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Students' voice on literature teacher excellence. Towards a teacher-organized model of continuing professional development



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HIGHLIGHTS

- A CPD-model that is managed by the professional community of teachers itself is introduced.
- Dimensions of literature teacher excellence are reliable and broadly supported by students.
- Students felt it is important for teachers to motivate them for the subject literature.
- Students and teachers have complementary concepts of an excellent literature teacher.
- Involving students in designing teaching standards increases the ecological validity of standards.

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ABSTRACT

This study contributes to the development of empirically based, domain-specific teaching standards in upper secondary education. It is part of a Dutch project to develop ecologically valid teaching standards and to find a teacher-organized model for continuing professional development. A previous study about teachers' perceptions of what constitutes an excellent teacher of literature resulted in a set of six domain-specific teaching standards. In this study, an exploratory factor analysis was performed to find out which dimensions or characteristics of an excellent teacher of literature could be gleaned from the students' perspective. We found four similar and two complementary dimensions.

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1. Introduction

This study was prompted by the ongoing discussion about the professional development of secondary school teachers. As in many Western countries, the Dutch government opted in the early twenty-first century for general teacher standards linked to a registration system for continuing professional development. It is now known, however, that teachers themselves often do not accept government regulation of teacher quality and professional development (Day & Sachs, 2004; Ingvarson, 1998; Sachs, 2003, 2011; Santoro, Reid, Mayer, & Singh, 2012). In the Netherlands too, teachers were highly critical of the professional standards (BON,

2010). This was especially true of teachers in upper secondary education, because the generic standards were not aligned with their discipline-based focus on education and their pedagogical content knowledge (Grossman & Schoenfeld, 2005; Howard & Aleman, 2008; Shulman, 1986). In the face of so much criticism, serious doubts were raised about the ecological validity of these generic standards (Blanton, 2006; Kagan, 1990). The essence of ecological validity is the design of the research representative of what happens in everyday life (Brewer & Crano, 2014). The importance of this type of validity will increase because teachers become more and more the agents of their own professional development (cf Franzen & Wilhelm, 1996). Teachers were also critical of the standards-based professionalization programmes, which failed to meet their needs. This prompted the Dutch Ministry of Education to initiate the Quality Agenda for Excellent Teaching, which includes projects designed to explore and stimulate pedagogical excellence within specific domains.

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One such project – excellence in literature teaching in upper secondary classes – is the subject of our study. It had a dual aim: (1) to increase the ecological validity of teaching standards and (2) to create a productive match between the professional development needs of teachers and the courses available at teacher training institutes. There are three phases in the project. In the first phase we investigated teacher perceptions of the competences of excellent teachers of literature in secondary education. This resulted in a coherent set of six domain-specific teaching standards (Witte & Jansen, 2015). In this article we report on the second phase of the project in which we seek to further increase the ecological validity of the teaching standards by introducing student voices. We share Hattie (2009) conclusion that teachers need to know about the visibility of learning from the students' perspective so that they have a better understanding of what learning looks and feels like for students. Teachers are very responsive to feedback from their students (e.g. Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005). We therefore decided to follow up our search for the qualities of an excellent teacher of literature with a study of student perceptions. Our chief interest is the extent to which teacher and student perceptions of excellence coincide. In the third phase we will gather self-assessments in the national database so that we can improve the model by adding developmental benchmarks and analyses of teacher professional development needs. To these ends we proposed a teacher-organized model of continuing professional development (CPD).

In order to place our study of student perceptions of excellent teachers of literature in context, in the following section we examine the discussion about government regulation versus teacher regulation. This forms the background for the proposed teacher-organized model of CPD and our contribution to the discussion on teaching standards and continuing professional development (Section 2). From Section 3 onwards we report on our study of student perceptions of literature teacher excellence and how these relate to the perceptions of the teachers themselves.

2. Context

International comparisons and rankings of student performance such as PISA and PIRLS have created a situation in which governments focus heavily on educational outcomes. Research shows that teacher expertise can account for about 15–30 percent of the variance in student learning – more than any other single factor, including student background (Hattie, 2009, 2012; Hilton, Flores, & Niklasson, 2013; Lingard, 2005; Rhoton & Stiles, 2002). Teacher quality is therefore given high political priority. Higher expectations about teaching quality call for teachers who are well qualified, highly motivated, knowledgeable and skilled, not only at the point of entry into teaching but throughout their careers. Continuing professional development (CPD) is therefore no longer optional but is expected of all professionals (Day & Sachs, 2004; De Vries, Jansen & Van de Grift, 2013b). Thus governments and other educational stakeholders have for some time been preoccupied with the question of how they can improve and safeguard teacher quality.

2.1. From government regulation to teacher regulation

Since the 1990s, we have seen governments all over the world seeking to boost the continuing professional development of teachers and monitor their quality by means of a registration programme. In addition to curriculum standards, teaching standards appear to be the most appropriate policy instruments for this purpose (Beck, Hart, & Klosnik, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Ingvarson, 1998; Kennedy, 2014). Standards are seen as a way to both improve the teaching profession and control teacher practice. These government measures brought an end to the traditional

post-war model of the autonomous professional, in which decisions about the curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment were the province of teachers (Day & Sachs, 2004).

However, since their introduction, both the standards themselves and the way they tend to be developed and implemented have been the universal subject of debate. The main criticism is that the standards are imposed and implemented by the government, and are not recognized by the community of teachers (Day & Sachs, 2004; Ingvarson, 1998; Ross & Bruce, 2007; Santoro et al., 2012). Smith (2005) cautioned that the lack of consensus renders these government standards invalid and that they often lead to a one-sided view of teaching and learning.

