

[Reporters: Dr. Rita Sinha-ISH Parent, Olivia Eggleston and Abe Linskens-ISH Students]

The International School of The Hague (ISH) successfully organised its 4th edition of yet another exciting TEDx Youth talks on 11 October 2016. The TEDx talks are organised independently under the umbrella of the well-known TED talks. This year's theme, 'Infinitely Curious', was aimed at sparking off curiosity and generating great ideas amongst the participants. The lively audience consisted of more than 300 students and VIPs from the ISH Secondary School, Rotterdam Secondary International School, United World College Maastricht, The British School in The Netherlands, International School Het Rijnlands Lyceum (Oegstgeest), Dalton scholengemeenschap and The European School The Hague. This year the ISH TEDx event reached a much wider audience thanks to the live streaming provided to the secondary classrooms and to online subscribers.

Mr. David Butcher, the Secondary School Principal kicked off the day's events with a fitting answer to the thought provoking question, 'Are we destroying creativity through the school curriculum?' He said, "Today's theme, 'Infinitely Curious', does bring creativity to ISH and to the youths taking part in this event". He hoped that everyone would enjoy the talks and added, "More importantly, learn from them to create ideas worth spreading". Two very talented students from ISH, Anna Busuttill and Louis Buijs did a superb job as the Masters of Ceremonies. The many stories and ideas shared during the talks and visual demonstrations varied from scientific research, technological innovation, social issues to dreams and aspirations and arts and culture. The speakers ranged from young and dynamic teenagers to people distinguished in their fields.

The Talks

Michaela Brchnelova, an aerospace engineering student at the Technical University Delft spoke about 'How to combine scientific and moral curiosity'. She wants to motivate young minds to explore their own potential instead of routinely following the system just as her own curious mind led her to discover an asteroid at the age of 16. Seventeen year old ISH student, Alexander van Dijk, with his keen interest in historical architecture had an intriguing piece of history to share in his talk entitled, 'Let's demolish the Notre Dame'. He feels that historical monuments are of great importance as they are the puzzle pieces of the manifestation of our cultural heritage, values and beliefs. He says, "Curiosity has no borders whatsoever. People's interests are extremely divergent and just by asking questions about what we see around ourself can lead to such interesting discoveries". Liam McClain, an ISH graduate explained in his talk how he accidentally discovered his passion for filmmaking through lucid dreaming and egged us on to literally go after our dreams. Another very talented ISH student, Sara van Eeghen, inspired us through her own life experience and demonstrated how through meditation we could prioritise, tackle and survive through problems related to health, relationships etc. A beautiful example of being curious with art was presented by Nick Ferguson, a London-based artist. In his talk, 'Teaching a fox to Appreciate Art', he illustrated an extremely positive example of how to turn any adversity into advantage.

Whenever we think of science and imagination, we envisage sci-fi. A virtual reality developer, Gijs Molsbergen, who works at LAB4242, a virtual reality development company, demonstrated how virtual reality, although seemingly ahead of its times, can actually change the world for real. He called it a 'revolution'. The very essence of merging electrical engineering with biology was demonstrated beautifully by Berend van Meer, an electrical engineer turned bio-engineer. He showed photos of his amazing bio-lab where a simple human skin had been biologically programmed to mimic a heart cell and later used for customised drug testing. He said, "This is just a tiny example of the huge potential for organ-on-chip industry for the future". A passionate, young researcher in quantum mechanics, Julia Cramer shared her fascination with quantum computers in her talk. She hopes that her experiments will soon turn dreams into realistic future technologies. Dr. Jonathan Forman, who is the Science Policy Adviser at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), opened our eyes to the world of harmful chemical weapons and how we could remove them from the world. He brought home the fact that chemistry does not mean just chemical weapons but it plays a major role in protecting humanity by positively influencing diplomatic negotiations towards a chemical weapons free world and thus making the world a better place. Dr. Oliver Jennrich, a scientist at the European Space Agency took us to far off galaxies and beyond giving us a glimpse of the recent gravitational wave discovery and its future. He said, "One has only to imagine and there is an infinite world waiting to be discovered in outer space".

The talks concluded with a gracious thank you note by the TEDx core team organiser, Ms. Yarona van der Horst. She said that being profoundly influenced by the great scientist, Albert Einstein, they had decided to create this year's innovative and unique theme. All speakers were presented with a keychain, a coaster, a bookmark and the prize winning desk lamp based on the TEDx theme, designed and made in-house by talented ISH students. There was plenty of entertainment on stage and on the plaza in between the talks in the form of the senior jazz band, self-composed and contemporary songs by gifted ISH students as well as a modern dance and a Peruvian folk dance (<http://www.tedxioyouthish.com/performers>).

