

THE IMPACT OF LITERATURE EDUCATION ON STUDENTS'  
PERCEPTIONS OF SELF AND OTHERS:

EXPLORING PERSONAL AND SOCIAL LEARNING

EXPERIENCES IN RELATION TO TEACHER APPROACH

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*Abstract*

The Dutch Institute for Curriculum Development argues that literature education is important for broadening students' personal, social and cultural horizons. Indeed, reading literary fiction may alter readers' self- and social perceptions, but little is known about whether adolescents gain such personal and social insights through reading in the secondary literature classroom, nor about how these perceived learning outcomes are related to their teachers' approaches to various aspects of literature teaching. Thus, the aims of this study were to examine the impact of literature education on students' self- and social perceptions and to explore relationships between students' learning experiences and their teachers' classroom practices.

Dutch students ( $N=297$ , grades 10-12) wrote a learner report about what they learned about themselves and other people through literature education, and completed a measure on familiarity with fiction. Their teachers ( $N=13$ ) completed the Teachers' Approaches to Literature Education Questionnaire (TALE-Q), which indicated more analytical-interpretative or personal-experiential approaches to three

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aspects of teaching. Students of teachers with distinct approaches to these aspects were grouped to compare their learning experiences.

Findings showed that nearly all students (99%) reported to have learned something about themselves and others through literature education, mainly personal characterizations of oneself and others, learning about oneself and others as literary readers, descriptions and evaluations of people's behaviors, and lessons for life. In addition, teachers' reports of more classroom interaction and student autonomy were related to students' more frequent reports of personal and social insights, but this may also partly be explained by students being more familiar with fiction and having a more positive attitude toward literary reading. Implications for personal and social learning in the literature classroom are discussed.

Keywords: Literature education, self-perceptions, social perceptions, teaching approach, adolescents

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, the Dutch Institute for Curriculum Development contended that literature education 'has an important value for developing citizenship, [for instance by] broadening social and cultural horizons and developing empathic capabilities' (2015, p. 15). This aim is not so far-fetched: not only has reading literary fiction often been considered an inherently cultural and social activity (e.g., Bloome & Green, 1984/2002; Galda & Beach, 2001) and not a monolithic form of experience (Miall & Kuiken, 1998; 1995), literary scholars have also connected reading literary fiction to readers' abilities to imagine other people's situations and to make inferences about their thoughts and emotions (e.g., Keen, 2006; 2007; Palmer, 2004; Zunshine, 2006; 2015). Moreover, the experience of reading literary fiction has been considered a life experience that can be self-modifying and thus may have impact on readers' self-development (Fialho, 2012; Miall & Kuiken, 2002).

The Dutch Institute for Curriculum Development, then, appeared to value what reading literary fiction may bring about: personal and social development. The Dutch secondary literature classroom may therefore precisely be the place to attend to personal and social aspects of literary reading. However, as Fialho (2012) noted from a global perspective, 'there still is no consensus (and perhaps may never be) about the aims of literary education, and little knowledge of how literary reading is processed, as social and cultural factors are involved' (p. 3). The same holds true for the Netherlands. There is no prescribed curriculum for literature teaching in secondary schools: teachers are allowed much freedom and may use different approaches to literature teaching (Janssen & Rijlaarsdam, 2007).

In this study, we examine whether a representative sample of Dutch secondary school students experiences any personal and social learning in their literature classrooms, and we explore how such experiences may be related to aspects of their literature teachers' practice. First, we outline the national context in which this study takes place. We then present the theoretical-empirical framework in which we situate this research.

### 1.1 *Literature Education in the Netherlands*

In line with the history of the institutionalization of literature as described by Graff (2007), literature education in the Netherlands originated at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In those days, it focused on historical-biographical knowledge. In the early 1970's, structuralist approaches in literary studies emerged (Witte, Rijlaarsdam & Schram, 2012). Close reading and structural analysis became important. From 1980, there was a transition from text-centered to more reader-centered approaches. Dutch literary educators were influenced by reader response critics from the United States, like Rosenblatt, Bleich and Holland, and by German reception aesthetics scholars, like Iser and Jauss. Their views were increasingly acknowledged and have influenced the practices of at least part of the Dutch literature teachers (Janssen & Rijlaarsdam, 2007; Witte et al., 2012).

Attention for close reading and structural analysis, however, has not disappeared. In 1998, as part of a larger Dutch educational reform, a new examination program for literature education has been introduced, which still applies today and intertwines three core elements: literary-historical knowledge, structural-analytical skills, and individual literary development. This program is confined to the upper grades of secondary education, which is the focus of this study. To obtain a satisfactory grade for literature education at the end of secondary school, a student must be able to give a substantiated report of his or her reading experiences of a number of self-selected literary works; to recognize and distinguish between literary text types and be able to use literary terms for interpreting literary texts; and to give an overview of the outlines of literary history and place literary works in a historical perspective (Dutch Institute for Curriculum Development, 2012, p. 25).

Higher general education students<sup>1</sup> must read a minimum of eight literary works, whereas pre-university students must read twelve, three of which must be published before 1880. All works must originally be written in Dutch; therefore, books by Flemish, Antillean and Surinam authors are allowed as well. In addition, teachers often require students to read adult literature. Generally, students are required to keep a reading portfolio. This usually contains a reading autobiography and several 'book reports', which may include book summaries, literary analyses, comparisons with films, and reviews. The portfolio allows for assessing students' individual literary development (Dirksen, 2007) and thus provides some space for a variety of reading preferences and choices among students. It is common, but not compulsory, that students round off literature education at secondary school with an oral exam about the books they have read and reported about in their portfolio.

All in all, the domain of literature education in the Netherlands allows for much freedom: '[t]eachers themselves decide which texts to work on, and decide which

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<sup>1</sup> *The Dutch secondary educational system distinguishes between higher general education (havo, five years), which prepares for higher vocational education, and pre-university education (vwo, six years), which prepares for university: see also <https://www.nuffic.nl/en/library/education-system-the-netherlands.pdf>*

objectives to emphasize and how much time to devote to literature' (Witte et al., 2012, p. 2). Such curricular freedom, however, may not necessarily contribute to students' motivation for literature education. Students not always become engaged with school-assigned texts. In many Dutch schools, they choose from a teacher-selected list of literary works. Conceivably, students may feel obliged to read texts they would not have chosen themselves, which might cause resistance to reading (Bintz, 1993). This could potentially impede transportation into a story, 'a convergent process, where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative' (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701) which 'may be a mechanism for narrative-based belief change' (p. 703). If there is little freedom of choice, students' individual reading preferences may not be fully acknowledged, whereas research suggests that attending to their preferences, offering them a certain freedom of choice and supporting them in choosing the book that fits them best at a particular moment may be crucial for their engagement in the literature classroom (e.g., Beach, Appleman, Hynds & Wilhelm, 2011; Lenters, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Witte, 2008).

### 1.2 *Reading Literary Fiction: Changes in Self and Social Perceptions*

Reading literary narrative fiction has the potential to change readers' sense of self (Fialho, 2012; Sikora, Kuiken & Miall, 2010) and their perceptions of others (Hakemulder, 2000). Current pressing questions concern the processes involved in a mode of reading that impacts self- and social perceptions (Fialho & Hakemulder, 2016) and the outcomes of this mode of reading (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015).

It has been suggested that Theory of Mind (Zunshine, 2006) and narrative empathy (Keen, 2013) are process components of reading literary fiction (e.g., Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Kidd & Castano, 2013). Zunshine (2006) defined Theory of Mind as 'our ability to explain people's behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires' (p. 6). Keen (2013) defined narrative empathy as 'the sharing of feeling and perspective-taking induced by reading [...] narratives of another's situation and condition' (n.p., see also Keen, 2007). Without being exhaustive, we outline some of the growing empirical support for these claims, based on both quantitative and qualitative studies (for overviews, see also Hakemulder, Fialho & Bal, 2016; Mar & Oatley, 2008).

