

**NARRATIVE ACTION APPLIED TO TRAINING AT THE LINGUISTIC LEVELS<sup>1</sup>****\*Santiago Sevilla-Vallejo**

Universidad de Salamanca, Facultad de Educación, Paseo de Canalejas, 169, 37008 Salamanca, Spain

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**Abstract**

Paul Ricoeur defined the poetic as the use of language to give an account of a personal and elaborated vision of the reality to be treated. Language expresses the tension and the unique life of those who use it to communicate their experience (Ricoeur, 1980). For this reason, the reading process is much more than the reception of the data contained in the text. It is a personal and transformative experience that is placed "at the service of the poetic function, that strategy of discourse by which language is stripped of its function of direct description to reach the mythical level in which its function of discovery is released" (Ricoeur, 1980). This paper continues previous research about the motivation and cognitive processes of reading (Sevilla-Vallejo, 2018) through the construction of meaning proposed by Paul Ricoeur. Reading develops the identity of students because it relates their selfhood and ipseity. An approach to reading is proposed from the mimesis defined by Paul Ricoeur to get the text to connect with "a close experience, either because he has lived it, or because he has fantasized it before" (*apud* Roca, 2003), in mimesis I or prefiguration; then to offer the student a coherent vision about the characters, the world in which they live and the adventure that is related, in mimesis II or configuration; and, finally, to favor an internal change in the student who, after having lived the adventures of the character and having reflected on them, not only understands the book better, but also understands himself and understands the world better (Roca, 2003), in mimesis III or refiguration. We have called this narrative action (Sevilla-Vallejo, 2022) and, in this work, it is applied to training at the linguistic levels.

**Keywords:** Identity, Selfhood, Ipseity, Linguistic levels, Mimesis.

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**INTRODUCTION**

It is usually understood that the subject is constructed through the linguistic and cognitive notion of "self", which gives rise to the consciousness that it has as a separate and independent entity. The term self can be broken down into the self, which would be equivalent to the reflexive self and indicates the character of introspection from which the personality arises; and self, which has to do with the identical or reiterated in a subject, which gives rise to the entity of the personality. However, Paul Ricoeur in *Self as Other* studies how identity is a combination between that which defines the subject, his selfhood, and the continuous transformation it carries out, ipseity. Thus, "identity is constantly constructed through discourse. In this sense, we can speak of a "discursive identity" and an "identity in practice" to refer to the linguistic process that forms our personality"<sup>1</sup> (Kanno and Stuart, 2011). The greatest human value of literature is that it helps us to construct ourselves as persons because it presents narratives comparable to the biographical narrative with which each subject defines himself. Each person experiences certain objective situations (facts), but these facts are not the most important thing in elaborating an identity. The aspects relevant to human experience are fixed as the person recounts his or her own experiences (narrative) (Sevilla-Vallejo, 2017b). As Marcos Roca explains, people are not a certain way since we are born, there is no a priori essence (*apud* Sevilla-Vallejo, 2017b: 291). Facts are neutral until the moment they are valued in a certain way: "a life is nothing more than a biological phenomenon as long as life is not interpreted" (Ricoeur, 2006). Human experience is divided into two facets: objective facts and perceived existence (Ricoeur, 1990). Narrative allows students to understand both what happened and their own impressions of who they are. We teachers must help our students to develop as persons through a reading that leads them to a process of individualization, which "can be characterized, broadly speaking, as the reverse of the process of classification, which eliminates singularities in favor of the concept" (Ricoeur, 1996). Language contains, among other resources, deictics to construct one's own experience (Ricoeur, 1996). In this work we intend to explore reading beyond the communicative situation to enter into the meaning of the statements and the subjects involved in reading (Ricoeur, 1996).

**Narrative identity theory**

We are going to try to give an indicative model of how to approach reading from the narrative identity. The selfhood of which Ricoeur speaks refers to that which we can reidentify in an individual, that is, which appears in multiple circumstances (1996). Any narrative is constructed from a certain consciousness or self. So that "the "I" becomes the first of the indicators; it indicates that which designates itself in every enunciation containing the word "I", carrying behind it the "you" of the interlocutor. The other indicators [...] are grouped around the subject of the enunciation" (Ricoeur, 1996). The pronoun I identifies the subject completely and never as a partial reference because [...] it is the function of narration to determine the "who of the action" (Ricoeur, 1996). The definition of the who must be linked to the what and why of his actions, which constitute the intention (Ricoeur, 1996). This means that the event is always personal. The narrative establishes "the temporal dimension of human existence" (Ricoeur, 1996) that constitutes the biography of a fictional character and a real person. It is language that leads us to acquire an identity perception:

