

>> LEARNING TASKS FOR PRE-MASTER CLASS STUDENTS OF THE FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY
AND PEDAGOGICS VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM

A Good Practice of Reflective Judgement Learning?

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Introduction

"I changed my mind. Partly for the reason that the article of X is ill founded. I cannot agree with his ideas about the present intercultural society. They are little rejuvenated. In my opinion society and religion cannot be detached. The realistic view on cultural development of Y has more appeal for me..."

In this quote Chris, a premaster class student pedagogics weighs up here the pros and the cons of multi-religious education. He explores his experiences in order to define his position in the discussion on mono religious and multi religious schools.

Such reflections, focused on students' judgement development, are at the heart of students' learning processes in higher (tertiary) education. The view that students have to be educated to become critical and responsible professionals, and that they have to learn to defend their judgements thoroughly, is supported by countries all over the world. Helping students learn to make defensible judgements, is seen as the most important responsibilities educators have.

For instance in the USA, this issue has emerged as an underlying theme in several national proposals for educational reform (King and Kitchener 1994) and recently in Europe, one of the Dublin descriptors is focused on making and defending judgements (Vroeienstijn 2003).

But although achieving this recognition at these educational levels, is half the battle won, ensuring actual integration into (multi)disciplinary courses where students learn to become reflective and critical is another matter. It is a difficult job to implement such new ideas in concrete disciplinary courses. Not only attempting to teach students to think more reflectively is a complicated and often difficult task, but also stimulating university teachers to teach in that ways, requires much time and labor. The last ten years, the VUA works on the implementation of value and judgement teaching (Boschhuizen, 2004). At the administrative level, the dialogue between the three implementation levels, university board,

educational management and university teachers, has been stimulated, so that these levels can complement and reinforce each other to.

At the level of the curricula of the faculties, the integration of the issues of judgement (scientific, social, ethical, philosophical) into their curricula has been supported, to enable students to reflect from more perspectives and at deeper levels. And the faculties were stimulated in developing common red threads (cumulative competencies) of reflection, through their curricula from the first year of the Bachelor's program through the last year of the Master's. With this the aim is not to integrate these aspects, as isolated, separate parts of reflective subject matters, or separate reflective courses. Rather, to integrate them as a central part of the curricula of the core subject matters of the discipline.

At the level of the concrete courses, the university teachers were supported to develop reflective, judgement elements in their courses, so as to reinforce, and give birth to, these red threads and to come to concrete improvement of the reflection, judgement abilities of students.

Although working on the administrative and general curricular levels is very important and favorable, if the university teacher do not integrate judgement learning in their concrete courses, all of these initiatives are fruitless. Therefore our focus lies in supporting university teachers to help their students in learning to make judgements defensible.

In paragraph 2 we show guidelines for it, in the shape of a Dilemma Oriented Learning Model. In this model the knowledge of experts of the discipline showing different points of view and ethics and philosophy are integrated in the judgement learning process. Since 2000 several courses were developed on the base of this model (Boschhuizen 2004). In paragraph 3 we discuss some learning tasks for pre master class students as a 'good?' practice in the faculty of Pedagogics and Psychology at the VUA. In paragraph 4 we introduce a

conceptual framework for Reflective judgement, and derived from that framework, we suggest five central questions for assessing the quality of courses on reflective judgement. Finally, we apply these five questions on the learning tasks and we do some suggestions for improvements in the future.

Guidelines for teachers: A Dilemma Oriented Learning Model

In 1999 a model for students’ value, judgement learning process was developed: the Dilemma Oriented Learning Model (DOLM) (see figure 2 for a diagrammatic representation).

The model is meant to stimulate students’ critical thinking and to develop students’ ability for reflective judgement, in which ‘entertaining doubts’ belongs to students’ academic habit.

