The Teacher Gets a Story!?[1]

¿¡El profesor tiene una historia!?

O professor tem uma história!?

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Abstract

This descriptive study explores the insights of a group of language practitioners from a public university in Bogota, Colombia about a proposal focused on their experience reading aloud while applying storytelling techniques. In this exploratory study, the data collection instruments included video-recordings of the practitioners' classes, reflective logs, field notes, and surveys. The results of this study suggest that exposing pre-service teachers to methodologies that include training in non-traditional teaching practices, such as reading aloud, combined with storytelling techniques, can have positive effects on their perspective towards their professional and personal growth as efl teachers. In addition, those effects might be influenced by factors such as how effective storytelling should be fostered, and storytelling and its pedagogical implications, and factors that inhibit storytelling.

Keywords

storytelling; pre-service teaching; reading aloud

Resumen

Este estudio explora la experiencia de un grupo de practicantes de una universidad en Bogotá, Colombia, sobre una propuesta enfocada en la lectura animada a través de técnicas de cuentería. En este estudio exploratorio, los instrumentos de recolección de información fueron videos de las clases de los practicantes, bitácoras, las cuales se escribieron en dos fases del proceso, diarios de campo y encuestas. Los resultados del estudio sugieren que presentando metodologías que incluyan entrenamiento en prácticas no tradicionales, como la lectura animada con técnicas de cuentería, puede tener efectos positivos en cuanto al crecimiento personal y profesional de profesores en formación. Factores tales como estrategias para llevar a cabo la lectura animada de un cuento, implicaciones pedagógicas y factores que inhiben el desarrollo de la lectura animada haciendo uso de las técnicas de cuentería son temas que surgieron del análisis de la información recogida.

Palabras clave

cuentería; docentes en formación; educación básica

Resumo

Este estudo explora a experiência de um grupo de estagiários de uma universidade em Bogotá, Colômbia, sobre uma proposta focalizada na leitura animada através de técnicas de narrativa oral. Neste estudo exploratório, os instrumentos de recolecção de informação foram vídeos das aulas dos estagiários, diários de bordo e enquetes. Os resultados do estudo sugerem que utilizar metodologias que incluam treinamento em práticas não tradicionais, como a leitura animada com técnicas de narrativa oral, pode gerar efeitos positivos sobre o crescimento pessoal e profissional de professores em formação. Fatores tais como estratégias para levar a cabo a leitura animada de um conto, implicações pedagógicas e fatores que inibem o desenvolvimento da leitura animada utilizando as técnicas de narrativa oral são temas que surgiram da análise da informação coletada.

Palavras chave

narrativa oral; professores em formação; educação básica

Introduction

In 2006, the Colombian government passed new educational policies related to bilingualism aimed at producing proficient English speakers by 2019. The reality is that, as of 2016, that aim has not yet been reached, although a variety of pedagogical projects have been implemented by the Ministry of Education. For instance, for primary schools, there have been two proposals, "Bunny Bonita" and "My abc English Kit," both of which are intended to help teachers in general—not just language teachers—to deliver English classes. In our view, neither proposal is strong enough to explore children's potential to learn a language in primary school. Additionally, the lack of language teachers is evident: As one teacher in Soacha[4] mentioned, "[...] little kids are capable of great things, and I do not know English [...] I know that whatever I teach them, they are going to learn it, and if you push me to teach them something in English, I will do it wrong, and they will learn it wrong!"[5].

On the other hand, high school students have had the advantage of language teachers who have been trained to improve their language and methodological skills to offer better classes. Further, some other projects have been implemented, such as "English, please!", which is a series of four books intended to help students in the 9th to 11th grades reach a B1 level based on the Common European Framework. Recently, a new programme called "Colombia very well" has been implemented with the aim of providing native speakers to help teachers and high school students to reach the bilingual goal by 2025.

Additionally, there is a new English curriculum designed by experts. The Ministry of Education intended it to be a plan for high school students, specifically those in the 6th to 11th grades, in which language teachers are presented with different ideas about how to prepare and organise their classes in

English. We believe the plan is a thoughtful improvement, but still insufficient.

