

AN EMPIRICALLY GROUNDED THEORY OF LITERARY DEVELOPMENT

Teachers' pedagogical content knowledge on literary development
in upper secondary education

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Abstract. Teachers encounter immense variety in literary competence among students in their secondary school classrooms. Yet, little is known about how they perceive and deal with this variety. Moreover, little is known about the literary development that students undergo during their school career and the different levels of development that can be identified. The aim of the present study is to design an instrument that can help to describe relevant differences in literary competence between students and to specify the individual literary development process of students in upper secondary education (aged 15-18). To tie in with teaching practice, we designed a research method by which we could explore the shared pedagogical content knowledge of a diverse group of six expert teachers. With the aid of questionnaires and panel discussions, data was collected on the following question: what does a student with a particular level of literary competence demonstrate with a particular literary text? The data analysis resulted in 14 indicators of literary competence which we then used to describe six successive competence levels. These levels are validated by both developmental theory and the practice of literature teaching.

Key words: literary competence; literary development; pedagogical content knowledge; reading levels; text selection.

1. INTRODUCTION

Which literary texts are able to stimulate student literary development under which circumstances is one of the key questions in literature teaching (Beach, Appleman, Hynds & Wilhelm, 2006, 2011; Nikolajeva, 2010). It seems to have become even more pressing since the 1990s, as numerous countries switched to a more student-oriented curriculum and as teachers seek to respond more effectively to the differences they encounter in their classrooms (Bonset & Rijlaarsdam, 2004). This also happened in the Netherlands, where a major overhaul of education saw the introduction of a student-oriented curriculum in 1997 as the government made 'taking account of differences' a priority area within the changes. The switch to a student-oriented approach had implications for the formal examination syllabus for literature education, with the emphasis moving to the literary development of students (De Kievit & Wagemans, 1996). For us, this revamp of education was the impetus to begin a study of student literary development in upper secondary classes. Before examining these issues in more detail, we will first explain them within the Dutch context so that the reader can better understand this article.

1.1 Dutch Delta

In the Netherlands the school subject Dutch is made up of different subcurricula which have little to do with one another. The main emphasis is on the language arts and literature. Of these two subcurricula, which are taught by the same teacher, the domain of literature allows for the greatest freedom. Teachers themselves decide which texts to work on, and decide which objectives to emphasize and how much time to devote to literature. This liberalism is characteristic of Dutch literature teaching and has been the subject of on-going discussions about the scope, content and aims of literature teaching. Since the 1960s these discussions have

covered issues like how learners should interact with literary texts, what role literary texts play in society and what learners need to know to become good, independent readers of literature. The aims changed over time in response to changing ideas about teaching the mother tongue in general (Griffioen & Damsma, 1978; Ten Brinke, 1978; Van de Ven, 2011) and in response to changes in the academic literary domain (Van de Ven, 1996; Van Schooten, 2005; Verboord, 2005). Teachers moved from a focus on 'work, author and literary history' in 1950-60, to 'work as immanent text' (1970s), to 'work as reflection of society' (late 1970s) and to 'work as constructed by the reader' (late 1980s).

Studies of teaching practice reveal that these different approaches have all left their mark on the landscape of Dutch literature teaching (Rijlaarsdam & Janssen, 1996; Van de Ven, 1996; Janssen, 1998; Witte, Janssen & Rijlaarsdam, 2005; Van Schooten 2005; Verboord 2005). This diversity of approaches looks as a river delta in which 'mainstream' approaches flow alongside a host of more minor brooks and streams. In other words, there are just as many literature teaching curricula as there are teachers. This indicates the literature curriculum as one of the 'ill-structured domains' (Spiro, Feltovich, Jacobson & Coulson, 1991). Whereas well-structured domains are subjects where most researchers and teachers agree on the aims and structure, ill-structured domains are characterized by an unsystematic structure and a multitude of visions.

Rijlaarsdam and Janssen (1996) have mapped this 'delta', identifying four main approaches: (1) cultural literacy, (2) aesthetic awareness, (3) social awareness and (4) personal development. Both the cultural-historical and literary-aesthetic positions have a long tradition and are well-established in classroom practice. Although many teachers have embraced the student-centred (or reader-centred) approach since the late 1980s, they still have difficulties with its pedagogical operationalization (Ravesloot, 1992; Janssen, 1998; Witte, 2008). Teachers are not trained in the reader-centred approach and also lack the resources. During their university studies in Dutch, and before that at secondary school, they are taught the dominant cultural-historical and literary-aesthetic approaches. School texts also emphasize this content (literary theory and history) and offer neither student nor teacher support in developing literary competence. School texts that took a different approach were used infrequently (Witte, 1994).

1.2 Channelling the delta

Freedom of education is enshrined in the Dutch constitution, giving teachers and schools a degree of autonomy. We use 'degree' with purpose, because there are of course rules attached to founding a school and the final central examinations in secondary education are regulated by the government. In addition, the government has attempted to channel the many different 'streams' in the Dutch educational delta. In the 1990s the learning-to-learn paradigm became the focus of cur-

riculum design in Dutch education. 1997 saw a full-scale overhaul of the educational system and the introduction of what is called the 'study house'. Study house is a metaphor for a pedagogic approach based on activity and independence. Sets of attainment targets and exam syllabuses were implemented to regulate this process. The curriculum for Dutch language and literature was divided up into four domains (reading skills, writing skills, oral skills and literary development) to be taught in parallel. The examination syllabus for literature comprises three subdomains: literary development (e.g. reporting personal reading experiences), literary theory (using theoretical terms to analyse and interpret literary texts), and literary history (presenting an overview of Dutch literary history) (Stichting Leerplanontwikkeling, 1996). A student's personal literary development was allocated a key place in the new examination syllabus for literature. Students were required to read an average of four literary works by Dutch writers a year and to report on their reading experience and appraisal in a reading log. Depending on the educational track, teachers were advised to administer an oral exam on eight or twelve books based on the students' reading records, which contained their reading logs and reflections on their literary development. This led to changes in the content of the oral exams. Whereas discussion used to centre on cultural-historical backgrounds and the interpretation of a work, it now also covered the student's personal reading experience and appraisals. As these personal discussions revealed the students' actual reading performance, teachers became even more concerned about how to encourage the development of their students' literary competence.

1.3 Differentiation

To gauge their students' literary starting level and attitude to reading, many teachers ask students at the start of upper secondary education (grade 10, age 15) to write a 'reading autobiography': an account about their attitude to reading and their development as a reader of fiction. There are big differences between students at this age, as the following passages from reading autobiographies show:

Rutger (age 15, grade 10)

'I don't read books anymore these days. I like to read specialist literature about agriculture, like *The Farm*, *Harvest* and *The Tractor*. But I do have to read books for school. I'll find that tough because my entire family simply hates reading books. My father has only ever finished three books. Just like me, at the moment. (...) I expect the reading record is going to be quite a tough task for me that will take up a lot of my time. I think it's a waste of time, but I'll probably learn something from it.'