Experimental studies have shed light on the role of Theory of Mind and empathy in reading literary fiction. In five online experiments among adults of around 34 years old, Kidd and Castano (2013) found that reading literary fiction enhanced readers' affective and cognitive Theory of Mind, which they defined, from a neuropsychological rather than a literary perspective, as 'the ability to detect and understand others' emotions' and '[the] inference and representation of others' beliefs and intentions' (p. 377). They contended that the (temporary) effects on Theory of Mind were specific to what they selected as *literary* fiction, and not to popular fiction. This distinction, which may seem somewhat artificial, was based on the work of Barthes, Bakhtin and Bruner (Kidd & Castano, 2013, p. 377-378) and was opera-

tionalized by selecting novels awarded literary prizes, against texts that did not receive awards. Despite the fact that the effects found by Kidd and Castano were not all confirmed in replication studies (Dijkstra, Verkoeijen, Van Kuijk, Chow, Bakker & Zwaan, 2015; Liu & Want, 2015), their study opened up the possibilities for further investigations on the role of Theory of Mind in literary fiction reading.

In a study among adult readers of about 25 years old, Bal and Veltkamp (2013) focused on empathy. Although, unlike Keen (2013), they defined the concept from a psychological perspective, considering it 'the cognitive and intellectual ability to recognize the emotions of other persons and to emotionally respond to other persons' (p. 2), they expected that this broader notion of empathy could be related to the literary reading process. They found that empathy increased a week after fiction reading, but only in case of high transportation (cf. Green & Brock, 2000).

Through interviews among 16-year-old readers, Charlton, Pette and Burbaum (2004) found that reading (literary) fiction made them compare their own lives to story situations and experience empathic engagements with characters' feelings. Moreover, adolescents regarded reading fiction as a way of understanding others' experiences, through which they might feel connected to others or see new possibilities for their own lives (Rothbauer, 2011). Finally, in a survey study among Dutch elementary and secondary school students, aged 9 to 17, Van der Bolt (2000) found that more than half of 3025 participants reported having experienced sympathy (52%) and empathy (57%) when reading fiction, and that these affective reading responses seemed to occur more often among avid readers.

More specifically, Theory of Mind and narrative empathy may be important components of reading experiences that can be characterized as self-modifying. First, in 19-year-old psychology students' think-aloud responses to a literary story, Fialho (2012) identified changes in their positioning towards the story and the main character, thus changing the way they perceived themselves as the reading unfolded. Findings revealed two types of self-modifying reading experiences: the first characterized by empathic engagement with the story setting and blurred boundaries between oneself and the narrator or characters, suggesting personal identification, and the second characterized by sympathetic engagement with characters and blurred boundaries between oneself and others, suggesting more general identification. Second, Sikora, Kuiken and Miall (2010) showed through questionnaire responses of 24-year-old literature students that self-modifying feelings and a deepened self-perception were evoked if readers, who lost a loved one, experienced aesthetic emotions when encountering stylistically striking passages in a poem. Third, Richardson and Eccles (2007) found in their interview study among adolescents that voluntary reading sometimes made them explore their possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986): it made them think about who they are, who they would like to be and who they do not want to become.

Theory of Mind and narrative empathy may also play important roles in modifying readers' social perceptions through literary reading. For example, Hakemulder (2000) found that identification with a story character who represented an outgroup positively affected readers' beliefs about this particular outgroup. These re-

sults were supported in a second study, in which Hakemulder found similar outcomes after readers were purposefully instructed to actively take the role of the character, by means of an empathy-building instruction. Similarly, Johnson (2013) found that adult readers of fiction who were more transported into a story reported less negative outgroup perceptions. Based on these findings as well as other studies, Koopman and Hakemulder (2015) proposed that such during-reading empathy and role-taking may result in real-world empathy as an after effect.

Clearly, there is support for the notion that reading literary fiction may 'change the reader for the better' (Hakemulder, Fialho & Bal, 2016): it may enhance their self-examination or self-reflection as well as their social understandings. This may have important implications for the potential of using literature in specific environments, for example, teachers' professional development (Kooy, 2006), people's professional behavior in general (Bal, Butterman & Bakker, 2011), and domain-specific education in literary studies (e.g., Fialho, Zyngier & Miall, 2011; Fialho, Miall & Zyngier, 2012) as well as the secondary literature classroom that forms the context for the present study.

### 1.3 *Adolescents in the Literature Classroom*

Studies about the effects of literary reading on self-insights and social insights have rarely focused specifically on adolescents (e.g., Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Fialho, 2012; Johnson, 2013; Kidd & Castano, 2013; Sikora et al., 2010). Yet, research has shown that reading processes of novice adolescent readers differ from reading processes of more experienced adult readers. Expert readers have, for example, a large variety of reading strategies at their disposal and are capable of regarding literary texts from multiple perspectives, as well as of analyzing them on various levels. Novice readers of literature, on the other hand, often mainly focus on the events in a story and regard a story from a single perspective (e.g., Andringa, 1990, 1995; Earthman, 1992; Peskin, 1998; Zeitz, 1994; for overviews also see Goldman, McCarthy & Burkett, 2015; Hanauer, 1999). These differences in literary reading processes suggest that the effects of literary reading on readers' selves and their social perceptions could differ as well: literary reading may affect expert adult readers and novice adolescent readers in different ways. The question arises, then, what is known about the impact of literary reading on *adolescents'* personal and social insights in the context of the *literature classroom*. Two terms are purposefully italicized here.

First, little is known about the extent to which adolescents gain personal and social insights from literary reading. Based on his interpretation of exemplary responses, Appleyard (1991) contended that adolescents may draw connections between stories, themselves and the social world. They may 'experience involvement with the story and identification with the character' (p. 100), but often with more than one character, which fits their growing ability to take various social perspectives. A character's identity may not resemble their own identity, but rather represent the kind of person they would like to become (cf. 'the desired self'; Markus & Nurius, 1986). Furthermore, Appleyard found that adolescents 'talk about the real-

ism of the story' (p. 100), for instance about how accurately a story reflects their own experiences or how easily similar situations can be imagined. Finally, according to Appleyard, adolescents stated that 'a good story makes them think' (p. 100): they may reflect on characters' motives and emotions and compare these to their own, or they may think about the meaning of a story.

Second, like Appleyard's (1991) research, most studies about adolescents' personal and social insights as a result of reading fiction are conducted in the context of voluntary leisure reading, like the studies mentioned earlier (Charlton, Pette & Burbaum, 2004; Richardson & Eccles, 2007; Rothbauer, 2011). Research conducted in the context of the literature classroom among adolescents, on the other hand, has often been confined to reading engagement and/or analytical skills in terms of interpreting literary texts (e.g., Eva-Wood, 2004; Janssen, Braaksma & Couzijn, 2009; Peskin, 1998; 2007; Pieper & Wieser, 2012; Tengberg, Olin-Scheller & Lindholm, 2015). Although many of these studies incorporated the perspective of what readers bring to the text – in particular Eva-Wood (2004), who developed a think-and-feel-aloud pedagogy – the perspective of what literary fiction might mean to adolescent readers and what they can take away from it for their (social) lives, remained largely unexplored.

Possibly, the literature classroom might hinder the gain of personal and social insights, if adolescents feel resistance toward literary fiction reading. In the Netherlands, this seems to be the case for at least part of the students. Van Schooten (2005) found that Dutch students' attitude toward literary reading became more negative in higher grades of secondary education: as the years of literature education increased, these adolescents seemed to enjoy literary reading less and less. Witte (2008) drew similar conclusions. Potentially, such negative attitudes impede with gaining personal and social insights from literary reading in the classroom.

On the other hand, the literature classroom might foster personal and social insights if the social nature of literary reading (Bloome & Green, 1984/2002) is acknowledged and valued, for instance if students are encouraged to bring personal experiences to texts and to share their reading responses (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand & Gamoran, 2003; Beach et al., 2011). Sharing their responses may broaden their minds (Holland & Schwartz, 1975), which may, by extension, broaden their perceptions of themselves and others. In conclusion, then, the teacher's perspective or approach taken in the literature classroom may, in part, determine whether students take away personal and social insights from literary reading and accompanying learning activities.

#### *1.4 Teachers' Approaches to Literature Education*

Which perspective is taken and which learning activities are emphasized in literature classrooms, is largely based on what teachers value. A conversational inquiry amongst Australian and Dutch literature teachers showed that teachers had their own opinions about what literature education should look like and that they developed their praxis accordingly (Van de Ven & Doecke, 2011). Approaches to litera-

ture teaching, thus, may vary strongly among literature teachers (cf. Applebee, 1994) and are therefore not easy to describe or define. In the Netherlands, this may perhaps be even more pronounced than in other countries, given the curricular freedom in this context (Janssen & Rijlaarsdam, 2007; Witte et al., 2012).

