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The Treatment of and Lack of Enthusiasm for  
Reading in Dutch Education

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## Introduction

In our current Western societies, reading is really an indispensable act. Throughout our lifetimes we come to read all sorts of texts, and we read on a daily basis. For those who are in school or attending university, and people with jobs in which it is important to read, reading may be done on a continuous basis. For those persons who cannot read or read poorly, it is difficult to inform themselves and to participate in society. To instead retreat from public life and cower in a corner at home is – insofar possible – per definition undesirable but about the only thing that is simple for them. Given the importance of reading in our societies it might strike as remarkable that reading is not a naturally learned act or skill like walking. What is more, the human brain has no distinct area which enables humans to read. Unless a child is intentionally taught to read, the child will not learn to, neither when it has grown up and has become an adult.

In earlier times, the act of reading was more often connected with the fear for possibly immoral contents of texts than today. This fear came forth out of the moral connotations of reading. Such fears were still seen long after the medieval era. Even less than a century ago a novel about the isolation of lesbian women in society was seen as a severely degenerating force.<sup>1</sup> Between the Middle Ages and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there appeared of course many more books that met such disparaging contempt. This obsession with morality was also driven by the perception that reading immoral stories has its effect on physical health, just as eating bad food or taking poison has. American free-speech advocate Theodore Schroeder was one of the first people to do away with this falsity, which in the course of the twentieth century has withered in Western societies.<sup>2</sup> According to Frank Furedi, this deadening has had the consequence that reading came to be perceived differently. Furedi writes that ‘[l]iteracy, which has often been perceived as a moral virtue, is today treated more as a cognitive skill. Being a cognitive skill, reading becomes denuded of any morally valued qualities and (...)

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<sup>1</sup> F. Furedi, *Power of Reading: From Socrates to Twitter* (London & New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 149.

faces the challenge of being culturally devalued.<sup>3</sup> I am not convinced by Furedi's remarks, for two reasons in particular.

First, I do not see how reading is being culturally devalued in the West. Due to the rise of multimodal online screens and the higher accessibility of audio-visual and non-textual visual media, reading becomes a less common (leisure) activity. This could be seen as unconscious devaluation of reading. However, reading is still acknowledged as an immensely important skill to master in Western societies. As such, it is taught and encouraged in all schools, and besides schools there are all sorts of activities and signs that show that people are often encouraged to read, such as the annual Dutch Book Week, or the German media coverage of the *Frankfurter Buchmesse*. The importance of enlarging knowledge through reading and thereby combatting prejudices and being able to distinguish between real and fake news is larger than ever, now that the responsibility to separate trustworthy information from outright figments has shifted from publishers and news agencies to the reader.<sup>4</sup> Second, as a consequence of this high value adhered to reading today I do not believe that reading is considered a cognitive skill, although I agree with Furedi that reading is not considered a moral virtue in the medieval sense. Yet moral connotations that play a role in determining what must be read do still adhere to reading. Taking a look at the Dutch education system, it is obvious to me that in Dutch education moralism does in different shapes affect reading and learning to read. I will argue in this paper that in Dutch schools reading is not treated as a cognitive skill, but as a moral skill.

I will give my argument in three pieces. In chapter 1 I take a closer look at the definition of reading. How have people read through time? Is all reading that takes place today the same, or is there a difference in reading brief scribbles and reading a complex novel? What effects does reading have on us humans that it is so broadly encouraged, whilst for instance smartphone use is not as highly appraised? In chapter 2, I will take a look at how reading is learned at home before a child attends school and is taught in Dutch primary schools. For the

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 151.

<sup>4</sup> B. Schofield, 'All the News That's Fit to Print: Fake News and the 2016 U.S. Election', *TXT*, 4 (2017), pp. 131-137, there p. 132.

analysis of pre-school learning, I use a range of recent scientific literature. To illustrate how reading is taught in schools, I analyse and comment on methods that are used for this. I will also touch on figures about the reading skills and willingness to read of Dutch school children, as officially measured by the Dutch Inspectorate of Education. Also the school subject of Dutch at all three secondary school levels will be discussed.<sup>5</sup> In the last chapter, I will discuss the moralism that affects Dutch education. The structuralistic approach towards literature and the curtailment of free book choice do not only create a moralistic atmosphere around reading, these also keep students from reading the books that are right for them in the perspective of their own needs and wants. I will discuss the need for adolescent students to read free from such moralism. I will also address religious education and its effects on reading in schools, in both primary and secondary education. I will conclude by giving an overview of the treatment of reading in schools in the Netherlands as a moral skill, and propose to treat it as a valued cognitive skill which should help high school students with learning to shape their ideas about themselves and others, and help them to function in society as independent and informed citizens.

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<sup>5</sup> Secondary education in the Netherlands consists out of three levels. These are, ranked from low to high, vmbo, havo, and vwo. These levels consist respectively out of four, five, and six Forms. Vmbo is internally split into, again from low to high, vmbo-b, vmbo-k, and vmbo-t.

## Chapter 1 – The definition of reading

### Introduction

In the first part of this thesis, I will discuss various types of reading. I will discuss three different types of reading, to illustrate how the skill of reading has been practised through time using the theory introduced in the 1970s by Rolf Engelsing, and how today different applications of the skill of reading are put into practice.

German historian Rolf Engelsing was the first to use the terms “intensive reading”, “reading revolution” and “extensive reading” to roughly distinguish between eras of reading history. In his work *Der Bürger als Leser*, he describes the state of the written word in the city of Bremen in late medieval and early modern times. The concepts of intensive reading and extensive reading describe two modes of reading, the first of which has been most common before the so-called reading revolution, and the latter has been default since this revolution. Intensive reading means the reading of a small number of works multiple times. After the reading revolution, it has become more commonplace to read a greater diversity of works, and to read them only a few times or just once, since there is so much more to read. I will discuss the reading revolution and the extensive reading that emerged further below, but first I will discuss the phenomenon of intensive reading.

### Intensive reading before the reading revolution

Intensive reading is, as written before, to read a few works multiple times, sometimes even throughout a whole lifetime. One exemplar expression of intensive reading comes from Wittenberg, the Saxony town that Martin Luther has brought everlasting fame as birthplace of the Reformation, where in 1708 a cleric

made a reading scheme that helped to read the entire Bible within a year.<sup>6</sup> This does not have much in common with our usual reading habits today. Neither does another situation about which Engelsing writes, that a monastic catalogue from Bremen from the year 1497 reports 187 titles in the monastery's library. This included printed and handwritten works.<sup>7</sup> This seems a lot for that day and age in particular, but remember this was an institutional library of a monastery, which by definition are meant for studying. Moreover, among these written texts were only religious works, while also classical works from ancient Greece were basic parts of studious reading of those days, too. And these were not at hand in Bremen.<sup>8</sup> Books were exclusive products still in late medieval times, and despite the invention of print they remained to be so in early modern times. For early modern Northern Italy, Frank Trentmann may claim that noblemen were not the only ones in Florence to purchase books, he also describes them however as material 'depiction of domestic comfort' that enriched domestic life in the course of the sixteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Books were considered to be precious objects, and thus were no common goods as for us today.

Summing up the givens that reading books was either financially or linguistically hard or impossible, it seems attractive to share Lisa Kuitert's view that intensive reading was only common practice for a lack of anything better to read. In line with this claim lies the idea that religious works were simply the easiest to put your hands on before the reading revolution.<sup>10</sup> This is however not entirely true. The claim of Frank Furedi that reading has been looked at as a moral virtue does well apply here.<sup>11</sup> For this is the correct half of his claim; reading before the reading revolution often was limited to religious works, and not only because there would not have been many other works to read, but people also read

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<sup>6</sup> L. Kuitert, *Het boek en het badwater: De betekenis van papieren boeken* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), p. 123.

<sup>7</sup> R. Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser: Lesergeschichte in Deutschland 1500-1800* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1974), p. 8.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> F. Trentmann, *Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, from the Fifteenth Century to the Twenty-first* (New York City: Allen Lane, 2016), p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> Kuitert, *Het boek en het badwater*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>11</sup> F. Furedi, *Power of Reading*, p. 151.

religious works out of moral motivations. Rolf Engelsing stresses the religious dominance among what was read in Bremen, and also gives an example of a woodworker from Frankfurt, who died in the year 1572 and left practically only religious works, among them a Bible. This man also owned writings of Luther and thus his Bible could have been written in the German vernacular.<sup>12</sup> Yet before the Reformation, the Roman-Catholic Church did its utmost to prevent publications of Bibles in any language other than Latin. Those who could not understand Latin also could not read the Bible in those days, which according to Dutch sociocultural historian Herman Pleij is the actual meaning of the medieval notification that someone was *illiteratus*; not completely illiterate, but incapable of using the Latin language.<sup>13</sup> The struggles for Bibles in the vernacular, as fought by Geert Groote and John Wycliffe, are together with their support indications of the want to read the Bible for oneself, instead of having to depend on a bishop reciting Scripture in the Latin language laymen lacked knowledge of, at least the *illiterati*.<sup>14</sup>

What is more, saints were often portrayed reading. In particular Mary, who has been depicted while reading a book even in the nativity scene, amongst her dazzled husband Joseph and the three wise men.<sup>15</sup> To see the Mother of God reading even so briefly after childbirth counted as a very clear indication that lay believers should make sure to know their religious texts. Reading instructions also show a strife for serious attitudes in reading the Bible. The Rule of Benedict from the sixth century AD is very well known in this respect, but I've written above about a similar example from Wittenberg that is more than a millennium younger than Benedict's Rule. Such a work as the Rule of Benedict, subscribing chapters from all across the book of Psalms, also shows that intensive reading was not done from cover to cover. Reading intensively, one seeks for a piece that has been

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<sup>12</sup> Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser*, p. 28.

<sup>13</sup> H. Pleij, 'Met een boekje in een hoekje? Over literatuur en lezen in de middeleeuwen', in W. van den Berg & H. Schouten (eds.), *Het woord aan de lezer: Zeven literatuurhistorische verkenningen* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1987), pp. 16-48, there p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> W. Blockmans & P. Hoppenbrouwers, *Introduction to Medieval Europe, 300-1500*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2014 [2007]), pp. 402-403; 409-410.

<sup>15</sup> Pleij, *Met een boekje in een hoekje*, p. 23.

read before, selecting a fragment of which the reader feels the need to revive it inside the mind.<sup>16</sup> A last thing which indicates that reading was considered a moral virtue, was that the manner to read which is plain normal to us, silently without saying the read words aloud, was in the medieval era considered as a strange thing to do. Normal was to read out loud what was being read, to read silently was remarkable and readers needed good reasons to do such.<sup>17</sup> This made it much more common to read to others, who would gather and listen to what was being read. In this lies a moral aspect of this reading aloud; both listeners and passers-by would hear what a reader was reading. When everyone would keep for themselves what they read, heaven knows what sorts of sexually or otherwise immoral reading material would sneakily permeate the minds of society!<sup>18</sup> The intensive reading that was common until the reading revolution was perceived as a moral virtue, as can be drawn from the examples above. Insofar people did not voluntarily read with a moral mentality, this morality was imposed on people through depicting reading saints and threatening laymen with the big degrees of sinfulness of anything and any text related to sexuality. Sexuality was universally considered to be sinful by definition, at least before the Reformation.<sup>19</sup>

### Extensive reading since the reading revolution

In the second half of the eighteenth century, a shift in reading emerged, ‘a deep seated shift of the reading style’ as Rolf Engelsing called it for his subject of study Bremen.<sup>20</sup> It has been described for many different places: by Engelsing for Bremen, Richard Altick for England, and for New England – across the Atlantic –

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<sup>16</sup> H. Pleij, ‘Lezende leken, of: lezen leken wel? Tekst, drukpers en lezersgedrag tussen middeleeuwen ven moderne tijd’, in T. Bijvoet, P. Koopman, L. Kuitert et al. (eds.), *Bladeren in andermans hoofd: Over lezers en leescultuur* (Nijmegen: SUN, 1996), pp. 50-66, there p. 60.

<sup>17</sup> Pleij, *Met een boekje in een hoekje*, p. 23.

<sup>18</sup> Pleij, *Lezende leken*, p. 57.

<sup>19</sup> C. Lindberg, *The European Reformation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010 [1996]), pp. 59-60.

<sup>20</sup> Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser*, p. 182. Original text: ‘ein tiefgreifender Wandel des Lesestils’. Author’s translation.

the particular change has been recorded as well. The timespans for which this so called reading revolution has been assigned do differ much though. Martyn Lyons dates the reading revolution in the West between 1780 and 1830, Bremen saw this change in the second half of the eighteenth century according to Engelsing, while Lisa Kuitert claims it is normally situated between 1780 and 1800.<sup>21</sup> Precise dates and years aside, Lyons' and Kuitert's universal timespans illustrate well that this shift in reading cannot be seen in detachment from the renewing spirit of the French Revolution. What does it mean to revolutionise reading in a revolutionary world?

In his study of the reading revolution in Bremen, Engelsing distinguished every important aspect of it. Readers until then read primarily religious works, and literary fiction was – if familiar at all – most peculiar for them. These readers however started to turn their attention 'to open forms of private individual development with a significantly widened scope'.<sup>22</sup> Newspapers – England and in particular Paris saw flood waves of new newspaper titles appear during different stages of the eighteenth century – travelogues, poetry, periodicals and satirical or critical journals were normalised in the course of the century.<sup>23</sup>

Not only did the variety of genres of written texts change in the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, people also started to read their texts differently. Intensive reading did not only mean that fragments from a small number of books were read over and over, it was also intensive for the books that due to their frequent usage wore off much faster than books of extensive readers. In extensive reading culture, books are more abundant and less frequently used, as Naomi S. Baron illustrates with a brief story about shoes. The more shoes a person has, the less that person will wear each pair if every pair is worn as often.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser*, p. 182; Kuitert, *Het boek en het badwater*, p. 121; M. Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing: In the Western World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 132.

<sup>22</sup> Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser*, p. 182. Original text: 'zu öffentlichen Formen privater Individualbildung mit einem wesentlich verbreiterten Spielraum'. Author's translation.

<sup>23</sup> Engelsing, *Der Bürger als Leser*, p. 184; Kuitert, *Het boek en het badwater*, p. 123; Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>24</sup> N.S. Baron, *Words Onscreen: The Fate of Reading in a Digital World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 34-35.

The same principle applies to texts. Books were more and more used as normal subjects, to the dismay of some like American publisher Samuel Goodrich.<sup>25</sup> Would such critics have implied that with the subject book reading would be degenerated too, then they could not have been any more wrong.

The economic rise did not only make publishing easier and cheaper, people also gained on leisure time, thus gaining both financial capacity to get hold of books and time to read them.<sup>26</sup> Reading not only extensified, but it also descended into the lower layers of society.<sup>27</sup> This development did not occur synchronically with the rising number of available texts. Adriaan van der Weel writes that the Dutch reading public was still divided into a lower and higher group when many new texts were already available.<sup>28</sup> Whether this statement that a descent of print took place would be more correct than claiming an elevation of the masses would be an interesting inquiry for which there is no place here. What is certain though is that reading gained not only in popularity, but also relevance. It was due to the reading revolution that in the nineteenth century the Order of the Book arrived.<sup>29</sup> This order ‘presupposes widespread access to a formal education based on book learning, and a high literacy level.’<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the nineteenth century saw (reading) education on the rise. In England, reading education for children was initially considered with caution, for conservatives thought of it as too Jacobin, in other words too much in line with the aims of France’s revolutionaries.<sup>31</sup> Despite the spirit of the French Revolution, also in early nineteenth century France reading education was considered as a manner to

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<sup>25</sup> Kuitert, *Het boek en het badwater*, p. 123; Lyons, *A History of Reading and Writing*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>26</sup> R.D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 87-89.

<sup>27</sup> A. van der Weel, *Changing our textual minds: Towards a digital order of knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p. 95.

<sup>28</sup> A. van der Weel, *Onbehagen in de schriftcultuur: Leesrevoluties in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam: Leiden University Press, 2007), p. 18.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 92.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 91.

<sup>31</sup> Altick, *The English Common Reader*, p. 144.

implement moral codes at a young age.<sup>32</sup> Reading education did emerge though, yet its sheer purpose was to elevate society, while the individual minds were meant to simply be taught to read in the most basic manner; seeing words and knowing their meaning.<sup>33</sup> This may not seem much of a symptom of the Order of the Book, but not long before mere transliteration had been considered as skilled reading.<sup>34</sup>

### Fear of extensive reading

In society, the Order of the Book was expressed by the emergence of a so called public sphere, in which read ideas and stories could be discussed and debated in relative freedom.<sup>35</sup> Reading became a central act in societies. The German term *Lesewut* – reading rage – thus was well applicable, despite its connotations originally being of a pessimistic kind. For criticisms against the rise of reading surely existed. Conservative voices were afraid that through frequent and extensive reading immorality would stealthily sicken society.<sup>36</sup> These fears were actualised when Goethe’s novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* sparked a series of copycat suicides, now named the Werther effect.<sup>37</sup> This appeared as an actual danger of reading, and suicide related stories in general, as the 1981 television series *Tod eines Schülers* has had a similar effect among young West-German males in the age group 15-29 years.<sup>38</sup> These are the same sex and age group as the protagonist of the series.

Apart from the Werther effect the dangers of extensive reading were all

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<sup>32</sup> M. Lyons, ‘New Readers in the Nineteenth Century: Women, Children, Workers’, in G. Cavallo & R. Chartier (eds.), *A History of Reading in the West* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), pp. 313-344, there p. 327.

<sup>33</sup> Altick, *The English Common Reader*, pp. 143; 150-151.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 151.

<sup>35</sup> Van der Weel, *Changing our textual minds*, p. 93.

<sup>36</sup> Furedi, *Power of Reading*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 112.

<sup>38</sup> A. Schmidtke & H. Häfner, ‘The Werther effect after television films: new evidence for an old hypothesis’, *Psychological Medicine*, 18 (1988), pp. 665-676, there pp. 668-671.

feared in vain. One Dutchman who, in the aftermath of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Era, agitated against immorality in all fields of society, and hence immorality lurking in the growing extent of reading material that allowed for extensive reading as well, was Isaïc da Costa. Born in an Orthodox Jewish family, he converted to the Orthodox Protestantism that in his days was propagated by the Réveil, a movement that called for spiritual renewal and purity. In the year 1823, publishing house L. Herdingh & Zoon published a pamphlet written by Da Costa called *Bezwaren tegen de Geest der Eeuw* (Scruples against the Century's Spirit), in which he scorned the immorality that in his eyes so characterised the nineteenth century.<sup>39</sup> In his chapter on decency, Da Costa saw a lack thereof in the works of Enlightenment writers like Voltaire and Diderot, he saw men and women and people of high class and the lowest classes read those works.<sup>40</sup> Most of society was negative about Da Costa's book, a small group of like-minded believers shared Da Costa's misgivings.

### Types of reading

Now that I have discussed the shift over time from intensive towards extensive reading, I think it is important to explain something about the different manners to encounter a text. As said, the definition of skilled reading was once to aptly transliterate texts, yet in a world in which reading is the major manner to learn new facts and things and is vital to function in society, the bar has been set much higher. What is more, with so many different sorts of text around us, different types of approaching a text can be distinguished, and must be in order to define reading in specific situations. How should reading be defined?

