

Literary learning: A proposal for using literature for the acquisition of emotional competencies

El aprendizaje literario: una propuesta para el uso de la literatura para la adquisición de competencias

L'aprenentatge literari: un proposta per a l'ús de la literatura per l'adquisició de competències

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Abstract

The concept of literary learning is based upon the conception that there are learning processes, which through the use of literary texts have a productive result. The linking element between both terms is the development of some competencies, in particular, emotional as well as discursive. By presenting these considerations, new answers to old questions, are provided: Why is literary reading necessary in Foreign Language Teaching (FLT), what goals are being pursued, how should literary reading be directed, and which learning processes they are intended for? The article deals with the aesthetic experience of literature on the basis of a lesson example. It is aimed at the aesthetic perception, whereby not only is a pleasurable reading understood, but it is also a critical examination of the represented reality in the text. The result is a productive and dialectic literary dialogue, in which the topics of narration are a starting point to an aesthetic judgment that also requires the ability to empathize with the characters and situations, so that learners ultimately improve their discursive skills.

Keywords: language education, literary learning, empathy, FLT

Resumen

El concepto del aprendizaje literario se basa en la idea de que hay procesos de aprendizaje que tienen un resultado productivo mediante el uso de textos literarios. El elemento unificador entre ambos conceptos es el desarrollo de competencias, especialmente de las emocionales y discursivas. Al presentar estas consideraciones, se ofrecen nuevas respuestas a cuestiones viejas: ¿Por qué es necesaria la lectura literaria en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras? ¿Cuáles son los objetivos? ¿Cómo debe dirigirse la lectura literaria y qué procesos de aprendizaje se pretenden? El artículo aborda la experiencia estética de la literatura mediante un ejemplo didáctico. A través de la percepción estética, por la que no sólo se procura una lectura entretenida, sino que también se pretende un examen crítico de la realidad representada en el texto. El resultado es una conversación literaria productiva y dialéctica en el aula en la que los temas de la narración son el punto de partida para un juicio estético, pero que también requiere la capacidad de empatizar con los personajes y las situaciones, de manera que el alumnado acabe mejorando sus habilidades discursivas.

Palabras clave: didáctica de la lengua, aprendizaje literario, empatía, enseñanza de idiomas

Resum

El concepte de l'aprenentatge literari es basa en la idea que hi ha processos d'aprenentatge que tenen un resultat productiu mitjançant l'ús de textos literaris. L'element unificador entre tots dos conceptes és el desenvolupament de competències, especialment de les emocionals i discursives. En presentar aquestes consideracions, s'ofereixen noves respostes a velles qüestions: Per què és necessària la lectura literària en l'ensenyament de llengües estrangeres? Quins són els objectius? Com s'ha de dirigir la lectura literària i quins processos d'aprenentatge es pretenen? L'article aborda l'experiència estètica de la literatura mitjançant un exemple didàctic. A través de la percepció estètica, per la qual no sols es procura una lectura entretinguda, sinó que també es pretén un examen crític de la realitat representada al text. El resultat és una conversa literària productiva i dialèctica a l'aula en la qual els temes de la narració són el punt de partida per a un judici estètic que també requereix, però, la capacitat d'empatitzar amb els personatges i les situacions, de manera que l'alumnat acabe millorant les seues habilitats discursives.

Paraules clau: didàctica de la llengua, aprenentatge literari, empatia, ensenyament d'idiomes.

1. Introduction: Literature and emotional development

Readers experience different emotions and states of mind through identifying with characters when reading fiction. Teachers who are committed to the aesthetic approach, (Schier, 2014, p.53; Delanoy, 2002, p.2) when exploring this verbal art form, differentiate the process of reading literature in the classroom from teaching literature with certain verifiable and evaluable objectives in the foreground.

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The experiential concept of literature and aesthetics means that readers bring literary texts to life through their personal internal acts of understanding. This position supports the idea that the interaction between text and reader is a dialogue. The intentional use of interesting and realistic topics in foreign language teaching (FLT) is designed to improve students' linguistic skills. Reading fiction offers occasions for debating real world problems as well as encouraging students to reflect on different contemporary themes. In this way, the approach of literary learning in teaching literature in the current didactics

of literature (Bogdal, 2002, pp. 88-89) is oriented towards emotional competences - applying learner-centered procedures in order to promote learning skills and competences which may be useful to students in their daily lives (López Valero et. al., 2001, pp.203-208). Spinner (2006, pp.6) argues with the concept of literary learning that there are learning processes which relate specifically to

engagement with literary texts. He distinguishes these ideas from the concept of reading literacy, which is strongly pragmatic and refers indiscriminately to both literary and non-literary texts.

