

**In Search of a Competency-Based Curriculum for English
Literature Education in Dutch Secondary Schools**



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Abstract

This thesis explores the possibility of implementing a competency-based method in the English literature curriculum in Dutch secondary schools. The current curriculum suffers from a lack of structure which is not conducive to pupils' literary competency, reading skills and reading enjoyment. In order to determine whether implementing a competency-based structure based on Dr Theo Witte's method would have merit a small-scale study has been carried out at two Dutch secondary schools, taking into account pupils' and teachers' experiences and opinions. The results of this study are discussed in this paper. Furthermore the practical difficulties of developing a competency-based method for literature education in a foreign language are addressed. Based on the study's results it can be concluded that there is a need for improvement in the English literature curricula at these schools and that experimenting with a competency-based method is recommendable.

Introduction

Ever since the first alarming reports started to appear in the eighties (Lavrijsen 31) the literary and educational landscape of The Netherlands has been plagued by one inescapable empirically researched truth: reading enjoyment in children and adolescents is steadily decreasing. In 1975 adolescents between the ages of twelve and nineteen would on average spend 4.6 hours a week reading; a number which by 1990 had already decreased by more than half to 1.4 hours a week on average (Witte, “Op zoek naar”). In 2007 13% of elementary school pupils claimed to never read a book unless it was mandatory for a school subject and the number of elementary school-aged children who read seven or more books a month has decreased from 14% to 7% between 1993 and 2005 (ibidem). A 2010 study on reading attitudes among Dutch children aged 7-15 reports that in the transition from primary to secondary education reading enjoyment decreases noticeably: girls’ attitudes towards reading generally change from positive to mildly positive, whereas boys’ reading attitudes change from mildly positive to mildly negative (Van den Eijnden 6). It is very likely that this is in large part due to the transition from children’s and youth literature to adult literature that pupils are expected to make when transitioning from primary to secondary education but in which they are often not adequately aided at school. Moreover, pupils report that the high number of books that are required reading at school lowers their reading enjoyment considerably; they view the set text lists as “too long” and the books on these lists as “boring and difficult” (Lavrijsen 32).

This problem is not limited to The Netherlands: numerous studies by US researchers have found that “young people across all age groups devote very little time to recreational reading” (Strommen 188) and that this has been the case since the 1940s (ibidem). A 2011 study among over 4,000 pupils by the British National Literacy Trust found that 18.8% of them claimed reading was “boring” and that they only read because they “had to” (Clark 14).

Students who do not enjoy reading and are averse to the typical school texts risk developing “a lifelong aversion to reading” (Seitz 31) which may hinder them in their academic career and limit their general knowledge and reading comprehension (*ibidem*).

In short: there is a lot to be gained when it comes to literature education in secondary schools with regard to pupils’ reading attitudes. Though it may very well be argued that the objective of education is not to entertain and that pupils’ enjoyment should not be paramount, the importance of a positive attitude towards reading should not be underestimated and is, in fact, essential to a successful literature education. As stated in a report by Stichting Lezen (transl. the Dutch Reading Foundation), “children should have as many positive reading experiences as possible [...] Reading enjoyment can above all also consist of a better understanding of a text” (Nicolaas 7). A positive attitude towards reading greatly contributes to literary competency, i.e. familiarity with literary texts and the ability to understand, appreciate and discuss them (*ibidem*), which is the objective of literature education in general. Researchers studying the international PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) data confirmed that “pupils who enjoy reading and perceive themselves to be good readers usually read more frequently and more widely, which, in turn, broadens their reading experience and improves their comprehension skills” (qtd. in Clark 10). The largest obstacle for an appreciation for literary texts and a positive attitude towards reading in general is mandatory reading imposed from above, which does not take into account pupils’ diverse competencies and tastes; in other words, the way the literature curriculum is currently structured in most schools.

In The Netherlands the current curriculum was shaped in the 1960s starting with the introduction of the law on secondary education, the so-called “Mammoetwet” (transl. Mammoth law). Under this law all different school types and levels were combined into one system, which facilitated movement between levels and gave pupils more freedom of choice

(Dekkers). The focus shifted to the individual pupil rather than the group, befitting the general social trend towards individualism (Witte, “Op zoek naar”). The law formulated requirements and objectives for the different subjects, but they noticeably lacked specificity: the objective for literature education did not stipulate the number of books that had to be read, nor what literary theory and history had to be discussed. Combined with the fact that classes now had more sociocultural diversity due to the democratisation of the system, which led to more didactic problems, this all resulted in a staggering amount of variety in literature education (ibidem). The flexibility of the guidelines allowed every teacher their own take on literature education: a welcome development in some cases, but overall the curriculum strongly lacked structure.

An attempt to introduce more structure into the curriculum, at least for Dutch literature, was made in 1996: the Vakontwikkelgroep Nederlands (transl. the Development Group for the Subject of Dutch) took the guidelines from a new examination programme introduced in 1991 and attempted to synthesize these into a more functional didactic programme. The number of books that had to be read was decided on and reading reports were made mandatory assignments, among others (Witte, “Op zoek naar”). It was a step in the right direction, but still literature education suffered from a lack of vision; a well-structured curriculum that gradually introduces more difficult books and assignments to aid pupils in their literary journey was still far away. As Dr Theo Witte termed it, literature education was still an “ill-structured domain” (ibidem). Knowledge and skills that are acquired in such a domain are non-flexible and non-transferable, usually leaving pupils unable to independently apply knowledge to new books that are not discussed under the teacher’s guidance (ibidem).

Realizing the magnitude of this problem and seeing a potential solution, Witte in the early 2000s set up a large-scale study in secondary education with a view to restructuring the literature curriculum once more – but thoroughly this time. This study would result in his

extensive 2008 dissertation *Het oog van de meester* (transl. *The master's eye*). With his central question “How can a literature teacher stimulate the development of pupils’ literary competency while accounting for differences in starting level and also ensuring reading enjoyment is retained and/or increased?” as a starting point, Witte set out to both map pupils’ literary development in the upper years of secondary education and at the same time develop a didactic tool to stimulate this development. This didactic tool is strongly competency-based, meaning that it takes into account that all pupils have different reading levels and skills rather than assuming that pupils of the same age group and education level are homogenous in their literary competency. Witte then designed a set text list for Dutch literature with six reading levels which correspond with different “levels” of competency. All books on this list meet the necessary standards when it comes to literary quality and canonical relevance but the ranking according to difficulty makes it far easier for pupils to choose the “right” book for their own reading level. This ranking also allows readers to gradually move on to a higher level, thereby eventually reaching the required level for their age and educational level at their own pace. As Witte states: “The most important stimulus for literary development is reading the right book at the right moment. The right choice gives pupils confidence and gratification and makes reading in the context of literature education a meaningful activity” (*Het oog* 20). Guidance by the teacher is, however, just as essential as a well-organized set text list: the teacher has the knowledge to accurately determine a pupil’s skill level and correctly interpret the books’ rankings, thereby acting as the necessary intermediary between pupil and book.

Witte’s method is now widely applied in teaching Dutch literature in Dutch secondary schools. The website lezenvoordelijst.nl has been modelled after his proposal and many teachers – at least 95%, research by the Dutch Reading Foundation has found (Beeke) – are familiar with this website and use it to guide their pupils towards the right books, citing that it noticeably increases pupils’ reading enjoyment and literary development (Dumont 18).

Witte's method is unique in its student-centered approach and differentiation in competency levels; an approach that has been proven successful in a recent study by Marc Verboord, stating that "student-centered literature education is more beneficial for students' reading motivation and reading enjoyment than culture-oriented literature education which prioritizes knowledge of literary history" (9).

But even though successes have been booked with Witte's method in the Dutch literature curriculum it is rarely applied in teaching modern foreign languages such as English and French, although their literature curriculum faces many of the same problems. A 2010 study by Paulien Hommersom-Schreuder explores the possibility of applying Witte's method to French literature education, resulting in an overall positive response from the pupils: the research group were all more positive about reading in general and felt they now better understood the importance of literature education (16).

Following Witte's and Hommersom-Schreuder's findings, this thesis concerns an area they both have not focused on: that of English literature education in Dutch secondary schools. The English curriculum suffers from largely the same issues the Dutch literature curriculum did, most importantly a lack of structure (Van der Knaap 217). A further complicating factor is the fact that in the modern foreign languages (MFL) literature education has always been secondary to teaching basic language skills such as speaking and writing. Moreover, historically – at least since the mid-1800s – MFL literature education has been reserved for the upper years and levels of secondary education; despite efforts to gradually introduce pupils to (young adult) literature in the first few years of secondary school, the transition is still jarring for most (Kwakernaak 138). Motivating pupils to read challenging texts in a language they have not mastered, which may hinder both their enjoyment and understanding of the text, is yet another added barrier (*ibidem*).

This raises the question: might these issues be improved in a manner similar to the

restructuring that “saved” the Dutch literature curriculum? Kwakernaak seems to think so, stating that “the ideal is an integrated learning plan for fiction education (young adult literature) in the lower years and literature education in the upper years. An integrated curriculum should take into account Witte’s six levels of literary competency. It is of no use to enforce literary development by making students skip phases in their development; however, it is appropriate to stay on top of the student’s individual level and to aim for N+1” (qtd. in Ewalds 10). Researcher Ewout van der Knaap is conducting a study into the transferability of literary competencies into a foreign language; preliminary results among a small group suggest that pupils’ competency levels for German correspond with their Dutch competency level (Claassen 2), meaning that a classification of books according to competency level might be just as possible for other languages. This thesis will explore just that, with as a starting point the central research question: “To what extent would using a competency-based set text list in English literature education in Dutch secondary schools stimulate pupils’ reading enjoyment and increase their competence?”

In an attempt to answer this question empirical research has been conducted among 143 pupils aged 15-19 in the upper levels (i.e. year 4-6) of two Dutch secondary schools. In addition the teachers who construct the literature curriculum in these schools have been asked about their opinions on and experiences with the current system and how they would feel about restructuring the curriculum according to (a version of) Witte’s method. The methodology of this research will be further explained in chapter one. The interpretation of its results and data can be found in chapter two, distinguishing between the data and opinions on the current state of the art in English literature education and the opinions on a hypothetical situation in which a set text list sorted according to competence is used. Chapter three discusses the details of implementing a competency-based method as well as the difficulties that arise with it.

The data set used in this paper is of course too small to reach a definitive and all-encompassing conclusion about how the English literature curriculum should be structured in every Dutch secondary school. This thesis does not aim to prescribe a cut-and-dried improved version of the English literature curriculum; rather, it should be viewed as a tentative exploration of the benefits and drawbacks of a possible new method and above all as a recommendation that further research is done on this subject.

Chapter 1: Methodology

In order to answer the question central to this thesis a small-scale empirical study has been set up and conducted among the two groups directly concerned with English literature education in Dutch secondary schools: pupils and teachers. Questionnaires and interviews were the main source of data collection; a justification of the participants, procedure and the materials used can be found below.

The relationship between reading enjoyment and literary competency has been empirically researched and proven by multiple authors; among others Gutrhie & Wigfield, Morgan & Fuchs and Unrau & Schlackman (qtd. in Schiefele 428). Questionnaires are the most commonly used method of assessment, as qualitative analysis does not lend itself well for this purpose (Schiefele 432), but the drawbacks of using questionnaires are several. This type of research relies heavily on the honesty of the respondent as well as his correct interpretation of the questions, and answers to open questions are open to subjective interpretation by the researcher. However, since it is an easy way of questioning a large group of respondents and the data are easily quantifiable and can therefore be objectively analysed, researchers often feel this outweighs the drawbacks and therefore I have opted to employ this method for this thesis.

Although the set-up of this study was strongly inspired by the method Witte employed in the research for his dissertation, there are the necessary differences. Nearly all of these are due to time constraints: whereas Witte had ample time and opportunity to select a cohort of students and closely track and work on their literary development over the course of a couple of years, this thesis had to be finished in its entirety in a couple of months. Tracking the development of a cohort was therefore impossible: it is extremely unlikely that pupils' literary competency would develop significantly over such a short period. Key to Witte's theory of

competency levels is that reaching a new level of competency is a very gradual process that, even with the right books and guidance, may take years. Moreover, Witte had the opportunity to implement his method of competency-based teaching and thereby actively aid in the literary development of the cohort he was tracking, which was not possible for this study either.

