

Quality Agreements 2019-2024

Report of evaluation talks with educational platforms

1. Context

The editorial board organised an open call in the fall of 2020. 21 groups responded with a proposal to start a new educational platform. Based on specific criteria—urgency of proposal, feasibility, originality in either educational model, approach, or topic—the editorial board selected 3 groups to start their platform from January 2021 onwards:

- Writing Classes
- Recipes for a Technological Undoing
- Garden Department

A coordinator supported the three platforms from January onwards.

The platforms started their activities during lockdown. While the Garden Department organized workshops outside, Writing Classes held writing and reading sessions with 1.5-meter distancing in the gym, and Recipes organised lectures and workshops online. As the regulations were loosened the platforms blossomed in the months leading up to the summer break. At the start of the new year, platforms presented themselves to the new BA and MA students around the campus. All three platforms invited a series of local and international guest writers, artists and academics to share their research and run workshops, as well as tailoring their programme to the interests and urgencies felt by their core group and participants from across the academy.

In the Fall, a symposium was organised by the editorial board in order to offer a public presentation on the work of the platforms to the broader community. In January 2022, the three platforms finished their programming. Writing Classes gathered texts written throughout the two semesters and brought them together in a publication, the Garden Department presented projects they developed during their permaculture course, and Recipes finished with an interactive lecture and workshop.

2. Three evaluation conversations

Coordinator of the platforms Rosie Haward and policy advisor Tessa Verheul organised evaluation talks with the three platforms and their participants in January 2022. A series of questions were prepared and shared with the platforms beforehand:

1. What were your expectations regarding the program at the start? To what extent have these expectations been fulfilled?
2. What was your most positive experience during this program? Can you describe what it was and why it was such a positive experience?
3. How did this program compare to the regular program of your department? Did they reinforce each other, was there conflict?
4. What was the average time investment in hours per week? How did you experience this?
5. Was this program of added value for your BA/MA study? If so: in what way? If not, can you explain your answer?
6. What tips and advice would you like to give to future platforms? Or if you were organizing another program, what would you do differently?
7. What do you think the editorial board should take into account when selecting new projects? Are there certain criteria that should be used?

Fragments of these conversations can be found in the attachment, see page 4.

3. Conclusions based on the three conversations

What the three platforms brought:

- The platforms didn't let the covid-restrictions stop them from organising qualitative programmes.
- Next to the actual programs, workshops etc, the platforms created a very different dynamic in the academy. Students and teachers working together on specific issues brought forward new ideas on education: As a teacher, it's good to remember that "right, it can be hard to study, and to keep on top of everything every week". Also: the way in which you work together is actually

a skill and a practice that you need to learn. It's not something which you just arrive and know how to do.

- For tutors to learn alongside students allows them to reflect on their own teaching practice. "The more you are learning, the more you know about what it is to learn and how learning functions".
- Students considered the possibility of organising their own educational platform as a great learning experience. To some of the participants student-led and student-organised education is a novel aspect, 'Which I thought was brilliant and useful if you're trying to build up another intellectual tradition'.
- It is an opportunity where practice and theory come together. Students learn practical skills such as organising their own open calls, or learn specific skills that they can bring into practice in the garden. Others stated that they experienced the platform to be a space where they could bring concepts into practice: "What I enjoyed the most with organizing this initiative was starting to work theory through more practically, which is an inherent difficulty. That's something I concern myself with in my own practice: to work though ideas into form".
- All groups expressed that it was wonderful to build a community of people from different departments and programs interested in the same topic. While to some platforms this community-building was already an aim in their proposal, to others it was an unforeseen yet much appreciated result. It was suggested to ask future applicants to state what kind of community they want to build with their platform.
- Although with all platforms a community was built, the commitment of participants wasn't always steady. It was hard to create a continuous group of participants, due to tight schedules, overlapping commitments and a lack of consistent and suitable available spaces for learning.
- The focus on topics and forms—bias in technology, gardening, writing as a creative practice—that are not well represented by departments was considered important, and contributed greatly to organisers and participants education.
- The freedom of the structure of a platform gave them time to explore. "When we created the platform I think we felt more liberty to experiment outside of writing, to invite guests who we otherwise might not have thought of"; The lectures "pushed me to read more about the subjects they were discussing. And from a philosophical point of view, to rethink my relationship with technology"; "It was a refreshing space to come into and to engage with this critical and really intellectual work which centered themes that we don't see enough, especially in the Netherlands".

