

De Bildung Academie

Manifesto - English version

2017

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De Bildung Academie is a bottom-up initiative in Amsterdam run by a team of highly driven and enthusiastic students, young alumni, and professors. The initiative originated from the desire to fully develop oneself as a human being. To capture this aspiration we turned to Bildung for inspiration.

Since September 2015, De Bildung Academie offers a full-time program of six months for students in the final stage of a bachelor's degree, master students, or people who have recently completed a bachelor's or master's degree. Four interrelated objectives lie at the core of the program.

The first objective is to aid students' development with regard to critical thought, moral sensibility, empathic ability, and expressive competence and authenticity. Second, to approach subjects from multiple angles and disciplines in order to help students acquire a nuanced understanding of complex issues. Third, our program is designed to stimulate students to relate to themes not only scientifically, but from a personal and societal perspective as well – thus integrating theory and practise. Fourth, and finally, we aim to enable our students to 'materialise': to implement what they have learned and experienced into a concrete form, be it a research-project, column, play, documentary, lesson, essay, debate, or something else.

Bildung, a broad academic education

- Who am I, how do I get to know myself and what are my talents and shortcomings?
- What does it mean to be persuasive? How can I be persuasive in an authentic way? Should I want to be persuasive?
- How do I relate to another person or an alternative view? Can I relate to the distant stranger as well?
- How do I retain a sense of 'home' in this complex world of tempo and transition, information and opinions, abundance and volatility?
- What is money? A medium of exchange, an illusion, or power?
- How does the Earth experience mankind? How much energy does the Earth have left to offer?
- What is my role in this society? Should I feel or be responsible? If so, how should I take responsibility?

Who would not want to engage in Bildung themes like these?

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In November 2014, a group of students and professors started making De Bildung Academie a reality. This initiative was a response to the joined experience that Dutch universities largely neglect their lawful directive: ‘to attend to the personal development of the student and to promote a sense of social responsibility’ (translated from the Dutch Law on Higher Education, Art. 3.1).

Many explanations may be offered to account for the failure of universities to deliver on this directive, such as issues of scale, a high workload for teachers, a lack of attention for teacher training in higher education, and a financial system strongly focused on efficiency and output.

Recent turmoil in the Netherlands (protests and demonstrations have even lead to occupation) largely stems from real problems like these. Instead of improving the educational system by protest, we have decided to create and to let our creation speak for us. Let’s not wait for the system to change; let’s be the change ourselves, and let the system follow!

So we started to create, and in doing so the Bildungsideal became our main inspiration. The Bildungsideal as we know it today originates from the German philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt (1757-1838). Von Humboldt strived to implement ‘humanity’ in education by exploring and developing the many qualities each individual intrinsically possesses. The Bildung Academie aims to adopt this body of thought in a contemporary way, so that Art. 3.1 of the Dutch Law on Higher Education need not remain a hollow clause.

We want to offer students a broad educational program, so that they can find their place in our complex society both more comfortably and confidently.

To this end the academy promotes not only critical thought, but additionally emphasises the empathic, ethical and expressive nature of man. These aspects are reflected in both the content of the themes and the didactic form of the education offered by the academy.



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Domains and modules: an interdisciplinary and highly relevant curriculum!

We believe education should not emphasise memorising and reproducing as much knowledge as possible, but rather focus on the manner in which knowledge is searched, selected, processed and judged.

We have reached a point in time where it is no longer possible for an individual to fully master the current abundance of knowledge, not even when limited to one specific field. Thus, finding ways to purposefully collect and select knowledge, judging its value, reflecting on it and applying this knowledge has become ever more relevant. How does knowledge assist a proper orientation on reality? What is its role in our culture, what is its place in a world in transition?

This quest cannot be taken lightly and should be pursued on a highly academic level. Our students are encouraged to approach subjects in various ways and from multiple perspectives. They are challenged to inspect their position in the world and gradually call it into question – so they may rebuild it on a more robust foundation. Students can thus simultaneously gather knowledge relevant to them in a critical manner and formulate answers to personal and social challenges.

*“Education is the most powerful weapon
which you can use to change the world”*
Nelson Mandela



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“Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned at school”
Albert Einstein

Our educational program is divided in three domains of six weeks:

Self and other

Who am I, how did my past shape me, who are others around me, and how do we relate to each other? In this domain, the emphasis is on increasing awareness of self and other. We aim to create a context in which students can safely question themselves and each other – their norms, values, interests, motives, ideals, behavioural patterns, feelings etc.

Our heritage

In what world do I live, what systems, traditions, and intersubjective spheres influence my life, and how do I personally relate to all that? In this domain, we aim to increase awareness of the world we live in, we stimulate students to question the status quo, and to actively experience ‘society as it is’.

Transition

Which transitional processes are going on in the world today, what transitions does the world need, what role do I want to play, and what can I do? After two domains in which students have been confronted with themselves and with the world they live in, in this last domain we confront the student with a complex world in transition and we invite our students to actively take a position in this world.

