Model: Honors pedagogies . Alfa-college, The Netherlands

***Alfa college***

Alfa-college is a regional training centre in the north of the Netherlands and provides vocational education, vocational training and adult education. There are 6 locations: 4 in Groningen and 1 in both Hardenberg and Hoogeveen.

***Excellence education***

Excellence programs are selected study programs linked to vocational education. These are designed for motivated (and gifted) students who want to do more than the regular program offers. The programs offer educational opportunities that are more challenging and demanding than the regular programs. We believe all students are talented, so we offer programs for every student, on various levels. There are programs in sports, art and culture, personal development, durability, Cambridge English etcetera.

***Honors pedagogies***

Our model of honours pedagogy was first introduced (to higher education) by Marca Wolfensberger, in her PhD dissertation*Teaching for excellence. Honors pedadogies revealed* (2012). This study discerns three pillars of honors pedagogies. Teachers from the United States and the Netherlands perceive the following teaching approaches as appropriate for honors education: creating community, enhancing academic competence and offering freedom.

Wolfensperger has explored the teaching strategies related to this pedagogy, and presents a different cluster of strategies for each approach.

***Creating community***

Three clusters of teaching behavior are related to creating community:

1) fostering social relatedness between the teacher and honors students and among honors students through interaction;

2) creating a positive and supportive atmosphere through encouragement;

3) becoming part of the community through interest and commitment. According to additional information from the interviews, teachers believe that institutional support for honors is needed to be able to create an honors community.

***Enhancing academic competence***

Three clusters of teaching strategies are related to enhancing academic competence:

1) offering an academic and societal context and stimulating connective thinking by tackling issues from an interdisciplinary angle;

2) stimulating analytical thinking and research skills by taking part in research;

3) presenting a quantitative and qualitative challenge, for instance by giving challenging assignments. In the interviews, the teachers stressed the importance of fostering creative, critical and independent thinking for honors students.

***Offering (bounded) freedom***

Finally, three clusters of teaching strategies are related to offering freedom:

1) teaching behavior that offers space for students’ questions, choices and initiatives, like allowing self-regulation;

2) stimulating enthusiasm and experimentation by surprising the students;

3) encouraging students to behave professionally (in teaching, learning and research), for instance through a master-apprentice relationship. In the interviews, teachers said that offering freedom is possible thanks to mutual trust and respect. Giving responsibility to students, coaching them to reflect, and presuming that they will take ownership of their learning are strategies related to offering freedom. Teachers see offering freedom as a means of fostering student involvement and outstanding performance (M. Wolfensberger, 2012).

***Workshops***

During the workshops that Alfa-college provides, teachers will be presented with hands-on tools to use the teaching strategies linked to **creating community** and **bounded freedom**. After participating, teachers will be able to try out and implement those teaching strategies in their own classroom.

You can read the full dissertation in the publication *Teaching for excellence.* You can buy the book online:

[Teaching for Excellence: Honors Pedagogies revealed: Wolfensberger, Marca V C: 9783830928232: Amazon.com: Books](https://www.amazon.com/Teaching-Excellence-Marca-V-Wolfensberger/dp/3830928238)