What drawbacks the platforms experienced:

- All groups addressed the large workload of the organising core-team, especially during assessments. "It would have been more successful if time management and coordination between my department and the platform would have been better. "I felt torn between different responsibilities".
- It was mentioned multiple times that more support and acknowledgement from departments would have been very valuable. It seems that not all departments are aware of what the platforms do and their position in the academy, and this has a detrimental effect on students integrating the organisation and what they have learned with their regular studies. They were "using it [the platform] to fill up gaps in our department curriculum"; "Having more purposeful communication between us and the department heads would be useful so that doesn't lead to conflicts".
- All groups addressed that they worked more hours than reimbursed via their contracts, this was partly due to their enthusiasm in organising many events, and partly due to the amount of work it takes to sustain an educational platform.
- Platforms spend much time and energy on organising practical things such as arranging an e-mail-address, finding rooms for performances, trying to reach students and teachers from across the academy. This led to frustrations, and a feeling that the institution wasn't able to support the activities that it had asked them to carry out.
- All platforms expressed a desire to continue with their activities in some way. In particular the Garden Department who cemented their presence at the academy and a continue to have a physical garden to take care of. Whilst the two-semester structure offered the platforms a great deal in terms of opportunities to connect with fellow students, staff and creative practitioners outside of the school, they all felt a lack of practical support in their desire to continue.

4. Possible solutions / advice to the editorial board

- Organise a moment for communication between the platforms, their educational departments and the editorial board.
- Organise more check-ins with the platforms and members of the editorial board.
- Offer and facilitate extra support on a practical level, from various parts of the academy, such as room reservations and facilities.
- Have a curriculum-free day in the schedule for all departments, similar to KABK, as a solution to scheduling clashes and potential tension between departments and platforms.

In the open call:

- Specifically ask for their ideas around community building, and how they hope to achieve this.
- Be clear about the new hourly rate and the budget available.
- Be clear about the average amount of hours it takes to run a platform, and what kind of work they will be reimbursed for.
- Make clear that the editorial board has a preference for student-driven proposals.
- Ask for a minimum of two students in the core group.
- Prioritise innovative proposals in terms of both content and organization.
- Prioritise proposals that take into account what the school might need in the current moment.
- Encourage activities that connect the academy to practitioners and spaces in Amsterdam that do not already have ties to the Rietveld/Sandberg.

Attachment: testimonials of the three conversations

As participating students (or staff), what were your expectations regarding the program at the start? To what extent have these expectations been fulfilled?

- Last year I was given the opportunity to attend a teacher's course, and now I have enrolled in a teacher qualification programme. These two things involve a learning process *about* how people learn. To *be* a learner in a course also touches upon this aspect of teaching. The more you are learning, the more you know about what it is to learn and how learning functions.
- The program that the editorial board allowed us to create allowed us to add new possibilities to what we were already doing. **We could expand our presence in school by engaging with other departments.**
- I think **these kinds of programmes can have a huge impact on the longer-term community building at the school**, and build relationships across departments, or different areas of the school.
- I hoped to not only create a platform which more people can join (also from basic year), but also make sure that if we all graduate, there will still be a group, which is constantly changing.
- It was a great opportunity to engage with this relevant topic.
- My expectation was to get a chance to work on theory through practice, which I also tried to do. A sense of continuity or follow-up to the different kinds of workshops would have been beneficial, though. There wasn't always time to see things thought as thoroughly as could have been. I don't think it took away from the worth of these workshops, I just think that there was some unfulfilled potential, possibly. On my end, **I would have been more successful if time management and coordination between my department and the platform would have been better. I felt torn between different responsibilities.**
- I wanted a big part of this class to be about **building a community**. To connect students from the MA and BA, from different departments. To not only learn from the lectures, but also to learn from each other, and share what we're working on, what we're struggling with, how we're integrating the information that we're receiving with our practice. Which turned out more challenging than I thought. Both practically and in terms of more abstract theory. But also logistically: trying to figure out when students are available, to reserve a space.

What was your most positive experience during this program? Can you describe what it was and why it was such a positive experience?