In the Dutch context, Janssen (1998) noted that teachers often taught eclectically, although they tended to emphasize one of four approaches (p. 311):

- An author-oriented, literary history approach (cultural development);
- A text-oriented, structural analysis approach (aesthetic awareness);
- A context-oriented, sociological approach (social awareness);
- A reader-oriented, text-experiencing approach (personal development).

Based on survey data of former students about the goals and text use in their literature education, Verboord and Van Rees (2003) brought these four approaches back to a subject matter- or culture-oriented approach (combining the author-oriented and text-oriented approach) and a student-oriented approach (combining the context-oriented and reader-oriented approach).

Other distinctions have been made as well, such as an interpretative versus an experiential approach (Fialho, Zyngier & Miall, 2011; Fialho, Miall & Zyngier, 2012), while other scholars have argued for bridging the gap by attending both to meaning of literary texts as well as bringing personal experiences to these texts (Wilhelm, 2007), for example by creating 'a social community that supports learning literature' (Beach et al., 2011, p. 8). Similarly, Van de Ven and Doecke (2011) noted that the teachers in their study connected the interpretation of literary texts to 'the need to negotiate the social relationships that comprise any classroom' (p. 219).

Characterizing Dutch teachers' approaches to literature education, thus, may be challenging. Yet, attempting to do so is relevant, because previous studies into Dutch literature education have shown that different teacher approaches generate different learning outcomes in students (Janssen, 1998; Janssen & Rijlaarsdam, 1996). In the context of the current study, teachers' emphasis on particular goals or pedagogical activities may be related to whether their students perceive any impact of literature education on their personal and social insights.

### *1.5 Aims and Research Questions*

The aim of the present study is to find out whether and to what extent a sample of Dutch upper secondary school students reports to experience gains in personal and social insights through literature education, and to explore whether this is in any way related to their teacher's classroom practice. Our research questions are:

- 1) Do students report learning experiences concerning their self-perceptions and social perceptions attributed to literature education, and if so, which kinds of learning experiences are these?
- 2) Are the (kinds of) learning experiences of students within a class related to their teacher's approach to literature education?



## 2. METHOD

### 2.1 Participants

We approached upper secondary school literature teachers in our network by e-mail and published a call for participation on a Facebook page for Dutch language teachers. 21 teachers were willing to participate. Of those, we selected 13 teachers (seven females), based on gender and location. Four teachers were from schools located in smaller towns, six in larger towns and three in major cities, distributed over the mid-western and southern part of the Netherlands. Their age ranged from 23 to 63 years ( $M = 42.15$ ,  $SD = 11.55$ ). Their experience as literature teachers in upper secondary education varied considerably ( $M = 11.62$  years,  $SD = 11.08$ , range 2-40), as did the percentage of time they allocated to the domain of literature within their Dutch language lessons ( $M = 29.31\%$ ,  $SD = 15.07\%$ , range 10-60).

Each teacher selected, in consultation with the first author, one class to participate in the study. We strived for variation in school levels and grades and included therefore grades 10 and 11 at higher general education level, and grades 10-12 at pre-university level. In addition, teachers only selected those classes which time schedules allowed for participation. We asked parents for consent for their child's participation in the study. None of them withheld their consent. In total, 297 students of 13 classes participated, of which 49% were females. Participants' age ranged from 14 to 20 years ( $M = 16.42$ ;  $SD = 1.05$ ). The number of students in a class ranged from 18 to 26 students ( $M = 22.85$ ;  $SD = 2.73$ ).

### 2.2 Instruments

**Learner report.** To collect responses about what students think they learned about themselves and other people through literature education, we asked them to complete a learner report: a semi-open reflective writing assignment, originally developed by De Groot (1980). A learner report allows for the explication of learning experiences that remain implicit in other measures and was found to be a valid and reliable instrument in previous research (Janssen, 1998; Janssen & Rijlaarsdam, 1996; Van der Kamp, 1980; Van Kesteren, 1993). The learner report has been designed to collect fundamental learning outcomes that cannot be assessed through tests or demonstrations, but that may have impact on students and therefore can be reported.

A learner report contains open questions, to be answered in free writing. Introductory phrases are provided, for instance, 'I learned that (I)...' and 'I now know that it is not true that (I)...'. In this study, these prompts were only intended to support the participants to word their experiences: using them was not compulsory and rephrasing was allowed. Apart from these introductory phrases, we provided examples of learning experiences from another school subject (History) and both oral and written instructions before starting the task.

A first version of the learner report was tested in a pilot ( $N = 93$ ) and revised based on students' comments. The final learner report contained four sections, as Table 1 shows. Each section started on a new page to provide enough space for writing. Students were randomly assigned to one of four different orders to avoid test effects as threats to internal validity.

*Table 1. Overview of learner report sections with questions, general writing instruction and introductory phrases*

Section	1	2	3	4
Question	Try to recall the literature lessons you attended. What did you learn about others during the literature lessons?	Think about the books you read for Dutch class. Try to remember what they were about. What did you learn about others by reading them?	Try to recall the literature lessons you attended. What did you learn about yourself during the literature lessons?	Think about the books you read for Dutch class. Try to remember what they were about. What did you learn about yourself by reading them?
Instruction	Write as many sentences as you can. Use and/or change the introductory phrases, if it helps you.			
Introductory phrases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- By literature lessons, I learned...</li> <li>- In literature lessons, I discovered...</li> <li>- Because of what we do in literature class, I noticed that...</li> <li>- Because of literature lessons, I know it is not true that...</li> <li>- What I know now by the lessons, is that...</li> <li>- In literature class, I experienced...</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- By reading... I learned that...</li> <li>- When reading stories, I noticed...</li> <li>- Because of the book... I know it's not always true that...</li> <li>- By reading... I discovered that...</li> <li>- What I know now I've read... is...</li> <li>- By reading, I experienced it's not true that...</li> </ul>	Similar to section 1.	Similar to section 2.

The learner report was preceded by a page with background questions, and two questions to trigger students' memories of specific reading experiences: 'What was the last book you read for school?' and 'Which book, of all books you've ever read,

do you remember best?’ At the final page of the booklet, we asked students to indicate on a Likert scale how difficult it had been to complete the learner report, ranging from 1 (*very easy*) to 5 (*very difficult*).

**Author Recognition Test (ART).** To determine students’ familiarity with fiction, we used an adapted version of the Author Recognition Test (Stanovich & West, 1989). An ART consists of a list of author’s names and foils, on which participants indicate real authors’ names. The number of correctly recognized names is an indicator of one’s familiarity with fiction: the ART was shown to have predictive validity for real-world reading, while avoiding socially desirable answering to questions about reading frequency and motivation (Mar, Oatley, Hirsh, dela Paz & Peterson, 2006; Rain & Mar, 2014). Because one may be familiar with other authors than those included in the test, scores are relative: if Philip scores 15 whereas Emma scores 4, Philip is assumed to be *more* familiar with fiction than Emma.

We adjusted the ART for Dutch adolescents. It included eighty names: forty authors and forty foils. We strived for variation in author’s names based on their original language (either Dutch or Flemish, or translated from other languages), main intended audience (either adults or youth), gender and canonicity. The instruction read: ‘Encircle those names which you know for sure are authors’ names. Some of these people are *not* authors, so do not guess.’ Test scores ranged from minus 40 to plus 40.

We piloted the ART along with the learner report. We substituted author’s names that were not recognized at all and created four final versions, in which only the order of names varied. The ART was provided halfway the task booklet, so that deeper, reflective thinking about learning experiences alternated with a cognitively less demanding recognition task.

**Teachers’ Approaches to Literature Education Questionnaire (TALE-Q).** To gain insight into their approaches to literature teaching, we asked teachers to complete the newly constructed Teachers’ Approaches to Literature Education Questionnaire (TALE-Q) online. Since various distinctions have been made in literature teaching approaches (Fialho et al., 2011; 2012; Janssen, 1998; Verboord & Van Rees, 2003, cf. introductory section), the TALE-Q emphasized what these studies have in common, thereby relying on a continuum with a so-called analytical-interpretative approach at one end, and a personal-experiential approach at the other end.

We considered the analytical-interpretative approach as more text-oriented, mainly focused on literary analysis and interpretation of texts substantiated by literary elements, and regarding works of literature as cultural, aesthetical, canonical objects. We considered the personal-experiential approach as more reader-oriented, mainly focused on personal experiences of literary texts, on drawing connections to the real, outer-textual world, and on sharing those literary experiences and resulting insights with others. Emphasis is given to discussing what a text means to its readers and to exploring in which ways readers may connect themselves to texts. Importantly, we did not regard the two approaches as being in dichotomy: teachers were not expected not employ ‘a’ personal-experiential approach or ‘an’ analytical-interpretative approach. Rather, for various aspects of

their teaching, they might lean toward each of the extremes of the continuum, or they might be somewhere in between both approaches.

