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THE STORY, THE SELF, THE OTHER

DEVELOPING INSIGHT INTO HUMAN NATURE
IN THE LITERATURE CLASSROOM

The aim of this dissertation was to investigate which instructional approach to literature teaching in Dutch upper secondary education would be appropriate for fostering students' insight into human nature, including their insight into themselves, fictional others, and real-world others. In the Introduction, we have argued that education has often been considered a place where people may learn to reflect on their own nature as well as the nature of others. Furthermore, for adults, adolescents and younger children alike, reading fictional and literary texts has been shown to result in such insights. Therefore, the literature classroom appears to offer a space of opportunity for adolescents to develop insight into human nature, which is valued as a potential outcome of literary instruction by teachers as well as policy makers in the Netherlands. However, in the Dutch context, there is no empirical support for the assumption that literary instruction may foster students' insight into human nature. With this dissertation, we aimed to fill this void.

STUDY 1 (CHAPTER 2)

In Study 1, we aimed to explore whether upper secondary school students gained any insight into themselves and others in the context of the literature classroom, as well as the relations between students' learning experiences and their teachers' classroom practices. Dutch students (N = 297, grades 10-12) wrote a learner report on what they learned about themselves and other people through literature education, and completed a measure on familiarity with fiction. Their teachers (N = 13) completed a questionnaire, which indicated whether they used more analytical-interpretative or more personal-experiential

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

Findings showed that nearly all students reported to have learned something about themselves and others, mainly in terms of personal characterizations of oneself and others, oneself and others as literary readers, descriptions and evaluations of people's behaviors, and lessons for life. In addition, students of teachers who reported to allow for more classroom interaction and student autonomy – characteristics of a personal-experiential approach – were found to have reported learning about themselves and others more frequently. Although these findings may partly be explained by these students being more familiar with fiction and having a more positive attitude toward literary reading, we considered these findings as initial parameters for the design of an instructional approach.

STUDY 2 (CHAPTER 3)

In Study 2, we aimed to identify design principles for an instructional approach. We conducted a systematic review of previous experimental and quasi-experimental literature classroom intervention studies that aimed to foster students' insights into themselves and others. Results from five research databases were screened, complemented with citation tracking, hand searches, and expert consultation. We included thirteen experimental and quasi-experimental intervention studies, for which we assessed methodological quality and the quality of the intervention descriptions. This process of quality appraisal functioned as a gatekeeper for the validity of researchers' conclusions.

Researchers of these thirteen studies expected that their instructional approaches would foster students' insight into themselves, their understanding of fictional others, and/ or their understanding of, views on, or intended behavior toward real-world others. Analysis of empirical support for expected intervention effects indicated that one intervention affected students' insight into themselves, two affected their understanding of fictional others, and six affected their understanding of, views on, or intended behavior toward real-world others. At this point, we concluded that these categories were not always clearly distinguishable, which led us to reformulate "insight into self and others" into the more broadly formulated concept of "insight into human nature". From the reviewed studies we inferred that, under certain conditions, literature education may foster students' insight into human nature.

Subsequent analysis of interventions with full or partial empirical support yielded three instructional design principles: 1) select fictional texts such as

novels, short stories, passages, or poems, that are thematically relevant for the intended outcomes of the intervention, such as texts with social-moral themes; 2) design writing tasks related to fictional texts and text themes that prompt students to activate previous personal experiences before reading, notice and annotate their experiences during the reading process, and/or write down (reflective) responses directly after reading; and 3) design exploratory dialogic tasks that stimulate students to verbally share and deepen their personal experiences related to fictional texts and text themes.

STUDY 3 (CHAPTER 4)

In Study 3, we described the iterative design process via which we developed an instructional approach for 10th grade literature classrooms in the Dutch higher general secondary education track. The design was informed by a theoretical-empirical model of transformative reading. Transformative reading includes "self-other perceptual depth", which resembles "insight into human nature" as it includes both self and others. In addition, transformative reading includes six other experiences: vividly imagining story setting and characters (*imagery*); recognizing aspects of self or others in characters (*identification*); enacting and embodying the experiences of a character (*experience-taking*); evaluating characters, positively or negatively (*character evaluations*); feeling sympathy and compassion for characters (*sympathy*); and being aware of striking words, phrases or sentences (*aesthetic awareness*). In the design process, we considered how students could be guided toward reflecting upon these reading experiences. The design was further informed by the design principles identified in Study 2: students read short stories that addressed social-moral themes (principle 1), and were stimulated to engage in internal dialogues with texts via writing tasks (principle 2) to prepare for external dialogues with their peers about their responses to the text, its themes and the connections with their own lives and the lives of others (principle 3). In two iterations, we designed two subsequent versions of the intervention, which we named Transformative Dialogic Literature Teaching: TDLT-1 and TDLT-2. We assessed validity – both at the content and construct level – and practicality of both versions, as these are amongst the indicators of the quality of an intervention.