Reflective judgement can be seen as a process of opinion forming and giving. Students clarify, weigh, choose and communicate relevant knowledge issues (knowledge from the discipline, the society, ethics and philosophy) and their underlying values. The quality of that reflection process depends on the quality of students’ academic abilities (communication and learning skills (as, applying new knowledge, analyzing, evaluating, abstracting, entertaining doubts) and is strongly influenced by students’ attitudes and values with respect to the process itself and to the content of the process: the knowledge issues and underlying values.

RJ can be brought in vision by the framework in figure 1.

Also communication, between students and students and teachers, on their choices, arguments and underlying values, is seen as very important. Such a communication has the potency for students to see more sides of the coin in terms of their own common sense language and values. And of their understandings of the arguments from the various sides of the new academic knowledge to study.

The DOLM is a four phase model (see figure 2). The model starts with the introduction of a case, involving dilemmas.

The underlying idea is that learning to make judgements and to clarify underlying values, has to start with realistic problems or cases for which there is no single correct answer and in which uncertainty (King and Kitchener 1994) is essential. At the beginning of the process of judgement the problems have to raise discomfort (Dewey) and uncomfortable Feelings (Atkins and Murphy 1993), through fields of tension where alternative views, perspectives, dilemmas, ask for students’ choices, arguments and clarification of underlying values.

Phase A - The intuitive phase

Working *intuitively*, students clarify their intuitive personal knowledge, they weigh the different relevant knowledge issues and underlying values and choose a course of action in that particular situation and formulate the arguments and (moral) values underlying their choice. The students then communicate their choices, arguments and values with each other and the teacher, dialogically.

This phase was built in from the following points of view The procedure starts with Students’ Intuitive Judgement, arguments and values. That means that with this we accept the evidence and the consequences for teaching of the following claims about students’ intuitive ideas, which are derived from twenty years of research on science teaching (Wandersee, Mintzes and Novak 1994):

Students bring a wide array of ideas on their world to their classes. These ideas are often at variance with accepted views in the academic disciplines.

Students of both genders and of virtually all ages, ability levels, and cultural backgrounds subscribe to intuitive ideas. However, the frequency of occurrence for a given intuitive idea may vary considerably. This depends on factors, such as the level and quality of prior instruction, as well as on personal and social experiences beyond the classroom walls.

Intuitive ideas are very tenacious. They reflect common cultural experiences involving direct observations, the use of everyday language, the influence of mass media, and the influence of instructional practice.