The TALE-Q consisted of six scales. Scale 1 (goals) indicated what teachers aim for in literature lessons. The five other scales represented a selection of pedagogical practices to pursue these goals, namely (2) text use, (3) focus on literary analysis or literary reading experiences, (4) degree of classroom interaction, (5) allowance for student autonomy, and (6) ambiguity of literature. Each bipolar item consisted of two statements, with a Likert scale in between, which ranged from 1 (the most analytical-interpretative option) to 5 (the most personal-experiential option). Table 2 shows examples of these statements. In half of the items, statements were mirrored. After answering several background questions, teachers indicated for each item which of both statements best fitted their literature lessons to the class that participated in this study.

Pilot participants ( $N = 17$ ) found a first version of the questionnaire, containing 51 items, too long. Twelve items were removed if this did not negatively affect the reliability of the then existing scales. Once the actual participants ( $N = 13$ ) completed the TALE-Q, two scales had a low reliability. From scale 2 ('text use';  $\alpha = .43$ ), three items were removed, which resulted in  $\alpha = .74$ . From scale 7 ('literature as object vs. as tool for yourself and the world';  $\alpha = .29$ ), two items were moved to scale 1, resulting in  $\alpha = .77$ , and one item to scale 3, resulting in  $\alpha = .86$ . Scale 7 then consisted of only two items and was deleted from the data, so that six scales remained (see Table 2).

Table 2. TALE-Q scales, item examples per scale, and Cronbach's Alpha

Scale	Approach characterizations		Example of item: two statements		Items (N)	Items deleted	Cronbach's $\alpha$
	Analytical-interpretative	Personal-experiential	Analytical-interpretative	Personal-experiential			
1. Goals	More subject matter-oriented, analytical-interpretative goals; building textual and contextual knowledge.	More student-oriented, personal-experiential goals; developing literary taste, experiencing personal value of literature.	'My goal is that students learn to place literary texts in the literary-historical context.'	'My goal is that students learn to relate literary texts to their own experiences.'	7	-	.77
2. Text use	Use of texts that are more removed from students' world; more traditional and canonical texts.	Use of texts that concur more with students' worlds; texts with more recognizable elements.	'I mainly pay attention to historical literary texts.'	'I mainly pay attention to contemporary texts.'	4	3	.74
3. Analysis vs. experience	A more cognitive, analytical focus on structural and literary characteristics; importance of analysis, understanding, interpretation.	A more personal focus on experiencing literary texts; importance of feeling, experience, recognition, imagination.	'In class, I mainly discuss the content and structural characteristics of a literary text.'	'In class, I mainly discuss how a literary text affects me and what the text means to me.'	7	-	.86
4. Classroom interaction	Less interaction: more use of frontal teaching and explanations by teacher; mainly individual learning, e.g. through writing.	More interaction: classroom conversations and student talk; mainly shared learning, e.g. through group discussions.	'Students mainly work individually.'	'Students mainly work together in duos or small groups.'	6	-	.89

5. Student autonomy	More control and decision making by the teacher; less freedom of choice for students.	Less control and decision making by the teacher; students have a say in choice of topics or literary works.	'As the teacher, I usually choose which literary texts we use in class.'	'Students usually have a say in which literary texts we use in class.'	5	-	.79
6. Ambiguity of literature	Regarding and propagating literature as having an assumed definite meaning; importance of finding the author's message.	Regarding and propagating literature as ambiguous; accepting multiple interpretations; indeterminacy of what the author means.	'By reading a literary work, the reader can discover what the author wants to say with it.'	'Every reader has an own interpretation of what a literary work could mean.'	5	-	.91

To determine whether TALE-Q scales might represent possible underlying factors, principal components analysis with Varimax rotation was used. Due to the small sample size, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was rather low (.33), yet the result for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ( $p < .001$ ). Analysis revealed three components which together accounted for 81% of the total variance. First, *Attitude toward literary reading* (eigenvalue 1.68, 28% of variance) included scale 3 and 6 and was considered to represent the extent to which a teacher promotes literary reading as a personal, ambiguous experience. Second, *Students' roles in classroom processes* (eigenvalue 1.62, 27% of variance) included scale 4 and 5 and was considered to represent teachers' self-reported practices in terms of student interaction and student autonomy in their literature classroom. Third, *Intended teaching content* (eigenvalue 1.55, 26% of variance) included scale 1 and 2 and was considered to represent what teachers intend to achieve in literature education and which types of literary texts they apply to achieve this (for factor loadings, see Table 3).

Table 3. Results of factor analysis of TALE-Q scales

Scale	Factor loadings		
	Aspect 1 Attitude toward literary reading	Aspect 2 Students' roles in classroom processes	Aspect 3 Intended teaching content
Goals	.35	.32	<b>.75</b>
Text use			<b>.83</b>
Analysis vs. experience	<b>.90</b>		
Classroom interaction		<b>.74</b>	-.43
Student autonomy		<b>.88</b>	
Ambiguity of literature	<b>.83</b>	-.31	

Note. High factor loadings are printed in bold. Factor loadings  $\leq .30$  and  $\leq -.30$  are not displayed.

### 2.3 Procedures

Teachers completed the TALE-Q before students wrote their learner reports. Three trained research assistants visited the classes during one 50- or 60-minute lesson to collect the learner reports. The procedure consisted of three steps:

- 1) Guided by a Powerpoint presentation, the assistants discussed with the students their literature education so far for about five minutes, to focus their attention on the topic.
- 2) The assistants explained the learner report and ART task, guided by a Powerpoint slide, and announced that a gift card would be put up for raffle among the participants.
- 3) The task booklet with instructions and examples, background questions, learner report questions and the ART was distributed in class. Students

were asked to work individually. After reading the instruction and examples, about 30-35 minutes were left to complete the task.

Apart from incidental student talk, the assistants reported no procedural irregularities.

#### 2.4 Data Analysis

**Segmentation.** Learner reports were typed out verbatim and imported into Atlas.ti. Because a sentence in a learner report could contain more than one learning experience (e.g., ‘I learned that I like to read novels *but also that I do not like to analyze them*’), we set rules for identifying single learning experiences. To assess reliability, a second, independent rater segmented a randomly selected set of learner reports ( $n = 3$ , containing 33 learning experiences). Agreement was substantial (90%, Cohen’s Kappa = .79). In Atlas.ti, the first author then distinguished and numbered all individual learning experiences. In case of doubt, she discussed sentences with the second researcher.

**Coding system.** We developed a coding system using LEX-NAP procedures (Lexical Basis for Numerically Aided Phenomenology; Fialho, 2012) for bottom-up qualitative analysis. LEX-NAP is grounded in phenomenology (analysis of experiences) and linguistics. Aiming for intersubjectivity among individuals, LEX-NAP analytical procedures involve seeking for ‘the knowledge shared by a community of experiencing subjects’ (Fialho, 2012, p. 103), thus formulating the essence of those experiences, as well for intersubjectivity among the researchers who study those experiences, measured by inter-rater reliability tests.

We applied LEX-NAP procedures to a randomly selected sample of 65 learner reports (five of each class). The learning experiences in these reports were subject to comparative analysis. Once we found two or more experiences similar in both content and form, we formulated a paraphrase to capture their essence (see Table 4), which functioned as a code.

Table 4. Paraphrase code based on intersubjective responses by students

Code	< <u>through / by X</u> I learned that (modified) <u>books / literature / texts</u> (can) emotionally affect me >
Responses	<p><u>By reading stories</u>, I noticed that <u>some of them</u> can be quite touching.</p> <p><u>In ‘Tonio’</u>, the story in particular affected me a lot.</p> <p><u>These books</u> stir up many emotions in me.</p> <p><u>By reading stories</u>, I [unreadable] that they can quite affect you.</p> <p>I also noticed that <u>books</u> can affect me rather fast on the emotional level.</p>

Note. Underlining, bold and italics represent similarities in form.

Comparative analysis of the sample resulted in 168 paraphrase codes. To address the reliability of the coding system, a second rater coded 10% of the learner re-



ports ( $n = 28$ , containing 283 learning experiences). Agreement was sufficient (75%, Cohen's Kappa = .75).