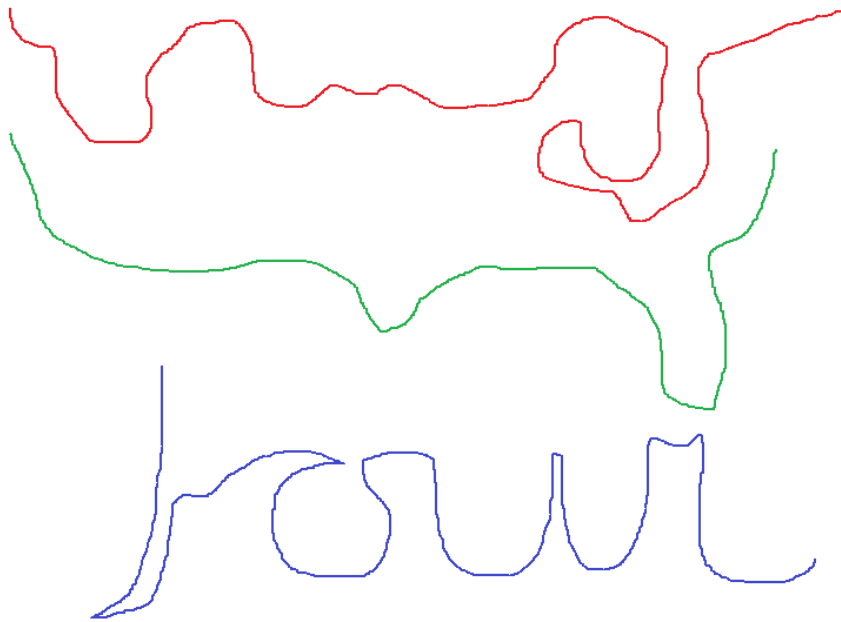
What reading actually is, in the broadest definition possible, can be explained by the history of graphic communication. In the prehistoric era a system

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<sup>39</sup> The Leiden-based publishing house L. Herdingh & Zoon was named after founder Leendert Herdingh, a revolutionary and a Thermidorian. His son Vincent took over after his father had died in 1815, and ironically published conservative works that bore the name of his liberal father.

<sup>40</sup> I. da Costa, *Bezwaren tegen de geest der eeuw*, edited by K. Exalto (Bleiswijk: Uitgeverij Tolle Lege, 1974 [1823]), pp. 16-17.

of clay tokens came in use, with which the then necessary administration of cattle could be kept and reported, without having to point at actually present cattle. Species and amounts could be expressed in a graphic system.<sup>41</sup> This system has developed, over time, into alphabetical writing.<sup>42</sup> This system is quite efficient; with a limited number of signs a near endless amount of words can be compiled, with words sentences can be built and with sentences stories. Letter signs are the



**Figure 1**

basis of alphabetical text, and a look at Figure 1 illustrates the underlying principle (Figure 1). The red line on top symbolises nothing at first sight, neither does the green one in the middle. But the blue line does contain meaning, it is universally recognised as the word “four” and not even as a line, which it

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<sup>41</sup> N. Carr, *The Shallows: How the internet is changing the way we read, think and remember* (London: Atlantic Books, 2010), p. 52; M. Wolf, *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 2008 [2007]), pp. 27-28.

<sup>42</sup> To read about this process is very interesting and insightful concerning the development of human communication, but it is too far off topic to discuss it here. For more about this development and the first alphabet, see: Carr, *The Shallows*, pp. 52-54; F.G. Naerebout & H.W. Singor, *De Oudheid: Grieken en Romeinen in de context van de wereldgeschiedenis*, (Amsterdam: Ambo|Anthos, 2014 [1995]), pp. 97; 101-103; Wolf, *Proust and the Squid*, pp. 51-78.

nevertheless is.<sup>43</sup> An alphabetical system of communication thus requires the ability to decode strings of signs – words – and recognise the correct pronunciations and meanings they symbolise. To learn to read is to learn to decode, and ‘[t]he more automated the decoding system, the more working memory space is left for comprehension’.<sup>44</sup> When considered as such, seeing the scribble ‘Wednesday 3pm dentist’, a road sign saying ‘Amsterdam 35 km’ or the news headline ‘Chelsea – AS Monaco cancelled’ are as much reading as, say, studying the history of liberalism. But the ways in which is read are obviously much different. So, what distinguishes between reading and reading?

Miha Kovač and Adriaan van der Weel distinguish three types of reading, two of which are what I call attentive reading, and the third type is skimming; the quick scanning of a text or sliding one’s eyes across scribbles or headlines or road signs. The first attentive reading type I will mention is immersed reading. It is defined by Kovač and Van der Weel as plunging into the plot of a story and losing yourself in it while deeply focussing on the text, and is typical for reading popular fiction.<sup>45</sup> The character of immersed reading is also illustrated by Natalia Samutina’s study of the Russian-speaking community of Harry Potter fans. Samutina describes fan fiction in general as ‘a space of active, involved and emotionally charged reading’, also stressing that the Russian-speaking readers of Harry Potter form an active online community and are ‘active engaged, passionate readers.’<sup>46</sup> This is well in line with the definition of immersed reading of Kovač

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<sup>43</sup> The green line does actually symbolise something, a geographical shape. Have another look. This illustrates the essence of reading, it can only be done once the graphic symbols are understood. The green line is the southern coast and border of the United States, with Florida overly significant.

<sup>44</sup> M. Kovač & A. van der Weel, ‘Reading in a post-textual era’, *First Monday*, 23 (2018), p. 1-11, there p. 5. Retrieved via: First Monday, ‘Kovač’, <<https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/rt/prINTERfriendly/9416/7592>>, (31 October 2018). Throughout this paper, I will refer to this version of the article. This is also the version to which annotated page numbers apply.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> N. Samutina, ‘Emotional landscapes of reading: fan fiction in the context of contemporary reading practices’, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 20 (2017), pp. 253-269, there pp. 254; 256-257. For the neuroscience behind immersed reading, see: C.T. Hsu, M. Conrad & A.M.

and Van der Weel, as is the claim of Samutina that romances and children's literature are typical types of text to be read immersed, both read with 'the general intensity of affect'.<sup>47</sup>

Then there is deep reading. In an NPR radio show, Maryanne Wolf defined deep reading as referring to 'a whole continuum of processes that include some of the most important things about thinking, and how we connect thought to what we read'.<sup>48</sup> This is however too broad a definition in my view, since all cognitive processes are a form of thinking. Also learning to read and reading itself require thinking, as the 'poorly automated decoding system' of dyslectics shows, acknowledges Wolf herself.<sup>49</sup> A better suited definition is to define deep reading as 'cognitively demanding in the sense that we use what we already know as the basis for comparing and understanding new information (...)'.<sup>50</sup> Deep reading is not done to acquire reading skills, but to extend knowledge through reading. As a way to gain knowledge, deep reading is typical for non-fictional texts like academic papers and monographs and longer in-depth journalistic pieces. D.T. Willingham describes the process of gaining information from text as the creation of an idea-web, in which the question at which position within the web new information should be attached is vital.<sup>51</sup> This is the case in any attentive reading, and deep reading stands out as the reading type aiming at greatly extending the idea-web of the reader to come to know more through reading and thereby learn to process text better. The connection between two ideas in a text is not always made clear explicitly. For the reader to recognise the connection and pick up the meaning of the (piece of) text – always in that order – requires for the reader to have strong enough reading skills, a large enough vocabulary and enough

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Jacobs, 'Fiction feelings in Harry Potter: haemodynamic response in the mid-cingulate cortex correlates with immersive reading experience', *NeuroReport*, 25 (2014), pp. 1356-1361.

<sup>47</sup> Samutina, *Emotional landscapes of reading*, p. 259.

<sup>48</sup> NPR, 'Why Johnny Can't "Deep Read": NPR', <<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129348373>>, (11 December 2018).

<sup>49</sup> Wolf, *Proust and the Squid*, pp. 214-215.

<sup>50</sup> Kovač & Van der Weel, *Reading in a post-textual era*, p. 6.

<sup>51</sup> D.T. Willingham, *The reading mind: A cognitive approach to understanding how the mind reads* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2017), pp. 112-113.

background knowledge.<sup>52</sup> Extensive deep reading would thus see the reader dive deeper into a subject, coming to know ever more and being ever more capable of formulating his or her ideas and findings. This is the wonted way in which we read when we're rehearsing for an exam or studying a subject for writing a paper.

Yet a shift is taking place, the prominence of deep reading is in decline. Academic reading for example, which per definition is a form of deep reading, has come to be shallower. Skimming, as done with scribbles, but also social media messages or short online news reports, is becoming customary for texts which used to be read deeply.<sup>53</sup> Naomi Baron writes that in 1977 scientists read an average 48 minutes per article and read 150 of them per year. In 2005 the time per article had fallen to 31 minutes, yet the average scholar read 280 articles throughout the year.<sup>54</sup> Nicholas Carr describes a similar outcome from a research looking into screen reading of academic texts.<sup>55</sup> Carr cites retired neuroscientist Michael Merzenich, who claims that digital technology fosters shallower forms of reading, as does Internet pioneer Jakob Nielsen.<sup>56</sup> As said, skimming has its useful purposes and is not wrong per se. 'What is different, and troubling, is that skimming is becoming our dominant mode of reading.'<sup>57</sup> This includes losing the qualities of deep reading, and because of that some fear the deterioration of young minds, and a less informed society.

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 116-118.

<sup>53</sup> A. Mangen & A. van der Weel, 'The evolution of reading in the age of digitisation: an integrative framework for reading research', *Literacy*, 50 (2016), pp. 116-124, there p. 117.

<sup>54</sup> Baron, *Words Onscreen*, p. 60. The total average reading time of scholarly articles in 1977, with the given figures, was  $150 \times 48 = 7200$  minutes. In 2005 this was  $280 \times 31 = 8680$  minutes, an increase in reading time of 20.6%. The issue is indeed not that less is read – on the contrary – but that deep reading becomes more fast paced and thereby shallower.

<sup>55</sup> Carr, *The Shallows*, p. 136-137.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 135-136; 137.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 138.

## The identity-shaping force of reading

Despite the fearful sentiments towards extensive reading written about above, the Order of the Book that I describe above is still in place. Reading has been reported to have several positive effects on humans, such as improvement of the abilities to cope with social pressures. Other research once showed that reading fiction can foster empathy. It has even appeared that reading a fictional tale containing a protagonist of which particular information like faith and ethnicity are mentioned, causes readers to be more empathic and understanding towards real-life people matching the protagonist's profile, a positive effect akin to the previously mentioned saddening Werther effect, and as precise as the effect occurring in relation to *Tod eines Schülers*.<sup>58</sup> In her dissertation *Reading Suffering: An empirical inquiry into empathic and reflective responses to literary narratives*, Emy Koopman further confirms these findings. Koopman describes what she calls “narrative feelings” as feeling sympathy with characters and identifying with them.<sup>59</sup> Also being absorbed – immersed – by a story is part of narrative feelings.<sup>60</sup> One explanation Koopman gives for why reading fiction stimulates empathic feelings, is that humans are highly empathic beings that in real life cannot always be as empathic with others as they might naturally be inclined to. Narrative fiction can however provide an ‘optimal aesthetic distance to engage with other people’s tribulations.’<sup>61</sup> Immersing oneself in a fictional narrative with characters with other traits and worldview can be ‘a way of discovering new worlds’, and thereby not only an empathy improving factor, but also an identity-

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<sup>58</sup> M. Salgado & A. van der Weel, ‘How reading fiction can help you improve yourself and your relationship to others’, 18 December 2017. Retrieved at: The Conversation, ‘How reading fiction can help you improve yourself and your relationship to others’, <<https://theconversation.com/how-reading-fiction-can-help-you-improve-yourself-and-your-relationship-to-others-88830>>, (11 December 2018).

<sup>59</sup> E.M. Koopman, *Reading Suffering: An empirical inquiry into empathic and reflective responses to literary narratives* (Rotterdam: Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, 2016) pp. 104-105.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 106-107.

shaping one.<sup>62</sup> To read is to let a root sink down, and I want to shine a light on how individual identity and reading are closely connected.

I write in my explanation about extensive reading above, that with the larger choice of reading materials, this widened media landscape caused that the choices for reading materials were made on a more individual basis. Nevertheless, Western societies were for long after the emergence of extensive reading characterised by the clotting of like-minded people. In the Netherlands, this phenomenon took the shape of “pillarization”.<sup>63</sup> This was a clotting that permeated all of Dutch society, from politics and newspapers to sport clubs and healthcare. A popular desire for individual independence and personal responsibility grew, and culminated in the liberal 1960s.<sup>64</sup> This came at the expense of social ties, which were loosened; flexible collectives became the ideal.<sup>65</sup> It should be stressed that the idea that Dutch society consisted of entirely unconnected atomised individuals is not correct, since Christians regrouped themselves and over time a ‘Muslim pillar’ emerged.<sup>66</sup> This shift in individualisation can be attributed to the meteoric rise of television and radio. These at the time new media allowed people more space to shape their worldview, and thereby contributed to loosening ties.<sup>67</sup>

In an article from 2002, sociologist A.K. Jain writes together with three colleagues that they distinguish ‘three crucial moments of change’, although the

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<sup>62</sup> U. Schneider, ‘The Social Dimension of the Printed Book as a Medium’, *TXT*, 5 (2018), pp. 119-126, there p. 120.

<sup>63</sup> J. C. Kennedy, *A Concise History of the Netherlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 340.

<sup>64</sup> P. van Dam, ‘Een wankel vertoog: Over ontzuiling als karikatuur’, *BMGN: Low Countries Historical Review*, 126 (2011), pp. 52-77, there p. 60.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>66</sup> M. Schrover, ‘Pillarization, Multiculturalism and Cultural Freezing: Dutch Migration History and the Enforcement of Essentialist Ideas’, *BMGN: Low Countries Historical Review*, 125 (2010), pp. 329-354, there 349-351. The Christian regrouping actualised itself in the emergence of two new media outlets: a newspaper called *Reformatorsch Dagblad* (Reformatory Daily) and a television broadcaster *DEO* (Latin for ‘God’ and abbreviation of *De Evangelische Omroep*; The Evangelical Broadcasting). The broadcaster soon changed its name to *EO*; Evangelical Broadcasting.

<sup>67</sup> Van Dam, *Een wankel vertoog*, p. 60.

term “moments” rather signifies fields.<sup>68</sup> The one field of interest here, is ‘the changes in information technology’.<sup>69</sup> This is indeed a process that has taken a massive flight over the past decades, eventually leading to digital technology to be widespread and present in every household, and even more recently also in everyone’s pocket.<sup>70</sup> Jain et al. write that ‘their interactive capacity facilitates individualisation and dissolves the temporal boundaries of media use’.<sup>71</sup> It is – once more – the increased size of the available bulk of information and its extreme accessibility which bring about ‘individualisation of information patterns and (...) diffusion and fragmentation of the public sphere’.<sup>72</sup> In line with this claim lies the conclusion that we have moved ourselves ‘beyond the global village’.<sup>73</sup> This conclusion was drawn by A.C. Clarke in 1992, yet is still not accurate on this day, despite technology being much more advanced and the accessible bulk of information immensely grown since 1992. Media use has fragmented but not atomised. There are still top viewed TV shows and cinema movies, and there are still top read newspapers and bestselling novels. How does the medium of printed text affect one’s identity?

German sociologist Axel Kuhn has written on reading as a shaper of individual identities. Kuhn fails to explain which type of reading he means, but since brief texts like news headlines and road signs do barely shape their readers, it is safe to assume Kuhn writes about attentive reading. Kuhn means to discuss long and middle-long texts which are read attentively. As primary shapers of individual identity Kuhn mentions social relations, although mass media can be considered a relatively new primary shaper.<sup>74</sup> I think they can indeed and even should, since we live in an extremely mediatised world in which there is no

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<sup>68</sup> A.K. Jain, H. Keupp, R. Höfer et al., ‘Facing another modernity: individualization and post-traditional ligatures’, *European Review*, 10 (2002), pp. 131-157, there p. 133.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>70</sup> The article of Jain et al. dates from 2002, when mobile technology was not as advanced as now. Perhaps needless to mention, it is nevertheless good to keep this in mind.

<sup>71</sup> Jain et al., *Facing another modernity*, p. 139.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 140. Italics in the original.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>74</sup> A. Kuhn, ‘Lesen als Identitätskonstruktion und soziale Integration’, in U. Rautenberg & U. Schneider (eds.), *Lesen: Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch* (Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 833-851, there pp. 833-834.

escaping from audio-visual and digital media. Yet neither is there an escape from printed texts, and I see no reason why attentive reading would not be a shaper of identity as well. Hence I will discuss it precisely so, and I wonder why Kuhn does not acknowledge the omnipresence of texts for attentive reading. In line with the previous, sociologists have described the formation of identity within the paradigm of individualisation. Identity is no longer a demarcated individual development, but more and more a ‘project plan of one’s own life’.<sup>75</sup> As a consequence of the interpersonal divergence that this causes, and the growing range and accessibility of media, general literature canons become ever more brittle as identity shapers.<sup>76</sup> Individualisation has progressed so much that identity projects as shared literary canons cannot have the effect they used to have in earlier times, such as those before television and radio gained attention.<sup>77</sup> Such audio-visual (mass) media moreover not only gained attention but also diverged it, and Kuhn writes that because of this multitude of media it does not matter anymore ‘what one reads, but that one reads’.<sup>78</sup> This has to do with the different manners in which print and audio-visual screen media are consumed. Reading requires a much higher attention span, requires more concentration, and fosters qualities of imagination, as shown by setting out the benefits of reading works of fiction.<sup>79</sup> Humans even use different brain circuits for reading. While seeing and speaking have distinct brain areas covering these abilities, reading has no distinguished neural circuit of its own.<sup>80</sup> A reader reflects on reading in a different and also deeper manner than a television viewer ponders and thinks about the

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<sup>75</sup> H. Keupp, ‘Identitätskonstruktionen in der spätmodernen Gesellschaft: Riskante Chancen bei prekären Ressourcen’, *Zeitschrift für Psychodrama und Soziometrie*, 7 (2008), pp. 291-308, there p. 295. Original text: ‘Projektentwurf des eigenen Lebens’. Author’s translation.

<sup>76</sup> Kuhn, *Lesen als Identitätskonstruktion und soziale Integration*, p. 837.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 843.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 839. Original text: ‘was man liest, sondern dass man liest’. Author’s translation.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 841.

<sup>80</sup> M. Wolf & M. Barzillai, ‘The Importance of Deep Reading’, in M. Scherer (ed.), *Challenging the Whole Child: Reflections on Best Practices in Learning, Teaching, and Leadership* (Alexandria: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2009), pp. 130-140, there p. 132.

broadcasts he or she has been viewing.<sup>81</sup> To choose particular works to read, is to shape your individual thinking and identity in a particular way.

That reading requires more reflection can be explained with the theory of Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan. In his most familiar work, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, he presents a divide between two types of media, hot and cool. A cool medium, argues McLuhan, is a medium of 'low definition, because so little is given', and the user of the medium has to interpret the medium's message in order to consume it.<sup>82</sup> A hot medium, however, has a lot filled in already, and can be used passively.<sup>83</sup> A darts match can be watched on TV while lounging on the couch and not reflecting at all on it, while a radio report of such a match would require a bit of imagination and significantly more attention. A written report of that match, even cooler than a radio broadcast, would demand much imagination and cognitive attention. This concept also comes to the fore in George Orwell's *1984* and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Apart from the dystopia, both novels share that screens have enormous proportions. *1984*'s telescreens are said to be able to hold whole rooms in their iron gaze if they are placed in the end wall of a room, whilst television screens cover entire walls in Bradbury's novel. Only booklover Professor Faber possesses a television of normal size.<sup>84</sup> Reading is more demanding than the use of media that in any way contain any visual images.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 839.

