

Policy vision on diversity and inclusiveness

Platform diversiteit ATD

1. Introduction

Two important developments within liberal democracy have led to changes in society during the last thirty years. Emigration and immigration have accentuated the need to recognize the internal diversity of a democratic society and globalization has shaken the idea of the territorial sovereign state. In other words, society is diverse in many ways. There are differences in gender, sexual orientation, nationalities, cultures, geographical origin, ways of thinking and religions. Along with these changes we need to re-examine the definition of the concept of citizenship. We live together and work together, so we have to see each other and recognize each other.

Citizenship can be defined in terms of rights and obligations with respect to the law, but also as active participation in the political institutions of a society and as deriving a specific identity from that participation. It is in the latter meaning, that since 2003 the Education Council of the Netherlands (Onderwijsraad) has issued advice on the development of citizenship in education (Onderwijs en burgerschap, 2003), with a special emphasis on the need to develop social competences and social cohesion in education. The Onderwijsraad states that next to the obvious qualification assignment of the HBO (that is the vocational qualification - to be able to exercise a profession upon graduation) also active participation in society through the promotion of social cohesion and democratic citizenship is paramount for education. This message has been re-iterated since, for example in the report “Verder met burgerschap in het onderwijs” (Onderwijsraad, August 2012). In their very recent, latest report about far-reaching differentiation in the Dutch educational system (Doorgesloten differentiatie in het onderwijsstelsel, 14 december 2018) the Onderwijsraad states the following:

- (1) young people from different social groups no longer meet each other in education;
- (2) placement in secondary education is becoming more and more determinative for the final level of young people; and
- (3) lifelong learning has no formal place in the education system¹

The Amsterdams Municipal Office for Research, Information and Statistics (Gemeentelijk bureau voor Onderzoek, Informatie en Statistiek, OIS) showed already in 2017 that Amsterdam parents are increasingly high educated. The number of high educated Turkish, Moroccan and Surinamese parents also rises every year. However, secondary schools in the city are increasingly more segregated, not only along the lines of culture and ethnicity, but even more so along the lines of socio-economic status. Considering statements (1) and (2) above (young people from different social groups no longer meet each other in education and placement in secondary education is becoming more and more determinative for the final level of young people) there is a lot of work to be done still in terms of diversity awareness and the development of diversity in schools on all levels. As long as, in the Netherlands, we do not manage to integrate the populations of our schools better, open up our education to all who want to be here, segregation continues.

¹ The advice in this report states the importance of connecting a reduction of differentiation to lifelong learning through a variety of options such dual learning, associate degree programmes, pre-bachelor programmes etc.

For the Academy of Theatre and Dance (ATD) diversity and inclusivity are embedded in its mission². We have committed ourselves to become an academy for theatre and dance for everyone who trusts that art matters and thinks that artists contribute to shape the world. The consequence of this ambition is that we don't just welcome diversity in cultural background, gender, taste and belief but also have to learn what that really implies and how to act. And consequently, bring it into practice.

In the recent years many steps were taken in this respect. Diversity and inclusiveness are in many departments top of mind and drivers for changes in curricula, debate, experiment and investments in programs and development. At the same time it is only a beginning. In 2018 a platform was installed that takes responsibility for developing a policy and bundle the initiatives into a consistent trajectory. Its task is to critically monitor and develop the actions and steps that need to be made.

The future of performing arts is depending on this development. If the work field should be representative for our diverse society we must keep on changing the academy. And welcome other stories and repertoire, other codes and images, new movement and reflection and the mutual recognition and connection of it all.

II. Where are we now?

Considering our school, the Academy for Theatre and Dance: a prerequisite for reaching more and diverse students is that students feel welcome and desired, that they know that the study programs and the ATD welcome everybody and that the Academy has a program to offer that connects with their needs in art and education. Trust is in this respect of paramount importance. It is not just a matter of expressing that trust in each other and in what we do, it is also a matter of really developing and experiencing it. After all, trust in each other presupposes that we see each other as capable and valuable people, and that we can keep each other accountable for our actions. Trust also presupposes an understanding of 'multiplicity'. We value autonomous life and do not want to encourage singular ideals as valid for every student, employee or teacher. A pluralism of values is desirable, assuming we truly acknowledge this pluralism.

