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In search of the excellent literature teacher. An inductive approach to constructing professional teaching standards

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This study makes a contribution to the development of empirically based, domain-specific teaching standards that are acknowledged by the professional community of teachers and which, therefore, have a good chance of being successfully implemented and used for professional development purposes. It was prompted by the resistance on the part of many teachers to the one-size-fits-all teaching standards imposed on them from above. We, therefore, looked for an alternative and canvassed teacher opinion about what makes an excellent literature teacher. Because our standards will be used to evaluate the profession, we also wished to know to what extent teachers satisfy (or would like to satisfy) their own ideal, and which factors influence their professional development. Contrary to earlier studies, we found that the professional community of literature teachers hold widely shared ideas about what constitutes excellence in their profession. We also found that almost 40% felt that their own level of professionalism fell far short of excellence, but that their professional growth was primarily hampered by external, contextual factors. If the government wishes to promote teacher ‘excellence’, the infrastructure for professional development will need to change so that teachers can acquire the knowledge and skills embodied in the teaching standards.

Keywords: professional development; teacher evaluation; teacher competences; domain-specific teacher standards; literature education

1. Introduction

Meta-analysis shows that teacher quality is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement. Teacher quality is therefore a topic with high political priority (Hattie, 2009, 2012; Hilton, Flores, & Niklasson, 2013; Lingard, 2005). Since the early 1990s, we have seen governments all over the world seeking to boost and monitor teacher quality. In addition to curriculum standards, teaching standards appear to be the most appropriate policy instruments for this purpose (Beck, Hart, & Kosnik, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Ingvarson, 1998).

The term ‘teaching standards’ is widely used in educational documents and discourses (Smith, 2005; Hilton et al., 2013). However, there appear to be several current interpretations of the word ‘standards’. Sachs (2003) identifies four contexts in which the term has acquired its own meaning. The first is a common-sense definition of what teachers should be able to do and what they should know. The second concerns quality assurance and accountability. The third meaning occurs in the context

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of professional development and quality improvement. Finally, the fourth meaning is used interchangeably with professional certification and licensing, often in combination with the introduction of a teacher registration system. These definitions are often not clearly distinguished in social and academic discourse, which in Sachs' (2003) view easily gives rise to misunderstanding about the role of teaching standards.

Generally, teaching standards are the result of a democratic process involving unions, school boards and the government, which means they have a political rather than an empirical basis. It is often unclear what these standards mean for teachers wishing to qualify further in their subject area. It is therefore hardly surprising that the professional community of teachers has had problems adopting them. Ingvarson (1998), Sachs (2003, 2011) and many other specialists believe that this is linked to the low level of teacher control and participation. This is confirmed by meta-analyses of implementation studies, which show that educational policy and research findings cannot be successfully implemented unless they tie in with the experiences, concerns, knowledge and views of teachers (Broekkamp & Van Hout-Wolters, 2007; Kennedy, 1997; McIntyre, 2005; National Research Council, 2002; Verloop, Van Driel, & Meijer, 2001).

A feature of government-imposed standards is that they are expressed in very general terms, in keeping with the principle of one-size-fits-all. 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). The upshot is that teachers will not acknowledge these general instruments for their professional development, because the competences do not reflect the essence of their work.

Both the standards themselves and the way in which they tend to be developed and implemented have long been the subject of debate (Ingvarson, 1998; Santoro, Reid, Mayer & Singh, 2012). Sachs (2011) reduced the discussion to two central oppositions – contractual versus responsive accountability and government control versus professional autonomy. Contractual accountability is evident in regulatory environments where the intent of government is compliance and control, whereas responsive accountability is about inclusion and using the profession to self-regulate practice. Like Ingvarson (1998), Sachs (2003, 2011) concludes that where the development and renewal of their profession is concerned, teaching standards must be owned and overseen by teachers themselves.

