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To support the development of entrepreneurial competencies of students in all levels and disciplines in Rotterdam, together with Hogeschool Rotterdam we launched O2Lab Rotterdam in 2020. The main objective: to build a community of teachers with a strong entrepreneurial mindset who will transfer this mindset and skills to their students.

To better understand the positive social impact of O2Lab, we interviewed two key figures in the project: Martijn Priem (Knowledge Centre Business Innovation at Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences) and Dimitri Verzijl (Albeda College Economie en Ondernemen).

Erasmus Centre for Entrepreneurship (ECE): Dimitri, how did you get involved with O2Lab Rotterdam?"

Dimitri Verzijl (DV): After a career in logistics, I travelled for a while, then studied Music Management, worked for a record label and eventually ended up in education. All these experiences greatly shaped my own entrepreneurial mindset, so when I heard about the O2Lab Train the Trainer at ECE, it seemed like a great opportunity!

ECE: Martijn, why did the University of Applied Sciences want to be involved in O2Lab as a partner?

Martijn Priem (MP): That actually happened rather organically. Following a European project in entrepreneurship education, we wanted to broaden the knowledge we had gained and improve connections to take the next step in this together as educational institutions in Rotterdam.

ECE: For us, the collaboration proved very valuable. Through O2Lab we are more actively ensuring that students from all educational institutions participate in our programmes. Following up on this, do you think there

are differences in exactly which skills to encourage among MBO, HBO and WO students?

DV: That's really interesting, I also supervised HBO students in their internships before and we often heard back that they are too theoretical, while MBO students are much more hands on.

MP: What was quite an eye-opener for me during the training that at university-level, one of the main challenges is to get students to go outside to gain practical experience, while at MBO it is exactly the opposite: encouraging them taking a step back every now and then to oversee the whole thing.

DV: Exactly. MBO students are so quick in coming up with solutions. By putting students from different institutions together, they can complement each other nicely and also practice giving each other feedback as a team.

DV: As teachers though, we must lead by example, and be able to reflect critically among ourselves.

MP: Agreed. Among teachers, I sometimes notice a big difference between 'merely' the role of teacher on the one hand and adopting an entrepreneurial attitude in your role on the other hand. I do find this difficult at times.

ECE: The aim of O2Lab is indeed to encourage not only the entrepreneurial mindset of students, but also of fellow teachers. Dimitri, how do you try to put this into practice?

DV: Small steps, and mainly realising that when you have a cool idea, it might not always be of interest to other colleagues, initially at least! In the first years that I was teaching, all I was doing was shooting ideas at people and nobody was really waiting for that.

ECE: So, it's about interpersonal skills? How do you try to apply this, Martijn?

MP: I recognise what Dimitri is saying. I found that

instead of saying how you think something should be done, it really helps to let colleagues experience it for themselves first.

ECE: Why do you think O2Lab Rotterdam has had a positive impact in the Rotterdam education ecosystem?

DV: Mainly because of the community feeling. During the training, I saw that participants really wanted to learn from each other.

MP: I think it also helps that in the training we bring together pioneers, people who are working on entrepreneurship education within their own institution.

DV: Definitely! By creating a safe environment in the training where people can tell their stories, everyone realises that you can do so much more to improve education together than on your own. That is really powerful and sometimes not as present internally within institutions.

ECE: Great! And how do you think more collaboration between Rotterdam educational institutions can contribute to such initiatives in the future?"

MP: As different institutions, we all have a role to play in driving these developments. Ultimately, of course, the goal is for O2Lab's mission and vision to become embedded in the DNA of Rotterdam's educational institutions. In other words, for us to become redundant."

DV: In the long term, I think this does depend on the extent to which institutions find it important to install a more entrepreneurial mindset in students. To this end, it is crucial that boards provide room for experimentation by teachers.

MP: Commitment at board level takes time anyway, we have to create a bottom-up movement as well. If we let colleagues and students speak on our behalf about their positive experiences, hopefully we will get everyone on board!