Cécile (age 15, grade 10)

'Last year I read all the books by Arnon Grunberg. I like his style of writing. In some ways he reminds me of the way I write and think. I read Ronald Giphart on the advice of my friends, but I think his writing is a load of rubbish. (...) Last summer I wanted to read more books, different books. I got a pile of 'good reads for beginners' from my parents and my brother, and I read books by Françoise Sagan, Willem Frederik Her-

mans and others. I then started reading *What is literature?* by Jean Paul Sartre. Grunberg, Hermans and Mulisch are my favourite writers at the moment.’¹

Teachers wishing to encourage the development of literary competence of all their students must be able to differentiate and must know the zone of proximal development of their students. This means knowing which literary texts and reading activities will help a student progress to a higher level (Vygotsky, 1978; Bandura, 1986; Schunk 2000). However, differentiation seems to be a difficult teacher’s skill; international studies show that few teachers master this skill (Hattie, 2009; Kyrakides, Creemers & Antoniou, 2009). Dutch teachers are no different from their counterparts in other countries. All PISA reports (2000, 2003, 2006, 2009) have shown that Dutch teachers achieve relatively good results for the middle group of students, but that they fall short when it comes to weak and very good students. Apart from the practical problem of the heavy teaching load in Dutch secondary schools (a fulltime job means 26-29 lessons a week and 8 to 10 groups of 25 to 32 students), there is a cognitive problem. Teachers do not have an adequate mental frame of reference for observing, labelling and classifying differences between students, let alone being able to identify and label the different stages of development (Schunk, 2000; Witte, 2008; Hattie, 2009). It is against this background that we began our research into an empirical basis for a literary frame of reference that teachers could use to distinguish different levels of literary competence.

1.4 Shared pedagogical content knowledge

Research reports on the success or failure of educational change often show that the implementation of research findings is unsuccessful if it does not tie in with the experiences, knowledge and views of teachers (Kennedy 1997; National Research Council 2002). This is something we wish to avoid in our study. An important prerequisite for successful implementation is that the outcomes should be recognizable to teachers (Van de Ven 1996; Kennedy 1997; Verloop, Van Driel & Meijer 2001). This is why we have taken the shared pedagogical content knowledge of teachers as our starting point (Shulman 1986). Shulman defines this type of practical knowledge as

‘... that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding’ (Shulman, 1986: 8).

To formulate a theory about student literary development in upper secondary education, we will take as our starting point the pedagogical content knowledge that teachers share concerning different levels of literary competence. This knowledge will enable us to gain an understanding of which literary competence levels teach-

¹ *Arnon Grunberg, Willem Frederik Hermans and Harry Mulisch are well-known, canonical Dutch authors, while Ronald Giphart is very popular among students.*

ers distinguish in practice. With this knowledge, we can lay an empirical foundation for a more structured curriculum for literature teaching.

2. LITERARY DEVELOPMENT IN AN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

In the context of education, literary development is primarily a socialization process (Garbe, 2009). Graf (1995) and Schön (1995) have used reading biographies to conduct retrospective research into the literary socialization of children between the ages of two and eighteen. Garbe (2009) summarized some of the findings of their research. In the literary socialization process, she distinguishes intrinsic and extrinsic development factors and two critical development stages – primary and secondary literary initiation. Primary literary initiation occurs within the family, and secondary literary initiation takes place mainly in upper secondary education (grades 10-12).

As well as internal development factors, such as brain function and socio-emotional and cognitive development in adolescents, there are extrinsic factors that play a key role in the literary development process (Alexander & Fox, 2011). Thus we saw above with students Rutger and Cécile just how powerful the influence of the home environment can be. The teaching of literature also influences the literary development of students. Students are initiated into literature and culture within the institutional environment of education (e.g. Hirsch, 1987; Purves & Pradl, 2003; Beach et al., 2006, 2011). In upper secondary classes in particular, students are guided through new literary experiences. They often are stimulated, if not required to read texts that they would not have chosen themselves. They learn to share their reading experiences and interpretations with teachers and peers, acquiring certain rules and conventions of the genre of discourse (Beach & Marshall, 1991; Beach et al., 2006, 2011). In other words, the class is an 'interpretive community' (Fish, 1980) in which they develop their literary competence.

2.1 *Literary competence*

The term 'literary competence' comes from the literary theories of Culler (1975) and Schmidt (1980), who used it by analogy with Chomsky's linguistic competence. The term was used in various countries in relation to the objectives of literature teaching (Groeben & Vorderer 1988; Soetaert 1992). In the Netherlands the term occurred in the late 1980s, in policy documents and professional journals for literature teaching.

The meaning of 'literary competence' became misty as a result of its frequent use as a new buzz word in a range of contexts; it threatened to become a 'catch-all term' (Ibsch & Schram, 1990: 20). For Coenen (1992) this was a reason to define the term for Dutch literature teaching. She did so by means of De Groot and

Medendorp's (1986) 'semantic concept analysis', which resulted in the following definition:

The literarily competent reader is able to communicate with and about literature. The content of this communication can be highly diverse, but it does at least satisfy the requirement that the reader is able to construct coherence. This entails constructing coherence within a text to enhance comprehension, observing coherence and difference between texts, relating the text to the world (society and the personal world of the author) and relating personal judgement about the literary work to that of other readers. (...) The literarily competent reader's attitude to literature is characterized by a willingness to invest in reading and to have an open mind with regard to unusual perspectives and frames of reference. (Coenen, 1992: 73)

This definition encompasses various parameters of literary competence which together describe the final attainment level of the typical student. We see these parameters in the 'mapping sentence' (Levy, 1976) with which Coenen operationalized the concept of literary competence:

A student (S) possesses a body of characteristics (C) which together constitute a literary competence (LC) that enables that S to express particular views (V) about particular texts (T) in a particular language (L) at a particular life stage (LS) and in particular situations (Si), views which – measured by particular means (M) and in accordance with particular criteria (Cr) – reflect performance at a particular level (Coenen, 1992: 71).

The adjective 'particular' expresses the notion that LS, L, T, V, M and Cr are variable. These parameters thus offer clues for identifying different levels. The question is whether certain combinations of values on these parameters correspond to levels of literary competence as observed by teachers in their upper secondary classes. We have therefore focused our research on the core of the mapping sentence, the interaction between student and text: what does a student with a particular level of literary competence (V, Cr) demonstrate with a particular literary text in upper secondary education (LS, L, Si, M)?