Teaching standards are often the result of negotiations between the government, school management and unions, which means they have more of a political foundation than an empirical one (Witte & Jansen, 2015). Another feature of government standards is that they are worded in very general terms in accordance with the one-size-fits-all principle. Domain-specific knowledge and skills are missing, despite the fact that teachers in secondary education tend to derive their professional identity and sense of pride from their own subject (e.g. Beijaard, 2006; Borg, 2003; Day & Sachs, 2004; Gess-Newsome, 1999; Grossman & Schoenfeld, 2005). Several studies demonstrate that teachers' skills and understanding are directly related to the degree that professional development experiences focus on subject-matter content (Cohen, Hill, & Kennedy, 2002; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Suk Yoon (2001); Kedzior, 2004; Ross & Bruce, 2007; Shulman, 1986; Van Veen, Zwart, & Meirink, 2012). This generalization of professional standards has led to a situation in which large groups of teachers do not acknowledge and recognize them (Witte & Jansen, 2015), despite the fact that ownership of the professional development process is a condition for learning and change (Fullan, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b).

The lack of ownership also explains why teacher professional development programmes usually fail to gain traction. A standards-based view of teacher development often goes hand in hand with a skills-based view of teaching, whereby teacher training programmes provide teachers with an opportunity to update their skills in order to be able to demonstrate their competence (Borko, 2004; Kennedy, 2014). The government funds and standardizes the training courses on offer and school management tells the teachers which courses they can or should take (Kennedy, 2014; Sachs, 2003). This top-down standardization of training opportunities overshadows the need for teachers to be proactive in identifying and meeting their own developmental needs in their subject (Borko, 2004; Van Veen et al., 2012). A situation in which there is a mismatch between supply and demand, but where teachers are urged to take courses for which they have no immediate need, leads to resistance (passive or otherwise) among many teachers and ultimately to apathy, a response that bears a close resemblance to student reaction to external motivational stimuli (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). This points to a stalemate in the professional infrastructure (Witte & Jansen, 2015). Teachers' adverse reactions to top-down regulation is a recurring theme in many implementation studies: educational policy cannot be successfully implemented unless it ties in with the experiences, concerns, knowledge and needs of teachers (Broekkamp & Van Hout-Wolters, 2007; Kennedy, 1997; McIntyre, 2005; National Research Council, 2002; Van Veen et al., 2012; Verloop, Van Driel, & Meijer, 2001). Moreover, government regulation of teacher professionalism goes against the need for autonomy felt by many teachers.

Fullan (2007), Ingvarson (1998), Sachs (2003, 2007, 2011) and many other specialists believe that the failure of government regulation of professional development is linked to the low level of teacher control and participation. Sachs (2011) concludes that

where the development and renewal of the profession is concerned, teaching standards must be owned and overseen by teachers themselves, and that it is not the government or school management but teachers who should be the 'agents' of their own professional development. She advocated a shift in teaching standards from government-imposed to teacher-developed, from regulation to development, from imposed accountability to individual responsibility, from direction and control by the government to development and management by the profession, from mistrust to trust, from external regulation to self-regulation, and from compliance to activism. The shift from government regulation to teacher regulation is clearly evident in recent research and discourse on teacher professionalism: we have seen a growing number of studies in which teachers play an active role in developing teaching standards as part of their professional development (e.g. Chen, Brown, Hattie, & Millward, 2012; De Vries, Van de Grift, & Jansen, 2013a; Hilton et al., 2013; Kriewaldt, 2012; Mayer, Mitchell, Macdonald, & Bell, 2005; Mulcahy, 2011; Witte & Jansen, 2015).

2.2. A teacher-organized model of continuing professional development

The evolution from government regulation to professional activism is also evident in the Netherlands. To this end we have proposed a teacher-organized model of continuing professional development (Fig. 1). This model is based on various studies of teacher professional development (e.g. Avalos, 2011; Kennedy, 2014; Ross & Bruce, 2007; Sachs, 2011; Van Veen et al., 2012). Our aim in proposing this model is to help enhance the quality of literature teaching.

Quality is a personal and contextual construct (Bandura, 1997; Berliner, 2005; Blanton, 2006). That is why our model should be based on a drive for quality from within the teacher, based on a clear reflection on and understanding of the teacher's actual level of performance on a personal level in relation to shared and internalized professional standards created through professional discourse on a national level (Hilton et al., 2013).

We know from research that self-assessment is a powerful technique for improving achievement (e.g. McDonald & Boud,

2003; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Ross & Bruce, 2007). Research suggests that teacher change occurs through reflection on experience and that self-efficacy beliefs mediate the influence of self-assessment on practice. Self-assessment in this proposed model is seen as integrating three processes identified by Ross and Bruce (2007): (a) self-judgements about ideal competences, (b) self-judgements about actual competences, and (c) student judgements. In addition, teaching standards must provide long-term direction and benchmarks for ongoing professional development, as Kyriakides, Creemers, and Antoniou (2009) have advocated for primary education. With modern media, it is possible to collect the above three judgements from the entire professional community, enter them into a national database and use them to establish developmental benchmarks. Teachers can then compare their own professional development and competences with those of their peers. Using the outcomes of this 'triangulation' (self, students, benchmarks), teachers can evaluate their actual competences, identify their personal needs and set their goals for further professional development, thereby becoming the agents of their own professional development. However, in order for them to realize these goals, there needs to be an appropriate range of courses.