<sup>82</sup> M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London & New York: ARK PAPERBACKS, 1987 [1964]), pp. 22-23.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, p.23.

<sup>84</sup> R. Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (London: Harper Voyager, 2008 [1954]), pp. 121-122; 171; G. Orwell, *1984* (London: Penguin Books, 1989 [1949]), p. 7.

<sup>85</sup> I deliberately use a long-winded description instead of 'visual media', since 'visual media' includes any medium consumed with the eye, and thus reading as well. This makes it not specified enough as definition in this respect.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the concept of reading. I have first done this by giving a rough outline of the history of reading modes. Before the reading revolution, which Martin Lyons dates quite universally in the timespan 1780-1830, intensive reading was the most common manner of consuming texts. Only a small number of texts was read back then, and these were reread in small pieces over and over again, sometimes throughout an entire lifetime. These read texts were practically always religious texts. One reason why this mode of reading prevailed, is that books were much rarer objects before the reading revolution than they became since, so that almost no one could afford to read a big share of different texts. However, the religious morality that was imposed on reading was much stressed and was a stronger fosterer of intensive reading than scarcity of texts. During the reading revolution, the medial choices widened. The scope of existing texts was enriched with new genres and more texts were produced. The choice of new reading materials grew more secular and the choice what to read became more private; more individually made. It was due to this revolution that extensive reading – reading many different texts a limited number of times, and linearly from cover to cover – became the standard. The reading revolution paved the way for the so called Order of the Book; reading education became ever more common and literacy ever more a necessity for functioning in a textual society.

After this chronological outline, I discussed the essence of reading, which is the decoding of graphic signs and being capable to assign correct pronunciations and meanings to them. Based on this broad definition of reading, I illustrated how Miha Kovač and Adriaan van der Weel distinguish three types of reading. Two of these do require that attention is being paid to the read text: immersed and deep reading. Immersed reading is the reading type that is typical for longer fictional texts like for instance novels, and also children's literature and romances. Deep reading is studious reading and reading in order to obtain new knowledge in general. D.T. Willingham calls this process the creation of an idea-web. It is an indispensable part of the Order of the Book to study, learn or come to know things through creating an idea-web of read information. That a third type of reading – skimming – is coming to be used at occasions at which deep reading

used to be the norm, might be or become a danger to the deep processing of texts. Skimming is reading without paying much attention, like seeing a road sign or scribble, but ever more also rushing through a scholarly article. Lastly, I illustrated that reading is a shaper of identities. Also in modern times, the scope of available media has expanded – I dare say more than ever – and this can be related to the trend of individualisation and more individual choice in media consumption, as during the reading revolution. But contrary to the reading revolution, the post-WWII era saw audio-visual media emerge, which radiate much more attraction than books. According to Merzenich and Nielsen the hotness of audio-visual and online media is a cause for deep reading becoming less deep.

## Chapter 2 – The skill of reading learned and taught

### Introduction

In this chapter, I will look at how the skill of reading is learned and taught. Reading has, in this respect, to be defined as the mere decoding of graphic signs and attaching meaning to them. I will start this chapter with a discussion of emergent literacy. This is a term used for the process of linguistic development seen in infants and in young children. Maryanne Wolf claims that the feeling of being loved while being read aloud to is ‘the best foundation for this long process’.<sup>86</sup> I will show however, using a great deal of recent research discussing the fostering of relations between various aspects of emergent literacy in children, that children are not passive factors that must experience love in order to come to like reading, but that they play an active role in the emergence of their own reading skill. After that, I will write about the following step of children in their process of learning to read; Dutch primary education. I will write about data on the reading skills of Dutch primary school children. As will become clear, these skills are but poorly developed and in decline. Also the willingness to read of young people in the Netherlands ranks lowly internationally. I will write about ways to motivate school children to read, the importance of doing so, and the benefits this would have.

### Emergent literacy

Must all preschool children be encouraged to read or be read to? The answer is no, for the simple reason that reading is something that must be learned over time. For the very youngest children, books issued with bright colours that contain only or mostly illustrations and tactile objects, are much better than a “normal” book. Touch and vision, two important aspects of reading, are still in development in the very early stages of childhood. A toddler does not understand a codex’ purpose as older kids and adults do, and when a toddler gets a book in his or her hands

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<sup>86</sup> Wolf, *Proust and the Squid*, p. 83.

‘senses are used haphazardly.’<sup>87</sup> At the age of two years, children are getting to understand what the concept of a book is.<sup>88</sup> From that moment onward, literacy can start to emerge.

Maryanne Wolf describes what aspects of literacy play a role in the emergence of literacy in children. She mentions the term ‘linguistic genius’, introduced by Russian Kornei Chukovsky, to name the rapid pace at which children develop their linguistic capacities.<sup>89</sup> According to Wolf, it is the ‘intertwining of oral language, cognition, and written language [that] makes early childhood one of the richest times for language growth’, and linguistic genius rests in particular on aspects of oral communication.<sup>90</sup> Wolf also acknowledges that linguistic development does not occur within a vacuum, and that changes inside the young brain have their impact.<sup>91</sup> How precisely she makes not clear, and I will discuss here various studies on the relations between various aspects of emergent literacy.

Of an importance just about impossible to overestimate for learning to read, is the sense of sight. As put forward in chapter 1, reading is the decoding of graphic signs, and thus a visual activity at the core. We see a letter or a word, and our visual brain areas, which in the process of learning to read have been connected to linguistic and conceptual areas, work together with said brain parts in order to – as we perceive it – read a word, sentence, or novel.<sup>92</sup> Children with poor vision are thus miles behind on the road to reading capacity in comparison to those that do have proper sight. These children do not naturally learn to recognise the letters of the alphabet, and their parents are advised on how to help their children to get a sense of phonological awareness. Neither can these children learn names of objects by asking what they are called as children do nonstop, since they can see objects less well. These drawbacks, in combination with the limited accessibility of children’s books in braille, make that children with poor vision

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<sup>87</sup> Kuitert, *Het boek en het badwater*, pp. 64-65. Original text: ‘de zintuigen worden lukraak ingezet.’ Author’s translation.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 65.

<sup>89</sup> Wolf, *Proust and the Squid*, p. 84.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 85.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 29.

‘begin preschool without adequate literacy skills’.<sup>93</sup>

The importance of visual letter recognition is not only stressed by the example of children who cannot see well, but also in an article by Tomohiro Inoue, George Georgiyo, Rauno Parrila & John Kirby. The research of Inoue et al. is based on the home literacy model of developmental psychologists Monique Sénéchal & Jo-Anne LeFevre. This model states that exposing young children to storybooks and teaching them about reading and letters are unrelated, distinct activities with distinct effects.<sup>94</sup> Inoue et al. also make this distinction between two different types of home literacy activities within the model, and call them code-related activities and meaning-related activities.<sup>95</sup> Code-related activities are such things as teaching children to recognise letters, to pronounce them correctly and to correct their spelling. Meaning-related activities are defined as those in which the meaning of a text is the main motive, for example a parent reading a story to his or – most often – her child.<sup>96</sup> Inoue et al. also call the code-related and meaning-related activities respectively formal activities and informal activities.<sup>97</sup> I consider this to be flawed terminology, because parents teaching their toddlers to read is not a formal setting per se. A formal educational home activity is a description for home-schooling, and not all instances of parents teaching their children something are home-schooling. Hence I renounce the use of the words formal and informal in this respect.

Despite not being formal in my view, code-related activities are

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<sup>93</sup> D. Chen & J. Dote-Kwan, ‘Promoting Emergent Literacy Skills in Toddlers with Visual Impairments’, *Journal of Visual Impairments*, 26 (2018), pp. 542-550, there pp. 543-544. For information about the difficulties blind people experience in relation to the use of the Internet, see: Ó. Völundarson, ‘A Non-Visual World of Text: Internet Accessibility for People Who Are Blind’, *TXT*, 4 (2017), pp. 86-91.

<sup>94</sup> M. Sénéchal, ‘Testing the Home Literacy Model: Parent Involvement in Kindergarten Is Differentially Related to Grade 4 Reading Comprehension, Fluency, Spelling, and Reading for Pleasure’, *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 10 (2006), pp. 59-87, there p. 61.

<sup>95</sup> T. Inoue, G.K. Georgiou, R. Parrila et al., ‘Examining an Extended Home Literacy Model: The Mediating Roles of Emergent Literacy Skills and Reading Fluency’, *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 22 (2018), pp. 273-288, there p. 273.

<sup>96</sup> T. Inoue et al., *Examining an Extended Home Literacy Model*, p. 273; Kuitert, *Het boek en het badwater*, p. 66.

<sup>97</sup> T. Inoue et al., *Examining an Extended Home Literacy Model*, p. 273.

nevertheless important. The group of researchers led by Inoue concludes after their research on the effect of home-taught literacy that parent-taught code-related abilities like knowing the different letters and phonological awareness underlie reading accuracy in Group 1.<sup>98</sup> Reading fluency was found to be not a mere exponent of being read to often, but the improvement of reading fluency also follows from better reading accuracy.<sup>99</sup> Wolf writes a similar thing about letter recognition, namely that ‘neurons gradually become more and more specialised and require less and less area’, which is similar to the statements made by D.T. Willingham that the less working memory the task of decoding requires, the easier it becomes to read.<sup>100</sup>

This is however but one conclusion from Inoue’s team; the most encompassing one is that ‘[t]aken together, these findings suggest that the pathways from home literacy activities to reading comprehension are widely distributed, perhaps even more widely and more complexly than (...) in the home literacy model’.<sup>101</sup> The development of literacy in small children consists of a very complex system of interrelated skills and neurological developments. This also shows from a recent study that investigates whether amidst the many connections between different literacy skills, there would also be one between narrative skill and early reading skills.<sup>102</sup> This is a link of which the authors claim that the insights about it in the available literature are limited.<sup>103</sup> The concluding answer to the main question was that ‘narrative skill did not contribute to early reading skills even when other language skills were not included.’<sup>104</sup> Non-narrative emergent literacy skills – among which are reading skills – were found to be related more strongly to each other than to narrative skill.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 284.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>100</sup> Willingham, *The Reading Mind*, pp. 65-66; Wolf, *Proust and the Squid*, p. 93.

<sup>101</sup> T. Inoue et al., *Examining an Extended Home Literacy Model*, p. 284.

<sup>102</sup> S.B. Piasta, L.J. Groom, K.S. Khan et al., ‘Young children’s narrative skill: concurrent and predictive associations with emergent literacy and early word reading skills’, *Reading and Writing*, 31 (2018), pp. 1479-1498, there p. 1480.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 1483.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 1488.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 1491-1492.

Maryanne Wolf describes research once carried out among five-year-olds, with which Wolf wants to illustrate the importance and linguistic effect of parents spending a lot of time on meaning-related activities with their children in the home literacy environment, specifically reading to them. Wolf writes that in the research experiment children were asked to tell a personal story, with one group of children being well-read-to at home and the other being poorly-read-to. The well-read-to children showed to be better skilled in all linguistic areas.<sup>106</sup> Wolf also writes about how well-read-to children are apt at understanding figurative language, this to stress that being read to is truly helpful in the development of the literacy of a young child.<sup>107</sup> As is, by the way, reading for oneself as a child, once one has learned to. The lack of literacy, of linguistic utterances in early childhood – be they oral or textual – can result in grave “word poverty” which will set back children throughout the whole of their primary school career.<sup>108</sup> Perhaps beyond that too. Word poverty may be as grave as hearing 32,000,000 fewer words between birth and the fifth birthday than the average child hears and hence processes through his or her lifespan thus far.<sup>109</sup> Children brought up in environments and households of low socio-economic status (SES) are much more prone to word poverty, since low literacy and low SES seem to correlate with each other.<sup>110</sup> Tomohiro Inoue and his fellow authors write in their conclusion that parents in general should be informed about the effects of home literacy, and ‘those from lower SES in particular’.<sup>111</sup> Poor financial situations can thus very well have a negative effect on how well children can read, and can cause a word poverty which puts low-SES-born students in the situation that they have to play catch up, starting on the first day of kindergarten. This was also found by Alpana Bhattacharya, who found that living in poverty in

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<sup>106</sup> Wolf, *Proust and the Squid*, p. 88.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 89. This is a good occasion to stress that human neurology consists of many complexities and wonders which I, having dropped Biology halfway high school without ever picking it up again since, would not dare to hint at or speculate about. I deal only with the effect of exposure of infants to text on emergent literacy in the general sense.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 102.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>111</sup> T. Inoue et al., *Examining an Extended Home Literacy Model*, p. 284.

early childhood has a negative effect on reading development throughout the whole of childhood.<sup>112</sup> Growing up in a poor household also affects reading development negatively because of domestic conflict due to economic hardship.<sup>113</sup> Note that Bhattacharya writes these things about the United States, where the system of social security is much less elaborate than in the Netherlands. Because of this financial safety net the negative effects on reading of a poor household might not be the same in the Netherlands and in the United States. This does not take away that parents, those from lower environments in particular, need to be made aware of this threat to their children and be encouraged to develop a home literacy environment to some extent. To this end, the free initiative BoekStart is promoted to all parents of young children by municipalities in the Netherlands. This initiative and the manner of creating attention for it can serve as an example for countries where such an initiative does not exist yet.<sup>114</sup>

That low SES has its impact on emergent literacy of children was also found by Julia M. Carroll and three fellow behavioural scientists. Carroll et al. start their article reporting their findings with stating once more that ‘it is well established that levels of emergent literacy upon school entry are a key predictor of later literary and hence academic success more broadly’.<sup>115</sup> I doubt whether this link that Carroll et al. describe between SES and academic success is not too rigid. The main question the scientists inquire is to what extent three factors are determining for emergent literacy. These three factors are SES, the home literacy environment and literacy interest. Literacy interest is measured in both the enjoyment of being read to, and the frequency of participating in this activity. In measuring, the child’s enjoyment is the leading factor.<sup>116</sup> I made a graph which

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<sup>112</sup> A. Bhattacharya, ‘The Influence of Poverty on Individual Differences in Reading’, in P. Afflerbach (ed.), *Handbook of Individual Differences in Reading: Reader, Text and Context* (New York & Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 305-317, there p. 309.

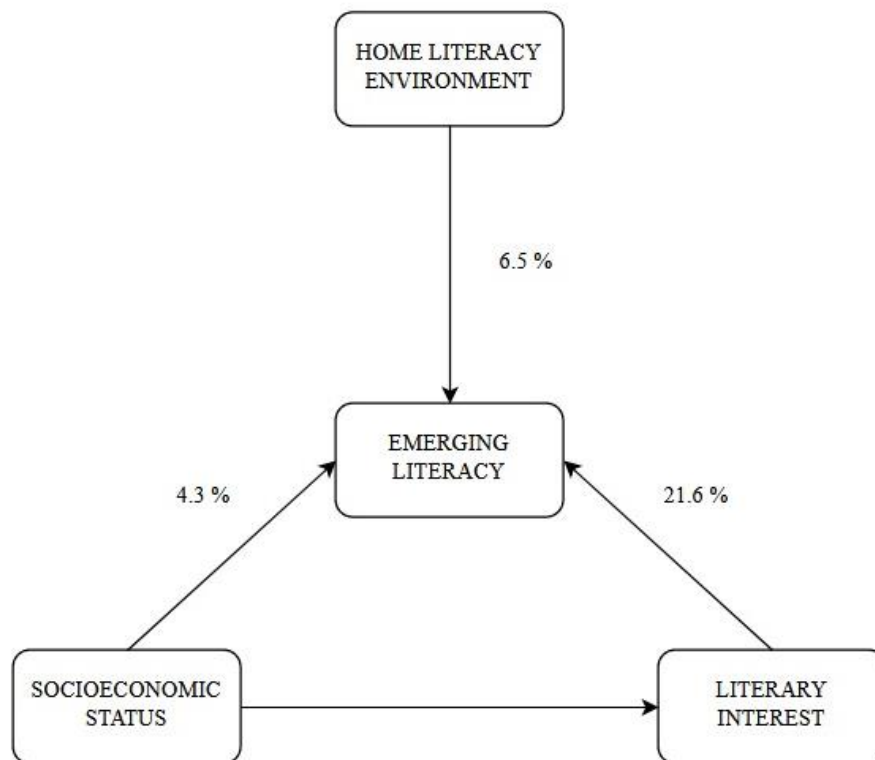
<sup>113</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 306.

<sup>114</sup> For more about BoekStart, see: BoekStart, ‘BoekStart stimuleert lezen met baby’s en peuters’, <[www.boekstart.nl](http://www.boekstart.nl)>, (14 February 2019).

<sup>115</sup> J.M. Carroll, A.J. Holliman, F. Weir et al., ‘Literacy interest, home literacy environment and emergent literacy skills in preschoolers’, *Journal of Research in Reading*, 42 (2019), pp. 150-161, there p. 151.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 153-154.

shows the relations found by Carroll et al., together with the percentage of variance in emergent literacy found for each of the relations (Figure 2).<sup>117</sup> Remarkable is that (low) SES has both a direct and an indirect effect on emergent literacy, and that Carroll et al. found literacy interest to be the largest factor. If this is such a big factor indeed, then the home literacy environment, of which I doubt if it really is not related to literacy interest as Carroll et al. write, should be considered much more relevant than it already is.<sup>118</sup> And if children happen to dislike it – Lisa Kuitert takes the example of boys, who generally are less motivated to read than girls – their remarks should be heard.<sup>119</sup>



**Figure 2**

<sup>117</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 156-157. For the indirect effect of SES, no percentage of variance was found.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 156.

<sup>119</sup> Kuitert, *Het boek en het badwater*, p. 66. For more on differences in reading motivation between boys and girls, see: S. McGeown, H. Goodwin, N. Henderson et al., 'Gender differences in reading motivation: does sex or gender identity provide a better account?', *Journal of Research in Reading*, 35 (2012), pp. 328-336.

## Technical Reading taught at primary school

‘[A]ll the precursors of reading come together in the world of kindergarten. No pre-learned concept, letter, or word is wasted by good teachers.’<sup>120</sup> This is true indeed, since in kindergarten, children cannot read yet; cannot decode letters and words yet. Literacy in children in kindergarten is certainly still emerging. Kindergarten is the first two years of Dutch primary school, with the two years separately called Group 1 and Group 2. It is important that children, who thus far in their lives relied on their home literacy environment, find themselves in kindergarten classes in which teachers stimulate the emerging literacy of the children, and make kindergarten an extension of or addition to the home literacy environment. In Group 3 (Grade 1), children learn to decode words and learn to connect phonology to accompanying letters. I have described this process above already. In the following, I will take a look at methods used in Dutch primary education from Group 4 onwards to teach children to read. Children leaving primary education after their last year there in Group 8 are reported to read worse year after year.<sup>121</sup> After an inquiry of the official figures of the Inspectie van het Onderwijs (Inspectorate of Education) behind this observation, I’ll take a look at how reading can be encouraged in class. I will show that it must indeed.

In Dutch primary education, a multitude of linguistic school subjects are distinguished. Official institutes like the Inspectorate of Education and Cito (the largest and most important producer of officially approved primary and secondary school exams) distinguish only two though: Reading and *Taalverzorging*. The latter translates to something like ‘taking care of language, and consists of active use of the Dutch language, including proper spelling.’<sup>122</sup> Subjects that cover Reading are Technical Reading (*technisch lezen*) and Understanding Reading (*begrijpend lezen*). I will also include book reading itself in this, since the skill to read cannot be learned and will never be learned from school books alone.