Recent years have seen a growing number of studies in which teachers play an active role in constructing teaching standards as part of their professional development (Sachs, 2011). Recent examples include Kriewaldt (2012), Mulcahy (2011), and Mayer, Mitchell, Macdonald, and Bell (2005). However, although standards developed in this way can make a major contribution to the professional development of the teachers involved, they lack an empirical foundation supported by the professional community, which prevents a seamless transfer to other schools and situations.

2. Dutch quality agenda for excellent teaching

This evolution from government regulation to professional activism is also evident in the Netherlands. Professional standards have significant potential for encouraging teachers to think in fundamentally different ways about their work, classroom

activities and professional identity (Sachs, 2003). For this reason, the Dutch Ministry of Education initiated the Quality Agenda for Excellent Teaching, which includes projects designed to explore content knowledge and pedagogical ‘excellence’ within specific domains. One such project, ‘Excellence in literature education in upper secondary classes’, has a dual aim: (1) to equip teachers with a pedagogical knowledge base and (2) to develop domain-specific, improvement-driven teaching standards. The development of this knowledge base is described in Witte, Rijlaarsdam, and Schram (2012).¹ The study reported in the present article deals with our search for teaching standards for literature teaching. Our aim is to formulate empirically based, domain-specific teaching standards that are acknowledged and recognized by the professional community of literature teachers and which, therefore, have a good chance of being successfully implemented and used for professional development purposes.

3. In search of the excellent literature teacher

The key challenge in our project is to answer the question: what are the competences of an excellent literature teacher? Teachers must be able to identify with the standards. We therefore felt that an inductive approach, which takes the views of the profession as its starting point, would have a greater chance of success. As far as we know, however, there are no studies of teachers’ views on the attributes of an ‘excellent’ literature teacher. Anyone wishing to explore teachers’ views on teaching has to consider contextual and personal variables such as beliefs, gender, experience, and qualifications (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Borg, 2003; Hattie, 2009).

3.1. Contextual factors

A proper understanding of the Dutch context requires an appreciation of the place that literature education occupies in the curriculum and an awareness of recent innovations in the secondary education curriculum. Historically, the literature domain was the prerogative of the teacher and allowed scope for considerable freedom. As a result, literature was 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 and approaches. Janssen and Rijlaarsdam (1996) found four educational paradigms for teaching literature: cultural, aesthetic, social and personal. In the past 15 years, the Dutch government has taken steps to introduce greater structure and standardization into the curriculum. The learning-to-learn paradigm became the focus of curriculum design in 1997, while four reference levels for grades 6–12 were established for Dutch language and literature in 2008. However, given the liberal tradition, it remains to be seen whether these innovations have influenced teachers’ views and whether they will result in a coherent set of teaching standards for literature teaching.

3.2. Personal variables

It is not just the context of literature education that affects teachers’ views; they are also influenced by personal factors. We will confine ourselves here to factors that are frequently examined in the context of classroom practice, namely level of teacher education, gender and experience.

Teacher training in the Netherlands is offered at research universities (university) and at universities of applied sciences (HBO). Denessen (1999) and Vogels (2009) found significant differences in the pedagogical focus of these two groups. University-trained teachers attach greater value to the transfer of subject knowledge and pay more attention to high student performance, while teachers trained at HBO institutions are more concerned with their students' personal development and well-being. These two orientations are already evident during training (Jansen & Bruinsma, 2007).

Timmerman and Van Essen (2004) found gender differences in classroom practice. Female teachers were more focused on interacting with children, whereas male teachers felt it was important to awaken student interest and motivation in a particular subject. Evans and Tribble (1986) and Pearson and Goff (1980) observed that female teachers have a stronger interpersonal bond with students than male teachers and pay more attention to learning to learn.

The final factor to be included in our analyses is the number of years of teaching experience. The innovations of the late 1990s have triggered a paradigm shift from a teacher-oriented to a student-oriented curriculum (Bonset & Rijlaarsdam, 2004), which has meant a fundamental change in teaching practice for many teachers. Teachers with lengthy experience also have more domain-specific knowledge than their less experienced colleagues and probably attach greater value to it (Janssen, Veldman, & Van Tartwijk, 2008; Meyer, 2004).

