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The Role of Ego Development and Development of Reading Attitude of Adolescents

Abstract

1. Introduction

Take a novel, ask different people, irrespective of age, to read this book and afterwards give their interpretations of the story. The result of this small study will surprise no one: you will not get an unambiguous interpretation. With some luck there are a few that match with regard to content. There will also be reactions you had never expected and that can never be found again in the novel. You can find an appealing example of what has just been described in the discussion that arose after Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix had just been published. J. Bristow dismisses the book as just an exciting book for children (NRC Handelsblad, 28 June 2003).

In Trouw of the same date P. de Boer gives an analysis of the development of Harry Potter in relation to Evil. At first Evil shows up in persons that are after him, and then Harry comes to see that Evil is also present within himself and that he will therefore have to struggle with himself to be able to control it.

De Boer furthermore refers to the possibility that a reader is able to reflect upon the way in which politicians and bureaucrats act (both within and outside the book).

One review (Trouw) is favourable, the other (NRC Handelsblad) is critical to the point of being cynical. How can it be that one story causes such different interpretations? Has that got to do with male/female differences, age, mental development? In this thesis we want to give theoretically and empirically founded answers to these questions.

In order to do this we first had to look at questions like: what is understood to be the (narrative) text, what the reader? Since we looked at readers between 13

1 Not for school, but for life we read
and 19 years old, we will also have to ask ourselves who the young reader is and how he/she deals with a narrative text.

2. Text and reader

In the last century literary theory dealt intensively with the questions that have just been formulated. At the beginning of the 20th century the (narrative) text was described as a piece of art (Russian Formalism). After that attention was given to the text as a world of words containing a structure (structuralism, post-structuralism, narratology). Under the influence of communication studies attention shifted from the text towards the reader and the communication between the two (Rezeptionsästhetik, Reader Response Criticism, Subjective criticism).

The different approaches in literary theory provide different answers to the question of who the reader is. Some theories (Rezeptionsästhetik) start from the idea of a non-existent reader who is as it were the only reader of the story and who is part of the narrative structure.

Other theories (Reader Response Criticism, Subjective criticism) and socio-logical and psychological research aim to answer the question of who the actual reader is. The researchers from these disciplines use questionnaires to draw a picture of the reader.

Nevertheless, the insight that we got from the literature search provided us with insufficient data. We wanted to know more about adolescents’ (young people between 13 and 19) reading attitude and included theories about youth literature and young adult literature in our research.

Already in the 19th and the 20th century, scholars tried to gain an insight into the young reader’s reading attitude. They attempted to make a division into levels by asking children questions and dividing them into groups on the basis of their answers (Leopold, in De Vries, 1989; Giehrl, 1972; Beinlich, 1982). Beinlich (1982) wanted to take gender differences into account. He thought that girls were further in their development than boys in the same age group. He also wanted to get rid of a description of development based on age. Charlotte Bühler (1918 and 1923) introduced among others the ‘Slovenly Peter level’, ‘Fairytale level’, ‘Robinson level’ and ‘Heroic level’.

Stories for children were often looked upon as a means of education until the 70’s of the last century. Not until the final decade of the last century books were written for young people between 15 and 20, the so-called young adult novels (De Sterck, in Leeswijzer 1993). Authors also tried to write a literary piece of art that (coincidentally) was also suitable for children.

Although various perspectives have paid attention to works of youth literature, and even an extraordinary professor of youth literature was appointed in the past (R. Bauer-Wechen), it was only at the end of the 20th century that more atten-
tion was given to youth literature and young adult literature. Especially because of the continuing effort of Stichting Lezen and the reintroduction of a named chair for children’s and youth literature at Leiden, a great number of scholarly publications on this type of literature have become available. Also at Tilburg (KUB) and Nijmegen (KUN) a lot of research is being done in this field.

Under the influence of changing views in developmental psychology it was realised that typologies and levels were too much based on the assumption that age is an important determinant in determining a typology or level.

It was realised that these classifications were too static when it comes to developmental processes. Especially the assumed connection between age and level specification or typology provides insufficient insight into the reading processes that occur in children.

The developmental psychologist Verhofstadt-Denève (1995), among many others, described the development of reflection. This development will make it possible to read a text from a different perspective.

Although according to the identity theme of Norman Holland (1968, 1975, 1988), a reader will always interpret a text in the same way, we are of the opinion that a reader’s reflective power can change, which makes a more differentiated interpretation of the same text possible.

On the basis of this we think that there really is a development within one’s own psychological processes, and therefore such a development can also be established with regard to the reading attitude.