TDLT-1 was a four-unit intervention, designed in collaboration with teachers. It was taught by 13 teachers in 22 classes. From these teachers and students, we collected implementation and evaluation data. This enabled us to draw informed conclusions about the validity and practicality of the TDLT-1 intervention, which appeared to be suboptimal. For example, students strug-

gled to see why internal and external dialogues with and about stories were relevant (content validity), found it unclear how they could engage in these dialogues (construct validity), were too often off task, and needed, according to their teachers, more time to get used to dialogic response practices in the literature classroom (practicality). We aimed to remedy these issues by setting up a second design iteration, in which three teachers who taught TDLT-1 cooperated with us to redesign the intervention.

The second iteration resulted in TDLT-2, which consisted of six units: one preparatory and five reading-and-dialogue units. It included 300 minutes of classroom work, complemented by about 45 minutes of homework assignments. Short stories with a social-moral theme were read, but in contrast with TDLT-1, we used a single-theme approach: all stories centered around "justice and injustice". In TDLT-2, students were taught strategies for external and internal dialogues. Thus, TDLT-2 differed from TDLT-1 in its strategy instruction, which included, in unit 1, peer observations, explicit instruction about external dialogue strategies, and applying these strategies in a try-out dialogue in a small group. Teachers were asked to take on a guiding, non-authoritative role when students engaged in external dialogues. They followed guidelines for providing guidance and feedback on students' dialogic processes, which included, for example, prompts and questions that stimulated students to continue and deepen their talk.

In units 2 to 6, the internal and external dialogue together formed the two-step basic TDLT structure. Internal dialogues remained implicit in units 1 and 2, when students were not yet given a particular reading instruction. In unit 3, students received strategy instruction for internal dialogues, which included observation of their teacher thinking aloud during reading. As incomprehension was considered to be a legitimate response in internal dialogues, the teacher also introduced strategies for dealing with difficulties during reading. Moreover, from unit 3 onwards, internal and external dialogues focused on transformative reading experiences, whereas in unit 1 and 2 they had focused on more familiar responses such as their initial opinion about a story. Activities were miscellaneous, short, and high-paced to keep students engaged and motivated. Students were stimulated to monitor their progress by working with a rubric.

Six teachers, including the three teachers involved in the redesign, taught TDLT-2 to one of their classes. From implementation and evaluation data we inferred that teachers felt that TDLT-2 was generally practical to work with, and that students were on task for a larger proportion of time in TDLT-2 than in

TDLT-1, in particular during external dialogues. Moreover, students considered explanations about internal and external dialogues particularly helpful, as well as the teacher modeling internal dialogue strategies. Overall, we concluded that TDLT-2 was a valid and practical operationalization of the transformative reading model and the design principles.

STUDY 4 (CHAPTER 5)

In Study 4, we assessed the effects of TDLT-1 on students' transformative reading experiences, including – and most importantly – their insight into human nature, in a quasi-experimental design with pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest with switching replications (N = 603). Students from 11 classes (n = 311) first participated in TDLT-1 and subsequently in an untreated control condition in which regular Dutch lessons were taught (but no literature); in the other eleven classes (n = 292), the order of conditions was switched. To gain first indications of what students learned from TDLT-1, we administered a written learner report directly after the intervention, as posttest-only. We developed the Transformative Reading Experiences Questionnaire (TREQ) and a story response task and administered both at the three measurement occasions. The TREQ included eight subscales: imagery, identification, experience-taking, character evaluations, sympathy, aesthetic awareness, self-insight, and insight into others. These scales were found to represent two underlying factors. For the story response task, three different texts were used. Students were asked to annotate their initial, spontaneous responses in the margin and were asked to complete three short writing tasks directly after reading.

Results from the learner reports indicated that students most often reported to have learned how to talk about stories. They further reported some transformative reading experiences, and indicated they had developed their thinking and opinionating skills. However, from the TREQ and story response task we detected no consistent effects of TDLT-1 on students' transformative reading experiences, including their insight into human nature. Several explanations are possible. First, although students relatively often indicated in their learner reports that they learned to talk about stories, dialogues remained rather short and superficial, as observed by various teachers and endorsed by a low on task percentage during small-group dialogues (see Study 3). Furthermore, students may have had too little experience with literary reading to be able to notice their responses during reading, as suggested by the smaller share of learning experiences that concerned, for instance, transformative reading, in-depth processing of stories, and noticing responses during reading. In addition, students

and teachers indicated that the purpose of TDLT-1 – gaining insight into human nature – remained too implicit. Therefore, students may not have been sufficiently motivated for and engaged in the units and stories. Finally, the instruction time may have been too short. Based on these findings, adjustments were made that resulted in TDLT-2.