3.3. Research questions

Because of the paucity of empirical research on excellence in literature teaching, and because we are aiming to tie in with teachers' own perceptions, we chose to base the instrument on the perceptions of members of the professional community. Three main questions and seven subquestions guided our research.

The first main question concerns the dimensions of excellence identified by teachers, and whether these are supported by professionals regardless of gender, experience or type of teacher training:

- (1) According to the professional community, what are the dimensions of excellence for literature teachers in upper secondary education (grades 10–12)?

Clearly, not all dimensions will be rated equally. Our second research question is therefore:

- (2) What is the relative importance of the different dimensions?

Teacher background characteristics can play a role in rating the dimensions.

- (3) Are there differences in these dimensions by gender, years of experience or type of teacher education?

Teachers do have some insight into their own level of accomplishment in teaching literature. We therefore analysed the relationship between teachers' reported

level of accomplishment and their desire to meet the required competences of an excellent literature teacher.

- (4) What are the relationships between the dimensions and the self-reported level of accomplishment for an excellent literature teacher?
- (5) Are there differences in self-reports and the extent to which a teacher wishes to match the ideal if we look at gender, experience and type of teacher training?

These questions relate to the ideal picture that teachers have, but this may differ markedly from what teachers are able to achieve within the context of their own schools (Goodlad, Klein, & Tye, 1979). Being an excellent literature teacher depends not only on teacher qualities or competences, but also on circumstances (Hattie, 2012). Because the ultimate objective of our project is to increase the quality of literature teachers, we are also interested in any practical obstacles that teachers experience in daily practice. Our last two research questions look at these circumstances.

- (6) Which circumstances do teachers experience as obstacles to becoming an excellent literature teacher?

This could yield pessimistic or optimistic answers to the question about whether teachers believe they match the profile of an excellent literature teacher.

- (7) What is the relationship between these circumstances and the self-reported accomplishment?

4. Data collection and analysis

4.1. Questionnaire development

We developed a questionnaire to discover the views of upper secondary teachers of literature on key dimensions of the competences needed to be an excellent literature teacher. We derived a set of those competencies based on authoritative handbooks of research on teaching language and literature (Kamil, Pearson, Moje, & Afflerbach, 2011; Lapp & Fisher, 2011) and specialist educational handbooks for teachers (Beach, Appleman, Hynds, & Wilhelm, 2011; Langer, 2010). For the purpose of face validation and to involve the profession, we then discussed our findings with two renowned researchers who are specialists in literature education and two distinguished teachers.

This yielded nine areas that describe the competences of excellent teachers. Likert-type items were formulated for activities in each of these areas, resulting in a 77-item questionnaire about the competences for quality teaching. The stem of each item was: 'A very good literature teacher in upper secondary education...'. Respondents could rate the answers on a five-point scale (1 = not an essential feature, 2 = somewhat desirable, 3 = desirable, 4 = very desirable and 5 = essential). In this way, we gathered by deductive means a very broad spectrum of items, which we could then present to the sample of teachers. By obtaining teacher responses to this broad view of activities and competences, we hoped to discover inductively the

views of literature teachers on these issues. We decided to use a questionnaire rather than, say, focus groups because we felt that the latter might neglect one or more dimensions.

In the second section of the questionnaire, we presented circumstances that could influence the ideal of achieving excellence. We also asked teachers to rate themselves on a scale from 1 to 10 to indicate the extent to which they felt they matched the profile of an ideal teacher, and the extent to which they wished to comply with their own ideal picture.

4.2. Sample

To reach as broad a group of respondents as possible, we approached several national networks of mother-tongue teachers via the internet. Although there were 262 teachers in our convenience sample, not all of them completed the questionnaire. We excluded from further analysis any respondent with a non-response of more than 10% on the items that described an ideal literature teacher, resulting in a response of 230.

