

Dutch DNA-Based Education with focus on entrepreneurship: a student perspective



Last week, we at TEDxAmsterdamED were visited by two amazing young women. [Dirkje van der Heijden](#) and [Sophie Beerthuijzen](#) study Entrepreneurship at [I AM College](#) and had the assignment to visit a company of their choice to find out how it really works (and not just serve coffee as they both jokingly mentioned when describing the assignment). Both girls have their own unique stories in regards to education and are very passionate about working towards change – both in regards to the education system and the world. That was also their thought behind visiting TEDxAmsterdamED – to see what it looks like in an organization that works towards inspiring change in the education system.

As soon as the girls entered our office, their radiant and positive energy rubbed off on the whole office. They were open minded, eager to learn and welcomed us into a conversation about everything between heaven and earth. If we weren't motivated before, Sophie and Dirkje made sure to remind us of why TEDxAmsterdamED exists to begin with.

During these deep, inspiring conversations, we realized that the experiences, thoughts and ideas of these girls, shouldn't be heard by just us. After all, TEDxAmsterdamED, in the spirit of [TED](#), is all about sharing "ideas worth spreading". We asked if they wouldn't be interested in a short interview that we would share on our channels. It made us very happy that they were just as excited about it as we were.

Sophie and Dirkje got to answer some of our questions and add anything that they thought was relevant and important. This is what they told us.



Sophie.

Sophie is a 19-year-old girl with the goal to have her own company. She never had any problems with learning but she started questioning the standardized way of education very early. *“Why would we all have to learn the same things in the same way and get graded based on the same test?”* Sophie says. While high school mostly focused on theoretical ways of learning, she felt like there was way too little practical experience. She believes that this is a big part of the reason for why teenagers have a hard time finding a purpose in life.

Sophie believes that a big step towards a solution to this problem is a more personalized education that focuses on the strengths of individuals rather than their weaknesses or things that they are bad at or aren't interested in. *“This way there is more room for growth and makes school really fun”* Sophie says, and is something that she has found at I AM College and the Entrepreneurship education. She tells us that at I AM College, you get to take responsibility for your own learning process and the means to get through it. That you get to schedule your own “speed classes” and breaks and that you get to learn by practical experience rather than just by reading from books. *“Indeed, we actually don't have any books”* Sophie says. *“It's an*

amazing experience to go to a school where things are done so differently. It makes it fun but also challenging which helps me grow into the person I really am''.

In regards to Sophie's goals for the future, Sophie wants to contribute to change through her own company that she will be starting as a part of the I AM College study. Change connected to social impact. *'I want my own cosmetics company. Completely cruelty free, nature friendly and gender neutral. In my opinion it is a way to express art like with a painting or sculpture. And why would you be hurting animals or nature while having fun with makeup? This needs to change''* Sophie says.



Dirkje.

Dirkje is 18 years old and loves being creative with singing dancing, acting and writing. Besides this, she is very passionate about education and wants to make a change in the Dutch education system. One of her strongest qualities is speech and she loves giving presentations. People often tell her that she is good at putting her feelings and thoughts into words. Dirkje's experience with education hasn't always been positive. She says that elementary school was fine because

she went to a really small school where personalization was possible. High school however, was a different story. When she started the higher part of high school, she found herself under immense pressure within a very short time.

“I was drowning in homework and had very long school days. I just didn’t understand why I had to learn all these things that I would never use in the real world. I felt like I was wasting my time and was trapped in something that would remain redundant for the upcoming 5 years” Dirkje says. Dirkje felt like her freedom was taken away from her and that she was forced to do what everybody else was doing just because “that’s the way it is”. Being a different, highly sensitive child didn’t make it easier for her. She tells us that the school could only adjust so much and it didn’t take long before she realized that school simply wasn’t for her. Dirkje dropped out and spent the four upcoming years with healthcare in the attempt to find herself again and work on her mental health. Last September she decided to enroll at I AM College with the goal to start her own business. *“I am loving it so far and feel like I’ve found my place in the world again”* Dirkje says.

Dirkje believes that education should be a lot more personalized and that it should support everyone unique qualities. Having a choice is important and she believes that it is important that students are enabled to in regards to what they want to learn and how they want to learn it. *“Another thing that is missing in education is personal development”* Dirkje says. *“I think it is really important that you get to know yourself and your qualities and strengths. If you get to know yourself well while being young, the choices for what you want to do in life will be easier”*. By implementing personal development, she believes that the trend of “choosing a random study just to find out that it’s not the right thing and dropping out within a short while”, can be avoided.

This is why Dirkje feels like she found her place with the Entrepreneurial education at I AM College. Here she gets the freedom to set her own goals and decide how she will reach them. *“There is a lot of room for failure because it’s when you fail that you learn the most. When you really fail, you get the chance to evaluate and how you will do things differently next time around”* Dirkje says. She also tells us about the personal coaches the students are provided with which help them to plan out their work load and structure. Just as Sophie, Dirkje values being treated like an equal rather than a pupil and the freedom to learn the things that will get her to the goals she set for herself.

One of these goals being to start her own company where she has the freedom to work towards what she wants; an improved education system. Dirkje wants to make an impact by telling her own story and sharing her ideas on how education can improve. Her ultimate goal is to be a role model for young people and to be someone they can look up to. *“I also really want to help people by inspiring them to pursue their dreams”*.

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As a last question, we asked the girls what they would say to other students if they got to say whatever they want.

Sophie’s message is that the world is a lot bigger than a single subject like math or history. *“The classes you take in school are not your only options for your future or career. Take the time to find your strengths and give those more focus than you give your weaknesses. Your low grades in French mean nothing if you want to be a great artist or mathematician.”*

Dirkje says that you shouldn't be afraid to do what you really want. *“People will always have an opinion on what you should or shouldn't do. My advice? Ignore the negative influences and surround yourself with people who support you. Only you decide where your limit is. So go pursue your dreams and don't let anyone bring you down!”*.

Even if these stories are only a tiny fraction of what Sophie and Dirkje are about, we at TEDxAmsterdamED believe that it is a great representation of their potential. It is also a great representation of some of the goals that we are working towards with [Dutch DNA-Based Education](#) and this year's focus on entrepreneurship; Finding educational designs that match our core strengths.

Thank you Sophie and Dirkje for bravely sharing your stories and speaking your minds. We hope that you will continue pursuing your goals and dreams (hopefully in collaboration with us later this year) and that you will continue to inspire the world just like you inspired us.