learning material in the project, like psychological knowledge seems to come back only slightly. Furthermore it seems that in a module with more technological knowledge, more learning content comes back in the project work, which is stated by one participant. The following quotations illustrate these views:

“Also rather things like, how do write an article? How do you do a research? Working with spss, with atlas.ti. Rather these things. Practical research work” (Participant 1)

“I believe the book was really 700 or 800 pages thick. And in the end it were 40-50 pages that were linked to the project. And then we rather got other sources for the project, which we should use or we should search on our own, instead of really linking to the reading, as it was planned in my opinion” (Participant 6)

“With Design and Research, it is more like that, because we also have the subject eHealth and there... we have this Roadmap Model [...] on electronic and

technological basis and that comes back in the project quite well. Many things you learn for the test, you understand better in the project. But with the other thing [psychological knowledge], honestly said: I don't think so" (Participant 8)

Furthermore several participants think that the project work is preparing them for later work situations. They learn to work in a team and to deal with difficult group situations which are competences that come back in later working contexts. Still, a few participants state that it is difficult to handle not-working group members, because nine weeks of project work are in some cases too short to realize that somebody is not working properly and benefitting from the others. Also role-taking is connected to the project work, as a few participants indicate. They learn to find their own role within the group work context which contributes to some extent to the development of their identity. But one participant states that it also gives the possibility to avoid parts of the project work, which one does not like:

"I realized that I cheat a bit within the group work, for example the statistics part is always given to the one who is good at statistics. That is also somehow stupid. That's some kind of group mistake." (Participant 10)

Several participants state that the project work is very time-consuming, because you have to coordinate everything with the group members and make appointments. Further on, the project work seems to promote self-responsibility within the working progress according to what some participants state. One participant mentions, that within the project, the students have more freedom in the working progress, which gives them the opportunity to be creative, which is illustrated by the following quotation:

"You can also work creatively here and you have the possibility to involve the literature that you find interesting. That it is possible in this project frame to work more freely than usual. [...] Thereby the learning and working is much more easy for me" (Participant 3)

Eventually contradictory to that, several participants mention that the instructions for the project work are too vague, which leads to more work when they have to rewrite whole parts after having received feedback on their 'wrong' work. They state that it should be clearer beforehand what is expected of them. Besides the opinions on the quality of feedback differ a lot. The varying experiences of feedback quality seem to depend on the respective docent or tutor:

"In the first two modules I had [name of docent] [...] With him you could talk very

good and he helped you properly. And if he didn't know something, he went immediately to look it up and fix it. But others, for example in the third module I had [name of docent], I don't want to talk mean about him, but from our point of view he was the personalization of incompetence” (Participant 6)

Several participants rate the third module of the first year negatively, because they find it too technological and too far away from psychology. Additionally a few participants desire more practice within the field of clinical psychology, in the sense that competences like professional communication skills from a psychological perspective play a bigger role within the first year. Many participants state that the quality of the project is suffering under time pressure. Some describe, that through the time pressure their working process within the project is characterized by achieving a grade to pass, rather than by working towards a qualitatively good work. The following quotation illustrates this point:

“We had no time for that. And in my opinion, if you work on a project, you also want to make something cool and good out of it. When we for example should invent such an intervention, in our group it was like, we write something down as fast as possible, for what we get a grade, which is halfway ok. But not really like: Ok, we invent something really creative to realize our ideas” (Participant 1)

Partial tests

Table 2. Overview over the perspectives on partial tests

Gives structure and prevents procrastination
Compensation is good
Helps students with exam anxiety
Evoke moments of revising earlier learning material
You may not fail a single test
Too many tests and/or too much learning material for given timespan

Generally, nearly all participants support the concept of partial tests. They like the given structure and many participants mention that it prevents them from procrastinating, as the following quotation illustrates:

“It is actually a good idea, because you get a scheduled learning process and you can work more structurally, so that you do not need to do everything in the end”

(Participant 13).

The regulation of compensation between tests of a single subject is evaluated positively by several students, because on the one hand they can compensate a test on a “*bad day*” or if they “*experienced something more difficult*” (Participant 15) and on the other hand it gives the students feedback on their learning performance so that they can adjust their effort throughout the module if it was not enough, as one participant states. Additionally one participant mentions the advantages for students who have acute exam anxiety. They benefit from various partial tests combined with compensation instead of a large single exam. A few participants propose to allow compensation between subjects to pass a module or even to allow compensation between modules in order to reduce the overall difficulty or strictness of regulations. Furthermore one participant states that through the concept of partial tests, repetition of the learning material can take place, if later tests also pick up content of the earlier tests:

“The last partial test is the first two tests added up plus a bit extra subject matter. So, you are actually rehearsing and that works for many people” (Participant 14).

Many participants experience that they may not fail a single partial test, because it is too difficult to acquire a grade with which they can compensate a bad grade. The following quotations illustrates this experience:

“if you perform poorly on one, it is nearly impossible to compensate it, depending on the subject. So you may hardly perform poorly” (Participant 4)

“You have the feeling as if you may not take one wrong step” (Participant 5)

Moreover, many participants state that there are too many partial tests in the first year, and that the learning material is too much for the given timespan. This leads to great pressure for many participants and a few suggest to either conduct fewer tests or to reduce the learning material, to make it more bearable:

“but either you have to take less subject matter into the test, so that it is only like a test for which you do not have to learn so much, only one day before for example, or you have to arrange it the way, that you have less of them” (Participant 1)

Workload

Table 3. Overview over the perspectives on workload

Workload too high

Could sometimes be better distributed

Not enough free time

Sacrifice of social-time

No time to work beside the study

Regarding the workload, most participants rate the workload as too high whereas several participants find the workload acceptable or have no problems with it at all. The experiences range from participants who describe that they have no time for any private life and invest 10 hours every day in the week, to participants who tell that they only invest some hours per day, have a free weekend and who find it difficult to understand why their fellow students have trouble with the workload. Also students seem to leave out lectures due to time pressure:

“[R:] You said that you have cut back everything. Then how was the proportion between freetime and study? [P:] Actually there was none... Certainly not in the first module. [R:] Certainly not what? [P:] Well, I can’t really remember that I ever did something else.” (Participant 10)³

“Now, I don’t go to the lecture at all, because I don’t have time for that. Was the same with nearly all my friends that we did not go to the lecture anyway, but partly we also left out the mandatory tutorials” (Participant 6)

“A great number of people find it very stupid, because they have so much pressure with learning, but that isn’t so terrible. If you do every day a bit, well, then you can for sure have a life beside it [...] Look, if you do everything at the last moment, then you have pressure. But that is always the case, I think. [...] I think that it is simply a question of assigning your time.” (Participant 15)

Many participants evaluate especially the first year as overloaded with work. This experience is also mentioned by the two first year students, of which one decided to quit in consequence of the high workload:

“But even if I would pass like that, I would not do that, because I think I cannot bear this – that is too much for me” (Participant 2)

³ [R:] = Researcher, [P:] = Participant

Yet many participants show a readiness to invest effort in the study and state that the study should demand commitment from the students, but that the pressure is exceeding acceptable limits:

“Perhaps somehow a balance between free time and study. Simply more balance. I would be willing, and I want, that it demands something from me. That you have to do something for it, actually I find that not so bad. But that you still have time to do what you want at the weekend” (Participant 1)

Accordingly most participants complain about having not enough free time for their own interests, independent from the study. The following quotation demonstrates probably a more distinct form of this perspective:

“I have the idea that I have to fully devote three years to the study and that I have time again for these things afterwards. That became clear to me, after a half year. [...] I think I cannot even manage to do some sport beside the study. I have to manage that somehow, indeed, even during the study, because I think it is really important. But these things, but also to have more time for myself and for things I want to learn or do, like learning a new language or I absolutely want to learn to sew; learning to play an instrument. I could never do that now. Would not work, I think.” (Participant 9)

Several participants mention that the workload should be better distributed, because some modules contained peak periods of workload and easier periods. Some participants report to sacrifice a lot of ‘social-time’ in order to cope with the workload. ‘Social-time’ here means time for establishing contacts and socializing. Also several participants dislike that they have no time at all to work beside the study. One participant tells about his fellow students who did have to work within the summer vacation and reports that they had no recreational period and were still stressed when the second year began in September.

Psychological aspects

Table 4. Overview over the perspectives on psychological aspects

Stress
Fear of failure
Constant pressure to learn
No relaxing and inner calm
Negative influence on wellbeing

A major aspect which came to the fore in the interviews is that nearly all participants describe the study and the learning process as inherently connected to stress. Participants mention several causes which evoke the experienced stress. One of these causes is the high workload:

“Because we simply have a weekly test, parallel to that, we need to prepare for the lectures and tutorials, parallel to that we have project groups and weekly deadlines plus individual assignments. That isn’t working at all, you have absolutely no time and it is far too much stress at once” (Participant 5)

Also some regulations regarding the study are likely to play a role. The BSA and the ‘0 or 15 points’ regulation seem to put much pressure on the students’ minds:

“And of course this pressure that you may only fail one module. And if you really want this study and actually are afraid all the time: Oh my god, if I do not pass the test, almost everything is lost. That is much pressure” (Participant 5)

“Last year I had considerable stress with every test especially in the first module, because I didn’t pass the first one, so it was like: I have to pass everything now, otherwise I just do not pass the module and then perhaps you do not pass the first year either, but finally it came out good. But in the meantime it evokes considerable stress, because you are all the time busy with: I have to pass that, I have to pass that” (Participant 11)

Another regulation is that the students have to retake the whole module in the next year, if they do not pass it. They try to avoid this case, because they do not want to invest so much effort, due to failing a single subject.