We must realize that the Academy for Theatre and Dance is not automatically a place where everyone feels safe and at home. We must first take a few steps back and analyze our organization. We will have to recognize that the system in which we live and work is based on a colonial cultural archive. And if we want to do something about that, we will have to do something about that internal system. The new generation no longer accepts that system, neither within the theatre school nor in the rest of society. Making the school inclusive includes so much more than inviting students with a different background to enroll in the school.

If we really want to make the necessary changes in becoming a school which provides inclusive education in an inclusive environment, we first have to explore the question who we are as individuals in the school and who we are as an organization. What is our role in maintaining this existing system? How can we change this system and what are the consequences?

² If we trust that art matters, if we learn from everyone, if we think artists contribute to shape the world, how will we act?

In our school in many programs³ we consider themes such as identity, diversity and global citizenship as important and realize that culture and identity are constantly evolving. However, at the same time we see and hear back from our (former) students that not everybody feels welcome or considered of equal value. We see that personnel and students are not highly diverse (in its broad meaning) enough yet.

In that sense, despite our developing consciousness and the work that we do, we can underline the opening statement of the recent article “Racisme is een groot probleem. Ook in Nederland.” (https://decorrespondent.nl/8970/zwarte-piet-is-morgen-weer-vertrokken-het-racisme-blijft/3278941448640-4efdaedd?fbclid=IwAR1Sl5ghyVI3TANS57_8fA4rNfDJMSUtkba04rABJEo-MJXYCCnyqXg5-ug). Considering other types of lack of diversity we could make similar statements. As indicated before, questions around diversity are not always easy to pinpoint or solve. There might be complex layered problems of economic situation, trying to live in Amsterdam (housing) stifling issues of racism and gender issues.

III. Where do we go from here?

There is a lot of work to be done and it feels like a mountain of knots that is hard to detangle. We chose not to make a hermetic plan with concrete end results but to work in a PDCA cycle where the platform will constantly check and recalibrate the plan, the measurements and the results. We will undertake the following actions that will have consequences for the whole community and altogether contribute to realize the values and mission stated above. Parallel to working out the diversity plan / PDCA cycle, we work on setting up a student bureau to increase our support in terms of financial aid, scholarships, fund raising, housing, administrative support etc. to create better support for all students.

1. Baseline measurement (nulmeting)

Considering the advice formulated by the workgroup diversity in 2017, we can state we need a baseline measurement. We do not have the numbers to sufficiently support the degree to which we can think of the ATD as ‘diverse’ (cultural, social economical, handicap, sexual orientation, gender, geographical background). At the same time we can state, from observing our community, that we are

³ At the ATD there are a number of programs that have been actively involved in diversity for many years and where the commitment to attract both a diverse student population and offering diversity-intensive education is part of the core of the program. UC and the 5 'O Clock Class, for example, explicitly want to reflect and educate the culturally diverse metropolitan field. But also the Theater Docent and OPP programme and the internationally oriented SNDO do not stand still. In all these programs, the importance of preventing exclusion has led in particular to innovative pedagogical concepts (in which, for example, transculturality and personal learning are central) and the adjustment of the recruitment and selection policy. The department Docent Dans is a forerunner when it comes to diversity policy. The program started the design process of a transcultural curriculum in 2014-2015, in which the collaboration with Ecole des Sables (Patrick Acogny) is an integral part of this curriculum. The student population has become more diverse by being consistent in the acceptance policy of students and teachers.

not diverse enough. Although we would still like to perform a baseline measurement on AHK level, at the same time we do not want to wait for it. There are things that we know we need to do now. Quantitative and qualitative research - systematic and documented will be helpful, but preferably at the same time as we move forward with other actions.