On our search for the (development of) reading attitude of adolescents we carried out an exploratory study of the development of reading attitude which extended over two disciplines, namely developmental psychology and literary theory. For this reason we gave an overview of several centuries of (developmental) psychology. We encountered data on the adolescent reader in Rousseau (1762), Van den Berg (1957) and Ariès (1962, 1973), and also in The Fin-de-Siècle Culture of Adolescence by Neubauer (1992). In this last book the author reviews Anglo-Saxon, German and French psychologists from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. These psychological points of view still did not provide us with a verifiable description of the adolescent reader.

3. Developmental Psychological Views

A new approach to cognitive developmental processes, which are linked to specific age limits according to Piaget (1948, 1955; Verhofstadt-Denève, Van Geert, Vyt, 1995), arose in the middle of the 80’s of the past century. This approach looks upon the human brain as a complicated system of receiving, storing and using information, comparable to the system of a modern personal computer.

Although such a view of information processing assumes an increasing
capacity in adults, it is generally accepted that there are also cognitive developments present in adolescence, which show major individual differences.

This also applies to social cognition. Even though halfway through adolescence a young person develops the skill to discover contradictions within himself, he is still not able to integrate contradictions into an abstract self-image. Such a developmental task is important because the characteristics belonging to this task are considered to be ‘part of life’ (Harter, 1990).

Just as for cognitive and social skills, thinking in terms of abstractions is required for social, political, ideological and moral concepts. Individuals differ in the age at which they achieve this thinking capacity. According to Vygotsky (1978), cognitive development is rooted in the social environment, which causes cultural attainments to prepare the individual for development and growth. The social ecology can be influential in a positive or negative way in all fields of development (Vygotsky, 1978).

There are major individual differences in biological maturation, (social) cognition and environment (family, education, denomination) between sexes and individuals. We therefore assume that classmates or peers that take part in our study do not all function within the same level of development at the same time. Individual differences in (development of) reading attitude are also to be expected.

As we presupposed a connection between developmental psychological levels and levels of development of reading attitude, we continued our search for a developmental psychological model that is not necessarily connected to age and that can show and describe individual differences in development in a differentiated way.

For that purpose we first considered the works of Erikson, Marcia and Bosma. Erikson introduced the concept of ‘ego synthesis’, but his levels of development are too broad and too rough. For example, within the adolescent level Erikson (1968) does not recognise differentiation. Apart from this, the lack of an adequate measuring instrument makes Erikson’s construct ‘ego identity’ unsuitable for our study.

Marcia (1982, 1994) presupposes four identity statuses based on the variables ‘exploration’ and ‘commitment’. Exploration refers to the extent to which an individual has genuinely looked at and experimented with alternative directions and beliefs. Commitment refers to the choice of one among several alternative paths in the different domains. Young people who have undergone the exploratory process and have made occupational and ideological commitments after a period of exploration (test everything and hold on to what is good), obtain the status of ‘Achievement’. Young people who are in the middle of a process of choosing and deciding, an identity crisis, are given the status ‘Moratorium’. When young people show strong commitment with an absence of exploration, they have the status of ‘Foreclosure’; they have prematurely ceased their search for themselves. The last status is that of ‘Diffusion’. Young people in this status may have done cursory
exploring, which has not led to ‘Achievement’, they remain uncommitted and do not worry about that.

Bosma’s theoretical model (1985) is relatively independent of age and includes three variables and an extension of the areas of identity. He considers the development of identity a process of changing commitments (including changes in the strength of such commitments).

Matteson (1975) describes the period of adolescence as a time in which the adolescent can come to face more than one crisis and Coleman (1974, 1980) developed a ‘focal theory’ with regard to different moments of choice at different times.

As the identity statuses model turned out not to be very suitable for a description of hierarchical levels of identity development, we concluded that it would be less usable for longitudinal study of the adolescent reader.

In the second part of chapter three we provide a more detailed consideration of the work of Loevinger (1968, 1987, 1993, 1998), followed in the Netherlands by Westenberg et al. (1998, 2000, 2002), relevant to our research. In Loevinger’s empirical model ego development is also not predominantly dependent on age. It is furthermore capable of determining and describing differences between persons in a differentiated way.

In Loevinger’s view the steering force of an individual is the ego, which offers him a frame of reference and with which he structures and experiences his world. Loevinger sees ‘ego’ as an activity that is subject to change. This change takes place according to a pattern of hierarchically structured levels of development. These levels are:

- the Impulsive level (E2)
- the Self-Protective level (E3)
- the Conformist level (E4)
- the Self-Aware level (E5)
- the Conscientious level (E6)
- the Individualistic level (E7)
- the Autonomous level (E8)
- the Integrated level (E9)

At the age of 8 there are two levels of development (the Impulsive and the Self-Protective), at the age of 25 there are five different levels (Westenberg et al., 2000). This fact shows that there are major differences between individuals with regard to ego development and that age is an insufficient criterion for the development of a person.

In our study we presuppose a connection between ego development and the development of reading attitude. Because of the relative independence of age and
the relatively simple measuring instrument, Loevinger’s model for ego development seems suitable for our study of possible differences in the development of reading attitude at MAVO, HAVO and VWO².