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**\*Corresponding Author: Santiago Sevilla-Vallejo**

Universidad de Salamanca, Facultad de Educación, Paseo de Canalejas, 169, 37008 Salamanca, Spain

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"the understanding of oneself is an interpretation; the interpretation of oneself, in turn, finds in narration, among other signs and symbols, a privileged mediation; the latter makes use of both history and fiction" (Ricoeur, 1996). The second instance of identity according to Ricoeur is ipseity or otherness, by which the subject is formed in the experiences he has with other people and with the world around him. The individual has the need to be more than what he has achieved at a given moment (selfhood), he dreams of being something different (ipseity). Narrative identity intervenes in "personal identity, as a specific middle ground between the pole of character, where *idem* and *ipse* tend to coincide, and the pole of self-maintenance, where ipseity frees itself from selfhood" (Ricoeur, 1996). Reading is one of the most powerful ways to enhance the relationship between the way of feeling, thinking and acting of the student at a given moment (selfhood) and the construction of another way of feeling, thinking and acting by the models provided by the characters and the relationship that the reader establishes with them (ipseity).

We can observe that, as the student masters the narrative, so does the meaning he gives to it. At first, the narrative is a never-ending succession of events, in which a cause and effect or simple chance relationship is established. In a second moment, the whole is given a certain meaning by which the parts of the story represent steps in a development with an established message, in which different interpretations can be possible, but not just any interpretation. The narrative offers both the writer and the reader a certain vision of the world. The writer transfers to the literary text a series of experiences, partially or totally invented, and the reader understands them to the extent that he has previously lived them or imagined them. The "scripts and schemes are not innate, but are based on experience. Readers enter fiction through schema recognition or knowledge of schema deviation. The latter requires attention and memory to adjust and restructure according to reality" (Nikolajeva, 2016). Literature offers us a powerful guide to build schemes that allow us to know ourselves, relate and adapt to the world (Sevilla-Vallejo, 2017a). In other words, reading and writing fiction broadens the intellectual possibilities of our students because it populates their imagination with schemes that serve to represent the human experience or, in other words, it fosters the discovery of oneself, of others and of the world. As a whole, it is a very valuable source for building personal identity. As Moisés Esteban-Guitart, Josep Maria Nadal and Ignasi Vila point out: "Identity appears as a life story, with scenes, environments, characters, objectives and themes. We reconstruct the past and anticipate the future in narrative terms that allow us to confer intentionality, integrate events and give unity and purpose to our lives" (2010: 80). For all that we have seen, we can defend that reading offers models for the construction of our students' identity: "the identity of a person, of a community, is made up of those *identifications* - values, norms, ideals, models, heroes, in which the person, the community, recognize themselves" (Ricoeur, 1996).

### **Narrative action applied to training at the linguistic levels**

One of the great opportunities we have as teachers is to take advantage of literature as a source of enjoyment, play and personal growth. Fiction is a human product that reveals how we feel, think, and act. Literature is so valuable because it gives meaning to the human experience. On the one hand, it leads us to reinterpret our own experiences and, on the other, it invites us to learn about the world (real or imaginary). Fictions make us live experiences through which our emotions, thoughts and attitudes come into play. In this way, human beings develop their symbolic thinking, their imagination and face conflictive situations in a playful way. Moreover, as David Comer Kidd and Emmanuel Castano have studied, fictions increase individuals' empathy: "Fiction seems to expand our knowledge of others' lives, helping us to recognize that we are similar to them" (2013). On the other hand, fictions are necessary to transmit the knowledge and identity of each of the social groups that make up society and of society as a whole. Literature helps us to shape an image of ourselves, others and the world we live in because "humanity has survived thanks to our ability to tell fictional stories" (Nikolajeva, 2016).