For these reasons the results of this study are in many ways the results of the state of English literature education in a very specific place at a very specific moment in time; there is no way to be sure whether pupils who exhibit a negative attitude towards reading (literature) in these results might feel differently about it by the end of the school year regardless of a change in method. In addition the data on pupils' and teachers' attitudes towards implementing a competency-based set text list that are discussed in chapter two are necessarily speculative in nature, since a competency-based method had not been implemented prior to gathering these data.

Despite these considerable drawbacks, I do consider the empirical results an important and necessary part of this thesis; without them it would run the risk of devolving into purely theoretical speculation which has no bearing on those actually involved in its practical application. Consulting those actually involved in English literature education, either through teaching or taking the classes, has drawn attention to issues which would likely not have surfaced through mere literature review.

1.1 Participants

Pupils

A total of 143 secondary school pupils participated in this study via questionnaires. These pupils attend either one of two schools: Jeroen Bosch College (JBC) in 's-Hertogenbosch or Leidsche Rijn College (LRC) in Utrecht. Both of these schools are so-called "scholengemeenschappen", which is best translated as "comprehensive schools": they cater to

pupils of different levels and pupils are sorted into classes according to level. Since literature is generally only taught at the higher levels only havo and vwo classes were included in this study. Vwo is the highest level in Dutch secondary school: pupils at this level are expected to continue their education at university after graduating. It takes six years to complete the vwo-stream. Havo is one level below vwo, preparing pupils for higher professional vocational training over the course of five years. In general, and at least at these two schools, pupils receive literature education during the last three years of vwo and the last two of havo; at havo-level the literature curriculum is more introductory in nature, whereas at vwo-level there is more focus on literary theory and history and the works discussed are more difficult.

The questionnaire was filled out in six different classes, three per school. At JBC, two of these classes were at havo-level (fourth and fifth grade respectively) and one class was at vwo-level, fifth grade. Likewise, at LRC two of the classes were at havo-level and one at vwo-level, but the two havo-classes were both fifth grade and thus parallel each other. The vwo-class at this school was sixth and thereby final grade. I expected that the differences in level would show through in the results: pupils with a higher educational level might find it easier to read in English, they might read more difficult books or even read more in general. Another variable to take into account is that the literature curriculum differs not only per school but also per level: pupils at vwo-level are assigned more challenging books and more time is spent on literary theory and history than at havo-level. More on that, however, in chapter two.

Girls were in the minority among the participants: only 53 out of 143 total participants were girls. In nearly every class, save for one, girls were outnumbered by boys. I expected that this would skew the results as well, since multiple studies have shown that girls on average read more than boys, have a higher reading level and enjoy reading more, too (Van den Eijnden; Van Lenteren).

Apart from educational level and gender, other variables that were taken into account in interpreting the results of the questionnaires were age and native language(s). All participants speak Dutch, but some were raised bilingually and therefore also speak for instance Turkish or Moroccan. Whether this affects the results is discussed in chapter two.

Teachers

Four teachers participated by way of interviews: three teach at JBC and one teaches at LRC. These teachers had all volunteered to participate; at LRC more teachers were asked to but they declined mostly due to lack of time. All teachers teach English predominantly in the upper school years, where literature is taught. They are also all partly responsible for structuring the literature curriculum in their respective schools. At JBC there are considerable differences in teaching experience: one of the interviewed teachers had just started on her first year of teaching, the other has nearly forty years of teaching experience and the third falls somewhere in between with fifteen years of experience. The teacher at LRC has been teaching for eight years.

Although pupils' experiences with and opinion on literature are central to this study, the teachers were involved in order to get a better understanding of what the literature classes and curriculum as a whole look like and to hear the motivation behind the design of the curriculum. It is also interesting to see whether the pupils' answers to questions about how often literature is taught match the teachers' answers or if pupils experience it differently.

1.2 Materials

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used to gather pupils' responses because it is an easy method of gathering data from a large group of respondents; interviewing all pupils would be impracticable due to time constraints and interviewing only a select group of pupils would make the data unreliable due to the small pool of respondents. The questionnaire was

deliberately kept rather short at 12 questions, most of them multiple-choice. This was to ensure that pupils would not lose focus and/or quit halfway through, but also in the hopes of lowering the threshold for teachers to distribute the questionnaire; since it can be completed in 5-10 minutes it does not take up a large portion of class time.

The design of the questionnaire, which can be found in appendix I, is based on the questionnaire Witte used in his study and the questionnaire used by Britt Ewalds in her master's thesis, which was also based on Witte's questionnaire. The questionnaire can be divided into three sections. The first four questions are intended to gauge the pupil's reading attitude and habits; questions 5-8 focus on the (pupil's opinion on) English literature classes and questions 9-12 aim to find out how literature classes could be made more enjoyable or fulfilling for the pupil. Most questions are multiple-choice; the open questions mostly ask for titles of books.

I expected that the questions about reading attitude and frequency would be indicative of the pupil's opinion on literature classes and reading English, e.g. pupils who do not frequently read for pleasure and do not enjoy reading will likely not enjoy the classes, find English books difficult to read and do not find learning about English literature important. I also expected pupils' reading frequency to have diminished over the years, which is why question 2 asks specifically about reading frequency in elementary school.

The questionnaire was conducted in Dutch to minimize the chances of pupils misunderstanding the questions due to a language barrier. The Dutch original has therefore been appended with this thesis.

Interviews

Teachers' responses were gathered by means of semi-structured interviews, i.e. a list of questions was used as basis but based on the response to these questions there was room to discuss other topics. I opted for interviews instead of questionnaires with the teachers for two

reasons: firstly, because an interview allows for immediate clarification of answers if needed whereas a questionnaire does not, and secondly because being interviewed is less “effort” for teachers than filling out a questionnaire: I hoped that this would lower the threshold for teachers to participate.

The interviews focus on the design of the literature curriculum, the reasoning behind this design and the place of literature within the English curriculum when compared to other aspects such as grammar and listening and speaking exercises. I was also curious about the teachers’ thoughts on pupils’ experience of literature class and their thoughts on implementing a more competency-based structure.

The transcriptions of the interviews can be found in appendices II to V. Like the questionnaire these interviews were conducted in Dutch and have therefore been appended untranslated; since all teachers are Dutch natively I decided conducting the interview in Dutch would be preferable in the interest of clarity.

1.3 Procedure

I contacted both schools via email. In both cases I had the advantage of knowing who to address: since I went to JBC myself I could contact one of the English teachers I knew, and in case of LRC I got the direct email address of the English department coordinator from an acquaintance who used to work there. I based my selection of the schools on where I thought I was most likely to receive a reply, which I thought would be challenging enough since most schools are constantly being approached for these kinds of studies and usually have to decline.

I visited both schools once, on separate occasions. During both visits I conducted both the questionnaires in all three classes and the interviews with the teachers. The questionnaires were distributed either at the start or during the last ten minutes of English class following a short introduction in which I explained the purpose of the study. All participants received the same questionnaire.

The interviews were conducted at the teachers' discretion: at LRC this was after all questionnaires had been completed, at JBC it was in between the distribution of the questionnaires in the different classes. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed to ensure the most accuracy. Ideally the interviews would have been conducted after analysis of the questionnaires to allow the teachers to elaborate on pupils' answers, but due to time constraints this was impractical for both the teachers and me.

Chapter 2:

Results

This chapter discusses the results of the study carried out at the two participating secondary schools. Due to the nature of the questionnaire that was filled out by the pupils, in which questions about the current state of the literature curriculum as well as a hypothetical future situation are asked without clear segmentation, this chapter will include all of the results but attempt to arrange them logically. To this end the chapter is divided into two parts. Part I covers all results pertaining to the current situation regarding literature classes; part II discusses the opinions on an as of yet hypothetical future situation. The results are arranged according to several themes which can be distilled from the questionnaire: reading habits, reading attitude (now and in the past), current literature classes, attitude towards literature and ideas about the ideal literature class. For each theme pupils' responses will be compared to the information their teachers provided in their interviews. Likewise the results per school will be contrasted to see if there are significant differences and how these may be explained. The questions discussed in part II about the ideal literature class or a different form of teaching literature (competency-based) are necessarily speculative in nature, since this method has not actually been implemented at either school. The resulting answers to these questions are therefore intended to gauge whether implementing such a method would be an improvement and if there are any obstacles that should be taken into consideration.

In the following analysis specific questions from the questionnaire and their multiple-choice answers will often be referred to; the questionnaire can be found in appendix I.

Participants

The study was carried out among a total of 143 pupils divided over two different schools: 73 at JBC, 70 at LRC. All participants filled out the questionnaire anonymously but were asked

to indicate their gender, age and native languages. The figures below show the gender distribution per school and per class.

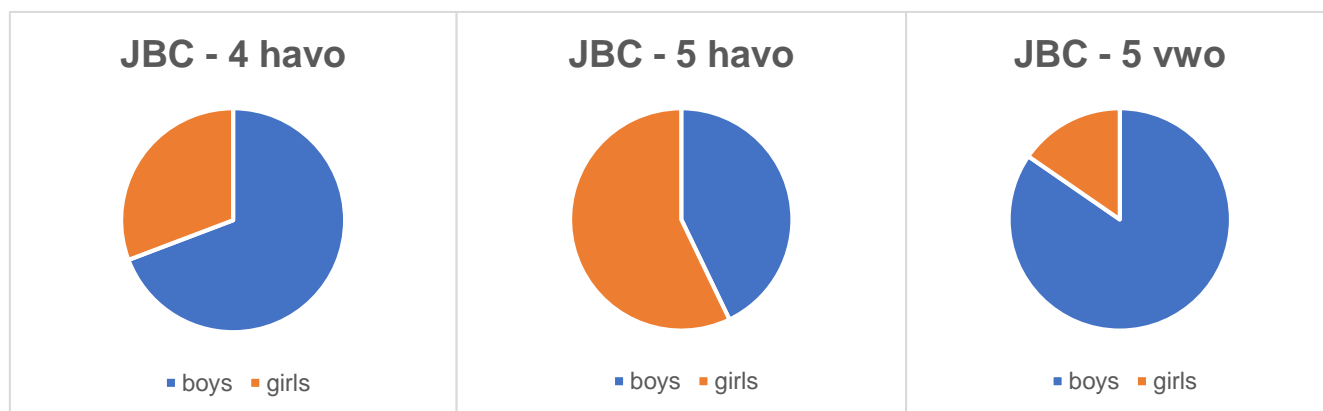


Figure 1 Gender distribution in all three participating classes at Jeroen Bosch College.

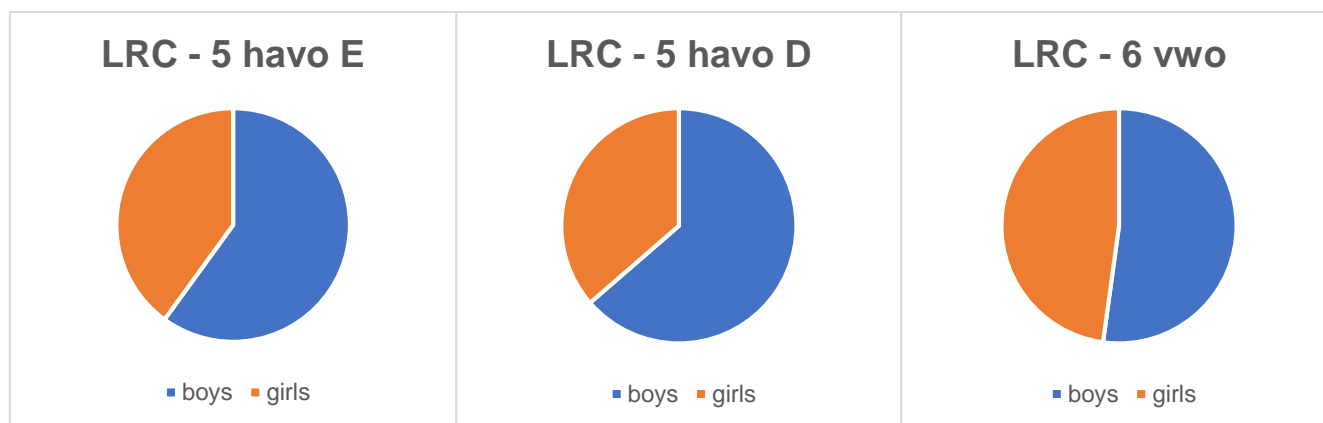


Figure 2 Gender distribution in all three participating classes at Leidsche Rijn College.

