



# AAU PBL Academy – Annual Report 2014

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## Introduction

Welcome to the 2014 annual report for the AAU PBL Academy. This year has been an active year for the Academy with initiation of new projects, many ad hoc activities and the consolidation of Journal of Problem Based Learning in Higher Education (JPBLHE).

Two of the faculties have appointed new members to the board of the Academy as Bettina Dahl Søndergaard from TEKNAT and Jacob Davidsen from HUM took up posts in the board replacing Jette Egelund Holgaard and Thomas Ryberg. The PBL Academy greatly appreciates the work and dedication both Jette and Thomas have put into their work in the board and we hope to continue the collaboration in the future. In addition to new faculty appointments the chairing of the board was, as part of the 18 month rotation passed on to SUND and Diana Stentoft.

The new PBL Academy strategy from 2013 has been further implemented in 2014. This meant continuing work with three focus areas: Flexible learning environments, progression of PBL competences and development of intercultural competence through PBL. The PBL Academy has also contributed to numerous internal activities, redesigned our web pages and participated in a revision of the leaflet on AAU PBL principles.

On the following pages we aim to present the work and activities of the PBL Academy and it is our hope this may inspire to an even more active and exciting 2015 where PBL will no doubt continue to be high on the agenda across faculties, campus areas and educations at AAU.

## A brief background of the PBL Academy

Problem based learning (PBL) constitutes the key approach to teaching and learning at Aalborg University and is a trademark for the university recognised worldwide.

In 2011 the AAU PBL Academy was established as a networking initiative across all four faculties at AAU. The Academy was established to strengthen coordination and synergy among researchers and staff working with PBL. The overall aim of the AAU PBL Academy is to ensure that AAU remains a leading international player in the continuous development and research on PBL in all subject fields and to ensure the internal development and discussion of the principles of PBL particular to AAU.

## 1. Journal of PBL in Higher Education

In 2013, the PBL Academy reached the goal of establishing an internationally recognised (open access) web based journal on PBL. *Journal of Problem Based Learning in Higher Education (JPBLHE)* has been established including an organisation of an open online journal system, which is now fully running. The journal editor in chief is professor Thomas Ryberg. Find more information on the Journal's homepage:

<http://journals.aau.dk/index.php/pbl/index>



The second call for papers was posted and published in 2014. The second issue was published at the end of 2014. The issue is available [here \(http://journals.aau.dk/index.php/pbl/issue/view/103\)](http://journals.aau.dk/index.php/pbl/issue/view/103).

Establishing an international peer-reviewed journal requires dedication and a committed editorial team who work hard to create procedures and routines for the continuous development of the journal. We are very pleased that this work has already been rewarded with contributions from around the world and by being added to the list of publications releasing publication points (BFI) in Denmark.

Two issues will be published in 2015. The first issue is a special issue on “PBL and creative processes”, which will be available in spring 2015. The second issue in 2015 is a regular issue and the call for papers for JPBLHE can be found here <http://journals.aau.dk/index.php/pbl/announcement/view/50>

## **2. Focus area 1: Flexible learning environments**

The academic staff at the four different faculties at AAU have different standards for what is considered the most appropriate learning environment when working problem and project based. At the same time the increased intake of students challenges the use of physical spaces for problem based project work. However, these challenges may serve as stepping-stones to foster new and more flexible learning environments aligned with the diversity of learning objectives in the educations. The question is whether all organisations of curricula and learning objectives require the same organisation of physical and virtual space. If not, how may we change and introduce more flexible learning environments?

During 2014 members of the working group have addressed issues of flexible learning environments from multiple perspectives and based on experiences from all four faculties in both Aalborg and Copenhagen. The project examines interplay between various learning environments at AAU and the learning objectives and organizations of PBL. The project looks at how different and more flexible learning environments may address different needs of teachers and students and the project will give concrete examples of new types of teaching within the frames of PBL. This project started autumn 2013 with the formation of working groups in both Aalborg and Copenhagen. These groups will present their work on a conference in March 2015.

## **3. Focus area 2: PBL and Progression**

It is increasingly important to document students’ academic progression and building of competencies through their education and so it is also relevant to gain a deeper understanding of how PBL may contribute to and strengthen progression.

This focus area will examine the progression of PBL competences throughout the curricula, and discuss how this progression can be more explicitly integrated into the written curricula.