2.2 *Defining levels of literary texts*

Basically we need to define the variety of literary texts and of student responses to this variety. Because reading novels dominates literary education in the Netherlands, we focus on novels. Readability formulas like the Lexile measure are not suitable for our purpose as these assume that a text has an intrinsic level of difficulty irrespective of the attitude, skills and expectations that a reader brings to the text. Nystrand (1986) has criticized this belief in the 'autonomous text', arguing instead that 'difficulty' is as much a function of what readers bring to texts as the characteristics of the text itself (O'Brien et al., 2009). A second problem with Lexile measures is that the matches are based on very limited semantic and syntactic fea-

tures, like word frequency and average sentence length. Typical features of literary texts such as narrative structure, literary speech, implicitness, ambiguity are not taken into account.

Jeanne Chall, who in 1958 was herself at the forefront of readability formulas, recognized the problem of validity. With her staff she developed a scale to qualitatively assess text difficulty (Chall, Bissex, Conard & Harris-Sharples, 1996). For five dimensions in 15 grades, this scale describes what the reader needs to bring to the text in order to read literature with understanding. Table 1 shows what this entails for grades 10, 11 and 12.

*Table 1. What the reader needs to bring to read literature with understanding
(Chall et al, 1996: 51)*

Knowledge of vocabulary	(grades 7-12) Increasing number of uncommon words; non-literal meanings.
Familiarity with sentence structures	(grades 9-15) Often complex and formal, currently uncommon structures appear in literature of earlier periods.
Depth and breadth of life experience	(grades 5-15) Capacity for complex emotions and judgments, for reflection, for imaginative grasp of the inner lives of others. Especially at the higher levels of this range, the capacity to entertain unusual perspectives and multiple values.
Cultural and literary knowledge	(grades 11-15) Cultural and literary knowledge increasingly essential for understanding literature, especially from other periods and cultures.
Skill in literary analysis	(grades 9-15) Literary analysis increasingly required for interpreting literature in academic contexts.

At first sight this scale appears to satisfy our need to describe the interaction between reader and text at different levels. Yet there are two problems that make it less suitable for our purposes. First, the scale does not describe features of texts but rather features of readers, while ignoring reader motivation and attitude. We agree with O'Brien et al. (2009) that educators need to take a realistic look at student engagement with reading at school. If students are not engaged, they cannot build proficiency. A second problem is that the classifications are very broad. As Table 1 shows, only one level is described for upper secondary education (grades 10, 11, 12), whereas we are seeking to specify different levels of competence.

3. RESEARCH QUESTION AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The core of our study is to define successively levels of literary competence in terms of the interaction between student and text on the base of shared pedagogical content knowledge of teachers. Three research questions guided our study, in which questions 1 and 2 are stepping stones to provide the answers on question 3.

1. Which levels of literary competence do teachers globally distinguish in upper secondary education, varying from a poor reader at the start of grade 10 (general higher track) to a highly competent reader at the end of grade 12 (pre-university track)?
2. Which texts do teachers consider indicative of a particular level?
3. According to teachers, (a) which features do these indicative texts possess and (b) which attitude, knowledge and skills are called upon by these features at a particular level?

3.1 Composition of the panel of teachers

Much depends on the composition of the panel of teachers. For logistical reasons, the number of panel members had to be restricted to six. To make a weighted selection of respondents, we opted for a judgement sample of 'typical cases'. These are teachers who represent a commonly occurring type and not extreme deviations (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Flick, 2002). We aimed for the greatest possible variation in terms of teaching experience (5 to 25 years), gender and philosophy of literature teaching. For the latter, teachers were interviewed about the objectives that they pursued. Using Rijlaarsdam and Janssen's (1996) typology referred to above, we identified two groups: subject matter-oriented (cultural-historical and literary-aesthetic orientation) and student-oriented (social and personal orientation). We also looked for variation in school type (private, public) and region (village, town, city) because the day-to-day work setting helps shape a teacher's pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986). Table 2 shows the general profile of the six teachers.

Table 2. General profile of the panel of teachers (names are fictitious)

	Teacher			Work setting	
	Subject matter-oriented	Student-oriented	Teaching experience (years)	School	Region
Anna (1973)	+	++	5	state	east, city
Joan (1971)	+++	++	5	private	north, city
Sil (1960)	+++	+	15	private	west, major city
Laura (1950)	++	++	23	state	north, village
Ted (1947)	+	++	28	state	east, village
Joop (1949)	+	+++	25	private	south, major city

Table 3. Summary of the data-collection process

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Aim	Distinguishing levels (question 1)	Describing literary competences at different levels (question 2 and 3)	Validation and synthesis
Object	Students in upper secondary education	Teacher panel judgements (about level of books) and utterances (about features of books and literary competences of students)	Data matrix and competence profile
Activity	Work group: determining number of levels (consensus)	Question 2 Individually: indicating level of books by means of questionnaire Question 3 Focus group: summarizing a panel discussion and categorizing teacher statements in a data matrix	Individually: evaluation of data matrix and competence profiles Work group: deciding on data matrix and competence profiles (consensus)
Result	Competence scale	Data matrix with literary competences categorized by level (and graduated reading lists)	Validated data matrix and competence profiles

3.2 Data collection and processing

Data collection and processing occurred in three stages (see Table 3). Working conferences of two half-days were organized for each stage. The conferences were spread out over a longer period to minimize the pressure on panel members' timetables. The first and third conferences took the form of a work group and the second a focus group (Swanborn 1999; Flick 2002). A work group conducts a decision-making discussion while a focus group conducts an opinion-sharing discussion. The aim of a decision-making discussion was to reach a joint decision, whereas the opinion-sharing discussion was designed to collect as many opinions as possible from panel members.

Stage 1

The key question during the first working conference was which competence levels do teachers distinguish in upper secondary education? The panel designed a competence scale to distinguish the different levels of literary competence for grades 10 and 11 of general higher education and grades 10, 11, 12 of pre-university education. The scale was to cover the range from a poor reader at the start of grade 10 (general higher education) to a competent or highly competent reader at the end of grade 12 (pre-university). The panel distinguished six levels in total and assigned them general norms for both general higher education and pre-university education (see Table 4).

Stage 2

The second stage was devoted to formulating literary competences for the six levels in the competence scale. We first asked which books were indicative of a particular level (question 2). We then examined the literary competences that books at a particular level call upon (question 3). This stage resulted in (a) lists of literary works that represent a particular level and (b) a data matrix containing levels and indicators in which the required literary competence could be described for each level.

Competence levels indicated by literary works

Using questionnaires we checked with the panel members which books were indicative of a particular level. For this purpose, we used the reading lists of the schools taking part in the study to compile a list of 170 novels, which we arranged randomly using the alphabetical order. We designed a questionnaire for each of the six levels. Teachers rated all 170 books, starting with level 1. For each book they indicated whether it was: (1) too easy for that particular level, (2) easy for that level, (3) neither easy nor difficult for that level, (4) difficult for that level, or (5) too difficult for that level.