We consider literary learning suitable in language teaching for speaking and writing about desires, fears, and conflicts that the characters live through as a means of facing questions, problems and different points of view, thoughts, perceptions and opinions, which learners have to manage linguistically. Such narratives lend themselves to reflecting on situations and circumstances, which foreign language students have to understand in order to handle them linguistically in an appropriate way. Thus, leading students to understand that expressing one's own emotions in a correct way is an important part of the language learning process. With these premises in mind, it is necessary to promote an emotional access to readings, rather than simply insisting on a purely analytical one. As a result, reading fiction as a verbal art form will foster the process of personal interpretation - enriching the students' linguistic and conceptual knowledge. From a pedagogical viewpoint, readings will allow for a high degree of identification if they are related to what the students know personally, thus reaffirming their ideas, experiences and possibly reinforcing their convictions. On the other hand, students will be able to reflect on new experiences, which may contradict or seem irreconcilable with their worldview and experiences. These cognitive conflicts may possibly extend their powers of imagination and perceptive abilities beyond their current limits and those that their daily lives allow. Closely related to these purposes, the current requirement of the acquisition of some linguistic and communicative competencies in B1 levels refers to the following capacities:

We consider literary learning suitable in language teaching for speaking and writing about desires, fears, and conflicts that the characters live through as a means of facing questions, problems and different points of view, thoughts, perceptions and opinions, which learners have to manage linguistically.

[The student] Can produce simple and coherent texts on familiar topics and areas of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and give brief reasons or explanations for plans and opinions. Can understand texts containing mainly very common everyday language as well as understand private letters describing events, feelings and wishes. (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)ⁱ

Within this framework of the communicative approach (Reyzábal, 2018, pp. 135; Mata Anaya et.al., 2015, p. 17), which focuses on speaking, where the competence to act linguistically in concrete everyday situations is realised through authentic occasions for communication, fiction can also be used successfully and in a motivating way for language and culture-related learning. FLT oriented towards literary texts focuses, among other things, on their linguistic-aesthetic dimension. Thus, I use the

literary language or the specific literariness of literary texts (Dobstadt, 2010, pp. 203-216), as described

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below with a B1 course as an example, in a much more comprehensive way, in order to develop the necessary skills to enable the learner to deal with everyday reality. Using literary texts has to do with current learning objectives such as empathy, perspective change and understanding of the other, which can be better achieved with certain literary texts than with the usual language learning material (Hogan, 2011 ; Wild, 1989) As a consequence, in both literature teaching and foreign language didactics, my approach is based on the concept of

experience-oriented learning (Kultusministerium Hessen, 2021). This means that the content of the reading should address learners' thinking, feelings and acting. This will be achieved through the experience of everyday life situations in a fictional space where learners can conceive it as a lived process in which thoughts and feelings come together, and in which he or she tries to interact with the characters of the text by reflecting on one's own living environment, perception, sensitivity and expression skills and strengthening the ability to criticize, to develop openness in facing the world and the ability to deal with problems. It can help students to explore other people's experiences and motives for action and to get to know a variety of feeling, thinking and acting ways. When dealing with foreign-language literature, they should also be guided to acquire cultural values, which should encourage their willingness to relate to other people according to the principles of tolerance, justice and solidarity. Since the literary text aims to foster new impressions, this experience includes not only intensive participation in the text, but also moments of distanced reflection. Distance and reflection serve to deal with the surprises, irritations and unfamiliar perspectives with which literary texts confront their readers. With respect to the skills of reading, speaking and writing, which are used in comprehension and interpretation, they offer original problem-solving situations, which require a wide range of the learner's active involvement. This might range from comprehending the characters and their problems, making personal connections, drawing conclusions, and finally reflecting on real life.

In numerous publications (Hallet et al., 2014, pp. 107-121; Saupe et al., 2012, pp. 95-98; Bredella et al., 2004, pp. 7) concerns are raised which plead for an aesthetic approach to literature which should be connected with imagination, pleasure as well as an emotional experience. These authors point out that literary texts place different demands on the recipient in terms of reading and experience than non-literary ones do as, literature, just like music or any other aesthetic experiences, can move its recipients emotionally because it touches them inwardly, or may even make them cry or laugh. Kramersch (2006, p. 251) formulates these ideas as follows:

What literature can do is foster the three major components of symbolic competence: The production of complexity, the tolerance of ambiguity, and an appreciation of form as meaning. What literature can bring to the development of symbolic competence is precisely the sense that human communication is more complex than just saying the right word to the right person in the right manner. Most of the time there is not even a right or wrong way of communicating; characters in novels get trapped by language into situations that offer neither good nor bad solutions, just tragic dilemmas. Works of literature can serve to discuss openly the contradictions between myths and realities, between words and deeds, not with a view to resolving these contradictions but to showing how language can be used to support conflicting and historically contingent truths.