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<sup>120</sup> Wolf, *Proust and the Squid*, p. 101.

<sup>121</sup> Kuitert, *Het boek en het badwater*, p. 83.

<sup>122</sup> Cito, ‘FA4\_3-klap\_Taalverzorging\_Universeel\_2016 - folder\_taalverzorging.pdf’, <[https://www.cito.nl/-/media/Files/ve-en-po/folder\\_taalverzorging.pdf?la=nl-NL](https://www.cito.nl/-/media/Files/ve-en-po/folder_taalverzorging.pdf?la=nl-NL)>, (6 March 2019).

Technical Reading encompasses the skill to read a word, and to pronounce it properly. The issue that is tackled by educating children in Technical Reading, can be illustrated with the word “cat”. As in English, the letter “c” can be pronounced both as an “s” or as a “k” in Dutch, with only one of those being correct each instance. Children often have difficulties with this, and see no reason why “cat” should not be pronounced as “sat”. Or “circus” as “kirsus” and “cursus” as “sursus”. This phonological awareness is one of the skills that well-read-to children have already partly developed in their home literacy environment during and before kindergarten. The subject Technical Reading is one of the instances where the difference between them and poorly-read-to children surfaces.

The method for Technical Reading of which I discuss the build-up here is *Station Zuid*, a rather new method first published in 2015. A lesson in *Station Zuid* starts with a list of words that share a common aspect. In the first lesson of Group 4, these are words ending on “-d”, “-dt”, and “-b”.<sup>123</sup> The “d” and “b” phonologically differ from the letters “t” and “p” in Dutch, but are despite that pronounced as such if either one is the last letter of a word. Children can learn this concept by learning to pronounce the words correctly. Below the single words are sentences with which the children can practice, and an accompanying book contains stories of 100-500 words with many words that share this phonological oddity.<sup>124</sup> Over time, children will come across all phonological matters from the Dutch language that deserve attention.

The progress that speaks from this method is remarkable. *Station Zuid* has books for the first half of the school year and the second half of the school year, but I only got books from the first half of Group 4 and Group 5 from the school that lent them to me; the books for the second half of the school year were in use at the time of writing. In Group 4, children start with learning mainly about the phonology of particular letters and letter combinations and with the concept that the loose syllables of words can be words themselves; for instance *stoomboot*

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<sup>123</sup> A. Berends, *Station Zuid: voortgezet technisch lezen. 4 roetsjboek 1 AVI E3-M4* (’s-Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 2015), p. 2.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 3; M. van Gog, M. Baeten, M. Mous et al., *Station Zuid: voortgezet technisch lezen. 4 leesboek 1 AVI M4* (’s-Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 2015), pp. 4-7.

(steamboat) and *koplamp* (headlight).<sup>125</sup> One year later, the first lesson of Group 5 is about long words in which the wrong composition of the syllables cause wrong pronunciation, such as *inademen* (breathing in).<sup>126</sup> The syllables of *inademen* are: *in-a-de-men*. Were it *i-na-dem-en*, the “i” would be pronounced long instead of short, and the first “e” would no longer be a schwa. Such is much more complicated already than pronouncing the “b” as a “p” anytime it is the last letter of a word. By the halfway mark of Group 5, children have also learned some English loan words and that the letters “y” and “c” can each be pronounced in different ways.<sup>127</sup> The word “cat” has become dead easy after only one and a half year of technical reading lessons.

### Understanding Reading taught at primary school

Reading is not only a matter of decoding letters though. Words carry meanings, which should explicitly be taught, as must be done with other aspects of learning to read. The idea that a child that maintains the skill of technical reading properly and also has a sufficient vocabulary for his or her age, can about automatically understand different sorts of texts and distil the correct messages and meanings from them, is not correct. Words as “thus”, “hence”, and “despite” are for instance signalling words that link information given in a text in implicit manners that children must learn to recognise. The same goes for words referring to previous words. As an example the following piece: “Jack and Jill went up the hill. Jack walked back down to Joe and together they went home.” Children do not naturally understand who “they” refers to. If Technical Reading made up all reading education in school, it is unlikely that children could ever read a large text and understand what it says. Therefore, Understanding Reading is taught as a distinct school subject in Dutch schools. This is currently often done with the method *Nieuwsbegrip*. I will discuss this method, and also compare it with another one,

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<sup>125</sup> Berends, *Station Zuid 4 roetsjboek 1*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>126</sup> A. Berends, *Station Zuid: voortgezet technisch lezen. 5 roetsjboek 1 AVI M5* (’s-Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 2015), pp. 2-3.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 8-9; 22-23; 26-27; 31-32; 38-39; 52-53; 54-55.

called *Goed Gelezen*.

*Nieuwsbegrip* is a little bit remarkable as a school method, because it does not consist of learning books, workbooks and test sheets. Instead, *Nieuwsbegrip* lessons are made anew each week, and always discuss topics that have recently been in the news, for instance copyright. *Nieuwsbegrip* makes several lessons per topic, one per level, ranging from AA for Group 4 until level D for the 4<sup>th</sup> Form of vmbo-t, havo & vwo.<sup>128</sup> The text about copyright on level A (Groups 5 and 6) focusses on vlogging, and that vloggers must take some things into account when they upload their videos.<sup>129</sup> Based on its adapted texts, *Nieuwsbegrip* aims at teaching children five strategies to tackle a text: ‘clearing up indistinct aspects, predicting, making connections, summarising and asking questions.’<sup>130</sup> Teachers are instructed to practise these strategies aloud before the children in their class have read the text.<sup>131</sup> The teacher would stand in front of the class and think aloud such a train of thought as: ‘In the title of the text I see the word “vlogging”. So this text is about vloggers. What do I know about vlogging? Do I know some vloggers from YouTube? A subheading says “making money”. Does that mean some people vlog as a job?’ *Nieuwsbegrip* is based on the said strategy learning and modelling. This seems quite obvious, this is what Understanding Reading is about in essence. Yet there is one remark to make about *Nieuwsbegrip*. It barely works. In February 2018, Mariska Okkinga promoted at the University of Twente with a PhD thesis about the effects of teaching reading

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<sup>128</sup> Nieuwsbegrip, ‘Welke niveaus hebben de teksten van Nieuwsbegrip? – Nieuwsbegrip’, <<https://www.nieuwsbegrip.nl/page/616/welke-niveaus-hebben-de-teksten-van-nieuwsbegrip>>, (1 March 2019).

<sup>129</sup> Nieuwsbegrip, ‘Nieuwsbegrip CED-groep - nbextraauteursrecht\_2018\_teksta.pdf’, <[https://www.nieuwsbegrip.nl/image/2018/11/12/nbextraauteursrecht\\_2018\\_teksta.pdf](https://www.nieuwsbegrip.nl/image/2018/11/12/nbextraauteursrecht_2018_teksta.pdf)>, (20 February 2019).

<sup>130</sup> Nieuwsbegrip, ‘staat\_van\_het\_onderwijs\_en\_nieuwsbegrip.pdf’, <[https://www.nieuwsbegrip.nl/image/2018/4/18/staat\\_van\\_het\\_onderwijs\\_en\\_nieuwsbegrip.pdf](https://www.nieuwsbegrip.nl/image/2018/4/18/staat_van_het_onderwijs_en_nieuwsbegrip.pdf)>, (20 February 2019). Original text: ‘onduidelijkheden ophelderen, voorspellen, verbanden leggen, samenvatten en vragen stellen.’ Author’s translation.

<sup>131</sup> Nieuwsbegrip, ‘Opdracht 1 (klas): Tekst lezen - nbextraauteursrecht\_2018\_handla.pdf’, <[https://www.nieuwsbegrip.nl/image/2018/11/12/nbextraauteursrecht\\_2018\\_handla.pdf](https://www.nieuwsbegrip.nl/image/2018/11/12/nbextraauteursrecht_2018_handla.pdf)>, (20 February 2019).

strategies using *Nieuwsbegrip*.<sup>132</sup> Her research was carried out among students of the 1<sup>st</sup> Form of vmbo.<sup>133</sup> Okkinga found that two years of using *Nieuwsbegrip* had no significant effect. It only produced a small moderator effect, attributed to the teacher modelling the reading strategy aloud, while the reading strategies themselves proved mannerisms that bore ample fruit.<sup>134</sup>

I think that one of the reasons for strategy learning having so little effect, is that *Nieuwsbegrip* supplies similar texts every week, with assignments like word puzzles and straightforward fill-in assignments.<sup>135</sup> The method *Goed Gelezen* avoids the problem of the artificialness of strategy learning in what I consider the one correct manner; by supplying different sorts of texts. Throughout the whole method, from Group 4 until Group 8, children read for instance poems, advertisements, news articles, comics, a recipe, tables with sports results.<sup>136</sup> Not only do children learn how to read different texts, but also to distinguish fact from opinion. One lesson treats two fictional news messages, both reporting the same story in wholly opposite ways, and teaches children how and on what grounds to determine which story one should believe.<sup>137</sup> Thereby not only understanding is

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<sup>132</sup> For Okkinga's thesis, see: M. Okkinga, *Teaching reading strategies in classrooms: does it work?* (Enschede: Universiteit Twente, 2018).

<sup>133</sup> K. de Gloppe, 'Nieuws over Nieuwsbegrip: Over de uitkomsten en interpretatie van een studie naar de effecten van onderwijs in strategieën voor begrijpend lezen', *Levende Talen Tijdschrift*, 19(2) (2018), pp. 26-32, there p. 27.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>135</sup> Nieuwsbegrip, 'Opdracht 1 (klas): Tekst lezen - nbextraauteursrecht\_2018\_opdra.pdf', <[https://www.nieuwsbegrip.nl/image/2018/11/12/nbextraauteursrecht\\_2018\\_opdra.pdf](https://www.nieuwsbegrip.nl/image/2018/11/12/nbextraauteursrecht_2018_opdra.pdf)>, (20 February 2019); Nieuwsbegrip, 'Opdracht 1 (klas): Tekst lezen – nbextramezzomantelzorg\_opdrb.pdf', <[https://www.nieuwsbegrip.nl/image/2018/11/5/nbextramezzomantelzorg\\_opdrb.pdf](https://www.nieuwsbegrip.nl/image/2018/11/5/nbextramezzomantelzorg_opdrb.pdf)>, (20 February 2019).

<sup>136</sup> D. Batterink, H. Klooster, B. Perfors et al., *Goed Gelezen! Begrijpend en studerend lezen: Leerlingenboek Groep 4* ('s-Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 1997), pp. 11-13; 14-16; 47-49; 70-72; J. van der Stoep, H. Klooster, R. Terpstra, *Goed Gelezen! Begrijpend en studerend lezen: Leerlingenboek Groep 5* ('s-Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 1996), pp. 57-58; C. van de Graaf, H. Klooster, P. Maillou, et al., *Begrijpend en studerend lezen: Leerlingenboek Groep 6* ('s-Hertogenbosch: Malmberg, 1997), pp. 107-109.

<sup>137</sup> Van de Graaf et al., *Goed Gelezen Groep 6*, pp. 30-32.

being taught, but argumentative skills as well. Another example from *Goed Gelezen* in which the text is processed actively by children, is the assignment in the book for Group 4 to draw what has been reported in the read news article, and to only draw things explicitly mentioned in the article.<sup>138</sup> This creates awareness of what actually has been read. Such is much more purposive processing of a read text than making a dead easy crossword or recording your own vlog, which are actual assignments from *Nieuwsbegrip*.<sup>139</sup> These examples above, despite there being many more, are representative examples for the method *Goed Gelezen* and its purposive setup. I believe that reading education in Dutch primary schools urgently needs the improvement a method like *Goed Gelezen* could offer, for the reading understanding of school children is in decline.

### Figures on reading skills in Dutch primary school children

Not only is the reading capability of Dutch school children in decline, it has even been declining sharply recently. For defining the sufficient level of children's reading skills, the Inspectorate of Education uses the same standards as the government's Department of Education, Culture and Science, under which the Inspectorate falls.<sup>140</sup> In the at the time of writing latest edition of the annual report *De Staat van het Onderwijs*, the Inspectorate of Education presents, among various other data, graphs, conclusions and diagrams, two small graphs on the reading skills of children leaving primary school, one for boys and one for girls. According to the graphs, in school year 2014-2015 76% of the boys and 80% of the girls departing to secondary education could read sufficiently. Both sexes show a slight decline of a few percentage points at most in 2015-2016, and a free

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<sup>138</sup> Batterink et al., *Goed Gelezen Groep 4*, p. 72. Said assignment is assignment 4 on the page referred to in this footnote.

<sup>139</sup> Nieuwsbegrip, 'Opdracht 1 (klas): Tekst lezen - nbextraauteursrecht\_2018\_opdra.pdf', <[https://www.nieuwsbegrip.nl/image/2018/11/12/nbextraauteursrecht\\_2018\\_opdra.pdf](https://www.nieuwsbegrip.nl/image/2018/11/12/nbextraauteursrecht_2018_opdra.pdf)>, (20 February 2019).

<sup>140</sup> For the reference levels used by the Dutch government and the Inspectorate of Education, see: Anon., *Referentiekader taal en rekenen: De referentieniveaus* (Enschede: Doorlopende leerlijnen Taal en Rekenen, 2009).

fall in 2016-2017. Only 62% of the boys and 69% of the girls read sufficiently in 2016-2017, giving a decline in sufficiently reading boys of 18.4% and a decline of 13.8% in girls, both over the course of only two years.<sup>141</sup> Despite the figures being alarming, these are nevertheless still higher than the percentages of children sufficiently capable of spelling properly and applying grammatical knowledge while writing, all gathered in the container concept *Taalverzorging*.<sup>142</sup> According to Lisa Kuitert, the decline in reading capability of young Dutch children has been going on since 2001.<sup>143</sup> Would this be so, then that would be a grave concern. It seems that it truly is so. The Inspectorate itself was reported to have announced a steady decline over the past 20 years.<sup>144</sup> Can this also be concluded from a look at their own reports? In order to answer that question I have taken a look at all editions of *De Staat van het Onderwijs* that have been published since 2001, the year Kuitert describes as the start of the decline. These annual reports cover all of Dutch education in the period 2000-2017. From these, the claim that Dutch reading education has been in decline over the past 20 years cannot be confirmed directly. Despite that, an overview of four negative trends can be given, which are so consistent that it is plausible that these cause the reported steady decline over time. Years mentioned in the section below refer to the year of publication of the report, that in turn discusses the (school)year before.

Children with foreign backgrounds are often unable to read (decode) by the end of Group 3 according to the report of 2001.<sup>145</sup> These children are often

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<sup>141</sup> Anon., *De Staat van het Onderwijs 2018: Onderwijsverslag over 2016/2017* (Utrecht: Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2018), p. 49.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>143</sup> Kuitert, *Het boek en het badwater*, p. 83.

<sup>144</sup> Anon., 'Het Nederlandse onderwijs glijdt af: al 20 jaar daalt niveau, zegt inspectie', 11 April 2018. Retrieved at: NOS, 'Het Nederlandse onderwijs glijdt af: al 20 jaar daalt niveau, zegt inspectie | NOS', <<https://nos.nl/artikel/2226821-het-nederlandse-onderwijs-glijdt-af-al-20-jaar-daalt-niveau-zegt-inspectie.html>>, (23 February 2019). Lisa Kuitert writes of a publisher of children's books specifically meant for reading education in primary school that was required to lower the standards of its distinguished reading levels. Children are meeting up reading standards because the bar has been lowered for them. (Kuitert, *Het boek en het badwater*, p. 83).

<sup>145</sup> Anon., *Onderwijsverslag over het jaar 2000* (Utrecht: Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2001), p. 22. In *De Staat van het Onderwijs*, these children are referred to as *allochtoon* or as having a non-Western migration background (*niet-westerse migratieachtergrond*).

(great)grandchildren of Turkish and Moroccan labourers who settled in the Netherlands in the 1970s. In 2005 and 2010 too, children with foreign backgrounds are mentioned to be reading worse than their fellows of Dutch origin.<sup>146</sup> And a graph on reading levels from the 2018 edition of *De Staat van het Onderwijs* even allows the rule of thumb that the higher the share of children of foreign origin on a primary school, the worse is the reading understanding of the average child in that school.<sup>147</sup> The figures I have researched disclose an ethnic divide in reading skills existing until this day in primary schools, and over time brought along to high school, too. In the four largest Dutch cities, on the lowest general high school level more than two third of students has a foreign background, at the highest level only just less than a quarter.<sup>148</sup>

But children with foreign backgrounds have not at all had a monopoly on reading poorly since the start of the millennium. In 2004, it was reported that about 10 % of the 8-year-olds in the Netherlands, spread over half of the primary schools, could not read.<sup>149</sup> This despite the fact that by that age children are in Group 4 or Group 5. One year later, the report published in 2005 reported that the same percentage of children leaving Group 8 for high school had technical reading skills below the average of Group 6.<sup>150</sup> These children had their reading skills lagging behind more than two years, which in the developmental era of childhood is enormous. Yet in 2006 this figure was 15 %, that is a rise of 50 % in one year time.<sup>151</sup> Some years later the degrees of incapacity backfired in the faces of these children, who by then were high school students. The Inspectorate's 2009 report mentioned that 18 to 25 % of all high school students was not able to read

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<sup>146</sup> Anon., *De Staat van het Onderwijs: Onderwijsverslag 2008/2009* (Utrecht: Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2010), p. 192; Anon., *Onderwijsverslag 2003/2004* (Utrecht: Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2005), pp. 10-11.

<sup>147</sup> Anon., *De Staat van het Onderwijs 2018*, p. 49.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>149</sup> Anon., *Onderwijsverslag: 2002/2003* (Utrecht: Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2004), p. 9.

<sup>150</sup> Anon., *Onderwijsverslag 2003/2004*, p. 10.

<sup>151</sup> Anon., *De staat van het onderwijs: Onderwijsverslag 2004/2005* (Utrecht: Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2006), p. 36.

all of their schoolbooks on their own.<sup>152</sup> Yet also the 2018 statistics mentioned above are good cause for slight panic. This is despite the improvement of learning methods which have started to cover the required knowledge ever more adequately since the 1990s, with no regression mentioned in the reports published since then.<sup>153</sup> Throughout the entire period 2000-2017, the reports do not explicitly show the decline in the understanding of read texts over time, but they do show a serious lack of reading skills among a significant number of students.

### Figures on and methods for reading encouragement

Something the Inspectorate's reports are somewhat ambiguous about, is the observation from 2013 that Dutch education has a general lack of excellence in all areas.<sup>154</sup> If this means that there are few school children and students that fall behind beyond belief at school, then I might tend to believe this. The 2013 report does claim this to be so; that there is little qualitative divergence between Dutch primary school children is said to be 'because in the Netherlands *practically all pupils possess the basic levels* (...). This goes for all investigated areas'.<sup>155</sup> I would call this misleading, for the selection of many given data and graphs referred to tell a bleaker story – as does the lack of motivation to read. The Inspectorate report edition 2014 mentions, besides a general decrease in the level of reading understanding, that Dutch school children show remarkably little interest in reading. Even in an international perspective Dutch youths are remarkably unmotivated to read. Research of reading motivation of pupils that compared 65 countries and areas worldwide saw the Netherlands come in 63<sup>rd</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Anon., *De staat van het onderwijs: Onderwijsverslag 2007/2008* (Utrecht: Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2009), p. 195.

<sup>153</sup> Anon., *De staat van het onderwijs: Onderwijsverslag 2006/2007* (Utrecht: Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2008), p. 47.