The American study of ego development (Loevinger, & Wessler, 1970) started out as a study of the personality of women. The model for ego development and the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (WUSCT) that resulted from this are in their current versions based on the study of both women and men (Loevinger, 1985; Hy, & Loevinger, 1996).

Westenberg et al. wanted to study in how far Loevinger’s model for ego development and scoring manual applied to Dutch children and adolescents. Because of the wide applicability of the WUSCT and the scoring manual, Westenberg et al. (1998) expected that it would be easy to score the data of over 2500 eight- to ten-year-olds, and that the production of a Dutch scoring manual would not require an excessive effort. This, however, did not turn out to be true.

The fact that these young participants belonged mainly to the lower levels (E2 and E3) had a significant effect on the composition of the scoring manual and consequently on the description of the earliest levels of ego development. The most significant differences were found by Westenberg et al. in ego levels E2, E3 and E4, so that these required most adjustments. In chapter three of the thesis we provide an overview of levels of ego development 2 to 6 inclusive.

Searching for the dynamics of the levels of ego development we found that Loevinger did not develop a theory that provides clarity with regard to the way in which the changes from one level to another take place. According to Westenberg et al. (1998, 2000) the new concepts introduced in every level are a response to the previous level. Kegan (1982) observes a similar pattern in the levels of self-development, where it is rather about foreground/background changes than about extreme contrasts. This leads to the picture of a bridge between two development domains in ego development; a level at which a person is not free from the old context to the extent that he could accept all aspects of a new context.

At the end of our search through developmental psychology we found that the subject of our study with regard to developmental psychology had to be the description of ego development of adolescents. The subject of our study with regard to literary theory is the description of the development of their reading attitude. Furthermore, we hoped to demonstrate a connection between ego development and the development of reading attitude of adolescents.

In the course of the study we had to come to the conclusion that the complexity of the work required refinement. This understanding resulted in the Main study, the Intervention study and the Follow-up study. We will now first deal

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² Lower General Secondary Education, Higher General Secondary Education and Pre-university Education.
with the concepts ‘ego’ and ‘reading attitude’. After that, we will discuss the Main study, Intervention study and Follow-up study.

4. Theoretical concepts

4.1 Ego

The term ‘ego’ refers to an organising principle, a general frame of reference with which all kinds of experiences (observations, feelings, ideas, behaviours) of an individual are made into a consistent and meaningful whole, also through time. The ego is aimed at consistent experiences, which among other things is reflected in the pursuit of a coherent life story (McAdams, 1998). Next to functions such as defence and intelligence, the organising and synthesising function of the ego (or ‘Ich’) also fits the view of psychoanalysis (Freud, 1923, 1961). In Loevinger’s approach, however, the synthesising function is not seen as just one of the functions of the ego, but as its central aspect.

‘The striving to master, to integrate, to make sense of experience is not one ego function among many but the essence of the ego’ (Loevinger, 1976, p. 59).

According to Loevinger (1976), the ego is also not a static quality but an activity which is subject to change, in which the change takes place according to a pattern of hierarchically ordered levels of development. From this point of view the ‘ego’ is not a difficult and abstract concept and can thus be crystallised in the description of ego development (Westenberg et al., 2000). To determine the ego development in the respondents in our study we could use the ZALC, the Dutch version of Loevinger’s Washington University Sentence Completion Test. This ZinnenAanvulLijstCurium (ZALC) was developed especially for children and adolescents in the Netherlands by Westenberg et al.

4.2 Reading attitude

Stalpers (2000) characterises reading attitude as an acquired attitude towards reading, which is positive or negative and has a social aspect (influences of friends, parents and other adults). Attitude is a mental state, organised by experience, which directs an individual’s reactions with regard to objects, situations or behaviours (Allport, 1935, in Stalpers, 2002). Attitudes have an evaluative aspect, are formed by experiences and are of a permanent nature. A positive effect on attitude formation is expected from positive experiences and a negative effect on this formation from negative experiences. Reading attitudes can be related to levels of development. Children’s reading attitudes can be relatively stable, but they are only to a
small extent predictive of the reading attitude in a subsequent level of development (Stalpers, 2002).

By the development of reading attitude we mean a process in time, involving positive changes in the quality of reading habits; such changes often require prolonged stimulation. Levels in the process are: the emergent literary person, resulting in independently enjoying reading (the awoken literary person) and reflecting on the text in relation to yourself, others and the world around you (the reflective literary person). To determine the respondent’s reading attitude we developed the *LeesAttitudeOntwikkelingsLijst* (LAOL, Schlundt Bodien/Nelck-da Silva Rosa, 1995).