All in all, despite the efforts of the Ministry of Education, it seems that much more needs to be done. This is especially true for primary schools, because all the language teachers currently work in high schools. In that sense, the Ministry of Education's efforts seem to have been meaningless because they do not address primary school, squandering the children's potential to learn a language, as mentioned above.

With this background in mind, we began to consider how we could facilitate the development of teachers capable of facing the Colombian reality in terms of bilingualism in our work with students who will be language teachers. Therefore, we started by conducting a needs analysis in our classes with pre-service teachers using questionnaires and observations. Surprisingly, we found that efforts to innovate the EFL classes were worthless because, during their careers, teachers tend to use the strategies their own teachers used when they were learning (Richards & Lockhart, 1995) rather than the new approaches they have discussed in different classes.

We had access to English classes in some public schools in Bogotá and Soacha, Colombia because of our participation in two different projects. One project implemented by the Secretary of Education of Bogotá was called "Acompañamiento para la implementación de la Media Especializada en Lenguas en 8 Colegios Distritales" (2009); the purpose of this project was to help teachers in eight public schools in Bogotá organise an alternative curriculum to help students in the 10th and 11th grades in an intensive study of English in order to reach a B1 level based on the Common European Framework. The other project in which we had the possibility to participate as researchers was "Prueba piloto para el fortalecimiento y mejoramiento de una segunda lengua de los docentes de le IE Ciudadela Sucre" (2013–2014), which was implemented by the Department of Education in Soacha; the purpose of this project was to help 209 English language teachers reach the highest level in their command

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4 Project held by the Secretary of Education of Soacha (2013–2014) "Prueba Piloto para el Fortalecimiento y Mejoramiento de una segunda lengua de los docentes de la ie Ciudadela Sucre".

5 Translated from Spanish by the researchers (October, 2014).

of the language and to share various methodologies to enable them to fulfil their task in the optimal way. In total, we were able to have contact with 220 language teachers who taught English as a foreign language in public schools.

From the data gathered as part of the needs analysis, the most important conclusion was that the pre-service and in-service teachers we observed were focused on structuralism and grammar translation. This was the case primarily because their classes were so large that it was impossible for them to do anything else. In some other cases, it was evident that the teachers were not confident that their language level was sufficient to deliver a class in English; consequently, there was no communication in the target language. Under these conditions, the discovery that Colombia is far from reaching the objective proposed by the government in terms of bilingualism is not surprising.

Based on all these considerations, we designed this study, which is aimed at analysing reading aloud and storytelling from a perspective in which storytelling is not examined regarding its benefit for children, as there is no doubt about its positive impact, but rather, for the language teachers, as a reflective means by which they can listen to themselves, develop an awareness of their own difficulties, and establish a plan to overcome them. Based on the data collected during the study, we can conclude that constant reflection on and inclusion of different methodological tools can enhance and lead to changes in the field of EFL/ESL language teaching.

Theoretical Considerations

Storytelling is a practice that has increased in terms of popularity in language classes over the last two decades. Different authors have recognised its value for language teaching and, consequently, its numerous benefits for English learners, including grammar contextualisation, improvement of listening skills, literary and cultural heritage, effective development of tasks, affective filter lowering, self-confidence, intragroup trust, and freedom to learn, among others (Cooper, 1993; Ellis & Brewster, 2014; Hines, 1995; Morgan & Rinvolucri, 1983;

Pedersen, 1995; Safdarian & Ghyasi, 2013; Soleimani & Khandan, 2013; Vacca & Vacca, 1989). However, it is worth noting that most of the literature on the use of storytelling in the EFL classroom is devoted to its importance to the process of acquiring or learning a language, as mentioned above. There has been little focus on the benefits it can provide for pre-service language teachers in their professional and pedagogical growth.

Storytelling as a Tool for Enhancing the Linguistic Competence of Teachers

There are few articles in which the performance of a storytelling session is used as a tool to develop and boost linguistic skills. Nevertheless, considering the linguistic benefits it can provide for learners, if it is true that teachers never stop learning, it can be assumed that those benefits are applicable to educators.

Consequently, through storytelling, teachers are challenged to utilise the natural rhythms and patterns of language. This, in turn, enables them to refine and enhance their segmental and supra-segmental skills, because they are able to embellish the story through a wide array of intonation patterns, pitches, and voices (Craig, 1996; Malo & Bullard, 2000). These last three aspects can be considered as linguistic delivery techniques (Cohen, 1996).

