

VU WORLD-ORIENTED
DIDACTICS

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Janneke Waelen
Yolanda Koevoets
Jessy La Faille

A word from the authors

We would like to express our gratitude to everyone who helped develop World-Oriented didactics.

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The didactics described in this document is the first design. In the coming years, we will continue to apply, evaluate, and further develop this design in practice. We warmly invite you, as a reader of this document, to share your input with us. You can email ctl@vu.nl.

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“At VU Amsterdam, we believe that global citizenship is not a title you can claim. It is a way of living. We call this “developing a broader perspective” - an invitation to immerse ourselves in perspectives that reach beyond our own, to think deeply about ourselves and one another, and to take responsibility for the world in which we live.”

*Jeroen Geurts, Rector Magnificus
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*

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1. INTRODUCTION

At Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU), we challenge students to consciously reflect on their own values, cultural and worldview identity, and the implicit and explicit assumptions that guide thinking and action. In this way, students learn to relate to others with openness and engagement and to find their footing in an increasingly complex and diverse society (VU Educational Vision, 2021). In the VU Institutional Plans 2026-2030, this is connected to global citizenship and humanity towards others. This is essential at a time when democracies are increasingly under pressure and individualism has become the norm.

This brings us to questions such as: *What do we mean by global citizenship? How do you give students the opportunity to develop as global citizens? How do you awaken a desire to contribute to the world through academic knowledge, skills and attitudes when that desire is not yet present? How do you balance invitation with setting expectations? How do you invite students to collaborate and remain present, even when they encounter perspectives they do not understand?* Drawing on valuable research and established concepts, we have developed pedagogical and didactic approaches to practice for teachers. We call this VU World-Oriented didactics.

VU World-Oriented didactics complements the [VU MIXED model](#). At VU, we believe that our diversity is a strength and that an inclusive learning environment is needed to give students the space to learn optimally from and with one another. To support this, the VU MIXED model was developed (formerly the VU Mixed Classroom model, Ramdas et al., 2019). The VU MIXED model emphasises exploring one's own frame of reference and positionality, engaging with other perspectives within the group, and integrating these different perspectives. Integrating perspectives does not mean seeking a compromise in order to arrive at one uniform perspective.

It is not about fusion or conflict, but about “to hold the tension of the opposites”. In an inclusive learning environment, it is about empathy and dynamic balancing without breaking the relationship.

From the VU Institutional Plan 2026-2030

We consider global citizenship important because the world needs people who embrace complex issues and approach them from a broader, holistic perspective. People who know that every action has consequences for the larger whole. People who understand that they need one another, one another's expertise and one another's perspective in order to find healthy, sustainable and just solutions to societal challenges. People who recognise that even smaller-scale issues are enriched when viewed from different angles. In short: global citizens who are attentive to different perspectives and interests, from the local to the global.

The VU MIXED model therefore focuses on the student (and the group of students) and provides direction for teacher practice along the teacher-student relationship. In Figure 1, this is represented by the purple line.

VU World-Oriented didactics places the emphasis on the dimension of “subject matter”, or “the world”. Through the subject matter, teachers point students towards the world (Eidhof, Janssens, Ris, 2021; Biesta, 2025). VU World-Oriented didactics provides direction for teacher practice along the teacher-subject matter relationship. We work with the pedagogical triangle, which Janssen, Imelman, Meijer and van der Ploeg (2024, 2025) have reappraised as a foundation and valuable compass for education.

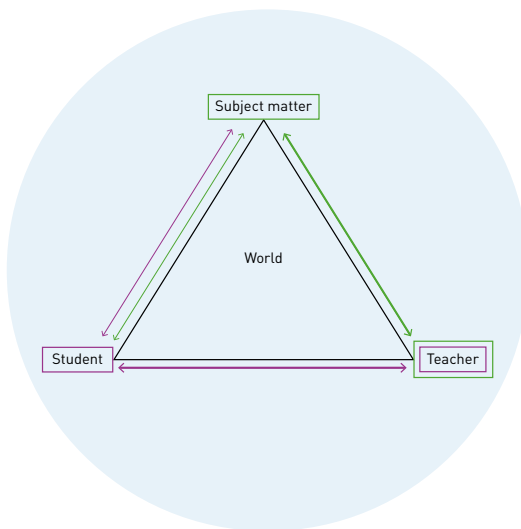


Figure 1. MIXED model & World-Oriented didactics in the pedagogical triangle

WHY WORLD-ORIENTED DIDACTICS?

Current global and technological developments raise the question of how we, as a university, can be of significance now and in the future. We want to educate students to become engaged global citizens. In the VU Educational Vision, we describe how our academic education stimulates the development of A Broader Mind: a broad perspective on the world rooted in societal engagement.

The greatest challenge we continuously face is how to put this into practice. *How do we give tangible form to the big ideas behind A Broader Mind? How do we equip students to find their footing in a complex, plural and dynamic society? How do we cultivate empathy and a sense of responsibility so that they can make a meaningful contribution to the world?*

For this reason, VU has developed, among other things, the ABM Course, Community Service Learning and ABM attainment levels. Yet practical application remains challenging. What higher education lacks is a broadly applicable didactics that also describes how to teach students in light of the complexity that surrounds us everywhere (Wessels, 2022). This is the “how” we describe in World-Oriented didactics. We address teachers because they make the difference.

At VU Amsterdam, we understand global citizenship as follows

Global citizenship with A Broader Mind develops along three lines that are inseparably connected: academic development, societal responsibility and personal development.

We educate our students to become responsible, free thinkers with a moral compass, who want to continue developing and who approach life with resilience. Our students are open to others, look beyond the boundaries of different disciplines, and approach the world with curiosity and a broad perspective. In this way, we prepare them to take an active role as professionals in addressing complex societal issues, both globally and close to home.