5. The Main study

5.1 The research questions

From the central research question: *Can connections be shown between ego development and development of reading attitude in adolescent readers?* the following central hypothesis was derived: *There exists a positive association between the level of ego development and the level of differentiation in reading.*

Based on our interest in education and schooling, we formulated the following two hypotheses:

- stimulation of the development of reading attitude will result in more differentiated reflection on the work read.
- stimulation of the development of reading attitude will also result in an increase of reflection as an aspect of ego development.

These hypotheses were tested by means of a study that we carried out with a group of students between 1995 and 1998. Part of the students ((55 out of 117 respondents) received intervention and training of reading attitude, others (62 respondents) acted as a control group.

We formulated the third research question as follows:

*Is there a difference between girls and boys with regard to ego development, development of reading attitude and influencing of reflection?* The accompanying hypothesis was that girls reflect in a more differentiated way than boys and they are ahead of boys in their ego development.

We determined differentiation in reflection by means of three levels (see also Braakhuis, 1984):

- level of reflection on yourself in relation to the work read (Self-Protective reflection)

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3 Reading Attitude Development Questionnaire
level of reflection on yourself and others in relation to the work read (Relational reflection)
level of reflection on yourself, others and the world around you (Abstracting Existential reflection).

Adolescents at the lower levels of ego development will be reflecting at the first level, young people at the higher levels will be reflecting at a higher level.

5.2 Research group and method of the Main study

Our design follows the line of a simple longitudinal study with two measurement points: we asked the respondents, 117 adolescents from MAVO, HAVO and VWO classes, to complete the ZALC and the LAOL twice at different moments in time (1995-1998).

At the first measurement point (1995), the respondents had a mean age of 14.4 years (standard deviation 0.8); at the second measurement point mean age was 16.8 years (standard deviation 0.9). Thus, if we refer to ‘young adolescents’ or ‘the first group’, we mean adolescents of 14.4 years on average; ‘older adolescents’ or ‘the second group’ refers to adolescents who are on average 16.8 years old.

The LAOL provided answers to the following questions: What do you read? Where do you read? When do you read? How do you read? We also asked parents/educators the question whether children were read to, songs were sung then and in the past, jokes and stories were told (Questionnaire for parents).

The LAOL was held as a half-open interview in September 1995 and June 1998. We selected all items that gave information on reading pleasure (from now on referred to as Hedonism) and all items that gave information on reflection on reading.

In order to determine longitudinal changes in ego development, the ZALC was administered with an interval of two and a half years (final semester 1995, first semester 1998).

5.3 Results of the Main study

5.3.1 Ego development

At the start of our study 46 respondents, 12 girls and 34 boys, were at the third (Self-Protective) level of ego development; 65 respondents were at the fourth (Conformist) level (42 girls and 23 boys); 2 boys and no girls were at the second (Impulsive) level; 4 girls and no boys were at the fifth (Self-Aware) level.

At the end of the study (1998) ego development had changed: 14 boys and 2 girls were at the Self-Protective level; 79 respondents (38 girls and 41 boys) were at
the Conformist level; 2 boys and no girls were still at the Impulsive level; 15 girls and 2 boys were at the Self-Aware level. Finally we scored 3 girls and no boys at the Conscientious level of ego development.

Comparison between the sexes at the end of our study (1998) showed (chapter 6) that girls were one to three levels more advanced in their ego development than boys: 2 boys were still functioning mainly at the Impulsive level (E2) and 14 at the Self-Protective (E3), while 15 girls were already at the Self-Aware (E5) and 3 at the Conscientious level (E6). Both in the beginning (1995) and the end of the study (1998) the majority of the respondents were at the Conformist level.

All respondents showed an equally fast development, but girls in our study start at a higher ego level than boys. This sex difference originates in late childhood and disappears in young adulthood (Westenberg et al., 2002). For a number of respondents the result of the ZALC in the beginning of the study (1995 measurement) turned out to be a half to one level higher than that at the end of the study (1998 measurement). A possible explanation is that they showed their optimum level of ego development at the first measurement and their functional level at the second measurement (Jurich, & Holt, 1987; Drewes, & Westenberg, 2001). Remarkable was the ‘leap’ of two levels of 3 girls. The measurements by Westenberg et al. did not show such a ‘leap’, so maybe these 3 respondents did indeed not function at their optimum level at the moment they completed the ZALC in the beginning of the study (1995 measurement).

At the end of the study (1998 measurement) significantly fewer VWO respondents were found at the lower levels of ego development and significantly more at the higher levels. A positive association was found between level of education and level of ego development: we observed an upward trend in the average level of ego from MAVO, through HAVO, to VWO.

We were also able to determine that there were significant differences with regard to level of ego development and denomination. Both in the beginning and the end of the study there were significantly more respondents from a Protestant Christian background at the lower levels of ego development (Impulsive and Self-Protective) and significantly more respondents from the group ‘others’ at the Conformist level. All these values were calculated using random permutation. As there was only a small number of Roman Catholic respondents in the research group no reliable conclusions could be drawn with regard to this category.