On the other hand, when teachers are accustomed to telling stories, they can master improvisational skills—that is, in this context, their capacity for impromptu speech and narration, without memorising the content and without previous preparation (Craig, 1996; Isbell, 1979). Furthermore, teachers who are accustomed to improvising while telling a story are very likely to become more fluent, because they must speak on the spot and under pressure. We consider that being fluent in oral terms implies the ability to express ideas in a clear and accurate fashion during speech. Therefore, a speaker should be able to employ both segmental skills (the correct pronunciation of individual sounds and words) and supra-segmental skills (stress, rhythm, and intonation) (Skandera & Burleigh, 2005). Such skills, together with the proper pace and speed, enable

teachers to engage in understandable speech for those who listen to their stories and, in the end, they are what makes the teachers fluent.

Oral improvisational skills are ignited during the narration of a story because the tellers (the teachers) sharpen their observational skills and, depending on the attitudes and reactions (verbal and non-verbal signals) they see in their students, they will adjust and modify the story along the way (Craig, 1996).

One last benefit of storytelling for teachers, which some might argue is emotional and psychological, rather than linguistic, is the premise that telling a story to a group that Malo and Bullard (2000) described as "an appreciative audience" (p. 8) fosters positive self-esteem. Based on the Affective Filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1995), it is well known that if individuals' affective filters are lowered, they

will be more prone to learn and to make linguistic progress. Therefore, if storytellers see a positive, welcoming and inviting reaction and attitude in their audience, they will feel more self-confident. Consequently, their linguistic skills will be enhanced more readily than if they receive a negative evaluation from the audience.

Through storytelling sessions, teachers can assess whether they have been able to make the proper social impression on their students, and if they succeed in doing so by maintaining the pragmatic concepts of image and face—their pragmatic competence—, they will be more adventurous and communicate more effectively in their future endeavours related to speaking in public or addressing a group in a foreign language (Craig, 1996).

To summarise this section, the different aspects discussed are presented graphically in Figure 1.
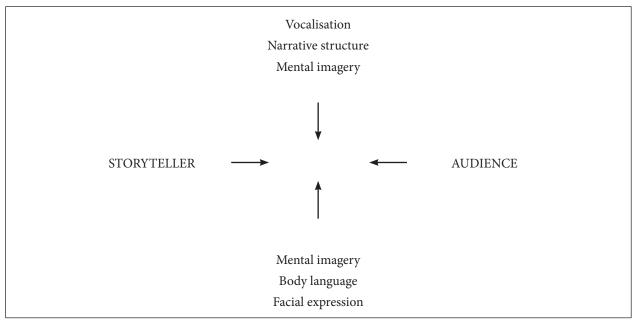
Figure 1. Storytelling

Vocalisation
Narrative structure
Mental imagery

STORYTELLER ⟶ ⟵ AUDIENCE

Mental imagery
Body language
Facial expression

Source: Adapted from Craig, 1996

Storytelling as a Pedagogical and Professional Growth Triggering Tool

Storytelling, as a pedagogical tool, can help teachers to reorganise and arrange class content;

through storytelling, a teacher can exemplify or illustrate a concept that needs further explanation (Cooper, Orban, Henry & Townsend, 1983); hence, language teachers have various opportunities to

arrange content to make it attractive and easy to share with their students. The possibilities are broader because storytelling permits the practice of listening and speaking skills while being cognisant that, as presented in Figure 1, it is a communicative cycle in which the teacher shares a story and reads the students' reactions (facial expressions and body language) in order to adjust as needed to recapture the audience's attention.

In addition, storytelling offers teachers the possibility to enhance their own literacy experience and to learn from the act of storytelling in terms of culture (Malo & Bullard, 2000). Through storytelling, teachers can become more linked to their students' preferences and their daily lives, and they can connect what they hear to what they see in their surrounding reality. These elements combined can make the language class more vivid for both students and teachers, because the stories chosen will be related to their reality and experiences.