The mean score indicates a book's optimum level. If the mean score is between 2.5 and 3.5, the book is suitable for that level; if below 2.5 or above 3.5, the book is respectively too easy or too difficult for that level. The standard deviation of the scores of the six panel members indicates the degree of agreement (i.e. the shared pedagogical content knowledge). The smaller the standard deviation, the more respondents agree about a book's level, and the more reliable, we suggest, the level indication.

Of itself, the mean is not a clear-cut indication of the degree to which a book represents a level. If a book A has a score of 3.0 at level N and got at level N+1 a score of 3.1, A is a less typical 'N book' than if book A got a score of 3.8 at level N+1. If in addition there was a marked difference in respondents' ratings (i.e. high standard deviations), the book's representativeness for level N is reduced still further. Effect size is a statistical measure for expressing what we here call representativeness (Cohen, 1988) as it establishes the size of the difference between group scores. In the Results section we will show precisely how we determined the level of representation.

Data matrix of levels of literary competence

We were using a Delphi procedure to examine literary competences in qualitative terms. We opted for a panel discussion in the form of a focus group (Swanborn, 1999) to elicit from the panel shared pedagogical content knowledge about six levels of literary competence.

A discussion round of about 45 minutes was devoted to each level. The input for each round was a selection of 'critical cases' (Miles & Huberman 1994; Flick 2002). Three groups of books were selected for a particular discussion round based on calculations of the mean score and effect size. These were (1) examples of 'highly representative books' (neither easy nor difficult for the level in question), (2) examples of 'borderline cases' (slightly easy or slightly difficult), and (3) 'counter examples' (much too easy or much too difficult).

For each case, the panel was asked to discuss why a book was representative of the level in question and why another book was a little or much too easy or difficult. The facilitator ensured that all members had sufficient opportunity to speak and the discussion remained on track, focusing on the relationship between reader and text. The facilitator also encouraged participants to express themselves in as concrete a fashion as possible so that the results would be meaningful to other teachers (Swanborn 1999).

The respondents' views were recorded as literally as possible by three minute keepers. Audio recordings were also made of both conferences so that the minuted comments could be verified later. For each level this gave us a set of comments (pedagogical content knowledge) about what a student shows in terms of literary competence with texts of a particular level.

To analyse this data we used an empirical, interpretive research methodology (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Without making use of an a priori system, this methodology seeks to discover certain regularities in the data and to reduce them step by step to dimensions of variables. The analyses were performed using ATLAS.ti. We firstly labelled the minuted teacher comments and then sorted the labelled comments into levels and parameters (student, text), and grouped the labels into 'families' (e.g. 'willingness', 'knowledge of the world', 'familiarity with literary techniques'). These families gradually built up the dimensions and indicators of literary competence with which to systematically describe the different levels. The analyses resulted in a data matrix, with the rows representing the dimensions and indicators of literary competence and the columns the levels of literary competence. Lastly, the respondents' comments were reformulated into succinct and distinctive descriptions.

Stage 3

At the last working conference the panel validated the data matrix containing the reformulated comments. An important principle here was that the results should be based on shared pedagogical content knowledge.

As a preparation for the working group session and to maximize the validity of the competence descriptions, we submitted the data matrix to the six panel members and to six external experts (two literary theorists, two teaching methodologists and two teachers). The respondents were sent the minutes of the discussions and the data matrix and were asked to check the correspondence between the comments and the matrix and to make concrete suggestions for changes in the matrix.

These suggestions formed the input for the third working conference with the six panel members. Consensus was reached on each point in the discussion of the suggested changes. Finally, for each level we synthesized the descriptions in the different dimensions and indicators into 'literary competence profiles'. These profiles were also validated by the panel members and experts.

4. RESULTS

The results consist of a competence scale (4.1), indicated book lists (4.2), a data matrix (Appendix 1) and lastly, a description of six successive literary competence levels (4.3).

4.1 Competence scale

Before our investigation into competence levels and the operationalization of the text parameter, we asked the following question: how many levels of literary competence do teachers distinguish in upper secondary classes? According to teachers,

the levels should be sufficiently distinctive, both for themselves and the students. The teachers agreed on six levels for upper secondary, working from the premise that the starting levels of students in year 4 can vary enormously because of the broad range of programmes in lower secondary schools (an ill-structured curriculum!). Fairly neutral labels were preferred for the initial, general descriptions of the levels: (1) very limited, (2) limited, (3) neither limited nor extended, (4) fairly broad, (5) extended and (6) very extended literary competence. These are of course relative descriptions which in principle only apply to students in upper secondary classes. To make these descriptions concrete and to place them in the context of development over several years, they were given a label that was meaningful for teachers. For example, level 3 is a 'good' performance at the start of literature education in grade 10 and a 'satisfactory' performance at the end of grade 11, but it is an 'unsatisfactory' performance at the end of grade 12 (see Table 4).

Table 4. Competence scale with common benchmarks and norms for six levels of literary competence for general higher education (HAVO) and pre-university (VWO)

	Level 1 Very limited competence	Level 2 Limited competence	Level 3 Neither limited nor extended competence	Level 4 Fairly broad compe- tence	Level 5 Extended compe- tence	Level 6 Very extended competence
Complexity	Cannot read, under- stand or appreciate very simple literary works	Can read, under- stand and appreci- ate very simple literary works	Can read, under- stand and appreci- ate simple literary works	Can read, understand and appreciate literary works of a medium level of difficulty	Can read, under- stand and appreci- ate complex liter- ary works	Can read, under- stand and appreci- ate very complex literary works
Starting level grade 10	Weak	Reasonable	Good	Very good	n/a	n/a
Final level grades 11/12	Very poor (HAVO: < 4)	Poor (HAVO: 5) Very poor (VWO: <4)	Satisfactory (HAVO: 6 to 7), Poor (VWO: 5)	Good (HAVO: 8 to 9), Satisfactory (VWO: 6 to 7)	Very good (HAVO: 9 to 10) Good (VWO: 8 to 9)	Very good (VWO: 9 to 10)

Note. The numbers in the last row refer to the mark the teachers would have given for performance in the final examination, whereby 5 is 'fail', 6 is 'pass', 7 is 'satisfactory', 8 is 'good', 9 is 'very good' and 10 is 'excellent'. HAVO refers to the general higher education track, and VWO to the pre-university track.