5.3.2 Development of reading attitude

Data acquired from both LAOL interviews that we compared with results from both ZALC questionnaires, showed that gender has a clear influence on the development of reading attitude (chapters 7, 8 and 9), although the picture of the development of reading attitude turned out to be quite variable. Adolescent boys
stop reading, girls retain the acquired reading attitude and manage to develop it, and their reflective capacity turns out to become more differentiated as well. Especially at the Abstracting Existential level they scored significantly higher than boys did (chapter 8).

We cannot give an affirmative answer to the question of whether early reading to children and other literary activities can add to the development of reading attitude. On the basis of the acquired data - at the start of the study the respondents were at age 14.4 (SD 0.8) - it cannot be determined whether early reading to children and/or any other literary activity had influenced the respondent’s reading attitude in 1995. Being read to seems to be an automatism in children’s education. Our subjects, the boys in particular, showed a great inter-individual variability in the ages at which being read to started and the ages at which it stopped. The parents’ level of education influences the ages at when reading to children starts and stops. Note, however, that we were not able to find a positive association between being read to at an early age and later reading attitude.

We were, however, able to establish that there is a connection between reading-to-habits (of the parents) and their level of education.

The younger boys at the MAVO (1995 measurement) read more comics and the number of older HAVO pupils (1998 measurement) that ‘fled’ to reading magazines had risen considerably. Older MAVO boys do not like reading books, but older HAVO boys also prefer other reading materials such as comics and (hobby) magazines.

Adolescents at age 14.4 (SD 0.8) who like youth literature still like it at age 16.8 (SD 0.9). The comprehensibility of the story was said to be an important reason for (keeping on) reading this genre. The respondents who did not read youth literature anymore, gave as a reason that they had either read everything or had started to find the stories childish. In the previous paragraph we already established that boys read less and less and we see that same trend with regard to boys reading youth literature. Considerably more girls (49 out of 58) than boys (30 out of 59) said that they still read youth literature at the end of the study.

A majority of the young female group (mean age 14.4; measurement 1995) report that their reading frequency had decreased considerably over the past years, i.e. they read more when they were still younger. A comparable decline is not reported by the young male group of respondents.

It also turned out that girls and boys had the feeling that they had read more between the first and second measurement than before that time. Comparison between reading frequency and education did not show a clear connection, so education was not important with regard to reading more or less.

A preference for elements of the narrative structure such as an open ending in a story was found for both sexes in the beginning of the study, at the end boys lost this preference. The more the level of reflection on a story had risen, the more the preference for an open-ended story rose. In boys it was found that reflection on a
higher level decreased, while it increased in girls. Therefore the preference for open-ended stories increased in girls and decreased in boys.

The question whether the respondents think of themselves as readers was more often answered positively by girls than by boys. There were more readers among VWO and MAVO pupils than among HAVO pupils. There were especially a lot of non-readers among HAVO boys and at the end of the study all MAVO boys turned out to be non-readers. The higher the level of education of the pupils, the more they read.

Among the respondents who considered themselves to be readers a strong change in reading attitude occurred between age 14.4 (SD 0.8) and age 16.8 (SD 0.9). This change was also mentioned by non-readers, but to a much smaller degree. That feeling of changing reading attitude had partly to do with not reading youth literature (anymore), a different way of reflecting on what respondents read and whether or not reading books was continued.

‘Discussion about what you have read’ did take place, but a great diversity applied to all levels of education: those who still discussed ‘a lot’ after reading in the beginning of the study, did this ‘sometimes’ at the end; those who did not discuss ‘a lot’ afterwards in the beginning also did this ‘sometimes’ at the end of the study. The HAVO pupils were an exception: the pupils who still discussed a lot afterwards in the beginning did not do this anymore at the end of the study.

Adolescents with parents with a higher education showed more discussion afterwards and more involvement in what was read. Nevertheless it was found that also among mothers with an LBO/MBO⁴ education there was a lot of discussion afterwards with the child about what it read. In the beginning of the study there was still a significant connection between the respondent’s education and discussion about books afterwards with others, at the end that connection disappeared. Did the respondents feel so independent by then that they did not feel the need anymore to discuss what had been read? Or were they so busy preparing for exams that they did not give themselves the time to discuss anymore? Our assumption that discussion afterwards could have a positive effect on the development of reflection and that on the other hand development of reflection would stimulate the need for discussion afterward about the reading material, turned out to be correct, but only for the older adolescents (1998 measurement).

The expectation that readers would also start buying books (for themselves) turned out to be correct, the pupils who considered themselves to be non-readers bought fewer books than those who considered themselves to be readers. If respondents ‘consider themselves to be readers’ and parents ‘buy themselves fiction’ both aspects will favourably influence the respondents’ buying behaviour with regard to fiction.