Another pedagogical advantage of storytelling is the ability of teachers to foster predictive and imaginative skills in young children through comments and questions (Ellis & Brewster, 2014). These predictive and imaginative skills have paramount pedagogical value: through them, teachers find it easier to gain rapport with their students and to engage them in listening and paying attention by having them predict what will occur next, or what will happen at the end, or by having them decide which characters to choose or when they should disappear from the story (Ellis & Brewster, 1991). The importance of rapport lies in the fact that it is the interpersonal ability that allows to establish strong relationships based on trust (Faranda & Clarke, 2004).

Finally, storytelling can be conceived as a medium which allows students' attention to be captured (Raines & Isbell, 1994). This process of engaging the children's attention should be personal; although the teacher shares a story with the whole group, every student feels the story is meant only for him/her. Consequently, the storytelling session becomes a customised act, even when the teacher is not aware of it.

Methodology

This was an exploratory-descriptive study developed with five practitioners (aged 20–25). The participants were undergraduate students in the last year of their study programme at a public university in Bogotá, Colombia. The data collection instruments included video recordings from workshops and classes delivered by practitioners, reflective logs, field notes, and surveys.

There were two phases, the first of which lasted one month. During this period, five workshops were held in which the instructors shared principles regarding how to read a story using storytelling techniques. In this phase, the pre-service teachers selected the stories they were going to use in their classes. The stories were mainly common folktales that were familiar to primary school students (in Spanish), including *Goldilocks and the Three Bears, The Three Pigs,* and *The Turnip*, among others.

The second phase also lasted one month. It was devoted to the application of the different ideas about storytelling that had been discussed in the workshops conducted in phase one, such as pronunciation, intonation, rapport, and body language, among other things. During the process, there were two moments in which the pre-service teachers were expected to reflect about their advances. The first occurred following the workshops (during the first phase), in which the reflection was focused mainly on what the practitioners had learnt. The second moment of reflection (during the second phase) was after the implementation with their students, when the pre-service teachers were asked to think about how they had applied the information delivered in the workshops (first phase) and how they felt (second phase). Afterwards, there were weekly meetings (first and second phase) in which the pre-service teachers had the opportunity to share their insights about their outcomes and to receive feedback from their partners and the researchers.

The procedures for the data analysis were based on the principles of the grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and included constant-comparison, questioning, mapping and outlining, and

coding. Triangulation of the data sources ensured the validity and reliability of the study.

Analysis and Discussion

Factors to foster effective storytelling

Two aspects were perceived as keystones in the process of reading aloud combined with storytelling techniques. The first deals with the importance of being proficient in the language used to read/tell a story. In that sense, the pre-service teachers had trouble with the supra-segmental aspects of language, such as accent, pitch, tone and intonation (Skandera & Burleigh, 2005). This issue was evident during the second workshop, in which the participants were reluctant to change their voices: "We are not use to doing such things! I sound ridiculous changing my voice!" (Excerpt S3, Transcription 2 Phase 1. Storytelling and Rhythm).

However, when they applied the different techniques with their students, they observed that without pitch, tone and intonation, it would not have been possible to have a good reading/storytelling session, and therefore, the children would not have comprehended the gist and details of the story: "[...] at the end, the girls were able to recognise the different characters in the story, but it was possible due to fact that I changed my voice every time the character changed." (Excerpt S1, Field Note 4 Phase 2. The Three Little Pigs and Descriptions).

Some observations of the pre-service teachers revealed that they did not receive the appropriate training during their major; although they were exposed to English classes centred around the student and the communicative conception, they felt they had received very structural language education in which many important aspects were left out.

The second keystone related to the supra-segmental linguistic aspects of language involves the literary elements presented in the picture books selected by the pre-service teachers. They analysed the importance of rhythm when reading/telling a story. Rhythm is another important aspect that affects the performance of the storyteller in making the story comprehensible for the audience. "The rhythm of a language is the recurrence of prominent elements of speech at what are perceived to be regular intervals of time. Depending on the particular language, the prominent elements are usually either stress or syllables, but they can also be high pitches" (Skandera & Burleigh, 2005, p. 87). It took time for the pre-service teachers to assimilate the idea of stressed rhythm, rather than syllabic rhythm, because Spanish speakers tend to read following syllables instead of stressed lines: "I cannot do it! It is impossible to read all those sentences using the same time; this one has more words, and they are longer!" (Excerpt S3, Transcription 4 Phase 1. Sentence Rhythm).