The teacher must help his students to put into practice a reading that leads them to a true reflection (MacIntyre, 2007), in which they perceive that the fictional character and the person share the process of identity construction when both are in action (MacIntyre, 2007). So narrative identity is applied in relation to character identity (Ricoeur, 1996) and is elaborated in the "concurrency between a demand for concordance and the admission of discordances that, until the closure of the story, endanger this identity" (Ricoeur, 1996). Concordance is based on the Aristotelian principle of "disposition of the facts" and discordance on "the reversals of fortune that make the plot a regulated transformation, from an initial situation to a terminal one" (139-140). Any narrative is constructed by means of discordant concord by which it gathers circumstances and relations between diverse events under a spatial and temporal coherence. The *poiesis* of the narrative transforms "episodic dispersion" into meaningful unity (Ricoeur, 1996: 140). That is to say, reading fiction offers the student a coherent system from which to make sense of his own existence and his relationship with others and with the world. At the didactic level, the story is established, at least, around three successive aspects. First, it starts from the event, which is defined "by its relation to the very operation of configuration; it participates in the unstable structure of discordant concord characteristic of the plot itself; it is a source of discord, insofar as it arises, and a source of concord, insofar as it moves history forward" (Ricoeur, 1996). The imagination from which a story is written and read has to do with the exploration of possibilities. Secondly, the characters serve as the first thread of the facts: "This *mediating* function that the narrative identity of the character exercises between the poles of selfhood and ipseity is essentially attested to by the *imaginative variations* to which the story subjects that identity. In fact, the story does more than tolerate these variations; it engenders and seeks them out" (Ricoeur, 1996). Thirdly, "the plot is placed at the service of the character. It is then that the latter's identity is really put to the test, escaping the control of the plot and its principle of order. The extreme pole of variation is thus reached, in which the character has ceased to be a character" (Ricoeur, 1996). In other words, the story reflects a true identity when the evolution of the character not only defines a coherent development, but also produces ruptures in the previous structure. This leads us to conclude that literature is a "vast laboratory for thought experiences where this union is subjected to innumerable imaginative variations" (Ricoeur, 1996). The real narrative has two differences with respect to the fictitious narrative. On the one hand, the individual establishes relationships of learning, cooperation and competition with other people, which generate an interweaving of the subject's story with that of many other people. On the other hand, the narration of a person's life is open at both

ends, the motivations by which a person is conceived belong to his parents and his "memory is lost in the mists of childhood" (Ricoeur, 1996) and death will be narrated in the story of those who survive the person. For this reason, the reading offers the reader (our students) interpretative closures to be able to explain one's own experience. The narrative unit of life is "an unstable set of fabulation and living experience. Precisely because of the elusive character of real life, we need the help of fiction to organize the latter retrospectively in the after" (Ricoeur, 1996). Narration allows us to divide human experience into meaningful episodes: "through the help of the narrative beginnings with which reading has familiarized us, forcing in a certain way the character, we stabilize the real beginnings constituted by the initiatives [...] that we take. And we also have the experience, which we can call inexact, of what it means to finish a course of action, an episode of real life" (Ricoeur, 1996). In this way, language is part of any *praxis*, but it is not simply a step of it, it gives its meaning. Language gives meaning to actions and also to the message itself through the interpretation that is made (Ricoeur, 1990). Narration allows the integration of relationships with objects and persons, which, being distinct from the subject, represent the ipseity; and of the subject's self, which is the selfhood from which he relates. Therefore, the story is a powerful tool for understanding human existence (Ricoeur, 2005). In this work we are interested in working on comprehensive reading to encourage students to delve into the meaning of the text and to develop their own identity. For this reason, we are going to propose a model of reading in the lexical pathway that relates cognitive-emotional operations and linguistic levels. Emilio García distinguishes the following reading processes:

- J Visual perceptual, which serves both the phonological and lexical pathways depending on the nature of the text and the reader's knowledge.
- J Lexicon, which corresponds to the phonological pathway.
- J Morphosyntactic, about the structure of words and the structural relationships established between them.
- J Semantic, relating to the meaning of each word and the relationships of meaning between words.
- J Textual, in which the integration of the propositions of the text, the reader's knowledge of the world, the inferences according to the cognitive schemes that the subject possesses and the interpretation of the text take place (García, 1993).