4.2 Classification of books into six levels

We received questionnaires from all six respondents (36 in total). The level could not be reliably established for 29 books because too few teachers were familiar enough with those books. The respondents proved a reliable jury: for all six levels the homogeneity between the respondents was high for 141 literary works (Cronbach's alphas for the respective levels were .89, .92, .91, .91, .88 and .78). We were able to reliably establish the level of these books: four were appropriate for level 1, 11 for level 2, 43 for level 3, 68 for level 4, 29 for level 5 and two for level 6 (see Figure 1).²

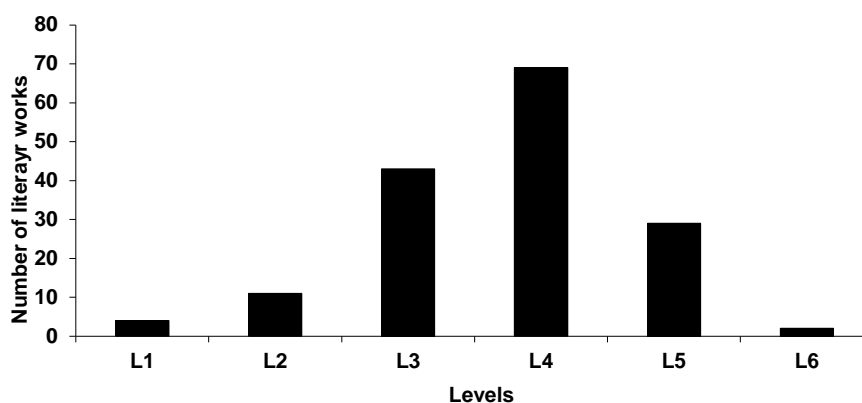


Figure 1. Number of books per level. The x-axis shows the competence levels and the y-axis the number of books. (NB. The total number of indications is 157. This is because some works (N=16) were seen as indicative of two levels and therefore occur twice in the data.

Table 5 shows an example of the reading list for level 2, the desired starting level for upper secondary classes (see Table 3, grade 10). The effect size indicates the extent to which a book is representative of that level. We applied the following standards: .2 indicates a small effect, .5 a medium effect and .8 a large effect (Cohen, 1988: 28). The smaller the effect, the less the literary work is representative of a level. We therefore linked these standards to three gradations of representatives, whereby A = highly representative of the level (large effect $\geq .8$), B = representative

² The small number at levels 1 and 2 and level 6 shows that the middle group (levels 3, 4 and 5) has a wide range to choose from, but that the range for the two lowest and the highest level is very small. This illustrates our comment above that Dutch teachers concentrate on the middle group and do not cater sufficiently for the weakest and strongest students.

of the level (medium effect $\geq .5$), and C = somewhat representative of the level (small effect $\geq .2$).

Table 5. Overview of books with an L2 indication ranked by mean complexity (M). If M is < 2.5, the book is easy/too easy for level 2; if M is > 3.5, the book is difficult/too difficult for level 2. SD is the standard deviation of the teacher ratings. R indicates representatives, with A showing that the book is 'very representative' of level 2, B 'representative' and C 'fairly representative'

	R	Literary Work	L1		L2		L3	
			M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
A	Keuls, Jan Rap en z'n maat	3.2	.41	2.8	.41	2.0	.63	
A	Dragt, Torens van februari	3.5	.58	2.8	.50	2.0	.00	
A	Ruyslinck, Wierook en tranen	3.7	.52	2.8	.41	2.3	.52	
A	Sahar, Hoezo bloedmooi?	3.3	.58	3.0	.00	2.0	.00	
A	Van Lieshout, Gebr.	3.3	.58	3.0	.00	2.3	.58	
A	Oberski, Kinderjaren	3.5	.55	3.0	.00	2.3	.52	
C	Büch, Het dolhuis	4.7	.52	3.0	.52	2.8	.41	
A	Frank, Het achterhuis	3.7	.52	3.0	.63	2.3	.82	
B	De Loo, Isabelle	4.2	.75	3.2	.75	2.7	.82	
A	Giphart, De voorzitter	4.0	.00	3.3	.50	2.3	.50	
A	El Bezaz, De weg naar het noorden	4.3	.58	3.3	.58	2.7	.58	

Twelve of the 170 books were given an L2 indication, with *Jan Rap en z'n maat* the easiest and *De weg naar het noorden* the most difficult book in the list. *Hoezo bloedmooi*, *Gebr.* and *Kinderjaren* are the most representative for this level (mc = 3.0 and SD = .00). In this list we also see that the level indication is not absolute, with most books matching two levels: *Jan Rap en z'n maat*, *Torens van februari*, *Hoezo bloedmooi*, *Gebr.* and *Kinderjaren* match L1 and L2, and *Het dolhuis*, *Isabelle* and *De weg naar het noorden* match L2 and L3.

4.3 Description of six levels of literary competence

As outlined above in Section 3.2 (stage 2), the books classified by level formed the basis for the panel discussions about which literary competences students need in order to independently understand books of a particular level. Once again, the panel proved very homogeneous. In their discussions they seldom disagreed about whether or not students with a particular level of literary competence could independently understand books of a particular level of difficulty. For example, if discussing whether a grade 10 student with a very limited literary competence (level 1) could read and understand Harry Mulisch's *De aanslag* (level 4), they came to similar analyses and conclusions. It struck us that the panel members hardly challenged one another's views, but supplemented them by citing their own experienc-

es and examples from their own teaching practice. These discussions resulted in a literary competence matrix and ultimately in six competence profiles.

Tying in with Coenen's mapping sentence (see 2.1), the matrix contains two parameters with which to describe literary competence at six levels: (1) the student parameter describes the disposition of the student as reader; (2) the text parameter describes the competences that relate to certain features of the text. The text parameter comprises three dimensions of literary competence: familiarity with literary style, familiarity with literary techniques, and familiarity with literary characters.

Each dimension in turn comprises indicators of literary competence, fourteen in total. These are obviously the variables that teachers use to determine the level of literary competence of students in upper secondary education. In Table 6, we give an overview for each parameter of the dimensions and indicators, with a brief description of the complicating factors.

Table 6. Overview of dimensions and indicators of literary competence

Dimension	Indicator	Description (complicating factors)
STUDENT		
General demands for engaging with the book	Willingness (time)	The extent to which the length of the text (number of pages) requires a certain investment of time.
	General knowledge	The extent to which the text calls for general knowledge, which is world knowledge (societal, historical) and anthropological knowledge (intercultural, social, psychological).
	Domain-specific (literary) knowledge and experience	The extent to which the text calls for experience with literature and domain-specific knowledge, such as the history of literature (literary periods), literary theory and intertextuality.
BOOK		
Familiarity with literary style	Vocabulary	The extent to which the text calls for a certain familiarity with particular registers of language use, such as the level of abstractness, the proximity of the represented world, and the diversity of vocabulary (archaic or regional varieties), possibly because of a historical distance (non-contemporary literature).
	Sentence structure	The extent to which the text calls for a certain level of familiarity with fairly complicated sentence structures (length, embedding, sequence of meaningful elements), possibly because of a historical distance (non-contemporary literature).
	Stylistics	The extent to which the text calls for knowledge of literary language use and its changes over time, that is, the extent to which language is figurative, multi-interpretable and refers to conventions and stylistics.
Familiarity with literary techniques	Act	The extent to which the text holds the reader's attention (suspense). This includes the pace of action and the sequence and intensity of dramatic events. It also includes story elements that interrupt the course of action and complicate the reading (internal monologues, reflections, descriptions, elaborations and expositions).