> In this second workshop, I learnt several things that I have not taken into account when using storytelling in the classes. One of them is that the use of voices is very important when reading because the stress and the intonation may imply a meaning when it is heard. Not only it is reading some phonemes, but giving it more meaning by the way it is said. (Excerpt S2, Reflective Log 2 Phase 1. Sentence Rhythm).

Additionally, another challenge emerged for the practitioners because they felt obliged to enhance their own pronunciation and intonation in order to render a melody and musicality when they were reading/telling a story (Craig, 1996; Malo & Bullard, 2000). From this standpoint, storytelling not only benefited the children who were told the stories, but also the pre-service teachers themselves, who discovered that it was necessary to work harder to be proficient in the English language to read/tell the stories. Accordingly, the whole process helped the pre-service teachers to grow professionally because they started to apply different strategies to improve their speaking skills.

Pedagogical implications

This section is dominated by a different view on what it means to be an English teacher. The practitioners considered, through their constant reflections, that a teacher is not only someone who teaches, but also someone who can tell stories. In doing this, they should incorporate more realia, roleplaying, context,

and predicting strategies in their classes. To an equal extent, in their comments, they advocated for the use of other methods to accompany the storytelling session. The one that most significantly triggered the students' comprehension of the stories was, not surprisingly, the Total Physical Response method:

> Today, we are going to play hide and seek. So, I brought some objects we are going to find in the story. I am going to name one object, and you are going to touch it, ok? You have to guess. Ready? Ok. There is a tree (most of the students ran to touch the huge paper tree the teacher had brought to play hide and seek). Excellent! Yes, this is a tree. Ok, now, where is the radio? Can you find the radio? (There was a very large radio on the teacher's desk). The students who were in the front ran to touch the radio [...]. (Excerpt S4, Transcript 4 Phase 2. Hide and Seek and prepositions of place).

Furthermore, the pre-service teachers regarded themselves as thorough and holistic human beings, because being knowledgeable about the subject matter (English) was not enough. Rather, they also had knowledge about their own bodies and body movements, which rendered meaning to what they were reading. Further, they could be models for their students, linguistically speaking, and could be entertainers and nurturers in leading the games actively: "Ok, did you like the story? (yes) Now, do you want to play hide and seek? (yes). Ok, I am going to count and you hide. One, two, three… ready or not here I go! [...]." (Excerpt S4, Transcript 4 Phase 2. Hide and Seek and prepositions of place).

In that sense, both the teachers and the students should be seen as individuals who signify a great deal through their bodies and who share equally dynamic roles. Thus, the text itself is relegated to a second position and non-verbal communication with the face and with the body in general, materialise the meaning that is embraced by reading aloud (Craig, 1996).

On the other hand, the practitioners' views about the students are important, because the students were regarded as the story learners and, in the long run, they could potentially become storytellers themselves. Thus, the positions that the teachers occupied in the storytelling process with regards to their students were redefined, because they were called on to organise the storytelling activities and to double check the likely cognitive load, as well as the cross-curricular connections that might emerge among the books they chose. Moreover, the teachers were ultimately the ones who had all the knowledge to provide feedback to their students: "It has contributed a lot to my professional development since it showed me new forms of teaching. It opened my scope of teaching approaches and methodologies, and helped me understand what children like or do not like." (Excerpt S3, Final survey Phase 2. Reflection on the Whole Process).

Factors inhibiting storytelling

After listening to the pre-service teachers' reflections during the two months of the study, the researchers could infer that some factors inhibiting storytelling were related to the professors' beliefs about EFL training. The professors were not providing the practitioners with the tools to tackle the different situations that pre-service teachers face in real classrooms, with real children and real problems (Kalmbach & Carr, 2010); instead, the pre-service teachers were being trained to make themselves understood in English. This is insufficient for teachers who will face a group of 40 children who do not understand the point of learning English, believing they will not use it (Excerpt S4 Field Note 1).