“I experience the pressure in the way that I simply know, if I do not get it now, I do not have the possibility to retake a single subject, but have to retake a whole module. That is a quite strong pressure” (Participant 8)

Furthermore the feeling of ‘you may not fail a partial test’ and the regulation that students may only do a retake if their overall grades are good enough, evokes stress as illustrated by the following quotations:

“but that you have the fear; that you have one week for a subject, you couldn’t allow

yourself to fail once. At least it was my impression. [...] Then it was simply the pressure that you try to pass every test” (Participant 9)

“you may only fail a certain number of subjects. So when I fail three subjects, that I may not have a retake. What in turn also increases the pressure” (Participant 5)

Besides, the aspect that students have no possibility to compensate for illness is mentioned as a cause for stressful study circumstances:

“that there is no possibility of retaking a test when you are ill, that is simply very harsh. [...] That is a pressure which is not acceptable” (Participant 7)

Finally the exam type or setup of the exam questions seems to be responsible for the feeling that principally you can study yourself to death:

“[R:] Why can you study yourself to death? What is responsible for that? – [P:] That is because of the questions that the docents are posing [...] That means that you have to learn every single detail for the tests to get a really good grade. But in the end, that is not possible in practice” (Participant 13)

One of the aspects of the study stress, namely the fear of failure, came already to the fore in some of the preceding quotations. Some participants experience this fear of failure which is connected to the students’ commitment towards the study and the deep fear of the eventual loss. The first of the following quotations illustrates this feeling and the second quotation shows a participant who got rid of this fear by attaching less value to the study:

“In the first quarter of the year it was totally terrible for me, because I was afraid the whole time. I felt as if I were on a mine field and if I take one wrong step, everything will explode. Because I simply had the feeling: I may not allow myself anything, I mean taking no wrong step, because otherwise my life simply, ... because otherwise I have to stop here and everything I wanted, I couldn’t do anymore. And psychology here was my only possibility. I knew that I could neither study here any more nor somewhere else in the Netherlands and for sure not in Germany. That would have destroyed everything. Just everything I dreamt about for my future” (Participant 9)

“And then simply to say: If you do not pass it, it is simply that way. Especially, you have these 45 EC that you need to study further. And in the third or fourth module I said to myself: Hey, if that is not enough or you did not pass that, it is simply that way” (Participant 13)

That fear of failure seems to lead students to the feeling of a constant pressure to learn. Many students report that it is a thought which is constantly present in the background:

“It is always on your tail. I have a lot of stress, so that I say: Hey, I cannot go out with you, I cannot take free one day, I have no time to do a movie night or something alike with you, because you think all the time: I have to pass, I have to pass” (Participant 5)

Another aspect connected to the experience of stress is the absence of moments of relaxation and moments of ease of mind, which many participants state. This feeling is closely linked to the feeling of a constant pressure to learn as the following citation shows:

“There are few periods in which it is really possible for the student to relax without a guilty conscience. To take breaks. These breaks he has to take consciously, but still it feels like I just told. After this weekend where I did nothing, I have a deficit. I have a guilty conscience. On Monday I had the feeling that I had to work at the weekend to advance with the learning material. What doesn't mean that I did not work on Friday until the afternoon.” (Participant 3)

Unfortunately many students report that they know fellow students who suffer from a negative influence on the wellbeing connected to stress. Some state that there are students who did quit the study because of this aspect and few students also tell about their experiences regarding the influence of stress on their wellbeing. Some of these experiences are portrayed by the following quotations:

“really a very deep fear, that you do not succeed, that you fail and that it is also the last chance and then you forget ... simply to live. With eating, everything is only focused to somehow succeed and I cut back everything in all fields. There I really felt a sort of fear, I did not know before” (Participant 10)

“When you then had vacation at some point. Then I always woke up with a racing heart at 9 or 10 o'clock, looked at the clock and thought: Oh god. That really took some days until you got out of this again. That you really had nothing to do, that was ... very strange [...] I also got severe neurodermatitis after the first year. I had it earlier as a child and I got it again when the vacation began. And I think that has a lot to do with this year, because you get neurodermatitis when having stress” (Participant 9)

Some participants also state that above all, in the beginning of the study the pressure is too high. They have the feeling of being thrown in at the deep end because of a high workload in the

beginning period where the new students at first have to orientate. Several participants state that you had to write an exam in the second week, although at first it takes some time to get the books for learning. Furthermore the new situation brings about aspects as getting to know new people, orientating within the university systems and living on your own for the first time:

“because you have to learn a lot of things at the beginning of the study. I had luck that I studied here earlier, so that I already knew many things of blackboard and Osiris and how everything works and how you register. But the first two quarters were very difficult for many people, because all these things came in addition. And you had to learn to live on your own. [...] I saw a lot of people who were knocked off their feet”
(Participant 14)

Learning

Table 5. Overview over the perspectives on learning

Link to practice
Superficial instead of deep learning
Too much learning content for given timespan
One does not remember the theoretical learning contents so much
Not enough time to deepen own interests
Not enough time to reflect on learning content
Result-directed learning
Learning in social context
Language ability has impact on learning tempo
More freedom in learning process
More pleasure with learning
More from intrinsic motivation

All participants highly value the linking of learning material to practice as already pointed out in the subchapter on project work. There it is also shown that most participants rate the application of competence-based learning material as a success, but indicate that the theoretical psychological learning material is not implemented enough. Complementing this view, some participants mention that they would like to have even more practice in their study. Following this, it comes to the fore that by linking to practice, the learning contents are processed more

deeply, but that this effect is absent for the greater part regarding the theoretical psychological learning contents as the following quotations show:

“When you simply read some theory 95000 times, on which the project is based, of course it is deepened” (Participant 10)

“I believe the book was really 700 or 800 pages thick. And in the end it were 40-50 pages that were linked to the project. And then we rather got other sources for the project, which we should use or we should search on our own, instead of really linking to the reading, as it was planned in my opinion” (Participant 6)

Further on, many participants state that to a large extent the quality in learning is fading to the background. This has been already mentioned concerning the project work and also regarding the theoretical psychological knowledge this seems to occur, due to a lack of time to truly focus and dive into the learning contents. This is described by several participants as ‘superficial learning’:

“When I learn, I try to understand a topic in the way that it helps, or can help me in my life. I try to understand theories properly, so that I never forget them or I try to deal with arguments really deeply so that I mastered them. But it is such a mass of information, that you cannot succeed to master everything and thereby you learn very superficial. That’s a pity.” (Participant 3)

Nearly all participants state, that the central problem is the amount of learning material for the given timespan. This aspect of too much learning content for the given timespan appears to be related to the following four views. First, many participants characterize the learning process as ‘fast and memorizing’:

“But it was too much to really dive into it in order to understand it. You simply had to learn it by heart, very very very fast and as good as possible, to apply it in the test and I would have gladly taken more time for it, to simply understand it and learn it with more pleasure, so that you also remember it” (Participant 9)

Secondly, most participants report that they do not remember a lot of the learned information:

“that I have the feeling, that nowadays plenty of learning content is tested and that this goes at the cost of the true learning process. That you have to learn things so fast, that you also have forgotten them quickly” (Participant 4)

Thirdly, many participants complain that they do not have the time to deepen interesting parts of the literature:

“I simply realize, I work on things that I find incredibly exciting, but I actually have too little time for these things. Not to mention to have time to deal further with the topic” (Participant 3)

And in the fourth place, several participants express that they lack the time to reflect upon the learning content what is portrayed by the following quotation:

“Because in order that something stays on your mind, you have sometimes to think it over and check if it makes sense to yourself, what the author has written. Personally, I did not have much time for that. And I think it is necessary that you somehow internalize it. Otherwise it is rather learning by heart and that is quickly forgotten” (Participant 1)

Another central experience is result-directed learning, which already partly came to the fore in the preceding quotations. Most participants report clearly that they rather learn to pass the test, assignment or project work, instead of learning meaningfully and profoundly which would extensively enhance their understanding of the topics. It seems to prevail learning for the test instead of learning for a deep understanding of the learning content and its contexts:

“Well, I pay a lot of attention to: What is now important to pass and what is perhaps less important. And I set clear priorities, what is also a pity, because it inhibits the process of diving into something and dealing extensively with something, because you simply always have the next test or deadline in mind, for which you always think: Ok, quickly multiple choice, learning by heart” (Participant 7)

Furthermore a positive point which comes to the fore is the promoting effect of learning in social context. Multiple participants state that it enhanced the learning process when they discussed the learning content with peers. Also the project group plays a role in relation to learning in social context. The fact that group members are dependent on each other's work appears to have a positive influence on the students' discipline:

“Now, I realized again that I learned so much about social psychology, where I learned together with [name of fellow student]. Where you simply discussed and not only read, highlighted and summarized; that I remember thereof incredibly much [...] we rather had that in the beginning. Real tutorials, where you simply talk and discuss it with others. And that lacked a little bit here and there” (Participant 10)

“It motivates, I think. Personally, when I am busy on my own, I am quite easily distracted like: Well, nobody has a problem with it, then I can shortly do this or that, but when you are busy with a group, you don’t want that the rest has a disadvantage, because you are just busy with something else. Then you are really focused on the work”
(Participant 11)

Several participants mention language ability as a factor which has impact on learning tempo. A few students with a German ethnic background state that at the beginning of the study, the just acquired Dutch language has influence on the information processing regarding learning. Furthermore one student who has a Dutch ethnic background thinks that instead of the language ability of Dutch, the language ability of English plays a more important role, because most of the readings are in English. In this context it also plays a role that students with a German ethnic background who quickly learn Dutch before the beginning of the study, experience that their English language ability declines severely. Further on, several participants desire more freedom in the learning process. It is mentioned that it is difficult to learn properly when you cannot concentrate fully on one aspect. You have to regularly switch between theory, project work and assignments, because the next test or deadline is forcing you. Another recurring experience is that there is often hardly pleasure with the learning process. Most participants report that experience and it also seems to be due to the amount of learning content and the time pressure:

“I could always make good progress. Then it is also a pleasure. I mean, I like learning new things. But here it is simply the way that I learned a page and then I looked up, how many still to go, and there was no end in sight. When you later looked back to see how much you remembered; there stayed nothing on your mind or I could not remember anything and then you don’t have this feeling of progress. And then it’s not fun. It is important that you can achieve something with learning; that I really make progress and that’s not the case at the moment” (Participant 2)

“you go to the university, you found the subject you like, and that is the case. Well, when I really have time to read the books, I think: That’s really interesting, totally cool. That makes fun, you read it with fascination, but when you have to learn it with this pressure: You must read it now, you must press it into your head, you must know it on Friday. You must, you must, then the pleasure in what you want to do, is missing. Then it is not becoming your passion any more, that is simply gone” (Participant 6)

Already in the previous quotations, it came to the fore that many participants seem to have an intrinsic motivation and interest to learn. This is also seen back in several other interviews and additionally illustrated with the following quotation:

“I think that learning means to me that you enhance your knowledge out of curiousness, thus that something is coming from yourself whereby you want. That’s very important to me. And I miss that in some moments within this study [...] At a certain moment it was a must. And that’s not pleasant anymore. I think that learning also has to be something very pleasant” (Participant 14)

Furthermore the following quotation illustrates the view of one participant who tells about his idea of a good educational system regarding the aspects of intrinsic motivation, deepening own interests and through this, shaping own identity:

“I think I imagine it in the following way: Three days in the week structured lessons with obligation, but that the workload is doable. And then implement in the last two days something like studium generale⁴. [...] if mandatory or not, that’s still the question, but simply where everybody can choose from a really wide range of subjects. Let it be history, philosophy, political sciences, languages. But these are only my interests. Choosing from the completely wide range of things. That would be interesting. Art. I also considered to do art in the minor. Then you can see if you go into art therapy⁵. That are all things I would like to try out. Political psychology. Very interesting topic. No time to deal with.” (Participant 3)

Development

Table 6. Overview over the perspectives on development

Developing academic skills to a great extent
Self-responsibility
Getting organized, disciplined, efficient and eager
Shaping own identity / developing personal profile
Not enough time for personal development beyond the academic frame
Extracurricular experience important

⁴ ‘Studium generale’: The idea that students can assign a certain amount of EC points to subjects from a wide range of disciplines.

