

31VOLTS

CASE #06

OMO
SCHOOLS



CREATING SPACE TO LEARN

Design the classroom of the future. Or rather: how can we best approach that challenge and can you teach us how to design and execute solutions that work. Education and school systems are constantly evolving. Schools are looking for new ways to deal with that, designing new spaces and new interiors is part of that quest.

‘Ons Middelbaar Onderwijs’ (OMO: Our Secondary Education) was established in 1916 as an umbrella organisation for secondary schools in the Dutch county of North Brabant. The schools offer education at most common Dutch levels. The guiding idea for OMO is to develop the talents of each student through “good education”. In their own words: *“You will exceed expectations by learning from and with each other and by creating space for all to live well together in society. That requires skills like collaboration, having a mind of your own, and problem solving. It is important to learn to understand and be open to other views and cultures. We give substance to this by educating the student based on our core values: good education, good citizenship, live good, and do good.”*

Providing students the best possible opportunities for life

OMO approached us with the question to design the classroom of the future. Education is constantly developing and changing: suitable education, customization, and on-going digitization are just a few of the developments. OMO’s focus always remains on giving students the best possible opportunities for their future. All these developments create a need for different spaces and a different layout than the traditional classrooms with standard tables and chairs that most schools still use. And the real question was whether we could help them with a method to best tackle this. Within the dynamics of continuously changing education, one classroom of the future does not exist – it evolves.



▲ We test ideas as quickly and easily as possible

1. Socialization
The school as meeting place

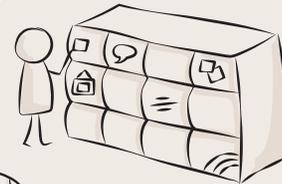


feel at home

pride

flexibility in methods

learn in your own way



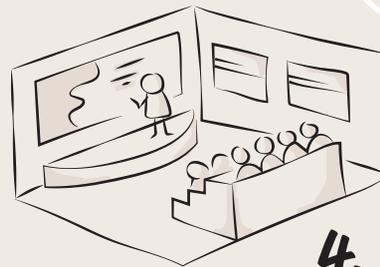
2. Make your own choices
Claim the school



3. Personal development
From the inside to the outside and back in

learn from experts

different forms of teaching



4. Qualification
The individual learning route

▲ Visualization of the four design directions

So the challenge at hand was about dealing with change and how to translate that into an optimal design of school spaces. That challenge immediately made us jump with joy. After all, design is a process of skills you can master, especially if you tackle it as a team. And it was clear that we would work together with a motivated group of teachers from two of the affiliated schools.

Classroom of Tomorrow

The Classroom of the Future. That may sound like science fiction, a vista. As something filled to the brim with technology and digital solutions. But of course, it doesn't have to be

that way. In fact, the classroom of the future may well be the Classroom of Tomorrow. Very practical and very near. Perhaps the challenge is predominantly about creating space where kids can learn, designing spaces that boost the natural learning process.

It goes without saying that digitization, ICT, and media literacy are important subjects in any school's curriculum. However, technology may not be the dominant factor in designing school spaces. During the conversations we had with the client about this, it became clear that technology is primarily a facilitating factor.

Essence of education

As a first step, we investigated the team's ambition and vision. We mapped out which topics are important in the school and for tomorrow's classroom. It was expressly not about tables and chairs, it was about the essence of education. About working together, being able to focus, creating your 'own' school that works for you, shaping conditions to get the best out of yourself. It was about the school's role in society and how to bring the outside world into the school. And also the other way around, bringing the school to the outside world and preparing students to become good citizens.

Experiment and innovate

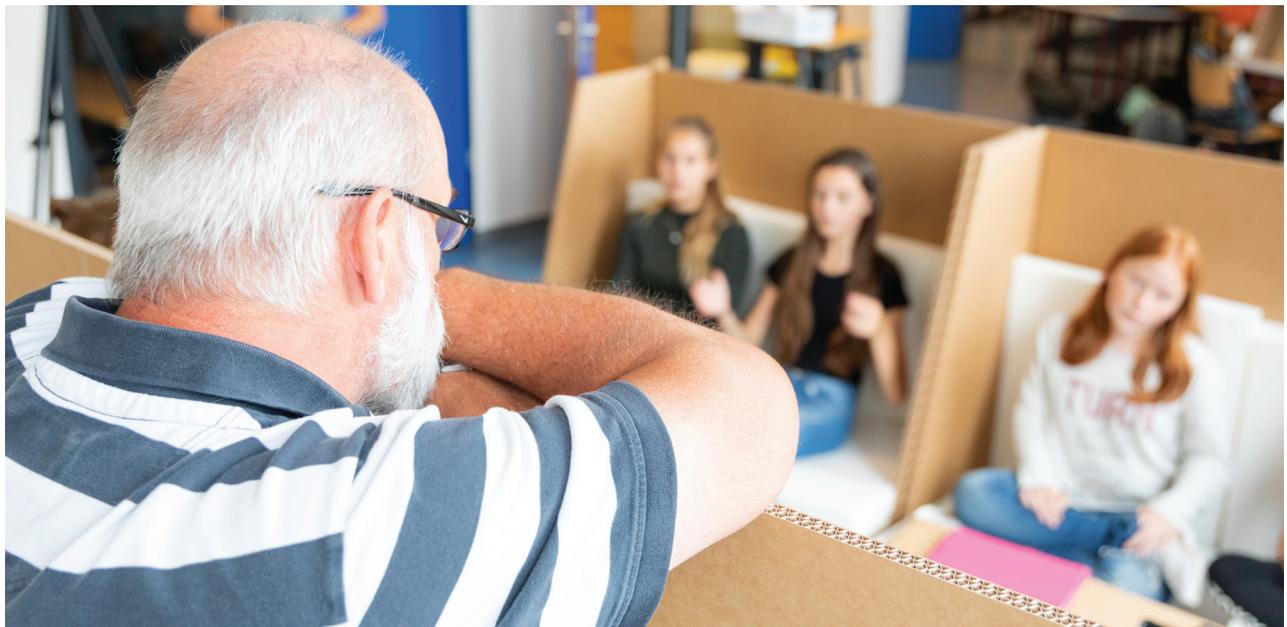
We held an interactive survey among colleagues and students (learning by doing), after which we facilitated a number of targeted workshops with the team. The directions became clear for the school to become an institution that best suits their education. These directions were in line with the goals they set for their education: socialization, personal development, qualification, and making your own choices.