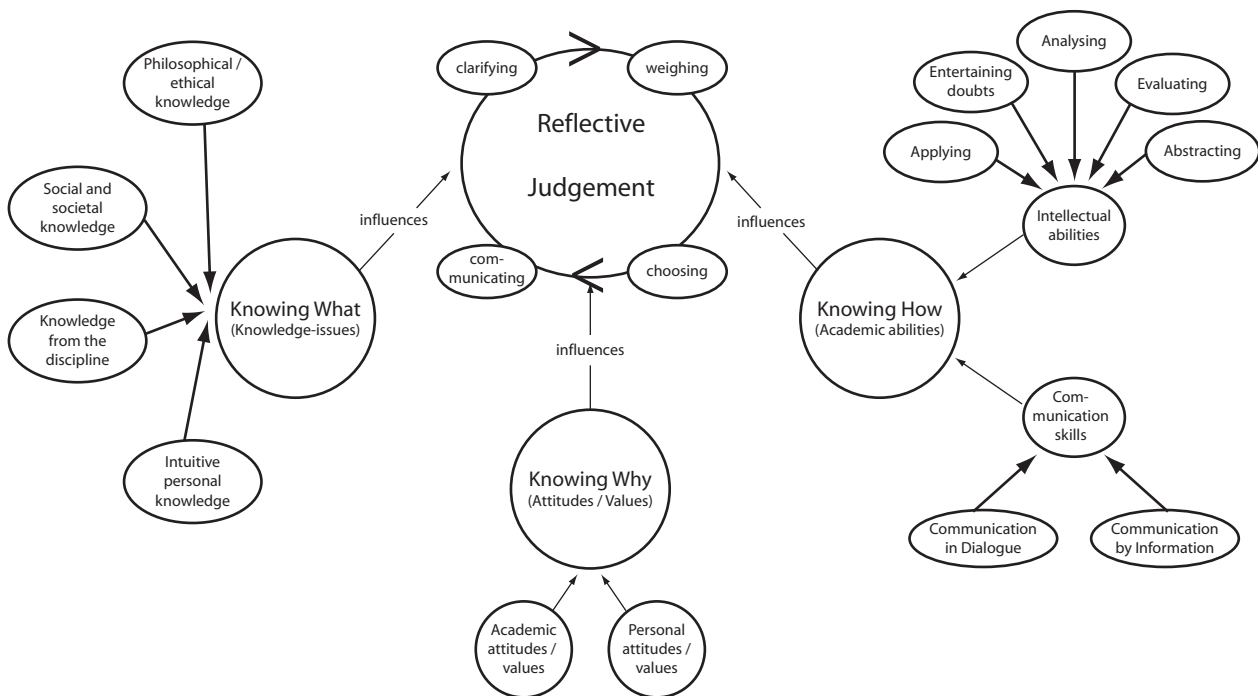


Figure 1 A framework for reflective judgement

In teaching we have to recognize intuitive ideas and to teach students accordingly. Students' own intuitive ideas and subject matter concepts all affect observations, interpretations and decisions. If the relationship between intuitive ideas and the subject matter concepts is neglected, then two different and isolated worlds could emerge: the world of the subject matter concepts and the world of intuitions and emotions. In judgement processes, such a separation could, for instance lead to alienation-either from the students' personal attitudes, feelings and values or from the sciences.

Phase B – The phase of the knowledge of experts of the discipline

In this phase, the students study the relevant bodies of knowledge from the experts of the discipline, (and, if relevant bodies of contextual knowledge from society experts) with different perspectives and clarify and weigh the various relevant knowledge issues and underlying values. Once again, they make a choice, presenting their arguments and offering an explanation of their values. This is followed by a dialogical communication between the students and teacher about their choices and values.

In this phase the bodies of knowledge of the discipline are integrated into the process of judgement. Here the facts, opinions, from the experts of the discipline are at stake.

Phase C - The phase of ethical and philosophical reflection

In this phase, the students reflect ethically on the case and philosophically on the adequacy and foundations of the relevant bodies of knowledge. Studying those reflections, once again they make a choice and present their arguments and clarify their values. Here too, they discuss their choices and values with each other and the teacher.

This phase was built in from the point of view that it will be fruitful for the depth and the quality of the process of students' judgement that the statements of the experts of the discipline in phase B, are submitted to further ethical and philosophical analyses.

This point of view is as old as the VUA is (from 1880) and from 1999 we try to build it in courses, in this way and systematically. The last ten years the idea of the importance of philosophical (epistemic) analysis in judgement development is also supported in the literature.

King and Kitchener (1994), for example, developed a Reflective Judgement model in which philosophical analysis, in the sense of the analysis of epistemic assumptions, also is very important. This reflective thinking model is an assessment model which contains sets of assumptions, or 'stages', each of which has its own logical coherency. Movement from lower to higher stages involves increasing complexity, sophistication, and comprehensiveness in the judgement process. The model describes increasingly complex ways individuals evaluate knowledge claims and explain and defend their points of view on controversial issues. They distinguish three main stages: pre-reflective thinking, quasi-reflective thinking and reflective thinking. Pre-reflective thinking students reason upon the assumption that one gains knowledge through direct, personal observation or through authority figures. They assume that the knowledge they gain in these ways is correct and certain. Pre-reflective judgements are based on the 'authority' of society or common belief, assumed to be correct, and not questioned. Quasi-reflective reasoning recognizes that knowledge claims about ill-structured problems contain elements of uncertainty. Quasi-reflective thinkers are unsure how to deal with the inherent ambiguity of ill-structured problems

However, lacking a full ability to weigh and sort the evidence in a particular situation, they may fall back on 'gut feelings' or their own past experiences that reinforced a stereotype.