As shown in the graphs above girls are, save for in one class at JBC, generally in the minority and occasionally strongly outnumbered (e.g. in 4 havo and 5 vwo at JBC); 53 girls participated in total, versus 90 boys. In chapter 1 I hypothesized that this would affect the results since studies have shown that girls are generally better and more avid readers than boys; this will be further discussed under the heading ‘reading habits’ below.

The table on the next page lists the mean age of the participants per class:

		Boys	Girls
JBC	4 havo	15.6	15.8
	5 havo	17	17.2
	5 vwo	16.5	16.5
LRC	5 havo E	16.9	17
	5 havo D	16.7	16
	6 vwo	17.8	17.3

Figure 3 Mean age of participants per class.

From this we can conclude that girls are generally slightly older than their male peers, but the difference is rather small and therefore not likely to be significant. The mean ages are consistent with the mean age of the nominal pupil in the Dutch school system, who is 15/16 in 4 havo, 16/17 in 5 havo and 5 vwo and 17/18 in 6 vwo. With these mean ages the entire research group also falls into the demographic category of adolescents, which comes with certain expectations about reading behaviour which will again be discussed below.

Participants were also asked about their first language(s); the graphs below detail the language diversity per school.

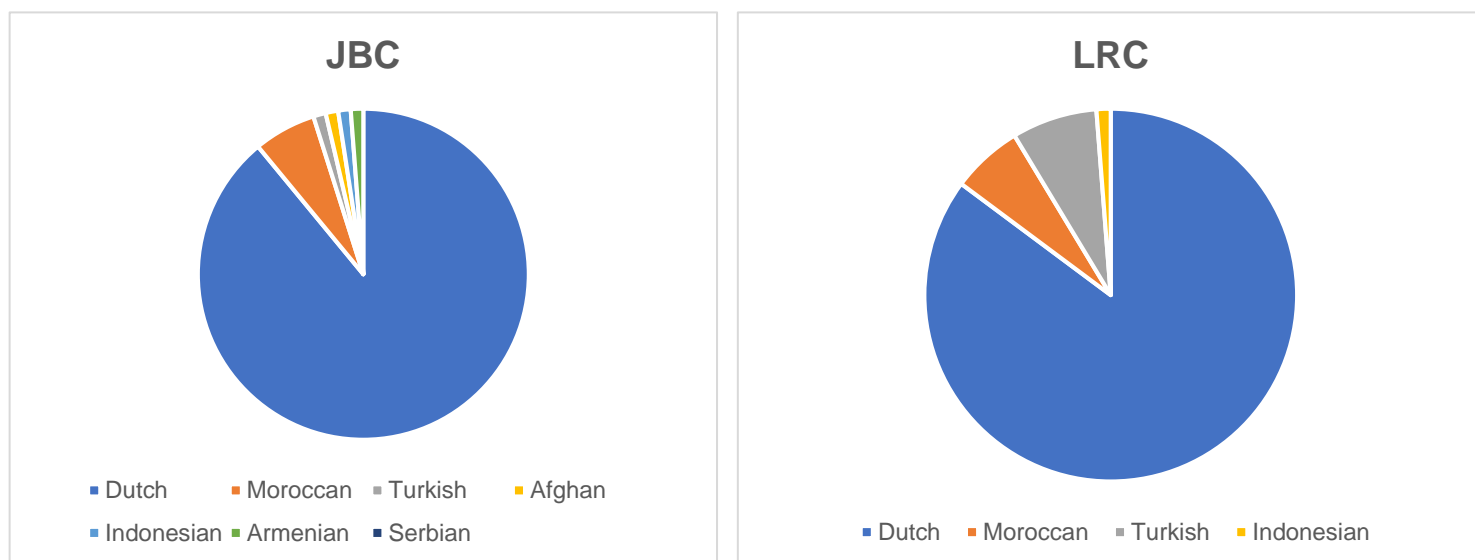


Figure 4 Language distribution per school.

All participants except for one have indicated that Dutch is (one of) their first language(s); only one boy in 5 have D at LRC has Dutch as a second language and Moroccan as his first. The language diversity at both schools is not particularly high: the bilingual pupils constitute a relatively small minority. I expected that bilingual pupils' responses might influence the results because studies have shown that certain groups of bilingual speakers – namely those whose parents have a migrant background, as is often the case for Moroccan or Turkish adolescents in The Netherlands – may experience more problems pertaining to reading skills than their monolingual peers (Van Rijswijk). However, since not even 1/7th of the research group is bilingual, I consider it safe to assume that the results of the bilingual participants have not significantly influenced the overall results.

Part I: The status quo

1.1 Reading habits

Foremost (and unfortunately), the questionnaires' results show that overall the pupils read little for pleasure. 41% of all pupils have indicated that they never read for pleasure; contrasted with the fact that only 3% have indicated that they read approximately a book per week for pleasure, these results are not particularly hopeful. Worth noting is that although the vast majority of boys have indicated that they never read for pleasure, the majority of girls have opted for answer E: they read approximately a book per year for pleasure. This low score when it comes to reading enjoyment is consistent with recent studies which have found, among others, that Dutch 15-year-olds are ranked at the very bottom of the international ranking of reading attitudes among adolescents, meaning that their attitude towards reading is decidedly negative (“Leesplezier kinderen”). The fact that the majority of girls read slightly more than the boys is consistent with studies claiming that girls generally read more and enjoy it more (Van den Eijnden; Van Lenteren).

In line with the expectations formulated in chapter 1 the results for question 2 show that pupils used to read more in their spare time when they were in primary school: here the most common answer is B, approximately one book every two weeks. This result shows just how a steep a decline there is in reading habits from primary to secondary school: it is a pretty large leap from reading a book every two weeks to never reading a book. Again the majority of boys have indicated here that they never read for pleasure either in primary school, but the difference is not as big as it was for question 1: here the majority means 29%, for question 1 it was 57%.

Another similarity in the results is that at both schools young adult is the most often read genre: 55% of all respondents have indicated that they read young adult books. This outcome is not surprising: it stands to reason that young adults would prefer a genre tailored to their interests and experiences. “Adult” novels, i.e. novels which are written for a mature audience and tailored to adults’ interests and experiences, is the second most common answer (31%). The table on the next page gives an overview of the titles that were mentioned the most in the answers to question 3; it includes every title that was mentioned at least twice.

Number of times mentioned	JBC	Number of times mentioned	LRC
7	<i>Harry Potter</i> (series, J.K. Rowling)	3	Books based on true stories
4	<i>Het leven van een loser</i> (Jeff Kinney)	2	<i>Harry Potter</i> (series, J.K. Rowling)
3	<i>The Hunger Games</i> (series, Suzanne Collins)	2	Thrillers
3	<i>The Fault in Our Stars</i> (John Green)	2	<i>The Selection</i> (series, Kiera Cass)
3	Biographies	2	Books by Mel Wallis de Vries
3	Non-fiction/informative books	2	<i>The Hunger Games</i> (series, Suzanne Collins)
2	Thrillers		
2	Books by Mel Wallis de Vries		
2	Books by Stephen King		
2	Books by Carry Slee		
2	<i>Ranger's Apprentice</i> (series, John Flanagan)		
2	<i>Brotherband Chronicles</i> (series, John Flanagan)		
2	<i>Het diner</i> (Herman Koch)		

Figure 5 The titles that were mentioned most in the responses to question 3 on the questionnaire.

Though LRC's list of titles seems considerably shorter here, the total number of answers does not differ much from that at JBC: there are merely more different titles mentioned and fewer instances of the same title mentioned twice. This overview confirms that the most often read books at both schools are indeed popular young adult titles and, inevitably, the *Harry Potter* series. What did stand out in the questionnaires is that LRC's pupils seem to have more

difficulty determining the genre of a book: on a lot more occasions than at JBC have pupils ranked a title as adult literature when it is decidedly young adult, or vice versa. JBC's pupils seem to have a better grasp of the genres and make fewer mistakes when classifying the titles. It seems logical that this is the case because pupils at JBC receive better instruction about the different genres, but since this difference only became apparent after processing all the data I could not verify this with the participants or their teachers. Regardless I thought it worth noting.

Finally, the majority of pupils of both schools have indicated that their preferred language when reading for pleasure is Dutch. A considerable percentage, however, have indicated that they read in both Dutch and English: 32%.

1.2 Reading attitude

The majority of pupils at both schools have indicated that their opinion about literature (class) is neutral: 62% at JBC and 60% at LRC. At LRC 20% enjoys literature class a lot, versus 24% who does not enjoy it at all; at JBC an almost equal percentage dislikes literature class and very few pupils have indicated that they enjoy it. These numbers are consistent with the general view and expectation that literature is rarely pupils' favourite subject and are therefore unsurprising.

At LRC the havo-classes seem to enjoy reading more than the vwo-class: the majority have indicated that they like reading English books and that they find it easy. A fair number have also stated that they think the number of books they have to read is too low, which seems to indicate a positive attitude towards reading literature. Although 6 vwo on average reads slightly more for pleasure than both havo-classes, their overall attitude towards it seems to be more negative: the majority have indicated that they dislike literature class, whereas the majority of the havo-classes are neutral towards it. Many vwo-pupils also find reading English difficult. These results are noteworthy, since in general higher educated pupils are

said to read more and enjoy it more; this particular 6 vwo-class clearly does not conform to this stereotype. There are several possible explanations for this: perhaps the interest of the 6 vwo pupils in question lies predominantly with exact subjects such as math and science, in which case it stands to reason that they are not as interested in literature. One of the teachers at JBC stated in her interview that this was very apparent in one of her classes – it might be the case for this LRC class as well. Another possible explanation is that it has to do with the amount of literature education the pupils receive, or the difficulty of the classes; at vwo-level more time is spent on literature and the material discussed is of a higher level than at havo-level, which might not be conducive to pupils' enjoyment. The teacher's enthusiasm might be another factor, but since all LRC classes have the same teacher that can likely be ruled out in this case.

What stands out at JBC is that significantly more boys than girls have indicated that they find reading English books difficult (22%) and/or dislike it (44%); this contrast is not as pronounced at LRC. On a more positive note, no pupils at JBC have indicated that they find the number of books they have to read for English class too high; assuming that if they truly hated reading any book would be too much, this seems hopeful for their reading attitude. Moreover, despite the fact that they may generally find it difficult and/or tedious, 11% of boys have responded that they think the number of books they have to read is not high enough.

Question 11 on the questionnaire asks the pupils to name a book that "has stayed with them". When designing the questionnaire I assumed that this question would provide interesting insight into pupils' reading attitudes: would they, perhaps in spite of their general dislike of literature, name a literary title? The table on the next page lists all the works that were mentioned at least twice in response to this question.

Number of times mentioned	JBC	Number of times mentioned	LRC
6	<i>Animal Farm</i> (George Orwell)	6	<i>Lord of the Flies</i> (William Golding)
5	<i>The Hunger Games</i> (series, Suzanne Collins)	4	<i>The Hunger Games</i> (series, Suzanne Collins)
5	<i>The Fault in Our Stars</i> (John Green)	4	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> (J.R.R. Tolkien)
4	<i>Life of Pi</i> (Yann Martel)	4	<i>Harry Potter</i> (series, J.K. Rowling)
3	<i>Harry Potter</i> (series, J.K. Rowling)	4	<i>The Fault in Our Stars</i> (John Green)
2	<i>War of the Worlds</i> (H.G. Wells)	3	<i>The Catcher in the Rye</i> (J.D. Salinger)
2	<i>The Hobbit</i> (J.R.R. Tolkien)	2	<i>The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas</i> (John Boyne)
2	<i>The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas</i> (John Boyne)	2	<i>Matilda</i> (Roald Dahl)
2	<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> (Mark Haddon)	2	<i>Dolphin Music</i> (Antoinette Moses)
2	<i>Pretty Little Liars</i> (Sara Shepard)	2	<i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> (Harper Lee)

Figure 6 The titles that were mentioned most in response to question 11 on the questionnaire.