So, the focus is always on personal benefit, which can only be achieved by experiencing literature aesthetically. In addition to didactic tasks, these complex literary reading processes should be oriented towards an aesthetic perception, it is worthwhile to deal with the connection between fiction and perception of reality as one of the ways to reflect on reality and search for truth (Leibrandt, 2016). Especially recommendable are those texts that stimulate meaning-making processes (ambiguities, ambivalences, citing speech, intertextuality, the relevance of the form, the complexity of the formation of meaning, Schiedermaier, 2017, p. 73) and exert a fascination because, they can be used much better for a literary discussion than if the text is clear and evident for everyone. Interesting questions arise precisely when ambivalences come up on which everyone can have a different opinion. During the reading, learners relate emotionally to the literary characters by sharing their emotions. Consequently, they develop emotions such as empathy or sensitivity of the human being, the capacity for compassion (Reyzábal, 2018, pp.112-113). In this way, it deals directly and psychologically with different experiences and ways of thinking, which contributes to being able to empathise with the protagonists, helps to produce identification, and at the same time, it expands the space of experiences. From a critical and reflective point of view, this empathic reading should involve ways of thinking that stimulate a critical reflection (Delanoy 2002, p. 22), so it has a bridging function between the fictional and the real world, the language learners in class and the countries whose language they learn. Literary learning is thus viewed as gaining new insights in the interest of a reflected and differentiated understanding of oneself and the world. By encountering literature, learners are invited to discover new possibilities for understanding and action.

2. Current approach to the emotional competence regarding the socializing aspects of reading

A point on the way to a successful aesthetic empathy and sensual perception concerns the ability to empathize with situations, characters and their linguistic representation. Fictional narratives evoke aesthetic emotions and one of them is empathy, which is a prerequisite for understanding a character. In this respect, Hogan (2011, p. 276):

Empathy is always fundamental to literature. Our emotional response to narratives is inseparable from our empathic response to figures, their situations, actions, capacities, etc. Of course, in the first place it is an aesthetic empathy, not the class of practical empathy that we could experience in the real world. After all, literary figures are not real. At the same time, however, literary works are connected with our empathic relationships to real people outside of fiction stories. Our relationships with the social identity groups (races, nations, classes) in the stories tend to be continuous with those relationship stories outside the stories.

This endeavor of empathy turns out to be particularly complex whenever the chosen form of language or the description of the characters seem strange to us. However, being able to empathise with others who may seem strange to the learner due to an unusual situation, expands the boundaries of his or her own context, and possibly allows him or her to understand others who are different. However, the following principle should not be disregarded: Without the assumption of a minimal similarity or equality by the observer, empathy does not take place, Breithaupt (2017, p.22), who defines empathy as follows:

Empathy consists of a co-experience with another, whereby the empathetic observer sees himself in the situation of the other and views this situation from his or her perspective, at least with a minimal component of self-interest and experiences it emotionally.

The approach of literature and its didactics to connect with an emotional access aims to open up some new ways of linguistic application, both for the linguistic acquisition and an emotional implication with the learning content. Learners should be able to empathise mentally and emotionally from their own experience with characters and situations, transporting themselves into the described circumstances and problems in the lives of the protagonists or narrators. As Hogan argues (2011, p. 276), literary works are connected with our empathic relations to real people outside the fictional stories. Our relations to social identity groups (races, nations, classes) in stories are likely to be continuous with those relations outside stories. In reference to the relevance of literature as part of the literary learning

process, Wild (1981, pp. 84-97) presents the following theses about realism in literature which can be very helpful when choosing a suitable reading: Literature, like all art, presents a form of knowledge of reality. Its anthropological origin lies in the need to order the apparently chaotic and threatening reality in order to face it. That is why, according to Wild, literature is a means of knowledge and provides this knowledge through mimesis, which is the representation of reality without being purely a reproduction as it modifies it at the same time. Therefore, realistic literature is based on human life with the aim of a better understanding of both, the social and natural reality, which depends on the historical changes of what is considered realistic. But fiction also allows us to represent possible forms of human behavior which do not exist in reality, and therefore implies surreal moments. Authors who write in an age-appropriate way, as in children's or young adult literature, present examples of conditions in which the protagonists live in different parts of the world by showing problems such as their coexistence, their relationship problems, questions about the self and other issues such as political or ecological ones.