Reflective thinkers accept that their understanding of the world is not 'given' and requires active construction. They also see that knowledge needs to be understood in the context in which it is generated. (Empirical) evidence is also explicitly used in this stage as a central criterion for evaluating the validity of a judgement.

Phase D - The phase of awareness of the learning process of judgement

At this point, the students look back on the three choices made in the earlier phases and give a verbal description of their learning process.

A 'Good Practice' in the Faculty of Pedagogics and Psycho-

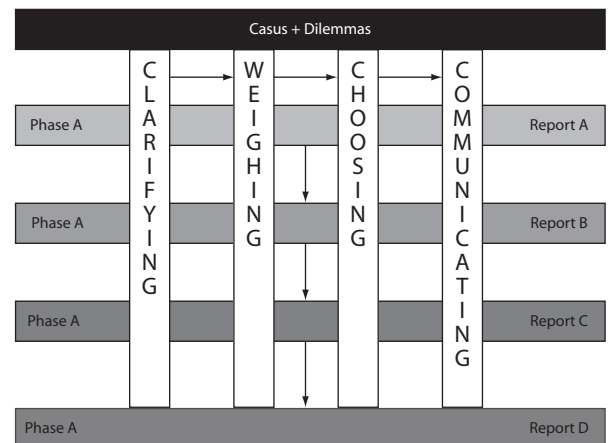


Figure 2 A diagrammatic representation of the processes of Reflective Judgement Learning: the DOLM

logy at the VUA?

The premaster class and tasks for reflective judgement learning

The premasterclass (pmc) is meant for students who have completed a related professional Bachelor. The pmc has to prepare them for a scientific master. Because the orientation of their previous master was professional it means the focus of this pmc must be on the academic skills and the scientific orientation. In the programme of the pmc there are three threads to be distinguished:

1. methods and techniques for social scientific research
2. sub-disciplinary knowledge
3. reflective judgment

This reflective judgment is the main topic in student guidance and practising this reflective judgment is the goal of the task we developed and which is described in this paper. Students did not get credits for this task, although it was obligatory to perform this task and report about it. They were told they had to do this assignment in the context of student guidance and that it was meant for them to gain insight in their learning process and their way of reflective judgment. Because the students didn't have much time to put in this task we limited the task to an individual one. They were allowed to discuss or communicate on the dilemma and their choices, but we didn't arrange group meetings. Because we wanted to experiment with Digital Port Folio we asked the students to write down their opinions and choices in a portfolio (reports A, B and C, see figure 2). Portfolio is a way to archive products in a structured manner. Also portfolio can be used to reflect on processes and the correlation between different tasks. We chose for a digital

portfolio which was part of our digital learning environment. Students could perform their tasks from any computer anywhere and could give their tutors digitally access to their portfolio.

We designed a task according to the 'dolm' format. In each phase students were asked to make a statement in the matter of mono- or multi-religious education. They also had to give their reasons and arguments for this choice. In each phase we added a different kind of knowledge. In the first phase (A) we showed them a documentary of a primary school which wanted to choose for multi-religious education. The film shows the opinions of children, parents and teaching staff. In the second phase (B) students read two scientific articles, one in English and one in Dutch. In the English article the author argues for multi-religious schools (Miedema 2000). He uses normative as well as empirical arguments. The other article reflects on the possibilities for Jews to participate in inter-religious education. (Evers,) The author sees a lot of barriers and chooses for mono-religious education.

Students were asked what in this phase their choice was and why. They were also asked if they had found new points of view or arguments.

In the third phase (C) they got an analysis of a philosopher. In this analysis he pointed out the arguments the authors of the scientific articles in phase B used. The students were asked to reflect on these arguments and the underlying views and their own position in this matter.