4.3. Analysis

To answer the first research question, we performed an explanatory factor analysis, followed by reliability analyses of the factors indicating the qualities of an excellent literature teacher based on teacher responses. The second question was answered by descriptives on the scales and items. The analysis for the third question was performed by means of *t*-tests on the scales for teacher characteristics. An ANOVA analysis of three groups of teachers was carried out to answer question four. Finally, we performed a factor analysis on the circumstances that could hamper excellent performance. We related these factors to teachers' scores on questions about the extent to which they match the ideal of an excellent literature teacher, which answered the last two research questions.

5. Results

5.1. Sample descriptive

Seventy-five percent of the teachers in the sample were female, 51% were university trained and 35% had less than five years' experience in the upper grades of secondary education. Of those with university training, 75% had more than five years' experience. For the teachers with HBO training, this figure was 52% (see Table 1).

Unfortunately, it is virtually impossible to test the representativeness of the sample by comparing it with national data. Although data are available on the total group of teachers at secondary school level in the Netherlands, broken down by gender, age and type of teacher training, these data are not comparable with the group of teachers we approached in this study – teachers who teach mother-tongue language and literature in upper secondary education (grades 10–12).

5.2. Dimensions of excellence in literature teaching

We performed an explanatory factor analysis – principal components with varimax rotation – on the 77 items describing an excellent literature teacher. Based on the scree plot, a six-factor solution explaining 51% of the variance was revealed and

Table 1. Sample mother-tongue teachers ($N = 230$).

Gender		Teacher training				Years of experience				
Male	Female	HBO 2	HBO 1	University	Other	0–1	2–4	5–10	11–20	> 20
25%	75%	8%	34%	47%	11%	11%	24%	24%	20%	21%

was readily interpretable. Loadings from .40 and above were used, as recommended by Stevens (2002) for samples of about 200 respondents. The 11 items that loaded on more than one factor were removed. The factors could be described as: knowledge about approaching students as individual readers; a varied repertoire of teaching techniques; literary and cultural skills and knowledge; a multiple approach to literature education; an integrated approach to literature education; professional development. Appendix 1 presents the items and factor loadings per factor. Reliability analyses show very reliable scales based on the factors. Some items that did not properly fit the scale in terms of content and which also had relatively low item-total correlations were removed from the scale. With the exception of the teaching techniques scale, one item was removed from each scale.

Table 2 presents the scale characteristics per scale. All scales have a good reliability (Cronbach's alpha of .80 or higher).

All scales have a moderate to high correlation with each other, as shown in Table 3. All correlations are significant ($p < .01$), indicating that the dimensions are strongly related and are likely to point to the underlying concept of an excellent literature teacher.

5.3. Relative importance of the dimensions

Looking at the mean of the six different scales in Table 2, we can conclude that 'knowledge of students as individual readers' is seen as an essential competence for an excellent literature teacher (mean = 4.27, SE = .53). The dimension 'integrated approach to literature education' has the least support, although the mean score of 3.42 (SE = .60) is above the middle of the scale and this dimension is still viewed as a desirable competence.

5.4. Gender, years of experience and training

The results of the t -test analysis show whether there are significant differences in scores on the scales between teachers with different background characteristics. We analysed differences with regard to gender, type of teacher training (university or HBO) and years of experience in the upper grades of secondary education (more/less than 10 years' experience).

Table 2. Scale characteristics.

Scale	N items	Cronbach's alpha	Mean	SE
Students as readers	13	.93	4.27	.538
Teaching techniques	8	.89	4.01	.559
Literary knowledge and skills	12	.89	3.95	.566
Multiple approach	5	.85	3.84	.670
Professional development	6	.84	3.81	.683
Integrated approach	6	.80	3.42	.601

Table 3. Correlations.

	Students as readers	Literary knowledge and skills	Teaching techniques	Professional development	Multiple approach	Integrated approach
Students as readers	1					
Literary knowledge and skills	.651	1				
Teaching techniques	.720	.551	1			
Professional development	.531	.525	.533	1		
Multiple approach	.598	.658	.528	.439	1	
Integrated approach	.426	.506	.466	.417	.441	1

All correlations are significant $p < .01$.

As Figure 1 shows, there were no gender differences in the mean scores on the six scales.