When coding the remaining learner reports, we found experiences that were not present in the first sample of 65, which we labeled as 'other responses'. In a second round, we checked for additional shared experiences, which we then assigned an own paraphrase code. We also merged paraphrase codes that highly resembled each other. Eventually, 114 paraphrase codes were left. Within these, three kinds of learning experiences emerged, on which we elaborate below:

- a) Learning experiences about oneself and others: content and evaluations;
- b) Learning experiences about literature and its context;
- c) Irrelevant or incomprehensible learning experiences.

**A. Learning experiences about oneself and others: content and evaluations.** Ten categories of content learning experiences (i.e., referring to *what* is learned about oneself or others, including both real and fictional people) were formed here, which are presented in Table 5, with examples of students' responses. These categories included the most relevant answers to the questions asked in the learner report and represented almost one third (64%) of all responses.

*Table 5. Categories of personal and social content learning experiences, with subcategories and examples*

Category with subcategories (if applicable)	Examples of students' responses
1. Learning about oneself and others as language learners and comprehensive readers. - No subcategories	- 'I learned that I am good at formulating and spelling.' - 'I learned to determine and improve my reading level.'
2. Learning about oneself and others as literary readers. - One's own literary skills and literary reading habits  - Assumed knowledge of how others evaluate and think about literature  - Affective literary responses (comparisons, recognition, identification, narrative empathy and sympathy)	- 'When reading stories, I noticed that I find it very hard to understand a story at once.' - 'In literature class, I discovered that opinions about books highly differ per individual.' - 'Through the literature, I also often compare the story to my own life.' - 'By reading books, I learned that I recognize little or nothing from my own life.' - 'Yet, these books ['Tirza', 'Het diner'] also often evoked a bit of compassion in me.' - 'When reading, you feel like being the main character. I experienced her experiences.'
3. Learning about oneself and others as persons: personal characterizations. - Insights in own personality, personal development and character traits  - Comparisons of other people or literary characters to each other (differences and similarities) - Notions of sympathy for and empathy with others, and understanding their emotions - Understandings of how others can be, what they can go through, that they	- 'I learned that my personality is rather a bit unique. I see things differently than others.' - 'I also discovered that the variety in world views and norms and values of different people is much larger than I initially thought.' - 'I read many books about war. These books evoke your sympathy and compassion for something that is not that long ago.' - 'Because of 'Maar buiten is het feest', I know that it is not all roses out there.

<p>can change, and why they make certain choices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understandings of others as impressionable by other people, culture, historical time, religion or what they go through in life (passively <i>being</i> influenced; compare to 6)</li> </ul>	<p>That people can have many problems, even though you can't see it from the outside.'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'By reading 'De helaasheid der dingen', I learned that your childhood has much influence on the person you become, so on how you think, how you react and how social you are.'</li> </ul>
<p>4. Learning about oneself and others as thinkers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The experience that literature makes the student think</li> <li>- Understandings of how people think and form or change their opinions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'A book can make you think differently about something, like your view on the world.'</li> <li>- 'I also learned something about how other people can think about the world.'</li> </ul>
<p>5. Learning about others in former times and other cultures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understandings of how people thought and behaved in former times, and differences to today</li> <li>- Understandings of what other cultures are like and differences to the student's own culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'In the literature lessons, I learned that people in former times didn't have such a good life. They had to work hard for little money.'</li> <li>- 'I learned more about people in other cultures / everyday surroundings, because in books, suddenly you come very close to different people with other philosophies of life.'</li> </ul>
<p>6. Learning about others as agents: behavioral characterizations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understandings of how people can behave or react in general or specifically</li> <li>- Awareness of consequences, strangeness and unpredictability of behavior</li> <li>- Awareness of influential behavior (actively <i>having</i> influence; compare to 3)</li> <li>- Evaluations of behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'By reading 'Sonny boy', I learned that people can be very unfriendly, only because you have a different skin color.'</li> <li>- 'Because of 'Bezonken rood', I know that characters not always react in a predictable way.'</li> <li>- 'What I know now because of the literature lessons, is that people in difficult situations can influence each other very much. This can have positive or negative consequences.'</li> <li>- 'In literature lessons, I learned that I don't like it when people are being selfish.'</li> </ul>
<p>7. Learning about one's future (un)desired selves: responses on what one does (not) want</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No subcategories</li> </ul>	<p>to be, do, become or achieve.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'Through books, I know what kind of man and father I would like to be in the future.'</li> <li>- 'By reading 'Gelukkige slaven', I discovered I never want to be blinded by money.'</li> </ul>

- 
8. Learning lessons for life: responses on awareness of the importance, relativity or complexity of (social) phenomena, often formulated using the inclusive 'you' and 'we'. Experiences are close to the self, but are (implicitly) extended to 'everyone'.
- No subcategories
    - 'In literature lessons, I experienced that we should be very glad we're so well off.'
    - 'I learned through literature lessons that every culture should be equal.'
    - 'When reading stories, I noticed you should not judge people too quickly.'
    - 'By reading 'Grip', I learned you actually don't have a grip on anything (life, time).'
    - 'I noticed that by reading books, I realize better that life is not as easy as it seems.'
- 
9. One's negations of learning: statements of having learned little or nothing about the self or others.
- No subcategories
    - 'I did not learn anything about myself in literature lessons.'
    - 'Further, I didn't learn much about others.'
- 
10. Other responses about the self and other people, which do not fit in the categories above.
- No subcategories
    - 'I noticed that I do believe there's something, but I don't think it is God.'
    - 'We did a bit of literary history, Charles novels. If I had to learn something, it is that actually everyone wants to be a lifesaver.'
-

Additionally, a number of responses about oneself and others were evaluations, which referred to one's own and others' (assumed) *attitudes* toward encounters with literature. We distinguished five categories (see Table 6).

*Table 6. Categories of evaluative responses, with examples of students' responses*

Type of evaluation	Example
1. Positive evaluations of reading and (specific types or works of) literature	- 'During literature lessons, I learned that I find literature quite interesting.'
2. Negative evaluations of reading and (specific types or works of) literature	- 'By reading 'Erik of het kleine insectenboek', I discovered that I find it nonsense.'
3. Positive evaluations of (specific activities during) literature lessons	- 'During literature lessons (and just before), I am always very cheerful and I always try to help people who don't understand it.'
4. Negative evaluations of (specific activities during) literature lessons	- 'Many of the lessons were not very useful for me, in particular the lessons about how you can best read and understand a text.'
5. Unclear or other evaluations (e.g., of school subjects, movies)	- 'I think it's nicer to watch a movie because you quickly miss out on details and therefore you have to watch the movie again.'

**B. Learning experiences about literature and its context.** In addition to responses concerning the self and others, we distinguished six categories about literature and its context (see Table 7).

*Table 7. Categories of learning experiences about literature and context, with examples of students' responses*

Topic	Example
1. Literary history	- 'By reading 'Mariken van Nimwegen' [a medieval text], I learned that the literature in former times was very different.'
2. Depth and profundity of literature	- 'Because of the lessons, I know it's not true that a book is written just like that, but that there's often much more to it.'
3. Range and scope of literature	- 'Through literature lessons, I learned that there are many different types of literature.'
4. Function or deploy of literature	- 'People don't write a book just to entertain other people, but also to make something clear or to spread a message.'
5. Authors	- 'I learned in the literature lessons that many authors insult other authors because of a different literary vision.'
6. Other responses about literature and context	- 'In many stories you see many things coming back every time. God, in particular.'

**C. Irrelevant or incomprehensible learning experiences.** Some learning experiences were irrelevant or incomprehensible, for example: 'I learned that you should not knock on some people's doors, because someone might chase after you with a hatchet', which seemed a generalization of a book passage to the real world, and 'We also went far back in time. Thus in the culture of that time', without further specification of what this student learned.

### 2.5 Description of Student Data

In total, students reported 2997 learning experiences ( $M = 10.09$ ,  $SD = 4.38$ ), ranging from 2 to 29 experiences in a learner report. On a 5-points scale, students indicated that completing the learner report was moderately difficult ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = .97$ ). There was no significant correlation between number of learning experiences and perceived difficulty, which indicated that students who found the task more difficult did not write down fewer learning experiences, and vice versa.