⁴ Lower Vocational Education / Intermediate Vocational Education.
In general the possession of books for one’s own use indicates an interest in reading. In the beginning of the study the number of respondents that owned between 26 and 50 books is 22, at the end that number had risen to 37. The number of respondents that owned between 51 and 100 books at the first measurement was 20 and decreases to 12 at the second measurement. An explanation for this phenomenon lies in the fact that many respondents from this group indicated that they had disposed of the youth books that, in their point of view, were childish. The number of respondents that owned over 100 books remained stable. A comparison in percentage terms shows that the majority of the MA VO pupils and HAVO pupils owned 0-50 books (HAVO: 76.4 %, MA VO: 90.5 %).

Both younger and older VWO respondents own more books than younger and older HAVO and MA VO respondents. Boys own a lot less books than girls. Parents encouraged their younger as well as their older adolescent children to read. Influencing the reading material is a different matter. Although no significant connection could be found, influence on their children’s reading material turned out to sporadically occur ‘frequently’. The majority of the parents ‘sometimes’ or ‘never’ interfered (92%).

About 60% of the older adolescents are not aware of the existence of literary magazines or newspaper supplements, the number of respondents that indicate that they occasionally read such a magazine rises with age. However, the difference between positive and negative changes, calculated by means of the Wilcoxon signed ranks test, is not significant (23 respondents have started to read these magazines more often, 12, on the contrary, less). Compared to the mother’s and father’s levels of education it can be noted that the respondents with parents with a low education come in contact with literary magazines and/or supplements less than respondents with parents with a high education. In both cases there is a significant connection between the parents’ education and the adolescents’ contact with literary magazines.

Developing and retaining reading pleasure would be desirable. The suggestion that reading pleasure has declined with increasing age seems to be correct, but the individual changes show that 12 out of 35 pupils with a low score (0-5) for reading pleasure start to enjoy reading more between the beginning and the end of the study. On the other hand, one third of the respondents with a middle score (6 or 7) looses reading pleasure. In another third of the respondents the reading pleasure increases. Half of the 14-year-olds (mean 14.4, SD 0.8) with the highest score (> 7) loose reading pleasure. With such a diverse pattern it will not be surprising that a statistically significant connection could not be found.

In the beginning of the study comparison on the basis of gender still indicated that boys have as much reading pleasure as girls. At the end of the study the reading pleasure of boys is over: 33 out of 59 boys score in the lowest category compared to 13 out of 58 girls. In the highest category (> 7) there are 24 girls versus 11 boys. The difference between the sexes continues to increase between the 1995 measurement and the 1998 measurement, which is also shown in the (signifi-

A comparison with the respondents’ level of education shows something comparable: 19 out of 41 VWO respondents score in the highest category against 12 out of 55 HAVO respondents and 4 out of 21 MAVO respondents (1998 measurement). In the middle category (scores 6 and 7) we find 10 VWO respondents, 21 HAVO respondents and 5 MAVO respondents. This connection is also significant (\( p = .035 \)).

We finally compared the respondents’ ego development with their scores for reading pleasure (Hedonism). We found a connection between the variables for the older adolescents, but not for the younger group. The older group of respondents are generally further in their ego development. On average the girls started one level higher than the boys, but both groups showed a development towards a higher level of ego development (see chapter 6). Respondents who were at the Self-Protective level (E3) at the end of the study, score at the lowest level of reading pleasure (0-5). Respondents at the highest levels (E5 and E6) mainly score high (> 7) and the respondents at the Conformist level (E4) score both low and high with regard to the score for reading pleasure. Apparently we may conclude that growth of ego development leads to an increase in reading pleasure. Gender, education and level of ego development are thus related to difference in reading between younger and older adolescents.

Reflection on the contents of the stories read in relation to yourself, others and the world you live in, seems to go together much stronger with the higher levels of ego development than with the lower, as if reflection is not related to ego development for young people at the lower levels. When respondents get older and reach higher levels of ego development that connection does arise. It seems that there are two qualities that strengthen each other when someone starts to function at a higher ego level.

It could also be determined that the increase of age falls behind with ego development, which explains why so many differences occur among peers with regard to the appreciation of a story. One fifteen-year-old reader reflects at the Self-Protective level, another, also fifteen, at the Relational level and still another fifteen-year-old reader at the Abstracting Existential level. These levels correspond with the Self-Protective, Conformist and Self-Aware levels of ego development (chapter 3).

### 5.4 Possible connections

*Can connections be shown between development of reading attitude and ego development?* Yes, they can. If one kept reading and enjoyed doing this, there turned out to be a significant connection between a high level of ego development and reading pleasure (Hedonism, chapter 7). Not only reading pleasure is connected to
ego development. Also at the three reflective levels it was shown that reflection at
the Self-Protective level corresponded with the lower levels of ego development,
that reflection at the Relational level was connected to the Conformist ego level and
that reflection at the Abstracting Existential level showed a connection with the
higher levels of ego development. Most of these connections are statistically
significant (chapter 8).