On average, teachers who were HBO-trained scored higher on the dimension 'integrated vision of literature education' ($M = 3.5$, $SE = .059$) than university-trained teachers ($M = 3.3$, $SE = .054$). This is a significant difference $t(214) = -2.04$, $p < .05$. The effect size (Cohen's d) of .13, although significant, is rather small (see Figure 2).

There was no difference in answers on the scales between teachers with less than 10 years' experience in upper secondary education and teachers with more than 10 years' experience (see Figure 3).

5.5. Self-reported level of meeting the criteria for excellent literature teachers and the relationship to the dimensions

What is the relationship between the self-report score and the mean scores on the dimensions? To make this result more tangible, we divided the teachers into three

Figure 1. Scores on dimensions by gender.

Figure 2. Scores on dimensions by type of teacher training.

Figure 3. Scores on dimensions by experience.

self-report groups. Group 1 reported their own level of accomplishment as 6 or lower (38%), group 2 as 7 (42%), and group 3 as 8 or 9 (20%). An ANOVA analysis revealed that there were significant differences on three dimensions: literary knowledge and skills, teaching techniques and a multiple approach to literature education. Table 4 shows that teachers with a higher self-report also have a higher score on these dimensions.

5.6. Self-reported level of meeting the criteria for excellent literature teachers by gender, experience and type of teacher training

Table 5 shows the self-reported level of meeting the criteria for an excellent literature teacher, broken down by gender, experience and type of teacher training and expressed on a scale from 1 to 10, with a score of 10 indicating that the respondent is an excellent teacher.

Women showed a lower self-report than men, although this was not significant. More experienced teachers rated themselves significantly higher than their less experienced counterparts ($M = 7.02$, $SE = .11$). The effect size (Cohen's $d = .63$) shows a medium to large effect. The differences between teachers with university training and those with HBO training is also significant, although the effect size is small to medium (Cohen's $d = .39$).

5.7. *Difference between ideal and self-report*

It is always good to strive for an ideal. We therefore asked teachers to what extent they wished to meet the ideal of an excellent literature teacher. The difference between the self-report and the ideal score sheds some light on whether teachers feel they are doing a good job or perhaps 'failing' to some extent. Table 6 shows the differences between the ideal and the self-report by gender, experience and type of teacher training.

Women feel further removed from their ideal picture than men ($p < .02$, Cohen's $d = .39$). Teachers with less than 10 years' experience show a significantly larger gap between ideal and reality than more experienced teachers ($p < .00$, Cohen's $d = .69$). At .05, the difference between university and HBO-trained teachers is not significant, but the effect size is still .25.

5.8. *Practical obstacles to excellent literature education*

We asked teachers to indicate on 13 four-point Likert-type items the extent to which the circumstances described in the items applied to their own teaching practice. For instance, 'I have too many classes and students', 'I don't have time to keep my

Table 4. Scores on dimensions by self-report group.

Dimension	Self-report		
	≤ 6	7	8 or 9
Knowledge and skills	3.85	3.94	4.19
Teaching techniques	3.90	4.05	4.13
Multiple approach	3.75	3.84	4.08

Table 5. Self-report by gender, experience and type of teacher training.

	Male	Female	<10 years	>10 years	HBO	University	Total
Self-report	6.85	6.50	6.28	7.02	6.37	6.83	6.61

Table 6. Difference between ideal and self-report by gender, experience and type of teacher training.

	Male	Female	<10 years	>10 years	HBO	University	Total
Difference between ideal and self-report	1.93	2.37	2.55	1.82	2.38	2.10	2.24

Table 7. Factor loading ‘Practical obstacles’.

Item	Individual	School
Big differences in quality of literature teachers in school		.716
Too much attention to linguistic skills		.692
Different views among literature teachers in school		.690
Literature is not highly regarded at my school		.666
Too few contact hours		.584
Too many classes (= students) per teacher		.455
Lack of time to train myself in all aspects of literature teaching	.818	
Lack of time to stay up-to-date in reading	.763	
Lack of proper professional development courses	.681	
Lack of literary and literature-teaching training	.586	
Difficult to arouse student interest in literature	.586	
Lack of good teaching and other materials	.577	
Literature is not my priority in teaching	.430	

reading up-to-date’. A factor analysis of these items revealed two factors that could be interpreted as a school factor and an individual factor. Table 7 shows the items and factor loadings.