A key objective of the Quality Agenda for Excellent Teaching is to ensure a good match between the needs of teachers and what the teacher training institutes have to offer. As we outlined above, the absence of such a link is one of the reasons why teacher professional development tends to stagnate at present. We believe we can optimize this link by using the self-assessment database not only for developmental benchmarks, but also for a systematic study of the needs of different groups of teachers. We can reveal these needs by analysing the ideal and actual competences of the professional community of teachers (self-judgements A and B). Teacher training institutes can then use these analyses to put together professional development programmes that are tailored to the needs of different groups of teachers.

The model will stand or fall by the ecological validity of the self-assessment instruments. In the first phase of this project, we constructed a coherent set of empirically based, domain-specific teaching standards that are acknowledged and recognized by the professional community of teachers of literature (Witte & Jansen, 2015). This resulted in six dimensions of competences of an

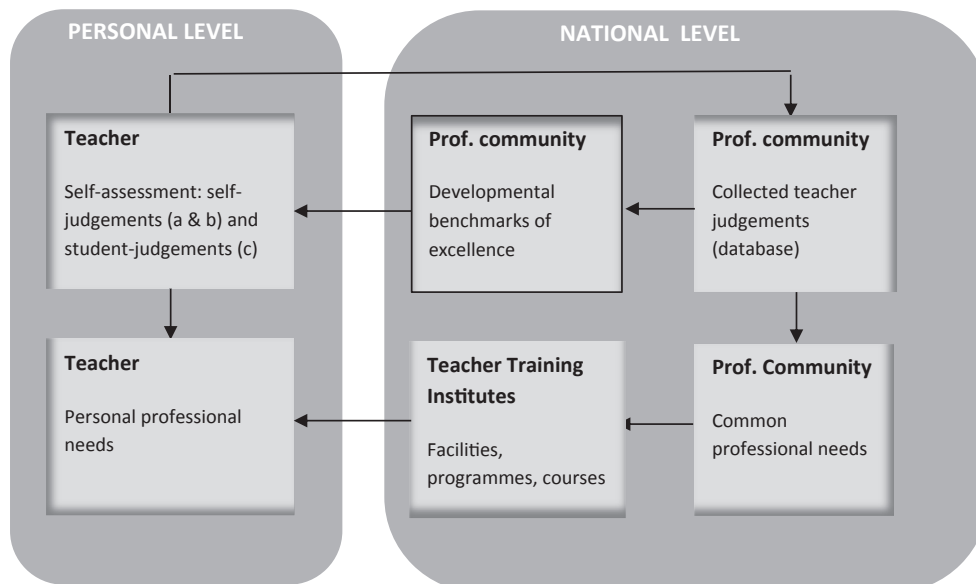


Fig. 1. Proposed teacher-organized model of continuing professional development.

excellent literature teacher. The focus of dimensions, teachers' mean scores on the dimension and example items are presented in Table 1.

The second phase of the project, which is the research topic in this article, concerns the students' voice on competences of excellent literature teaching in order to enhance the ecological validity of the fields of literature-teaching competences.

3. Students' voice on literature teacher excellence

When considering the possibilities for teacher self-assessment, we encounter a logical parallel: just as teachers are involved in quality assessment, so too can students be involved in assessing the quality of teacher performance or competence (Van Petegem, Deneire, & De Maeyr, 2008). According to Hattie (2009), this should be a major concern:

The visibility of learning from the students' perspective needs to be known by teachers so that they can have a better understanding of what learning looks and feels like for the students. (...) A key is not whether teachers are excellent, or even seen to be excellent by their colleagues, but whether they are excellent as seen by students: the students sit in the classes, day by day, they know ... (Hattie, 2009: 116).

Giving students a voice continues to be a growth area in both international research (Kane & Maw, 2005) and international literature (MacBeath, Demetriou, Rudduck & Myers, 2003). Students appreciate being given a voice and being asked for their opinions (Strikwerda-Brown, Oliver, Hodgson, Palmer & Watts, 2008). They appear to be accurate judges of excellence, and can discriminate between teachers who are experienced and expert and those who are experienced and non-expert (Irving, 2004). However, the use of student rating has been hotly contested, especially in higher education (D'Apollonia & Abrami, 1997; Coggs, Bivona, & Reschly, 2012). Some have argued that they are merely popularity contests (Hattie, 2012). Although the majority of studies show that student ratings are reliable, trustworthy and reliable (Hattie, 2012; Marsh, 2007). Where subject matter is involved, the predictive validity of aggregated student ratings is higher than the predictive validity of external observations (De Jong & Westerhof, 2001). For this reason, a study measuring upper secondary students' perceptions of the competences of an excellent teacher of literature would be a useful addition to the research into teacher perceptions of excellence. As with our study of teacher perceptions, here too we have opted for an inductive approach in

order to enhance both the ownership and ecological validity of the instruments.