	Chronology	The extent to which the text demands flexibility with respect to the chronology and continuity of the action. Shifts in time, references to the past (flashbacks) and references to the future all complicate the reading process.
	Storyline(s)	The extent to which the text calls on the ability to simultaneously follow different storylines and link them to each other. The number of strands and the links between them (primary, secondary, embedded) influence the level of complexity.
	Perspective	The extent to which the text calls on the ability to distinguish between different perspectives. The reliability of a perspective and how this can be played out (manipulation) forms an additional complicating factor. The first-person narrative used throughout the text is also accessible because the reader has only one centre of focus within the fictional world. In general, changes in perspective are a complicating factor (multiple perspectives). An omniscient narrator is generally considered less complex because of his or her intermediary status between reader and story.
	Meaning	The extent to which a text requires the ability to recognize and connect various levels and elements of meaning (e.g. irony and parody). Complexity increases with the number of levels (reality, psychological, political, philosophical, literary, etc.) and elements (motifs, themes, ideas) that are included. A high degree of implicit information also makes the reading more complex.
Familiarity with literary characters	Character	The extent to which a text calls for the ability to fathom both character and character development. It refers to the level of characterization as well as character development (type and character). Further complicating factors are the level of predictability/unpredictability and the reader's distance from the morals and behaviour of the characters, their historical status (old texts) or level of abstraction (literary persona)
	Number	The extent to which a text calls for the ability to differentiate between main and subsidiary characters. The number of characters is a complicating factor.
	Relations	The extent to which a text calls for the ability to fathom the relationships between characters. The nature of the relationships (psychological, sociological, intercultural) and any related changes in them are complicating factors.

If we combine the six levels with the 14 indicators, we obtain a system to describe the literary competence for all six levels. Appendix 1 presents an abbreviated version of the matrix. The cells in the matrix provided the building blocks for a more holistic description of each of the six levels of literary competence in a competence profile. Once the six competence profiles had been validated, each profile was given a descriptive label denoting a particular kind of reading.

Profile level 1: Experiential reading (very limited literary competence)

Student as reader Students with very limited literary competence have little experience of reading fiction. They have difficulty reading, understanding, interpreting and appreciating very simple literary texts, as well as communicating about their reading experiences and reading tastes. Their general level of development is inadequate for gaining entry to the world of literary books for adults. They are unfavourably disposed towards literature because they find the content too remote and the style too difficult. Their willingness to invest in literature is slight. Book size and task type are therefore factors that weigh heavily with these students. Their ideas about literature and their attitude to reading are characterized by a need for tension (action) and drama (emotion). Their kind of reading can be labelled experiential reading.

Text The books suitable for these students are written in simple, everyday language and are closely linked to the experiences of adolescents in terms of content and characters. The storyline is clear and simple, with exciting or dramatic events succeeding one another at a rapid pace. There are few structural elements, such as thoughts or descriptions, to interrupt the action.

Profile level 2: Identifying reading (limited literary competence)

Student as reader Students with limited literary competence have experience of reading fiction, but almost none of reading literary novels for adults. They are capable of reading, understanding and appreciating very simple literary texts and can report on their personal reading experience and tastes. Their general level of development is sufficient to understand adult literature, but not to gain entry to a reality, or 'novel world', that is very different from their own experience. They are willing to invest in literature, but not to a great degree. As a result, book size and task continue to guide their choice of book. Their attitude to reading is characterized by an interest in recognizable situations, events and emotions. They believe that literature should be realistic. This kind of reading can be labelled identifying reading.

Text The books suitable for these students are written in everyday language, have a simple structure and relate to their experiences. Although the books are written for adults, the main character is usually an adoles-

cent. There is a dramatic storyline in which actions and events succeed one another at a fairly rapid pace. It is not particularly problematical if the tension is interrupted from time to time by thoughts and descriptions. These students prefer a closed ending.

Profile level 3: Reflective reading (somewhat limited literary competence)

Student as reader Students with somewhat limited literary competence have experience of reading simple literary texts. They are capable of understanding, interpreting and appreciating simple literary works and can discuss with classmates social, psychological and moral issues based on a book. Their general and literary development is sufficient to gain entry into a somewhat complex novel structure and into the world of adults. They are willing to invest in literature, but will not readily embark on a thick book or a more complex task. Their attitude to reading is characterized by an interest in social, psychological and moral issues. For them, literature is a means of exploring the world and forming their own ideas on a wide range of issues. Reading at this level can be labelled reflective reading.

Text The books suitable for these students are written in simple language and have a complex but nonetheless transparent structure with a deeper layer of meaning alongside the concrete one. The content and characters do not relate directly to the experience of adolescents, but the story addresses issues that interest them, such as love, death, friendship, justice and responsibility. Their preference is for texts dealing with social or political issues. Inasmuch as the text contains complex narrative techniques (such as shifts in time, changes in perspective, motifs, etc.), these tend to be explicit. The story confronts the reader with questions that may remain unanswered and usually has an open ending.

Profile level 4: Interpretive reading (fairly broad literary competence)

Student as reader Students with a fairly broad literary competence have experience of reading simple literary novels for adults. They are capable of reading, understanding, interpreting and appreciating literature that is not too complex and they can communicate effectively about their interpretations and tastes. Their general and literary development is sufficient to allow them to gain entry to the novels of notable literary authors, provided these are not too complex. They are clearly willing to invest in literature. The number of pages and the size of the task are no longer so relevant. These students display a budding aesthetic awareness: they are discovering that a literary novel is 'created' and that writing is an 'art' and not a 'trick'. These students' attitude to reading is characterized by a willingness to immerse themselves in complex events and

adult emotions that are far removed from their own experience. They are interested in narrative technique and novel structure, and perhaps also in the author's intent. Reading at this level can be labelled interpretive reading.

Text The books suitable for students at this level are written in a 'literary' style and are not immediately related to the world of adolescents in terms of content and characters. This makes the storyline and character development less predictable. The literary techniques used are somewhat complex: unreliable perspective, implicit time shifts and changes in perspective, unanswered questions, multiple layers of meaning, metaphorical style, etc. These techniques encourage the reader to interpret the text. At this level we encounter many well-known works by notable authors.