6. Intervention study

In September 1996 an Intervention study was started in which 30 girls and
25 boys out of the 117 respondents took part on a voluntary basis. The 62 others
automatically functioned as control group, for they also took part in the Main study
on a voluntary basis. The 55 respondents from the research group had to read one
book a month for ten months. These books were of an increasing level of difficulty
with regard to both form and content.

After reading a book the respondents, who were all in the pre-final year of
HAVO or VWO, had to complete a questionnaire on the book read. The questions
consisted of thesis-like statements that asked for a deeper reflection on the events in
the story and other narrative aspects (thesis and hypothesis can be found above).

Our expectation was that stimulation of the development of reading attitude
will result in more differentiated reflection on the work read and will also result in
an increase of reflection as an aspect of ego development.

Our second expectation was that girls reflect in a more differentiated way
than boys and they are ahead of boys in their ego development.

7. Results of the Intervention study

Findings from the Intervention study showed that VWO girls from the inter-
vention group scored significantly higher with regard to reflective capacity. A com-
parison with girls from the control group showed that the absence of continuous
coaching and discussion of the stories read causes a reduction of their reflective
capacity. Contrary to our expectations, boys from the intervention group showed a
higher reduction of reflective capacity than their fellow respondents from the con-
trol group. Participation in the Intervention study gave them the advantage of
having finished their booklists at the end of the study. This especially stimulated the
willingness among boys to take part in the study. This principle of usefulness may
have influenced their (reduced) reflective capacity. It is, after all, surprising that
boys from the control group score higher on reflective capacity than those from the
Intervention study, who were the ones that were trained in increasing that capacity.

These findings are of interest for education. They offer a perspective for an
approach towards reading and dealing with stories based on intensive coaching and discussion of what has been read, but especially of thinking about subjects the story offers (the text guides the reader, the reader forms his interpretation of the text guided by the text, Rosenblatt, 1938).

We could not find connections between ego development and development of reading attitude with this Intervention study (chapter 9). Data comparison between ego development and reflection scores showed that respondents at the Impulsive and Self-Protective levels mainly reflected in relation to themselves and the text (Self-Protective reflection). At the Conformist level they mainly reflected at the Relational level, and at the Self-Aware and Conscientious levels they mainly reflected at the Abstracting Existential level.

The fact that a lot of boys functioned at the lower levels (Impulsive and Self-Protective) and girls at the higher levels (Self-Aware and Conscientious), supports the finding that especially girls were at the Relational and Abstracting Existential reflective levels and boys at the Self-Protective.

8. The Follow-up study

Since the results from the Main study and the Intervention study were not conclusive, we decided to do a follow-up study. For this study we narrowed the research question down to reflective development as an essential element of the development of reading attitude and formulated the following research question.

Does an adolescent show a more differentiated reflection on the content of a text as his ego development also shows a more differentiated structure? The hypothesis that arose from this question was:

Respondents at a higher level of ego development can show a more differentiated reflection on texts. Since adolescent girls are further than boys with regard to ego levels, we will find the most differentiated reflection in girls.

We examined this hypothesis as follows. We determined the levels of ego development of the 25 respondents in the fourth and sixth forms of VWO who took part in the study on a voluntary basis. Of these 13 boys and 12 girls we confined ourselves to the data of respondents showing a pure ego level (E3, E4, E5, E6), thus avoiding eventual confusion resulting from transitional levels (e.g. E3.5).

We presented all respondents with three poems and asked them to take their time to read them and then record all responses that occurred to them on tape or – if they preferred to do so – in writing. The recorded responses were typed out verbatim. After that we classified the nature of the reflective elements from these protocols into one of the three reflective levels (Self-Protective, Relational, Abstracting Existential).

Because of the available amount of time for the full Follow-up study (two
fifty-minute classes) we looked for texts that were not too long, but nevertheless substantial (i.e. containing all three reflective levels). After all, they had to appeal to the different levels of reading attitude and the reflective levels connected to them.

In our opinion the following poems met these requirements: Untitled, with ‘Boven het hooi hangt de boer’ as its first line (Kopland); De Tuinman en de Dood (Van Eyck) en Afsluitdijk (Vasalis).

9. Results of the Follow-up study

The comparison showed that the respondents at the lower ego levels mostly scored at corresponding reflective levels, and sometimes at higher levels. Respondents at the higher ego levels also reflected at a lower level. This broadly means that female readers show reflective scores that are related to their level of ego development. For boys this did not turn out to be the case. These findings were confirmed by the results from simulation (random permutation) (p for girls = .043 in 2000 simulations; for boys .059 in 5000 simulations), in which the null hypothesis states that the connection found is coincidental.