As a next step we translated this into tangible innovations. It was all about the experiment and the process. The aim was to investigate the impact we could have.

Prototyping and co-creation

We designed various prototypes. We made scale models out of cardboard and wood. Then we had furniture made to measure, also from cardboard and wood. In one of the two schools, we experimented with these prototypes with some added IKEA products. We wanted to see if and how pupils would make the furniture 'their own', how the classes, interaction and collaboration would change. The testing was therefore expressly not about whether the furniture was comfortable (the human measure), but whether it had a positive effect on new ways of learning and teaching (the dynamics).

Only when you let the end user test your prototypes, will you discover if and how they really work. Are they being used as you expected? Do they trigger what you intended? What unexpected things do you see happening? The students' insights were refreshing. Adjustments are usually needed; working with prototypes of "cheap" materials accommodates that in a fast and budget-friendly way. Working in co-creation provides the quickest insights and results you are looking for.



▲ Because of the furniture, not only the students, but also the teachers adopt a different attitude



▲ All aspects of the furniture are extensively tested



▲ We visualize everything

Design thinking in the organization

The organization's aim was to find a way to continuously think about and design the classroom of the future. In order to do that successfully, it is important to involve teachers and students. Without that involvement, it would mainly be about the colours and shapes of the interior; completely missing the bigger picture of the essence of education and ways that facilitate learning at its best. In order to embed our approach and methods

within the organization, we visualized the joint design process in the 'PROEF! Book'. A handy document that illustrates and explains the project's route (and the turns we took along the way). The book contains all the insights, opportunities, experiments, and results. The team can build on that and work on creating the classroom of the future on a daily basis. They now have the tools and techniques to use design thinking in shaping their education, now and in the future.

We design for aspiring organizations that strive to be meaningful for people.

Design in the service of people. That's the shortest version to explain what we do. Designing is something you do for others, for users, customers and co-workers. That is why we always put people first; they shape our work.

"But what do you guys actually design?" is a question we get a lot. The answer is not always clear-cut, especially when we are just starting a new project. What we can tell you is that the answer is not a product, a poster, an app or an interior. Nevertheless, things like that might very well be part of the solution.

So what do we do? We design the relationship between organizations and people. Those people can be customers, students, colleagues, patients, suppliers or users. That is why no project is the same in our line of work.

What's the real question here?

We always start out with a thorough look at the problem at hand. That's how service design differs from other design approaches. What is the challenge we are dealing with? What is the perspective of the end user? Who is that user? And what's the real question we need to answer?

Approaching our work like that lands us in the most interesting places. We wandered the streets of Cairo, visited schools in southern Netherlands, researched the F-Terminal on Schiphol and had a meeting in the machine room of an elevator in Amsterdam. We followed potential museum visitors in the city of Utrecht, interviewed civil servants at a

Dutch ministry and talked to people seeking help with 'Slachtofferhulp Nederland' (Victim Support Netherlands). To just name a few of the things we do.

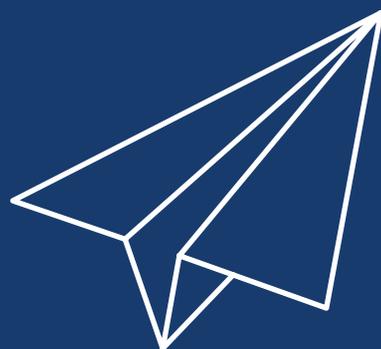
We research the way people interact with our client's organization and brand and we uncover what their desires and needs are. Only then can we find the opportunities for meaningful innovation. Those opportunities may lead to new or improved services, products, processes or business plans.

Design is a verb

Design is the way we work, the way we approach any project, the way we find answers. Design is a verb, that much we know. We involve people in each step of our design process; from research to co-creation and from prototyping to implementation. Designing the future is a joint effort, powered by people.

The thing is, it's easy to design something or to come up with 'a solution'. "Solutions are not the problem," is what we keep telling each other. We will never start thinking about or working on solving a problem until we have a very clear understanding of the actual question. And about the experience of the end user. Knowing the real challenge, leads us in the direction of solutions that add value. How can we create that value for the end user and for our client? And even more important; how do we make that come true?

Only if and when we can see and measure the impact and success of our solutions, will we finish up a project.



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