With the knowledge that students are very capable of evaluating teachers and teaching, our aim in this article is to let the students' voice be heard regarding the characteristics of an excellent literature teacher. The question is to what extent we can view the student population as a unified whole, as student variables can play a role in rating the dimensions. Teaching is a complex activity with multiple interrelated components (e.g. clarity, interaction, organization, enthusiasm). Students may value various aspects of excellent teaching differently (Kuzmanovic, Savic, Popvic, & Martic, 2013; Marsh & Roche, 2000). We therefore look at differences between student groups with respect to gender, grade, major, stream and reading experience. For instance, many studies show that girls outperform boys on reading assessments (Canadian Council of Learning, 2009; OECD, 2014). Girls' attitude to reading, both school reading and leisure reading, seems more positive than that of boys (e.g. Mol & Bus, 2011; Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004; Sulkunen, 2013). These gender differences in reading ability and attitude could influence the perceived importance of the different dimensions of an excellent teacher. Another factor could be the choice of major. Students who have chosen an Arts major are probably more interested in literature than students in other majors, such as Science or Health, and may place other – perhaps even higher – demands on the domain-specific competences of the literature teacher. Furthermore, from a developmental point of view we can expect younger, beginning students (grade 10) to have other expectations about excellent teachers of literature than students in their final exam year (grade 12) (Witte, Rijlaarsdam, & Schram, 2012). In particular, looking at differences between the pre-exam and final exam year, when literature is often tested in the school exam, it is arguable that students place greater emphasis on aspects relating to exam requirements. For this reason we expect differences as a result of the student variables of gender, reading experience, grade, stream and chosen major. Finding differences between student groups will have implications for teachers in terms of differentiating their teaching.

Because our ultimate aim is to develop an instrument to give teachers a better understanding of relevant professional development issues, we wanted to compare the dimensions that teachers felt were important (Witte & Jansen, 2015) with those that students perceived as important for an excellent literature teacher. Perhaps the dimensions identified by students are not as obvious to teachers, and vice versa.

Table 1
Teacher perceptions of the qualities of an excellent literature teacher.

Scales	Focus	Example item
Knowing their students as readers (M = 4.27)	Knowledge of their students as readers in relation to the knowledge and skills required by certain literary texts and assignments (differentiation)	Can identify and name differences between students (reading level, reading style)
Teaching techniques (M = 4.01)	Varied repertoire of techniques to facilitate and optimize the learning and developmental process	Encourages exchange of reading experiences and discussion between students in class
Domain-specific knowledge and skills (M = 3.95)	Cultural and literary knowledge and skills	Makes links between literature, cultural movements, art forms and history
Multiple approach (M = 3.84)	Pursuit of several domain-specific aims (e.g. cultural, textual, social, personal approach)	Ensures that students develop a feeling for the style and beauty of texts
Professional development (M = 3.81)	Up-to-dateness of professional and domain-specific knowledge and skills (pedagogical content knowledge and skills)	Keeps a close eye on literature teaching developments through professional journals, conferences and communities
Integrated approach (M = 3.42)	The position of literature in relation to language skills	Gets students to write stories and poems themselves to help them understand theory

NB. Scores from 1 to 5, where 1 means not an essential feature and 5 means highly essential for an excellent literature teacher.

Research questions

The considerations described above prompted the following research questions:

1. Which dimensions of excellence in literature teaching in upper secondary education can be discerned from student opinions (grades 10–12) and are these dimensions evenly rated by students or can they be ranked in importance?
2. Are there differences in the rating of these dimensions according to the student variables of gender, reading experience, grade, stream and chosen major?
3. To what extent do students and teachers identify the same dimensions of excellence in literature teaching and which additional dimensions can be added to the teachers' view based on student perceptions?

4. Method

In order to answer the research questions, a questionnaire was developed to provide insights into students' evaluations of items that describe aspects of the competences of an excellent literature teacher.

4.1. Questionnaire development

The content of the teacher questionnaire developed in phase 1 of the project provided the initial impetus for the structured interviews with 30 students in grades 10–12 at five schools as a source of information to construct the questionnaire. The questionnaire was tested by 10 students (grades 10–12) thinking aloud while filling out the questionnaire. This led to some minor changes in the wording of the items. Students could respond to the items on a five-point Likert-type scale, with 1 being 'not necessary' and 5 'definitely necessary'. The stem of the items was: 'A good teacher of literature ...'. Students were also asked to fill out their gender, stream, grade, major and reading experience.

4.2. Analysis

An exploratory factor analysis was performed to find out which dimensions or characteristics of an excellent teacher of literature could be gleaned from the students' answers. Our aim was to discover different dimensions of excellent literature teacher's competences seen from the student perspective. Therefore, we decided to perform an exploratory factor analysis (Principal Components) because this is a technique that reveals underlying dimensions represented by a combination of items. This results in a number of factors that can be seen as multi-item scales measuring specific dimensions. The reliability of the scales was assessed by computing Cronbach's alpha, which indicates whether the items are internally consistent and can be regarded as measuring the underlying construct.

Descriptives on both the scales and the items within a scale were used to rank the dimensions. Comparisons of means (t-tests and ANOVA) provided information where there were differences on the dimensions in terms of student characteristics such as gender, grade, stream, reading experience and chosen major.

Finally, a comparison was made between the dimensions found in the teachers' questionnaire from phase 1 and those found in the students' questionnaire in this subproject.

4.3. Participants

The participants were 853 students in grades 10–12 in 34

classes in upper secondary schools in the Netherlands. Grades 10 and 11 were each represented by 15 classes and grade 12 by 4 classes. Because upper secondary education in the Netherlands consists of two streams, a five-year and a six-year stream, there are fewer students in grade 12. Literature is a compulsory subject in secondary education. The questionnaire was administered by the teacher or researcher during regular classes, not only Dutch Literature classes but also other classes (such as Biology). The students were informed about the research and participation was voluntary but all the students in the classes took part. The questionnaire was anonymous: students were assured that data could never be traced back to individual respondents and would never be seen by their teacher or their school.

