Ladies and Gentlemen,

Almost 10 years ago, in 2001, the Institute of Psychology settled down here in Rotterdam at the Erasmus University to build a brand new bachelor and master program in psychology. By embracing this initiative, the Chair of the Executive Board of the university at that time, Henk van der Molen, took a great leap into the unknown. The baggage which the founders of the Institute, Henk Schmidt and another Henk van der Molen, - no family of the first one- brought along was full of Psychological content, and consisted of course material in the core domains of educational, work and organizational, clinical, and cognitive psychology.

In addition, the founders felt the freedom to bring along a didactical model to educate the students of Psychology: The so-called problem-based learning model, PBL, which they combined with extensive skills training. PBL is a small-group learning model. To that date this model was unfamiliar within the campus of the university. However, the founders had high ambitions, based on the empirical finding that PBL leads to more self-directed learning, better retention of knowledge, and enhanced intrinsic interest in the subject matter.

About one fifth of the 1400 medical schools around the world work with PBL. And Maastricht University already has been working with PBL for more than 25 years. So did the Maastricht blacksmithing result in successfully welding PBL into the Rotterdam University campus?

Let me show you the results. Across eight years in which the bachelor program has been evaluated by Elsevier, it ranked first among the Dutch Psychology programs with one exception when it ranked second. These results in later years were paralleled by our Master program and by the yearly survey of the Keuzegids Hoger Onderwijs - the Higher Education Choice Guide.

Our program even ranked 6th ex aequo with several other programs out of 400 bachelor programs. Perhaps most importantly, the program was placed first in
the 2007- report of the National Accreditation Committee in the peer-review ranking in Psychology.

It looks like the high ambitions set at the beginning have been achieved so far. This successful PBL-model now has also been implemented in the Sociology department of the Faculty of Social Sciences. And also the department of Public Administration has embraced small-group learning.

One might be thinking: That is nice, all those results. But is it worth it? How does it feel as a teacher when it is not possible to follow the traditional educational methods anymore? How does it feel when you cannot permanently teach in front of a 300 person crowd that is reading newspapers, drinking coffee, and does anything except listening to you? How does it feel if you are confronted with questions from students who, within the boundaries of their small student group, have been freely and autonomously searching for scientific sources to reflect on a problem? It feels exciting, because the problem turns into the solution. Watch for yourself and watch our video on problem-based learning.