For both schools the most often mentioned title is indeed a literary work, in both cases one that was assigned reading. The table also includes other titles that were either assigned reading or chosen by the pupil but still read for school, such as *Life of Pi* and *The Catcher in the Rye*. The fact that pupils have indicated that these “have stayed with them” is mark of a successful literature class. Young adult novels are also, predictably, well-represented in this list: these books are the ones pupils have read for pleasure instead of for school. Though there

is still a pronounced difference between what pupils read for pleasure and what they read for school – they do not read literary works in their spare time unless they have to – it is a hopeful sign that at least the works they read for school are memorable to them. Moreover it is noticeable that most of these books – both the literary and the young adult titles – are stories about “heavy” subjects which evoke profound emotional responses; it stands to reason that these would stay with the reader. The above overview could be very useful in redesigning the literature curriculum and developing a new set text list: even though not all works belong in literature class it does speak volumes about pupils’ tastes and interests.

1.3 The current literature curriculum

At JBC I interviewed three teachers on the subject of literature class. Mr Blans has been working at this school for nearly thirty years; Mrs Pelsler for two years, though she has been teaching for 15 years, and Mrs Koopman has just started her first year of teaching. Despite their differences in experience and familiarity with the school they all have an equal say in how the literature curriculum is constructed – though it has become clear from the interviews that the current literature curriculum leaves much to be desired. The current curriculum is what Witte would likely call “ill-structured”. There are rather loose agreements among teachers about what it is the pupils should learn about English literature: for example, some Shakespeare is mandatory and short stories should at some point be dealt with, but for the most part it is up to every individual teacher to decide which works exactly they will be discussing with their class. There is no textbook or other method to fall back on, merely the (spoken) agreements among teachers about what concepts, context and works they want to teach; nothing is set in stone. The curriculum may therefore differ radically from class to class; even parallel classes, i.e. of the same year and the same level, may not be discussing the same material. Perhaps unsurprisingly all interviewed teachers are not completely satisfied with the current curriculum; they all state that it needs work and that a clearer framework

would be desirable, but also indicate that there would have to be a lot of time invested in designing such a framework and that right now they lack that time.

The pupils' responses seem to reflect this lack of structure, since pupils' perceptions of how much time is spent on literature in English class are very divergent. The answers differ from once a week to a couple times a month to never – all in one class. This is the case for all three classes. To some extent this is understandable: the teachers indicate that it varies during the school year and that during some terms more time is spent on literature than during others. However, it is puzzling that a fair number of pupils have responded that no time is ever spent on literature – this raises the question if the teachers succeed in making it clear enough what literature is and what the point is of literature class. The majority of pupils have indicated that they have had to read a number of books for English class – usually between two and five, slightly more for the higher years and levels, which is consistent with the numbers stated by the teachers.

At LRC the literature curriculum is a lot more rigidly structured than at JBC. Only one teacher was available for an interview here: Mrs Andringa, who has worked at this school for 8 years now teaching English mostly in the upper years. According to Mrs Andringa all English teachers are consulted when designing the curriculum and it is applied in all classes. The curriculum is designed as follows. In 4 havo short stories are dealt with, thereby introducing pupils to story elements such as time and place, setting, characters, chronology, plot etc. The short stories are followed by a play, which they read and watch a film adaptation of, contrasting both mediums. In the following year, 5 havo, *Lord of the Flies* is read in class, they watch the film adaptation and pupils react to it by means of a vlog.

At vwo-level the story elements are already introduced in the third year, so once pupils enter the upper years of secondary school they have a basic knowledge of story structures and are equipped to begin reading literature. The literature curriculum for 4 vwo starts with the

play *Bang Bang You're Dead*; the same play which is discussed in 4 havo, except here it comes earlier in the year. Secondly, *Beowulf* is discussed in the context of a larger “monsters and heroes”-theme which explicitly refers to modern superhero narratives in popular culture such as the popular Marvel-franchise and therefore ties into pupils’ interests. This comes with a creative assignment where pupils can choose whether they want to react to what they have learned by means of an essay or by writing their own story in the style of the monsters and heroes-theme. Finally, the 4 vwo pupils receive an introduction to poetry. The following year, in 5 vwo, one Shakespeare’s plays is discussed, usually a different one each year: from *Hamlet* to *The Merchant of Venice* or *Romeo and Juliet*. Pupils are eventually tested on their understanding of this play through an essay assignment. In the latter half of the school year romanticism is dealt with in combination with poetry. Over the course of the year pupils are also assigned two books to read, to which they have to respond by means of an essay. In their final year, 6 vwo, pupils have to read two books which fit the (post)modernist movement. They are taught about the context and history of this literary movement through lectures and are expected to be able to accurately place the works they read within this movement.

Though this curriculum might seem like it leaves little room for differentiation and adjustment to differences in reading competency, Mrs Andringa states that this is not an obstacle. When selecting the works that will be dealt with the teachers try to choose texts that they feel are understandable for all pupils. They also do not expect pupils “to understand every word of Shakespeare; we want them to understand what it is about and to recognize certain quotes, to grasp the gist of what is being said”. Mrs Andringa is very satisfied with the current curriculum: apart from diversifying when it comes to the works that are discussed, mostly to keep it interesting for the teachers, she does not feel there is a need for drastic changes to the programme.

Part II: The future

2.1 The ideal literature curriculum

The interviewed teachers at JBC are less satisfied with their current curriculum: they have all stated that they would like a more structured curriculum which at the same time leaves room to cater to the individual pupil's tastes and abilities. Mrs Pelsler states that she would like to see an English literature reading list implemented similar to the one that is used for the subject of Dutch, which is designed according to Witte's method. All teachers agree that differences in reading level are currently a major obstacle for them: the current "one-size-fits-all"-approach causes pupils whose reading skills are not quite at the level they should be to fall behind, but time constraints make it impossible to do justice to the differences – at least in the present system. Ideally the teachers would have more time to devote to literature, which would allow for a system with more individual guidance for each pupil while keeping the group discussions and the "larger picture" of literary history as a touchstone.

The pupils' answers to the final question on the questionnaire ("How could your teacher improve English literature class?") seem to echo the teachers' ideas somewhat. The most often mentioned suggestions (at least twice) are listed in the table on the next page.

Number of times mentioned	JBC
15	Watching films / watching the film adaptation of the book we're reading
10	More freedom in choosing books / choosing books together / being able to choose books that appeal to you
4	Reading to the class / reading in class
2	More assignments instead of just reading / more creative assignments
2	More literature class / spending more time on literature

Figure 7 *The most often mentioned suggestions for improving literature class at JBC.*

The second suggestion seems to fit in well with the teachers' ideal of a system with more diversity and room for individual taste. Predictably "watching films" is most often suggested, sadly reinforcing the idea that adolescents would rather passively consume stories than actively read them. Of course film can be a very valuable addition when discussing a literary work, as long as it is that – an addition, not a substitute. I also think it unlikely that this suggestion will ever be taken seriously and that teachers will just let their pupils watch the film instead – a teacher at LRC mentioned in passing that that feels like "giving up".

The table on the next page shows the most often suggested improvements for literature class at LRC.

Number of times mentioned	LRC
15	Watching films
9	Reading by ourselves instead of in class or to the class
5	Reading more “fun” books / more appealing books
5	More freedom in choosing books
3	More variation in classes (instead of only reading)
3	Clearer lectures and assignments / more coherence
2	More group assignments
2	Letting the class decide which books we will be reading
2	More focus on the context of the books

Figure 8 *The most often mentioned suggestions for improving literature class at LRC.*

Curiously, although Mrs Andringa is very satisfied with the current curriculum, her pupils would like to see a fair number of changes to the form of the literature classes. Currently a large portion of class time is spent on reading: most works are read in class and pupils have to take turns reading parts aloud. Most pupils seem to dislike this, stating that they would prefer to read at home and use class time for assignments; they state that all of the reading makes the classes boring and monotonous and that reading aloud or reading together does not aid them in understanding what they are reading. Moreover, in 6 vwo literature class often has the form of a lecture such as one students would receive at university in order to prepare the pupils for that; however, many pupils have indicated that these lectures are not very clear to them. They feel the lectures are too abstract and make them lose sight of the larger picture of what is being taught; they often do not understand what exactly they are supposed to take away from it or what is expected of them. The pupils would like more context and a clearer framework for what is discussed.

These results are striking, considering the fact that the pupils' opinions contradict the widely held belief – even by Witte – that they fare well by a very structured curriculum. The pupils at LRC are even more critical of their literature classes than their peers at JBC. What is important to take away from this is that when teaching literature a very clear framework is desirable: the context and importance (“the point”) need to be obvious in order to get pupils' attention. Actually reading the books remains a tricky aspect; as the data on reading attitudes and reading habits have shown, generally pupils are simply not fans of reading. It is therefore important that class time is used variably: not for merely reading and listening but also for assignments, films, group work and discussion. The aspect of choice is also critical: the best way to get pupils to pick up a book is if it appeals to their very individual tastes and interests.

A final note: neither of these schools use existing teaching methods – textbooks and such – when teaching literature, so experience with this method of teaching literature could not be taken into account in this study. It seems likely that using a textbook would have some advantages: it provides structure and a continuous, often chronological sequence of material, making it comprehensible for the pupil. Since textbooks often include a fair bit of literary history and theory it likely also leads to a better understanding of the context of the literary work. On the other hand it is precisely this structuredness which does not leave much room for individual differentiation and responding to pupils' diverging needs and interests. It also removes the aspect of choice, which is inconvenient for the pupils who have indicated that being able to choose books themselves is important to them. Whether the benefits of using a textbook in teaching literature outweigh these drawbacks might be an interesting subject for another study.

Chapter 3: Towards a Competency-Based Set Text List

As discussed in the previous chapter the study's results show that the current literature curriculum at the participating schools has room for improvement; it may be worth a try to experiment with a competency-based method. Applying Witte's method to the English literature curriculum in Dutch schools is, however, a complicated endeavour. As stated in this paper's introduction, in modern foreign language education literature is by definition and necessarily secondary to teaching the language itself; after all, a certain command of the language is required in order to understand a (literary) text. Despite these efforts, pupils' command of said modern foreign language will of course rarely be on the same level as their proficiency in their first language; and herein lies the difficulty when applying Witte's method, since this method is designed for first language literature education. It assumes that despite differences in literary competency at least all pupils have a fluent command of the language they will be reading literature in. When it comes to literature in the modern foreign languages, however, differences in linguistic proficiency or competency should be taken into account, thus creating a system of two different tables of competency levels which have to somehow be combined. This chapter will explore if and how this is possible.

Linguistic competency

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is the European standard for teaching languages. It sets the guidelines for curriculums, textbooks and exam requirements, ensuring that a certain standard and quality of language education are maintained, which "will facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications gained in different learning contexts, and accordingly will aid European mobility" (*Common European Framework* 1). Moreover, CEFR has developed descriptions of the various proficiency levels of the non-native speaker in a foreign language. Six levels of proficiency are distinguished:

Breakthrough, Waystage, Threshold, Vantage, Effective Operational Proficiency and Mastery. These levels can be interpreted as subdivisions of the three broader “classical” levels of the basic (A), independent (B) and proficient user (C). The branching scheme then looks like this:

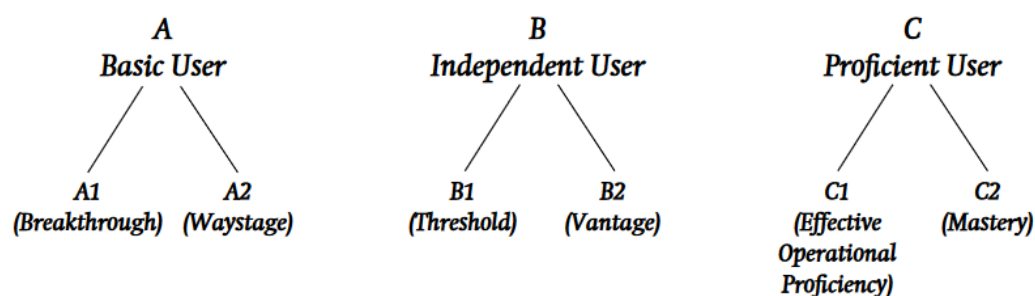


Figure 9 The six proficiency levels according to CEFR (Common European Framework).