The Workshops

The talks this year were further enriched with 16 workshops that gave the participants a wonderful opportunity to do a hands-on and test their curious minds. The workshops were led by persons well-versed in their fields which included some of the speakers and brilliant ISH teachers. Workshops ranged from creative puzzles (by Dr. Miroslav Zivkovich, University of Amsterdam), bricolage (by Suhaib Aslam, student at the University of Twente), and an art workshop to create your own infinity logo (by Tina Maria Ortiz and Marie Keaveny, ISH Visual Arts teachers) to 'OasISH', the designing of a habitat island in the ISH pond (by Elisabeth Chute, ISH Visual Arts Teacher, and landscape artists, Annechien Meier and Gert Jan Gerlach, Microclimates Laboratory). The programme also included workshops designed to help us connect with our inner curious mind such as the workshop on learning how to stay in touch with our gut feeling so that we are able to do our best in life (by Carolina Sleijffers, founder of *Time to Talk*), 'Being curious together', a workshop on how to be creative and imaginative when working together as a team (by Micky Keeren, French and Dutch fiction writer) and the workshop by London-based artist, Nick Ferguson, 'Training a fox to appreciate art' that highlighted the role of animals in shaping our behaviour and environment.

Vibrant song, dance and drama workshops were also part of the programme since these are all expressions of the curious and imaginative human nature. As Diego Meelis Madurga and Charlie Delaney, quite aptly said, about their theatrical improvisation workshop, "Mainly, we want to spread the message of how theatre and improvisation can help to express oneself and overcome confidence issues". Other popular workshops were 'Acapella', a singing workshop (by Ms Ogusu, ISH Music teacher, and Maya and Siiri, senior ISH students) and a dance workshop by Kiera Drake, a senior ISH student and performer with Ordinary People Dance company, CODARTS, who said, "Dance is very much about expressing oneself through music. To be successful one needs to be curious and constantly strive to develop new ways of expression". The Capoeira workshop, a martial art combining elements of dance, acrobatics and music (by Serena and Dinho, Gingaxé Mistura de racas) was a liberating experience for stimulating inner creativity and power. Well, how can one leave out sports from the agenda. But the workshop, '(S)Cool on Wheels', (by John van der Meer, www.fondsgehandicaptensport.nl and AON), was a sports workshop with a twist. It was life-changing for participants to experience how a person despite facing physical challenges and confined to a wheelchair is able to perform sports activities.

An 'Infinitely Curious' event will be incomplete without its science and technology-based workshops. The 'Virtual Reality' workshop showcased the power of virtual reality (by Gijs Molsbergen, founder of Lab4242), the 'Living microchips' workshop showcased the organ-on-chip technology to improve our world (by Berend van Meer, Leiden University Medical Center), and the 'How to run a chemical weapons investigation' workshop (by Dr. Jonathan Forman and Mike Barret, OPCW) demonstrated the challenges one faces in carrying out an investigation into chemical weapon use. How diverse one's curious mind can be, is reflected, by the opinion expressed by one of the students, who said, "I personally found the talk on historical architecture and the exhibit on aerospace engineering to be most in line with 'Infinitely Curious' because they both showcase the individual's curiosity and drive to seek out knowledge".

Plaza Exhibits

In between the talks and workshops there was ample opportunity to meet members of the international school community, fellow speakers, workshop leaders and other distinguished guests on the buzzing plaza. The plaza foyer offered many exhibits which were the talking points amongst the participants. One could view an in-house built rocket on display by the Delft Aerospace Rocket Engineering students, the prototype of a microclimate by two Dutch landscape artists from the Microclimates Laboratory, the Lisa pathfinder, a model of the gravitational wave detector by the European Space Agency and the sleek sustainable car built by ISH students. A mind-boggling tasting table was provided by the school caterer for participants with curious taste buds where they could taste bugs and insects!!! They were also seen queueing up to try the virtual reality hands-on where one got to experience the feeling of swinging from the top of a high church ceiling. Although chilling but truly a thrilling experience.

Support

This TEDxYouth event would not have been possible without the marvellous TEDx core team, namely, Ms. Yarona van der Horst (Organiser), Mr. David Butcher (Principal Secondary School), Mr. Pjer Wijsman, Dr. Camelia Constantinescu, Mr. Simon Brooks, Ms. Mariane Cunane, Mr. Timothy Jones, Ms. Christel van Meeuwen, Dr. Linda van Goor, Ms. Sima Zolfaghari, Ms. Belinda Verhagen, Ms. Barbara Bouwman, Ms. Bronwen Hennop and Ms. Anna Lorant. They and the speakers were very well supported by an excellent support team and coaches (<http://www.tedxyouthish.com/team>) and a very motivated bunch of parent and student volunteers. Last but not least the generous funding support from the ISH partners (<http://www.tedxyouthish.com/partners-cs51>) went a long way in making this event possible.

Everyone including the participants and the speakers were highly motivated and enthusiastic throughout the entire event. To quote one of the most curiously minded scientists the world has ever known, Albert Einstein, “The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existence. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery each day”. This successful TEDx edition organised by the International School of The Hague only goes to show how the school is nurturing the curiosity and imagination of the youth to their fullest potential and investing in a better future for all. More details about the TEDx events at ISH can be found at <http://www.tedxyouthish.com/>.



About the author

Dr. Rita Sinha is a parent from the Primary section at ISH. She is a scientist with a passion for writing on various subjects.