2. Platform and staff

The platform consists of staff members and alumni of ATD and develops and monitors policy. It reports to the Academie Bestuur. It will be supported by members of Team Bedrijfsvoering. There is budget available for consultancy, advise and development. The Platform itself will need to be more representative for the whole organisation.

We will not hire a dedicated diversity manager as was recommended by an earlier workgroup of ATD (2017) because we all need to take responsibility. We should look at what we have: what is the structure here already that has the most success?

The structure of the ATD is documented: Domain meetings, Team Bedrijfsvoering, Academie Bestuur, Plenary Meetings and more. We need to make sure that the Platform Diversity has a sufficient representation of the structure of the organization. Every domain should have the diversity subject always 'in'. 'In' in the sense that every subject, every topic should have the diversity topic included. Diversity is a discussion or a responsibility that is not limited to a certain group. We have to find a way to bring diversity, as a subject always present in our awareness, in our conversations, to all tables and decisions.

We will have access to consultants for specific questions and challenges. We need to make sure that staff and students get the advice and support that is needed and offers trust and recognition. The consultant(s) are outside eyes can also coach us as consultants for each other (and beyond), we look at the curriculae and all other topics, ask questions, share, discuss and look for solutions.

3. Awareness and responsibility

Everyone in this organization should be aware of the importance and urgency of this mission. Take the inclusive story into each department. Start from personal stories and experiences. Listen and always listen. Confront ourselves with the reality that some students don't feel like they can be who they are in this organization. Even students that succeed in this school, don't always feel accepted.

From there it's possible to build critical thinking and historical knowledge. And be in dialogue. The diversity conversation often gets stuck because of the lack of understanding of what systemic and structural forms of oppression and exclusion are. That is why training and education on this specific topic is needed as a first step to build awareness: why change? and what kind of changes are necessary on the level of curricula, structure, content, teachers, communication etc.?

We will start with organizing awareness sessions in the school. With students, alumni and the ones that dropped out. They all have their stories. And both groups' stories are actually not that dissimilar. We will ask students and alumnae to tell their stories to the school. We will organize that first one for artistic leaders, next for teachers and other staff etc .

We will have bias training for all staff in 2019.
There will be courses in developing intercultural competences for staff members.

4. Setting targets for diversity

We would like to work with targets in the back of our minds when taking students into the school. We rather speak of targets, instead of quota. We will develop these targets and develop policy and instruments to realize them.

The same goes for hiring staff. We experience that we need access to other networks and media to reach candidates for positions that are available in the academy. We will not set quota but definitely set targets and do everything to reach them.

5. Auditioning and scouting

A vital aspect for diversity is how to reach a real diverse population, including for example Turkish and Moroccan children⁴. We need to invest in talent development, vooropleiding, talent organisations like De Gasten and our own Five O Clock Class. We need actively support theater- art- and dance-lessons in school curricula. We will continue and intensify the contact with De tafel van talentontwikkeling to give talent more access to the academy. We will consider if it works to develop more introduction-courses than we already do. Our network of scouts will be more diverse and active.

Another aspect is auditioning. We intend to exchange best practices and principles of auditioning and implement the results in the schools practice.

6. Curriculum design

How do we learn? What do we learn? What school do we need to be if we want to include diversity? For which work field do we prepare the artists that we invite as students? Why do students from other backgrounds sometimes don't feel motivated or connected to ATD? All these questions relate to the curriculum: it is what we do and where we stand for. In many of our departments these questions are asked and are the starting point for new programs and curricula. And often diversity and inclusiveness is a driver. In the coming years we will intensify, structure and monitor these developments in relation to the mission to attract a more diverse population.

We will decide on inviting an educator in residence to analyze the state of diversity in the academy, especially in relation to curriculum, and advice the departments.

⁴ One problem we face here is that already in the step from primary school to high school we 'loose' children. Children with a very low SES (Social economical status) very often receive low-school advice and don't go to havo or vwo, although they have the capacities (Rapport van de Onderwijsraad 2017, *De leerling centraal?*)

There is a budget from the Studie Voorschotgelden for professionalisation in relation to inclusiveness. The platform will develop plans for this.

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