In describing the skills that are associated with each proficiency level the CEFR makes a distinction between several different categories of language use: understanding (listening and reading), speaking (spoken interaction and spoken production) and writing. The descriptions of the levels for the category of reading – which are most interesting for this paper’s purpose – are as follows:

A1	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.
A2	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.
B1	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.

B2	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.
C1	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.
C2	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.

Figure 10 *The reading skills associated with each proficiency level (Common European Framework).*

Variations in skill level are possible even within these levels: after all, there is a substantial skill difference between a foreign language learner who has almost but not quite reached C1-level and one who has just reached B2-level, yet they will both be categorized as B2-proficient. To account for such differences the levels can be subdivided using further numbering, such as B2.1 or even B2.1.1.

In the Dutch school system the CEFR levels are used to determine the level pupils require to pass their final exam: at havo-level B2-aptitude is required for a pass (“Welk ERK-niveau voor havo?”), at vwo-level demonstrable C1-aptitude constitutes a pass (“Welk ERK-niveau voor vwo?”).

When taking the CEFR descriptors as a starting point, it is worth noting that literature only comes into play upon reaching B2-level. Moreover, the description suggests that prose is the only genre that is intelligible for B2-learners: apparently poetry and plays are by definition out of their league. According to researcher Ewout van der Knaap, this displays a very limited idea of what literature is (215). It also excludes for instance young adult literature entirely for

learners who are not yet at B2-level, even though young adult literature is usually more accessible than “real” literature and therefore often serves as a gateway to more difficult works for readers who may otherwise find this transition too jarring. Adhering to these descriptions would also mean that at havo-level literature can only be discussed in the final year, and to a very limited extent: only contemporary literary prose, meaning that the vast majority of literary texts would be impossible to discuss. Van der Knaap however states that “many titles can be found for which a B2-skill level and a solid didactic framework are sufficient” (215).

The CEFR levels may be a good indicator of linguistic competency – though it must be kept in mind that the standard required skill level may not be reached at the same pace by all pupils, if it is reached at all – but it lacks solid guidelines for literary competency. This is where Witte’s competency levels come into play.

The descriptions for the six levels Witte has developed discuss the student’s reading skills and their attitude towards reading, label their style of reading and indicate what type of books would be suitable for a student at this level. An overview in brief of the six different levels can be found below:

Level 1: Very limited literary competence

Pupils who are very limited in their literary competence have little experience reading fiction. They struggle with reading, understanding, interpreting and appreciating very simple literary texts and have difficulty communicating about their reading experiences and tastes. [...] Their attitude towards literature is dismissive because the subject matter is usually foreign to them and the writing style too difficult. [...] Their reading attitude is further characterized by a need for action and drama. Their style of reading can be described as *experiential reading*.

Books suitable for these pupils are written in simple everyday language and their

subject matter and characters are familiar to adolescents. The narrative structure is transparent and uncomplicated and there is a rapidly paced succession of dramatic events.

Level 2: Limited literary competence

Pupils with limited literary competence have some experience reading fiction but hardly any reading literary novels. They are able to read, understand and appreciate very simple literary texts and reflect on their reading experience and taste. [...] Their reading attitude is characterized by a preference for familiar situations, events and emotions. They believe literature should be realistic. Their style of reading can be labelled *identifying reading*.

Books suitable for these pupils are written in everyday language, are clearly structured and deal with subjects familiar to adolescents. The main character is usually in their own age range. The storyline is dramatic and fairly rapidly paced, although it is not troublesome when the action is momentarily interrupted by thoughts and descriptions.

Level 3: Moderate literary competence

Pupils with a moderate level of literary competence are experienced in reading simple literary texts. They are able to understand, interpret and appreciate these texts and can reflect on social, psychological and moral issues raised in said text. [...] Their reading attitude is characterized by an interest in works which deal with these issues. To them literature is a tool to explore the world and formulate their own ideas about a variety of topics. The style of reading at this level can be characterized as *reflective reading*.

Books suitable for these pupils are written in simple language and have a complex yet transparent structure. They contain a deeper layer of meaning alongside the more obvious, concrete one. The subject matter and characters are not necessarily directly familiar to adolescents, but the story addresses issues which appeal to them, such as love, death, friendship, justice and responsibility. Complex narrative techniques such as time jumps and changes in perspective are used sparingly and made very explicit.

Level 4: Fairly extensive literary competence

Pupils with a fairly extensive literary competence are experienced in reading simple literary novels. They are able to read, understand, interpret and appreciate literature which is not too difficult and can adequately communicate their interpretations and preferences. [...] Their reading attitude is characterized by a willingness to understand complex events and emotions that are foreign to them. They are also interested in narrative techniques and structures and authorial intent. Their style of reading is called *interpretative reading*.

Books suitable for these pupils are written in a literary style and their subject matter and characters may be far removed from adolescents' experiences. Storyline and character development are therefore less predictable. Fairly complex literary techniques such as unreliable perspective and implicit time jumps are used, encouraging the reader to interpret the text.

Level 5: Extensive literary competence

Pupils at an extensive literary competency level have extensive experience reading literary novels. They are able to understand, interpret and appreciate complex as well as old literary texts and exchange ideas about their reading experience, interpretation and tastes. [...] They are aware that texts operate in a cultural and historical context and that literature is a tool to acquire knowledge about the past and about cultural identities. Their reading attitude is characterized by an interest in the canon, literary conventions, cultural and historical context and classical authors. Their style of reading can be called *literary reading*.

Books suitable for these pupils may diverge strongly from what they are accustomed to in terms of characters, subject matter, vocabulary and literary conventions. [...] The narrative structure is increasingly complex and characterized by ambiguity and implicitness.

Level 6: Very extensive literary competence

Pupils with a very extensive literary competency level are very experienced in reading literary texts, including world literature. They are able to place books and literature in a broader context and exchange ideas and interpretations with experts. [...] They are able to see connections and generate meaning both within and beyond the text. [...] Their approach to reading is a critical one characterized by versatility, dedication and an interest in academic literature. Their style of reading is best described as *academic reading*.

Texts suitable for these pupils are written in a difficult literary style which allows for an experimental form. They have a layered and complex structure which makes it difficult to generate meaning. The text makes use of symbols and abstract motifs and contains a substantial amount of intertextual references.

The six competency levels according to Witte, translation mine (Witte, Het oog 505-10).

Research by Van der Knaap suggests that literary competency may be transferable from one language to the other, meaning that pupils' level of literary competency in their first language matches their competency level in a foreign language. His study conducted for the subject of German seems to point in this direction, but Van der Knaap himself states that his study was too small-scale to reach an all-encompassing conclusion about the transferability of literary competency between languages and that further research into this subject is necessary (216-7).

We therefore cannot assume that a pupil whose Dutch reading level corresponds with for instance the third level on Witte's scale can read English books on the same level. The fact that linguistic difficulty is an extra factor when reading in a foreign language has to be taken into account, which is where the CEFR scale comes into play. Both the CEFR and Witte's method use a scale of six levels to determine the difficulty level of a book; one focusing principally on linguistic difficulty, the other on literary difficulty. Ideally, these scales would seamlessly be combined into one, with the first level on the CEFR-scale corresponding to

Witte's first competency level; in practice, however, this transfer is less simple. A pupil whose language abilities fit CEFR level B2 may still struggle to read the type of books suitable for a level 4-pupil according to Witte's scale; likewise a pupil with extensive literary competency may be hindered by a limited vocabulary to the extent that he cannot understand the books suited to his competency level in a foreign language because they are too difficult linguistically speaking. In other cases it might be evident that the scales do match: a pupil with A1 level proficiency will very likely not be able to read texts at a higher level than the first one on Witte's scale, and it is also unlikely that a pupil at level 6 in literary competency – which is extraordinary for a high school student – has not reached beyond A1 or A2 level in proficiency.

In order to come to a competency-based set text list which covers all manners of competency, both linguistic and literary, the books need to be selected and ranked on both these scales. Theoretically the scales could be combined as well, but to account for every possible combination of literary competency level and proficiency level the scale would have to consist of 36 different levels and that would likely not be workable; working with two different scales and using two rankings for each title might provide a more comprehensible list. A few examples of how books might be ranked will be given below. The books used were chosen for these examples either because they are already taught at one of the two participating schools, or because pupils indicated that they had read the book and/or that it had stayed with them.

1. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* – Mark Haddon

This story of an autistic boy who sets out to investigate the death of his neighbour's dog and ends up finding out a lot more than he expected is usually something of a favourite among young adults. It is described as a coming-of-age story, making it relatable for adolescents going through the same phase; it is also

not set in a time or place far removed from their own experience; and although the events unfolding are not grand or spectacular they do evoke a wide range of emotions, making it a captivating read.

The book is not of a very high literary level but is precisely for that reason an excellent starting point for a less experienced reader. I would rank this as literary competency level 2. Since the book is clearly written for young adults it is linguistically not too difficult, but the protagonist's autism is reflected in the writing: the language is distinct and the story contains lots of puzzles and mathematical references, which may hinder a less proficient reader's comprehension. I would therefore rank this book B1 on the CEFR scale.

Level 2 / B1

2. *To Kill a Mockingbird* – Harper Lee

This book's subject of racism set among the remnants of the American Civil War is further removed from adolescents' experiences and can therefore be classified as higher in literary level. Nevertheless it is something a coming-of-age-story of sorts and the subject matter will be familiar to pupils from history class, helping them understand the context. The writing style is not too complex but literary techniques such as unreliable narration and time jumps are employed, which may challenge the reader. I would classify this book as level 4 in literary competency.

Linguistically speaking the book is not too difficult and will likely be intelligible for readers of average proficiency level; I would rank it B2, though it may not be too ambitious for some B1-learners either.

Level 4 / B2

3. *Macbeth* – Shakespeare

The Bard simply cannot be overlooked in literature class, but reading his plays is no easy feat for a layman. They are set during a time and place unfamiliar to adolescents and require a lot of context to be explained; *Macbeth* is filled with dukes and thanes, superstition and military jargon, and also set in the 17th-century Scottish highlands. Its larger themes of ambition, (corruption of) power and guilt are, however, easily intelligible and speak to the reader. The largest obstacle in understanding the play may then lie in linguistic rather than literary difficulty: for a pupil who is still learning the language Shakespearean English can be tremendously difficult. I would therefore rank the play C2 on the CEFR scale, but level 5 on Witte's. It is essential that this – or, for that matter, any Shakespearean – play is actively taught instead of merely read by the pupils to ensure that they get a valuable experience out of it, instead of letting its difficulty turn them off of literature.

Level 5 / C2

In using a list with this type of ranking to match books to the pupil the teacher's guidance is essential; he or she can interpret the rankings correctly and aid the pupil in determining their own skill level and choosing the right book for it.