Both factors form reliable scales (Cronbach’s alphas of .73 and .77, respectively). The male score on the school-related factor is somewhat higher than on the individual factor (mean 2.30, SE .10 and mean 1.92, SE .08, respectively).

Women reported school factors as obstacles in their educational practice more frequently than men (mean for women 2.50, for men 2.30 $p < .09$). While there were no differences between university-trained and HBO-trained teachers, experience appears to play a role. Experienced teachers scored lower on the individual factor scale than their less experienced counterparts (means 1.89 and 2.09, respectively, $p < .05$, Cohen’s $d = .35$).

5.9. The relationship between ‘practical obstacles’ and self-reported accomplishment

Looking at the self-report groups (Figure 4), we can conclude that the lower a teacher’s score on self-reported accomplishment, the higher the scores on the individual hindrance factor. All groups experienced the external school factor as troublesome.

Figure 4. Practical obstacles by self-report group.

6. Conclusions and discussion

Our aim was to construct a coherent set of empirically based, domain-specific teaching standards that are acknowledged and recognized by the professional community of literature teachers and which, therefore, have a good chance of being successfully implemented and used for professional developmental purposes. Literature teachers can use these standards to assess their teaching competences and set professional development goals. To make sure that teachers will be able to accept and identify with the standards, we decided to give them a say in determining what key competences an excellent literature teacher should possess. We consciously opted for an inductive approach, but we were doubtful whether this method could help us arrive at a coherent set of standards. This was because research has shown that teachers have different views about good teaching in general and about literature education in particular. We hoped through this study to make a contribution to the ‘major shift in focus’ that Sachs (2011) says is required for teachers to become activist agents in the development and renewal of their profession.

Three main questions were leading. The first one was about which dimensions of excellence teachers identify and whether they are supported by the profession regardless of gender, experience or type of teacher training. 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 are significant ($p < .01$), indicating that the dimensions are strongly related and are likely to point to an underlying concept of what constitutes an excellent literature teacher. ‘Knowledge of students as individual readers’ is seen as an essential competence (mean 4.27), followed by a ‘varied repertoire of teaching techniques’. An ‘integrated approach to literature education’ is the least valued competence, although still viewed as desirable for an excellent literature teacher (mean 3.42). Teachers clearly attach considerable importance to internal differentiation in their classes, which ties in with what is generally regarded as a characteristic of pedagogical excellence (Hattie, 2009, 2012; Kyriakides, Creemers, & Antoniou, 2009). Apart from a small effect size (Cohen’s $d = .13$), there were no significant differences in the scores on the dimensions by gender, years of experience or type of teacher education. 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 literature teachers.

This homogeneity was a surprise. We did not find the four paradigms (cultural, aesthetic, social and personal) that Janssen and Rijlaarsdam (1996) had encountered among literature teachers. A possible explanation is that they 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 may have identified types in theory, in practice, they usually encountered hybrids. We also found this eclecticism in our study, with teachers placing a high value on a multiple approach. Professionals clearly view excellent literature teachers as all-rounders with a wide range of approaches in their teaching repertoires.

Because our instrument will be used for professional development, our second leading question focused on current and desired pedagogical excellence. Teachers rated themselves 6.61 out of 10 when it came to satisfying their ideal picture, whereas they reported their desire to match their ideal as 8.86. This difference of

2.21 points between the current and desired level indicates a need for professional development.