In the fourth phase (D) we asked the students to look back at their choices and reflect on the process of judging and learning.

Are these tasks examples of a good practice for reflective judgement learning?

At least, good practices for reflective judgement learning challenge students to entertain doubts. As mentioned earlier in paragraph 2, this attitude and ability belongs to their desirable academic habit. It is important that students do not get stuck in their own prejudices. Sticking in prejudices is a risk, we can observe from the research on intuitive ideas in science teaching and from own research (Boschhuizen and Brinkman and 1998): intuitive ideas often are tenacious and very resistance to teaching.

In our research on the DOLM (Boschhuizen et al. 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003), three possible outcomes of the judgment process, were identified: confirming, broadening and changing.

The process of *confirming* takes place when an individual is confirmed in his/her initial choice. It is a process of assimilation in which current structures (believes) are used to interpret experiences, books, articles etc. These structures remain the same or become stronger.

The process of *broadening* occurs when a student adopts alternative views, but retains his/her – still dominant, initial views. It is process of assimilation in which the current structures still remain the most important. However alternative ideas are adopted as likeable.

The process of *changing* occurs when a student exchanges his/her initial values/views for alternative ones. It is a process of accommodation in which current structures are exchanged for alternative ones.

Especially confirming can be a not desirable outcome when students do not give well-argued reasons for rejection of the alternatives.

In order to answer the question of this paragraph, we asked the (research) question which of the outcomes of the judgement processes (confirming, broadening, changing) the premaster class students show.

Another aspect of a 'good practice' for reflective judgement learning is that the learning tasks fit in with students'

intellectual abilities. The task developers decided that in phase C (philosophical reflection) a philosopher had to be studied who analyzed the articles of Everts and Miedema and answered the question for their basic assumptions. Are students not able to find these basic assumptions themselves? Therefore we asked the second (research) question

at which moment (phase A, B, C) the basic assumptions of Everts and Miedema appears into the argumentation of the students.

The research method to answer the first question

In total 20 premaster class students Pedagogics at the VUA attended the course. To answer the research questions we analyzed these students' responses to a task in phase D. The elements of this task are presented in survey 1.

Survey 1: The elements of the task in phase D

Which of the following statements apply to you?
Write down the number of the statement.

1. I chose for mono-religious school three times and was confirmed in that view
2. I chose for multireligious schools and was confirmed in that view
3. I chose to take a middle position three times
4. I chose for mono-religious school three times, though my sympathy for the multi-religious schools increased
5. I chose for multireligious schools, though my sympathy for mono-religious schools increased
6. I changed my choice

The research method to answer the second question

After each phase (A, B and C) we asked the students to write down their choices, their arguments and underlying values. We analyzed their answers from the question which content elements can be recognized and which of them are in the neighborhood of the basic assumptions of Everts and/or Miedema.

Results, the outcomes of the judgement processes

Figure 3 shows the number of students who supported the mono religious view, the multi religious view and the number who took a middle position in phase A (their initial views)

The multi religious positions were dominant in phase A. Following the phase B and C, we were able to identify six groups of students:

- a. Mono religious students who confirmed their position;
- b. Multi religious students who confirmed their position;
- c. Multi religious students who broadened their position with some sympathy for the mono religious point of view;
- d. Middle position students who confirmed their position;
- e. Middle position students who broadened their position with some sympathy for the multi religious point of view;

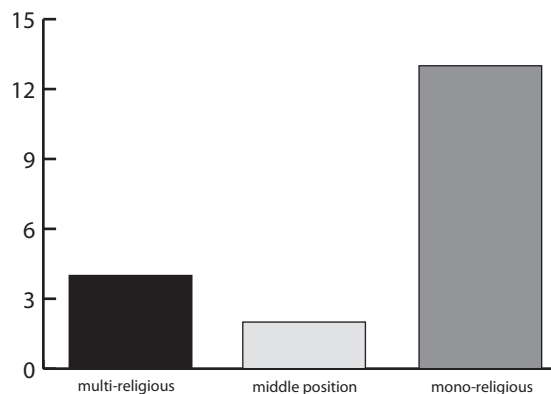


Figure 3 The number of students who supported the mono religious view, the multireligious view and the number who took a middle position in phase A (their initial views)

- f. Middle position students who changed from the middle position into the multi religious one.