The last three processing steps correspond to the lexical pathway, that is, the one in which the meaning of the different linguistic units (monemes, words, syntagmas and sentences) guides the reading until the global meaning of the communicative act is reached. We can divide language into a series of levels that are organized in a hierarchy of complexity of the linguistic code. The study of language by linguistic levels allows us to relate the elements that make up the code to the process of reading comprehension. A first approach to reading processes could be the following. First, graphic patterns or graphemes are recognized and related to give rise to monemes (morphemes and lexemes), which already have a meaning. Then, the union of these gives rise to words, which represent the next level in meaning. Next, one must understand how these words are put together in sets of meaning to form syntagms and sentences. Finally, the reader relates the sentences to establish the meaning of the text as a whole, taking into account the context from which it has been written, and arrives at the overall meaning of the communicative intention. What we have just described constitutes the ascending processes, by which the reader progressively decodes and processes more complex linguistic elements, but there are also descending reading processes in which the reader's knowledge guides comprehension. We will rely on Alonso Tapia's model to better explain the nature of both processes and their relationship:

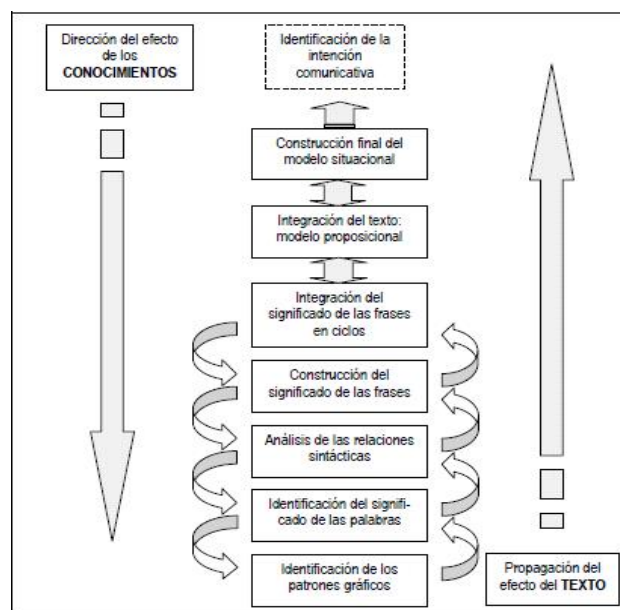


Figure 1. Reading processes (Alonso Tapia, 2005)

As we have seen, bottom-up processes refer to a series of steps from the simplest to the most complex textual features: graphic patterns, monemes, words, syntagmatic relations<sup>2</sup>, meaning of sentences (separately), meaning of sentences in cycles (sets of sentences), integration of the text (construction of the global meaning of the text) and construction of the situational model

<sup>2</sup>The scientific consensus recommends talking about syntagmatic relations rather than syntactic relations in order to be able to study the sentence components in greater detail.

(relation of the above with the context in which it arises). In this sense, reading partly follows an analytical chain in which increasingly elaborated textual features are accessed and incorporated. The text would gradually open up to the reader, who would have to add these features until reaching a complete understanding of the text as a communicative act. On the other hand, the descending processes represent the opposite path. This is the case of an expert reader with knowledge of the content treated and of the communicative context and the ability to establish a global meaning that guides the reading process: meaning of the sentences in cycles, meaning of the sentences, syntagmatic relations, words and graphic patterns. The combination of bottom-up and top-down processes gives: "the interactive model, which considers reading as a complex process in which four components concur, interactively and simultaneously: the writer, the reader, the text and the context in which the whole process occurs" (Martínez, 2016).

As Alexis Sierra (2009) has studied, the didactics of reading follows four stages:

- ) Zero comprehension: involves the simple conversion of written signs into phonetic signs. Letters and words are identified but their meaning is not grasped.
- ) Literal comprehension: elementary level of reading, i.e., superficial comprehension of the author. This level requires a process of recognition and identification of the explicit meaning in the sequence of words and their grammatical and syntactic relationships in paragraphs and chapters. Here the reader identifies situations, spatial, temporal and causal relationships of what the author of the text states directly and explicitly.
- ) Inferential comprehension: the reader goes beyond the explicit text. The author's intentions or purposes, thoughts, judgments and assertions, state of mind and attitudes are inferred or interpreted.
- ) Critical comprehension: requires processes of evaluation and judgment on the part of the reader about the ideas read, in order to develop the principles and foundations that allow him/her to adequately judge the ideas expressed by the author. This level involves deducing implications, drawing generalizations not established by the author, speculating about consequences, distinguishing between facts and opinions, between the real and the imaginary, and making critical judgments about the author's sources, credibility and understanding.