Women and teachers with less than 10 years' experience felt further removed from the ideal than men and more experienced teachers. A possible explanation for these findings could be that less experienced teachers were overrepresented in the female group. It is heartening to see that more experienced teachers felt a closer conformity to their ideal, although this could be explained in both positive and negative terms. Also, women are perhaps more idealistic and they set the bar higher than men when it comes to striving towards teaching excellence (Van Essen, 1999; Timmerman & Van Essen, 2004). This would cause them to experience a bigger gap between their ideals and their actual behaviour. Thirty-eight percent of the teachers in our sample reported that they did not meet the criteria for an excellent teacher. Forty-two percent saw themselves as partially satisfying the criteria, and 20% as fully satisfying them. Our analysis revealed significant differences between those grades of excellence on three dimensions: literary knowledge and skills, varied repertoire of teaching techniques and a multiple approach to the goals of literature education. Perhaps, we can interpret these dimensions as indicators of pedagogical excellence.

To support teachers who feel that they fall far short of their ideal, we need to know more about the potential obstacles to further professional development. The results show that hindrance factors can be divided into personal and contextual. For the latter, the main factors appear to be differences in teacher quality and differing views among the language teachers in a school. This is surprising, given the reported unanimity among the respondents. A possible explanation is the large number of unqualified teachers appointed in the past 10 years because of the Dutch teacher shortage. There is also a division between teachers who specialize in language or literature. Perhaps language specialists and unqualified teachers are underrepresented in our sample. For the personal factor, we note that teachers are mainly bothered by a lack of time and appropriate training opportunities. The shortage of time stems from the fairly heavy workload of mother-tongue teachers (Frielink, Backbier, Simons, Groeneveld, & Franck, 2001). Given the relationship between supply and demand in the training market, this also explains the lack of appropriate training courses. It points to an impasse in the professional infrastructure, with the range of training courses failing to match teachers' needs and teachers lacking the time for professional development. Politicians and school boards wishing to promote teacher professionalism must take responsibility for this structural problem.

6.1. Limitations and further directions

This study suffers from some limitations. First, the convenience sample is rather small and may not be representative of the population of literature teachers as a whole. Because participation was voluntary, teachers who are more interested in literature teaching may be overrepresented in the sample. This is not too problematic in our view, because this study does provide insights into the key competences for literature teachers. A second limitation is that the study was confined to Dutch teachers. Although the situation of literature education in the Netherlands might differ from that of other countries, we feel that these differences are likely to be small, especially as international comparisons and ratings in various countries reveal the same pedagogical trends (Bonset & Rijlaarsdam, 2004; Van de Ven & Doecke, 2011; Witte & Sâmihăian, 2013). In addition, our international literature search

failed to reveal an empirical basis on which we could elaborate. This suggests an avenue for further research. It would be interesting to compare the views of Dutch teachers with those of teachers from other countries. Furthermore, setting up focus groups to discuss our findings could further highlight teachers' views about the domains in which the competences of an excellent literature teacher should be strengthened. This is the next step in our research into developing an assessment instrument.

Our ultimate aim is to develop an instrument that teachers can use to compare their self-reported competences with competences judged by the professional community to be essential for an excellent literature teacher. Teaching standards must provide long-term direction and milestones for ongoing professional development. We believe it is possible to use national scores to calculate averages for the variable 'experience', for example, as Kyriakides et al. (2009) have advocated for primary education. If these data are collected and stored at a national level, it will also tell us about the training needs of different groups of teachers so that we can respond accordingly. However, self-assessment does not monitor classroom performance. Other instruments to evaluate a teacher's performance, as a supplement to self-assessment, are also important. For instance, a key factor is teaching quality as perceived by students (Hattie, 2009). Students seem to be accurate judges of excellence, and could discriminate between teachers who were experienced and expert and those who were experienced and non-expert (Hattie, 2012). A study measuring the perception of upper-secondary students of the competences an excellent literature teacher should possess would be a useful addition to this research.

Note

1. There is now a European version of the knowledge base for teachers (www.literaryframework.eu), developed as part of the European Commission's Lifelong Learning Programme.