Profile level 5: Literate reading (extended literary competence)

Student as reader Students with extended literary competence have broad experience of reading literary novels. They are able to understand, interpret and appreciate complex works, including old literary texts written before 1880, as well as to exchange ideas with others about their reading experience, interpretation and tastes. Their general, historical and literary knowledge is sufficiently advanced to gain entry to complex modern and old classical texts. They are willing to read these texts and to immerse themselves not only in themes and structure, but also in literary-historical backgrounds and style. They are aware that texts operate within a cultural and historical context and that literature is a tool for learning about the past and about cultural identity. Their attitude to reading is characterized by an interest in the canon, literary conventions, cultural and historical backgrounds and certain classical authors. This kind of reading can be labelled literate reading.

Text The books suitable for students at this level not only contain characters and themes that are far removed from their own experience, but may also differ greatly from what they are accustomed to in terms of language use and literary conventions. This is particularly true of old texts, which contain a historical novel reality with obsolete values and norms, and of old Dutch, with its outmoded literary conventions. With modern novels, we observe an increase in the complexity of the novel structure, which is characterized by ambiguities and implicitness, as well as by technical and stylistic refinements.

Profile level 6: Academic reading (very extended literary competence)

Student as reader Students with an academic literary competence have a wealth of experience of reading literary texts, including world literature. They are able to place books and literature in a broad context and to discuss their

reading experience and interpretations with 'experts'. Because they are so well read and possess both highly developed general knowledge and specific cultural and literary knowledge, they are able to establish links and to generate meanings both within and beyond the text. They have a great willingness to invest in literature, provided they have some degree of autonomy. They are of the view that literature adds a further dimension to their lives and helps them understand reality (existential function). They have a critical approach to reading, characterized by versatility, passion and an interest in specialized literature on the subject. This kind of reading can be labelled academic reading.

Text The texts suitable for these students are written in a fairly inaccessible literary style which may include experimental forms and styles. They have a multi-layered, complex structure, making it difficult to penetrate through to the story and to interpret its meaning. The text has symbolic features (abstract motifs) and contains references to other texts and knowledge (intertextuality) that are essential for a proper understanding.

5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to create a frame of reference for the development of literary competence in the context of literature teaching in upper secondary education. Such a frame of reference should make it easier to identify differences between students and to deliver teaching that stimulates the literary development process of students with different levels. A key principle for us was to base the frame of reference on the shared pedagogical content knowledge of a varied group of teachers so that the research outcomes would be meaningful for teachers.

The result is that we identified six levels of literary competence that relate to norms for general higher education and pre-university education (Table 1). We used two parameters (student and text) taken from Coenen's definition of literary competence to operationalize six levels of literary competence. For pragmatic reasons we decided to restrict ourselves to the novel. This resulted among other things in reliable graduated reading lists (Table 4 and Figure 1), an instrument to describe the difficulty and accessibility of texts for different reading levels (Table 6) and a data matrix and six competence profiles in which six consecutive levels of literary competence are described based on fourteen dimensions and indicators. Both the competence profiles and the data matrix used to compile the profiles were validated by the panel of teachers and by a group of external experts. Inasmuch as we have been able to ascertain, this is the first time that the link between graduated reading levels for students aged 15 to 18 and graduated levels of difficulty for literary texts has been described so systematically and in such detail.

Consistency

The fact that we were able to describe the competences for all six levels in the data matrix means that there is consistency both within and between levels. The panel identified the consistency within levels as a particular kind of reading: 'experiential' (level 1), 'identifying' (level 2), 'reflective' (level 3), 'interpretive' (level 4), 'literate' (level 5) and 'academic' (level 6). Each level clearly focuses on a particular function of literature and the acquisition of the associated kind of reading: you can read for pleasure (level 1), recognize your own experience and find self-affirmation (level 2), expand your horizons (level 3), discover deeper meanings and aesthetic enjoyment (level 4), immerse yourself in literature, culture and history (level 5), and nourish your intellect (level 6).

The six levels of literary competence appear to reflect a development spiral (Bruner, 1964, 1984; Kohlberg, 1969; Van Parreren, 1988). How this development progresses needs to be further investigated. Given the changes in reasons for reading and in the view of literature at each level, this may not be a gradual and continuous process but rather a discontinuous process that occurs in fits and starts, whereby each stage lays the foundation for the next, with new structures being integrated into existing ones (Piaget, 1952). In that case, the six competence profiles could be seen as repertoires of mental operations that a student can apply flexibly. Flexibility is thus a feature of a higher level of literary competence. A reader with, say, a fairly broad literary competence (level 4) is able to use different reading modes (experiential and/or identifying and/or reflective and/or interpretive), whereas a reader with a very limited literary competence (level 1) has only one reading mode – a literary text should entertain. Literary development can possibly be regarded as a cumulative process in which students expand their repertoire of reading modes step by step and in which literary texts acquire different functions.

Reliability

Important questions are (1) whether the graduated reading lists and the six competence profiles reliably reflect the stages of literary development and (2) whether the instrument is ecologically and theoretically valid. In principle, the small number of respondents limits the generalizability of our findings. Parts of this study need to be replicated in order to determine whether our results are valid. Nonetheless, we feel that there are already strong indications that the levels of literary competence that we have identified are ecologically valid. In order to generalize and formalize the knowledge basis, this must be based on teachers' shared pedagogical content knowledge (Verloop, 2003), hence our decision to opt for six teachers, both male and female, who represented a broad range of views, experience and work settings. However, these differences had little effect on the ratings for the relative complexity of books. There was shared pedagogical content knowledge in both the individual ratings and the focus group discussions about critical cases. This was even more the case in the validation of the data matrix and competence profiles (stage 3) where, apart from a few style issues, both the teacher panel and the expert group confirmed the study results

To be able to generalize our findings to other educational contexts, the study needs to be replicated in other countries. In 2010, as part of a European project, a five-country study was launched into levels of literary competence for 12 to 18-year-olds.³ Preliminary findings show that teacher panels in other countries come to the same conclusions as the Dutch panel, which suggests that different groups of teachers in different contexts are likely to arrive at similar conclusions and that a generalizable development model is quite plausible.

With regard to generalizability, we can also ask about the extent to which this classification has theoretical validity. Anglo-Saxon literature in particular is concerned with the theory of stages of literary development. Applebee (1978), Thomson (1987) and Appleyard (1994) have researched the literary development of various groups of subjects. In the Netherlands, Nelck-da Silva Rosa and Schlundt Bodien (2004) investigated the development of students' reading attitudes in relation to Loevinger's (1976) stages of ego development. All these developmental theories arrive at five or six virtually identical development stages. There are also strong parallels with the phasing in aesthetic development models (Housen, 1983; Parsons, 1987; Gardner, 1990). Although the models were developed in different contexts using different study samples, a range of research methods and different research objects, they nevertheless have an identical phasing. According to Gardner, 'such a consensus is rare in the behavioral sciences and strongly suggests that we have here an instance of genuine developmental sequence' (Gardner, 1990: 17). This means that the instrument is supported not just by the practical knowledge of teachers, but by developmental theory as well.