4.4. Sample description

Table 2 provides information about the sample. There were more female (54%) than male students (46%), which is in line with national figures on the student population in upper secondary education (Statistics Netherlands, 2013).

The six-year stream (preparation for university) is over-represented, and the choice of an Arts major is consistent with the national picture. What stands out is the low percentage of students who read books for leisure, in other words not prescribed reading by the school.

5. Results

5.1. Dimensions of an excellent teacher of literature

An explanatory factor analysis (Principal Components) with varimax rotation and factor loadings above .40 resulted in a six-factor solution with easily interpretable factors that accounted for 38% of the explained variance. The KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy) was .912, which means a very good sampling adequacy (Field, 2009). Table 3 shows the scale descriptives based on the factors; the appendix shows the constituent items per factor.

According to students the most important teacher characteristic was 'ensuring a stimulating learning climate'. This means not only general pedagogy such as ensuring a quiet classroom, structured lessons etc., but also knowing a lot about books and authors, talking enthusiastically about literature and literary history, and being fond of literature. The second most important characteristic was 'legitimizing why literature education is important'. Although on average a good deal of value was attached to this characteristic, opinions varied widely (SD .87). Students rated the teacher's role in teaching how to read literary texts almost as highly. The last dimension viewed as desirable for a good teacher of literature was 'giving individual attention to students'. For this dimension too, students qualified the more general pedagogical approaches with content-specific issues such as 'knows my reading level' or 'stimulates my self-confidence in reading literature'. Students scored the 'multiple approach' and 'variety' dimensions just below the mid-point on the scales, giving a value between 'slightly desirable' and 'desirable'. All scales correlate significantly with each other, ranging from .13 to .60 as shown in Table 4, which points to an underlying concept of excellence in literature teaching.

5.2. Student characteristics

To answer research question 3, we tested score differences on the dimensions for the different student groups. Table 5 provides comprehensive information on the differences in terms of gender, grade, stream, major and reading frequency.

Table 2
Descriptives sample (n = 853).

Male	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	5-year stream	6-year stream	Arts major	Reading frequency		
%	%	%	%	%	%	%	% high	% moderate	% low
46	45	44	11	31	69	14	10	20	70

Table 3
Scales dimensions of an excellent literature teacher.

Scale	Focus	Example item	No. of items	Cronbach's α	Mean	SD
Stimulating learning climate	Positive attention to all students and enthusiasm for the subject of literature	Makes sure that everyone participates in the lesson	10	.80	3.87	.59
Legitimizing literature	Functions of literature for young people	Explains why literature teaching is important for young people	4	.84	3.31	.87
Literary reading	Techniques for understanding, interpreting and appreciating literary texts	Teaches me different learning strategies	9	.82	3.28	.64
Individual attention	Personal characteristics of students (differentiation)	Knows which topics interest me	7	.70	3.03	.64
Multiple approach	Various approaches to literature: cultural, textual, social, personal	Makes sure that I increase my knowledge of the world through books	12	.86	2.92	.65
Variety	Diversity in teaching methods	Gives us creative processing assignments	7	.68	2.76	.68
Mean				.78	3.20	.68

Table 4
Intercorrelations between the dimensions.

Scale	Stimulating learning climate	Legitimizing literature	Literary reading	Individual attention	Multiple approach	Variety
Stimulating learning climate	1					
Legitimizing literature	.292**	1				
Literary reading	.601**	.321**	1			
Individual attention	.388**	.222**	.454**	1		
Multiple approach	.492**	.380**	.554**	.443**	1	
Variety	.279**	.134**	.335**	.342**	.361**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Table 5
Score differences on the dimensions of an excellent literature teacher.

	Gender		Stream		Grade		Major		Reading frequency		
	Male	Female	5-year	6-year	Pre-exam year	Final exam year	Arts major	Other major	High	Moderate	Low
Stimulating learning climate	3.72	4.00	3.83	3.59	3.82	4.03	3.96	3.85	3.90	4.04	3.81
	(.620)	(.537)	(.570)	(.602)	(.604)	(.526)	(.569)	(.591)	(.578)	(.505)	(.603)
Legitimizing literature	3.37	3.26	3.26	3.32	3.29	3.38	3.28	3.28	3.46	3.27	3.29
	(.900)	(.840)	(.823)	(.887)	(.872)	(.857)	(.810)	(.859)	(.822)	(.824)	(.883)
Literary reading	3.17	3.39	3.29	3.28	3.24	3.44	3.31	3.89	3.18	3.36	3.27
	(.677)	(.598)	(.634)	(.648)	(.653)	(.596)	(.570)	(.602)	(.651)	(.549)	(.639)
Individual attention	2.95	3.10	3.11	3.00	3.01	3.09	3.17	3.01	3.03	3.10	3.01
	(.678)	(.609)	(.608)	(.657)	(.651)	(.621)	(.613)	(.639)	(.699)	(.621)	(.647)
Multiple approach	2.89	2.94	2.85	2.95	2.87	3.04	3.08	2.87	2.95	3.10	2.85
	(.680)	(.638)	(.657)	(.651)	(.654)	(.677)	(.602)	(.655)	(.680)	(.586)	(.654)
Variety	2.71	2.78	2.83	2.72	2.77	2.69	2.86	2.75	2.70	2.78	2.74
	(.687)	(.689)	(.638)	(.708)	(.695)	(.660)	(.701)	(.672)	(.620)	(.664)	(.704)

Standard deviations between brackets.