A great deal has been written about the importance of educating global citizens, what it means to be a global citizen, what world-oriented education should focus on, and the why and to what end of such education (Biesta, 2022; Dewey, 1916; Boyer & Hechinger, 1981; Van Matre, 2025; Nussbaum, 2011). In the Netherlands, this is also broadly supported in society (de Onderwijsraad, 2011; Eidhof et al., 2024, p. 29). The literature also describes different forms of education that give substance to what students can learn while prescribing a particular form, such as Community Service Learning.

We do not wish to imply that a handful of strategies and examples makes it possible to teach in a fully world-oriented way. Practice is far more complex. In which courses, for example, do you incorporate which building block? How often should the building blocks recur? Choices need to be made at both course and curriculum level, and that requires teamwork.

Responsibility for achieving world-oriented learning goals does not lie with individual teachers. It also calls for humility: we can only offer students an environment that invites formation; formation cannot be demanded as an outcome. In the same way, the outcome of education is essentially open. Education is a process whose outcome can never be fully predicted in advance (among others, Bertram-Troost, 2022).

WHAT DOES WORLD-ORIENTED DIDACTICS OFFER?

In this document, we offer inspiration for those who want to work on world-oriented education and describe practical approaches for teachers. We do so through a didactic framework for shaping a world-oriented learning environment within the context of higher education. We discuss three building blocks that are important to include in education when you want to foster global citizenship through A Broader Mind.

World-Oriented didactics also invites teachers to reflect on their own contribution as global citizens. Alongside being a scholar, the teacher is a role model. The focus is on how the teacher can model agency: the ability to form independent judgments and to act.

We describe three building blocks. We explain why each building block matters, which teacher strategies can be used and what the building block is intended to support. We provide an example for each building block. Finally, we reflect on the role of the teacher and explain the relationship with the MIXED model.

The interested reader will find the foundation of VU World-Oriented didactics in Addendum 1. In Addendum 2, we describe dilemmas and issues arising in practice.





"As a teacher, you try to create a sense of agency: to dispel the idea that, as individuals, we are powerless in the face of something as vast and complex as the planetary crisis. It starts by inviting students to think along and make decisions about the content and form of the course and the themes to be addressed. That means that not all our pet topics can be included, and that sometimes we learn with the students."

John van der Kamp and Simone Burger, lecturers in Sustainability for Behavioural and Movement Science

THE THREE BUILDING BLOCKS

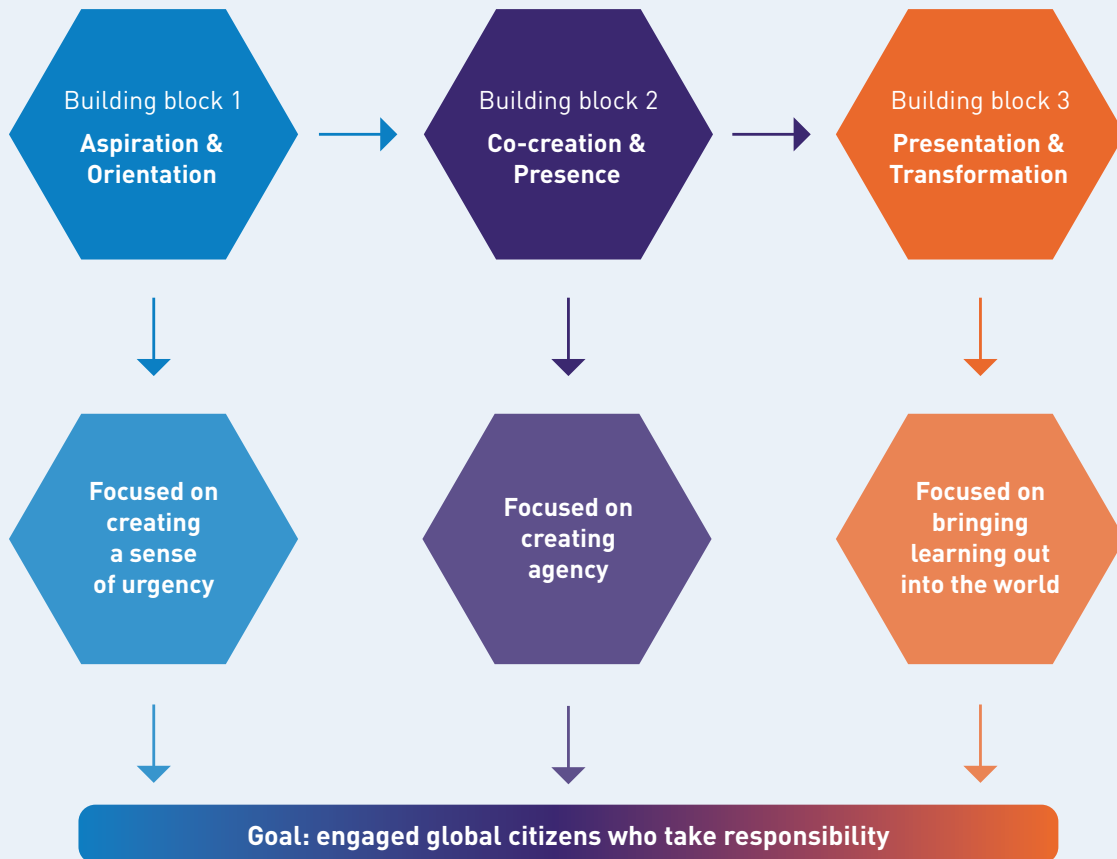


Figure 2

2. WORLD-ORIENTED DIDACTICS

To arrive at World-Oriented didactics, we first immersed ourselves in important thinkers in the field of world-oriented education. We developed a foundation from which we compared different forms of education that aim to contribute to students' formation as global citizens.

We searched for central pedagogical-didactic principles within these forms of education and found that world-oriented forms draw on dialogic learning, transformative learning, responsive learning, resonant education and co-creation. Biesta (2022) is the most explicit and identifies three pedagogical approaches to practice: interrupting, slowing down and supporting.