On the Author Recognition Test, students scored on average 8.91 ( $SD = 5.27$ , range -2-26). Pre-university students scored significantly higher ( $M = 10.74$ ,  $SD = 5.38$ ) than higher general education students ( $M = 6.02$ ,  $SD = 3.52$ ):  $t(295) = 8.34$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, pre-university students were on average older and more experienced with literature education than higher general education students. Yet, even when we only took 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade into account, pre-university students ( $n = 113$ ) scored on average 10.35 ( $SD = 5.79$ ) and were still more familiar with fiction than higher general education students:  $t(226) = 6.85$ ,  $p < .001$ . School levels thus differed in familiarity with fiction, which indicated the validity of the ART.

### 2.6 Description of Teacher Data

We used TALE-Q factor scores to map similarities and differences among teachers on three aspects of their teaching: 1) their attitude toward literary reading; 2) their self-reported practice in terms of students' roles in classroom processes; and 3) their intentions with regard to teaching content. We compared teachers' mean scores on each aspect of teaching to the overall mean of that aspect. In Table 8, an A represents a more analytical-interpretative approach to an aspect of teaching, indicated by scores of at least one standard deviation ( $SD$ ) below the mean, whereas a P indicates the opposite: the teacher scored at least one standard deviation above the mean, suggesting a more personal-experiential approach to that aspect of teaching. In this way, Table 8 demonstrates the overlap as well as the variety among teachers: some of them centered around the mean on each of the three aspects (i.e., Eva, Peter and Tess), whereas the others showed unique patterns of A's, P's and neutral aspects of teaching.

Table 8. Indications of approach to aspects of teaching, based on teachers' TALE-Q scores

Teacher	Aspect 1 Attitude toward literary reading		Aspect 2 Students' roles in classroom processes		Aspect 3 Intended teaching content	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	3.19	.63	2.74	.71	3.21	.48
Alice				A		
Anna		A				A
Daniel						A
Jeff		A		A		
Eva						
Peter						
Tess						
Karl				P		P
Margaret						P
Martin				P		
Milly				P		
Olaf		P				
Rebecca		P				

Note. A = analytical-interpretative approach to aspect; P = personal-experiential approach to aspect; empty cell = neutral approach to aspect. Teachers' names are pseudonyms.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1 Frequencies of Learning Experiences

Table 9 demonstrates which types and categories of learning experiences students reported most frequently. Calculation of the percentages in the middle column of Table 9 was based on the total number of reported experiences.

Table 9. Frequencies of categories of learning experiences

Category of learning experiences	% of all learning experiences	% of students responding at least once
A. Oneself and others	86.6	100.0
Content learning experiences: learning about...	63.8	99.3
Oneself and others as persons	19.6	80.1
Oneself and others as literary readers	13.3	64.6
Others as agents	7.0	48.8
One's lessons for life	5.2	33.3
Other responses on roles of selves	4.3	32.3
Negations of learning about self or others	4.3	26.3
Others in former times and other cultures	4.1	29.2
Oneself and others as thinkers	2.6	19.2
Oneself and others as learners / comprehensive readers	1.8	14.5
One's future (un)desired selves	1.6	12.5
Evaluations	23.0	81.8
Positive evaluations of reading and literature	9.2	51.2
Negative evaluations of reading and literature	6.2	38.4
Other evaluative responses	3.2	25.9
Negative evaluations of literature lessons	2.6	19.9
Positive evaluations of literature lessons	1.8	15.2
B. Literature and context	11.0	55.2
Authors	2.7	18.9
Other responses on literature and context	2.3	20.2
Literary history	2.3	16.5
Function / deploy of literature	1.5	11.4
Profundity of literature	1.2	10.8
Scope of literature	1.1	8.8
C. Other responses	2.2	19.5

Note. Middle column = percentages of total number of learning experiences ( $N = 2997$ ; categories ordered from highest to lowest frequency); right column = percentages of number of students ( $N = 297$ ) responding at least once.

The middle column of Table 9 shows that responses about oneself and others were most frequent. Most of these learning experiences were formulated in terms of personal and social content: students reported *what* they learned about themselves or others. Responses about oneself and others as persons were most frequent, covering 19.6% of all responses. For example, one student reported: 'I discovered that the variety in world views and norms and values of different people is much larger than I initially thought'. Second, responses were frequently about oneself and others as literary readers (13.3%), such as 'When reading, you feel like being the main character. I experienced her experiences'. This category was followed by responses about others' behavior (7.0%), for example, 'By reading *Sonny boy*, I learned that people can be very unfriendly, only because you have a different skin



color', and lessons for life (5.2%), with responses like 'I noticed that by reading books, I realize better that life is not as easy as it seems', and 'I learned through literature lessons that every culture should be equal.' Learning about others in former times and other cultures, about oneself and others as thinkers and about one's future (un)desired selves proved to be rather small categories. Almost a quarter of all responses were evaluations.

Percentages of the total number of responses could be influenced by a few students who repeatedly reported similar responses, either to emphasize them or because they could not think of other experiences. We therefore calculated for each category the percentage of students who reported at least one learning experience in that category. The right column of Table 9 shows that nearly all students reported at least one content learning experience about themselves or others (99%), most of them about oneself and others as persons, oneself and others as literary readers, and others as agents. Although the percentages in the middle and right column differ, the order of proportions is similar. Thus, the effect of students repeating themselves in their learner reports seemed negligible, and therefore we deemed it justifiable to perform further analyses on percentages of all learning experiences.

For only three categories of content learning experiences, there was a weak linear association between students' familiarity with fiction and the number of learning experiences they reported: for learning about oneself and others as persons ( $r = .21, p < .001$ ), for learning about others as agents ( $r = .18, p = .002$ ) and for learning about one's future (un)desired selves ( $r = .21, p < .001$ ). These few weak correlations suggested that reporting more learning experiences about oneself and others not necessarily went hand in hand with a higher familiarity with fiction.

### 3.2 Relations between Aspects of Teaching and Learning Experiences

Our second research question concerned whether students' learning experiences are related to their teacher's approaches to literature education. We first calculated correlations between teaching aspects and students' content learning experiences (i.e., the mean frequency for each class on each category). For *Students' roles in classroom processes*, we found rather strong significant correlations with two categories of learning experiences: learning about oneself and others as literary readers ( $n = 13, r = .62, p = .025$ ) and learning about others as agents ( $n = 13, r = .56, p = .045$ ). Students of teachers who said to stimulate interaction and classroom autonomy thus reported more learning experiences in these two categories. For *Teachers' attitude toward literary reading* and *Intended teaching content* we found no significant correlations with categories of learning experiences.

Table 8 showed, for each teaching aspect, which teachers reported a more pronounced analytical-interpretative practice (i.e., A's) or a more pronounced personal-experiential practice (i.e., P's). This enabled us to examine whether differences in students' content learning experiences could be found in relation to approaches to teaching aspects. For each teaching aspect, we grouped students of A-teachers and

students of P-teachers. We assessed differences in frequencies of content learning experiences through independent sample *t*-tests. Results are presented below, accompanied by comparisons of ART scores and evaluations of literary reading and literature lessons, because these student variables may offer additional explanations for potential differences in learning experiences.

**Attitude toward literary reading.** Four teachers deviated at least one standard deviation from the mean: Jeff and Anna reported a distinct analytical-interpretative approach to this teaching aspect, whereas Olaf and Rebecca reported a distinct personal-experiential approach. We found that students taught by Jeff and Anna reported fewer learning experiences about themselves and others as literary readers ( $n = 36$ ,  $M = 1.00$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) than students taught by Olaf and Rebecca ( $n = 45$ ,  $M = 1.78$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ). Levene's test indicated unequal variances ( $F = 13.37$ ,  $p < .001$ ), so degrees of freedom were adjusted from 79 to 75. The difference was statistically significant:  $t(75) = 2.58$ ,  $p = .012$ .

This result could not be attributed to Olaf's and Rebecca's students being more familiar with fiction than Jeff's and Anna's students: we found no significant difference on ART scores between both groups. However, Olaf's and Rebecca's students reported more positive evaluations of reading literature ( $M = .82$ ,  $SD = .96$ ) than Anna's and Jeff's students ( $M = .39$ ,  $SD = .60$ ). Due to unequal variances ( $F = 8.96$ ,  $p = .004$ ), degrees of freedom were adjusted from 79 to 75. The difference was statistically significant ( $t(75) = 2.48$ ,  $p = .015$ ). For students' negative evaluations of literary reading and their evaluations of literature lessons, we found no significant differences between both groups.