⁵ ‘Art therapy’: a therapeutical discipline connecting the fields of psychotherapy and art

Regarding the theme ‘development’, two different conceptions of development come to the foreground: Firstly the academic development in the form of having learned to write academically, to search literature, to make use of quantitative and qualitative research methods, how to do a good presentation, in short: how to perform research. Secondly the development of a personal profile in the form of exploring own interests, reflection in the general sense, defining the own position in relation to the environment, in short: shaping own identity. It needs to be noticed that some students implicitly consider academic development as personal development or have to think outside their box to see a difference between the two conceptions. Regarding the first conception of development, the development of academic skills seems to take place sufficiently. Some participants state that especially the project work and the assignments deepens the academic competences. The following quotation illustrates this view:

“I also think that when the tom students are close to the bachelor thesis, they have an enormous advantage, simply because they learned from the first week how to do research and how you write academically” (Participant 12)

Further on, there are views on the aspect of self-responsibility which have to be differentiated. On the one hand some students desire more self-responsibility and experience the obligation to attend a lot of lectures and tutorials plus the forced structure of partial tests as hindering to develop self-responsibility. On the other hand several students describe the working progress within the project work as promoting self-responsibility. Besides, participants mention four traits of character that are fostered by the study, which are ‘organized’, ‘disciplined’, ‘efficient’ and ‘eager’. The following citation includes two of these:

“Of course you are put to work. That is something I did not have earlier. I was a lazy bitch. You need a certain eagerness to get through here. Without it you don’t succeed” (Participant 7)

Regarding the second conception of development, the statements of several participants seem to indicate insufficient support and time for their personal development. Yet one participant states that he reads the media more critically related to the understanding of validity and reliability and one participant mentions that project work helps students to find their role in group work situations. Also several participants report to experience personal development. But the overall impression remains, that the study is not fostering personal development. Many participants experienced the subject ‘development of talents’⁶ as a trial to promote personal

⁶ In original Dutch: ‘Talentontwikkeling’

development but rate it as a total failure, because they seem to experience it as qualitatively bad and “*it comes too much from the outside*” (Participant 3). The following quotation gives a detailed impression of an interesting perspective of one participant regarding shaping the own identity or developing a personal profile:

“Vacation, free time. Students have to learn, to be able to deal with themselves. I mean this is an essential period in life. There they need time for self-study, intrinsic interests. To see, who am I actually? What do I want to do later? Developing an own profile and for that, breaks are essential. [...] Especially in this critical period, the beginning 20’s, where many are ready with school, grew up at home earlier and then come to the university, where they have little time to find themselves. Actually, I think that this is a very important process or important years of your life. Beginning 20’s, where you realize, that you get independent” (Participant 3)

Furthermore some participants mention that there is simply not enough time for personal development. For several participants everything seems to be limited to the academic frame which is illustrated with this quotation:

“I have the idea that I have to fully devote three years to the study and that I have time again for these things afterwards. That became clear to me, after a half year. [...] also to have more time for myself and for things I want to learn or do, like learning a new language or I absolutely want to learn to sew; learning to play an instrument. I could never do that now. Would not work, I think.” (Participant 9)

Complementing this, several students state that they experience development which is evoked by extracurricular activities. In relation to that some desire the possibility to do internships because they think that on the one hand this is another form of important experience to develop oneself and on the other hand that it helps students to evaluate if later they really like to work in this working field. The following quotation illustrates the positive potential of extracurricular experience in the form of social contact and activity in a student organization:

“I did develop in the first year and developed personally in a positive way [...] I think that it is rather due to the environment. Well, I really had luck with the environment, with the people I got to know. Or also this function in [student organization], where you have to stand in front of the international students and have to arrange everything. And not so much due to the TOM, to be honest” (Participant 6)

Regulations

Table 7. Overview over the perspectives on regulations

0 or 15 EC points regulation
No possibility of being ill etc. without getting into (more) trouble with workload
Retakes should not be a privilege
More retake possibilities
Compensation between subjects

The most striking result regarding the regulations within the study is that most participants experience the ‘0 or 15 EC points’ regulation as unfair or unjust. The students mention the following points of critique: Firstly they find it unfair to fail the whole module when you are good in all subjects except one. Most participants state that by this you do not get the deserved reward for your achievements in the subjects you passed. They want to get rewarded for the things they have done good, otherwise it is same “*as if I was not there that three months*” (Participant 9). Secondly, one participant criticizes that you have to redo a whole module when you fail, which directly leads to study delay of a quarter of the year. And thirdly one participant finds it odd that you have to do subjects again that you actually have done good. Another aspect concerning regulations is that some participants state that it is not possible to be ill or otherwise impeded on the day of a partial test or to be ill for one or two weeks. In the first case several participants experience that you cannot afford to miss a partial test due to illness or another reason because that actually leads directly to a ‘reparation’⁷ or if your overall grades are not good enough, directly to failing the whole module:

“but at the time of the test my grandfather had cremation, he passed away. And that counted as an attempt and you got automatically a ‘1’ and then you had to do reparation and this, I didn’t like. Because I thought: It is not that I like to go to my grandfather cremation and like to miss the test, I simply cannot do something about it. Why does it then count as an attempt?” (Participant 11)

One participant also reports that a fellow student who had a severe illness that should have been treated in a hospital, rather did the test, than going to the hospital, because she did not want to

⁷ A ‘reparation’ or the Dutch original ‘reparatie’ is the possibility to do a retake if a student did not pass a part of the module. This retake is however only granted if the student achieved a certain average grade for the overall module

miss the test. The second case, being ill for one or more weeks, also appears to be impossible following the view of several participants. One participant raises the question if it is actually possible to still pass the study, when you are ill for a longer time for example due to a broken leg. Following this but also generally, some participants have the opinion that the reparation should not be a privilege, but above all that there should be more retake possibilities, especially when there are strict regulations like ‘0 or 15 EC points’ and ‘no possibility of being impeded on the day of a test’. These regulations are also one of the major factors for the experience of stress as many participants state. A last point concerning regulations is that a few participants mention that compensation between subjects would be an idea to loosen the strictness of the regulations.

Organization

Table 8. Overview over the perspectives on organization

Compulsory attendance
First theory and then project work
Retakes should not take the vacation to learn
Poor organization in the first modules of the first year
Module handbooks should have same structure
Support from staff

A recurring aspect concerning the organization of the study is compulsory attendance. The views differ on whether it should be obligated to attend lectures and tutorials. Some value it as help for discipline others experience it as disturbing their own individual time schedule. Apart from that many participants rate some tutorials as unnecessary and senseless, namely the tutorials of ‘development of talents’⁸ and ‘professional academical competences and development of talents’⁹. Further on, a central recurring idea for improvement is to structure the module in two parts: The first part for learning the theoretical learning content and the second part of the module for the project work. This layout has been experienced by a few participants in the first module of the second year and also other participants evaluate this idea as promising. It is mentioned that with this divided module you are better able to focus on learning the theory respectively on doing the project work. Other mentioned arguments for this

⁸ The original Dutch term: Talentontwikkeling

⁹ The original Dutch term: Professionele en academische vaardigheden en talentontwikkeling (PAVaT)

layout are firstly, that you first have the possibility to get an overview over the theoretical learning material. Secondly, sometimes it does not seem to work to learn and directly afterwards apply the contents because it needs some time to properly understand the contents. The following quotation illustrates these two views:

“We did in the first four weeks only theory and only from that moment on we started with the project. And I personally really notice that you implement the things you learnt into the project. When I was working on a project last year it was like: I look for some references for it, I throw some terms in the project work, but that was a little bit away from each other, what you learned from theory and what you did in the project. It should belong together, but actually you did both apart from each other, because it did not come together. And then in this module: Oh we had that in the lecture of week 2 what I implement in the project. [...] And I think that now, I can apply it much better in the project” (Participant 11)

Furthermore a few participants mention that the reparations should not evoke that students learn throughout the vacation time because by that they have no recreational periods any more. Additionally it is stated that the reparations can lead into a vicious circle: When you have to do a reparation, you have less energy for the next module because you either have no vacation to calm down or, depending on when the retake takes place, you have to learn within the next module for the reparation. This in turn leads to a poorer performance in the following module which in turn leads again to a reparation. Another aspect many participants mention, is a partially poor organization of the first modules. They report things like vague criteria of grading or poor coordination between tests, lectures and the project work concerning the learning contents:

“Last year everything was messy, the first weeks actually were disastrous, because then we had a test and the week after, we had learning content which was part of the test. Or we had to do an analysis within the project work, but the week after we had the lecture over how to do analyses. Everything was messy” (Participant 11)

Two participants address the module handbooks and state that it always requires new effort to understand the module handbooks because they are structured so differently. One participant suggests to ensure that all module handbooks have the same structure. As a last point, there are a few very positive evaluations regarding the number of docents, the reachability of the docents and the commitment of the docents and tutors:

“You have the feeling that the people are really keen on teaching you a lot. This effort, I find it very important. [...] Then I think that tutors are always reachable. I feel perceived here. [...] There are many tutors present. There is a good docent-student-proportion, many docents for the number of students” (Participant 3)

Miscellaneous

Table 9. Overview over the perspectives on miscellaneous topics

Feedback from the students
Public portrayal of TOM unbalanced

Besides the main themes which were addressed in the preceding subchapters, there are several uncategorized topics that are presented in this subchapter. One of these topics is the dealing with the students' feedback on the new educational system. There are several participants who express that the students actually have no voice concerning their opinion on the educational system or that their voice is not heard. It is interesting that two students who have less problems with workload and are rather tom-supporting, have the feeling that students generally have possibilities to give feedback for example through focus groups¹⁰, and that his feedback is also implemented. Contrary to that, several students who complain about the workload and are rather tom-disapproving, express the feeling that the students' opinions on the educational system is not valued or even not heard at all. The following quotation highlights this impression and additionally illustrates this participant's feeling of having no energy to raise the voice and being quite uninformed about the feedback through focus groups:

“I was often upset because of these points [strict regulations, workload] and then everybody said: Then just do something about it. But there was somehow ... that is like ... yes, somehow they make you powerless. With all this stuff, what you have to manage, you have no energy to stand up and say: Right! This far and no further! But also because there exists no group dynamic. Everybody says it is shit, but perhaps one does not know where to go with these feelings. There is also something where people are invited to say something about TOM [the focus groups]. But somehow I was never there. I also don't know, if the people can be invited actually” (Participant 10)

¹⁰ In the original Dutch, these are called 'panelgesprekken'

Another aspect which is connected to the discontent of several participants is that some have the impression that the TOM is portrayed in an unbalanced manner. These participants criticize that there are no negative aspects depicted about TOM at the university website and that the university is whitewashing the situation. The second of these opinions is expressed in the following quotation:

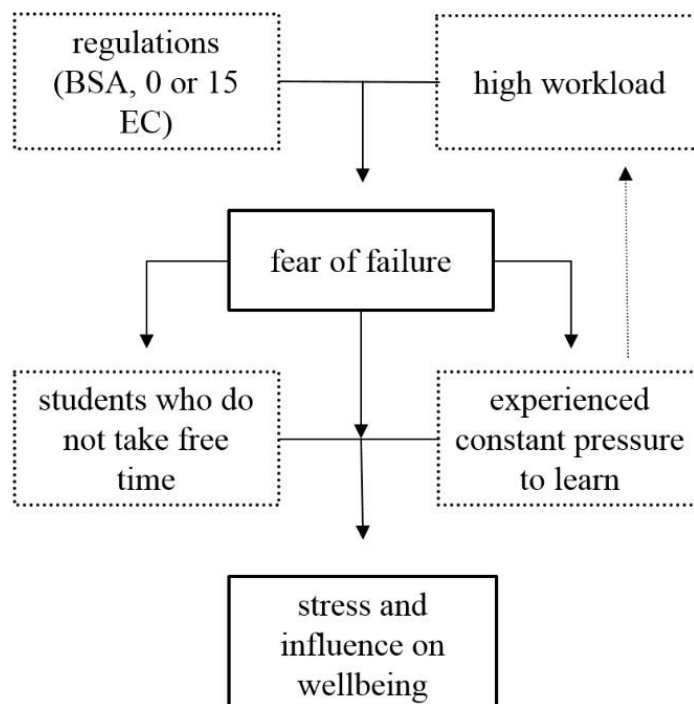
“The impression of nearly all of us is that [...] they try to whitewash that. And in my opinion, when one has the aim to achieve something good, then one has to realize one’s mistakes. [...] Or also, we got the statistics¹¹ at the beginning of the year [...] and then they wanted to show us that – I don’t know how they obtained that – even two percent more of the students came into the second year. But I mean, we talk among ourselves and know, who really left or simply changed the university, because he meant: I won’t do that anymore. I can’t stand it anymore. That was simply totally whitewashed”
(Participant 6)

Relations between findings on workload, regulations and psychological aspects

Many participants experience stress and a few report stress-induced negative influences on their wellbeing. Regarding this aspect, there seems to be a relationship between (1) the regulations (BSA, 0 or 15 EC, retake as a privilege, little retake possibilities, ‘you can not be ill on the day of a test’), (2) the (experience of a) high workload, (3) the fear of failure, (4) the experienced constant pressure to learn and not daring to take free time and (5) the stress and in the severe cases, negative influences on wellbeing. Although it is not clear in which relationship these aspects occur, the following figure illustrates the image which came to the fore during the interviews.