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Appendix 1. Items and factor loadings per factor

Item	Fac1	Fac2	Fac3	Fac4	Fac5	Fac6
29. encourages the development of both fairly poor and good readers	.787					
27. is interested in the students' literary development process	.731					
28. can identify and name differences between students (reading level, reading style)	.696					
26. can reliably advise students on which books to choose	.688					
25. is interested in students' tastes, interests, lives and ideas	.641					
33. knows which texts really appeal to students (reading pleasure)	.624					
32. knows what makes a text problematical and/or challenging for different reading levels	.585					
30. has positive expectations of all students (including unmotivated readers)	.569					
60. ensures that students derive a great deal of pleasure from reading literary texts	.554					
51. relates literary texts and theories to young people's experiences and to current issues	.523					
69. gives tailored feedback	.493					
50. ensures a safe climate in which students are open to one another's experiences and views	.476					
35. knows which texts help students to progress to a higher level	.457					
21.* stimulates colleagues and is an oracle for literature education	.411					
55. makes links between literature, cultural movements, art forms and history		.663				
37. is a good storyteller		.649				
56. places Dutch literature and culture in an international perspective		.622				
9. has broad cultural knowledge and interests (film, visual arts, philosophy, history, etc.)		.592				
38. is good at reading aloud (prose) and reciting (poetry)		.583				
39. brings old texts and periods to life		.580				
54. makes links between literary theory and the theory of other narrative and lyrical art forms (film, cartoons and drama)		.563				
3. reads widely and is familiar with major writers and works of world literature		.529				
8. has a thorough knowledge of the Dutch "canon" and of literary history		.487				
10. has a highly developed sense of literary style		.415				

(Continued)

(Continued).

Item	Fac1	Fac2	Fac3	Fac4	Fac5	Fac6
52. incorporates current literary events in lessons (literary awards, death of well-known writers, book week, etc.)		.407				
20. identifies and remedies shortcomings in teaching resources (textbooks, etc.) and is able to supplement and improve them		.401				
48. encourages cooperation between students			.687			
43. knows the learning gains of assignments and teaching methods			.636			
47. meets the needs of different student groups in the lesson			.612			
49. encourages exchange and discussion between students			.612			
44. demonstrates how students can tackle a complex task (strategies)			.607			
66. varies the type of assessment			.560			
40. varies the teaching methods and resources			.544			
45. can analyse students' thought processes and bring them into the open			.542			
70. has an inquiring attitude (wants to know whether something works and why)			.450			
72.* is not afraid to abandon the set path (regulations, study guide and method) where necessary			.438			
74. keeps a close eye on literature teaching developments (through professional journals, conferences, study days and professional communities)				.754		
13. keeps abreast of key publications on literature teaching (e.g. on reading levels)				.690		
75. keeps a close eye on developments within literature at universities				.649		
14. keeps abreast of the resources available (textbooks and websites) for literature teaching				.620		
12. keeps abreast of the regulatory framework for literature teaching (core objectives, learning outcomes and reference levels)				.587		
77. seeks training and other opportunities to overcome own knowledge gaps and pedagogical shortcomings				.482		
7. has a thorough knowledge of literary theory				.449		
58. uses literary concepts to teach students to understand and appreciate texts				.425		
64. ensures that students develop a feeling for style					.658	
62. encourages students' literary-historical awareness					.651	
65. ensures that students experience the beauty of texts					.643	
34.* knows what students can learn from a text					.620	

(Continued)

(Continued).

Item	Fac1	Fac2	Fac3	Fac4	Fac5	Fac6
61. ensures that students understand the importance of literature for their personal and general development					.542	
31. is aware of the educational value of a literary text					.443	
17. identifies and utilizes opportunities to give creative writing a distinct place in the curriculum						.778
59. gets students to write stories and poems themselves to help them understand the theory						.620
11. provides narrative comments on students' 'literary' writing (creative writing)						.607
18. identifies and utilizes opportunities to work with colleagues in related subjects (culture and the arts, drama, classical and modern languages)						.529
19. identifies and utilizes opportunities to combine literature with language skills (writing and speaking)						.487
5. * is interested in popular genres (thrillers, fantasy, comics, songs, cabaret, etc.)						.415
24. organizes literary events at school (e.g. inviting a writer to speak, poetry competition and theatre)						.412

*Item removed from scale.