We used the ingredients from these different educational forms as sources of inspiration and connected them to our own teaching experiences. This resulted in three building blocks. Biesta's three pedagogical approaches (2022) - interrupting, slowing down and supporting - are integrated within them.

Why do we believe working with these building blocks is essential? We found that "working on world-oriented education" is a highly complex, integrated task. Thinking in terms of the three building blocks helps us navigate this task:

1. ASPIRATION & ORIENTATION

2. CO-CREATION & PRESENCE

3. TRANSFORMATION & PRESENTATION

By incorporating these building blocks into education - within a lesson, course, learning pathway or curriculum - teachers strengthen a world-oriented perspective. Does this mean all education must be redesigned? No. It is up to the teaching team to determine to what extent, and where, the world-oriented perspective can be strengthened.

In the following sections, we explain for each building block how teachers can guide students and we offer practical approaches. For each building block, we describe its core, the goals it seeks to achieve and teacher strategies.

We also add a reflection question for the teacher to each building block, so that there remains space for one's own questions and uncertainties and awareness of personal values and one's role as a forerunner is strengthened. Each building block has value in its own right.

Although it may seem "logical" to start with building block one, this is not necessary. The building blocks, and the order in which they are described, are intended as guidance. In practice, a teacher may at times work on two building blocks simultaneously, or move back and forth between building blocks 1 and 2 before moving to 3. In describing the didactics, we keep the building blocks separate so that teachers can retain an overview while practising with the approach.

BUILDING BLOCK 1: ASPIRATION & ORIENTATION

This building block revolves around the questions: *How do societal issues become meaningful to students? How does the desire arise to engage with concrete issues?*

These are challenging questions because every group and every student is different. What is meaningful to this student or group of students? How do you respond to that as a teacher? One starting point is a fundamental stance that recognises diversity and regards it as an added value.

Within this building block, students need a learning environment that stimulates them to orient themselves towards complex and challenging problems and that kindles a sense of urgency, awareness and engagement.

Building block Aspiration & Orientation is intended to support students to:

- orient themselves, from their own study/discipline, towards themes that are currently central in the world and feel a sense of urgency to take responsibility;
- be open to diversity in culture, beliefs and lifeworlds (multiple perspectives);
- show a desire to learn by exploring these themes in a broader context and formulating learning experiences that connect with their personal engagement, curiosity or sense of wonder.

Because this is about kindling a feeling, interruption and slowing down are needed. Recognising and understanding feelings requires awareness, attention and practice, and that requires slow time.

This means that teachers may encounter discomfort. You bring students close to potential pangs of conscience: something “gnaws” at them, and doubt may arise about choices and actions (Buber in Biesta, 2025). *Discomfort can also arise when time pressure is experienced. If the feeling that something must happen “now” is awakened, how do you relate to slow time?*

This can evoke emotions that feel uncomfortable for both student and teacher. The art is to make room for these emotions despite a full curriculum. This building block also centres on openness to other perspectives, because curiosity can emerge precisely in the encounter with the other and with what is different.

TEACHER STRATEGIES / APPROACHES TO PRACTICE

Touch the emotional layer

What can move students towards a sense of urgency?

Research by neuroscientist Mary Helen Immordino-Yang (2015) shows that emotions guide learning. How can you reach the emotional layer during learning? One approach is to work with stories or art. Sharing stories with students can generate transcendent thinking: thinking about something larger. Participants orient themselves, and a desire emerges to discover something beyond themselves.

Focus on the whole task

It helps students to see the larger whole, the authentic task, because this gives meaning (Merriënboer et al., 2024). When students see how they are part of that larger whole, it strengthens their confidence that they can genuinely add value. In practice, this means connecting your teaching to “real” situations. Within that real situation, students receive a clearly bounded assignment while also experiencing what lies beyond the boundaries of that assignment.

Create slowing down

By creating teaching time in which there is time to listen to one another, space emerges for wonder, fascination, and uncertainty. It is an exercise for attention and dedication. Art can help us seek slow time and learn to pause (Twaalfhoven, 2020, p. 33). Regardless of their expertise and subject

"At the start of a seminar, I always begin with a short check-in. I ask students which recent criminal-law news items or case law have affected them and how they interpret them. If students do not have an immediate example, I provide a concrete example myself, such as the incident in which a minor was shot dead by the police while carrying a prohibited weapon. Examples like these often lead to strong opinions and lively discussions. Students share their insights and notice that their views matter, which encourages them to participate actively in the seminar."

Imane Bourahtouf, lecturer in criminal law

"When discussing a modernist poem such as *The Wasteland* by T.S. Eliot, students quickly make connections to the present. Although "*The Wasteland*" is specifically about the sense of chaos and alienation after the First World War, those same feelings still resonate today because many of us experience a similar sense of instability as a result of, among other things, the climate crisis and polarisation. By studying how Eliot and other writers responded to this, conversations emerge about literature and hope, political versus apolitical art, and the value of stylistically conveying despair and confusion, both for readers in the 1920s and today."

Berit Brink, lecturer, FSG

matter, teachers can create space for working with stories, poetry, music, film, and visual art. It can also help to use the environment beyond the lecture hall, laboratory, or classroom.

Bring the outside world in

Give students the space to explore cases and issues playing out in the world from different perspectives. One recommendation is to experiment through play (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 134). Through a play situation, confront students with the ideas of others so that they can practise safely.

Model interest

Inspire students with your passion for your discipline and for the world. Students in broad programmes develop more divergent interests, whereas students in specialised programmes develop more convergent interests. This shows how students use the space teachers provide in their programmes to shape their interests (Dams et al., 2023). The interests you model therefore matter.

Reflection question for you as a teacher

What are your aspirations? What do you want to take responsibility for? What moves you? And what remains underexposed as you reflect on this?