Bold: difference significant at .01 level.

5.2.1. Gender

The mean scores on literary reading, stimulating learning climate and individual attention differed significantly between males and females, with female students scoring higher on all three scales than male students. The effect sizes, Cohen's d , are .33, .48, and .25 respectively, indicating small to medium effects.

Five-year or six-year stream. Table 4 shows significant differences in scores on stimulating learning climate, literary reading and multiple approach in the five-year and six-year streams. Although these scores differed significantly between the streams, the effect sizes are very small (Cohen's d .16 and .17).

5.2.2. Grades

Table 4 reveals significant differences with small to medium effects for the scales literary reading, multiple approach and stimulating learning climate (Cohen's d .32, .26, and .37 respectively). Students in the final exam year rated these dimensions more highly than students in the pre-exam year.

5.2.3. Major

Students in Dutch upper secondary schools have to choose a major, a coherent package of subjects that gives access to specific fields of higher education. There are four majors: Arts, Social Science and Economics, Health, and Science. We expected to find

differences between Arts students and students in the other majors. A multiple comparison showed differences on the multiple approach, stimulating learning climate and individual attention scales. Students with an Arts major scored significantly higher on those scales than students from the other majors, with small to medium effect sizes (Cohen's d ranged from .26 to .39).

5.2.4. Reading frequency

We asked students how many books they read just for pleasure in their leisure time. Students could answer in five categories, ranging from 'I hardly ever read a book in my leisure time' to 'I read a book every week in my leisure time'. Because the answers were skewed, we decided to distinguish three categories: frequent readers (at least one book every two weeks, $n = 85$, 10%), moderate readers (approximately one book a month, $n = 169$, 20%), and those who hardly ever read a book in their leisure time ($n = 584$, 70%). These figures are consistent with recent data from a study of time use from the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Cloin, 2013).

Multiple comparisons revealed that the moderate readers valued literary reading and stimulating learning environment more highly than the very frequent readers. The mean score on the literary reading scale was $M = 3.36$ ($SD = .549$) for the moderate readers and $M = 3.18$ ($SD = .651$) for the frequent readers, which results in a small to medium effect size of Cohen's $d = .30$. For the stimulating environment scale, the mean scores were $M = 4.04$ ($SD = .505$) and $M = 3.90$ ($SD = .578$) respectively, with an effect size of $d = .26$. The moderate readers scored significantly higher on the multiple approach and stimulating learning environment scale than the very low frequency readers, with effect sizes Cohen's $d = .40$ and $d = .41$.

We asked ourselves whether there are more high frequency readers in the Arts major than in other majors. Fifteen percent of students in both the Arts and Health majors were identified as frequent readers. However, the Arts major students had the lowest percentage of low-frequency readers – 58% compared with 64–75% in the other majors.

5.3. Student additions to teachers' view of excellence in literature teaching

There were similarities between many items in the student and teacher questionnaires but the interpretative names of the factors are somewhat different because of the different line of approach. Broadly speaking, we see correspondences between the students' 'individual attention' scale and the teachers' 'knows their students as readers' scale. The 'multiple approach' factor equates to the teachers' 'multiple approach', and the 'variety' scale is in line with the teachers' 'teaching techniques' scale. The 'literary reading' scale corresponds to the teachers' 'domain-specific knowledge and skills' scale. These are the similarities. What are the differences? Across all dimensions, teachers made higher demands on an excellent teacher of literature than the students, $M = 3.89$ and $M = 3.20$ respectively. Surprisingly, students placed a high value on the competences creating a stimulating learning climate and legitimizing literature, aspects that were not mentioned by teachers. Less surprisingly, the interviews showed that students were not concerned about teacher qualities that are not directly evident in the classroom, such as professional development and an integrated approach of language and literature. If we combine the six teacher dimensions with the six student dimensions, we arrive at eight dimensions of an excellent teacher of literature (Table 6).

6. Conclusion and discussion

The Dutch Ministry of Education initiated the Quality Agenda for

Excellent Teaching, which includes projects designed to explore pedagogical excellence within specific domains. One such project – excellence in literature teaching in upper secondary classes – is the subject of this study. It had a dual aim: (1) to increase the ecological validity of teaching standards and (2) to create a productive match between the professional development needs of teachers and the courses available at teacher training institutes. Aiming at ecological validity is especially challenging for the subject of literature because literature teaching is one of the 'ill-structured domains', which means that practitioners hold a wide range of views about the aims, structure and content of their domain (Spiro, Feltovich, Jacobson, & Coulson, 1991; Witte et al., 2012). And of course this diversity makes it difficult to set generally accepted teaching standards. For our second aim, we proposed a teacher-organized model of continuing professional development (Fig. 1). The construction of this model is a multi-stage project to develop teaching standards for teaching literature with a high ecological validity. This study reports on the second stage.

To ensure that teachers will accept and identify with the standards, in the first phase of this project. Witte and Jansen (2015) investigated teacher perceptions of the competences of excellent teachers of literature in secondary education. This resulted in a coherent set of six domain-specific teaching standards. However, a key factor in excellence is teaching quality as perceived by students. To ensure that students also had a voice in setting teaching standards, we repeated this study, but this time from a student perspective. The study was informed by three questions.