<sup>154</sup> Anon., *De staat van het onderwijs: Onderwijsverslag 2011/2012* (Utrecht: Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2013), p. 185.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 187. Original text: 'doordat in Nederland vrijwel alle leerlingen de basisniveaus beheersen (...). Dit geldt voor alle onderzochte gebieden'. Author's translation. No italics in the original.

place.<sup>156</sup> Past research by the Dutch governmental research organisation SCP shows a decline in the reading amount of the Dutch population aged 13 or older of 34.1 % in the period 2006-2016.<sup>157</sup> Among the youngest researched group, aged 12 to 19, the decline is 38.5 % in the same period.<sup>158</sup> Kuitert mentions a similar age range of 14 to 20 as a stage in life in which reading is viewed with much less joy and willingness as directly before or after this stage.<sup>159</sup> I hence dare to state that around the age of 13 a Little Dark Age (LDA) of reading takes off in the lives of school children, who right around that time become high school students. This LDA seems to last for about seven years, into the early twenties.

For children who do not learn to like reading the LDA can be a confirmation of their aversion. German pedagogue Christine Garbe writes in an article on the literary socialisation of children and students in her own home country that children's literature mainly aim at the pleasure of reading through stories within stereotypical children's genres.<sup>160</sup> I will write in chapter 3 that American literary scholar J.A. Appleyard confirms this idea. Children often read obsessively and extremely eagerly, writes Garbe. Yet the end of the childhood years often sees the development of a reading crisis, or a Little Dark Age (LDA) as I've called it.<sup>161</sup> After the LDA multiple types of readers can emerge according

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<sup>156</sup> Anon., *De staat van het onderwijs: Onderwijsverslag 2012/2013* (Utrecht: Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2014), pp. 14-15. Apart from 61 sovereign nations, 4 Chinese areas – Hong Kong, Macao, Shanghai & Taipei – were investigated independently. The same graph shows Dutch pupils come last in motivation for mathematics, and overall the graph portrays Dutch children as generally reluctant to learn or read, irrespective what.

<sup>157</sup> A. Wennekers, F. Huysmans & J. de Haan, *Lees:Tijd: Lezen in Nederland* ('s-Gravenhage: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2018), p. 36. The figures give an insight in the use of any textual media as main activity, and do not only focus on book reading.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 62. In 2006, 65 % of the respondents in this age group read textual media. In 2016, this figure was 40 %. These percentages underlie the claim of a 38.5 % decline over the said ten year timespan.

<sup>159</sup> Kuitert, *Het boek en het badwater*, p. 64.

<sup>160</sup> C. Garbe, 'De literaire socialisatie van jongeren in de mediamaatschappij: Onderzoeksperspectieven uit Duitsland', transl. P. Buurman, in A.M. Raukema, D. Schram & C. Stalpers (eds.), *Lezen en leesgedrag van adolescenten en jongvolwassenen* (Delft: Uitgeverij Eburon, 2002), pp. 263-283, there p. 276.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibidem*.

to Garbe, but also the risk that out of the LDA a non-reader comes forth does exist.<sup>162</sup> With regards to literary education, Garbe states that an open manner of processing read works leaves generally positive impressions on students, also when classical or early modern works are discussed.<sup>163</sup> According to Garbe, working on identity and personal biographies are vital in the teenage years, and it is of importance as well that reading competence must be based on a foundation of reading motivation. Therefore it is important that primary school teachers know how to stimulate reading motivation among the children in their classes.

One former primary school teacher who has elaborate ideas about how to make children willing to read, is Aidan Chambers. In his 1991 book *The Reading Environment: How adults help children enjoy books*, Chambers introduces a model according to which the process of encouraging reading and reflecting on it should occur in primary schools. This model that Chambers introduces is called the Reading Circle (Figure 3).<sup>164</sup> It is a circle, because Chambers believes that reflecting on reading causes more reading to be done. Despite being circular, the Reading Circle has a defined starting point; namely the selection of what to read.<sup>165</sup> After a book has been selected, actual reading starts. Aidan Chambers understands reading as ‘a means of thought’, and does not care much for ‘reading as a soporific or as a pastime hobby.’<sup>166</sup> The reading Chambers aims at is hence attentive, either immersive or deep. In Chambers’ diagram, this includes being read to, the significance of which I have already discussed. After reading or being read to, the response to the book follows; Chambers’ term of choice for the spectrum of manners in which the reader can reflect on what he or she has read. I will briefly discuss all three aspects of the circle, as well as the driving force behind the circle’s spinning.

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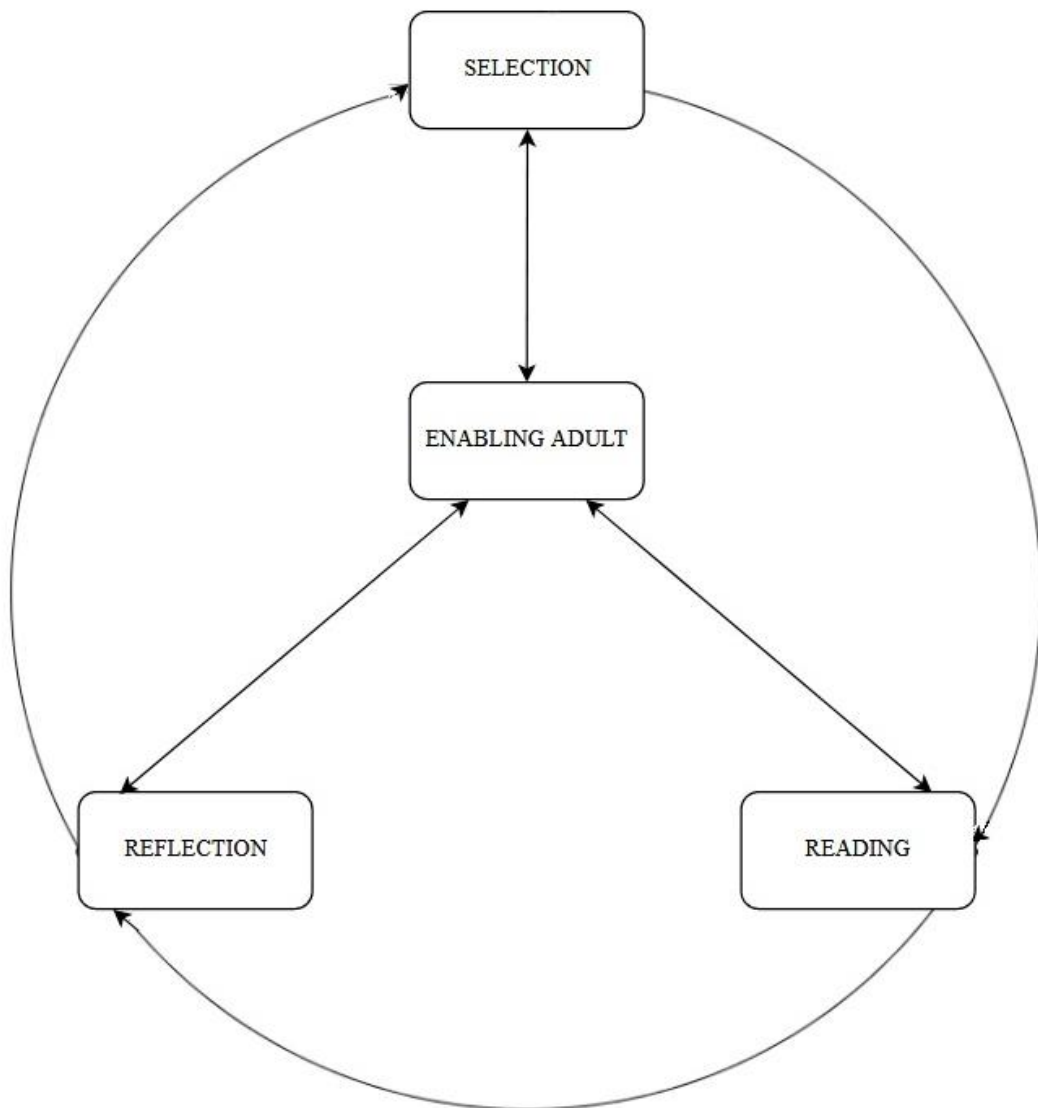
<sup>162</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 277.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 279.

<sup>164</sup> A. Chambers, *The Reading Environment: How adults help children enjoy books* (Stroud: Thimble Press, 1991), p. 9. Chambers’ circle turns counter-clockwise, which I find confusing. Hence I illustrate it turning clockwise.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 14.



**Figure 3**

All reading, according to Chambers, begins with selection.<sup>167</sup> And all selection begins in turn with accessibility.<sup>168</sup> In schools, accessibility of some books and the inaccessibility of other ones are determining factors in the reading of school children and students. In particular the inaccessibility of books can be welcomed by school boards or parents boards, with the underlying moralistic aim to keep school children or high school students away from books deemed

<sup>167</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

inappropriate for whatever reason. This will be a key concept in the discussing of moralism in Dutch education in the following chapter. As far the accessibility of books for primary school children is concerned, Aidan Chambers stresses above all the importance of it. Chambers approves book selection by children themselves, but denounces the frequency of letting children choose books only once a week, asserting correctly that books are too inaccessible then.<sup>169</sup>

After selection, reading is the next step in the circle of Chambers. This step takes a shape that seems perhaps a tad odd at first; namely a whole class in which everyone drops everything but their reading books, and sits reading a book of own choice in utter quiet.<sup>170</sup> Teacher included, because as Mariska Okkinga showed, positive modelling effects exist, and why would children read at the order of a teacher who does not? Why this might appear as odd, is because for purposes other than tests classes in primary schools are rarely so quiet. Why it is very useful, is because reading is but so much learned from schoolbooks aiming at technical reading skills and reading understanding. It really must also just be done. At high schools as well this could be introduced as an attempt to lift up reading encouragement there. It was found that at vmbo, the lowest of three main levels in Dutch high school, only every third student is a frequent reader.<sup>171</sup> Chambers suggests that reading time in class is done daily for a time that suits the attention span of the age group of a class. Chambers advises in addition to make book reading in school a daily activity.<sup>172</sup>

The response to what children have read, to communicate with them about their reading, is what Aidan Chambers pays most attention to. In fact, after *The Reading Environment*, Chambers published a book called *Tell Me: Children and Reading Talk*, which is entirely dedicated to the aspect of response of children to read texts.<sup>173</sup> In his circle, Chambers characterises response as formal talk or

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<sup>169</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 36.

<sup>171</sup> L. Aartsma & J. Evers-Vermeul, 'Vrijtijdslezen door vmbo'ers: Kansen volgens leerlingen', *Levend Talen Tijdschrift*, 19(4) (2018), pp. 28-36, there p. 31.

<sup>172</sup> Chambers, *The Reading Environment*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>173</sup> For more of Chambers and his ideas on discussing reading books with children, see: A. Chambers, *Booktalk: Occasional writing on literature & children* (London: The Bodley Head, 1985).

book gossip, which he specifies as informal “booktalk” among friends, peers or fellow students, or in class sessions.<sup>174</sup> What these have in common is discussing what has been read, and potentially being led to their next piece to read and teaching others. Chambers offers a multitude of creative ways to carry this out with primary school children. One that seems particularly useful to me, is the keeping of a reading diary. Aidan Chambers got this idea from an encounter with two teachers who had their own reading diaries. They could browse to any record of a read book and then remembered much more about their life than just reading the book. According to Chambers, reading diaries can serve as chronicles of our thinking.<sup>175</sup> Teachers have a public task to positively contribute to these chronicles, and these biographies are useful as well to help them selecting the right works for the right child.<sup>176</sup> It should be encouraged that these diaries will be carried ‘year to year, class to class, school to school’, and eventually become works of life as with the two teachers Chambers met.<sup>177</sup>

The final component of Chambers’ circular diagram is placed in the centre. It is what Chambers considers as the driving force behind the circle’s turning. It is the enabling adult, who can help new readers to overcome the obstacles on the narrow road meandering towards being a frequent and thoughtful reader.<sup>178</sup> In the setting of a primary school, it is obviously the teachers – and in the background the headmaster too – who are responsible for the selection of new books for the school library, for helping individual children to pick a book, for arranging time to collectively read in class and also time to process the read matter. Even an ultimate booklover as Aidan Chambers saw the light thanks to devoted high school teachers.<sup>179</sup> There lies an important role for teachers in both primary and secondary education to shape new readers. Not only readers at school, but also leisure time readers.

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<sup>174</sup> Chambers, *The Reading Environment*, pp. 9, 74-75.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 41.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 42; A. Chambers, *Tell Me: Children Reading and Talk* (Stroud: The Thimble Press, 1993), p. 70.

<sup>177</sup> Chambers, *The Reading Environment*, p. 42.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 88.

## The linguistic benefits of reading

In chapter 1, I have written about an emotional benefit of reading fiction, namely that it can improve the empathy the reader has towards other people. The linguistic benefits of leisure reading during youth – defined in this section as broadly as possible; from being a baby until being a college student – have been researched by remedial education scientists Suzanne Mol and Adriana Bus from Leiden University. Their research is a meta-analysis of earlier studies, from which they seek to conclude if there is a relation between leisure reading during youth and vocabulary and reading understanding.<sup>180</sup> Among their findings was a confirmation of what I have shown already; that often being read to and growing up in a rich home literacy environment are very beneficial for the emerging literacy of toddlers.<sup>181</sup> Focussing at reading at later stages in youth, research among schoolkids from Group 3 until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Form in high school showed that the older the participants were, the more impact leisure reading had on their technical reading skills. Other cited research, among American academic students, shows an even stronger relation between leisure reading and reading skills.<sup>182</sup> I would like to speak here of an Enlarging Divergence Effect (EDE), because when a child has learned to enjoy reading and has picked it up, the divergence with non-readers of the same age only widens over time. The EDE is found to appear irrespective of one's initial level of reading skill or understanding. A life at the textual rock bottom is not forever if one finds the right books to climb up.

The positive relation between skill and reading is illustrated by Mol and Bus by another circular graph. Its sequence of stages is: frequent leisure reading → enlarging vocabulary and reading skill → more leisure reading → large(r) vocabulary and better reading skill, and completing the circle with a step towards frequent leisure reading again.<sup>183</sup> Strangely, none of these steps is appointed as

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<sup>180</sup> S.E. Mol & A.G. Bus, 'Lezen loon teen leven lang: De rol van vrijetijdslezen in de taal- en leesontwikkeling van kinderen en jongeren', *Levende Talen Tijdschrift*, 12(3) (2011), pp. 3-15, there pp. 3-4. For the thesis of Mol, from which this article was derived, see: S.E. Mol, *To Read Or Not To Read* (Leiden: Leiden University, 2010).

<sup>181</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11.

starting point by Mol & Bus, and both leisure reading and improvement of reading skills and vocabulary are doubly mentioned in the circle of Mol & Bus. Since the authors do not give any reason for this redundancy, I consider the oval in Figure 4 a better projection of the positive spiral (Figure 4). In Figure 4, the redundant aspects of the scheme of Mol & Bus have been removed. Since the same reading that helps skills enlarge is a part of Chambers' circular reading process, a complete bird's eye view of reading among school children and high school students only emerges if the schemes of Chambers and the two Dutch scholars are combined (Figure 5). In this combined scheme the two loose schemes are recognisable and practically left unaltered, except for the recognition of adequate

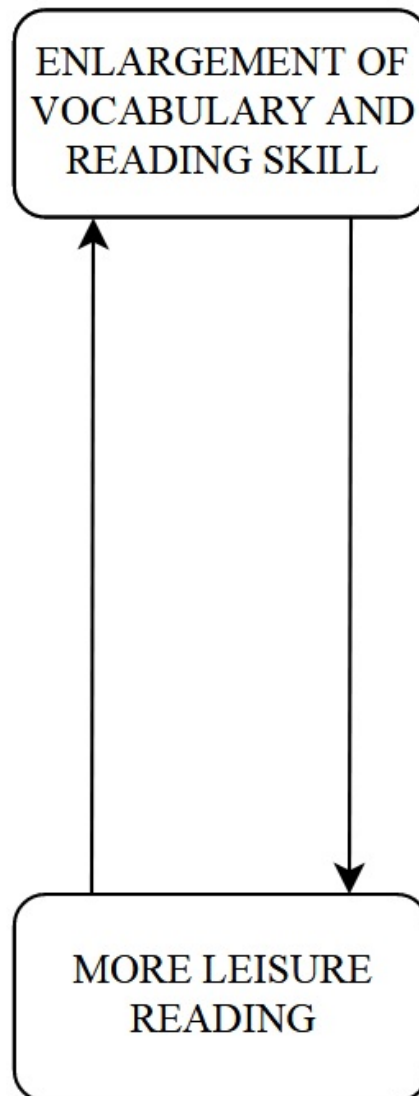


Figure 4

skills as catalyst of the reading, which remains to rely directly on the proper selection as well.

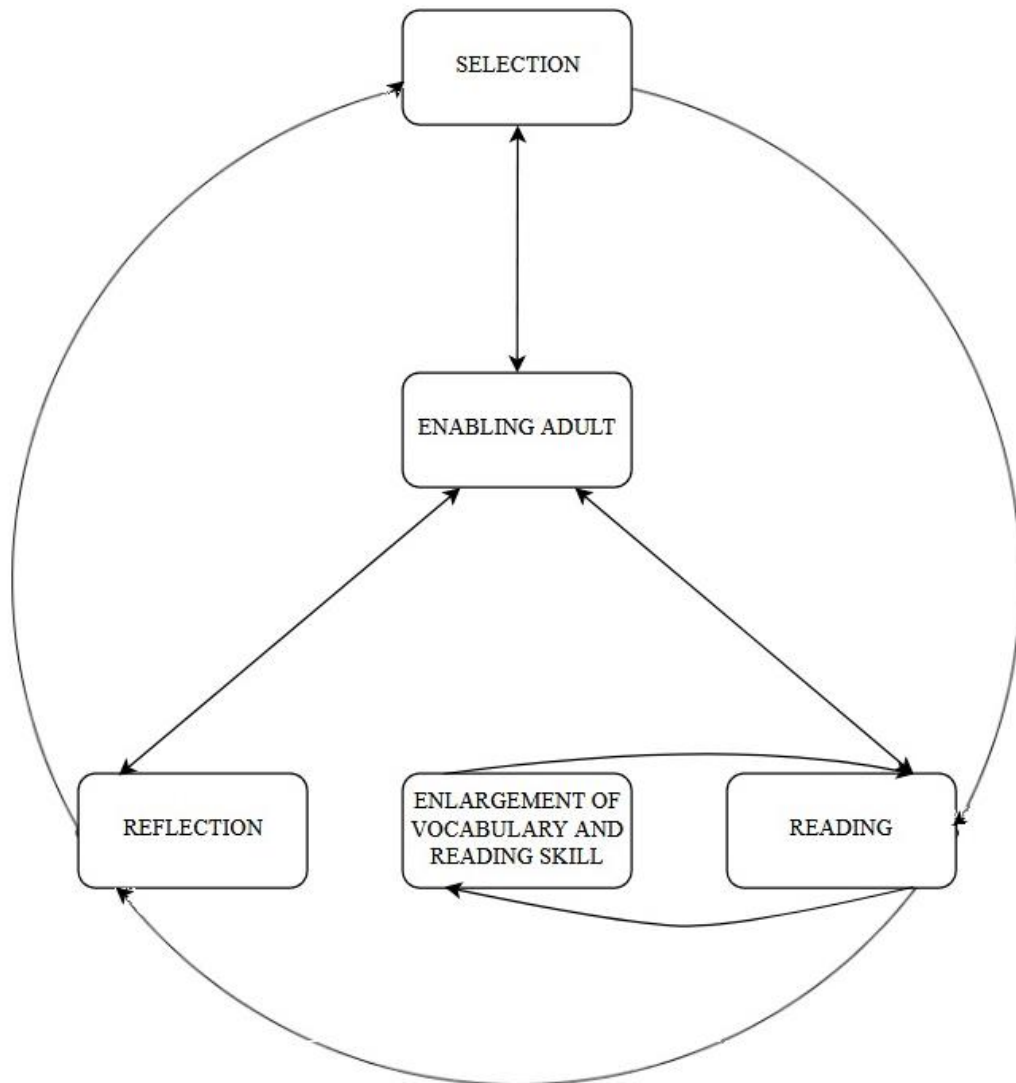


Figure 5

### The school subject of Dutch in secondary education

After a discussion of primary school curriculum, I will now take a look at linguistic education in Dutch high schools. In high schools, all previously mentioned components of linguistic education are components of the school subject of Dutch. Since high school students can read, albeit not always well enough as I have addressed above, I will not write about reading education in high school, since learning to decode words is not what the school subject of Dutch

entails. I will describe in a brief manner what the school subject of Dutch consists of on each of the different main levels of Dutch high school education.