But as Voss (2004, p. 109) rightly points out, maturity and the level of language, which determine the emotional level of feeling and understanding, are indispensable in this type of empathy:

The maturity of a personality is measured, among other things, by the sovereignty with which he or she is able to interpret correctly even non-stereotypical, unconventional or even paradoxical behavior as an expression of a certain emotion. Thus, children and naïve persons are hardly able to correctly assess ironic expressions and behaviors because they have no second level of interpretation.

Considering the fact that literary reading is an excellent opportunity to acquire or improve emotional and linguistic competences, through the didactic use of literature I seek a spontaneous and emotional encounter with the text, while at the same time I attempt to lead the learner to a reflection, and so offering him or her another way to progress in these processes. As literature covers all the emotions experienced by the characters in different phases and situations such as death, separation, love or violence, as well as the relationship between the young and elderly, for the learners, living the lives of the literary characters and feeling with them means a very good way of facing questions, problems and different points of view, thoughts, perceptions and opinions, which they are supposed to manage linguistically in their everyday life. Foreign language learners, who in the case under study university students, face the challenge of correctly understanding the fictional conflicts, and learn in this way that a correct way of emotional expression is an important part of the language learning process, in order to handle possible problems linguistically in an appropriate way,

In opposition to an 'adequate' understanding of a text, Bredella (2012, pp.33-48) points out that the importance of reading lies in the quality of the reception itself, in other words, in the intensity of what is lived through or the type of experiences, which a reader can have in the reception. The reader is put to test when thoughts and feelings of the other/protagonist are to be understood, but often cause astonishment, perhaps even incomprehension. Therefore, the text should encourage interaction, so that the reader has to bring his prior knowledge and understanding of facts into the reading process. Therein lies the dialogue character of reading and the function of reading literature is precisely to put these competencies into practice by finding out its correspondence in the development of non-literary competencies, which are required in different stages of a person's development, the most important of which is social interaction. This means that in the reception of literature, the same forms of interaction occur as in the personal social interaction, and these learning processes in one of the two worlds will be transferred into the competences of the other one. With this, Bredella (2010, p.31) refers to the dialogic structure of understanding the other: Literary texts are only educationally relevant if they address and challenge their recipients, so that their views and values come into play. In stories, learners experience how others make plans, how they justify their actions, how they get into conflicts and look for solutions. The reader is thus encouraged to wonder what he would have thought, felt and acted in their place, and what the alien world is revealing about his own world.

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In the competence concept, which refers to the mastery of a set of skills, the emotional ones are highlighted: They are also known as social-emotional competencies, a set of skills, which allow us to understand and express the emotional phenomena in an appropriate way by facilitating a better performance in life circumstances such as interpersonal relationships or problem solving. Here I focus on the ability to recognize what others are thinking and feeling, the social skills, empathy, and to capture non-verbal communication (Bisquerra, 2007, p.6). These skills are more pertinent to our field:

1. Awareness of feelings: Ability to perceive one's feelings accurately, and to label them.
2. Considering another's perspective: Ability to perceive accurately the point of view of others.
4. Analysis of the social norms: Ability to critically evaluate the social and cultural norms and the individual behavior.
5. Respect for others: Intention to accept and appreciate individual and group differences and to value the rights of all people.

6. Problem solving: Ability to develop solutions to problems.

Today neuroscientists, like Ciompi, recognise the interdependence between feeling and thinking, or in other words, between emotions and cognition (2005, p.12). An important first step, as shown above, is to become aware of one's own feelings, to express them adequately linguistically, as well as recognize and understand the emotions of others. For Saarni (1999), these emotional skills are especially relevant in the area of social interaction:

1. Being aware of their own emotions (implies knowing that in certain situations various and contradictory emotions can be experienced).
2. Perceiving and understanding the emotions of others (involves interpreting the emotional issues which occur in a situation or the behavior of others).
3. Communicating about emotions (implies knowing the correct vocabulary in a given culture regarding emotional expressions).
4. Empathizing (allows us to participate in the emotional experience of other people).
5. Being aware of the emotional communication in a social interaction (to know that the social relationships depend on the way the emotions are communicated).

As mentioned before, empathy through identification is considered to be the most competent form of social interaction, especially required in the FLT-classroom as students have to deal with other habits, customs and practices of the foreign country. By reading literature. they can be trained in meeting all these requirements. Not only does empathy allow them to immerse into the world through other identities, but it also requires exercising a cognitive act through which they have to anticipate and assimilate feelings and emotions by interpreting and identifying certain effects, and so make it possible to draw conclusions about the internal state (Schön 1995, p.101). Therefore, empathy consists of being able to put one's own self in someone else's shoes.