The first question concerned the dimensions of excellence identified by students and whether these are supported by all students in upper secondary classes (grades 10–12) regardless of gender, stream, grade, major or reading experience. Six fields of literature-teaching competences were identified that could be measured using reliable scales. There was a moderate to high correlation between all the scales and all correlations were significant ($p < .01$), indicating that the dimensions are strongly related and likely to point to an underlying concept of what constitutes an excellent literature teacher. According to students the most important teacher characteristic is 'ensuring a stimulating learning climate' (3.87). The second most important is 'legitimizing literature education' (3.31). Students rated the teacher's role in 'teaching how to read literary texts' almost as highly (3.28). Other characteristics of an excellent teacher of literature are 'giving individual attention to students' (3.01) and 'achieving a multiple approach' (2.92). Students scored the 'variety' dimension just below the middle of the scales (2.76), which is midway between desirable and slightly desirable.

The second question concerned the differences between student groups. With all group variables (gender, stream, grade, major, reading frequency) we see virtually the same ranking on the scales. However, we did find small to medium effects (minimum $d = .26$; maximum $d = .53$) for the value that different groups of students attach to certain dimensions of excellence. Regarding the variable of gender, girls attached relatively greater value to 'stimulating learning climate', 'literary reading' and 'individual attention'. This indicates that girls are more intrinsically engaged in literature teaching than boys. They feel that teachers of literature should cater for their reading level and needs, should ensure that there is a safe and cooperative atmosphere in the classroom and should prepare students well for the exam. We often find this type of preference among girls in gender studies of adolescents (e.g. Wolters, Denton, York, & Francis, 2013). As often demonstrated in the literature on gender effects in reading ability, this may be because girls read more and have a more positive attitude to reading books than boys (Coles & Hall, 2002; Mol & Bus, 2011; Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004; Sulkunen, 2013). A closer analysis of reading frequency confirms

Table 6
Teacher and student perceptions of what constitutes an excellent literature teacher.

Teachers	Students	The ability to ...
1 Students as readers	Individual attention	Cater to students with different reading levels through book choice, supervision and teaching so that all students continue to develop their literary competence
2 x	Stimulating climate	Approach all students positively and encourage their enthusiasm about the subject of literature
3 Varied repertoire	Variety	Vary teaching methods, techniques and materials
4 x	Legitimizing literature	Convince students of the importance of literature and literature teaching
5 Literary and cultural knowledge	Literary reading	Teach students the literary and cultural knowledge and skills needed to understand, interpret and appreciate texts
6 Multiple approach	Multiple approach	Approach literature from different literary paradigms (cultural, textual, social, personal)
7 Integrated approach	x	Utilize opportunities for integrating literature into other domains
8 Professional development	x	Keep their pedagogical knowledge and skills up to date

this: in our sample we found a significant difference between male and female students ($M_{\text{male}} = 1.90$, $SD = .773$; $M_{\text{female}} = 2.31$, $SD = .786$; $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = .53$).

For the variable of 'grade' we see that in their exam year students attach more value to exam-oriented items on the 'multiple approach' and 'literary reading' scales. Students who chose the Arts major also attached greater value to these exam-oriented scales. The fact that Arts students also attach relatively more value to 'individual attention' is probably because girls are overrepresented in this major (68%). Given the relatively high standard deviations in both groups, we need to be cautious about making generalizations about all male and female students: there are also boys who read a lot and girls who do not like reading at all (e.g. Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). There were conspicuous differences between students with a high, moderate and low reading frequency. In relative terms, moderate readers placed the highest demands on the teacher's abilities. Perhaps they feel somewhat more dependent on the teacher than students with more reading experience. Students who read hardly any or no books in their free time placed the lowest demands on the teacher and therefore appeared somewhat more indifferent about the domain-specific qualities of the teacher than students who read a lot or a moderate amount. What we also observed with all these groups is that opinions diverged more widely about 'legitimizing literature' ($SD > .8$) than about the other scales and that this variation cannot be attributed to one of the group variables.

Our search is for an instrument that can be scored by both teachers and students. This brings us to the third question: To what extent do students and teachers perceive the same dimensions of excellence in literature teaching and which additional dimensions can be added to the teachers' view, based on students' perceptions? The most important similarity between teachers and students is that they both have a uniform concept of what constitutes an excellent literature teacher. In view of the 'ill-structured' literature curriculum, we were surprised by the remarkable homogeneity within the group of students and teachers. We did not find the four paradigms (cultural, aesthetic, social and personal) that Janssen and Rijlaarsdam (1996) had encountered in literature teaching. A possible explanation is that those authors were investigating the objectives that teachers pursued in their literature lessons, whereas our respondents extrapolated from their own lessons to reflect on the qualities of the ideal teacher. We should also bear in mind that while Janssen and Rijlaarsdam (1996) may have identified types in theory, in practice they usually encountered hybrids. This also seems to be the case for literature teaching in the context of EFL (English as Foreign Language) (Bloemert, Jansen, & Van de Grift, 2016). American studies show that eclecticism is a recurrent

finding in language arts teaching (Beach, Appleman, Hynds, & Wilhelm, 2011; Beach & Swiss, 2011). We also found theoretical eclecticism in our study, with teachers and students placing a high value on a multiple approach. Teachers and students clearly view excellent teachers of literature as all-rounders with a wide range of approaches in their teaching repertoires, enabling them to engage different groups of students in their lessons (Appleman, 2000).