Connection with the VU MIXED model

One of the main aims of the VU MIXED model is for students to be open to diversity in culture, beliefs and lifeworlds and to learn how to engage with perspectives other than their own. In this respect, the two didactic approaches reinforce one another. In the first building block of World-Oriented didactics, teachers focus on exploring their own view and approach to their teaching. Activities from the sensitizing and engaging phases of the VU MIXED model can contribute to the first building block of World-Oriented didactics.

BUILDING BLOCK 2: CO-CREATION & PRESENCE

Creation is central to the second building block. Where the first building block generated a sense of urgency, agency now takes shape. The key questions are: *How do I create a practice space in which students can work safely and challengingly on a complex issue? How do I create a place that invites creation and collaboration with people who hold different perspectives?*

We use the concept of agency as described by Micha de Winter (2024), who, following Giddens and Bandura (De Winter, 2024), uses it to refer to the capacity to act and to bring about change independently or together with others. Students need a learning environment that invites them into action. This asks the teacher to be a secure base. By a secure base, we mean

Building block 2 Co-creation & Presence is intended to support students to:

- show curiosity and ask focused questions to deepen their understanding of complex issues from within their own study/discipline;
- explore alternative perspectives on societal issues (for example through art, imagination, design, debate or dialogue) and work together on a creative solution;
- learn to suspend judgment and think and act with nuance, beyond quick conclusions;
- be actively present and engaged in learning activities and contribute to shared learning processes.

a person - or a place, goal or object - that provides a sense of protection, safety and care. At the same time, it is a source of inspiration and energy, enabling us to explore, take on challenges and dare to take risks (Kohlrieser et al., 2018).

It also helps if students feel hope or optimism and/or have a perspective for action, so that they want and are able to become part of the solution (De Winter, 2024; Klomp, 2025; Twaalfhoven, 2020). This helps them to be “present”. Otto Scharmer (2025) describes this as being present in the here and now, being able to sense signals and remaining open to an emerging future.

This building block focuses on students’ creativity, inventiveness and imagination. Solutions to complex societal challenges are not unambiguous. The teacher has the task of making room for systems thinking and a perspectival approach (Janssen et al., 2019). This requires a certain form of courage from both teachers and students, because solutions do not always align with the dominant narrative or the current system. It involves a positive interpretation of “not knowing”: not as insecurity or a deficit, but as part of science and as a source of learning and creation.

A student cannot do this alone; the challenge exceeds the individual. This is why co-creation is essential in the second building block. A group process in which people make use of diversity and genuinely create together ($1+1=3$) is needed in the development of engaged global citizens (Ramdas et al., 2025; Scharmer, 2025). In this way, students develop a shared language through which they come to understand one another and the world more deeply. In Bloom’s taxonomy, (co-) creating is described as the phase in which students learn to visualise, reorganise, design plans and construct (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

Project-based learning, challenge-based learning and Community Service Learning are examples of educational forms that show how this can be designed. In these approaches, students work in groups on a meaningful, authentic case.

VU Community Service Learning

Because education extends beyond the classroom or lecture hall, Community Service Learning (CSL) brings students, teachers and societal partners together to address real-world problems and gives students the space to develop as global citizens. Through projects - from local neighbourhood initiatives to global themes such as health, climate and inclusion - students develop essential skills for the future. The VU CSL team supports teachers in implementing CSL in their education.

TEACHER STRATEGIES / APPROACHES TO PRACTICE

Create space for creation

Create a place that feels safe, where there is room to fail and where there is hope. This requires your attentive engagement (Bastiaansen, 2021). Give students freedom in the process while remaining present as a role model for agency. This requires flexible movement between providing structure and autonomy, guiding and letting go, wherever the student's level of development allows it (Merrienboer, Kirschner & Frerejean, 2024).

Make room for not knowing

Sustaining not knowing requires a certain lightness. For example, invite students through small creative assignments to become accustomed to not knowing. If students get stuck, consider whether you can offer more structure.

Make action possible quickly

Because action is central to this building block, it helps to let students practise it relatively quickly. Students learn through experience. Give students assignments that invite doing, not only thinking. Give them space to get started.

Facilitate conversations

Alongside creating, this building block explicitly concerns collaboration with people who hold different perspectives. Facilitate conversations that invite students to suspend judgment. This requires practice in critical thinking, listening, and asking curious questions. You could practise this by introducing a "controversial" point or case and asking students to discuss it in pairs or groups, with only one person speaking at a time and the others first asking follow-up questions before giving their own opinion.

Model collaboration

Show how you collaborate across disciplines and learn from different perspectives. When you introduce students to interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary issues, this also asks you to collaborate with other programmes and disciplines.

Reflection question for you as a teacher

When is it easy for you to remain present, and when is it more difficult? What positive changes do you see? In what ways are you creative and innovative?

Connection with the VU MIXED model

Creating a safe practice space first requires attention to the learning climate. By using strategies from the VU MIXED model, teachers and students can jointly create a practice space in which students are open to one another's perspectives and approaches and learn from and with one another. It is important to remain attentive to the possible reproduction of societal inequality in the classroom. Continuing to reflect on positionality, and discussing concepts such as intersectionality and privilege, are important here. Teachers and students can then use co-creation to work towards the learning goals formulated for this building block: oriented towards the world.





"In 2024, the Institute for Environmental Studies (IVM) at Vrije Universiteit launched the Honours programme "From Plate to Planet: Crafting Sustainable Food Systems". The programme focuses on understanding food systems and transforming them towards more sustainable alternatives. Students explore the economic, societal and cultural aspects of food chains and reflect on their own role within them.

The programme consists of actively investigating sources, group discussions and excursions. One example is fieldwork in a supermarket, where students take photographs of food products whose production processes they later want to investigate. The activity invites active action (taking the photographs). Back on campus, they use Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) to analyse and discuss their findings, thereby facilitating the conversation. The photographs are laid out in a row and the students jointly select one image for the session, opening up the space for creation. Through this active and in-depth processing of information, students become aware of their own perspectives and those of others on food."