The question remains who would be designing a set text list with this form. Teachers would be the most logical answer: this would allow every teacher to create a relatively restricted list which best fits their curriculum and pupils instead of having to sort through a standardized long list. Time may, however, be the issue here: if teachers had ample time to design such a list they likely would have already done so. Either time needs to somehow be made so that teachers can really commit to this task, or it needs to be distributed elsewhere. There may be a task here for educational publishers: though teaching methods for English

literature exist already, a list based on Witte's competency levels would be a new addition. Since the 1990s publishing house Noordhoff has been publishing the so-called Blackbirds: sets of English books grouped together according to difficulty level. There are the Early Blackbirds, suitable for 12 to 14-year-olds, the Young Blackbirds for 13 to 16-year-olds and the Blackbirds Classics ("Blackbirds"). This system approaches a competency-based one, but needs to be taken one step further in order to fit Witte's method. The Blackbirds Classics, for instance, now are pocket-sized canonical works of English literature which according to the description on the Noordhoff website are suitable for ages 16 and over (ibidem); but no distinction, difficulty-wise, is made between these books. All the classics are grouped together, though it can be strongly argued that for example *Of Mice and Men* is a much easier read than *Macbeth*. Moreover, the website states that the Blackbirds Classics are suitable for all upper school years from 4 havo to 6 vwo, although there logically is a huge difference in both the linguistic and literary skill level of a 4 havo pupil and that of a 6 vwo pupil. Lastly, with only three sets of three books each to choose from the Blackbirds offer a very limited pool of books. The Blackbirds are definitely a step in the right direction, but using them in class currently still requires a lot of extra input and guidance from the teacher, meaning that there is no real incentive for the teacher to choose using this method over designing their own curriculum. If Noordhoff were to expand the Blackbirds-series and employ a more refined method of indicating difficulty level the collection could easily serve as a competency-based set text list.

Conclusion

Although the competency-based method developed by Dr Theo Witte has long been the norm in Dutch literature education in Dutch secondary schools, the English literature curriculum has not experienced a similar evolution from ill-structured to student-centered and competency-based; as a result the current state of English literature education in The Netherlands leaves much to be desired. Since studies have shown that a competency-based method can successfully be applied in French literature education (Hommersom-Schreuder) and that literary competency is likely transferable from one language to another (Van der Knaap) this raises the question whether this method could be applied to the English literature curriculum as well; or, as summarized in the question central to this thesis: “To what extent would using a competency-based set text list in English literature education in Dutch secondary schools stimulate pupils’ reading enjoyment and increase their competence?”

This question has been an adequate basis for the research conducted for this thesis but it has only been partly answered; inevitably so, since a competency-based method has not been implemented. To what extent the method would have (the desired) effect therefore remains guesswork of sorts. I do believe this study’s results have produced a reliable picture of the current state of the art regarding English literature education from which certain conclusions can safely be drawn. The study has also occasionally yielded surprising new insights.

In order to answer the research question this thesis has first of all aimed to chart the current status of English literature education in two Dutch secondary schools: Jeroen Bosch College in ’s-Hertogenbosch and Leidsche Rijn College in Utrecht. The advantages and drawbacks of the current literature curricula in both schools were discussed in order to determine whether implementing a competency-based system based on Witte’s method for Dutch literature education would be beneficial. In order to reach this conclusion teachers and

pupils of both schools were consulted via interviews and questionnaires respectively. They were asked about both their opinion on the current system and how they would feel about a different method of literature education.

The questionnaire distributed among the pupils aimed to get an idea of their reading habits, reading attitude and their attitude towards literature class. The results have shown that, in line with expectations raised by recent studies, pupils of both schools read very little for pleasure, although they used to read more in primary school. Their attitude towards literature is generally dismissive and they do not particularly enjoy literature class. Girls on average read slightly more than their male peers and boys generally enjoy reading less and/or find it more difficult. Noteworthy is that at both schools the pupils in higher level classes seem to enjoy reading less than their peers at havo-level, which contradicts research stating that pupils with a higher education level are usually better readers and enjoy reading more. This noteworthy deviation might be due to pupils' predisposition towards the exact sciences or because the amount and/or difficulty level of the literature classes they receive has an adverse effect. On a more hopeful note, pupils who have indicated that they do not enjoy reading English books or find it too difficult are decidedly a minority in both schools, and a considerable number have indicated that they would like to read more English books.

From both the teachers' and the pupils' responses it has become clear that for both schools restructuring the literature curriculum could potentially be beneficial; at JBC the teachers in particular have expressed dissatisfaction with the current curriculum, whereas at LRC the discontent lies more with the pupils. In my opinion, considering the results the study has yielded at both schools, implementing a version of Witte's method would potentially have merit. Teachers at JBC in particular have indicated that currently pupils' reading levels are too divergent for the "one-size-fits-all"-approach that is now often adopted, where the entire class is assigned the same book. Witte's approach allows for more adjustment to individual skill

level and interests, which is likely to ensure that every pupil's reading level is improved gradually and at their own pace, leading to a more positive reading experience and attitude towards literature. Moreover the majority of pupils have indicated that above all more freedom in choosing books would increase their reading pleasure and enjoyment of literature class.

There are several issues to be taken into consideration when realizing a new structure for the literature curriculum. As discussed in chapter 3 the system Witte has developed for Dutch literature is not readily transferable to the subject of English due to the added complication of linguistic competency which ought to be taken into account, meaning that a text list which combines both types of competency needs to be created first. Teachers may be hard pressed to find the time to design a complete list, but educational publishers may have a part to play here by for instance further developing already existing methods into more competency-based ones. Another issue to be taken into account is that a competency-based method also requires more of the teacher: his or her guidance is essential in letting the pupil make the right book choice, but assisting each individual pupil in this process naturally takes a lot more time. This may be a considerable drawback for the teachers – especially those at JBC, who have already indicated that lack of time is the biggest obstacle for them in improving their literature curriculum.

It should be kept in mind that the relatively small size of this study's research group means that the results cannot be used to reach a conclusion about how the English literature curriculum should be restructured in every Dutch secondary school. It is, however, a recommendation that the current curriculum is contemplated critically. To follow up on this study it is recommended that another experiment with a set text list befitting Witte's model, i.e. competency-based, is done. Ideally this list would be implemented in the English literature curriculum in several schools for a fixed trial period and teachers and pupils would be

questioned on their opinions prior to working with this method and after said trial period, in order to accurately measure its effect and their experiences.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Questionnaire

The following questionnaire was distributed among the pupils at the participating schools and completed by all 143 participants.

Ik ben een jongen / meisje

Geboortejaar:

Moedertaal/moedertalen:

Klas:

1. Hoe vaak lees je een boek **voor je plezier** (dus niet als opdracht voor school)?

- a. Ongeveer een boek per week
- b. Ongeveer een boek per twee weken
- c. Ongeveer een boek per maand
- d. Ongeveer een boek per twee maanden
- e. Ongeveer een boek per jaar
- f. Nooit

2. Hoe vaak las je **op de basisschool** een boek voor je plezier?

- a. Ongeveer een boek per week
- b. Ongeveer een boek per twee weken
- c. Ongeveer een boek per maand
- d. Ongeveer een boek per twee maanden
- e. Ongeveer een boek per jaar
- f. Nooit

3. Wat voor soort boeken lees je voor je plezier? Je mag meerdere antwoorden aankruisen.

Geef ook een (paar) voorbeeld(en) van boeken die je hebt gelezen.

- a. Kinder- en jeugdboeken, namelijk:
- b. Young Adult-boeken, namelijk:
- c. 'Volwassen' boeken, namelijk:
- d. Literatuur, namelijk:
- e. Anders, namelijk:

4. In welke taal lees je boeken voor je plezier?

- a. Nederlands
- b. Engels
- c. Beide
- d. Anders, namelijk:

5. Hoe vaak wordt er **tijdens de Engelse les** aandacht besteed aan verhalen, gedichten of toneelstukken?
- Een keer per week
 - Een keer per twee weken
 - Een keer per maand
 - Een paar keer per jaar
 - Nooit
6. Welke vorm heeft de Engelse literatuurles meestal? Je mag meerdere antwoorden aankruisen.
- Tijdens de les wordt er (voor)gelezen
 - Tijdens de les maken we een opdracht
 - Tijdens de les kijken we film
 - We krijgen een boek mee naar huis om te lezen
 - We krijgen een opdracht mee naar huis
 - Anders, namelijk:
7. Wat vind je van deze lessen over literatuur?
- Heel erg leuk
 - Leuk
 - Neutraal
 - Vervelend
 - Heel vervelend
8. Hoeveel boeken heb je in totaal voor het vak Engels moeten lezen tot nu toe (dus ook in de onderbouw)?
- Geen boeken, alleen korte teksten en gedichten
 - 1-2 boeken
 - 2-5 boeken
 - Meer dan 5 boeken
9. Kruis de stellingen aan die jouw mening het beste weergeven. Je mag meerdere antwoorden aankruisen.
- Ik vind Engelse boeken lezen (te) moeilijk.
 - Ik vind Engelse boeken lezen niet leuk.
 - Ik vind dat we te veel Engelse boeken moeten lezen op school.
 - Ik vind Engelse boeken lezen makkelijk.
 - Ik vind Engelse boeken lezen leuk.
 - Ik vind dat we te weinig Engelse boeken moeten lezen op school.
10. Kruis de stellingen aan die jouw mening het beste weergeven. Je mag meerdere antwoorden aankruisen.
- Ik vind het belangrijk om over Engelse literatuur te leren.
 - Ik vind het niet belangrijk om over Engelse literatuur te leren.

- c. Als ik zelf mocht kiezen welke boeken ik las, zou ik de Engelse les leuker vinden.
- d. Als ik zelf mocht kiezen welke boeken ik las, zou ik de Engelse les niet meer of minder leuk vinden.

11. Kun je een voorbeeld geven van een Engels boek dat je hebt gelezen en dat je is bijgebleven?

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.....
.....

12. Hoe zou jouw docent de Engelse literatuurles (nog) leuker kunnen maken?

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Bedankt voor het invullen!

Appendix II: Interview with Fred Blans, teacher at JBC

24 Oct. 2017

Hoe lang geeft u al les?

Op deze school vanaf 1988, maar in 1978 ben ik begonnen. Bijna 40 jaar dus al. Ik ben begonnen met Nederlands en Engels en op een gegeven moment ben ik overgestapt naar Engels. Ik ben hier begonnen met vmbo-t, maar geef nu alleen les aan havo en vwo.

Hoeveel tijd wordt er bij Engels besteed aan literatuuronderwijs?

Op de havo heet het niet echt literatuur, daar zijn we meer bezig met het lezen van boeken. In 4 havo moeten er twee boeken gelezen worden en in 5 havo één, en daar krijgen ze dan ofwel een toets ofwel een mondeling over. Dat kun je dus niet echt omrekenen naar uren. Op het vwo is het anders: daar krijgen ze wel een vorm van literatuurgeschiedenis. In 4 vwo beginnen we dan met de middeleeuwen, in 5 vwo gaan we verder, in 6 vwo maken we een uitstapje naar Shakespeare enzovoort. Maar het is nogal grillig en het verandert naarmate de bezetting van het team verandert, want vaak hebben docenten hun eigen voorkeuren. Ik denk dat er gemiddeld nog geen uur per week aan besteed wordt. Maar in bepaalde periodes wordt er meer tijd aan besteed, omdat het in die periode dan getoetst wordt.

En hoe die lessen er dan uitzien is dus grotendeels afhankelijk van de docent?

Ja. Ik heb er zelf een handje van om leerlingen presentaties te laten houden. Ik geef dan de periode aan waar we het over gaan hebben, geef drie introductielessen over die periode en dan nemen we een aantal schrijvers. Bij iedere schrijver of bij ieder werk heb ik een aantal opdrachten. We formeren groepen en die groepen storten zich op zo'n opdracht en bereiden een presentatie voor. Daar krijgen ze een paar weken voor en dan zijn we er dus iedere les mee bezig. Dus het is geen droge literatuurles in de zin van, dat ze allemaal maar hun schriftje moeten pakken en meeschrijven.

Zijn er bepaalde werken die altijd worden behandeld?

Nee, eigenlijk schiet het van links naar rechts. Het is zo afhankelijk van de voorkeur van de docent. We proberen wel die doorlopende lijn van 4 naar 6 vwo erin te houden, maar als je bijvoorbeeld eenmaal aan Shakespeare bent begonnen is dat zo verslavend... eigenlijk hebben we gewoon te weinig tijd. We zouden eigenlijk gewoon een uur per week moeten kunnen besteden aan literatuur. Je kunt er zoveel leuke dingen mee doen, het is zo verruimend voor de leerlingen. En je kunt er ook heel goed de taal aan ophangen: spreekvaardigheid, leesvaardigheid, noem maar op.