Using literature for this purpose in the classroom lends itself to experimenting in a playful way with the frontiers of one's own identity and that of others, especially with situations and emotional states, which lie outside one's own experiential sphere in order to exercise the empathic mode. It can be a good way to develop the capacity for empathy, which implies identification with the others' perspective and will have a positive influence on social competence.

It seems crucial for a narrative understanding and an essential prerequisite that first the perspective of the fictional characters must be adopted in order to immerse in a narrative (Coplan, 2004, p. 141).

The reader empathises, but also reacts to the information, which then allows him to access worlds unknown to him. This would result in true learning growth, ultimately leading to an emotionally satisfying experience. Hence, the central didactic position is to provide experiences, emotions and the possibility of self-questioning, as well as to know the reactions and arguments of others. In this way, another aspect closely related to these requirements are different decision-making situations, which concern moral development, as literature invites reflection on basic ethical positions. Therefore, through guided reading, many possibilities are opened up to broaden reading experiences. It is through the psychological and emotional depth of the literary characters that authors offer a way to access the characters' emotional state thus contributing to readers' better understanding and reflection on the world that surrounds them. This is why literature has a lot of validity and quality as a substitute means for a lack of authentic encounters with the foreign country in the classroom, leading to themes and emotions, which can provide these kinds of experiences.

3. Contemporary realistic literature as a supplement to FLT

As mentioned before, I focus on realistic literature, which offers learners different perspectives on conflicts, structures and relationships in contemporary society, but above all, the environment they usually experience such as family, school or university. Offering stories of a real everyday environment

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with its conflicts, problems and feelings involved makes it possible for teachers to offer situations that, like a mirror, provide learners with experiences requiring a profound understanding of different ways of life. Certainly, it depends on the respective text as well as on learners' maturity in the reception process whether more own experiences and previous knowledge or more features of the text are in the foreground. Therefore, a

preliminary assessment of the text quality and its demands on the participants are indispensable for a successful learning process. If elaborations, i.e. productive links between what is known and what is new, emotional involvement and textual distance should take place, the teacher has to know in advance how much prior knowledge (subject and content-related knowledge, experiences, feelings) needs to be activated and how precise text perception is to take place with the aim of relating what is known and what is newly perceived. In the framework of communicative language teaching, literary texts seem to be dispensable, and literature is often used only as a means of lexical and grammatical

practice or as a mere occasion for conversation and writing as Dobstadt and Riedner (2011, p.6) point out:

In communication and action-oriented foreign language teaching, the acquisition of communicative intercultural competence is the central overriding learning objective. With conventional foreign language teaching, literature is often only used as a means of working out lexicon and grammar or as a mere reason for speaking and writing. When it comes to regional studies, it serves often as authentic material that is intended to offer insights into foreign ways of thinking and the opportunity to exchange views on cultural differences. However, their literacy is usually not taken into account, let alone used for language and culture-related learning processes.

As argued thus far, literature as authentic material provides the best way to bring learners closer to understanding other cultures, points of view and feelings. Therefore, the authors cited before perceive foreign language teaching as a space in which aesthetic-creative processes take place, which need to be identified, reflected upon and promoted so that throughout language learning, learners are not limited to acquiring merely instrumental application skills. Competences, on the other hand, are skills and abilities to solve problems and to use problem solving in different situations. The concept of competence is characterised by an emphasis on the individual contribution to problem solving and the use of knowledge and skills in real life social situations (Bredella, 2010, p. 31). Kråling, Martin and Caspari (2015, pp. 93-95) see literary learning and the aesthetic function of language as a means of learning related to language and culture, and advocate a re-evaluation of the aesthetic aspects of literature. Therefore, they demand a change of perspective in the conception of literature in language teaching towards communicative purposes, but in a more authentic way. In this way, I conceive FLT as a space in which learners, in the course of their language learning; not only acquire instrumental application skills. Hence, I suggest addressing the following questions before selecting a novel and a brief orientation regarding the criteria for the choice and suitability of a text for the treatment in foreign language classes:

- Which competences of a linguistic level can be integrated into literary reading and promoted better than in conventional language teaching?
- Which tasks can be stimulated by literary aesthetic narratives and be made productive for the processes of language learning?
- For what purpose do you want to use this text?