Mario Torralba Vioretta, Marije Schaafsma, Pim van Tongeren, Aalt Smienk, Marina de Regt, Saskia van der Vies, Jessy la Faille

BUILDING BLOCK 3: TRANSFORMATION & PRESENTATION

This building block revolves around the questions: *To what extent has the preceding process led to change in myself? What value have I added to the world, and how do I make that visible?*

This is a crucial part of World-Oriented didactics because it is about “putting your idea into the world”. In this building block of transformation and presentation, students share what they have learned with one another, with teachers and, where appropriate, with society.

Within Co-creation & Presence, students have collaborated, explored different perspectives and may have taken a position. They become even more aware of this during Transformation & Presentation. It is precisely when “putting the idea into the world” that this awareness emerges. This requires focused reflection on the experience, which can potentially lead to transformation (Mezirow, 1991; Korthagen, 1985). The social

Building block 3 Transformation & Presentation is intended to support students to:

- actively put ideas, solutions or visions into the world and communicate them to a wider audience;
- articulate their position and demonstrate, in a transparent way, insight into the choices made, the societal value of their work and the positions of other people;
- reflect on the experience gained and develop insight into the development it has generated in themselves and in the world.

context in which students find themselves influences this, because they move through the process in contact with their environment.

Through contact with the environment, students are invited into perspectival flexibility: who was I before, and who am I now? How might someone else view this situation? This creates space for reflection at the level of identity (Croix, de la, 2025). Reflection can take place at the level of environment, behaviour, skills, beliefs and identity (Bateson & Dilts, in Korthagen, 2022). These levels can be used to formulate questions for students, such as: What was an important, helpful belief for you during the co-creation process? Which belief got in your way?

In this building block, we give students the opportunity to reflect on their experience and to make their development visible through presentation. Shaping the presentation requires awareness of the movement taking place within oneself, as well as awareness of what the project has set in motion in the world. It is about presenting the work that has been developed, while continuing to learn through the interaction with the audience.

The teacher keeps the goal in view: the student develops as an engaged global citizen. Feedback is directed towards keeping the sense of urgency and agency alive.

TEACHER STRATEGIES / APPROACHES TO PRACTICE

Include focused forms of reflection in your teaching

Reflection requires attention, time, and space. Students take a position in relation to what they have studied and in relation to others. Models such as Korthagen’s spiral model from 1993 (also known as the ALACT model) (Korthagen & Nuijten, 2023), as well as the model of Bateson and Dilts’ six logical levels of reflection (Korthagen, 2002), can provide structure. At VU, the CSL team has developed the reflection toolbox. It is available via <https://vu.nl/en/about-vu/more-about/student-reflection-tool>

Provide presentation space

Space to present is needed to make unconscious development conscious. In searching for the right words, students develop language to make explicit what they have become aware of.

Broaden the perspective on presentation

Presentation is not one-way communication. It is about presenting in contact with your target audience. Even in this final building block, curiosity, dialogue and the evolution of one's own perspective remain central. Listening is therefore part of presenting. Presentation is understood here more broadly than simply telling the group what you have discovered.

"In the master's course interdisciplinary Community Service Learning (iCSL2), we experimented with 4D Mapping, a method from Social Presencing Theater (SPT) that makes system dynamics visible through embodied experience rather than analysis. Students took on roles within a complex societal theme, in this case the Toeslagenaffaire, and created a living "sculpture" of the current situation and a possible future.

Although the session began chaotically, an intervention ("Let your body find the right position") led to a shift from analytical thinking to embodied experience. This resulted in deeper empathy and engagement. One student said: "I have thought about this case for months. But I had never really understood what it would feel like to be in their shoes, until now."

After the 4D Mapping, a lively and meaningful dialogue emerged with a high level of engagement. This experience confirmed a recurring pattern: after an embodied exercise, participants want to talk, share experiences and make meaning of what has happened."

Frederique Demeijer, Almina Karya Odabaşı & Jaro Pichel

Give feedback that keeps urgency & agency alive

A challenge for you as a teacher is how to assess a transformative learning process in a meaningful way. In any case, direct your feedback towards keeping urgency and agency alive, for example by addressing the engagement you have observed in the student, keeping the dialogue alive, and focusing less on giving tips. Working with formative dialogue can be helpful here (Voogd, in press).

Model reflection

Reflection, transformation, and presentation are vulnerable processes. It helps to see that another person dares to do this and how they approach it. Model how you reflect on your own role and show which sources you need, how you search, and how you take on other perspectives.

Reflection question for you as a teacher

What does teaching mean to you as a human being? Who have you become through what you have learned and continue to learn? Education is not only a place to learn something, but also a place to become someone.

Connection with the VU MIXED model

Reflection is also an important part of the learning process in MIXED model education. In phase 2 (engaging), students interact with different perspectives and approaches, and in phase 3 (optimizing) they are invited to reflect on how integrating other perspectives has enriched their own learning process. In this sense, there is overlap with the third building block of World-Oriented didactics. What is added here is the opportunity to make visible the transformation students themselves have undergone and to bring it into the world.



"We implemented the ALACT reflection model in a second-year academic skills course within the bachelor's programme Farmaceutische Wetenschappen. The ALACT model is a spiral approach to reflection in which students begin with (1) a concrete experience, (2) observation and reflection, and then (3) form abstract concepts and generalisations about the experience. These are used (4) to draw up an action plan, which is then (5) carried out. The final step becomes the new experience from which the cycle repeats. The model was applied to both presentation and teamwork skills, practised in a relevant academic context. The aim was to improve and accelerate students' insight into their strengths, growth and areas for improvement. Our research showed that the intervention leads to greater awareness of existing competencies and steps for improvement, and to a very positive view of reflection and its role in skills development."