¹¹ Statistics concerning the evaluation of the first year of the TOM within psychology

Figure 1. Relations between workload, regulations and psychological aspects



These connections are explained in the following: Several participants seem to have a high workload and additionally many second-year students report that this experience of a high workload was predominant in the first year. This aspect can be seen from two different perspectives: On the one hand the factual workload is simply too high, so that the students are practically not able to do something else. On the other hand, the students' experiences of a high workload stands in the foreground. Within the second sense, this experience seems to be originated in the issue that several students do not seem to dare to take free time and experience a constant pressure to learn due to the fear of failure. Apparently connected to the BSA and the '0 or 15 EC points' regulation, they do not want to risk to fail a single test, a module and in the end, the whole year and want to be with certainty on the safe side. This leads them to be mentally permanently concerned with passing the next test, assignment or project work and additionally they do not seem to dare to take free time. These two aspects plus the fear in general, appear to be responsible for stress and negative influences on wellbeing.

It seems that also independent of the experienced workload, a constant mental concern for passing and a fear of failure can arise only through the named regulations. This in turn seems to be responsible for the absence of moments of relaxation, in other words, stress. This is clearly

illustrated by the following quotation of a participant who states to have nearly no trouble with the workload:

“Last year I had considerable stress with every test especially in the first module, because I didn’t pass the first one, so it was like: I have to pass everything now, otherwise I just do not pass the module and then perhaps you do not pass the first year either, but finally it came out good. But in the meantime it evokes considerable stress, because you are all the time busy with: I have to pass that, I have to pass that”
(Participant 11)

Conclusion

This chapter is dedicated to answer the research questions ‘How do students learn and develop?’ and ‘What are areas for general improvement?’

(1) How do the students learn and how do they develop?

The learning process of most participants can be characterized predominantly as results-directed, regarding both the project and the tests. This corresponds to the finding of Steens and Oude Alink that students seem to learn from test to test (Steens & Oude Alink, 2014a, p. 15). Further on, Steens and Oude Alink also find that there seems to be too much learning content for the given timespan which concurs to the present findings (Steens & Oude Alink, 2014d, p.65). This lack of time seems to make it difficult to learn for a deeper understanding, to deepen interests within the readings and to reflect sufficiently on the learning contents. ‘Fast and memorizing’ appears to be the prevailing learning style with the readings. All in all, these interconnected aspects result in superficial learning as mentioned by many participants.

Independently, the link to practice and learning in social context are promising features that support deep processing of learning contents. But while competence-based learning contents like SPSS and academic skills are implemented to a great extent into the project, the theoretical psychological learning contents only come back slightly in proportion to the amount of content. This explains the seemingly contrasting findings that many students experience the learning process as superficial and result-directed, while stating at the same time that the academic competences are learned to a great extent.

Regarding the students’ development, there has to be made a distinction between academic development and personal development. Here, academic development entails the acquisition of skills like performing quantitative and qualitative analyses, evolving an academic

writing style, searching literature, all in all: performing research. Personal development means exploring own interests, broadening the own horizons, defining the own identity, all in all: the evolvement of the own personality.

The development of academic skills appears to occur successfully to a great extent. The findings strikingly indicate that the project work plays a major role in acquiring academic skills through the application of these skills within the project. Most participants have the feeling that they develop the necessary skills that are important to perform proper research.

The development of the own personality seems to occur individually different, related to the experienced workload and amount of free time. The findings point to the direction that on the one hand many participants have insufficient possibilities or time to pursue and deepen interesting parts of the readings, but also other subject areas, which would help to broaden the own horizons. On the other hand a fair amount of students experience stress and a constant pressure to learn which seems to be responsible for little free time. These aspects make it difficult for the students to pursue own interests outside the academic frame, like hobbies, social contacts or engagement in student organizations. However, these aspects are essential in evolving the own personality.

(2) What are areas for general improvement?

Certainly the experienced high workload is a central issue for the students that needs to be improved. The amount of partial tests and learning content, as well as the project work as very 'time-consuming' seem to play a role in this context. Also it seems, that in some modules the workload could be better distributed throughout the 10 weeks.

The role of stress and pressure with learning is an important point for improvement. Especially the beginning of the first year seems to overwhelm many students, because beside the study workload, the students firstly orientate within the university context and within the new life situation. Furthermore, whether or not the high workload is factual or 'only' experienced is of importance when it comes to the question of where to tackle the problem of stress and little free time. However, the aspects of workload and regulations seem to be closely connected in evoking the experience of stress. In the end, regardless of whether the high workload is factual or 'only' experienced, the experience of stress has to be taken seriously so that all students have moments of relaxation and no student suffers from negative influences on wellbeing that are stress-induced.

In this context, many participants want the strictness of regulations to be loosened. The 0 or 15 EC point regulation is the main aspect of the regulations which is disapproved by the

students. It is seen as unfair and unjustified that students earn 0 EC points although they invested a lot of effort and successfully passed many or most parts within that quarter of the year. But also more retake possibilities, more flexibility in the case of absence on a test due to illness or other impeding reasons are regulations that need to be improved following the view of most participants.

Furthermore the findings of a result-directed and superficial character of learning are major points for improvement. Several participants complain about having not enough time to deepen own interests within the readings, reflect on the learning content and to strive for a deep understanding of the learning contents.

Subsequently, it seems that the room and possibilities for personal development need to be extended regarding the fact that several participants feel that they are not able to do sports, pursue hobbies and explore their widespread personal interests.

A last point for improvement is a more explicit and clear communication towards the students concerning feedback, the process of improvement of the TOM and the results of the evaluation of the TOM. This follows from the impression of several participants that the university is not honest about the success of the TOM and the impact it has or can have on students.

Discussion

Interpretation

This subchapter aims at interpreting the findings in the context of scientific, social and ethical aspects.

Firstly, the aspect of academic and personal development is of importance for the students' future. The successful development of academic skills surely has a positive effect in preparing the students for upcoming working situations. But also the presence of a distinct personal profile forms a strong selection criterion in the working world. Furthermore would the deepening of personal interests within other subject areas support the working field flexibility. In this sense the personal development should not be forgotten in the effort to prepare students for the job market. However the students' personal development is not only a necessity to prepare them for the job market, but a necessity on its own.

Secondly, concerning the role of stress, it is important to consider two aspects that are affected. On the one hand stress can negatively influence the memory performance as Schwabe

and Wolf indicate, which hinders a successful learning effect (Schwabe & Wolf, 2010). On the other hand the discovered negative influences on personal wellbeing are not justifiable. It needs to be discussed and examined thoroughly to which extent the negative effects of stress can be attributed to the influences of the TOM alone, but the findings of the present study hint at a considerable influence of the workload and the regulations. These impacts on the learner should be reconsidered carefully.

Thirdly, the ‘Twents Onderwijs Model’ is built on the ideas of problem-based and project-oriented learning. Although there are different conceptions on what problem-based learning specifically has to consist of, it necessarily entails that the student is not only receiving and applying knowledge, but that the student creates and constructs knowledge through intrinsically motivated solving of a given problem (Savery, 2006). This highlights the importance of the student as exploring, deepening and reflecting knowledge. So, the construction of own knowledge through committed and meaningful learning styles is inherently connected to the presence of intrinsic motivation (Barrows & Kelson, 1995). The students should not receive or absorb the learning content to reproduce it in a test or project work, instead the students’ learning should spring from an intrinsic motivation to understand the learning contents and its contexts in order to satisfy their intrinsic interest to solve the given problem. Hendry, Frommer and Walker point out that moderate arousal and low anxiety are necessary conditions for intrinsic motivation within problem-based learning (Hendry, Frommer, & Walker, 1999). Furthermore the following citation clarifies their view on the role of high workload regarding problem-based learning:

“When courses in higher education are overloaded with content in lectures and tutorials, students often do not have sufficient time to create what they perceive as the levels of knowledge expected by faculty. This situation is worsened when course objectives are poorly defined and/or students do not have a clear understanding of the aims of summative assessments. In this context, although arousal may be optimal, anxiety increases, self-efficacy is minimised, and students are forced into reproductive learning strategies to prove rather than improve” (Hendry, Frommer, & Walker, 1999, p. 368)

This citation also exemplifies the potential role of anxiety leading to the named reproductive learning strategies which concur with the present findings on result-directed learning. This memorizing and reproducing character of learning also comes back in Van Rossum’s model of learning conceptions that consists of six consecutive stages of learning (van Rossum & Hamer,

2010). In the context of the present study, the students appear to remain in the stages two and three, which describe learning as memorizing and reproducing, and learning as memorizing and applying the learning content in practice. Not until the fourth stage of learning conception, learning is characterized by an active construction of knowledge in context with meaning, which corresponds to the aims of problem-based learning. Van Rossum argues that the students' transition from memorizing and applying to actively constructing is the most difficult step to make, but that it is also the most important step that should occur in higher education.

Therefore the transition to a character of learning that consists of intrinsically motivated knowledge construction seems to be the reasonable and important change. Several conditions to advance this goal are demonstrated, like moderate arousal, low anxiety and a suitable workload. Furthermore, the contrast of the students' appreciation for extrinsic motivation, in the form of provided structure and at the same time the desire for room for intrinsic motivation, in the form of deepening interests in a wide of range of topics should be understood differentiated. The trait of being intrinsically or extrinsically motivated has no categorical character like having the one or the other, but a dimensional character. Students are motivated intrinsically and extrinsically at the same time to a certain degree in relation to different topics. Following this view the university should provide extrinsic motivation where necessary and desired, as well as support and above all elicit intrinsic motivation to reach a truly constructivist problem-based learning character.