Reading is a process that leads students to a progressively deeper knowledge of the facts told, inferences about the narrator's identity and situation, and the evaluation of the information received and the development of their own criteria. Our teaching and research work leads us to think that one way to favor this deepening of meaning in our students' reading is to bring it closer to their own identity. Paul Ricoeur proposes three steps for a reading that fosters discovery in texts, which we will call living reading:

Mimesis I or reading prefiguration. At first, the reader connects with those parts of the text that refer to a close experience, either because he has lived it or because he has fantasized it before (Roca, 2003). The reader identifies with situations, feelings, thoughts, desires and concerns that are part of his or her own self. As teachers, we can choose realistic texts that are very close to the daily life of the students in order to foster situational identification. It is a very common resource to choose books in which the characters are children of similar ages to the readers and study in a school, live with their families and have the problems typical of the evolutionary stage in which they find themselves. However, stories that present alternative worlds, such as fantastic, marvelous and science fiction narratives, to mention a few cases, can also provoke identifications. Our students have been constructing their otherness with a range of stories that constitute meaningful experiences. Fairy tales, stories of supernatural beings such as wizards or vampires, and superheroes are some of the claims to capture the attention of our students.

Mimesis II or reading configuration. The text offers the reader a coherent vision about the characters, the world in which they live and the adventure that is related. While the child's everyday experiences have no concrete value, the fictional text offers him/her an organized world from which he/she can learn about the characters' behaviors and the consequences they entail. However, fictions are much more than cautionary tales. If we ask our students to tell what a story is about, each one of them will look at some or other aspects and will relate and evaluate them in a personal way according to their own feelings, values, thoughts and attitudes. This personal organization is what constitutes the reading configuration and informs us of the particular identity that each of our students has. Thus, the configurations reached by the students are a very valuable material to know the feelings, thoughts and attitudes of our students.

Mimesis III or reading refiguration. Finally, literary texts produce an internal change in the reader, after having lived the adventures of the character and having reflected on them, he not only understands the book better, but also understands himself and the world better (Roca, 2003). A true reading produces a transformation in the students' identity. The teacher should encourage the student to see the relationship between the characters and the facts that are told with his own biography and how these presents him with a new reality with which to rethink who he is. To do this, the teacher should give guidelines in the reading and propose activities that go beyond the meaning of the text.

### **Classroom application of narrative action to training the linguistic levels**

The application of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* to the early childhood classroom is offered. This work was carried out by Noelia Brasileiro Garrido, Estela de Cabo Hernández, María Calles Gómez, Esther Castillo Botejara and Alba Garrido Iglesias. This chapter shares fragments of their results with the consent of the students. In mimesis I, the teacher must first help the student to find the correspondence between something told by the text and his or her experience. If this is achieved, the following can be worked on: the intelligible structure of the story, i.e., a reading that makes sense around a certain experience (thought, emotion or attitude); then, those symbolic features of the action typical of the literary fact are highlighted; and, in this

way, this allows the perception of temporality of the action in the Ricoeurian sense, i.e., that the student lives their experiences with the characters. The students aforementioned transfer the inequality of the story to the difference in the country of birth. In Mimesis I, this group extracted from their analysis that this story can capture the attention of their students, because it conveys the struggle of an underprivileged and good child against rich and spoiled children. Thus, this allows them to connect with real life experiences or those of the imaginary of the differences between people and the values associated with them.

The students say the following:

The story can convey many lessons, but in this case, we consider that one of the most significant is that hope is the last thing you lose, because you don't know what the future may hold. In Charlie's case, he was a poor boy who could barely cover his basic needs and, suddenly, he had a stroke of luck that changed his life, becoming the owner of a large factory. This is also due to his good behavior inside the factory and his effort not to fall into the temptation of eating what was in the factory despite his hunger, respecting the rules imposed by Willy Wonka, which were the same for everyone, regardless of their purchasing power. We consider that the story also reflects the differences between very rich and very poor people, and we believe that this is very present today. From the classroom, we have to make the students aware that this reality exists, trying to put them in the shoes of these people and, in this way, make them realize that their situation is unfair. Also, the theme we have chosen is relevant because it shows that with effort and good behavior everything can be achieved. As can be seen, the students relate fiction to a social purpose that can be very useful for fiction to be more than pure entertainment and can be related to reality.

Mimesis II or configuration is "the "world of the text" waiting to be refigured by reading [...] To configure is to elaborate a synthesis of the heterogeneous". With the second mimesis, Ricoeur indicates the importance of fixing one's gaze on the text, of analyzing and reflecting on it in order to extract one's own image, but based on the discourse read. Text commentary should deal with these operations. The problem with text commentary is often that it is detached from the experience we have discussed in Mimesis I and, therefore, its product tends to be formalistic and synthetic, leaving out the human and analytical. That is, this would only allow a literal reading (Sierra, 2009). If the teacher in this mimesis helps students to determine a theme of the text that responds to their own sensibilities and to analyze it from both grammatical knowledge and narrative interpretation, students will not only find the plot, as a delimitation of the text to a coherent or unitary aspect of the text, but they will extract a meaning that will be connected to many other knowledge. This is the key for reading to become meaningful because the text acts on the identities of the subjects and thus can be achieved, in addition to the usual, a true inferential and critical reading (Sierra, 2009).