Isabel Braadbaart, Anna Vuuregge, Fanny Beekman, Sonja van Scheijen, Jacqueline van Muijlwijk-Koezen and Danny Scholten

WORLD-ORIENTED DIDACTICS AT A GLANCE

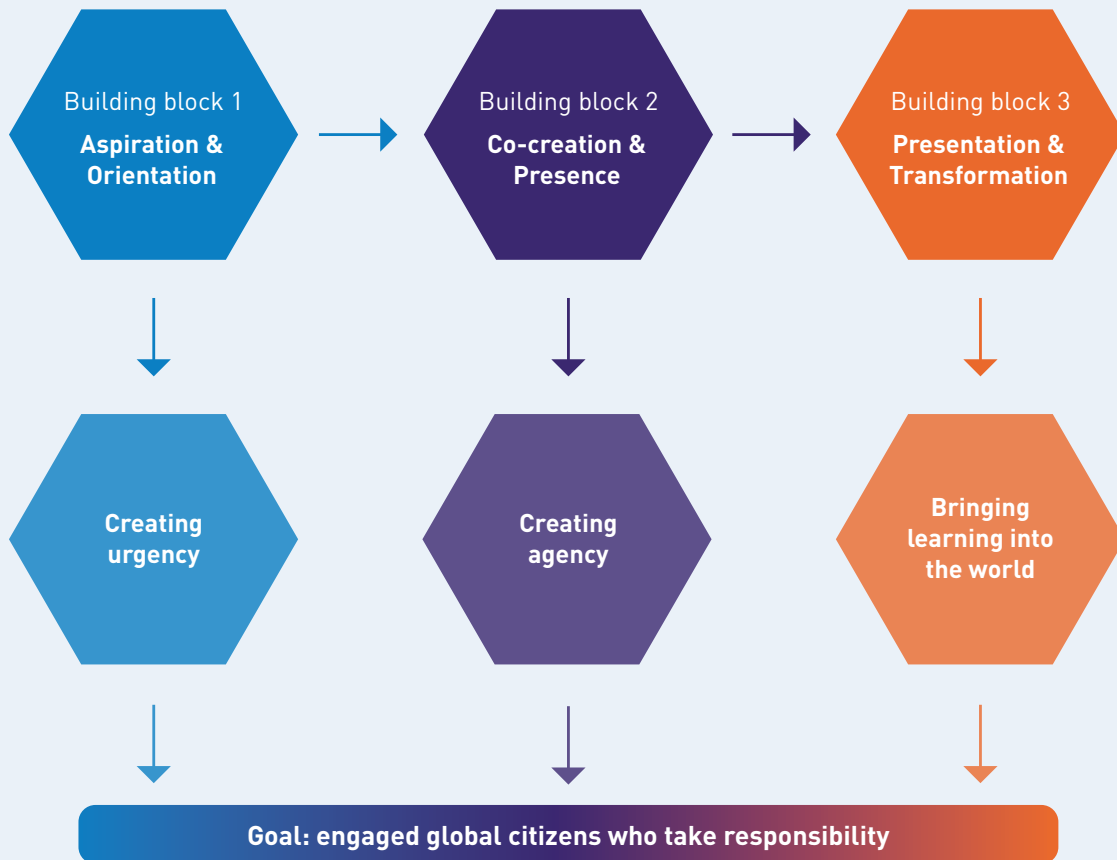


Figure 2





3. IN CONCLUSION: ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR TEACHERS

By applying World-Oriented didactics, you create education in which agency is cultivated and engagement with the world can emerge. Students experience what it means to care, to feel responsible, and to act.

How you apply World-Oriented didactics depends on the context. You can incorporate the building blocks at lesson, course, learning pathway, or curriculum level. Each time, you can choose a different application, for example working with a project on one occasion and with the arts or nature on another. Or you can work with a similar approach so that it becomes recognisable to students. You can focus on one building block in a course or allow all three to recur. The choice is yours.

What matters is that you are aware that you are a role model. Formation is present; it is not scheduled for a particular day in a particular period or confined to extracurricular activities (Onderwijsraad, 2011). This does not mean that you have to act flawlessly. On the contrary, by modelling that mistakes are part of learning, you become an important source of inspiration.

We also want to emphasise that you are not responsible on your own. Collective “teacher efficacy” is needed. By this, we mean the collective belief of a teaching team that, together, it is capable of creating an environment that gives students the space to develop as engaged global citizens.

This asks teaching teams to collaborate as a collective, to remain curious about what students can achieve, to experiment and investigate which approach produces the strongest results in their context, and to focus on their own teacher behaviour (Hattie, 2011). Students are your partners in this process. They can share responsibility for shaping this learning environment. Good education is built together.



4. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MIXED MODEL

In this document, we have explained how World-Oriented didactics relates to the MIXED model. In some instances, the MIXED model will give teachers more guidance for designing and implementing education; in other instances, World-Oriented didactics will do so. Ideally, the two are combined.

Figure 3 shows how the two didactic models come together in a lemniscate. The diamond in the centre shows what makes education at VU distinctive: education that starts from diversity, strengthens the uniqueness of the individual, and forms students as world-aware professionals who are able to create meaning in the world.

At VU, this stimulating, responsive environment emerges through the combination of the two didactic approaches. The diamond represents the practice space in which people learn from and with one another through different perspectives.