Ideas for improvement

The following ideas for improvement are of course not taking into account the practical obstacles and are meant as a source of inspiration.

Regarding the contrasting wishes for a structured study and room for intrinsic motivation, it seems to be reasonable to connect these two and provide both: Extrinsic motivation where necessary and desired, plus room for intrinsic motivation for unfolding personal interests that support a deeper understanding of the learning contents as well as personal development. An interesting vision towards this idea has been formulated by the participant who suggested to introduce the concept of 'studium generale'. Reserving a certain amount of EC points that can be assigned individually to different subjects of a wide range, like mathematics, philosophy or history, but which could also include subjects related to personal development like workshops or courses to develop communicative, reflective and artistic competences. A realization of this idea which could provide inspiration can be seen at the Witten/Herdecke University in Germany (Witten/Herdecke University, 2015). Furthermore the

project work is a promising possibility for deepening interests, acting out intrinsic motivation and more freedom in the learning process. Perhaps it should be made possible for students to deepen parts of the readings which they find particularly interesting and let them transform these into a project work. In this case, the students' process of constructing the project work on their own represents a truly constructivist problem-based learning moment in which the students are invited to pose and solve a problem from an intrinsic motivation. Of course the students will need help in the form of assistance and guidance and they need to be handed the necessary tools. However in this vision the underlying driving force is not of extrinsic nature which easily elicits result-directed learning styles, but in contrast the underlying intrinsic motivation fosters meaningful and deep learning processes.

Another idea for improvement is to split the module regarding the theory and project work. Many participants valued the idea to first learn the theoretical learning contents altogether, before beginning with the project work. On the one hand this gives the students the possibility to fully concentrate on one type of learning and learning contents and on the other hand the students have an overview over the topic and the learning content before implementing pieces of it.

If the language ability of English and Dutch plays an important role regarding the learning tempo, it will be an idea to facilitate the students' learning process by fostering the language skills. In this context it is interesting that students from Germany who learn Dutch directly before the beginning of the study experience that their ability to speak English is affected for a certain timespan. Perhaps it should be fostered that while learning Dutch the foreign students maintain their language ability of English.

Limitations

This study mainly involved second-year students which nearly excludes the population of students who quit on their own or do not pass the year. This deficit is compensated to a certain degree by the involvement of two participants who did quit studying within the TOM. It is also important to bear in mind that the emotions of the second-year students about their first year experiences are less present and vivid than during their first year and that this sample did only include two first-year students. Furthermore the sample is unbalanced regarding the ethnicity of the participants. Only 3 participants with a Dutch ethnicity were recruited in comparison to 12 students with a German ethnic background.

Further on, due to the time and resources for this research, no methods have been used to improve the internal validity of this research. This could have been realized for example by

involving a second researcher who acts as a ‘devil’s advocate’ throughout the whole research process and who generally tries to provide doubtful view. Also the transcripts could have been coded by several researchers in order to guarantee inter-rater agreement.

Suggestions for further research

Generally there is the need to investigate the representativeness of the present findings through quantitative research. Especially the findings of result-directed learning, stress, fear of failure and negative influences on wellbeing should be addressed to examine how widespread these experiences are. Furthermore qualitative research should zoom in on the psychological aspects like stress, fear of failure and negative influence on wellbeing. This could explore more deeply the relations of these aspects and to which extent the study system is responsible for the psychological phenomena.

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Appendix

A Interview framework

The following interview framework was developed throughout two pilot interviews and was used as a checklist. When participants did not address an aspect on their own, this aspect was introduced by the researcher.

- What is your experience with the TOM?
- Did your experience change during time?
- How do you like the project work?
 - Topics
 - Application of learning contents
- Partial tests
- Compulsory attendance
- Self-responsibility
- Workload
 - Proportion study – free time
- Efficacy of learning
 - Remembering the learning content
- What does learning mean to you?
- Organization of the study
- Difficulty of the study
- Regulations
 - 0 or 15 EC points
 - Reparation
 - No possibility of being ill
- Personal development
- Feedback of the students
- Suggestions for improvements

B Quotations in original language

Participant 1: “auch eher Sachen wie zB wie schreibt man so einen Artikel? Wie macht man eine Onderzoek? Arbeiten mit SPSS mit AtlasTi. Sowas dann eher. So ein bisschen praktische

Forschungsarbeit.” – “Also rather things like, how do write an article? How do you do a research? Working with spss, with atlas.ti. Rather these things. Practical research work”

Participant 6: “Ich glaub das Buch ist echt 700 oder 800 Seiten dick gewesen. Und davon waren es am Ende 40-50 die sich noch ein bisschen auf das Projekt beziehen. Und wir haben dann immer fuer das Projekt noch eher andere Brunnen gekriegt, die wir nutzen sollten dafuer und halt selber nochmal suchen sollten, anstatt sich wirklich auf die Lektuere zu beziehen, so wie es halt meiner Meinung nach eigentlich geplant ist” – “I believe the book was really 700 or 800 pages thick. And in the end it were 40-50 pages that were linked to the project. And then we rather got other sources for the project, which we should use or we should search on our own, instead of really linking to the reading, as it was planned in my opinion”

Participant 8: “Bei Design und Research, da ist es ein bisschen mehr so, weil wir das Fach eHealth auch haben und da ist es zB so.. wir haben dieses Roadmap Modell [...] auf elektronischer oder technologischer Basis und das kommt dann schon ziemlich im Projekt zurueck. Vieles was man fuer den Test vorbereitet versteht man dann im Projekt besser. Aber bei der anderen Sache finde ich das nicht so, muss ich ganz ehrlich sagen” – “With Design and Research, it is more like that, because we also have the subject eHealth and there... we have this Roadmap Model [...] on electronical and technological basis and that comes back in the project quite well. Many things you learn for the test, you understand better in the project. But with the other thing [psychological knowledge], honestly said: I don’t think so”

Participant 10: “mir ist dann aufgefallen, dass ich dann doch mich innerhalb der gruppe da so durchschlinge, zB den Statistik teil, das wird dann immer an den abgegeben, der gut statistik kann. Ist ja auch irgendwie doof. das ist natuerlich dann wieder son gruppending oder gruppenfehler” – “I realized that I cheat a bit within the group work, for example the statistics part is always given to the one who is good at statistics. That is also somehow stupid. Thats some kind of group mistake.”

Participant 3: “Man kann dabei auch kreativ arbeiten finde ich und man hat dabei auch die Moeglichkeit sich in die Literatur einzulesen, die man selber spannend findet. Das es in diesem Projektrahmen ein bisschen moeglich ist, freier zu arbeiten als sonst. [...] Dabei faellt mir das Lernen auch deutlich einfacher und das Arbeiten” – “You can also work creatively here and you have the possibility to involve the literature that you find interesting. That it is possible in this project frame to work more freely than usual. [...] Thereby the learning and working is much more easy for me”

Participant 6: “in den ersten beiden Modulen hatte ich den [Naam van docent] [...] mit dem konntest du richtig gut reden, der hat dir dann vernuenftig geholfen. Und wenn der irgendwas nicht wusste, ist der sofort los, hat sofort geguckt, wie er das regeln kann und dass er das rauskriegt. Und hat dir halt sofort eine Loesung praesentiert. Aber andere zb im dritten Modul hatte ich [Naam van docent], ich will jetzt nicht so boese ueber den reden, aber fuer uns war das schon gefuehlt die Inkompetenz in Person” – “In the first two modules I had [name of docent] [...] with him you could talk very good and he helped you reasonably. And if he didn’t know something, he went immediately to look it up and fix it. But others, for example in the third module I had [name of docent], I don’t want to talk mean about him, but for us he was the personalization of incompetence”

Participant 1: “wir hatten keine Zeit dafuer. Und ich find wenn man so ein Projekt macht, will man auch was Cooles machen und was Gutes da rausholen. Wenn wir zB so eine Interventie da uns ueberlegen sollten und bei uns war es dann immer so ein bisschen ja wir schreiben moeglichst schnell was zusammen wofuer wir irgendwie eine Note kriegen, die halbwegs ok ist. Aber nicht so richtig: Ok wir ueberlegen uns voll was Kreatives, um unsere Ideen da richtig zu verwirklichen” – “We had no time for that. And in my opinion, if you work on a project, you also want to make something cool and good out of it. When we for example should invent such an intervention, in our group it was like, we write something down as fast as possible, for what we get a grade, which is halfway ok. But not really like: Ok, we invent something really creative to realize our ideas”

Participant 13: “ist es eigentlich ne gute Idee, weil einem das lernen so aufgeteilt wird und man struktureller arbeiten kann und nicht am ende alles hat.” – “It is actually a good idea, because you get a scheduled learning process and you can work more structurally, so that you do not need to do everything in the end”

Participant 14: “De laatste deelttoets is die eerste twee bij elkaar opgeteld en een beetje stof extra. Dus je bent eigenlijk aan het herhalen en dat werkt wel voor heel veel mensen” – “The last partial test is the first two tests added up plus a bit extra subject matter. So, you are actually rehearsing and that works for many people”

Participant 4: “wenn du einen schlecht schreibst oder bloed schreibst, dann wird es je nach Fach fast unmoeglich das einzuholen. Also man darf sich kaum nen Aussetzer leisten” – “if you perform poorly on one, it is nearly impossible to compensate it, depending on the subject. So you may hardly perform poorly”

Participant 5: “Du hast das Gefuehl, als ob du dir nicht einen Fehltritt erlauben duerftest.” – “You have the feeling as if you may not take one wrong step”

Participant 1: “nur entweder man muss weniger Stoff nehmen fuer einen deelttoets, dass das dann halt wirklich nur so wie Tests sind, wo man dan halt nicht so mega viel fuer lernen muss, wo es dann reichen wuerde einen Tag vorher oder so, oder man muesste es dann wirklich so machen, dass man irgendwie weniger davon hat” – “but either you have to take less subject matter into the test, so that it is only like a test for which you do not have to learn so much, only one day before for example, or you have to arrange it the way, that you have less of them”

Participant 1: “wenn wir mal wieder so ne Phase haben, wo voll viel ist, kann man nicht immer sein Wochenende frei machen, aber ist schon besser geworden auf jeden Fall, weil letztes Jahr war das halt gar nicht so. Da weiss ich, dass ich so viele Wochenenden immer hier war. Einfach jeden Tag in der Uni. Obwohl ich das fuer mich auch nicht unbedingt wollte” – “when we have again a period of a lot of work, you cannot always have a free weekend, but it has become better. Because last year it was simply not like that. I know, that I was so many weekends here. Simply every day at the university. Although I did not want that”

Participant 10: “[R:] Du sagst auch, dass du so alles zurueckgeschraubt hast, wie war denn dann dein Verhaeltnis zwischen freizeit und studium? [P:] Gabs eigentlich nicht. also... im ersten modul auf keinen fall. [R:] auf keinen fall was? [P:] also da kann ich mich nicht so richtig dran erinnern, dass ich da ueberhaupt irgendwas anderes gemacht hab” – “[R:] You said that you have cut back everything. Then how was the proportion between freetime and study? [P:] Actually there was none... Certainly not in the first module. [R:] Certainly not what? [P:] Well, I can't really remember that I ever did something else.”