Er wordt pas in de bovenbouw begonnen met literatuur; is er in de onderbouw wel al aandacht voor lezen?

In de onderbouw lezen ze al wel van die niveauboekjes, maar dan gaat het vooral om leeskilometers maken.

Is de overgang van de onderbouw naar de bovenbouw dan niet heel groot? Hebben de leerlingen daar moeite mee?

Nou ja, het is ook wel een beetje vanuit de gedachte: in klas 4 zijn ze er pas echt aan toe. Dat is natuurlijk eigenlijk een hele foute gedachte, want je kunt leerlingen natuurlijk ook van literatuur laten genieten als ze 12 of 13 zijn. Maar van oudsher is het gewoon zo dat we in de bovenbouw pas beginnen met literatuur. Ik denk dat we daar gewoon eens vanaf moeten. Maar het zal niet gebeuren, omdat we zo krap in de tijd zitten. Ook in de bovenbouw: er moet zoveel gebeuren in die 40 weken. Ze moeten eindexamenteksten lezen, ze moeten schrijven, en dan komen dingen als literatuur, die eigenlijk heel belangrijk zijn, een beetje in het verdomhoekje.

Waarom is het volgens u zo belangrijk dat leerlingen toch wat van literatuur meekrijgen?

Ik denk dat literatuur een verruiming is van hun horizon, dat het goed is om een keer in een andere wereld te kruipen. Het is goed voor je fantasie, de vorming van meningen over zaken. Het zegt veel over de wereld waarin wij leven.

Hoe denkt u dat de leerlingen de literatuurlessen ervaren? Vinden ze het leuk?

Literatuurlessen zijn natuurlijk een onderdeel van het schoolsysteem, en veel leerlingen hebben hun antennes alle kanten op staan, behalve de kant van het onderwijs. Dus het wordt ook weer gewoon een onderdeel van het onderwijs, iets wat moet. Het mooiste zou zijn als we het daarvan een beetje konden loszingen: dat leerlingen met elkaar gaan werken, dat we samen discussiëren, in plaats van dat er een docent voor de klas staat die zijn verhaal doet en dat de leerlingen alleen maar luisteren. Het literatuuronderwijs is onlosmakelijk verbonden met de modus van het gehele onderwijs, en dat is jammer. Dat zou helemaal op de schop moeten.

Merkt u grote niveauverschillen binnen een klas?

Ja, zonder meer. Je merkt dat sommige leerlingen echt stappen vooruit zijn: die lezen bijvoorbeeld al heel veel. En er zijn erbij die het boek gewoon verafschuwen. Dat zijn ook hele slimme leerlingen, maar die krijgen informatie op een andere manier tot zich. Het zijn geen lezers, dus laat staan het lezen van literatuur. Bij zo'n presentatie is het dan wel fijn dat ze in een groepje zitten waar een paar goede in zitten en een paar minder goede, dat ze zich een beetje kunnen optrekken. Maar de verschillen zijn wel groot.

Denkt u dat de lessen op dit moment genoeg recht doen aan die verschillen? Dat het niet voor sommige leerlingen veel te makkelijk is en voor andere veel te moeilijk?

Nee, daar wordt absoluut geen recht aan gedaan. Dat heeft ook weer te maken met het

systeem: je kunt niet differentiëren als je 32 leerlingen in een lokaal hebt en er geen ruimte of tijd is om ze in te delen in groepen.

Denkt u dat het beter zou werken als er gewerkt zou worden met een boekenlijst ingedeeld naar niveau?

Ja, maar dan heb je het allereerst toch weer over leeskilometers maken, en wat ik het meest waardevol vind aan literatuuronderwijs is dat je het met elkaar erover hebt. Niveaugroepen zouden prima werken, maar dan moet je het wel zo organiseren dat je binnen die niveaugroepen een discussie op gang kunt krijgen. Dan pas begint literatuur te leven, lezen is maar het beginpunt.

Zou een vorm met niveaugroepen wel werkbaar zijn?

Jawel. Je moet de leerlingen wel op een hoger niveau kunnen tillen. Het zou zeker kunnen, maar dan moet je het – wederom – anders inrichten.

Hoe zou u de literatuurles dan het liefst ingericht zien? Als er alle tijd en ruimte was?

Leerlingen merken natuurlijk of er iemand voor de klas staat die enthousiast is, dus ik zou sowieso zaken willen behandelen die ik zelf interessant vind, maar ze dan wel ook in de richting sturen van hun eigen voorkeuren. Zo van: ‘vind je dit niks? Kijk dan eens daarnaar. Ben je meer een sciencefiction-type? Kijk dan eens naar dit boek,’ enzovoort. Zodat je ook gericht leesadvies kunt geven. Literatuurgeschiedenis moet je er dan natuurlijk wel boven laten hangen, want het is wel belangrijk dat ze een boek ook kunnen plaatsen. Maar bijvoorbeeld ook de tijd kunnen nemen voor een bepaalde auteur. Maar die tijd is er nu niet, en daarom werken we nu zo met hapklare brokken.

Het klinkt misschien heel negatief wat ik nu allemaal vertel, maar ik ben wel heel enthousiast hoor. Als de leerlingen bijvoorbeeld eenmaal bezig zijn met presenteren doen ze het echt fantastisch, ze weten er echt iets heel moois van te maken. En toen we vorig jaar in 5 vwo met

Shakespeare bezig waren hebben we op een gegeven moment een toneelgroep laten komen, en toen hebben ze met z'n allen in één dag Romeo and Juliet ingestudeerd en opgevoerd. Dat vonden ze hartstikke leuk. En daar is literatuuronderwijs ook voor, maar ja... het moet ook maar kunnen.

Appendix III: Interview with Janin Pelsler, teacher at JBC

24 Oct. 2017

Hoe lang geeft u al les?

Dit is mijn vijftiende schooljaar als docent en mijn tweede jaar op deze school, hiervoor werkte ik op een school in Helmond. Ik heb altijd Engels in de bovenbouw gegeven.

Hoeveel tijd besteedt u aan literatuur in de Engelse les?

Op vwo meer dan op havo, hoewel ik vind dat we havoleerlingen geen literatuur mogen onthouden. In 4, 5 en 6 vwo zijn we het niet hele jaar met literatuur bezig, maar zeker wel twee periodes. Van de drie lessen die we per week hebben probeer ik er dan zeker wel twee aan literatuur te besteden.

Hoe zien die lessen er dan uit?

Dat verschilt. In 6 vwo zijn we deze periode bijvoorbeeld bezig met American short stories, dan lezen en analyseren we vier korte verhalen. In periode 3 gaan we een stuk van Shakespeare volledig uitdiepen. Die korte verhalen lezen ze dan thuis, als huiswerk, en in de les krijgen ze dan achtergrondinformatie, historische context, groepswork, noem maar op.

Hoe wordt er getoetst?

Ze krijgen een toets, waarbij de behandelde verhalen terugkomen en waar een nieuw verhaal in is opgenomen dat ze moeten analyseren.

De invulling van de literatuurles verschilt per docent, maar wordt er wel onderling vastgelegd welke algemene zaken er in ieder geval aan bod moeten komen?

Ik moet zeggen dat we op dit moment geen hele duidelijke literatuurlijn hebben. Daar willen we wel naartoe, met een duidelijke opbouw vanaf klas 4 waarbij je dus met een tijdlijn werkt. We doen het nu wel in overleg, maar omdat literatuur zo breed is is het ook wel fijn om iets te

kunnen behandelen waar je voorkeur naar uitgaat. We zijn het er wel over eens dat een vwo'er het vwo niet mag verlaten zonder kennis van de grote namen, zoals Shakespeare.

Hoe is de overgang van onderbouw naar bovenbouw wat betreft literatuur?

Dat is een redelijk grote stap voor de leerlingen. In de onderbouw gebeurt ook wel wat met lezen, en met teksten die de methode aanbiedt, maar beduidend minder en de overstap is groot.

Merkt u grote niveaoverschillen bij de leerlingen?

Ja, maar ook grote verschillen in motivatie. De bètaleerlingen, zonder ze allemaal over een kam te willen scheren, hebben niet echt een voorkeur voor literatuur – met name jongens.

Hoe probeert u ze dan toch gemotiveerd of geïnteresseerd te krijgen?

Dat moet je vooral leggen in de manier van aanbieden. Het moet geen droge kost worden, dus ik gebruik verschillende werkvormen: achter de computer, in de klas, in groepen. Maar het is best moeilijk om daar je weg in te vinden.

Bent u tevreden met de manier waarop u nu literatuur kunt geven?

Ik ben nu met name tevreden over het programma van 6 vwo. Dat heb ik meegenomen van mijn vorige school, dat stond daar heel stevig. 5 vwo gaat ook goed, 4 vwo heeft nog de nodige aandacht nodig; daar ligt wel een mooi programma over de middeleeuwen, maar dat is nog niet gestructureerd of uitdagend genoeg. Er is altijd nog wel werk nodig.

Heeft u het idee dat u genoeg tijd aan literatuur kunt besteden?

In ieder geval in 6 vwo vind ik dat er voldoende aandacht voor is. Het is natuurlijk ook lezen, en daarmee voorbereiding op het eindexamen. Ik kan natuurlijk ook het hele jaar proefexamens met ze doen, maar ik zie literatuur ook als oefening in leesvaardigheid.

Zou een boekenlijst ingedeeld naar niveau werken bij Engels literatuuronderwijs?

Ja, ik denk het wel. Bij Nederlands wordt het natuurlijk zo gedaan, en die aansluiting probeer ik ook te zoeken. We hebben nu wel een boekenlijst, maar die is niet uitgebreid of gestructureerd genoeg en ook niet ingedeeld op niveau. We geven leerlingen ook de vrijheid om buiten de lijst om te lezen, maar dan wel in overleg met ons. Hoe ze het bij Nederlands doen, daar moeten wij ook naartoe, maar dat gaat nu nog niet helemaal goed. Ik denk namelijk dat dat bij ons net zo goed zou werken. Maar iemand moet zich daarover buigen, en die tijd missen we.

Hoe denkt u dat de leerlingen de literatuurles ervaren?

Ik heb niet de illusie dat ze het allemaal leuk vinden. Leerlingen hebben natuurlijk ook specifieke voorkeuren, en ik loop er met name tegenaan dat veel bètaleerlingen zeggen: 'Ik heb juist geen alfapakket gekozen omdat ik van dat lezen af wilde, en nu zit ik er weer mee.' Maar Nederlands en Engels zijn natuurlijk kernvakken en daar hoort literatuur nou eenmaal bij, dus dat kan wel eens een strijd zijn. En dat is jammer, dat vooroordeel van 'dit is niet leuk'.

Wat is volgens u het belang van literatuur?

Je wil de leerlingen natuurlijk een bepaald wereldbeeld meegeven, ze breder laten kijken, zich algemeen laten ontwikkelen, vanuit een zeitgeist laten denken. Ik ben ervan overtuigd dat ze veel ook zullen tegenkomen in een vervolgstudie. Het vormen van leerlingen en hun denkwijze, dat is belangrijk.

Appendix IV: Interview with Joy Koopman, teacher at JBC

24 Oct. 2017

Hoe lang geeft u al les?

Dit is mijn eerste jaar. Ik heb wel eerder stage gelopen op een andere school. Ik geef les in bovenbouw havo/vwo.

Hoe ziet de literatuurles eruit?

Het ligt er een beetje aan. Tot nu toe zijn we alleen bezig geweest met short stories. In het programma hebben we ook staan dat ze thuis nog een boek lezen. Voor 4 vwo hebben we boeken besteld, vier verschillende, zodat ze keuze hebben maar ook wel een aantal mensen hetzelfde boek lezen. Ik wil dan dat ze vragen voorbereiden en daarover met elkaar in gesprek gaan, zodat er een soort kleine boekenclubjes ontstaan. Ik heb ook wel eens gedaan dat ze in de klas lezen en dan een Goodreads aangemaakt, zodat ze van elkaar kunnen zien wat ze lezen. Dat werkte wel goed.