The official exam programme of vmbo, which mentions what vmbo-students should have learned by the end of their years in secondary education, gives the idea of the subject of Dutch as if it were a general guide to life. Some of the learning aims that are formulated are: ‘knowing and handling one’s own and someone else’s standards and values’; ‘functioning as a democratic citizen in a multicultural society (...)’; ‘solving problems of choice in a thoughtful way’; ‘judging information at trustworthiness, representability and usefulness; processing and making use of information’.<sup>184</sup> This idea of the subject of Dutch as a guide to life is confirmed by the table with exam requirements. It speaks among other similar things of correct application of reading strategies, listening strategies and the ability to recognise the main argument of a text.<sup>185</sup> This makes it seem as if Dutch at vmbo is an extension of the primary school subject Understanding Reading. Even a school book for the 4<sup>th</sup> Form of vmbo-b and vmbo-k, the exam year, does much resemble the books of *Goed Gelezen* which I examined above. The assignments are similar and the level is not much higher than the level of *Goed Gelezen*. All together that leaves hardly any room for literature or reading as an enjoyable yet thoughtful activity. In the exam programme, the subheading ‘Fiction’ harbours requirements that require students to be able to recognise types of fiction, to give a personal reaction about a work of fiction based on examples from it, to describe the relation between the work of fiction and real life. A lesson about poetry does then only consist of an outline of possible characteristics of poems.<sup>186</sup> In the curriculum of vmbo reading is presented as a mere cognitive skill

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<sup>184</sup> Examenblad, ‘examenprogramma\_nederlands\_vmbo\_2014.pdf’, <[https://www.examenblad.nl/examenstof/nederlands-vmbo-3/2019/f=/examenprogramma\\_nederlands\\_vmbo\\_2014.pdf](https://www.examenblad.nl/examenstof/nederlands-vmbo-3/2019/f=/examenprogramma_nederlands_vmbo_2014.pdf)>, (27 February 2019). Original texts: ‘het kennen van en omgaan met eigen en andermans normen en waarden’, ‘het functioneren als democratisch burger in een multiculturele samenleving (...)’, ‘op een doordachte wijze keuzeproblemen oplossen’, ‘informatie beoordelen op betrouwbaarheid, representativiteit en bruikbaarheid, informatie verwerken en benutten’. Author’s translation.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>186</sup> L. Haan, E. Huppelschoten, F. Karman et al., *Nieuw Nederlands: Leerboeken 4 vmbo-b(kader)* (Groningen: Noordhoff Uitgeverij, 2015), pp. 111-116.

without any further cultural values.

The two highest main levels of secondary education in the Netherlands are havo and vwo. These share one exam programme, and hence have a similar setup of the subject Dutch. The exam programme is divided into six domains: Reading skills (*Leesvaardigheid*); Oral linguistic skill (*Mondelinge taalvaardigheid*); Writing skill (*Schrijfvaardigheid*); Argumentative skills (*Argumentatieve vaardigheden*); Literature (*Literatuur*); and Orientation on study and profession (*Oriëntatie op studie en beroep*).<sup>187</sup> These domains can be divided into two groups. One is the Central Exam, which is centrally examined in accordance with tight governmental requirements. The other is the School Exam, which is not centrally examined but only by schools, which have a certain degree of independence in their examination manners and curriculum contents of School Exam domains. The literary domain falls under the School Exam.<sup>188</sup> As was the case with the exam programme for vmbo, the programme for havo and vwo appears to be much aimed at enlarging linguistic skills. This also follows from the two schoolbooks for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Forms of havo and the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Forms of vwo that I have examined. These are divided into sections concentrating on the different skills formulated in the exam programme, including formulating, spelling and vocabulary.<sup>189</sup> It is no wonder in my view, that the lack of actual knowledge-based teaching in the subject Dutch fosters the negative image of the subject, as three scholars from the University of Groningen suggest.<sup>190</sup> That the subject of Dutch has a negative image among havo- and vwo-students is beyond

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<sup>187</sup> Examenblad, 'Microsoft Word – examenprogramma nederlands havo\_vwo\_2014.docx - examenprogramma\_nederlands\_havo\_vwo\_2014.pdf', <[https://www.examenblad.nl/examenstof/nederlandse-taal-en-literatuur-2/2019/f=/examenprogramma\\_nederlands\\_havo\\_vwo\\_2014.pdf](https://www.examenblad.nl/examenstof/nederlandse-taal-en-literatuur-2/2019/f=/examenprogramma_nederlands_havo_vwo_2014.pdf)>, (27 February 2019).

<sup>188</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>189</sup> H. Frank, J.E. Grezel, M. van der Hulst et al., *Nieuw Nederlands: Leerboeken 5/6 vwo* (Groningen: Noordhoff Uitgeverij, 2014), pp. 4-7; H. Frank, J.E. Grezel, M. Kooiman et al., *Nieuw Nederlands: Leerboeken 4/5 havo* (Groningen: Noordhoff Uitgeverij, 2014), pp. 4-7.

<sup>190</sup> S. Prinsen, T. Witte & C. Suhre, 'Imago en inhoud van het schoolvak Nederlands', *Levende Talen Tijdschrift*, 19(3) (2018), pp. 26-35, there p. 27.

doubt: ‘Most students find the subject Dutch boring, no fun and not interesting.’<sup>191</sup> Taking in mind that high school roughly corresponds with the LDA during which students are inclined to like reading less, it is not surprising that a skill-centred colouring of the subject of Dutch is considered boring and that two thirds of vmbo-students do not read. Reading is taught as a skill in Dutch schools. Or perhaps it would be more correct to say that skill is taught instead of reading. This latter statement sounds harsh and horrific, but the Inspectorate of Education reported in its last report that there are signs that the School Exam is more and more a general repetition for the Central Exam. This despite the fact that the School Exam was originally meant as a space to broaden lessons in school besides the government-set curriculum of the Central Exam.<sup>192</sup> What does that mean for the literary domain of the subject of Dutch? That it deserves a place in the third and final chapter of this paper, which is the chapter on moralism in Dutch literary education.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have taken a look at the process of learning to read, from pre-kindergarten age onward. Before going to school, infants learn most of their linguistic skills at home. Their emergent literacy can develop at a rapid pace, although this is not necessarily always the case. Parents have a big influence on the emergent literacy of their infants, as has the socioeconomic status of these parents. The Dutch initiative BoekStart does a great job in creating awareness among young parents for the importance of reading to little children. Carroll et al. found that the literacy interest of these children, how much they actually like being read to, also contributes to or thwarts emerging literacy skills.

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<sup>191</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 29. Original text: ‘De meeste leerlingen vinden het vak Nederlands saai, niet leuk en ook niet interessant.’ Author’s translation. The study from which this followed was carried out in only three of the twelve Dutch provinces. Nevertheless the study confirms earlier findings (p. 32).

<sup>192</sup> Anon., *De Staat van het Onderwijs 2018*, p. 108.

In Dutch primary schools, the subject Technical Reading covers the training of phonological awareness of children, and their skills in decoding letters and words. The subject Understanding Reading covers the teaching of reading understanding, but the method *Nieuwsbegrip* does this in a poor manner. This method aims too much at artificial strategy learning. Reading understanding among Dutch school children was nevertheless in decline way before *Nieuwsbegrip* existed, and this negative trend has persevered for two decades already. *Nieuwsbegrip* does nothing to remedy this.

In high schools in the Netherlands, the same problem arises in the school subject of Dutch. Reading is treated, at any school level, as a skill which can be mastered through possessing knowledge of the correct reading strategy. As a consequence, students have been reported to find the subject of Dutch dull and irrelevant. They think as low of reading during the Little Dark Age, which takes place between the ages 13 to 20. To show how reading books could be promoted among school children and high school students, I used the Reading Circle of Aidan Chambers. Chambers thinks reflection on read books to be important, and keeping a reading diary is one means he employs for this reflection. Combined with the meta-analysis of Suzanne Mol and Adriana Bus, I showed that picking the right book of the right level can get anyone to become a reader and also grow linguistically.

## Chapter 3 – The moralism in Dutch education

### Introduction

Literary education at the higher two levels of Dutch secondary education is part of the subject of Dutch. Books are read for other linguistic subjects as well, such as the subjects of English and German. But for no subject do students read as extensive as the subject of Dutch. Moreover, literary structures and techniques like character types and metrical feet are taught in the subject of Dutch alone. The literary education of which I will discuss the moralism that affects it is that as taught in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Forms of havo and the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Forms of vwo, because only for these parts of these school levels – the so-called Tweede Fase (Second Phase) – have literary learning goals been formulated. Vmbo, the lowest level in Dutch secondary education, does not know the sort of literary education that is taught at the other levels. As put forward in the previous chapter, vmbo-students learn only to characterise multiple types of fiction. For this reason, literary education at vmbo is entirely excluded from the discussion of literary education. Once I have given an illustration of the moralism that affects Dutch literary education, I will address findings that plead against the current state of literary education from other scholars. After that, I will discuss the Dutch phenomenon of particular education, and write about the opportunities for moralistic education that that offers.

### The recent history of literary education in Dutch schools

The modern age of Dutch secondary education started in 1968 with the implementation of what is called the Mammoetwet (Mammoth Law), which made Dutch education less elitist and more meritocratic instead by introducing a new secondary school system.<sup>193</sup> This is the system that, although not unaltered, is still

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<sup>193</sup> P. Slaman, “'Waartoe toch die klove?’ Selectie in het middelbaar onderwijs, 1860-2018’, in P. Slaman (ed.), *In de regel vrij: 100 jaar politiek rond Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap* (’s-

in use today and has educated two entire Dutch generations and is currently educating a third one. In the process of the preparation of the implementation of the system an advisory board imagined literary education as taught by enthusiastically dedicated teachers introducing their students to ‘the riches of our national culture’.<sup>194</sup> How teachers were to carry this out in practice was not administered. Guidelines were lacking and teachers and students were left with literary education not being free, but anarchic.<sup>195</sup> Often teachers did not know what books were read until but briefly before the oral exam about the corpus of works a student had read. Of significant influence on literary education was the tendency towards the structuralistic approach of literary texts, whereby the structure of the text and the intended message of the author are the main points of study. This was despite critiques that more attention should be paid to reader reception of texts, the demarcation of literature and the social construction of literary canons.<sup>196</sup>

In the 1990s, the second half of the school levels of havo and vwo were reshaped. In the new structure, the Tweede Fase, requirements for literary education were formulated for the first time. Havo-students are since then obliged to read a minimum of eight literary works, while vwo-students must read at least twelve, and at least three from before the year 1880. In the process of setting up the Tweede Fase, much stress was put on the need to differentiate. This aim to personalise education for every student also comes to the fore in the first exam programme on literature under the Tweede Fase. It aims at ensuring that the reading of students connects with their reading experiences thus far, and obliges in response to the earlier mentioned critiques, that students make reports on their read works in which they reflect on their reading experiences.<sup>197</sup> Structuralistic

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Gravenhage: Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2018), pp. 121-137, there pp. 129-130.

<sup>194</sup> T.C.H. Witte, *Het oog van de meester: Een onderzoek naar de literaire ontwikkeling van havo- en vwo-leerlingen in de Tweede Fase van het voortgezet onderwijs* (Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2008), p. 24. Original text: ‘de rijkdom van onze nationale cultuur’. Author’s translation.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 550.

approaches were not done away with however, and literary terms and history had to be learned as well in order for students to reflect well on what they read.

### Literary education at havo and vwo

The domain of literary education at the secondary school levels of havo and vwo makes up domain E of the exam programme. This domain is divided into three subdomains. Subdomain E1 is called Literary development and treats the reading of literary works by high school students. I will discuss this domain in greater detail below. First, I will discuss the other two subdomains.

Subdomain E2 is called Literary terms (*Litteraire begrippen*), E3 bears the name History of literature (*Literatuurgeschiedenis*). The first domain requires students to know literary terms and to be able to use them in interpreting texts of various literary sorts. The latter requires students to place the books they have read for subdomain E1 in their historical context. The foundation for this is to have enough cultural knowledge of literary history; hence this is also expected from students under subdomain E3. So, where the school subject of Dutch has been described as being too focussed on strategy learning, while too little actual knowledge was taught, this goes as a welcome positive exception. Literary terms and history are taught with school methods distinct from the books used for the other fields of the subject of Dutch. These methods focus on the meanings of literary terms in both poetry and prose, and also on a range of works. Prose in this respect means strictly novels, which limits the scope of literary works.

These methods pay much attention to styles of writing and the meanings of literary works that the writer intends them to harbour. Despite the emotional and empathic effects reading fiction is known to harbour, too little attention is paid to the ideas and feelings students get when they read a poem or a (piece of a) novel. For instance, the method *Nieuw Nederlands Literatuur* has in its vwo-edition eight assignments on the poem *Essentie van het missen* by Anna Enquist. The first two questions focus entirely on the dissection of the rhyming scheme and cadence of the poem, the next five ask for things Enquist as author means to say. Only in the last question are students asked about their own ideas about the poem,

and then in relation to the stylistic characteristics of the poem.<sup>198</sup> The questions about texts of Flemish novelist Tom Lanoye in this same method also concern the texts themselves.<sup>199</sup> Another method for literary education, often called *Dautzenberg* after its main author, shows a similar structuralistic perspective. Despite the topics of exam programme domains E2 and E3 being separately discussed in *Dautzenberg*, questions about for instance literature in the Interbellum focus mostly on stylistic issues.<sup>200</sup> So these methods do still have a very structuralistic perspective. Issues such as synesthetic expressions or elisions and epentheses in a iambic rhythm are much discussed in classes on literary and cultural history.

These examples might be anecdotal, but after my examination of school methods for literary education I present the examples as accurate illustrations. An overview of every assignment in literary high school education that focusses too much on styles and the author's intentions would be way too lengthy. Dutch author Alex Boogers wrote two books on the demise of reading and literary education in the Netherlands, and states in one of those books with somewhat coarse but nevertheless rightly expressed sarcasm that this obsession with style suffocates literary engagement and the utmost importance for stories to resonate in the readers' heads.<sup>201</sup> Too much structuralistic emphasis on literary styles and cultural history classes will not encourage the shaping of new readers. To do away with these entirely is even less desirable though. Literary terminology and history form a cognitive curriculum piece that is so direly needed within the school subject Dutch. But in my view, these tend to be too prominently present, which I fear discourages students to read for leisure.

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<sup>198</sup> M. Kooiman & H. Frank, *Nieuw Nederlands literatuur: Leerwerkboeken 4/5/6 vwo* (Groningen: Noordhoff Uitgevers, 2018), pp.272-273.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 268-271.

<sup>200</sup> J.A. Dautzenberg, *Literatuur: geschiedenis en theorie. Opdrachtenboek* (Den Bosch: Malmberg, 2009), pp. 42-53.

<sup>201</sup> A. Boogers, *Lang lever de lezer: Manifest* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Podium, 2018), p. 112.

## The curtailment and moralisation of reading literature in school

The actual reading of literature finds itself among the most notorious parts of the curriculum of secondary education. Subdomain E1 of the exam programme is called Literary development (*Literaire ontwikkeling*), and requires students to be able ‘to give an argumentatively founded report of [their] reading experiences with a number of *literary works* selected by [them]selves.’<sup>202</sup> The required minimal quantity of literary works to be read by students depends on the school level. Havo-students must at least read eight literary works, while vwo-students must read at least twelve of these. The latter group must meet the demand that determines that at least three works should stem from before the year 1880. Any chosen literary work must originally be written in Dutch, thereby limiting the range of possibly selected works to those written by Dutch, Flemish and Surinamese writers. In this respect, I consider it correct to recall the writings of Aidan Chambers, who put particular emphasis on the selection process in his Reading Circle: ‘[t]hey who choose are exercising power.’<sup>203</sup> Yet it is not the government with its exam programme that selects harshly and narrows the corpus of books that can be chosen by students for their reading lists. It is schools that use the freedom to examine literary development in their own chosen manner not to let students slowly digest their read works, but instead compile a small selection of novels to read, and thereby chop literature down to ready-to-eat chunks.

Practically all secondary schools in the Netherlands use reading lists that consist of selected works to be chosen from by students for the sufficient completion of subdomain E1. This is in itself allowed, since this subdomain of literary development is a school-examined part of the exam programme, as is the

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<sup>202</sup> Examenblad, ‘Microsoft Word – examenprogramma nederlanders havo\_vwo\_2014.docx - examenprogramma\_nederlanders\_havo\_vwo\_2014.pdf’, <[https://www.examenblad.nl/examenstof/nederlandse-taal-en-literatuur-2/2019/f=/examenprogramma\\_nederlanders\\_havo\\_vwo\\_2014.pdf](https://www.examenblad.nl/examenstof/nederlandse-taal-en-literatuur-2/2019/f=/examenprogramma_nederlanders_havo_vwo_2014.pdf)>, (27 February 2019). Original text: ‘kan beargumenteerd verslag uitbrengen van zijn leeservaringen met een aantal door hem geselecteerde literaire werken.’ Author’s translation. No italics in the original.

<sup>203</sup> Chambers, *Tell Me*, p. 61.

whole domain of literature.<sup>204</sup> Yet with such lists many schools limit the liberty of literary choice left to students. One reading list from a school in the south of the Netherlands even requires that all literary works must be picked from the school's list.<sup>205</sup> The freedom that the government gives to broadly explore Dutch-lingual literature is used by this school to drastically narrow this down to only 134 novels to pick from. Freedom of choice is narrowed down even further at this school with a crystallised distribution of the novels over time and the prohibition of reading multiple novels of the same author.<sup>206</sup> Schools that do allow novels that are not on their list to be read practically always require permission to be asked from a teacher. This is however something positive, since this makes the teachers get more involved in the book choice of their students. Teacher involvement in reading literature is sadly still at a minimum. Whichever student chooses to only read works from the school's list of selected works will not have to show the chosen works to his or her teacher until a short time before the examination. Many schools rank novels on their lists with levels, points systems or numbers of stars, in order to ensure that students read novels of 'an acknowledged literary quality'.<sup>207</sup> Sometimes there are also further requirements set by schools. Entire genres are sometimes forbidden; examples are literary thrillers, young adult novels and *boekenweekgeschenken*.<sup>208</sup>

Alex Boogers recalls in his elegies that the books on the reading list of his high school were quite old, and often dealt with issues and themes that he did

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<sup>204</sup> Examenblad, 'Microsoft Word – examenprogramma nederlands havo\_vwo\_2014.docx - examenprogramma\_nederlands\_havo\_vwo\_2014.pdf',

<[https://www.examenblad.nl/examenstof/nederlandse-taal-en-literatuur-2/2019/f=/examenprogramma\\_nederlands\\_havo\\_vwo\\_2014.pdf](https://www.examenblad.nl/examenstof/nederlandse-taal-en-literatuur-2/2019/f=/examenprogramma_nederlands_havo_vwo_2014.pdf)>, (27 February 2019).