Participant 6: “ich geh jetzt gar nicht zum College hin, weil ich dafuer gar keine Zeit habe. War auch bei fast allen meiner Freunde so, dass wir dann halt zur Vorlesung sowieso nicht aber teilweise auch die verpflichtenden Tutorials einfach sausen gelassen haben” – “Now, I don't go to the lecture at all, because I don't have time for that. Was the same with nearly all my friends, that we did not go to the lecture anyway, but partly we also left out the mandatory tutorials”

Participant 15: “Heel veel mensen vinden het erg stom, omdat ze zo druk zijn met leren, maar dat valt eigenlijk best wel mee. Als je elke dag iets doet, nou dan kun je er ook best een leven ook na hebben [...] Kijk als je alles op het laatste moment gaat doen, dan heb je het druk. Maar dat is altijd zo denk ik. [...] Ik denk dat het gewoon een kwestie is van je tijd goed indelen” – “A great number of people find it very stupid, because they have so much pressure with learning,

but that isn't so terrible. If you do everyday a bit, well, then you can for sure have a life beside it [...] Look, if you do everything at the last moment, then you have pressure. But that is always the case, I think. [...] I think that it is simply a question of assigning your time."

Participant 2: "Aber selbst wenn ich so durchkommen wuerde, wuerde ich das nicht machen, weil ich glaube das halte ich einfach nicht durch - das ist mir zu viel." – "But even if I would pass like that, I would not do that, because I think I cannot bear this – that is too much for me" Participant 1: "Vielleicht irgendwie so ein bisschen Ausgeglichenheit zwischen Freizeit und Uni. Einfach mehr Ausgeglichenheit. Also ich waer schon auf jeden Fall bereit, das wuerde ich auch wollen, dass mich das schon irgendwie fordert. Das man schon was dafuer tun muss, das finde ich eigentlich gar nicht schlecht. Aber das man trotzdem noch Zeit Wochenenden noch so zu gestalten, wie man will" – "Perhaps somehow a balance between free time and study. Simply more balance. I would be willing, and I want, that it demands something from me. That you have to do something for it, actually I find that not so bad. But that you still have time to do what you want at the weekend"

Participant 9: "ich hab grad die idee, dass ich mich drei Jahre lang voll und ganz dem Studium widmen muss und danach wieder Zeit fuer sowas hab. Wurd mir dann nach einem halben Jahr spaetestens klar, dass das so ist. [...] ich denke ich schaffe das noch nichtmal neben dem Studium ein bisschen Sport zu machen. Das muss ich jetzt zwar auch noch waehrend des Studiums irgendwie hinkriegen, weil ich glaubdas ist echt wichtig. Aber solche Sachen, aber auch irgendwie mehr Zeit fuer mich selbst zu haben und fuer Dinge, die ich lernen will oder machen will, wie eine neue Sprache lernen oder ich will unbedingt naehen lernen, ein Instrument spielen lernen. Das koennte ich jetzt niemals. Ging glaub ich gar nicht" – "I have the idea that I have to fully devote three years to the study and that I have time again for these things afterwards. That became clear to me, after a half year. [...] I think I cannot even manage to do some sport beside the study. I have to manage that somehow, indeed, even during the study, because I think it is really important. But these things, but also to have more time for myself and for things I want to learn or do, like learning a new language or I absolutely want to learn to sew; learning to play an instrument. I could never do that now. Would not work, I think."

Participant 5: "Weil wir einfach woechentlich eine Pruefung haben, parallel dazu uns auf die Vorlesungen und werkcolleges vorbereiten, parallel dazu Projektgruppen haben und woechentlich Abgabetermine haben plus irgendwelche individuellen Schreibauftraege haben. Und das funktioniert vorne und hinten nicht, also man hat ueberhaupt keine Zeit und es ist viel

zu viel Stress auf einmal.” – “Because we simply have a weekly test, parallel to that, we need to prepare for the lectures and tutorials, parallel to that we have project groups and weekly deadlines plus individual assignments. That isn’t working at all, you have absolutely no time and it is far too much stress at once”

Participant 5: “Und natuerlich diesen Druck hat, dadurch dass man nur durch ein Modul durchfallen darf. Und wenn man das wirklich moechte hier und eigentlich die ganze Zeit Angst hat: Oh gott wenn ich die Pruefung nicht schaffe ist fast alles verloren. Das ist schon viel Druck” – “And of course this pressure that you may only fail one module. And if you really want this study and actually are afraid all the time: Oh my god, if I do not pass the test, almost everything is lost. That is much pressure”

Participant 11: “ik had vorig jaar wel toch behoorlijk stress bij elke toets van vooral in het eerste module, omdat ik de eerste dus niet gehaald had, van: ik moet nou alles halen, want anders heb ik gewoon het module niet gehaald en daardoor haal je misschien dit jaar ook niet, maar uiteindelijk is dat wel goed gekomen, maar het zorgt er tussen wel voor behoorlijk wat stress, omdat je de hele tijd bezig was met: ik moet dat halen, ik moet dat halen” – “Last year I had considerable stress with every test especially in the first module, because I didn’t pass the first one, so it was like: I have to pass everything now, otherwise I just do not pass the module and then perhaps you do not pass the first year either, but finally it came out good. But in the meantime it evokes considerable stress, because you are all the time busy with: I have to pass that, I have to pass that”

Participant 8: “Ich erfah den Druck in der Hinsicht, dass ich einfach weiss, wenn ich das jetzt nicht schaffe, hab ich nicht die Moeglichkeit ein einzelnes Fach zu wiederholen, sondern muss ein ganzes Quartal wiederholen. Das ist ein ziemlich krasser Druck” – “I experience the pressure in the way that I simply know, if I do not get it now, I do not have the possibility to retake a single subject, but have to retake a whole module. That is a quite strong pressure”

Participant 9: “aber dass man halt die Angst hat, dass man eine woche zeit hat fuer ein fach, du konntest dir trotzdem nicht erlauben mal durchzufallen. hatte ich zumindest das gefuehl. [...] Dann war das einfach der Druck, dass du versucht hast, jede klausur zu bestehen” – “but that you have the fear; that you have one week for a subject, you couldn’t allow yourself to fail once. At least it was my impression. [...] Then it was simply the pressure that you try to pass every test”

Participant 5: “man darf ja nur eine bestimmte Anzahl von Faechern falsch haben. Also wenn ich durch drei Faecher durchfalle, dass ich dann keine Reparatur mehr machen kann. Was den Druck auch wieder erhoehrt.” – “you may only fail a certain number of subjects. So when I fail three subjects, that I may not have a retake. What in turn also increases the pressure”

Participant 7: “dass es da keine moeglichkeiten gibt, wenn man krank ist dann mal ne pruefung nachzuschreiben, das finde ich schon sehr hart einfach. [...] das ist ein druck, der so nicht vertretbar ist.” – “that there is no possibility of retaking a test when you are ill, that is simply very harsh. [...] That is a pressure which is not acceptable”

Participant 13: “R: Warum kann man sich zu Tode studieren? Wodurch kommt das denn? P: Das kommt dadurch, dass die dozenten in tests gerne fragen stellen [...] Das heisst man muss eigentlich jedes kleinste Detail fuer die tests gelernt haben um wirklich ne richtig gute note zu bekommen. aber letztenendes ist das in der praxis nicht moeglich” – “R.: Why can you study yourself to death? What is responsible for that? – P.: That is because of the questions that the docents are posing [...] That means that you have to learn every single detail for the tests to get a really good grade. But in the end, that is not possible in practice”

Participant 9: “Im ersten vierteljahr war das fuer mich ganz schrecklich, weil ich hatte die ganze zeit angst, ich hab mich so gefuehlt, als waere ich auf einem Minenfeld und wenn ich einen falschen Schritt mache, dass alles explodiert. Weil ich einfach das Gefuehl hatte, ich darf mir nichts erlauben, also keinen falschen Schritt gehen, weil sonst mein Leben einfach, weil ich sonst hier aufhoeren muss und nicht mehr weitermachen kann und alles was ich wollte nicht mehr machen kann. Und psychologie hier war meine einzige moeglichkeit gewesen. ich wusste auch, dass hier gar nicht und in holland nicht mehr studieren und in deutschland wuerde das sowieso nicht klappen und das haette halt alles kaputt gemacht. So alles was ich mir ertraeumt haette fuer meine zukunft” – “In the first quarter of the year it was totally terrible for me, because I was afraid the whole time. I felt as if I were on a mine field and if I take one wrong step, everything will explode. Because I simply had the feeling: I may not allow myself anything, I mean taking no wrong step, because otherwise my life simply,... because otherwise I have to stop here and everything I wanted, I couldn't do anymore. And psychology here was my only possibility. I knew that I could neither study here any more nor somewhere else in the Netherlands and for sure not in Germany. That would have destroyed everything. Just everything I dreamt about for my future”

Participant 13: “Und dann eben auch einfach zu sagen: wenn man es dann nicht schafft, dass es eben so ist. vor allem, man hat ja diese 45 ec die man braucht um spaeter weiter studieren zu duerfen. Und im dritten oder 4. modul hab ich mir gesagt: du wenn das nicht reicht oder du es nicht geschafft hast, dann ist es eben so” – “And then simply to say: If you do not pass it, it is simply that way. Especially, you have these 45 EC that you need to study further. And in the third or fourth module I said to myself: Hey, if that is not enough or you did not pass that, it is simply that way”

Participant 5: “Man hat das immer im Nacken. Ich hab da schon viel Stress, dass ich sage: ey ich kann nicht mit euch feiern gehen, ich kann mir nicht einen Tag frei nehmen, ich hab keine Zeit mit euch einen Filmabend zu machen oder aehnliches, weil man denkt rund um die Uhr: Ich muss das schaffen, ich muss das schaffen” – “It is always on your tail. I have a lot of stress, so that I say: Hey, I cannot go out with you, I cannot take free one day, I have no time to do a movie night or something alike with you, because you think all the time: I have to pass, I have to pass”

Participant 3: “Es sind wenig Phasen drin, wo es dem Studenten wirklich moeglich ist, ohne schlechtes Gewissen abzuschalten. Pausen zu machen. Die muss er sich bewusst nehmen, aber es fuehlt sich trotzdem immer so an, wie ich eben erzaehlt habe. Nach diesem Wochenende, wo ich nichts gemacht habe, habe ich ein Defizit. Ich hab ein schlechtes Gewissen. Am Montag hatte ich das Gefuehl, ich haette am WOchenende arbeiten muessen, um mit dem Lernstoff voran kommen zu koennen. Was nicht heisst, dass ich nicht bis Freitag nachmittag gearbeitet habe” – “There are few periods in which it is really possible for the student to relax without a guilty conscience. To take breaks. These breaks he has to take consciously, but still it feels like I just told. After this weekend where I did nothing, I have a deficit. I have a guilty conscience. On Monday I had the feeling that I had to work at the weekend to advance with the learning material. What doesn't mean that I did not work on Friday until the afternoon.”