It is interesting to see that students attached the greatest value to 'legitimizing literature' and 'stimulating learning climate', whereas these dimensions were absent for the teachers. Teachers are often insufficiently aware that what to them is self-evident – reading literature – is not necessarily the same for students. Students clearly believe that the teacher should help them understand the importance of literature. Students also had little concern for two dimensions that teachers regard as important: professional development and an integration approach. This could be explained by the fact that these dimensions are present outside the actual literature lesson and are therefore less noticeable for students.

An overall comparison between student and teacher perceptions of the qualities of an excellent teacher of literature shows that most of the teacher scales were concerned with increasing literary competence, whereas the students emphasized a stronger engagement with literature education. This study shows that the perceptions of teachers and students are complementary to excellent (literature) teaching. Therefore, the voice of students cannot be missed for the development of teaching standards. All in all, we can conclude that the dimensions identified in this project are reliable and coherent, and are broadly supported by the professional community of teachers of literature and their students. This therefore satisfies an important condition for the successful implementation of our professional development model, namely ecological validity.

7. Limitations and further direction

This study suffers from several limitations. First, the study was confined to Dutch students (and teachers). Although the situation of literature education in the Netherlands might differ from that in other countries, we feel that these differences are likely to be small, especially as international comparisons and ratings in different countries reveal the same pedagogical trends (Beach & Swiss, 2011; Beach et al., 2011; Grossman & Schoenfeld, 2005; Witte & Sâmihăian, 2013; Van de Ven & Doecke, 2011). In addition, our international literature search failed to reveal an empirical basis on which we could elaborate, suggesting an avenue for further research. It would be interesting to compare the views of Dutch teachers and students with those from other countries. Furthermore, information about the domains in which the competences of

an excellent teacher of literature should be strengthened could be enhanced by focus groups to discuss our findings. This is the next step in our research into the development of assessment instruments. In addition, more qualitative information with regard to differences between student groups, for instance male and female students, in their opinions about literature-teaching competences will provide more tools for teachers to differentiate within the classroom. Furthermore, if students are asked to evaluate their own teachers' competences, a more robust analysis can be carried out using multi-level analysis. Then it is possible to see if variances in evaluation of the teacher competences can be attributed to the school, class or individual student.

A further limitation is that we do not yet know whether and to what extent teachers will embrace our CPD model. This will have to be revealed in the next phase of our research. What we do know is that, with the help of modern media, our model has the potential to become highly successful. Teacher professional learning is a complex process that requires the cognitive and emotional involvement of teachers both individually and collectively (Avalos, 2011). Because it is not the government but the teaching community that is responsible for quality standards and because teachers are the agents or their own professional development, we have to increase teacher ownership and responsibility. These are key conditions for CPD, according to Christopher Day, Judith Sachs and other experts in this field. Moreover, because our CPD model makes provision for systematic research into teacher needs, we believe that it will also break through the stalemate between the needs of teachers and the courses available at teacher training institutes.

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Appendix

Perceptions of students: a very good teacher of literature ...

Factor 1: Ensures a stimulating learning climate

1. makes sure that I can concentrate well during the lesson.
2. listens to me.
3. does not have any prejudices about students.
4. talks enthusiastically about literature and literary history.
5. knows a lot about literature (books, writers, etc.).
6. has a clear structure in his/her lessons.
7. loves literature.
8. makes sure that everyone takes part in the lesson.
9. gives us assignments that we really learn something from.

Factor 2: Legitimizes literature education

1. explains why we learn literary history.
2. explains why we should read books.
3. explains why we should analyse texts.
4. explains why literature education is important for young people.

Factor 3: Teaches students literary reading

1. teaches me different reading strategies.
2. occasionally demonstrates out loud how I should read and analyse literature.
3. teaches me how I should apply literary concepts (e.g. space and perspective).
4. makes me aware of relationships in a literary text.

5. teaches me how I can best read different kinds of text (novel, play, poem).
6. knows what professional knowledge is needed when reading literary texts.
7. asks clear questions that ensure that I understand the essence of the text.
8. teaches me how I can read literature independently later.
9. prepares us for a text through questions and discussions.

Factor 4: Pays attention to individual students

1. takes account of my personal background (values and feelings).
2. knows what topics interest me.
3. encourages my self-confidence in reading literature.
4. knows what my reading level is.
5. takes account of my background.
6. sees when I need help.
7. ensures that I develop my own taste.

Factor 5: Pays attention to the multiple functions of literature (multiple approach)

1. lets me appreciate good style.
2. ensures that I expand my horizons through books.
3. teaches me to look for life lessons in books.
4. makes connections between literary history and art history.
5. makes connections between Dutch literature and literature in other languages.
6. shows the role of literature in society.
7. shows me how literature and literary history relate to each other.
8. challenges me to read difficult/more difficult books.
9. helps me to link what I learn to what I already know.
10. gets the class to have discussions about literature.
11. encourages me to evaluate books independently.
12. shows me the meaning of old texts (e.g. from the Middle Ages).

Factor 6: Varies teaching methods

1. gives us creative processing assignments (e.g. making a drawing or writing an alternative ending).
2. includes examples of popular texts in the literature lesson (e.g. rap texts or song lyrics).
3. gets us to act out stories (drama or film) to get us 'into' the story.
4. is good at reading aloud.
5. gets us to work together on book assignments in class.
6. teaches us how we can write a poem or story ourselves.
7. gives assignments that are appropriate to the book that I have read.

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