Figure 4 present the new distribution. The categories of b and c are dominant. Confirming is dominating (see figure 5)

The basic assumptions

In figure 6 the appearance, in the phases A, B and C, of the content of the main statements of the authors in the argumentation of the students is shown.

For most of the students basic assumptions of Everts/

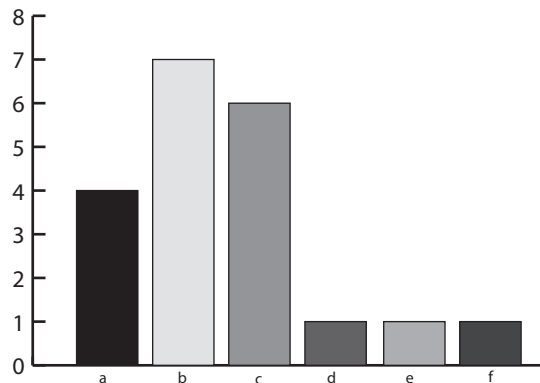


Figure 4 The number of students in the different categories

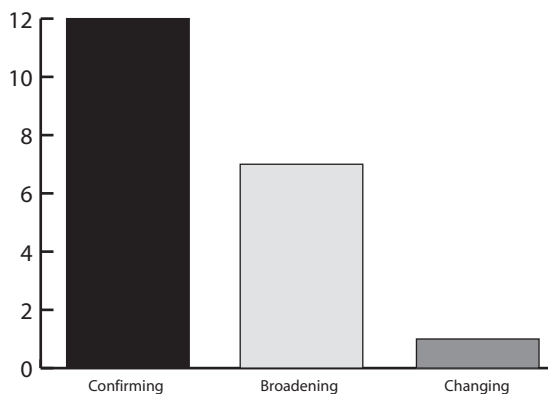


Figure 5 The number of students in the categories confirming, broadening and changing

Miedema appear in phase C after studying the intervention of the philosopher. They do not analyse in phase B both of the articles at the level of those assumptions and seem to be very supported by the work of the philosopher in phase C.

Conclusion

Confirming is dominant and most of the students do not show their analysing abilities in finding the basic assumptions of Everts and Miedema themselves.

Discussion

Are these tasks on mono-religious and multi-religious schools examples of a good practice for students' reflective judgement learning?

A part of a positive answer is that for a number of students these tasks set up the intuitive ideas and arguments (phase A reactions of the student) in motion: for the multi-religious who broadened their position (30%) and for the middle position students, who broadened or changed their position (10%).

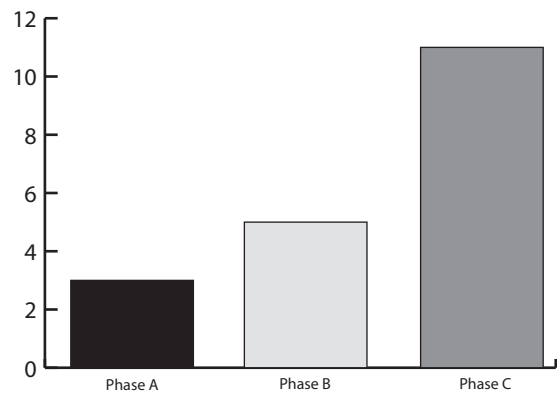


Figure 6 The appearance of the content of the basic assumptions of Miedema and Everts into the argumentation in the three phase A, B and C

However the majority of the students is a confirmer. That is not necessary a problem. For students can be confirmers, after a well-argued rejection of the alternatives. But we found such well-argued rejections sparingly. In this respect the tasks failed.