Participant 10: “einfach echt so eine ganz Tiefe Angst, dass man das nicht schafft, dass man da versagt und dass es ja auch so die letzte chance war und dann vergisst man so .. einfach zu leben. also mit essen, also alles nur so darauf fokussiert, dass man das irgendwie schafft und also ich hab alles andere zurueckgeschraubt in allen bereichen so. da hab ich auch echt so ne angst gespuert, die hab ich vorher auch noch nicht gekannt” – “really a very deep fear, that you do not succeed, that you fail and that it is also the last chance and then you forget ... simply to

live. With eating, everything is only focused to somehow succeed and I cut back everything in all fields. There I really felt a sort of fear, I did not know before”

Participant 9: “wenn man dann mal Ferien hatte. Ich bin dann immer mit Herzrasen aufgewacht um 9 oder 10, auf die Uhr geguckt und dachte: oh gott. Das hat irgendwie so ein paar tage gedauert, bis man da wieder rausgekommen ist. Das man wirklich mal gerade nichts zu tun hat, das war,... ganz komisch [...] Ich hab auch nachm ersten Jahr richtig stark Neurodermitis bekommen. Also das hatte ich schon, als ich klein war, aber das hat aufgehört. Und das habe ich dann wiederbekommen, als die Ferien angefangen haben. Und ich glaub, das hatte viel mit diesem Jahr zu tun, weil Neurodermitis kriegt man ja, wenn man stress hat” – “when you then had vacation at some point. Then I always woke up with a racing heart at 9 or 10, looked at the clock and thought: Oh god. That really took some days until you got out of this again. That you really had nothing to do, that was ... very strange [...] I also got severe neurodermatitis after the first year. I had it earlier as a child and I got it again when the vacation began. And I think that has a lot to do with this year, because you get neurodermatitis when having stress”

Participant 14: “omdat je in het begin van je studie moet je heel veel dingen leren, nou heb ik het geluk gehad, dat ik al eerder hier studeerde, dus dat ik al heel veel dingen wist van blackboard en osiris en hoe het allemaal werkt en hoe je aanmeldt, maar de eerste twee quartielen zijn heel moeilijk geweest voor vele mensen, omdat die dingen erbij kwamen. En omdat je moest leren om op jezelf te gaan wonen. [...] ik zag wel dat heel veel mensen daar onderuit gingen” – “because you have to learn a lot of things at the beginning of the study. I had luck that I studied here earlier, so that I already knew many things of blackboard and Osiris and how everything works and how you register. But the first two quarters were very difficult for many people, because all these things came in addition. And you had to learn to live on your own. [...] I saw a lot of people who were knocked off their feet”

Participant 10: “Wenn man halt 95000 mal so ne theorie liest, auf die das projekt aufgebaut ist, ist es natuerlich schon vertieft.” – “When you simply read some theory 95000 times, on which the project is based, of course it is deepened”

Participant 3: “Wenn ich lerne dann versuch ich ein Thema zu verstehen, so dass es mir im Leben noch weiter helfen wird oder kann. Versuche ich Theorien richtig zu verstehen, dass ich sie nie wieder vergesse oder versuche mich mit Argumenten wirklich tief auseinander zu setzen, so dass ich die beherrsche. Aber das ist so eine Masse an Informationen, dass man es nicht schafft das alles zu beherrschen und dabei lernt man sehr oberflaechlich. Das finde ich schade.”

– “When I learn, I try to understand a topic in the way that it helps, or can help me in my life. I try to understand theories properly, so that I never forget them or I try to deal with arguments really deeply so that I mastered them. But it is such a mass of information, that you cannot succeed to master everything and thereby you learn very superficial. That’s a pity.”

Participant 9: “Aber es war zu viel, um sich da wirklich hinter zu klemmen, um das zu verstehen. Du musstest das einfach auswendig lernen. Ganz ganz ganz schnell und so gut wie es geht, um das dann im Test anzuwenden und supergerne haette ich mir dafuer mehr Zeit genommen, um einfach das zu verstehen und das mit mehr Freude zu lernen, damit man das auch behaelt” – “But it was too much to really dive into it in order to understand it. You simply had to learn it by heart, very very very fast and as good as possible, to apply it in the test and I would have gladly taken more time for it, to simply understand it and learn it with more pleasure, so that you also remember it”

Participant 4: “dass ich das Gefuehl habe, das heutzutage sehr viel abgefragt wird von Studenten und dass das dann auch auf Kosten des eigentlichen Lernprozesses geht. Das man Sachen so schnell lernen muss, dass man sie auch schnell wieder vergessen hat” – “that I have the feeling, that nowadays plenty of learning content is tested and that this goes at the cost of the true learning process. That you have to learn things so fast, that you also have forgotten them quickly”

Participant 3: “Ich merk einfach, ich bearbeite Sachen, die ich wahnsinnig spannend finde, aber ich hab eigentlich fuer die Sachen zu wenig Zeit, die bearbeitet werden. Geschweige denn noch Zeit mich weiter mit dem Thema beschaefligen zu koennen” – “I simply realize, I work on things that I find incredibly exciting, but I actually have too little time for these things. Not to mention to have time to deal further with the topic”

Participant 1: “Weil damit igrendwie was haengen bleiben kann, muss man das ja mal ueberdenken und mal irgendwie gucken ob das auch fuer einen selber Sinn macht, was der Autor da geschrieben hat. Ich persoendlich hatte da nicht so viel Zeit fuer. Und ich glaube das ist schon noetig, dass man das irgendwie verinnerlicht. Sonst ist das halt mehr so ein auswendig lernen und das ist auch schnell weg” – “Because in order that something stays on your mind, you have sometimes to think it over and check if it makes sense to yourself, what the author has written. Personally, I did not have much time for that. And I think it is necessary that you somehow internalize it. Otherwise it is rather learning by heart and that is quickly forgotten”

Participant 7: “Also, ich gucke schon sehr drauf: Was ist jetzt wichtig zum bestehen und was ist vielleicht weniger wichtig. Und setze da irgendwie klare Prioritaeten, was ich auch ein bisschen schade finde, weil es den Prozess von sich in was reinfuchsen und grossartig sich damit auseinandersetzen, unterbindet, weil man eben immer diesen naechsten Test oder den naechsten Abgabetermin vor Augen hat, wo man dann immer guckt: ok schnell multiple choice auswendig lernen” – “Well, I pay a lot of attention to: What is now important to pass and what is perhaps less important. And I set clear priorities, what is also a pity, because it inhibits the process of diving into something and dealing extensively with something, because you simply always have the next test or deadline in mind, for which you always think: Ok, quickly multiple choice, learning by heart”

Participant 10: “ich hab jetzt wieder gemerkt, dass ich so viel ueber soziale Psychologie, wo ich dann aber auch mit [naam van medestudent] gelernt hab, wo man halt einfach darueber gesprochen hat und so und nicht nur gelesen, markiert und zusammengefasst, dass da unglaublich viel haengen geblieben ist [...] das hatten wir ja auch am anfang eher.. so richtige tutorien, wo man einfach spricht und das mit anderen mal so durchsprechen kann. und das hat ein bisschen gefehlt zwischendurch” – “Now, I realized again that I learned so much about social psychology, where I learned together with [name of fellow student]. Where you simply discussed and not only read, highlighted and summarized; that I remember thereof incredibly much [...] we rather had that in the beginning. Real tutorials, where you simply talk and discuss it with others. And that lacked a little bit here and there”

Participant 11: “Het motiveert sowieso wel, vind ik. Ik persoonlijk, als met me eentje bezig ben, ben ik toch al gauw afgeleid van: Ach, niemand heeft er toch last van, dan kan ik wel eventjes dit doen of wel eventjes dat doen, maar als je toch bezig bent met een groep, wil je ook niet dat de rest van mijn leden plotseling achterlopen, omdat ik eventjes bezig ben met iets anders, dan ben je wel heel erg gefocused daarop” – “It motivates, I think. Personally, when I am busy on my own, I am quite easily distracted like: Well, nobody has a problem with it, then I can shortly do this or that, but when you are busy with a group, you don't want that the rest has a disadvantage, because you are just busy with something else. Then you are really focused on the work”

Participant 2: “Ich bin immer gut vorwaerts gekommen - dann macht mir das auch Spass. Also ich lern ja auch gern neue Sachen. Aber hierbei ist es einfach so dass ich immer ne seite gelernt hab und dann hab ich geguckt, wie viel ich noch muss und es wollte einfach gar nicht aufhoeren.

wenn man dann nachher nochmal zurueckgeblaettert hat um zu schauen, wie viel man noch kann, dann ist einfach nichts sitzen geblieben oder ich konnte mir nichts merken und dann hat man diese Bestaetigung nicht, und dann macht das auch keinen spass. das ist wichtig, dass ich mit dem Lernen auch was bewirken kann. dass ich wirklich dadurch vorwaerts komme und das tue ich im moment einfach nicht so” – “I could always make good progress. Then it is also a pleasure. I mean, I like learning new things. But here it is simply the way that I learned a page and then I looked up, how many still to go, and there was no end in sight. When you later looked back to see how much you remembered; there stayed nothing on your mind or I could not remember anything and then you don’t have this feeling of progress. And then it’s not fun. It is important that you can achieve something with learning, that I really make progress and that’s not the case at the moment”

Participant 6: “du gehst jetzt auf die Universitaet, du hast das Fach gefunden, was dir gefaellt und das tuts auch, also wenn ich wirklich Zeit habe, die Buecher zu lesen, dann denk ich, das ist voll interessant, das ist super geil. Das macht mir voll Spass, das liest du mit Faszination, aber wenn du das halt mit diesem Druck lesen musst: Du musst das jetzt lesen, du musst dir das jetzt reinpruegeln, du musst das jetzt am Freitag wissen. Du musst, du musst, dann fehlt halt der Spass an dem, was du eigentlich machen willst. Dann wird das halt wirklich nicht mehr zu deiner Passion dafuer, das ist halt nicht mehr da” – “you go to the university, you found the subject you like, and that is the case. Well, when I really have time to read the books, I think: That’s really interesting, totally cool. That makes fun, you read it with fascination, but when you have to learn it with this pressure: You must read it now, you must press it into your head, you must know it on Friday. You must, you must, then the pleasure in what you want to do, is missing. Then it is not becoming your passion any more, that is simply gone”

Participant 14: “Ik denk dat leren voor mij betekent dat je uit nieuwsgierigheid je kennis verbreed, dus dat uit jezelf iets komt, waardoor je graag wil. Dat vind ik heel belangrijk. Dat mis ik wel op sommige momenten in deze studie [..] Op een gegeven moment was het een moeten. En dat is niet meer leuk. Ik vind ook dat leren iets heel leuks moet zijn” – “I think that learning means to me that you enhance your knowledge out of curiousness, thus that something is coming from yourself whereby you want. That’s very important to me. And I miss that in some moments within this study [..] At a certain moment it was a must. And that’s not pleasant anymore. I think that learning also has to be something very pleasant”

Participant 3: “Ich glaub ich wuerd mir das so vorstellen: Drei Tage die Woche wirklich sehr strukturiert Unterricht mit Präsenzzeit, aber dass es moeglich ist, das gut zu schaffen. Und dann an den letzten zwei Tagen sowas wie Studium Generale einzufuehren. [...] ob verpflichtend oder nicht, das ist noch so die Frage, aber einfach wo jeder genoetigt ist oder nicht genoetigt ist aus so nem wirklich sehr breiten Angebot aus Faechern sich Sachen auszuwaehlen. Sei es Geschichte, Philosophie, Politikwissenschaften, Sprachen. Das sind jetzt aber nur Interessensgebiete von mir ne. Komplett in der Breite sich irgendwelche Sachen auszusuchen. Das faende ich interessant. Kunst. Hatte ich auch ueberlegt im Minor nochmal Kunst zu machen. Kann man nachher gucken ob man in die Kunsttherapie reingeht. Das sind alles Sachen, die wuerd ich gerne ausprobieren. Politische Psychologie. Super spannendes Thema. Habe ich keine Zeit fuer mich mit auseinander zu setzen” – “I think I imagine it in the following way: Three days in the week structured lessons with obligation, but that the workload is doable. And then implement in the last two days something like studium generale¹². [...] if mandatory or not, that’s still the question, but simply where everybody can choose from a really wide range of subjects. Let it be history, philosophy, political sciences, languages. But these are only my interests. Choosing from the completely wide range of things. That would be interesting. Art. I also considered to do art in the minor. Then you can see if you go into art therapy¹³. That are all things I would like to try out. Political psychology. Very interesting topic. No time to deal with.”