It can be deduced from this that both the development of reading attitude and reflective development can be intertwined with ego development. The response of a female respondent with both the highest ego level and scores at the highest level of reflection and that of a male respondent with the lowest ego score and low reflective scores provides further anecdotal support this view.

These findings support the conclusion of the Intervention study in which we stated that the respondent’s reflective power can be influenced (ZPD, zone of proximal development, one of Vygotsky’s principles). Guided by the situation (literary questionnaire, certain texts) respondents who are, for example, at the Conformist level of ego development, can react at a reflective level that is higher than their ego level.

The results of the Follow-up study partly pointed in the expected direction: adolescents at a certain level of ego development respond in accordance with the reflectivity related to that level.

We conclude that our findings provide support for the idea that the three developments (ego development, reflective development and development of reading attitude) form a spiral of spirals of changes that react to each other, in which the final product can not be predicted from the starting point, not to mention the possibility that it may be deduced from the final products which factors were influential in which proportion (Verhofstadt-Denève, Van Geert, Vyt, 1995, p. 58).
10. Didactic implications

Between infancy and completion of secondary education, the literary person moves from emergent literacy to the level of being a reflective literary person. This developmental process depends on a didactic process of support and teaching, which is successful when children, during the communication process with others, learn to listen to, think and talk about narrative texts. When the other person in this process is an adult, he has to be prepared to not impose his own opinions about the story on the child that is thinking along.

The parent’s ideas should be stimulating for other points of view that the child brings up itself. For this to happen an atmosphere of safety and security should always be created, also when the child reaches the age of adolescence.

Since children develop at their own rate, a lot of reading material of different quality should be available, in order to allow everyone to make his own choices at his own level. Forms one to eight of primary school should follow a single approach from a didactic point of view. It should also be possible to let children from a lower form participate in a higher form when they are ready for it, as ego development is different for everyone (see chapters 3, 6).

The teacher should be cautious not to impose his interpretation as the interpretation of the story. Pupils learn by thinking together about the emotions, actions and thoughts the text evokes. Personal and group responses to a story can be acted out, drawn, filmed and turned into music.

Just like in primary education, the focus in secondary education should be on developing reading attitude and not on retelling of what the teacher likes to hear. There should also be a rich and varied number of all kinds of texts available. No narrative text is unusable, the responses to it are important and pupils are very well capable of critical evaluation. Furthermore, it is of high importance that pupils are given the freedom to choose their own texts, as far as their (ego) development allows.

The Russian developmental psychologist Vygotsky (in Van Parreren, 1972; Verhofstadt-Denève, Van Geert, Vyt, 1995) thought it much more important to chart what the child could do with the aid of an adult than to just know the child’s actual development. This idea of the ‘zone of proximal development’ (ZPD) is in our opinion of great importance to reflecting on stories. In discussions about the story readers should be stimulated to reflect at a level at which they can function.

11. Conclusion

The question about a connection between ego development and the development of reading attitude cannot be answered unambiguously. We have been able to show connections between ego development and education, ego development and denomination and ego development and sex.
We were also able to show a connection between ego development and hedonism: if one kept on reading and functioned at a higher level of ego development, reading pleasure (Hedonism) increased. We could establish this connection for girls. For the boys the result is less clear because in the beginning of the study there were too few boys at the higher levels of ego development in the group of older adolescents. Respondents at high levels of ego development (E5 and E6) turned out to retain reading pleasure, this applied to half of the respondents at these levels. At the lower levels of ego development reading pleasure decreased sharply between the 1995 and 1998 measurement (the research period). Again this decrease was less sharp for girls than for boys. The importance of education lies in the fact that stimulating reflection on what you read has a positive effect on the development of reading attitude.

A significant connection could be found between (development of) reading attitude and ego (development), where the development of reflection was taken into account. Higher levels of ego development show more differentiated forms of reflection, which is expressed in these levels: Self-Protective reflection, Relational reflection and Abstracting Existential reflection. Connections between the reflective levels and the ego levels existed for girls at the higher levels of ego development and the higher reflective level and for boys at the lower ego level and the lower reflective level.

Female VWO respondents from the Intervention study (chapter 9) showed progress with regard to reflective capacity because they took part in an assignment which stimulated reflection on stories read, the other intervention respondents and the control groups showed a decrease in reflective ability.

The Follow-up study (chapter 10) also showed that, contrary to expectations, boys did not show a statistically significant connection between ego development and reflective development. Some girls turned out to be almost three years ahead in their ego development of boys of the same age. They read more and reflected in a more differentiated way.

Should we conclude that the theory about the connection between ego development and reflective development (chapters 3, 4) shows a weakness, because the results are not unambiguous? Perhaps results from follow-up studies can answer this question.

A prolonged educational process, which starts at infancy and ends when the child has left secondary school, is in any case necessary for the development of reading attitude.