Thus, the lack of training is a fundamental issue in using storytelling techniques. This is because proficient oral skills are required to read to and with children (Craig, 1996; Malo & Bullard, 2000) in a way that they can understand, which will enable them to imitate the model provided to them by their teacher. The practitioners struggled to produce the right supra-segmental factors, both because they had not been challenged in this area previously and because storytelling techniques were a novelty for them.

I don't know what you think, guys, but I believe that there were many things we could have learnt in phonetics, and of course, in the regular English classes. We could have contact with this marvelous material, but instead, we were filling in the blanks and repeating things without sense. Much more could have been done. (Excerpt S3, Final meeting. Final Reflections).

The pre-service teachers involved in the study went on to say that this weakness does not lie solely in the linguistic field; they also expressed their concern regarding the pedagogy, methodology and didactics. According to them, teaching children and the different methodologies for doing it were not addressed in their classes. They claimed that they had read different theories about methods and approaches for teaching English, but training sessions and practicalities such as those provided in the storytelling workshops were not provided. They even proposed that language students should receive instruction in theatre and acting to help them become aware of their faces and bodies, and the use of space:

I believe that we could have some training on these aspects as a methodology, for example, but we just read about the different approaches. We never had the opportunity to go beyond that [...] we had microteaching with our partners in class, but it is never the same as working with our partners and working with kids. (Excerpt S4, Final meeting. Final Reflections).

On the other hand, some other factors inhibiting storytelling were related to the Colombian educational policies. For example, the state educational programme on coverage pushes in-service teachers to work with large groups (30–40 students). The grades in which the pre-service teachers worked during the implementation of their projects had groups of forty children. This made it very difficult for them to engage and maintain the children's attention for longer periods:

There is a problem, I have noticed that those students who are in front of me pay more attention and are more engaged in the lesson than the ones

in the back. They seemed to be distracted, so I walk around the classroom to maintain everybody's attention, but it really does not work. I have tried arranging them in a horseshoe, in circle, in small groups, but each strategy seemed to be more distractive than the previous one. I guess the problem I have is that there are 40. (Excerpt S3, Transcription 3. Workshop on Rapport).

The practitioners' continuing challenge was to provide all the students an active role, so that progressively, they could help the teacher to read and tell the story. The teachers acknowledged the difficulties they encountered in maintaining the attention level and in classroom management. This was particularly true at the beginning of the research, because it was challenging for them to maintain all the students' pace of learning; further, some students eventually lost their ability to focus:

Not all students were involved in the class, maybe because of the organisation of the class. They must be immersed using different resources that may call their attention and have them participate more. Also, the organisation of the class can be proposed in a different way, so the students can participate actively. (Excerpt S2, Reflective Log 3 Phase 2. Reflecting on my Lesson Plans).

Another critical aspect the practitioners tackled in their reflections was the fact that the students were not accustomed to reading, and even less, to being read to, which is a common trend in Colombian homes and schools. Typically, the students read because they must meet certain requirements in terms of assessment, yet few of them do it for pleasure or for fun. Although this research is considered as an exploratory and sensitising stage, it must be openly affirmed that in the researchers' recordings of the final observations, most of the students, with few exceptions, were completely engaged, although they were being exposed to English:

What surprised me the most was the fact that the girls were so into the project that as soon as we finished the class, they always asked, "What is the book for next class?" and of course, they were speaking in English; so, this project was

not only about teaching English, but it was also about encouraging them to enjoy reading, which, I guess, was accomplished. (Excerpt S1, Final Survey Phase 2. Reflecting on the Whole Process).

As expressed in the introduction to this article, one of the major issues related to the teaching of English in primary schools is the insufficient practice of L2 Colombian students. This, as the four practitioners reinforced, is linked to the fact that there are few hours of instruction in English, and in most of the cases, the teachers who lead the teaching of English are not specialists in the area. Moreover, the methodology they use does not enhance the acquisition of the foreign language; rather, English class becomes a translation course or a structural one. The practitioners expressed that it would be possible to gradually create an acquisition context for English if the methodologies were followed by teachers who identify with what it means to be a child: methodologies through which the students can play and explore with language, and use it in different contexts. They suggested that a methodology like the one used in our research is well-suited to serve this purpose, because both the teacher and the students use the language in a more natural and contextualised way: "Storytelling let me reflect about me as a teacher and the methodologies I used in my classes; also, it made me reflect about my students, their needs, interests and likes, and how important they are in my classes, and to develop a meaningful learning environment." (Excerpt S2, Final Survey Phase 2. Reflecting on the Whole Process).