STUDY 5 (CHAPTER 6)

In Study 5, we aimed to assess the effects of TDLT-2 on students' transformative reading experiences and other indicators of insight into human nature, their reasons for reading, their use of strategies to deal with difficulties during literary reading, and their motivation for literature education. In addition, we explored the extent to which strategy use and motivation functioned as mediators for effects of TDLT-2 on students' insight into human nature and eudaimonic reasons for reading.

We applied a quasi-experimental design with pretest, posttest and delayed posttest (four months after the intervention), in which six classes participated in TDLT-2 (n = 166) and six classes in the control condition (n = 166). In the control condition, students followed their teachers' regular literature curriculum, mainly focused on literary devices and analysis. As instruments, we used the TREQ as well as scales from other validated questionnaires. In addition, we analyzed a task in which students wrote a dialogue with an imaginary peer in response to a short story for transformative reading experiences and other indicators of insight into human nature.

Findings indicated that TDLT-2 had positive effects on students' insight into human nature. For example, TDLT-2 had a medium effect on their "insight beyond story worlds", a factor score derived from the TREQ that included self-insights and insights into real-world others, and a small effect on their "experiences within story worlds", a factor that included imagery, experience-taking, and evaluations of how characters think, feel and behave. Likewise, TDLT-2 had a medium effect on students' eudaimonic reasons for reading: these became more important to TDLT-2 students, but not to students in the control condition. Analysis of students' written dialogues supported these findings. For example, more TDLT-2 students reasoned to understand and interpret story characters significantly often than students in the control condition, and fewer of them wrote superficial descriptive-evaluative statements. The positive effects of TDLT-2 on students' insight into human nature and eudaimonic reasons for reading were still statistically siginificant four months after the intervention, although they were then smaller than directly afterwards.

In addition, TDLT-2 positively affected students' strategy use, as well as their feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as indicators of their motivation for literature education. Students' strategy use and feelings of competence and relatedness functioned as mediators for the effects of TDLT-2 on several indicators of insight into human nature and on eudaimonic reasons for reading. These mediating effects were statistically significant but relatively small. Students' feelings of competence played the largest mediating role for "insight beyond story worlds". This finding suggested that teachers and educational designers should be responsive to students' feelings of competence in the literature classroom: the more they indicated to have gained insight into themselves, fictional others and real-world others.

GENERAL DISCUSSION (CHAPTER 7)

In the general discussion we considered four concepts that are central in this dissertation. First, we reflected upon capturing multiple relevant terms concerning self and others in a single concept, which we ultimately termed "insight into human nature". We addressed the entanglement of the terms "self" and "other" as well as of fictional and real-world others, and we indicated how terminological issues were partly based upon the language setting in which this dissertation came about: TDLT was developed for Dutch language classrooms, but reported on in English.

Second, we discussed the application of the transformative reading model in the context of Dutch literature classrooms. We concluded that transformative reading can be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively, and that TDLT guided students toward noticing, reflecting on, and talking about transformative reading experiences. This dissertation has thus expanded previous research into transformative reading from adult readers to adolescents, and has demonstrated that transformative reading can be a meaningful concept in an educational context. Third, we discussed the possibility of using, in 10th grade classrooms, fictional narratives that are likely to be perceived by students as "literary texts", as students were capable to refer to literary devices in texts, to clarify and substantiate their responses and the insights they gain from reading and talking about stories.

Lastly, in terms of dialogic teaching and learning, we concluded that dialogues in literature classrooms may take place on two levels: between the reader and the text (internal dialogue), and among readers in response to the text (external dialogue). Building upon the work of Bakthin and Rosenblatt, we explained the relevance of internal dialogues; likewise, we attempted to illumi-

nate the relevance of external dialogues from a cognitive and a social constructivist perspective. We have also discussed the pros and cons of peer-led and teacher-led dialogues in the literature classroom, including the consequences for students' power positions and teachers' roles as non-authorative figures who avoid to provide "the right answer".

Subsequently, we discussed potential validity issues of our studies. We concluded that the systematic review (Study 2) contributed to the validity of the intervention design, because critical quality appraisal of methodologies and intervention descriptions functioned as a gatekeeper for the design principles that we identified. Furthermore, the iterative design process contributed to the validity of the intervention-as-designed. Simultaneously, the data collected in this process contributed to the validity of the intervention-as-implemented: by using multiple instruments to collect implementation and evaluation data from both students and teachers, we gained a valid impression of how TDLT-1 and TDLT-2 were implemented. Whereas implementation fidelity of TDLT-1 had been at stake, this validity issue appeared to be alleviated in TDLT-2. Moreover, we attempted to optimize ecological validity of TDLT-1 and TDT-2 by asking students' own teachers to participate in the studies and by involving teachers in designing and redesigning TDLT.