<sup>205</sup> Stedelijk Gymnasium Den Bosch, '2015-2016\_LITERATUURLIJST\_alfabetisch.pdf', <[https://www.stedgymdenbosch.nl/uploads/bestanden/vakken/nederlands/2015-2016\\_LITERATUURLIJST\\_alfabetisch.pdf](https://www.stedgymdenbosch.nl/uploads/bestanden/vakken/nederlands/2015-2016_LITERATUURLIJST_alfabetisch.pdf)>, (30 March 2019).

<sup>206</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>207</sup> Bonnefanten College, 'Literatuurlijst Nederlands (na 1880) - Bonnefanten College', <[www.bonnefantencollege.nl/bestand.aspx?id=1801](http://www.bonnefantencollege.nl/bestand.aspx?id=1801)>, (29 March 2019). Original text: 'een erkende literaire kwaliteit'. Author's translation.

<sup>208</sup> *Boekenweekgeschenken* are novellas that are given away freely with books bought during the annual Dutch Book Week.

not recognise from his own life. With Boogers being born in 1970, his time in high school was in the early 1980s. Boogers laments the elevated appearance of literature in high schools in his time and in the current one still. He considers this as a huge blow for literature, because according to Boogers only stories that new readers can identify with can teach them to the higher strata of literature, and only these stories can learn new readers to eventually empathise with protagonists that are different from them. Otherwise, why would children's stories be so stereotypical, as Garbe writes? Why would such stories always be about firemen, dragons, and princesses then? Yet nowadays those same books as 35 years ago still make up the as good as compulsory lists that high schools compile.<sup>209</sup> Boogers correctly objects that new writers with new stories about the current world can barely bring themselves under the attention of younger generations, because the teachers of these 15-years-old students obligate them to empathise with Jan Wolkers' reflection on his Calvinist youth in the 1930s, or with Anton Steenwijk who in *The Assault* must carry the burden of World War Two traumas. Literary development has been made synonymous with letting school children read the existentialist works of W.F. Hermans, the novels of Maarten 't Hart about anticlericalism in the once Calvinist Netherlands, and the stories of Remco Campert that tell of the *joy de vivre* and liberal spirit of post-war urban youngsters. The Big Three novelists of Dutch literature are still taught to be Hermans, Reve and Mulisch. These men died in 1995, 2006 and 2010 respectively. Some say there are actually four big Dutch writers, counting Wolkers as fourth. He died in 2007. Apparently no great writers are alive today, or at least that is what is taught about literature in schools; great writers are past giants. Great writing and good literature are presented as past relics and the painful elevation as a necessary thing to do.

Literature is often presented to students as something far from their own worlds, as something difficult and complex, as something dull and annoying. This is the way that Boogers learnt to know books at secondary school. When one of his teachers sent him out of class, he had to copy a page from a nineteenth century

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<sup>209</sup> A. Boogers, *De lezer is niet dood: Schotschrift* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Podium, 2015), pp. 57-58.

novel to torment, to punish and to annoy.<sup>210</sup> What annoys Boogers still, is the elevation of literature, which for a large part comes to the fore through contempt for particular genres, as for instance young adult novels. When confronted with the idea to allow this genre for reading under subdomain E1, teachers are reported to reply with saying that their task is to introduce students to complex literature, or with the disdainful remark that the teacher himself read no young adult novels but works of Jean-Paul Sartre at the age of sixteen.<sup>211</sup> A similar disdain is described by Boogers concerning books about sports. These are by definition called non-literary in Dutch schools and thus do not count as good reading material. This is the moralism that hinders reading lists from renewing or from being abandoned. Yet what hurt would it do if a teacher allowed a student who suggests reading a novel or biography on sports to do so? Why would teachers not prize the active involvement and the sincere willingness to read of such a student?<sup>212</sup> Research carried out by Jeroen Dera of Radboud University Nijmegen on students' approval ratings of books read for school and the composition of school-compiled lists shows that young adult literature and thrillers are much liked by the participating students – who hence attend schools that allow these to be read.<sup>213</sup> The most often read works are however not the ones that students like best, but the early modern and medieval works that schools most often oblige their students to read.<sup>214</sup>

Apart from the elevated concept which is made out of literature, young adult literature suffers from something else. In the same article that had two teachers arguing against young adult novels, a third interviewee, who is a former teacher, states that teachers in the schooling for their profession do not even discuss the genre. Motivated future teachers may pay attention to the genre, but

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<sup>210</sup> Boogers, *Lang leve de lezer*, p.13.

<sup>211</sup> B. Maliepaard, 'Adolescentenliteratuur voor de lijst, hoezo?', *Lezen*, 4(3) (2009), pp. 22-23, there p. 22.

<sup>212</sup> Boogers, *Lang leve de lezer*, pp. 132-133.

<sup>213</sup> J. Dera, *De praktijk van de leeslijst: Een onderzoek naar de inhoud en waardering van literatuurlijsten voor het schoolvak Nederlands op havo en vwo* (Amsterdam: Stichting Lezen, 2019), pp. 24-25.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 16.

often lack the free time to do so.<sup>215</sup> It is taught to future teachers that only “complex” literature, or “literature for adults”, or only “real” literature is worthy of its place in the curriculum. This deep-seated efficiency is one cause for the moralistic manner in which students are introduced to literature. This also comes to the fore in the distribution of attention between the Central Exam and the School Exam. The centrally examined parts are the skeleton of a subject in which students must meet governmental requirements. The Inspectorate reported last year however, that centrally examined parts start to push aside not centrally examined domains, such as the literary domain E of the subject of Dutch.<sup>216</sup> This can be blamed on an obsession with achievement that can be seen in Dutch education. This results in credential capitalism; the idea that obtaining more diplomas and degrees is synonymous with being a more competent employee.<sup>217</sup> This obsession causes schools, parents and children to focus only on high grades in cognitive fields.<sup>218</sup> In relation to this phenomenon stands the transferring of individual attention for students from regular schools to institutions for extra lessons.<sup>219</sup> High schools risk becoming places where students only get to hear what they must know for their final exams. A function of education that as a consequence is being displaced, is the socialising function of education. This consists of teaching students to participate in society as tolerant and democratic citizens.<sup>220</sup> To function properly as democratic citizen, one must know how to read and judge long pieces of text. Students are reported to be unable to do this properly.<sup>221</sup> Credential capitalism and its measurement of capability in degrees and grades may result in a higher educated population that is less capable of informing itself. It is important to come to realise again that some vital skills are not obtained with a degree.

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<sup>215</sup> Maliepaard, *Adolescentenliteratuur voor op de lijst, hoezo?*, p. 23.

<sup>216</sup> Anon., *De Staat van het Onderwijs 2018*, p. 108.

<sup>217</sup> L. Elffers, *De bijlesgeneratie: Opkomst van de onderwijscompetitie* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), pp. 38-39.

<sup>218</sup> S. Bloemink, *Diagnosedrift: Hoe onze labelcultuur kinderen tekortdoet* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), pp. 106-109.

<sup>219</sup> Elffers, *De bijlesgeneratie*, pp. 133-135.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 13.

<sup>221</sup> Schofield, *All the News That's Fit to Print*, p. 134.

Until that is realised, the moralism of literary education in Dutch high schools becomes even more steadfast, for the sake of efficiently giving cognitive parts of the Central Exam priority over reading in the literary domain and the idea that only “real and complex” literature is worth the effort. But the exam programme sets no genre requirements; literary non-fiction likening that of George Orwell, Paul Theroux or Ryszard Kapuściński, young adult novels and books of poetry are in principle all allowed to be read under subdomain E1.<sup>222</sup> But in real life young generations learn that literature is the old books prescribed by school. Prescribed so often that there are either detailed summaries or film versions available online that help with tackling the structuralistic questions about plot and characters.. The book does not have to be read, convincing the teacher that the book has been read is good enough. The structuralistic fixation on writing styles and character types leaves the ideas and perceptions of students about their “read” books ignored. Subdomain E1 is strangled, and has been for much of the Tweede Fase era, by moralism justified by efficiency demands. It is a play; pestiferous puppeteering.<sup>223</sup>

Alex Boogers, with his pair of passionate pleas, does not stand alone in his critique on the current state of literary education. In a brief interview published on 14 March 2016, author Kluun laments the lack of new titles on the reading lists of schools.<sup>224</sup> He propagates a much freer form of literary education, with examination in the shape of writing assignments about books chosen by students without prescribed list. Someone who is critical of Kluun’s remarks is writer and literary reviewer Aleid Truijens, who used her newspaper column six days after Kluun’s interview to state that real and complex literature must be taught from the 4<sup>th</sup> Form onward. New titles like those of Kluun can then be read in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Form

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<sup>222</sup> Poetry is treated in class and read by students, yet often these poems do not count for the minimum set under subdomain E1. Would there be a next step in making the subject of Dutch more efficient and less time-consuming, it could well be the abandonment of poetry from the curriculum, since poems already do not count as literary works. There might be schools that do include poetry in the count for subdomain E1, but I found no such school during my research. Neither did I attend such a school.

<sup>223</sup> Boogers, *De lezer is niet dood*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>224</sup> A. van Rhee, “‘Waarom gedwongen Reve doorploegen?’”, *Algemeen Dagblad*, 14 March 2016, pp. 8-9.

at the latest. The reading lists that exist offer new worlds to students as they must, writes Truijens. Her statement that students have much of a free choice in combination with her approval for reading lists strikes me as strange – or perhaps Truijens really believes that the books on the list for decades are the sole ones that can educate and motivate students.<sup>225</sup> This I have attempted to refute in the previous already. To plan on reading novels in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Form is not realistic however; for the first 3 Forms of havo and vwo, there is no set out programme of learning plans; literary education until the 3<sup>rd</sup> Form is anarchic still.<sup>226</sup> Literary education only starts halfway high school, which is a genuine problem.

### Experts' views on the need for the right book

That the books that are selected for high school students do not or not sufficiently match up with their experiences and environments has in the previous section been mentioned as a big problem and a significant shortcoming of the current literary education in the Tweede Fase of both havo and vwo. In the following piece, I want to take a further look at the supposed need for a connection between the literary works that are read in school on the one hand, and the reading experiences of students up till the 4<sup>th</sup> Form on the other. Does the moralism of the reading list with its restrictive effect on this connection also reduce the growth and development of students into new readers; as thistles and weeds strangle wheat irrespective of the fertility of the soil? What has been written on this topic by scholars? In the following paragraphs I will give an overview of writings that altogether justify considering the said shortcoming as a problem, and a recent example from the Netherlands that illustrates the ignorance regarding this issue.

In chapter 2, I have written about Christine Garbe, who advocates making reading motivation the foundation of teaching reading competence in

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<sup>225</sup> A. Truijens, 'De verplichte leeslijst opent nieuwe werelden', *De Volkskrant*, 19 March 2016, p. 17.

<sup>226</sup> There are no learning plans for the subject Dutch in the first half of high school, and neither are there such plans or programmes for other subjects. However, simply following the textbook is at least something to go by. The issue here is that that is impossible for literary education.

schools. As an exponent of this Garbe concludes that book topics as well as methods in literary education must be synchronised and connected with the needs of adolescent students in order to have a chance to succeed.<sup>227</sup> What is remarkable about Garbe's piece, is that she places the LDA in the few years right after childhood. Garbe writes that the LDA is most visible in the age group 13-16 years, which Garbe treats as synonymous with the 1<sup>st</sup> until the 4<sup>th</sup> Form of high school.<sup>228</sup> Theo Witte, who in his dissertation took over Garbe's development scheme in a table, places the LDA as Garbe did before him right after the childhood years. Witte is even so exact to tie the age of 12-15 years to the LDA. That is much shorter than the timespan until age 20 that I have determined for the LDA based on Lisa Kuitert and figures of the SCP. Perhaps the answer can be found in studying another developmental model, that of J.A. Appleyard.

Appleyard has been a teacher at Boston College who, through time, discovered a discrepancy between his approach of literature and the one common among his students. About this, he writes in the introduction of his book *Becoming a Reader: The Experience of Fiction from Childhood to Adulthood* the following: 'I wanted them to think about how books and poems were structured and how they worked, (...) [t]he students seemed to want to discover messages about the meaning of their lives, (...) interesting characters they could identify with in their fantasies, or to use the ideas of the author to bolster their own beliefs and prejudices.'<sup>229</sup> Appleyard came to the conclusion that children and adolescents shift on their way to adulthood through a regular sequence of five reading attitudes, which he describes in *Becoming a Reader*. It is important to know that the sequence that Appleyard describes is his ideal pathway for shaping a capable adult reader.<sup>230</sup> This means that in real life not everyone completes the

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<sup>227</sup> Garbe, *De literaire socialisatie van jongeren in de mediamaatschappij: Onderzoeksperspectieven uit Duitsland*, p. 280.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 270-271.

<sup>229</sup> J.A. Appleyard, *Becoming a Reader: The Experience of Fiction from Childhood to Adulthood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 1.

<sup>230</sup> K. Laarakker, 'Het grillige pad dat de lezer bewandelt. Naar een meer flexibele benadering van (literaire) ontwikkeling', in D. Schram & A.M. Raukema (eds.), *Lezen in de lengte en lezen in de breedte: De doorgaande leeslijn in wetenschappelijk perspectief* (Delft: Uitgeverij Eburon, 2006), pp. 41-60, there p. 48.

full sequence. Some drop out on the way and become sporadic readers or even non-readers, apart from the skimming of brief texts.

The first stage that Appleyard describes is the reader as player. This is preschool literacy, and thus the emergent literacy I already have discussed in detail in the previous chapter.<sup>231</sup> The second stage is the reader as hero or heroine. This is the stage in which ideally children aged 7 to 12 find themselves. Children at that age read stories that Appleyard calls adventures, thereby meaning that children's stories are simply about a protagonist that sees things happening in the world and goes through experiences and events him- or herself.<sup>232</sup> Appleyard states these stories are a mere plot without deeper layers.<sup>233</sup> Yet this suits children well. The specific developmental task at this age is for children to gather, process and structure data about the world around writes Appleyard, and according to him this makes reading not only 'a skill to be mastered', but also 'focus[sing] on issues of identity, in the image of the powerful or clever hero or heroine' serving as archetype for the self as central in the world.<sup>234</sup> Part three of the sequence of five is the reader as thinker. For Appleyard, this stage is synonymous with adolescence, which he defines as the stage between the ages of 13 and 17 years.<sup>235</sup> Appleyard introduces a teenage guy called Chris to illustrate the reader as thinker. Chris is said to like George Orwell's essay *Shooting an Elephant* not because of a sensational or exiting plot, but for the ability to relate to the author's described feelings of not fitting in.<sup>236</sup> This is according to Appleyard typical for adolescence, when the main developments are '[t]he discovery of subjectivity and the relativism of points of view' and the integration of an own identity.<sup>237</sup> Books can be helpful with this, and thus beneficial to the adolescent, only if these allow those teenagers to think and identify. As Appleyard writes: 'The adolescent turns to the realism of the book as the criterion of its acceptability.'<sup>238</sup> Thus, books that

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<sup>231</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 47.

<sup>232</sup> Appleyard, *Becoming a Reader*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 64.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 59; 62.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 96.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 94.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 100.

guide or steer a teenager in his or her endeavour will likely be read with a certain joy. But also Appleyard acknowledges despite his utopian outline of literary development that adolescents read but little.<sup>239</sup> Combined with the ages 13 to 17, Appleyard in his ideal development has integrated a short LDA as well. I assume that if adolescents get the right books to help them grow and develop, they will come to read more. I assume therefore, that the short LDA put forward by Appleyard, Garbe and Witte is an ideal to admire, whilst the long LDA that the SCP found in its research and Kuitert wrote about is a more truthful illustration at the moment. If high school students get the freedom to search, find and read the books they need, the Little Dark Age will indeed not last all the way until age 20. Further research on the LDA could give further insight about this assumption. It cannot be ruled out that geographical and sociocultural differences affect the LDA. Like Alpana Bhattacharya has written about the impact of poverty on childhood literacy in an American setting with ample or no social safety net, other factors might also have an impact on reading development and the LDA in the teenage years. In the following two stages of Appleyard's sequence, the academic humanities student is described as the ideal step towards the pragmatic adult reader. The pragmatic reader is the final stage of Appleyard's sequence, and is presented as an adult who is able to adapt his or her reading style to either one of three common uses of reading, which Appleyard acknowledges were arbitrarily chosen.<sup>240</sup> It could better be said that the pragmatic reader is capable of making good indications of what type of reading that has been discussed in chapter 1 should be used; deep reading, immersed reading or skimming.

Didactics specialist and literary scholar Theo Witte from the University of Groningen writes in line with Appleyard's analysis that the literary development in the Tweede Fase of Dutch secondary education is related to the socioemotional and cognitive development of students.<sup>241</sup> There are however, writes Witte, but few teachers that deliberately differentiate their classes on

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<sup>239</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 99.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 164.

<sup>241</sup> Witte, *Het oog van de meester*, p. 41.

literature, as they were meant to at the Tweede Fase introduction in 1997.<sup>242</sup>

Neither does Witte report about teachers that are involved in the choices for books to read of individual students. This is fatal for the necessary foundation of reading motivation. The porter is an invalid. It is not only the first phrase of W.F.

Hermans' *Beyond Sleep*, it is also much true for literary education in the Tweede Fase, in which involved adults fail to be enabling adults.

In order to improve this situation, Witte launched the website *Lezen voor de lijst* (Reading for the list) in 2009. This website gives an overview of books that can be chosen to read under subdomain E1. These books are divided into six reading levels, all of which Witte specifies in his dissertation.<sup>243</sup> Level 1 much resembles the reader as hero that J.A. Appleyard describes, while level 6 readers show competences that exceed the adolescent's reading stage as thinker. A board of teachers keeps the list of titles up to date, and each book has its own page where extensive information about the division into a particular level is given, as well as background information about the story.<sup>244</sup> This all in order to help teachers to differentiate literary education in the Tweede Fase and drop the reading lists that schools compile. Although *Lezen voor de lijst* still works with a relatively small selection of works, it allows for a more open form of literary education which is much needed. It allows for literary education which extends beyond structuralistic approaches. Since for every book a number of key topics is given, topical differentiation is made easier with *Lezen voor de lijst*. In a recent article in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, high school teacher of the subject of Dutch Nico van Lieshout writes about his topical approach of the reading for subdomain E1. He allows students to write their book reports on a novel about a topic they

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<sup>242</sup> T. Witte, 'Van Floortje Bloem naar Inni Wintrop. Zes niveaus van literaire competentie', in D. Schram & A.M. Raukema (eds.), *Lezen in de lengte en lezen in de breedte: De doorgaande leeslijn in wetenschappelijk perspectief* (Delft: Uitgeverij Eburon, 2006), pp. 61-92, there p. 64.

<sup>243</sup> Witte, *Het oog van de meester*, pp. 195-198.