Our research methodology using a fairly small but varied group of teachers has clearly produced reliable outcomes for the development of formalized, generalizable pedagogical content knowledge about the relationship between different levels of mastery and the difficulty of learning tasks. This is an interesting observation for this type of pedagogical study. Replication studies in other domains of mother-tongue education and with other school subjects will have to demonstrate the extent to which our research methodology can be extrapolated.

In conclusion

A rigid pedagogical application of our instrument in practice, as is still the case with the classical Lexile measures, would be entirely wrong in our view. The primary function of the competence profiles and graduated reading lists within teaching is a heuristic one. A teacher who can work with this frame of reference 'sees and knows more' and can therefore deliver appropriate instruction to students with different starting competences, like Rutger and Cécile in the introduction to this

³ *Comenius Project: 'Literary Framework for Teachers in Secondary Education' (LiFT-2). This project is part of the European Union's Lifelong Learning Programme. In addition to the Netherlands, the countries taking part in this project are the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Portugal and Romania. The first results will be available in 2012 on www.literaryframework.eu.*

article. Members of the teacher panel reported one year later that they had internalized the frame of reference and were increasingly starting to think 'in levels'. Preliminary student experiences with the instruments show that the frame of reference also provides guidance for students. They can recognize themselves and their classmates in the profiles and can note the direction in which to develop their literary competence. Initial reports also show that many students find it a challenge to aim at higher reading levels. For teaching teams and policymakers too, the instrument can serve as a frame of reference because they can use it to underpin agreements on matters such as the desired level of a particular group.⁴ For this reason the instrument also offers a frame of reference for designing a structured curriculum.

The instrument provides researchers with a 'yardstick' for mapping the literary development of various groups of students. This implies in principle that it can be used to evaluate the outcomes of literature teaching and to substantiate, using empirical arguments, pronouncements on such matters as the progress or regression of particular groups of students – in principle as the instrument is not yet complete. We have yet to operationalize the pedagogical variables 'tasks' and 'effects' in Coenen's mapping sentence. We will be reporting on this in a subsequent article that will focus on the question of how to stimulate literary development.

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⁴ Levels 1 to 4 have since been incorporated into a general frame of reference for language teaching in the Netherlands (*Expert Groep Doorlopende Leerlijnen Taal en Rekenen, 2008*).

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APPENDIX

Data matrix: Teachers' pedagogical content knowledge about levels of literary competence in upper secondary education. Level 3 is grey-shaded

	Level	1	2	3	4	5	6
Literary competence		Very limited	Limited	Neither limited, nor extended	Somewhat extended	Extended	Very extended
		Cannot read, understand or appreciate very simple literary works	Can read, understand and appreciate very simple literary works	Can read, understand and appreciate rather simple literary works	Can read, understand and appreciate literary works of a medium level of difficulty	Can read, understand and appreciate complex literary works	Can read, understand and appreciate very complex literary works
Type of reading		experiential reading	identifying reading	reflective reading	interpretive reading	literate reading	academic reading
Function of literature		entertainment	to recognize own experiences and find self-affirmation	to discover the world and expand own horizons	to discover deeper meanings and aesthetic enjoyment	to become immersed in literature and cultural history	intellectual development
General demands for engaging with the book	Willingness (time) General knowledge	75 – 150 pages without difficulty knowledge of everyday situations – home, school and society	some understanding of human nature to explain the inner life of more or less familiar people in more or less familiar situations. Basic general historical and social	150 – 250 pages without difficulty the ability to put oneself in unfamiliar situations and cultures, and to identify with the complex emotions of fairly unfamiliar people		250 – 400 pages without difficulty the ability to reflect on (culturally) different or (historically) dated views, norms and values	> 400 pages without difficulty the ability to reflect on abstract, intellectual world view or view of humanity

Lit era	Level	1	2	3	4	5	6
Familiarity with literary style	Domain-specific (literary) knowledge and experience	distinguishes between reality and fiction	knowledge (e.g. persecution of Jews in WWII, integration) simple genres (crime, social issues, war, etc.)	distinguishes between popular literature and literature elementary narrative theory (instrumental)	(aesthetic) judgements theory of story analysis and text interpretation	literary-historical knowledge (movements, historical context) and/or autobiographical knowledge (oeuvre), literary style	broad cultural interest and basic knowledge (Bible, mythology, literary canon, world literature, philosophy, art, etc.)
	Vocabulary	everyday language	more nuanced, some unknown words	nuanced and somewhat varied vocabulary (less everyday, a little more remote from student)	varied vocabulary which is often far removed from the student's language use	both varied and sophisticated vocabulary (subtle), poetic, as well as old or outmoded usage	
	Sentence structure	simply structured, short sentences	many long but clearly structured sentences		many long, fairly complex sentences	complex and less accessible sentence structures (e.g. comparative constructions)	
	Stylistics	redundant, literal use of language (clichéd)	predominantly literal but also figurative language		language with several layers of meaning (metaphors, irony, symbolism)		both language with several layers of meaning (metaphors, irony, symbolism) and experimental use of language
	Perspective	single perspective		multiple perspective but changes are clearly marked	unreliable perspective		unreliable and/or multiple perspective with changes not clearly marked
Familiarity with literary techniques	Story-line(s)	a single storyline with few gaps and a closed ending		both a main storyline and some clearly marked secondary storylines and gaps (also open	several storylines not clearly marked, with gaps		complex structure with several unmarked storylines; also old (classical) or old-

Lit era	Level	1	2	3	4	5	6
					endings)		
	Chronology	chronological structure with few jumps in time	structure with few jumps in time	chronology is interrupted by clearly marked jumps in time	not chronological with jumps in time that are not clearly marked (e.g. frame story)		
	Action	emphasis on plot/action (almost no description, thoughts)	emphasis on plot/action but to some extent also thoughts, descriptions and dialogues	both events and relatively many descriptions, characters' thoughts and dialogues	both descriptions, etc. and reflections		and/or expositions
	Meaning	concrete layer of meaning with clear theme and concrete, very explicit motifs		both a concrete and a deeper layer of meaning: fairly straightforward theme and fairly concrete motifs	several layers of meaning: different themes with a range of concrete and abstract motifs that express an idea or vision		
Familiarity with literary characters	Number	one main character and a few secondary characters		a few main characters and a few secondary characters		many main characters	
	Character	simply developed, sometimes stereotypical characterization	well-rounded characters who undergo logical development	well-rounded characters who undergo unpredictable development		historical figures	literary (abstract) figures
	Relations	almost no change in relationships between characters		changing relationship between characters		relationships between characters develop and change constantly (and sometimes very subtly)	complex relationships that are difficult to fathom