The students prepared two mimesis II activities that brought the lexicon and the representation of the characters closer to the students.

The activity is structured as follows:

Different cards with drawings of words, together with their spellings, related to poverty and wealth, which will form pairs of antonyms, will be distributed throughout the classroom (shelves, books, tables, floor, etc.). Most of these words will be obtained from the story, being these: hunger-abundance, watery cabbage soup-chocolates, thin-fatty, cold-feel a pleasant temperature, small house-big factory, uncomfortable-comfortable, torn clothes-luxurious clothes, few objects-many objects, little money-a lot of money, torture-happiness.

The other activity is described as follows:

The students will continue to be grouped in the circles from the previous activity, and the teacher will place a box next to each of the circles. In one box there will be Wonka characteristic items (e.g., 10 hats), and in the other box there will be Charlie characteristic items (e.g., 10 broken gloves). Each of the children must take an object depending on the group they are in and put it on, disguising themselves as the character. Once they are dressed up, they will go back to the pair they were with in the previous activity. The teacher will tell them that they have to think of a possible ending to the story in which the two words that each pair has (their cards) appear. After allowing some time to think about it, she will ask each pair for their possible ending and ask them to act it out, going out to the center of the class, using simple dialogue and gestures. When all the pairs have acted out their part, they will sit back down in the assembly and the teacher will finish telling the story. In this way the opposition of terms serves to allow the students to pay attention to how literary language defines the difference between the other children and Charlie. This lexical selection serves the refiguring of the text. Similarly, the characters' clothing expresses the same opposition and allows the text to be brought into play and the students' theatrical involvement.

Finally, mimesis III or refiguration refers to the "'world of the text' refigured in the reading that is the operation that consummates the reference". This is the relationship between plot and comprehension, "the structure of sensation" (Roca, 2003: 51). Once the text has been configured, the learner has given it his or her own meaning, now the challenge is to reconnect the text with the experience. Good literature generates debates, provokes emotions, invites to think in a different way or to behave differently in the future. The last step in reading, which justifies calling the method narrative action, is to ask the learner to think about applications of the text in his or her reality. In this way, there is an "actualization in reading, through the rhetorical strategies of persuasion of the text". A text can "resignify the world, reveal to us the understanding of the world, and with it, ourselves" (Roca, 2003: 53). That resignification is produced by experiences that go beyond the text. Thus, we arrive at the mimetic arc, with which we return to the reader's experience from which we started. In this work, the application is given, as in the previous mimesis, by the example in which the students take the literary text to their classroom.

Finally, the students pose a mimesis III activity to go beyond the differences in the story to the differences in the real world. In the assembly area there will be a cardboard box containing different papers (on eleven of them it will say "Country 1: Cameroon", on seven of them it will say "Country 2: Spain" and on two of them it will say "Country 3: Germany"); and in the work area the tables will have been arranged in such a way as to make three groupings according to the countries, each group of tables having the name of that country placed on it together with its flag [...] On the table of the country of Cameroon there will be three crayons of different shades of blue; on the table of the country of Spain 5 colors will be given based on those of the rainbow; and on the table of the country of Germany there will be a total of twelve materials in which there will be both paints and felt-tip pens. In order to make them, they will have to organize themselves so that everyone participates, as there cannot be anyone who has not intervened and decorated the drawing. The difficulty is that not all the groups will have the same amount of paints as there are children in the group.

In this way, the students transfer the inequality of the story to the difference in the country of birth.

## Conclusion

The works of Paul Ricoeur offer a theoretical model of approach to reading, which has been proposed for a formative application. This is concretized in a didactic way in what we have called narrative action and, specifically, in the work on linguistic levels. With this, as a whole, we achieve firstly, to work with the motivation and personal involvement of the student; secondly, to the evaluation of the text around an idea and the analysis of the linguistic levels; and finally, to take the content worked on to the experience of the world so that literature affects the way of being of the students. In this work, we have offered an analysis of the application of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* by future teachers of this methodology in the classroom.

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