The PBL Academy marks the beginning of work on this focus area with a seminar in January 2015. Following the seminar a working group with representatives from all four faculties will continue the work with the aim to develop descriptions of models and strategies from across educations which may serve as inspiration in future curriculum development.

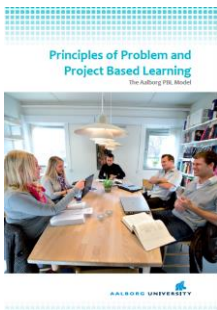


#### 4. Focus area 3: PBL and Intercultural Competencies

This focus area will gather information and examples of practices of intercultural competence and PBL. Each year AAU receives hundreds of international students who come here among other things to get a chance of engaging in PBL activities and participating in project work. This places some demands on both teachers, international students and Danish students and simultaneously give a unique opportunity for all to develop intercultural competencies through problem based learning activities. Work with this focus area will be carried out in 2015.

#### 5. Revision of the AAU PBL principles

The PBL Academy was requested to start a revision of the pamphlet "Principles of Problem and Project Based Learning" - see the publication [here](#).



The primary purpose was to make sure that the publication corresponds to current developments in the model. The PBL Academy collaborated with Rectors office in clarifying the areas in need of revision. The PBL Academy contribution to this revision was completed in 2014.

#### 6. New design and content on the PBL Academy webpages

In 2014 PBL Academy web pages were integrated into the new AAU-design. As part of this we wished to give the pages a make-over and hopefully make them more accessible and inspiring with a more logical structure. Therefore, we invited students from Information Architecture to develop proposals for the implementation and restructuring as part of their 8<sup>th</sup> semester project work. One group took the challenge and we are very happy with the result. With some minor changes and additions their proposal was integrated and we now look forward to developing the pages even further in 2015. This means continuing the development of resources on PBL. Our first resource set is already there and contains video material on how to organize group exams.

<http://www.pbl.aau.dk/Resources+-+Group+exams/>

#### 7. Internal Activities

The PBL Academy contributes to several internal ad-hoc activities when needed. Ad hoc initiatives include e.g. assisting international office to introduce new international students to the AAU PBL-model, activities related to AAU on Demand etc.

In 2014 the PBL Academy specifically contributed to the following activities:

##### Introductions to students

- By request from International Office the PBL Academy gave two introductory presentations to international students in 2014. The presentations are brief and related to general elements in



problem-based learning at AAU. The purpose of the presentations has been to introduce the pedagogical approach and the overall rationale behind the approach – and to make the International students able to ask relevant questions regarding the use of PBL at their specific AAU education.

- In February 2014 the PBL Academy gave a presentation regarding PBL to AAU on Demand.
- In September 2014 the PBL Academy gave a presentation regarding PBL to AAU on Demand.

## 8. External activities

External activities include all activities where the PBL Academy members are representing the Academy at occasions where external partners are present and key-audience. In 2014, the PBL Academy participated in the following external activities:

- Visit from Ritsumaikan University, Japan: In April Thomas Ryberg gave a presentation of the PBL model to a delegation from Japan
- Visit from University of Tarut, Estonia: 5 November Bettina Dahl Søndergaard gave a presentation of the PBL model to a delegation from Estonia.
- Visit from Ritsumaikan University, Japan (2<sup>nd</sup> visit): In November Jacob Davidsen gave a presentation of the PBL model to a delegation from Japan.
- Visit from Lappeenranta University, Finland: In December Diana Stentoft gave a presentation of the PBL model to at delegation from Finland.
- Visit from Oslo University: In December Jacob Davidsen gave a presentation of the PBL model to a delegation from Norway.

## 9. Other activities

The PBL Academy had eight board meetings in 2014. In 2014 it was also decided to publish a regular newsletter every three months to keep information current and accessible to all AAU employees and other interested parties.

Finally it should be noted that the PBL Academy board contributed a paper on Tomorrows PBL to the Anniversary publication marking the AAU 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

## 10. Looking ahead

2015 is already here and already proving busy and exciting from a PBL perspective. The PBL Academy has already planned numerous activities and is looking to strengthen Journal of Problem Based Learning in Higher Education even further. At the same time AAU is already in full swing preparing a new five-year strategy in which PBL and PBL research is central. We welcome this and hope to be able to contribute towards an even greater PBL practice at AAU in years to come.

Members of the PBL Academy:

Diana Stentoft (Chairman)  
SUND

Erik Laursen  
SAMF

Bettina Dahl Søndergaard  
TEKNAT

Jacob Davidsen  
HUM