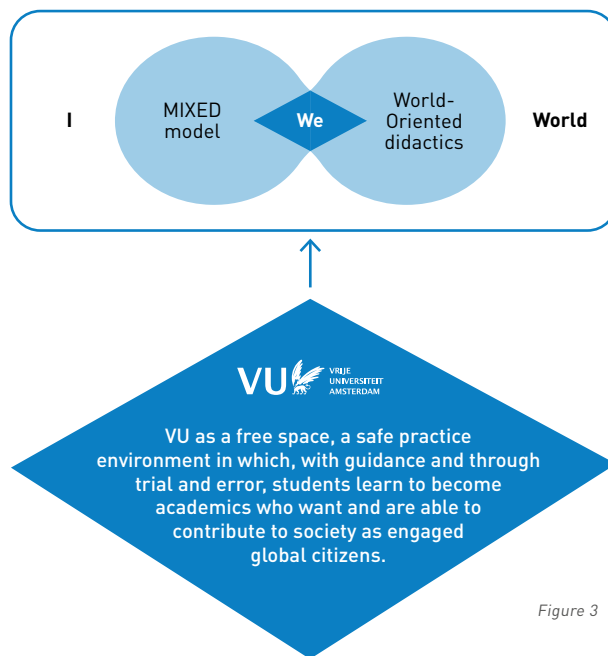


Figure 3

"As Rector, I see up close how difficult it can be to deal with tensions. Our campus is not always comfortable, but I also see how a small gesture can make a difference. An open question. An outstretched hand. A conversation that continues precisely when things become difficult. Genuine

dialogue, in all its vulnerability, can shift something. And perhaps that is the essence of global citizenship: not the grand gestures of a few, but the everyday choices of many."

Jeroen Geurts

ADDENDUM 1: THE FOUNDATION OF VU WORLD-ORIENTED DIDACTICS

We would like to explain the ideas on which we have based the didactics.

The educational mission: global citizenship

The world-oriented focus as we understand it stands in the tradition of Dewey (1916). His work was formative for progressive educational theory and lays out the foundation for education that seeks participation, reflection, active learning, and societal engagement. Biesta (2022, 2024) has provided new language and breathed new life into the concept of world-oriented education. We are also inspired by, among others, Paulo Freire (1972), who sees education as a practice space oriented towards liberation and conscientisation, and Martha Nussbaum (2011), who connects education with the cultivation of democracy.

From the VU foundation, we recognise the view that global citizenship is not neutral but value-laden.

“Neutral citizenship does not exist (...). Every view of what it means to be a good citizen, and every view of how people in a diverse society ought to relate to one another, is coloured by its own (explicit or implicit) view of humanity and the world, or worldview (...)” (Bertram-Troost, 2022, p. 13).

Formation alongside knowledge transfer and skills training

Global citizenship has a cognitive, behavioural and social-emotional component. Central to it is that students learn to experience different perspectives on the world (Duarte, 2021). Students learn to make moral judgments, develop communication skills, learn to think critically, analytically and conceptually, and learn to engage with diversity in beliefs and cultural backgrounds (Onderwijsraad, 2011, p. 9).

Global citizenship therefore goes beyond knowledge transfer and skills training. From educational-philosophical and pedagogical perspectives too, it is emphasised that global citizenship concerns formation. Formation cannot be enforced; students cannot simply be trained to become global citizens. Education can, however, be oriented towards the formation of inclusive, active and critical citizenship. This is why terms such as “practice space”, “space” and “learning environment” are more appropriate for this form of education. Guiding students towards critical global citizenship therefore requires more than transferring knowledge and teaching skills.

The university as a practice space: room to act

In the transition from student to critically thinking adult, information transfer needs to be accompanied by activation and challenge (Nussbaum, 2011). Global citizenship is about action, about being able to act. For this, students need active hope and optimism (De Winter, 2024, p. 31; Klomp, 2025). Our World-Oriented didactics is therefore directed towards setting students in motion and stimulating their agency. The development of agency benefits from a responsive environment in which dialogue is self-evident and interaction is experienced as both enjoyable and challenging (Ramdas et al., 2025; Nijnatten, 2010; Van Matre et al., 2025).

An important element for action is motivation: wanting to begin, wanting to continue, and having confidence in one’s ability to learn independently. Here we connect with Deci

and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory, which emphasises autonomy, relatedness and competence as fundamental human needs that promote (intrinsic) motivation.

How do we create an environment that invites action?

Through a pedagogical context in which space has been made for the student voice. Through an opportunity structure that offers a safe space for action and practice, where mistakes can be made and even encouraged. A space in which people can collaborate and carry responsibility (De Winter, 2024, p. 79). A space in which we balance providing direction with the freedom to make one's own choices (De-meijer et al., 2025). In this way, a practice space emerges (Rinnooy Kan, 2023).

The teacher is also a role model

Within this practice space, the teacher - often alongside being a subject-matter expert - is a role model (Onderwijsraad, 2011). In a practice space, the teacher offers countervoice and thoughtfulness (De Winter, 2024, p. 79) and helps students learn to deal with existential uncertainty (Bertram-Troost & van Putten, 2025, p. 154). This requires teachers to reflect on themselves.

Questions that can help include: What do I want to be a role model for? What do I see as my task? What do I see as the task of education? How do I relate - as a scholar, for example as a historian or physicist - to prevailing views in society? Which tensions do I encounter? How do I teach

students about engagement with others while living in a society where individualism is often taken for granted? How do I myself move between my own wishes and needs and attuning to others?

Through reflection, teachers gain insight into their own perspective. Because world-oriented education concerns complex issues, a perspectival approach is needed to find solutions (Janssen, Hulshof & Van Veen, 2019). When you are aware of your own positionality, you can actively seek out and introduce other perspectives.

In our didactics, we use the term "practice space". This term reaches back to philosopher and educationalist John Dewey, who in his education-as-laboratories work from 1938 emphasised that school also functions as a practice space for learning to live together. The school is a society in miniature in which learners develop as citizens through experience and action, or what Hannah Arendt calls an "in-between space" between the family and "larger" society (Nivoz, 2018a; Nivoz, 2018b).

ADDENDUM 2:

ISSUES & DILEMMAS

QUESTIONS AROUND AGENCY

Within student groups, there are always students who are hopeful, but there are also students who become cynical and feel that they have no influence - no agency - in relation to major societal issues such as the climate crisis, polarisation and the rise of the far right. Yet the development of hope begins with the experience of agency.