**Students' roles in classroom processes.** Five teachers deviated at least one standard deviation from the mean: Alice and Jeff reported more teacher-led classroom processes, whereas Karl, Martin and Milly reported more student interaction and student autonomy in their literature classrooms (see Table 8). For six categories, we found significant differences in frequencies of learning experiences, as presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Differences in frequencies of learning experiences between students taught by Alice and Jeff and students taught by Karl, Martin and Milly

Category	Mean [SD] per group		t-test result
	Alice, Jeff (n = 39)	Karl, Martin, Milly (n = 74)	
Oneself and others as literary readers	1.05 [1.23]	1.99 [1.92]	$t(107) = 3.14, p = .002$
Oneself and others as persons	1.26 [1.21]	1.96 [1.64]	$t(111) = 2.36, p = .020$
Others in former times / other cultures	.21 [.47]	.58 [1.09]	$t(108) = 2.56, p = .012$
Others as agents	.46 [.68]	.89 [1.11]	$t(109) = 2.55, p = .012$
One's future (un)desired selves	.05 [.22]	.19 [.46]	$t(111) = 2.15, p = .034$
One's self-extended lessons for life	.41 [.94]	.86 [1.25]	$t(98) = 2.17, p = .032$

Note. For nearly all tests, Levene's test indicated unequal variances; degrees of freedom were adjusted from 111 for category 'literary readers' ( $F = 11.85, p = .001; df$  to 107), category 'former times' ( $F = 10.30, p = .002; df$  to 108), category 'agents' ( $F = 5.18, p = .025; df$  to 108), category 'future selves' ( $F = 14.49, p < .001; df$  remained 111), category 'lessons for life' ( $F = 13.83, p < .001; df$  to 98).

Results showed that the students of Karl, Martin and Milly, who favor interaction and student autonomy in their lessons, reported more learning experiences in these six categories than Alice's and Jeff's students.

However, these differences may additionally be explained by students' familiarity with fiction: Karl's, Martin's and Milly's students ( $n = 74$ ) obtained higher ART scores ( $M = 8.57, SD = 4.86$ ) than Alice's and Jeff's students ( $n = 39, M = 5.21, SD = 3.05$ ). Due to unequal variances ( $F = 6.47, p = .012$ ), degrees of freedom were adjusted from 111 to 108. We found a statistically significant difference:  $t(108) = 4.51, p < .001$ . Similarly, students of Karl, Martin and Milly wrote more positive evaluations of literary reading ( $M = 1.35, SD = 1.40$ ) than Alice's and Jeff's students ( $M = .62, SD = .96$ ). Again, Levene's test indicated unequal variances ( $F = 5.28, p = .023$ ), so degrees of freedom were adjusted from 111 to 103. The difference was statistically significant:  $t(103) = 3.28, p = .001$ . We found no significant differences for negative evaluations of literary reading and for evaluations of literature lessons.

**Intended teaching content.** As Table 8 shows, four teachers deviated at least one standard deviation from the mean: Daniel and Anna reported to strive for more analytical-interpretative goals and to choose texts that concur with these goals, whereas Karl and Margaret reported more personal-experiential aims and text choices. We compared the frequencies of their students' learning experiences, but found for none of the categories a significant difference between both groups.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Does reading literary fiction teach us something about who we are, what other people can be like and how we can relate to them and their (inner) lives? According to previous research, this appears to be the case for (avid) adult readers, but these

studies have told us little about how *adolescents* perceive personal and social learning in the institutional context of the literature classroom. We therefore asked students to reflect in writing on the learning experiences about themselves and others they gained from their literature education. The present study shows that students report learning experiences concerning self- and social perceptions which they attribute to (aspects of) their literature education: reading literature for school, and attending literature lessons.

Our second research question concerns relations between students' learning experiences and their teachers' approaches to literature education. Based on the results, we ought to be careful to conclude the existence of such relations. The extent to which teachers report to promote interaction and student autonomy in their literature classroom (the aspect *Students' roles in classroom processes*) is positively correlated with frequencies of students' learning experiences about themselves and others as literary readers, and about others as agents. For the two other aspects, *Teachers' attitude toward literary reading* and *Intended teaching content*, there are no linear relations with students' learning experiences. When focusing on teachers who most pronouncedly favor an analytical-interpretative approach or a personal-experiential approach to an aspect of teaching, significant differences in some categories of their students' learning experiences occur: for *Teachers' attitude toward literary reading*, there is a difference in one category and for *Students' roles in classroom processes*, there are differences in six categories. In all cases, students taught by teachers with a personal-experiential approach have reported more learning experiences that demonstrate insights in themselves and others than students of teachers with an analytical-interpretative approach to an aspect of teaching. However, students' familiarity with fiction and their evaluations of literary reading may also offer an explanation for more frequent reports of learning about themselves and others.

#### 4.1 *Perceived Personal and Social Learning Through Literature Education*

Most often, amongst the students in this study, the perceived impact of literature education on their self- and social perceptions takes the form of personal characterizations: as subcategories and examples of student responses show (see Table 5, category 3), students report that literature education offers them insights into their own personality, understandings of how people are, and notions of empathy or sympathy with others. These latter statements are of particular interest: they incorporate learning to imagine what it is like to be in the shoes of real other human beings and to feel for them. For example, when asked what was learned about others through reading books for school, a seventeen year-old girl writes: 'I learned to look a bit further than my own surroundings. I can better imagine what it is like to be in other people's situations (at least try to do so)'. It seems that literary stories or literature lessons may function as mediators between students and the social world around them.

Even though Kidd and Castano's (2013) finding that reading literary fiction improves Theory of Mind was not replicated by other researchers, the present study suggests that students, through reading literary fiction, sometimes *do* imagine what it is like to experience someone else's situations and feelings. Whether literary reading may result in improvement or growth of Theory of Mind or related empathic skills remains a question to be answered, in particular for literary reading in a secondary school context.

Furthermore, perceived personal and social learning through literature education often refers to literary reading itself: students report to have learned about their own literary reading habits and about different views on literature, but also report experiences of narrative empathy and sympathy (cf. Keen, 2007; Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015). These empathic and sympathetic engagements with literary characters and situations are in line with the results of previous studies of adolescents' reader responses (Appleyard, 1991; Charlton, Pette & Burbaum, 2004; Rothbauer, 2011; Van der Bolt, 2000).

Next, almost half of the participants reports perceived learning about people's behavior. Most of these learning experiences are formulated in a descriptive manner: students say to have learned *how* people can behave and sometimes evaluate other people's behavior. They note, for instance, that people can be dishonest, cruel or unpredictable, or that they can behave deceptively. These descriptions and evaluations of behavior seem rather basic learning experiences, compared to, for example, self-other comparisons, empathic or sympathetic engagements with characters or real people, or lessons for life, which appear to reflect more profound insights than observing how people can act and expressing an opinion about that.

Self-extended lessons for life form another large category: they are reported by one third of the students. For instance, students report that they have come to appreciate their own lives, to have learned valuable lessons about social (in)equality or prejudices, or to have realized they cannot control everything in life. These lessons for life seem typical adolescent responses. As Applebee (1978) noted, readers of about sixteen years old consider literature as 'one of many statements of how life might be understood' (p. 125) and reflect on whether it changed their own views on life. In other words, adolescent readers may transfer ideas and experiences from within a book to their own, outer-textual world. They reflect on what kind of impact a work of literature may have had on their own life, as this student statement demonstrates: 'Because of reading *'Die zomer'*, I know that you don't always have to follow your friends, but that you should choose your own way'.

In addition, some categories of learning experiences emerge relatively infrequently in students' learner reports, such as understandings of people in former times and other cultures. These learning experiences seem to suggest that literature education may sometimes evoke historical empathy in students, which refers to 'the ability to see and judge the past in its own terms by trying to understand the mentality, frames of reference, beliefs, values, intentions and actions of historical agents [...]' (Yilmaz, 2007, p. 331; see also Davis, Yeager & Foster, 2001), as well as

change their attitudes toward multiculturalism and ‘the other’ (Hakemulder, 2000; Johnson, 2013). Furthermore, students sometimes report to experience literature as a catalyst for thinking (cf. Appleyard, 1991). Whereas these responses are in this study rather infrequent, there is growing attention for the potential of literature education as a stimulus for critical thinking (e.g., Bean & Moni, 2003; Faust, 2000; Koek, Janssen, Hakemulder & Rijlaarsdam, 2016). Finally, in line with findings by Richardson and Eccles (2007), we assumed that the participants in this study would also report to experience explorations of their possible future selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). However, such experiences are reported by only 12.5% of the students, which is a rather small percentage compared to many other content learning experiences. An explanation may be that Richardson and Eccles asked for responses about ‘voluntary reading’ (p. 342), while in our study students reflect on compulsory reading and literature lessons. It is conceivable that literature education that allows for (more) freedom in book choice might result in more students reflecting on what kind of person they would or would not like to become.