<sup>244</sup> Lezen voor de lijst, 'Colofon - Lezen voor de lijst', <<https://www.lezenvoordelijst.nl/colofon/>>, (23 April 2019); Lezen voor de lijst, 'Alleen met de goden - Lezen voor de lijst', <<https://www.lezenvoordelijst.nl/docenten-15-18/niveau-3/alleen-met-de-goden/?docenteninfo>>, (23 April 2019).

like that was mentioned in the novel.<sup>245</sup> To link topics that students like in such a direct manner to literature is a more open manner to teach about literature that leaves more space for the creativity and imagination of students than dissecting the technical structure of texts. It needs to be recognised that such open forms of education with differentiation of reading instead of prescribed reading lists can also have their place within the existing exam programme.

This need is not recognised however by the Dutch Minister of Education herself. The Minister, Ingrid van Engelshoven, finds among her secondary tasks that of emancipation, mainly the emancipation of women and sexual minorities. On Valentine's Day 2019 the initiative Queerboeken.nl was launched. This website is basically a list of LGBTI-themed books to be brought under the attention of high school students. In the spirit of the criterion for realism formulated by Appleyard, which stems from reading being an identity-shaping activity in adolescence, this is a praiseworthy project to launch. Yet Minister Van Engelshoven praised the initiative on Twitter as a tool for everyone to come to primarily understand others; to primarily understand the struggles of LGBTI-students with the heterosexual norms that surround them.<sup>246</sup> This might be noble, but literary education is not suitable for primarily learning to understand others before learning to understand yourself through literature. That the Minister seeks to use literary education in schools for emancipatory ends is as moralistic as the reading lists already in use.

### Religious and ideological moralism

In this chapter, I have made clear already that there are several kinds of moralism and moralistic sentiments that in my view affect Dutch literary education. The

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<sup>245</sup> N. van Lieshout, 'De overtreffende trap van lezen', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 143(19-20) (2019), pp. 118-119; 121, there p. 121.

<sup>246</sup> Twitter, 'GSA Netwerk op Twitter: "'Ik wens iedereen veel plezier met de website <https://t.co/a0sU8YffaO> en met de verkiezing van het mooiste queer fragment. Laat dit een aanleiding zijn om op deze #Valentijnsdag een mooi gesprek te hebben over liefde in de literatuur in al haar vormen". @ivanengelshoven... <https://t.co/ulQyx6JClc>"', <<https://twitter.com/GSAnetwerk/status/1095995015053094915>>, (23 April 2019).

school-compiled lists are however nothing compared to the list of the Anbeek committee. This committee, led by Leiden Professor Ton Anbeek, consisted of three scholars that in August 1990 proposed the introduction of a compulsory list of 21 novels that had to be read and structuralistically discussed in the Tweede Fase.<sup>247</sup> Many criticised the proposal, among whom was Wam de Moor, a scholar who feared – in line with my argument in this paper – that this compulsion to read 21 elevated books would alienate students from the pleasure of reading; De Moor feared it would create ‘a lot of snobs, but few readers.’<sup>248</sup> Some headmasters and teachers had however other reasons to lament the proposal. These people had ethical objections to titles on the list proposed by the Anbeek committee. One teacher was reported to state that in particular the proposed works of Gerard Reve and W.F. Hermans were too blasphemous for his students, while there were no Christian novels on the list.<sup>249</sup> These remarks and complains stem from another source of moralism in Dutch reading education; the freedom of particular education (*bijzonder onderwijs*).<sup>250</sup>

The freedom of particular education is the right to start up a school based on religious or ideological grounds and yet receive equal subsidies as public schools. It stems from the year 1917, when irreligious political parties wanted universal suffrage and religious parties wanted the freedom of particular education. Neither side liked the other’s demand, and in what is called the 1917 Pacification both demands were conceded.<sup>251</sup> Thereby the freedom of particular education became a constitutional right, and it has remained a part of the Dutch Constitution until this day. Particular education has always been defined as any

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<sup>247</sup> The second part of havo and vwo has only since 1997 officially been called Tweede Fase. The Anbeek commission stemming from 1990 makes the use of said term an anachronism in this case.

<sup>248</sup> W. de Moor, ‘Verplichte literatuurlijst vergalt het leesplezier’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 21 August 1990, p. 7. Original text: ‘veel snobs, maar weinig lezers.’ Author’s translation.

<sup>249</sup> Anon., ‘Verplichte literatuurlijst dreigt voor eindexamen Nederlands’, *Nederlands Dagblad: gereformeerd gezinsblad*, 18 August 1990, p. 1.

<sup>250</sup> Particular education is not the same as special education, which is education for children who are mentally or cognitively inept for regular forms of education.

<sup>251</sup> P. Slaman, ‘Baas in eigen school: De strijd tegen “staatspedagogiek”, 1848-1980’, in P. Slaman (ed.), *In de regel vrij: 100 jaar politiek rond Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap* (’s-Gravenhage: Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2018), pp. 23-37, there p. 29.

education on a non-public footing. Calvinistic schools and Montessori schools have for instance always been equally particular. Notice that in 1917 Dutch society was characterised by strong vertical segregation – as I have illustrated in chapter 1 – and hence the Pacification sparked a fierce press-ganging in churches and town life for the minimum number of signatures that were needed to get permission for a particular school.<sup>252</sup> As time passed, tensions died out for the most part, until in 1987 groups of migrants submitted requests for Islamic and Hinduist schools. Liberal and socialist politicians were taken aback, but because anything non-public counts as particular and the requests were valid, the desired schools opened their doors in 1988.<sup>253</sup>

The possibility provided by the Constitution to educate on any religious or ideological footing also has its moralistic effect on reading education and literary education. The historic example of non-religious and Protestant versions of the same children’s book seems funny today, but this happened on the basis of the same constitutional article that is in force today.<sup>254</sup> The selection of books that Aidan Chambers correctly rendered so important, happens in Reformatory Calvinist schools on a strictly moral basis. For a children’s book to contain the word “stupid” or to be about talking animals might be enough to be rejected by boards of such schools.<sup>255</sup> In Reformatory Calvinistic high schools this moralism affects literary education through a different composition of the reading lists that I have discussed earlier in this chapter. The list as used on the Reformatory Calvinistic Pieter Zandt Scholengemeenschap contains no books from the often blasphemous Gerard Reve, none as well from atheist Hugo Claus. A distinct list with works that may be considered immoral is discussed in relation to *Literatuur*

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<sup>252</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>253</sup> P. Slaman, ‘Oude vormen, nieuwe tijden: de Pacificatie ter discussie, 1980-2018’, in P. Slaman (ed.), *In de regel vrij: 100 jaar politiek rond Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap* (’s-Gravenhage: Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2018), pp. 51-63, there p. 59.

<sup>254</sup> Slaman, *Baas in eigen school*, p. 36.

<sup>255</sup> M. Oussoren-Buys, ‘Adviesbureau Boekenwurm helpt reformatorische basisscholen met de schoolbibliotheek’, 12 February 2016. Retrieved at: Reformatorisch Dagblad, ‘Adviesbureau Boekenwurm helpt reformatorische basisscholen met de schoolbibliotheek - Boeken - RD.nl’, <<https://www.rd.nl/boeken/adviesbureau-boekenwurm-helpt-reformatorische-basisscholen-met-de-schoolbibliotheek-1.527189>>, (29 March 2019). Despite being a Christian believer myself, the irony of Calvinists that find stories about talking animals improper is not at all lost on me.

*in Zicht*, a Reformatory Calvinist method for literary education.<sup>256</sup> This leads to literary education being led by moralism, be it moralism opposing that of Minister Van Engelshoven. It must be said that most Christian particular schools have grown quite open and liberal throughout the years, while keeping their particular status. Protestant primary schools that are quite free in general nevertheless may still refrain from books with specific topics ‘due to possible objection from parents.’<sup>257</sup> Due to their particular status nothing stands in the way of these schools making their own decision about what books should not be allowed. Even if a particular school on whatever anti-Semitic footing would decide to use *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as a school book, being particular grants it every right to do so.

So it can easily be said that the freedom of particular education allows undesirable excesses. For example Reformatory schools that consider themselves church institutes rather than state institutes, and regard teaching students to become followers of Christ as their primal task. This is voiced as such by reverend Den Ouden in a speech at a Reformatory Calvinist school.<sup>258</sup> Recently, discussion about the freedom of particular education has emerged as it does occasionally, on this occasion because the constitutional freedom forbids the closure of an Amsterdam Islamic school despite the school being suspected to have close ties with terrorists.<sup>259</sup> As always it proves impossible to alter or abandon this freedom.

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<sup>256</sup> Pieter Zandt College, ‘Boekenlijst Ned. 4-6 HV printversie.pdf’,

<<https://www.pieterzandt.nl/Portals/0/pieterzandt2011/Mediatheek/Boekenlijst%20Ned.%204-6%20HV%20printversie.pdf>>, (18 March 2019).

<sup>257</sup> E. van Koeven & Y. Leeman, ‘Citizenship education for a pluralistic world: the selection of children’s literature in Dutch Protestant primary schools’, *Intercultural Education*, 22 (2011), pp. 395-410, there p. 404.

<sup>258</sup> P. den Ouden, ‘Docent moet jongere tot geloof leiden’, 16 January 2019. Retrieved at: Reformatoisch Dagblad, ‘Docent moet jongere tot geloof leiden – Opinie – RD.nl’, <<https://www.rd.nl/opinie/docent-moet-jongere-tot-geloof-leiden-1.1540785>>, (16 January 2019).

<sup>259</sup> H. Keultjes, ‘Dijkhoff wil streng zijn’, *Algemeen Dagblad*, 24 April 2019, p. 11. Several months later the accusations proved to be false (Anon., ‘Inspectie: Geen bewijs voor salafisme, wel kritiek op bestuur Haga Lyceum’, 18 June 2019. Retrieved at: NU.nl, ‘’Inspectie: Geen bewijs voor salafisme, wel kritiek op bestuur Haga Lyceum’ | NU - Het laatste nieuws het eerst op NU.nl’, <<https://www.nu.nl/binnenland/5941032/inspectie-geen-bewijs-voor-salafisme-wel->

Education should teach students to live together with others who have different values and norms; to create religious safe spaces is not a task of educational policy.<sup>260</sup> This socialising function of education comes much more to its right in a diverse classroom. Diversity challenges ideas and perceptions of school children and high school students. Diversity in the classroom might be a strong force against prejudice and decreasing self-questioning, which is fostered by the increasing consumption of news (real and fake) via social media.<sup>261</sup> Freer literary education can keep students from becoming non-reading adults. Classroom diversity can strongly combat prejudice. Together they make for a literate, reading, deep reading, and self-critical population.

## Conclusion

When the Mammoetwet that modernised Dutch secondary education entered into force in 1968, requirements for literary education were barely formulated. Teachers that were responsible for literary education were left in some sort of an anarchic void. Structuralism, the study of the technical aspects of texts, did however soon become a commonality in discussing literature in high school. In the 1990s new and extended requirements for reading and studying literature in high school were formulated. Under the new Tweede Fase there had to be much room for the differentiation of literary education. Since the introduction of the Tweede Fase, havo- and vwo-students have to read a minimum of either eight or twelve literary works, and also literary terms and cultural history must be taught since then. In the methods for these last two fields structuralism is still prominent, and there is almost no space for the personal reflections of students in these methods.

This is no different for the required reading of literary works. Since the

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kritiek-op-bestuur-haga-lyceum.html>, (18 June 2019)). The principle that conformation of these accusations would not have been enough to close the school stays despite that unaltered.

<sup>260</sup> W. Veugelers, 'Creating critical-democratic citizenship education: empowering humanity and democracy in Dutch education', *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 37 (2007), pp. 105-119, there p. 113.

<sup>261</sup> Schofield, *All the News That's Fit to Print*, pp. 132; 134.

literary domain of havo and vwo falls under the School Exam, it is not centrally examined. Schools are thus left free to choose their way to test students about their literary reading. This leads to the common practice of school-compiled reading lists that moralise Dutch literary education. Most of these books are too outdated to speak to the minds of 15- or 16-year-olds. In the middle of their LDA these students suddenly have to read complex and elevated works of literature, a big contrast to the first three Forms of high school in which no literary education requirements are in force. Christine Garbe writes that the motivation to read must be the foundation of the competence to do so in an adequate manner, and that the needs of students must be met in literary education. J.A. Appleyard writes in his book *Becoming a Reader* that children read books with no deep layers that are about a protagonist that lives through adventures, and that in adolescence the desire to identify with a story through its realism becomes central in the discovery of the subjective self and the formation of an individual identity. I reckon that application of Garbe's and Appleyard's findings in schools would shorten the LDA. This assumption does however require more research.

Besides structuralism and the reading lists, moralism also takes the shape of religious influences in education. These are allowed in the Netherlands, and religious schools get equal state payments as secular schools. The religious curtailment takes the shape of banishing books that are considered blasphemous or immoral from the reading list, as well as giving the whole of literary education on a school a moral footing.

## Conclusion

In the previous three chapters, I have given a detailed illustration of definitions of reading, the identity-shaping force of reading, how reading is learned by infants and then taught in schools. I have also treated figures on reading skills and willingness to read among Dutch youths, and in response to these figures integrated two models of reading encouragement and the improvement of reading skills. In the last chapter I discussed literary education in the so-called Tweede Fase of secondary education in the Netherlands. I addressed the moralism that affects it, views of scholars on literary education and development, and lastly I wrote about how particular education allows for religious influence in state-financed schools.

Through time, people have not always read in the same ways. In the times of which Frank Furedi writes that reading was regarded as a moral virtue, people had access to but a few works that they read intensively. This meant that they did not read from cover to cover, but read several fragments over and over again. With the increase in published printed materials in the eighteenth century came a shift in reading. Printed texts became more accessible, and people started to read extensively; they began to read many different works from cover to cover. With this reading revolution the Order of the Book was established in Western societies, meaning that reading became a vital part of public life and societal functioning. This sparked fear for the new medial wave of large amounts of printed text, as the example of Isaac da Costa demonstrates.

The establishing of the Order of the Book meant that different sorts of texts came to be produced, which ask for different types of reading. The broad and overarching definition of reading is the ability to decode graphic signs and allocate the correct phonetics and meaning to these. The three different types of reading, as distinguished by Miha Kovač and Adriaan van der Weel, are skimming, immersed reading, and deep reading. In particular the last two of these require attention from the reader, and it is these two that are ever more replaced by shallow skimming. The identity-shaping force of reading deeply or immersed has been pointed out by Axel Kuhn. Kuhn states that in an individualising society creating identity has become a personal project. As such, that people read

attentively is of greater importance than what they read.

In chapter 2, I examined the concept of emergent literacy. The development of literacy in children that do not yet attend a school is of enormous importance, and poor development may affect children throughout their years in school. Tomohiro Inoue and his fellows found that the emergence of literacy in small children takes place in a network of brain alterations and interrelated skills. The importance of a proper home literacy environment should be voiced more. Carroll et al. found that not only the home environment helps to foster literacy, but also the infant's willingness to be read to. Later in life, the willingness to read is remarkably low among Dutch youths. It has been found that Dutch people between the ages 13 and 20 barely read. I have called this period of unwillingness to read the Little Dark Age.

In Dutch primary schools, Technical Reading and Understanding Reading are taught as separate subjects. Technical Reading consists of learning to decode words and phonology lessons. Understanding Reading is often taught as mere strategy learning instead of teaching children to actually understand a text well. The same can be said of the subject of Dutch in high school, which is aimed at learning reading tricks instead of actual skills or knowledge. Figures show that the reading understanding of Dutch school children is in decline and that multiple negative trends persevere. Between well reading and poorly reading children an Enlarging Divergence Effect will show up; the difference between the skills of readers and non-readers only increases with age. Suzanne Mol and Adriane Bus illustrate with their positive reading spiral that improvement for poor readers is possible, while Aidan Chambers' Reading Circle gives instructions for reading encouragement in schools, driven by enabling adults. Figure 5 shows these schemes integrated as a model that shows how reading encouragement leads, if successful, to improvement of reading skills and vocabulary growth.

The desire to read, if present, finds itself hindered by moralism in Dutch education. One of the forms of moralism is the prescribed reading list used in Dutch high schools, where students have to read a number of literary works. Schools are free to examine students about their readings, yet use this freedom to impose reading lists with prescribed novels to read. The novels on these lists are often relatively old and certainly too old for students to relate to. Identification

with the novels is even more difficult because until 3<sup>rd</sup> Form there is no set plan for reading encouragement, and students in the 4<sup>th</sup> Form are expected to rise up to the level of the prescribed literature; this gives literature the image of an elevated thing standing far from the worlds of students. The second source of moralism is that structuralism – the study of a text in its own right and its technical dissecting – prevails in both methods for literary education and the examination by teachers. Against the background of the findings of Christine Garbe and J.A. Appleyard this can be daunting. Garbe states that literary motivation must be the foundation for literary development, Appleyard writes, in line with Axel Kuhn, that for adolescents identification and creation of an individual identity are the things they seek in reading. Both describe in their ideal situations an LDA that only lasts until age 16 or 17. I am convinced high school students would, were these findings integrated in Dutch education, enjoy reading more. But for now moralism stands in their way.

A third form of moralism in Dutch education is religious education, as made possible by the constitutional freedom of particular education. This may take forms of religious expurgation of reading lists or religious school methods for the subject Dutch. Also the selection and deselection of books in the school library may be religiously affected, and Chambers correctly wrote that whoever selects exercises power. This power proves not always in good hands, as the ideas of reverend Den Ouden show, and the possible confirmation of accusations against a religious school in Amsterdam would show. Classroom diversity, which I believe to be a strong force against prejudice, is hindered by this attitude.

In this thesis, it has appeared that reading is much taught as a skill to be mastered, as a set of strategies to apply. Would Furedi's remarks on the perception of reading be applied to reading education in primary school and the subject of Dutch in the first years of high school, then the remarks would be correct. From age 6 until 15 reading is encouraged, but apart from that it is taught as a cognitive skill in public (non-particular) schools. However, many schools in the Netherlands still adhere to their past religious connotation, which allows them to impose religious influences. And the subject of Dutch is also taught in the Tweede Fase, when students are told to elevate themselves rather than to identify themselves. The multiple sorts of moralism are prevalent enough for me to state that reading in

Dutch education is considered a moral skill. Decoding and understanding a text are considered skills, the choice of reading materials is strongly steered by moralism. I believe this to discourage school attenders to read. I propose another approach to reading in education.

Above all I propose a change in the literary education in the Tweede Fase. Slacken the reins of structuralism. Do not forbid it: that would in a sense be moralistic as well. I propose that personal perceptions of a text and structuralistic analyses must coexist in literary education. Hereby the necessary creation of identity gets room in education. I also propose that differentiation will no longer be a policy maker's catchphrase but actual practice. To that aim schools must be forbidden to compile reading lists as they do currently. This prohibition must be included in the exam programme for havo and vwo. Students should get an actual free choice of what they will read. The abolition of reading lists obligates teachers to become directly involved in the development of their students. With the use of the six reading levels that Theo Witte distinguishes, teachers can help their students to develop at the right pace with the right books. This real differentiation will, so I believe, lead to real motivation to read among students.

To stimulate reading from a young age, and to stress its importance, I would like to see one more change. Starting up reading diaries in primary school should become a common practice. Around the time that most children can properly decode texts, say Group 3, 4 or 5, primary school teachers would preferably start up a reading diary for every child in class. With these being carried along through time, this helps in selecting the right books at high school and becomes a valuable chronicle of one's reading and one's thinking through the years. With these changes implemented, reading would be a cognitive skill. Albeit still facing challenges from online screens, this cognitive skill would have such a high personal value that it is not going to crumble off as easily as currently feared.

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