But how can we improve them so that there will be more broadeners and changers and that the choices will be better argued? And how can we improve the tasks in order that students show their intellectual abilities as analysing and abstracting in a better way?

To discuss these questions, we need a handle, a consistent complex of areas for special attention for improvement. Such a framework was introduced in figure 1 as description of the concept 'Reflective judgement'. From this framework for reflective judgement and from the stages of King and Kitchener five central questions can be derived as a handle for improving the learning tasks on Reflective judgement (see table I)

Table I Five central questions for improving learning tasks on reflective judgement

Do the learning tasks, in an adequate way:

In general

1. contribute to the development of reflective judgement as described by King and Kitchener?
2. explain the steps in the process of reflective judgement (clarifying, weighing, choosing and communicating) and explain the phases A, B, C and D? With respect to the knowing what
3. introduce the relevant knowledge from the discipline, the philosophy, ethics and social and societal sciences? And reckon with the intuitive personal knowledge? With respect to the knowing how
4. fit in with the academic abilities of the students (the communication skills and the intellectual abilities)? With respect to the knowing why
5. reckon with the attitudes/values underlying the knowledge issues and with the personal attitudes and values?

These five questions can be applied to the learning tasks on mono- or multireligious schools. Table II shows some remarks and suggestions for improving the tasks in the future.

Table II the learning tasks and the five central questions

The learning tasks and question 1

The tasks refer much too little to empirical data that can support the choices for mono- or multireligious schools. Consequently no attention was paid on the adequacy and foundations of the bodies of knowledge introduced by Everts and Miedema. Suggestion for the future:

- introduce learning tasks for Phase B which focus on empirical data which support both the alternative views.
- introduce learning tasks for phase C that students help to analyze the empirical data methodologically, to judge the adequacy and foundations of the knowledge based on the empirical data.

The learning tasks and question 2

During the introduction of the learning tasks there was no attention for the four steps, the phases and their interrelations. Suggestion: introduce an advanced organizer to show these steps, phases and their interrelations.

The learning tasks and question 3

A The relevant knowledge from the discipline
Everts and Miedema show extremely different points of view. In our opinion, students who apt to confirming do not get convinced by the extreme opposite. In the contrary the 'extreme' could be rejected by such students in advance. Suggestion: develop a learning task also with authors who defend a middle position.

B The relevant philosophical knowledge
No attention was paid on philosopher's views on the adequacy and foundations of bodies of knowledge. Developing learning tasks on philosophy of science could be sensible.

C The relevant ethical/social, societal knowledge
In the learning tasks, the problem of mono- or multi religious schools was not seen from ethical points of view. A suggestion could be to build in some ethical items, dilemmas, with different consequences for questions in our society.

The learning tasks and question 4

Not any attention had been paid on (the development of) intellectual abilities. For example the communication between students was not organised. Also abilities as analysing, abstracting and 'entertaining doubts' were ignored. Our suggestion will be to develop learning tasks with the focus on that kind of abilities. Especially focused on 'communicating' 'analysing', 'entertaining doubts' and abstracting.

The learning tasks and question 5

It is possible that with the kind of the case, the learning tasks come to near to the very basic (religious) values of students. Possibly it is good to weigh again the kind of the case: mono- or religious schools. Maybe it could be better to choose another subject.

General suggestions: broaden the knowledge base especially with respect to the social and societal aspects of the problem and integrate the three red lines (methods and techniques for social scientific research, sub-disciplinary knowledge and reflective judgment).

The main question of this paper was: Are these learning tasks an example of a good practice of reflective judgement learning?

In any case our framework for reflective judgement, the DOLM, the five central questions and this kind of research can be interesting tools on the road to the answer. However, the final answer can not be given. This answer could be given after strong empirical research in the future. Such a research could be focused on causes and effects of (parts of) learning environments that really learn students to become reflective judges.

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