The question is how this sense of capacity to act can take shape within more theoretical programmes, such as the humanities. Students in this context generally have strong analytical skills: they can reason about complexity, make connections, write and think critically. They have extensive knowledge of English-language literature and modern society. Although themes such as polarisation, climate, racism and extremism are discussed frequently, the sense that they themselves can do something is missing.

What if you do not have active hope and optimism?
How do you deal with that as a teacher?

"Suppose you ask students to contribute to limiting climate change. This requires them to position themselves in relation to the dominant narrative of economic growth (Klomp, 2024)."

Both from an educational-pedagogical perspective and on the basis of the Mixed Model, we see taking diversity as a starting point as a valuable fundamental stance for every teacher. How do you

create meaningful education that evokes urgency and prompts agency when students in a diverse group have different ideas about what is meaningful?

WHAT ROOM DOES OUR CURRENT EDUCATION SYSTEM OFFER?

Biesta distinguishes three domains of purpose for education: socialisation, subjectification and qualification. Subjectification can be challenging in an educational environment in which choices and innovations concerning curricula have been made from a disciplinary or institutional perspective (Robberts, 2015), with making knowledge measurable as a guiding principle.

There is, however, no guarantee of "achieving goals". That is precisely the beautiful risk of education (Biesta, 2013). Particularly in relation to subjectification, there is no fixed step-by-step plan with predictable outcomes. Human formation, as an ongoing process of "coming into the world as a self" - which is precisely what world-oriented education is concerned with - requires space and trust (Bertram-Troost, 2022).

Arjan Wals, Professor of Transformative Learning for Socio-Ecological Sustainability at Wageningen Universiteit, describes in earth-centered education that we are not simply moving through a transition

in a complex society, but through a deeper “system failure” that calls for a radical pedagogical reorientation (2025a, 2025b). Wals sees education as a practice space for connection with the Earth, moral orientation, critical resilience and imagination.

This requires a different kind of professionalism from teachers. The teacher is no longer only the neutral transmitter of knowledge or guardian of the curriculum, but a moral and pedagogical compass: the teacher as connector between students and the world. Pedagogical competencies such as being able to guide existential conversations about what is valuable and being able to reflect on one’s own moral compass receive greater emphasis. This may mean that teachers find themselves in a field of tension between, on the one hand, the urgency of the challenges playing out in society and, on the other, an education system in which learning objectives, attainment levels and assessment pressure are leading.

HOW DO I, AS A TEACHER, ENGAGE WITH THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSION?

Desire and engagement are not only cognitive. They have a bodily/affective dimension. The affective dimension concerns feeling and noticing emotions and sensations, and observing body language. What do I feel when something affects me? How does my posture change? Do I move forward or backward? Becoming skilled in noticing can complement analytical reflection. Pamela den Heijer and Roos Bits-Derksen write about this in their book [De docent is ook maar mens \[2025\]](#).

How do you provide a context in which this feels safe and challenging? An important substantive question concerns the space of the student. Are there also boundaries? Who or what determines where the boundary lies? May a student also be contrarian by going against the teacher’s view?

To what extent are you, as a teacher, a role model as a human being? Or are you primarily a role model as a scholar?

IN CONCLUSION

Our student group is not very societally oriented. I do not know how to motivate them.

Van Matre, de Wit and Demeijer (2025) researched this. Read:

Van Matre, J. C., de Wit, A., & Demeijer, F. (2025). Motivating Business Students for Civic Education: Design Principles for Aligning Civic Engagement Programs with Student Motivation. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 0123456789. www.doi.org/10.1007/s10551-025-06059-w

I teach a very large group of students. Is it possible to apply an educational form such as CSL?

Scheffelaar et al. (2023) researched this. Read:

Scheffelaar, A., Blignaut-van Westrhenen, N., Labrie, N. H., Pittens, C. A., & Zweekhorst, M. B. (2023). A Multiple Case Study of Implementing Community Service-Learning in Large-Scale Higher Education Courses. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 27(1).

OVERVIEW OF TEACHER STRATEGIES / APPROACHES TO PRACTICE

	TEACHER STRATEGIES	LEARNING OUTCOMES	REFLECTION QUESTIONS
Aspiration & Orientation	• Orient themselves, from their own study/discipline, towards themes currently central in the world and feel urgency to take responsibility. • Be open to diversity in culture, beliefs and lifeworlds (multiple perspectives). • Show a desire to learn by exploring themes in a broader context and formulating learning experiences that connect with personal engagement, curiosity or wonder.	• Touch the emotional layer • Focus on the whole task • Create slowing down • Bring the outside world in • Model interest	• What desire do you feel? • What do you want to take responsibility for? • What moves you? • What remains underexposed as you reflect?
Co-creation & Presence	• Show curiosity and ask focused questions to deepen their understanding of complex issues from within their own study/discipline. • Explore alternative perspectives on societal issues (e.g. through art, imagination, design, debate or dialogue) and work together on a creative solution. • Learn to suspend judgment and think and act with nuance, beyond quick conclusions. • Be actively present and engaged in learning activities and contribute to shared learning processes.	• Create space for creation • Make room for not knowing • Make action possible quickly • Facilitate conversations • Model collaboration	• When is it easy for you to remain present, and when is it more difficult? • What positive changes do you see? • In what ways are you creative and innovative?
Transformation & Presentation	• Actively put ideas, solutions or visions into the world and communicate them to a wider audience. • Articulate their position and demonstrate transparent insight into choices made, the societal value of their work and the positions of others. • Reflect on the experience gained and develop insight into the development it has generated in themselves and in the world.	• Include focused forms of reflection in your teaching • Provide presentation space • Broaden the perspective on presentation • Give feedback that keeps urgency & agency alive • Model reflection	• What does teaching mean to you as a human being? • Who have you become through what you have learned and continue to learn? • Education is not only a place to learn something, but also a place to become someone.

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