- One nice experience was a class about ecosystems and resilience. In this class the whole group was making some sort of spider web. It was like a game where we were asked: what are the connections between all the elements in this system? I thought that the way in which this was being communicated to us as a group was a really great learning experience, it **emphasized the importance of the group**.
- There was this great energy and **this feel of togetherness**, even though we were all in different departments and stages in our lives. I enjoyed that a lot.
- For me, one of the best moments was entering the garden after the permaculture classes and having new knowledge and a new point of view from which to look at and touch plants. The **possibility of learning new skills and immediately** wanting to go to the garden to figure out how they change me and how to **apply them**.
- A program into which we could bring students from different departments. The session at Perdu was another chance to bring the conversations *outside* the bubble of the school. I also enjoyed seeing which students came to the sessions, which questions they had. Bringing people together that didn't know each other from before but were interested in the topic, and bringing a curriculum like that to school was fantastic. When I was studying, I didn't feel like there was anywhere I could go to talk about technology in a critical way.
- What I enjoyed the most with organizing this initiative was starting to work theory through more practically, which is an inherent difficulty. That's something I concern myself with in my own practice: to work though ideas into forms.
- One thing I would like to say is that **we don't have enough spaces like this**, regardless of what the logistical complications might have been for the organizers. It was a refreshing space to come into and to engage with this critical and really intellectual work which centered themes that we don't see enough, especially in the Netherlands. I would be really excited to see if something like this could extend to my institution. To me it was a truly necessary and needed

exercise. **And the fact of it being student led and student organized is also a very novel aspect that I haven't seen in my institution at all. Which I thought was brilliant and useful if you're trying to build up another intellectual tradition.**

How did this program compare to the regular program of the department? Did they reinforce each other, was there conflict?

- Because I believe that education could also expand outside of buildings I couldn't, inside the school, do what I now do in the Garden Department. But at the same time, I feel that the expertise I have in graphic design, or the expertise I developed in school, can complement the activities done in the garden.
- It can be hard to present the group work at **assessments**, which I think several of us have tried. Especially after we got funded it was easier to claim that "I need to be in this". That, for instance, every other Tuesday I would be in the Permaculture Course. But I did miss classes because of it. I don't regret it, let's say. But it did feel like being part of two departments, at some point.
- I also found it difficult to present the work at assessments, and it not being seen as art. I'm not sure whether *even I* see it as art. But **I definitely see it as part of my art education**. For instance: reading through all the motivation letters submitted to the Permaculture Design Course I felt like I learned a lot. Unfortunately, there isn't often time to discuss the Garden Department with my teachers, because we mostly discuss things which happen in (their) class. It's a pity because I think it would have been useful for me.
- **Then there is the issue with conflicting schedules**. As a teacher I am also attached to the Royal Academy in the Hague. There we have a very simple but clever solution to this: all the Wednesdays are always open to intercurricular programmes. It's a very basic solution but it works.
- Currently we have conflicts between the Rietveld and the Sandberg schedules, or between the departments. If we could solve this, I think it would make a huge difference. My reflection is that it feels like the responsibility to figure such things out rests on individual shoulders, rather than at an **institutional level**. And I don't think this is something we should be asking of students. It also can put individual teachers in possible funny situations.
- I think it's common that commitments spill over. There were several chunks of time where I would have liked to join something but it was completely impossible. I'm glad I could dip into this program without being disruptive or feeling completely lost. It was nice that the program was structured so that you could walk in and walk out without creating a big problem.
- **I think this program reinforces what I do in my department, and offers the chance to be more precise with it**. Another thing that got me excited was to find other people in the school who are interested in this subject.
- You want to attend, and the department isn't necessarily against it, but especially in my department, since we don't have a lot of classes there is an assumption that we are available on any day of the week. It makes it difficult. At the same time, I think it's very important that initiatives like this continue to exist.

On working together (students and teachers, or students and students)

- I think **it creates a very different dynamic in the academy**. As a teacher, it's good to remember that "right, it can be hard to study, and to keep on top of everything every week". Also: the way in which you work together is actually a skill and a practice that you need to learn. It's not something which you just arrive and know how to do.
- Organizing your own event or platform is difficult but you learn from the experience. I think that as art students and future artists it is very valuable to know how to organize your own projects, even when they are big.
- In the beginning we didn't think much about our social structure. But that would be good to do. To not only talk about planning and the stuff that needs to be done. To sometimes ask "Hey, how does everybody feel? Who's taking what responsibility?".
- One administrative thing that we did want students to be more involved with is the design of the posters which we were able to get a group to do, for one lecture. But the second semester, especially, we were thinking that this would be an amazing way to get students to work together. To put a design up for coming events. If we had a tighter, consistent group of students it would have been easier and quicker.
- It was great for my personal growth. It was educational in itself. Getting to know guest teachers, reaching out to them, amplifying my knowledge, empathizing with students, etc.
- My most memorable experiences were the ones where the group dynamic was really great. It was nice to see people who came to class to contribute so much to each other and carry the whole class themselves. It's a lot of responsibility to organise so it was nice to see people with

a common interest come in and support each other. **That gave us a lot of energy and encouragement.**

What was the average time investment in hours per week? How did you experience this?