Op welke manier wordt er getoetst?

Ze krijgen een mondeling, dat is vrij globaal. Er wordt dan niet specifiek gevraagd naar personages etc., maar meer naar thema's, de moraal, dat soort dingen. Bij de toets over de short stories krijgen ze quotes uit de verhalen voorgeschoteld waar ze dan iets mee moeten in hun antwoord.

Hoe zou u de literatuurles het liefst ingericht zien?

Zoals het nu gaat met de boeken die ze moeten lezen zie ik wel heel vaak dat het gewoon niet gebeurt. Ik wil eigenlijk dat het wat meer leeft, dat ze met elkaar in discussie gaan, erover praten. Dat hele idee dat je meer empathie krijgt als je leest, dat vind ik belangrijk. Dat ze realiseren dat de wereld er voor sommige mensen heel anders uitziet en dat ze zich leren

inleven. Dus ik probeer het ook altijd wel te koppelen aan hedendaagse dingen. Zodat het niet gewoon een verhaal blijft, maar dat ze leren dat het iets zegt over de wereld.

Wat ik ook graag zou zien is dat er meer gedaan wordt met creative writing, en essays en dat soort dingen. Dat het wat diepgaander is, en dat dan ook iedereen meekomt. Nu is dat niet te doen, omdat sommige leerlingen dat gewoon niet aan kunnen.

Hoe vinden de leerlingen de literatuurles?

Ik merkte op mijn vorige school dat ze het heel lastig vonden, het niet begrepen. Ik moest vaak alles helemaal uitspellen en ik vond het ook heel lastig om in te schatten hoe ver ik daarin moest gaan. Dit jaar gaat het tot nu toe wel oké, hoewel ik wel merk dat de leerlingen de verhalen die we nu lezen vooral raar vinden.

Zijn er grote niveauverschillen tussen leerlingen?

Ja, ontzettend. Dat is natuurlijk ook wel een beetje het gevaar bij Engels: niemand kiest ervoor want het is voor iedereen verplicht, en dan zie je veel niveauverschil. Sommigen moeten bijna ieder woord opzoeken en anderen kunnen al na één keer lezen de thema's uit een verhaal halen.

Hoe probeert u daar rekening mee te houden?

Ik probeer degenen die het wel weten er wat meer bij te betrekken – niet dat de anderen dan niet evenveel aandacht krijgen, maar meer zodat zij een voorbeeld kunnen zijn. Bij de rest komt er ook meestal niet zoveel uit. Maar het is voor mij nog een beetje zoeken naar de juiste vorm.

Hoe motiveert u de leerlingen om te lezen?

Wat ik vorig jaar wel deed is ze laten lezen in de les, en dan gewoon hun eigen boek. Zo probeerde ik het lezen een beetje te automatiseren, dat ze dan misschien ook denken van 'dit is eigenlijk wel fijn' of 'hier ga ik thuis mee verder'. En als docent deed ik dan ook mee, om

het goede voorbeeld te geven. Zo wordt het een soort boekenclubje. Dat hoop ik altijd, dat we met de klas een soort boekenclubje kunnen vormen.

Denkt u dat een boekenlijst ingedeeld naar niveau zou werken voor de Engelse literatuurles?

Ja. Wat ik nu vaak zie is dat leerlingen hun eigen boek mogen kiezen, en daar ben ik niet zo voor. Er is natuurlijk wel wat voor te zeggen dat ze eerder lezen als ze iets leuk vinden, maar ik vind dat het er ook gewoon bij hoort om sommige dingen te lezen omdat het moet. Dat is goed voor je algemene ontwikkeling, en misschien kom je er zo wel achter dat je andere dingen ook leuk vindt. Ik heb er ook wel eens aan gedacht om in te delen naar thema, en dat ze dan niet twee boeken uit dezelfde categorie mogen lezen. Dus ik denk dat een vorm van een boekenlijst in ieder geval een goed idee is. Het wordt ook zo'n zootje als iedereen alles maar zelf mag kiezen en iedereen iets anders leest. Met niveaus ben ik dan aan de ene kant wel bang dat sommige mensen blijven hangen en niet genoeg uitgedaagd worden, maar aan de andere kant: als ze nu boeken moeten lezen boven hun niveau, dus die te moeilijk zijn, merk ik dat ze het gewoon niet doen.

Er wordt sinds kort ook tweetalig onderwijs gegeven op deze school. Merkt u dat dat invloed heeft op het niveau van de leerlingen?

Dat is hier nog niet te zeggen omdat die leerlingen nu alleen nog maar in de eerste en tweede klas zitten, maar op mijn vorige school werd dat al langer gedaan en daar merkte je het ontzettend. Die leerlingen konden in de vierde klas al Margaret Atwood lezen en daar essays over schrijven. Het was veel meer zoals je dat op de universiteit ook zou doen, en dat konden ze ook gewoon allemaal. De taalvaardigheidsniveaus zijn dan al voorgeselecteerd, dus iedereen zit in principe op hetzelfde niveau en dat is heel fijn. Je kunt daar echt een stuk meer mee en de leerlingen zijn veel gemotiveerder.

Appendix V: Interview with Hanneke Andringa, teacher at LRC

22 Nov. 2017

Hoe lang geeft u al les?

Acht jaar, en al die tijd op deze school. Ik geef soms in de onderbouw les maar meer in de bovenbouw.

En wordt er alleen in de bovenbouw literatuur gegeven?

In de onderbouw leggen we al wel een beetje een basis. In 3 vwo gaat het bijvoorbeeld wel over verhaalelementen zoals tijd en plaats, setting, we hebben het ook over characters en perspective, chronology, plot... We hebben in eerdere jaren ook ironie geprobeerd te doen maar dat vinden ze heel lastig dus dat hebben we er nu uit gehaald. Het verandert eigenlijk wel steeds een beetje, maar dat soort basiselementen van een verhaal doen we al in de derde klas.

Hoeveel tijd wordt er in de bovenbouw besteed aan literatuur?

Best veel eigenlijk. We doen per leerjaar ongeveer twee literatuurprojecten en die beslaan meestal een periode. Grofweg zal het zo'n 20 uren per jaar zijn.

En hoe zien de literatuurlessen er dan uit? Wat wordt er behandeld?

In 4 havo starten we met short stories, dus dan lezen ze een hele hoop verhalen en gaat het ook over die verhaalelementen. Wat we in 3 vwo doen doen we ook in 4 havo, zeg maar. Daarna gaan we een toneelstuk behandelen, dus lezen en een film kijken en dan ook verschillende mediums vergelijken. Daar gaat het heel erg om de beleving van zo'n verhaal: wat doet zoiets nou met je, wat haal je er voor thema uit bijvoorbeeld.

In 5 havo hebben we een behoorlijk groot project en lezen we een volledig boek samen, Lord of the Flies. Ze kijken de film en daar geven ze hun reactie op door middel van een vlog.

In 4 vwo beginnen ze met dat toneelstuk dat ze in 4 havo ook doen, Bang Bang You're Dead is dat, dus dan doen ze hetzelfde project maar dan eerder in het jaar. En Beowulf doen we ook, dat gaat dan meer over het thema monsters & heroes, en ook over hoe dat in hun eigen omgeving nu te zien is met alle superhero-films bijvoorbeeld. Daar is een heel creatieve opdracht bij waarbij ze kunnen kiezen of ze een reactie geven op wat ze hebben geleerd, of dat ze zelf een verhaal schrijven in de stijl van monsters & heroes. Verder zijn ze vrij om te kiezen welk boek ze lezen. Dus in 4 vwo wordt behoorlijk veel gedaan aan literatuur eigenlijk. We hebben vorig jaar trouwens ook nog poetry gedaan, dus gedichten en hoe dat dan in elkaar zit en wat je daaraan hebt.

In 5 vwo doen we een Shakespeare-stuk, dit jaar Hamlet. Vorig jaar heb ik The Merchant of Venice gedaan, en in eerdere jaren heb ik wel eens Romeo & Juliet gedaan. Dat gaat dan meer over hoe zit zoiets in elkaar, en waarom is dat nog steeds relevant. Daar schrijven ze dan een essay over. In de laatste periode van 5 vwo hebben we het over romanticism en gedichten daarin. En ze lezen in 5 vwo ook twee boeken die of qua genre met elkaar te vergelijken zijn of doordat ze door dezelfde schrijver zijn geschreven, en daar geven ze ook een reactie op door een essay.

In 6 vwo moeten ze ook twee boeken met elkaar vergelijken en die komen allebei uit een soort subgenre van modernisme of postmodernisme. Ze leren in grote lijnen over de historische achtergrond van het modernisme en postmodernisme en daar moeten ze werken die ze zelf lezen in plaatsen, dus dan moeten ze echt wel laten zien wat ze qua inzicht hebben.

Zit dit programma altijd hetzelfde in elkaar?

We passen altijd wel een beetje aan. Aan die short stories is bijvoorbeeld al veel gesleuteld, Beowulf hebben we eerst veel traditioneler les in gegeven en niet echt de koppeling gemaakt

met nu. Dat koppelen aan het moderne doen we nu steeds meer: kijken waarom iets relevant voor hun is, hoe kunnen we de verbinding leggen tussen het literaire werk en hun eigen leven.

Dit literatuurprogramma hebben jullie dus met z'n allen gemaakt en wordt in alle klassen hetzelfde gegeven?

Ja.

Hoe wordt er getoetst? Voornamelijk dus door essays?

Veel inleveropdrachten inderdaad. Echte toetsen hebben we eerst wel eens gedaan en die ideeën die zijn er wel, maar vaak is het gewoon veel bevredigender om een creatieve opdracht te geven omdat ze dan zichzelf kunnen uiten in een vorm die ze zelf kiezen.

In de onderbouw wordt dus de basis gelegd; merk je dan dat de leerlingen het een grote stap vinden om literatuur te gaan lezen of valt dat juist wel mee?

Nee, dat valt wel mee eigenlijk. Zeker omdat we in het begin van de vierde klas ook met best moderne dingen komen, dus het is niet heel erg een ver-van-hun-bed-show. En we maken heel expliciet die koppeling met hun eigen leven.

Merk je bij de leerlingen grote niveaoverschillen?

Ja, zeker. Er is altijd een klein handjevol die graag leest en die kunnen inderdaad al wat pittigere dingen aan, of ze kiezen zelf al langere boeken uit. Dat is leuk om te zien natuurlijk, maar we selecteren wel de werken die we zelf behandelen op haalbaarheid, dat het voor iedereen mogelijk is. En bij 5 vwo verwachten we natuurlijk echt niet dat ze elk woord van Shakespeare begrijpen, maar dat ze snappen waar het over gaat en dat ze sommige uitspraken herkennen bijvoorbeeld, dat ze in grote lijnen begrijpen wat er gezegd wordt. Dus de niveaoverschillen zijn niet echt een probleem.

Ben je tevreden met hoe het literatuurprogramma er nu uit ziet?

Ja, zeker. Ik wil natuurlijk het liefst continu veranderen want ik wil het ook interessant

houden voor mezelf en bijvoorbeeld wel variëren in welk stuk van Shakespeare we doen, niet 5 jaar achter elkaar hetzelfde stuk behandelen, dat lijkt me doodsaaï. Maar we hebben de laatste tijd juist heel erg geïnvesteerd in het literatuurprogramma om dat steeds frisser en aansprekender te maken.

Denk je dat de leerlingen de literatuurles ook leuk vinden?

Er zijn altijd leerlingen die gewoon bij voorbaat zeggen ‘dit is stom’ – ik kreeg gisteren toevallig de vraag ‘waarom doen we dit eigenlijk?’ over Shakespeare en dat vond ik eigenlijk wel heel leuk, daar hebben we toen even een goed gesprek over gehad in de klas en dat was heel betekenisvol. En dat maakte ook dat ze inzicht kregen in waarom we het doen en daardoor ook wat meer waardering kregen ervoor. En er zijn erbij die het fantastisch vinden.



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