Participant 12: “ich denke auch, dass die tom studenten, die in den bereich kommen die bachelor arbeit zu schreiben, dass die einen riesigen vorteil haben, einfach weil die von der ersten studienwoche an gelernt haben, wie man halt nachforschungen fuehrt und wie man akademisch schreibt” – “I also think that when the tom students are close to the bachelor thesis, they have an enormous advantage, simply because they learned from the first week how to do research and how you write academically”

Participant 7: “Klar man wird zum arbeiten gebracht. das ist was, was ich vorher nicht hatte. ich war ein fauler hund. einen gewissen ehrgeiz brauch man um hier durchzukommen, ohne den schafft man es auch nicht” – “Of course you are put to work. That is something I did not have earlier. I was a lazy bitch. You need a certain eagerness to get through here. Without it you don’t succeed”

¹² ‘Studium generale’: The idea that students can assign a certain amount of EC points to subjects from a wide range of disciplines.

¹³ ‘Art therapy’: a therapeutical discipline connecting the fields of psychotherapy and art

Participant 4: “Ich glaube schon, also wenn man 3/4 Jahre mit dem Modell umgegangen ist, dass man schon gepräget wird dadurch. Und dass jetzt zb auch mit jedem Tag was tun und jeden Tag busy sein, dass das sehr viel Struktur verschafft. Und dass man schon am Ende, wenn man da raus kommt sehr gepräget ist durch diesen dauernden Lernstress. Dass man auch danach das Gefuehl hat oder in der Arbeit - das man sich dann dadrauf einstellt. Dass man dann sagt: Jo das geht wahrscheinlich so weiter, oder das wird mein Leben lang so sein” – “I think, that if you dealt 3-4 years with the model [TOM], that you get shaped by it. And for example also the fact that everyday doing something and being busy every day, that this gives a lot of structure. And that you in the end, when you get out of it [TOM] are very shaped by this permanent learning stress. That you also afterwards have the feeling or at work, that you adjust yourself for that. That you then say: Yes, that’s probably going on like that or it will be that way my whole life”

Participant 3: “Ferien, Freizeit. Studenten muessen es lernen, zu schaffen sich mit sich selbst zu beschaeftigen. Ich meine das ist ne essentielle Phase im Leben. Da brauchen sie Zeit fuer, Selbststudium, Eigeninteresse. Zu gucken wo stehe ich ueberhaupt? Worauf habe ich spaeter Lust? Eigenes Profil entwickeln und ich finde dafuer sind Pausen essentiell. [...] Gerade in dieser kritischen Phase, Anfang 20, wo viele aus der Schule kommen, vorher zu hause aufgewachsen sind und dann gehts in die Uni, wo wenig Zeit ist sich selbst zu finden. Eigentlich finde ich, ist das ein sehr wichtiger Prozess oder wichtige Lebensjahre. So anfang 20, wo man merkt, man wird unabhaengig.” – “Vacation, free time. Students have to learn, to be able to deal with themselves. I mean this is an essential period in life. There they need time for selfstudy, intrinsic interests. To see, who am I actually? What do I want to do later? Developing an own profile and for that, breaks are essential. [...] Especially in this critical period, the beginning 20’s, where many are ready with school, grew up at home earlier and then come to the university, where they have little time to find themselves. Actually, I think that this is a very important process or important years of your life. Beginning 20’s, where you realize, that you get independent”

Participant 6: “hab ich mich jetzt im ersten Jahr schon gut entwickelt und persoendlich positiv entwickelt [...] Ich glaube eher, dass das am Umfeld liegt. Also ich hatte hier auch richtig Glueck mit dem Umfeld, mit den Leuten die ich kennen gelernt hab. Oder jetzt auch diese Extraaufgabe mit [student organization], wo du halt da vor diesen Internationals stehen musst und alles regeln musst. Und nicht so viel an diesem TOM, um ehrlich zu sein” – “I did develop in the first year and developed personally in a positive way [...] I think that it is rather due to the environment. Well, I really had luck with the environment, with the people I got to know. Or

also this function in [student organization], where you have to stand in front of the international students and have to arrange everything. And not so much due to the TOM, to be honest”

Participant 9: “als waere ich das vierteljahr nicht da gewesen” – “as if I was not there that three months”

Participant 11: “maar tijdens het moment van mijn toets was mijn opa overleden en hij had crematie. En dat telde dan wel als poging of zo, en dan kreeg je automatisch een 1 en dan moest je het herkansen en dat vind ik zelf een stuk minder, want ik had zelf iets van: Ja het is niet zo, dat ik graag naar mijn opa's crematie ga of zo en graag die toets mis, ik kan er nou gewoon niets aan doen, waarom telt dat dan wel als een kans” – “but at the time of the test my grandfather had cremation, he passed away. And that counted as an attempt and you got automatically a ‘1’ and then you had to do reparation and this, I didn’t like. Because I thought: It is not that I like to go to my grandfather cremation and like to miss the test, I simply cannot do something about it. Why does it then count as an attempt?”

Participant 11: “we hebben in de eerste vier weken alleen theorie gedaan en pas vanaf dat moment zijn we bezig gegaan met dat project en ik merk persoonlijk ook echt, dat de dingen die je hebt geleerd ook in je verslagen in je project opneemt. Als ik vorig jaar bezig was met een verslag, daar was het van: Ik zoek wel wat bronnen erbij, ik gooi wel wat termen in, maar ja dat liep een beetje langs elkaar heen, wat je leerde van theorie en dat je bezig was met het project. Het hoorde wel samen te komen, maar eigenlijk deed je allebei los, omdat het net niet bij elkaar kwam. En dan in deze module: oh dat hebben we in dit hoorcollege in week 2 gehad, dat ik nou in het project opnemen. [...] En ik vind dat ik het nou wel veel beter kan toepassen” – “We did in the first four weeks only theory and only from that moment on we started with the project. And I personally really notice that you implement the things you learnt into the project. When I was working on a project last year it was like: I look for some references for it, I throw some terms in the project work, but that was a little bit away from each other, what you learned from theory and what you did in the project. It should belong together, but actually you did both apart from each other, because it did not come together. And then in this module: Oh we had that in the lecture of week 2 what I implement in the project. [...] And I think that now, I can apply it much better in the project”

Participant 11: “Vorig jaar hadden ze echt alles door elkaar, de eerste weken waren eigenlijk ook echt rampzaalig, want dan hadden we een toets, en die week daarna hadden we nog stof, die over de toets ging. Of we moesten bezig gaan met de analyse van een project en pas de week

daarna hadden we een hoorcollege over hoe doe je analyses. Dat liep echt allemaal door elkaar” – “Last year everything was messy, the first weeks acutally were disastrous, because then we had a test and the week after, we had learning content which was part of the test. Or we had to do an analysis within the project work, but the week after we had the lecture over how to do analyses. Everything was messy”

Participant 3: “Du hast das Gefuehl die Leute sind ernsthaft daran interessiert, dir viel beizubringen. Diese Anstrengung, die finde ich sehr wichtig. [...] Dann finde ich, dass die Tutoren staendig erreichbar sind. Ich finde man fuehlt sich wahrgenommen hier. [...] Es sind viele tutoren anwesend. Guter dozentenschluessel vorhanden, viele dozenten auf wenige studenten.” – “You have the feeling that the people are really keen on teaching you a lot. This effort, I find it very important. [...] Then I think that tutors are always reachable. I feel perceived here. [...] There are many tutors present. There is a good docent-student-proportion, many docents for the number of students”

Participant 10: “Ich habe mich oft darueber aufgeregt ueber die Punkte und alle haben gesagt, ja dann mach halt was dran, ne. Aber dann gabts ja irgendwie,... ja das ist dann wie. ja irgendwie machen die einen dann doch unmuendig mit dem ganzen zeugs, was man so regeln muss, hat man keine kraft aufzustehen und zu sagen: so. bis hierhin und nicht weiter. aber weil es auch irgendwie nicht diese gruppodynamik da gibt. also es sagen alle es ist scheisse, aber vielleicht was man auch nicht wohin damit oder so. also es gibt ja auch sowas, wo leute auch eingeladen werden um ueber tom was zu sagen. war ich aber auch irgendwie nie dabei. ich weiss auch nicht, ob die leute da eingeladen werden koennen ehrlich gesagt” – “I was often upset because of these points [strict regulations, workload] and then everybody said: Then just do something about it. But there was somehow ... that is like ... yes, somehow they make you powerless. With all this stuff, what you have to manage, you have no energy to stand up and say: Right! This far and no further! But also because there exists no group dynamic. Everybody says it is shit, but perhaps one does not know where to go with these feelings. There is also something where people are invited to say something about TOM [the focusgroups]. But somehow I was never there. I also don't know, if the people can be invited actually”

Participant 6: “Der Eindruck von fast allen von uns ist, dass die das [...] versuchen schoen zu reden, ne. oder zu beschoenigen. Und das finde ich halt, wenn man wirklich dieses Bestreben hat, was Gutes zu erreichen, dann muss man Fehler einsehen. [...] Oder auch wir hatten jetzt die Statistiken gekriegt anfang des Jahres [...] und dann wollten sie uns halt damit zeigen, dass

irgendwie wie auch immer sie das gemacht haben, sogar zwei Prozent mehr der Leute ins zweite Jahr gekommen sind. Aber ich mein wir unterhalten uns ja untereinander und wissen, wer wirklich weggegangen ist oder einfach auch die Uni gewechselt hat, weil er meinte, das mach ich nicht mehr, das halte ich nicht mehr durch. Das war einfach total beschoenigt” – “The impression of nearly all of us is that [...] they try to whitewash that. And in my opinion, when one has the aim to achieve something good, then one has to realize one’s mistakes. [...] Or also, we got the statistics¹⁴ at the beginning of the year [...] and then they wanted to show us that – I don’t know how they obtained that – even two percent more of the students came into the second year. But I mean, we talk among ourselves and know, who really left or simply changed the university, because he ment: I won’t do that anymore. I can’t stand it anymore. That was simply totally whitewashed”

¹⁴ Statistics concerning the evaluation of the first year of TOM within psychology