- Which methods do you want to use in the classroom?
- What kind of learners do you have?
- Which information in the text can they understand, and which can they not?
- With regard to the content, it is important that the story does have an emotional and social impact on the reader, so that he or she can interpret it by making it his or her own. So, the content should be close to the learners' life and experiences.
- The solutions to the conflicts should be developed by the protagonists to encourage an active attitude in the reader. Presenting new strange situations will require reviewing the possible prejudices, thus leading to reflections on ethical positions and moral development.
- It should have a motivating effect by offering learners something new and interesting, having personal relevance, and leading to identification.
- In determining the suitability of a text, the specific aspects of age, situation and culture must be taken into account. In terms of content and reference to everyday topics, it can provide information of all kinds (political, historical, geographical, anthropological), which can be used to learn more about the real life of a country, and so develop historical understanding, which in turn might result in a change of perspective.

The topicality of a certain theme makes it possible to catch up with the present and to create possible applications in the world of the learners. This aspect, and the final important benefit of all literary reading, is that fictional worlds are opportunities for the learner to transcend his or her own reality, to acquire new knowledge and to integrate it into his or her own knowledge of the world. The reference to life practice is a part of comprehension called application. By relating the meaning of a narration, certain experiences and knowledge from a reading to one's own life situations, complex situations of application arise, through which literary texts acquire a cultural, social and personal relevance characterised by multiple relationships: the literary text and its situation, the reality of the learner's life, his or her interpretation of the world and all that he or she brings to the texts in terms of knowledge, perspectives, emotions and evaluations. This means that topics relevant to everyday life can be addressed in a way that the learner has to deal with his or her own emotions, experiences, attitudes and competences. Since the effect of a narration is based on basic human experiences or constellations of problems, it offers meaning and truth.

I have discussed that texts, which contain recognisable information gaps are particularly suitable for triggering a controversial conversation in the classroom. In this way, students will be involved in

dealing with the comprehension problem. Any text, which poses coherence problems, is more suitable for this method than texts in which no coherence problems are encountered because the latter does not challenge the learners. This reader-oriented approach starts from the reaction of the learner and places him/her in the foreground of the text's interpretation. According to the hermeneutic approach and reception-aesthetics (Schier, 2014, pp. 51-53), the meaning of a literary text, which is open and indeterminate, only emerges through reading, thus allowing for several equally valid interpretations. In this way, reading is conceived as an interaction between text and reader, and not only invites spontaneous and also affective expressions, but requires the activation of an attitude of expectation, prior knowledge or creative anticipation, i.e. an activity which precedes the actual reading. In this sense, I understand using literary texts in FLT as a communicative action by giving students an active and self-determined role in the process of understanding them. Kramsch (1993, p.13) also points to this possibility of reading texts on different levels of meanings from which arise the educational challenge and a dialogical pedagogy:

The educational challenge is teaching language 'as context' within a dialogic pedagogy that makes context explicit, thus enabling text and context to interact dialectally in the classroom. Dialectic means a dialogue between two opposed or contradictory viewpoints. In the course of this dialogue, each party comes to understand the other's position from a broader, less partial perspective, which does justice to the substance of each point of view, but allows the search for a common ground. It is in the course of this search that understanding between people may emerge, based on a recognition of difference and an acceptance of continued dialogue despite differences.

4. The example of Peter Härtling's *Oma*, (Grandma) in German as a foreign language

As an example of a literary learning process, I present the short narration *Oma* (Grandmother) from Peter Härtling (1977), one of the most distinguished contemporary German-language writers, who received the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany and was awarded a Jacob Grimm Prize in 2010. I use it every year in a B1 German language university course with students aged 18-22. As it belongs to youth literature, it can also be used with younger learners, although the tasks may need to be adapted, but the main objectives are improving reading comprehension as well as speaking and writing skills, in order to make learners participate in conversations about everyday life, which should correspond to the linguistic competences of the CEFR.

In this story, the author explores the themes of generational conflict, upbringing, and strangeness, as he writes about the loss of parents, so that Grandma takes over the upbringing of her grandson, which leads to frequent misunderstandings and conflict situations due to the age gap. Learners might empathise with both main characters, the Grandma and her grandson Kalle, but they have to find their way into this special relationship, the coexistence of two different generations, and understand these two opposed positions in various situations, and finally take a critical standpoint. For Kalle, since he lives with his Grandma, everything has been very different from the way it used to be with his father and mother. Many problems arise, so both frequently argue and try to find solutions. At the end of each chapter, Grandma reflects upon a particular problem she has to deal with, so that learners have to empathise with her position, discuss it from different points of view and reach a solution. Here are two examples about the problem of upbringing, and her own behavior when always telling the same stories:

Kalle quickly realised that it's different here than at home. Dear heaven, this free education! Am I supposed to run out of the bathroom naked in the morning or in the evening just because he's used to it from his parents? He doesn't know what old people look like. And besides, I'm ashamed. I can't go along with that. I come from a different time. People weren't so - how shall I put it? -so shameless. But shameless is the wrong word. They don't have to be ashamed any more, and that's actually right. But I can't do that. He must understand that. (Härtling, 1999, p. 21)

All right, the boy must know how it used to be. For example, when I was young and my name wasn't Erna Bittel, but Erna Mauermeister. Why is he bored with these stories? Only when I tell him about the war does he sit up and take notice, he wants to know exactly whether I experienced shooting and whether there were casualties. The warlike must be in the children. It's horrible. Today, when I remembered how I met Otto and how I got hiccups from excitement which lasted for hours, Kalle just said: I already know that story. I know very well that I have never told it before. Maybe it was all too long ago. (Härtling 1999, p.33)

The main objectives of the didactic approach and examples of tasks are the following :

Differentiating views (describe the main character from his or her point of view).

Change of perspectives: What different perspectives do you learn about in this story?

Opinions: What are the opinions of the different characters in the book? Compare the characters with people you know, e.g. the grandmother in the book with yours, etc. Explain, criticise and evaluate the behaviour of the characters in the book.

Task 1: Explain Grandma's and Kalle's positions, their thoughts, feelings. What does the author want to show the reader? Have you ever experienced a situation like this?

Task 2: What do you talk with your parents or grandparents about and how does the discussion go? What arguments does Grandma have and what arguments does Kalle have? What conclusion does Grandma come to?

Task 3: Expressing your own opinion on a topic: What is your opinion about raising children? What are the differences between your grandparents and your generation regarding this topic? How does Grandma understand justice? And how do you understand it? Are you on Granny's side or on Kalle's? Justify your answer.

Task 4: Why does Kalle sometimes argue with Grandma? Formulate the problem Kalle has with Grandma. Can you give Grandma and Kalle some advice? If I were you,, I would ... You could ... You should...

Example for writing a comment on a chapter:

- The text is about/ deals with the topic.....
- The Grandma/Kalle argues that..., thinks that..., is of the opinion that..., Negative: I do not agree with Grandma/Kalle, as I think that..... In my opinion, Positive: I agree with Grandma/KallePartly: I only partly agree with Grandma's/Kalle's opinion.....
- Personal opinion: In my opinion..... As for me.....
- Conclusion: For all of the above/In my opinion .../I am certain that.../I am convinced that.../I believe that... /I think that.../In conclusion.....

Some guiding questions for the writing part, which intend a change of perspective and empathic understanding, are the following:

- What do you learn about Grandma and about the relationship between Grandma and Kalle? How are Grandma and Kalle described? What does Kalle like and dislike?
- Identify the narrative perspective: What thoughts does Grandma have? Where does she see a problem?
- When Grandma tells stories about past times: What is typical for Grandma and how does Kalle react? What is her problem and what does the author want to show with it? How does Grandma react and how does Kalle react? What does Grandma think about it?

As an example for a perspective takeover and the capacity to put yourself in the position of others, I show here a letter which a student has written from the grandson's point of view to Grandma during her stay in hospital, and two final blog entries where others reflect in a final comment on what they have learned with the book and what they liked.

Dear Grandma,

I hope you are well. I'm sorry I can't come and see you, but I'll join you soon. Don't worry, you will soon recover. When I visit you, we can organise a trip together to a village nearby, would you like that? We'll go by train because you're afraid of planes. We can go somewhere quiet so you can read, be in nature and go for a walk. We won't watch TV, so we won't argue. I have a lot to tell you. We will see each other again soon.

Many greetings, Kalle

- 1) There are many parts of the book that I find interesting, but the most interesting is when Grandma and Kalle argue. It has been shown throughout the story that they have very different views because of the age difference between them. For example, when Grandma doesn't want Kalle to play football with his friends because she is afraid he will get hurt. I don't like the ending because Kalle realises that his grandmother is old and close to death and that she is also not in the best shape because of her old age. And also because I feel sorry for Grandma getting older and Kalle suffering. But I think it's a very realistic chapter, because although we don't like to admit that our grandparents are getting older, it's something we all live with. Besides, Kalle is already 10 years old and it's normal that his grandmother tells him that. I think what the author wants to teach is that age differences mean that everyone has very different views, and that learning to listen and putting ourselves in the shoes of others are very important. I also think he wants to show that family is something very important, and even if we have bad days and argue, everything makes us grow as people. At the end of the day, our parents and grandparents only tell us all this because they love us. Another message of the book is that we have to love each other.
- 2) A very important moment in the story seems to me to be when Kalle has problems at school and hides them from grandma and grandma defends Kalle anyway. Another important point for me is the character of the caretaker and how she makes Granny react and defend herself. The title brings us to the core of the book: *Oma* is the story of Erna Bittel and her grandson Kalle and how they have to learn to live together and overcome their differences after the death of Kalle's parents. I find the part of the book where Grandma argues with Kalle about