In addition to learning experiences concerning self-perceptions and social perceptions, part of the learning experiences concerns literature and its context, which concurs with responses found by Janssen (1998). She distinguished, for instance, responses on ‘literary works’, and ‘literary-historical backgrounds’, including biographical knowledge of authors. The same holds true for the evaluative responses the students in this study report: Janssen found similar responses, and labeled them as positive and negative attitudes. For this type of learning, thus, the results of this study also concur with results of previous research.

#### 4.2 *Aspects of Teaching, Perceived Learning Outcomes and Student Variables*

We have shown that in their literature education, students perceive a variety of personal and social learning outcomes. It has been challenging to relate this perceived impact of literature education to the multidimensional array of teaching practices in the literature classroom. For the purposes of this study, we made use of a continuum, ranging from an analytical-interpretative to a personal-experiential extreme. We are aware that this opposition may seem rather obsolete in light of recent research (e.g., Beach et al., 2011; Van de Ven & Doecke, 2011; Wilhelm, 2007), but this does not mean that literature teachers are able to bridge the gap as well (Hillocks, 2011). Although teachers may be increasingly aware of the potential benefits of valuing their students’ experiences, in practice there appears to remain a divergence between more engaging, experiential instruction and more formalist, knowledge-oriented instruction in the literature classroom (Ives, 2012; Malo-Juvera, 2014), which may partly be due to the convenience of text analysis for testing and evaluation. Of both extremes described here, neither is ‘best’: they represent *different* approaches, here seen as a continuum, which are likely to have different outcomes as well (cf. Janssen & Rijlaarsdam, 1996).

TALE-Q scores have shown that the participating teachers, to a certain extent, differ in which perspective they emphasize: some teachers report neutral scores,

while others report to use either analytical-interpretative approaches or personal-experiential approaches. Yet, if they do so, they are not fully consistent: there is no teacher who has reported to distinctively enact either of both approaches across all three aspects of teaching.

When we compare perceived personal and social learning outcomes of students whose teachers report either an analytical-interpretative or a personal-experiential approach to an aspect of their teaching, some significant differences occur, in particular with respect to students' roles in classroom processes. In classes of teachers who report to attend more to classroom interaction about literary experiences, to students' personal preferences and to (a certain degree of) freedom of choice, students report more personal and social learning experiences than students in classes of teachers who report to provide more teacher-led literature instruction with limited interaction and less freedom of choice.

This result concurs with previous studies that emphasize the importance of agency and freedom of choice in the literature classroom (e.g., Beach et al., 2011; Lenters, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002) as well as the potential benefits of interaction and dialogue (e.g., Applebee et al., 2003; Eeds & Wells, 1989; Galda & Beach, 2001; Nystrand, 1997). The current study expands these insights to perceived personal and social learning in the literature classroom, although we should bear in mind that no causal relations can be detected.

In addition, student variables seem to play a role. Results indicate that the students of teachers who report more interactive and autonomous student roles not only write down more personal and social learning experiences, but that they also evaluate literary reading more positively and that they are more familiar with fiction than students of teachers who report to apply more teacher-led instruction. There may be complex mediating and/or moderating relations among students' perceived learning outcomes, their evaluations of literary reading and literature lessons, their familiarity with fiction and their teachers' approaches. While being beyond the scope of this paper, further study of such relations would certainly add to the existing body of research on literature education.

#### 4.3 Limitations

This study is based on students' self-reports. Even though the learner report is a validated instrument, we should take into account that completing the task can be challenging. We are quite sure that not all internal learning experiences are explicated via this instrument: it may just be the tip of the iceberg. Yet, the small share of irrelevant or incomprehensible responses strengthens the validity of the learner report: in general, participants were inclined and able to report relevant learning experiences, and did not indicate to find the task very difficult.

A second limitation is that the conclusions of this study are mostly based on frequencies of students' learning experiences, which does not tell us anything about how an experience affects an *individual* student. By relying on frequencies, valuable and insightful learning experiences with much significance for individual

students may remain under the radar. In future research, asking students to reflect on their learner report in a face-to-face conversation with the researcher may reveal which experiences have been most meaningful to them.

Furthermore, the representativeness of the sample can be questioned. The student sample size ( $N = 297$ ) is satisfactory and has enabled us to achieve variety in terms of school level and grades, which is reflected in the range of ART scores: we have not merely included avid readers. However, as a consequence of keeping the amount of qualitative student data manageable, the teacher sample is relatively small ( $N = 13$ ). Although there are some indications that teachers' approaches to students' roles in classroom processes are related to personal and social learning outcomes as perceived by students, results are by no means generalizable to all Dutch literature teachers.

Moreover, teacher data are also based on self-reports. For a small sample, the TALE-Q has shown to measure approaches to literature education on several teaching aspects in a reliable way. The fact that different learning outcomes are found for different approaches to an aspect of teaching, as reported by the teachers themselves, strengthens the validity of the TALE-Q. However, we have not confirmed through observations whether teachers actually enact what they claim to do, due to limited time and resources. Classroom observations would be of added value in future studies: now that approaches to teaching aspects appear to be related to students' gain of personal and social insights, it is recommendable to study what teachers and students actually *do* in literature classes.

With regard to the TALE-Q, data analysis is subject to a statistical limitation. We have applied multiple *t*-tests, which was appropriate in terms of the nature of the data set. However, multiple testing may increase the chance of finding significant results. Next to students' familiarity with fiction and their evaluations of literary reading as additional explanations, then, multiple testing is yet another reason to cautiously consider the results on relations between approaches to teaching aspects and students' learning experiences.

A final limitation is that we cannot draw any conclusions on growth or development in learning about oneself and others through literature education. We therefore suggest that small-sample longitudinal cohort studies (cf. Witte, 2008) can provide more insights in this kind of development.

#### *4.4 Pedagogical Implications*

The Dutch Institute for Curriculum Development (2015) contends that literature education has the capacity to expand students' social and cultural horizons and to stimulate their empathic capabilities. In this respect, our finding that Dutch adolescents report to attribute valuable lessons about themselves, other people and the world around them to literature education, is encouraging: the objectives mentioned by the Institute for Curriculum Development appear to be met, mainly in terms of the larger categories we have described above. However, some other categories occur less often, like reflecting on oneself and others as thinkers and on the



future self, which suggests there is room for widening the scope of personally and socially relevant literature education. If literature education has the capacity to impact adolescents' sense of self and their social understandings, we might want to stimulate these insights, either by focusing even more on experiences students may already be familiar with or on experiences which seem rather infrequent.

This study supports the notion that, for adolescents, literary fiction can be a vehicle for gaining insights in themselves and others, even when reading takes place in secondary schools. The weak correlations between students' reported content learning experiences about themselves and others and their familiarity with fiction suggests that adolescents do not necessarily need to be 'bookworms' to learn about themselves and others: students who are less familiar with fiction have also reported valuable learning experiences. Reading and discussing a relevant and thought-provoking story may have impact on students' personal and social insights, even for students with a low reading motivation. Moreover, if students are allowed to make their own choices, this may facilitate their learning even more (cf. Lenters, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002), as is exemplified by this response of an eighteen year-old girl: 'I learned not much through the books I read for school, not about myself nor about others, partly because I often don't like those books'. Responses like these also concur with the role of transportation into a story (cf. Green & Brock, 2000). If students do not feel transported into the texts they read and discuss, learning about themselves and others may be less likely to occur.

The main contribution of the present study is the description of the kinds of personal and social insights students report to take away from literature education. To our knowledge, this study is the first to systematically analyze a large number of student responses on this particular topic. The study further shows that these learning experiences occur in a complex, multidimensional context. Relations between approaches to certain aspects of teaching and perceived personal and social learning in the literature classroom cannot be pinpointed easily, and apply only to the Dutch educational context. Yet, there are some indications that teachers' practices with regard to the role of the student in the literature classroom are related to what students report to have learned about themselves and others. This implies that teachers and educational designers *can* engage in educational approaches that aim at enhancing these kinds of personal and social insights.

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