The validity of the TREQ was supported because different samples of students generally responded to the items in a similar way. Because students also expressed transformative reading experiences in response to specific texts, via writing tasks, our studies showed concurrent validity and avoided a "mono-method bias" as a threat to construct validity. In addition, we concluded that the learner report was a valid instrument to tap into students' learning experiences, as students found the task feasible and reported few irrelevant or incomprehensible learning experiences; moreover, learning experiences were well-distinguishable as demonstrated by coding systems with substantial inter-rater agreement. Finally, this dissertation supports the validity of the Author Recognition Test for measuring Dutch adolescents'familiarity with fiction: in Study 1, students in pre-university scored significantly higher than those in higher general secondary education, and average scores were similar across our studies.

We further concluded that we could rather confidently ascribe the effects of TDLT-2 to the treatment. As a strength, multiple teachers were involved in both the experimental and control conditions. However, as a validity threat, teachers and classes were not randomly assigned to conditions in Study 5; yet, as we found no significant differences between particular classes on relevant back-

ground variables, the lack of random assignment to conditions was counter-balanced to some extent. Furthermore, we ruled out selection bias as a threat to validity in Study 5: students of teachers who were already familiar with TDLT did not score significantly higher than students of the teachers who were new to TDLT. Lastly, we addressed the possibility of a Hawthorne effect in Study 5, which could not be ruled out, but may not be all too problematic from an instructional point of view.

In terms of external validity, we indicated that the three initial design principles may be considered "first principles": the mere fact that they are operationalized increases the probability that the desired learning outcome will be achieved. It is unlikely that small adjustments in TDLT units would drastically change its outcomes. The findings of our intervention studies cannot be generalized beyond students in Dutch upper secondary education. Considering teaching experience, effects of TDLT-2 may hold if different samples of teachers are involved, as teachers with a wide range of teaching experience seemed equally able to implement TDLT-2 as intended, and effects were consistent across teachers who were and were not previously familiar with it. Furthermore, we should be careful to generalize the effects of TDLT-2 to individual students, although additional explorative analyses indicated that the intervention was equally effective for subgroups within the sample. Finally, we concluded that the outcomes of this research project do not seem to be caused by researcher bias, as we collaborated with teachers, relied on multiple data sources in the design process, triangulated data in the intervention studies, and avoided that data were collected by a single researcher.

Next, we addressed starting points for future studies, which may focus on the respective roles of text selection, internal dialogues, external dialogues, and attention to transformative reading experiences; on the cognitive and affective processes that underlie students' development of insight into human nature; and on further developing and validating instruments for measuring insight into human nature.

Finally, we addressed implications for educational practice. In view of an imminent nation-wide curricular reform in the Netherlands, we believe that the main contributions of this dissertation to Dutch teaching practices are threefold. It offers research-based instructional design principles that fit the kind of approach to literature teaching as envisioned for the curricular reform; it has shown how these design principles can effectively be operationalized in class; and it has empirically demonstrated that this operationalization fosters stu-

dents' insight into human nature, their support for eudaimonic reasons for reading, their reported use of strategies to deal with difficulties during literary reading, and their motivation for literature education. Further, we suggested that the approach may potentially have positive implications for students' reading comprehension, or may stimulate them to enter an upward spiral of reading frequency.

We further argued that the starting point of any instructional approach in literature classrooms should be that students learn to become aware of their initial responses to literary texts and to put these into words. With this notion, we have attempted to answer to the potential criticism that TDLT cannot truly be considered "literary instruction": precisely the attention for students' initial responses to texts, as well as the focus on substantiating those responses with references to literary devices identified in texts, differentiates TDLT as an approach to literary instruction from other educational disciplines. Taking students' initial responses to texts as a starting point further implies that monologic, teacher-centered literary instruction does not appear to be the way forward for future literature curricula.

These implications raised at least three questions. First, how may the implementation of TDLT and its principles find its way into literature classrooms? We indicated that there may be a need to develop a professional development course for pre-service and in-service teachers, and that it may be worth considering to set up teacher design teams for teachers' professional development. Second, we addressed questions about assessment and testing which are highly relevant to teachers. We argued in favor of formative assessment, for which the TDLT rubric, written dialogue, and learner report task may be helpful tools. Finally, we raised the question to which texts and educational domains TDLT principles may be applied. We discussed the potential of adolescent and young adult literature, and pointed out that, although they may be thematically relevant, the language in historical literary texts or texts in foreign language curricula may hinder their implementation in TDLT. Lastly, we have indicated that TDLT may offer opportunities for transdisciplinarity in schools, by connecting literary instruction to other disciplines in which human nature plays a role, such as history, citizenship education, social studies, and arts education.