the TV while herself watching a film the most interesting. I was surprised by this story and how the author shows that grandma is not only a tough person, but also weak and old. I don't like the ending of the story so much because it's very sudden, it's hard to connect with the characters, and towards the end, when I started to get to know them, the book was over. That is partly bad and partly good, because it allows me to think about the ending I prefer, rather than settling on one. I have the impression that the author wants to show us through the book how old and modern life clash and coexist, represented by the characters of Grandma and Kale respectively. I think the author wants to show us what happens to old and young people in contemporary life. I would recommend the book because I think it is a good way to learn German, with a curious and entertaining story.

As the examples may show the following competences, which follow the description by CEFR as quoted at the beginning, based on the reading have been practiced:

- Describing experiences, events or wishes in simple coherent sentences.
- Explaining and briefly justifying opinions.
- Asking and answering questions, commenting on information: I find it interesting ... /I'm surprised that.../ I wouldn't have thought that.../ I was angry/sad because.../ it's funny that....
- Talking about everyday problems or something unreal, commenting on a situation.
- Expressing one's own opinion on a topic: Arguing - good or bad? Evaluating actions, behavior and motives.
- Giving advice, justifying something, agreeing or disagreeing with someone.
- Recognising, understanding and resolving conflicts, talking about stages of life, problems, fears and hopes: What difficulties and conflicts are described?
- Empathising: Choose a character from the text and express what you have in common with them.

Regarding the emotional competences, the experience-oriented learning as well as the dialogical pedagogy, I consider the narrative of *Oma* as an ideal opportunity for students in this level to reflect on the experiences and images of what childhood and the intergenerational relationship are from two opposite points of view. With the example of the family environment, they get to know very clearly that the emotional competencies and interpersonal relationships play a key role in the good functioning of a family and their coexistence because of different attitudes, wishes and responses. That

is why I choose readings which appeal to them primarily emotionally in terms of content. On the other hand, the methodology of literary learning gives them the possibility of experiencing other situations by recreating them in fictional worlds.

5. Conclusion

Based on the reading of the short novel *Oma* by Peter Härtling in a B1 course in German as a foreign language, the underlying didactic objectives were presented: The learners were introduced to a sensitive dialogue with the characters through an aesthetic text and an action-oriented approach. The reflection on certain difficult moments in the lives of the characters brought them into contact with surprises, irritations and unfamiliar perspectives and situations, which was intended to promote their emotional competence. The didactic learning objectives presented before the reading of such a novel focus on the interpersonal and social competence, the capacity of perception in order to consciously interpret one's own feelings and those of others as well as to know how to evaluate them. It allows the students to acquire a more in depth understanding of what it means to experience empathy, by feeling what others think and perceive, and to be able to understand it. But, above all, they practice the capacity to communicate and learn how to talk about emotional experiences. In conclusion, it seems to be crucial to encourage the use of the fictional narratives in FLT when they are intimately linked to the linguistic competences learners have to acquire. They will most likely engage in the different tasks when they feel emotionally involved in those stories, which are linked to the emotions experienced in real life. Such type of narratives, like the realistic one by Härtling, offer affective responses to a situation, both real and fictional, which can be transferred and expressed in oral as well as in written communication. By focusing on emotions and identity through fiction, it becomes especially attractive to consider the possibilities of identification, which connect directly with the world of the learners' particular experiences. In this sense, perhaps more changes still have to be made in the didactic use of literary texts, but as the above example hopefully has shown, literature not only offers the possibility of entertainment, but also an opportunity to grow emotionally.

It allows the students to acquire a more in depth understanding of what it means to experience empathy, by feeling what others think and perceive, and to be able to understand it. But, above all, they practice the capacity to communicate and learn how to talk about emotional experiences.

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How to cite this paper:

Leibrandt, I. (2022). Literary learning: A proposal for using literature for the acquisition of emotional competencies. *Journal of Literary Education*, (6), 132-151. <https://doi.org/10.7203/JLE.6.23656>