- Of course, at the peak I spent *much more* time on it than I got paid. But still, I think the editorial board really helped us recognize the value we put into this project. On average I think I spent at least 14 hours a week on the Garden Department.
- For me it was 6-10 hours. It felt nice to have 6 hours paid, but so much work was necessary to accomplish the visions we had in mind. What am I supposed to do? Shall I leave out the things I really want to do for this project since I'm only paid for 6 hours? Shall I behave as if I have a contract and I really attend to the contract, like I'm an employee and I do my job strictly? Or do I continue investing in my dreams and being happy about this amount being paid?
- I have several other positions at school. Which means that I am present or working at the Rietveld/Sandberg several days a week. I receive a certain income from school, and thus felt more open to volunteering my time. I don't think that all teaching staff are in that position
- That's an important thing for future platforms to think about: **administrative maintenance really adds up. How to best account for that so people don't get burnt out or feel taken advantage of?**
- A lot of the time waste is due to a lack of structure. **If the rooms would be ready and clear every time there is a permaculture course, or if there was a standing room for our weekly meetings it would be less stressful. It's not only a matter of time but also of energy spent, constantly cobbling everything together. The academy could provide more support.**

Was this program of added value for your BA/MA study? If so: in what way? If not, can you explain your answer?

- **To have a place where you can make concepts into practice is incredibly valuable.** I really think there should continue to be spaces like that. Things in the academy can sometimes remain at a conceptual stage. And what I think that what we need in this day and age are places of action.
- I would also like to highlight how it was possible to work in the garden during the pandemic. I helped build the willow space during the first year, and that was in full lockdown. That hasn't really been mentioned before. Perhaps in future education it can be a bigger topic to think about.
- The **workload** has been pretty difficult.
- What I was missing were **more check-ins**. Making sure that I wasn't drifting too much into this program while attending classes on the periphery. Overall, the freedom was absolutely appreciated, but having more ongoing support during the entire course was missing.

What tips and advice would you like to give in future projects? Or if you were organizing another program, what would you do differently?

- If I would do it again, I would perhaps do a little bit less and be more effective with my energy. A quality over quantity approach.
- I would give the advice to immediately open an email account. Have a whole list of the heads of the departments and the people who want to be part of your community, who want to receive your information. Immediately create an Instagram. Think about whether you want to have a graphic designer or what your image should be. And have a fixed room. These few things would help a lot if you already have them from the beginning. Make it clear for students but also for staff, teachers, heads of departments and facilities.
- Don't feel pressure and keep investing in creativity. See also this opportunity as another project in a school environment
- In the future for initiatives like this that do really want a community component it would be nice with more institutional support. Maybe through department heads disseminating the information (about the platform) to students. Making the community thing happen - we fell a bit short. But there was also the pandemic.
- For this kind of mainly academic/lecture-based program I would advise the organizers to find a balance between overplanning and under-planning. There is a balance, and it might be more exciting for participating students if they can shape the trajectory, maybe suggest someone they know to do a workshop, an alumni, someone that's local. We also could have done formats we hadn't even considered, like movie screenings or events around food.

- Finding a balance between building something stable for students, something regular that they can go to, and leaving spaces for a dynamic being able to happen. The times we live in also require an extreme adaptability to constantly new situations.

**What do you think the editorial board should take into account when selecting new projects?
Are there certain criteria that should be used?**

- Be receptive to any kind of innovative input. Not only reading the concept but also noticing how the group wants to organize themselves: innovation.
- So getting substantive feedback to your proposal from that group, who's a bit outside of what you're doing, would be meaningful for all the groups, not just the ones who succeed.
- To have some sensibility towards what the school needs at this moment in time. Not necessarily the novelty of the topics, but how much they are needed. And to make sure that it's student-run as much as possible. It gives students an opportunity to practice theory in reality, by organizing and thinking together. I think that the more student-led the program is, the better. Another criterium I think should be used for proposals is: **what kind of community are these applicants going to build?**
- I agree with that, and I would like to reinforce that I think a minimum of three people in the core group is a must, probably more is better, especially if your platform is hands-on. Our email list ended up being around 110 people. Students and people around Amsterdam who had heard about the program. On average we had 15 participants per session, maybe 25 for a larger lecture. Because of students' scheduling it's really hard to anticipate a regular group of students.
- I was impressed with the initiatives that were chosen to be supported, and how they managed to operate during these peculiar times, with plan A and plan B, online and offline. I don't really have any criticism, but I did see that there was some overlap at the school and that it would be impossible for someone to see three events at the same time. I guess the question that the editorial board should take into consideration is one of scheduling. How the programs can be accessed in terms of not being a distraction from your education, adding too much.