Within these three domains, we develop ‘modules’ over which we divide our students: thematic, fulltime courses of 6 weeks. In these modules a specific theme relevant to the domain is dealt with in depth. So far, in the first domain we have developed the modules Identity, Rebellion, and Rhetoric. In the second domain we have developed the modules Art, Money, and Religion & Spirituality. In the last domain we have developed the modules Digitalisation, Energy, and Stuff. Together with a carefully designed overarching program – consisting of an introduction weekend and week, a selection of workshops and lectures, and a final week to close the semester – these modules form the full program of a semester at De Bildung Academie.

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Who are involved?

Head-teacher

A head-teacher is the main teacher of a module and, being an expert, guarantees the quality of the content of a module.

Guest-teachers

Guest teachers work with students one or several times, providing a lecture, discussion, workshop, excursion, or other activities. Guest lectures can be scientists, but also artists or entrepreneurs for example.

Module guides

Module guides are student-assistants who are responsible for all practical arrangements and fulfil a mentor role for the students.

Semester guides

Semester guides are student-assistants who intensively work with the students the whole semester. They facilitate the module-overarching program and co-guide modules together with a module guide.

Students

We approach our students as active contributors to the educational process. Therefore the course of our modules is always flexible and students have a high degree of freedom in assignments.



Four central human capacities

We aim to base our didactic forms on a frame of four central human capacities that together ensure a broad conception of education.

Critical thought

In the scientific domain the ability to think critically is typically valued highly. It is about the ability to systematically dissect a complex problem and to subsequently reflect upon it in an objective, independent and critical way.

Expressive competence and authenticity

Expressive competence is the ability to express your thoughts, emotions and positions in a concise, attractive, personal and appropriate manner in language (written or spoken) and in performance (acting or visualising).

Empathic ability

Empathy is the ability to transfer yourself into the thoughts, feelings, position and interests of someone else using one's imagination. In this way you understand the other and are able to take the other into account in your behaviour.

Moral sensibility

Moral sensibility is the ability to determine what is the right thing to do. This is a complex matter; what is the right thing in the ever changing world we live in, with its conflicting ideas, needs and motives? We believe that this is a question we should all find our own answers to, time and again.



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Didactic principles: Innovative, confronting, and personal

Educational culture: organised inspiration in a safe environment

The academy is setting out to not only be tantalising in its content and form of education, but also in the way it tries to create a culture of motivation and trust and safety. This way we challenge the student to take responsibility and to develop joy in her own development. Therefore, we organise regular activities and workshops that nurture such an educational culture and we regularly reflect on group processes. Furthermore, inspiring teachers play a crucial role! Our teachers can be found in universities, corporations, art and politics and are regarded as the best amongst their peers. They know themselves and the environment and are driven to share their knowledge, to listen, to be an example for the students and continuously offer new perspectives. This way, they are able to succeed in creating magical moments between students and teacher time and time again. The dedication of the student is just as essential: after all, an enthusiastic student motivates the teacher. In short: De Bildung Academie depends on organised inspiration.

Interdisciplinarity and counterpoint

An interdisciplinary approach – an approach in which not one but multiple, sometimes conflicting perspectives on the subject matter are offered – teaches students to deal with complexity and to find their own stance. In this light, De Bildung Academie introduces the term ‘counterpoint’. Sometimes, our students will feel at home in a certain perspective, explored in interaction with theory and practice, and will suddenly be confronted with a different and conflicting viewpoint – a counterpoint – that stimulates a student to reconsider her ideas.

Integration of theory and practise

Integration of theory and practise makes education on De Bildung Academie lively. When studying a certain subject, we aim to both base real events in theoretical perspectives and to enrich theories with practical experiences. As such, integrating theory and practise stimulates students to relate to subjects from both theoretical, societal and personal perspectives.

Materialisation

Bildung is not only a process of inner development, but also concerns the ability to translate thoughts, feelings, and insights to concrete actions. Therefore, we introduce the concept of ‘materialisation’: a project in which students implement that which they have learned and experienced into a practical form, be it a research-project, column, play, documentary, essay, debate, or something else. Materialisation assignments stimulate students to experiment with new forms of expression and thus enable them to develop self-confidence, expressive skills, and the power to (co)create.

360-degrees feedback

For the education we offer, in which personal learning processes are central, grading often feels irrelevant. We believe that students learn more from detailed feedback and personal reflection. We work with ‘360-degrees feedback’: feedback from multiple sources (e.g. peers, teachers, friends, self) and multiple perspectives (e.g. artistic, argumentation, societal relevance). In 360-degrees feedback, students also reflect on their own work and try to integrate all feedback to maximise learning.

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The main objectives

1. To aid students' development of critical thought, moral sensibility, empathic ability, and expressive competence and authenticity
2. To acquire a nuanced understanding of complex issues by approaching subjects from multiple angles and disciplines.
3. To not only relate to themes from a scientific, but also from a personal and societal perspective, and to thereby integrate theory and practice
4. To enable students to 'materialise': to implement that which they have learned and experienced into a practical form, be it a research-project, column, play, documentary, essay, debate, or something else.



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