Conclusions

After analysing the collected data, we can present the model that emerged from the study of this group of pre-service teachers. The teachers became storytellers who initiated a communicative cycle with their students by presenting a story. To present the story, five aspects were taken into consideration to start the process.

1. The EFL storytellers do not forget to take their students into consideration when selecting the story to be shared in each section, because the story becomes the excuse to encourage them to be part of the story as well.

2. The EFL storytellers must be able to pronounce the words presented in the reading, and thus, practice beforehand is key.

3. The EFL storytellers are able to use the appropriate pitch, tone and rhythm to make the story comprehensible and memorable.

4. The EFL storytellers do not forget to use their bodies and faces to help the children grasp the meaning of the story.

5. The EFL storytellers do not forget to bring the story to life, so that translation is not necessary for comprehension.

After accomplishing the five aspects presented above, EFL storytellers must be aware of their audience. This is necessary because, while the story is being presented, the children are struggling to comprehend all the input they are receiving through all their senses. Therefore, the students use facial expressions and body language to communicate back to the teacher; these elements are very important for maintaining rapport until the teacher finishes telling the story. At that point, the storytelling communicative cycle is completed, and the task is accomplished. What follows depends on the creativity of each of the individual teachers. This entire process is illustrated in Figure 2.
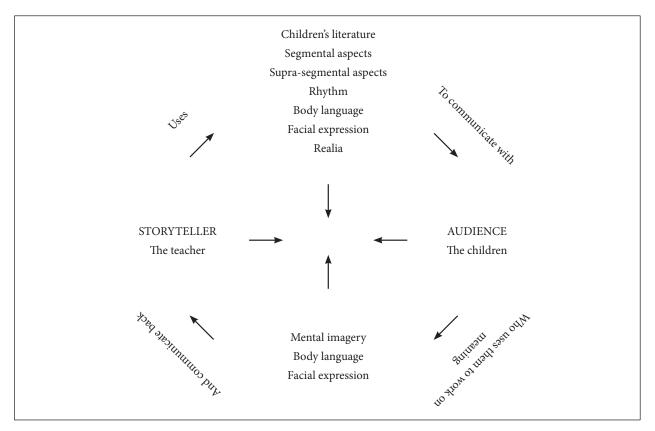
Children's literature
Segmental aspects
Supra-segmental aspects
Rhythm
Body language
Facial expression
Realia

Uses

To communicate with

STORYTELLER
The teacher

AUDIENCE
The children

And communicate back

Mental imagery
Body language
Facial expression

Who uses them to work on
meaning

Figure 2. Storytelling as a communicative cycle

Source: Adapted from Craig (1996)

We are convinced that all universities that offer language teaching programmes should establish, as a priority in their agendas and curricula, the inclusion of projects such the one in this study, in which practitioners are provided the professional and academic opportunity not only to improve their pedagogical practicum, but also their linguistic and paralinguistic skills. The research demonstrated that despite the practitioners' strong attitudes, drive and desire to pedagogically apply the techniques they were learning in the workshops, their linguistic background in English, including supra-segmental and pragmatic factors, sometimes caused them to feel hesitant and somewhat frustrated.

We strongly urge both new and experienced language teachers who read this article to rethink their views about the teaching of children and to direct their attention to storytelling, including the benefits teachers themselves might receive, both linguistically and professionally.

We invite both practitioners and experienced teachers who enjoy storytelling to lead further investigation regarding this subject matter and its connection to aspects that we did not explore in depth or at all, such as storytelling and culture, and storytelling and literature.

As a long-term and much more ambitious goal, we expect this exploratory-descriptive study to be enhanced and sponsored by local educational authorities so that we can officially offer this proposal in several schools in Bogotá. Consequently, storytelling sessions for fun and pleasure will become customary and mandatory in those schools, either at the beginning or the end of the school day.

As a midterm goal, we expect the practitioners who participated in this research to assist us in the creation and consolidation in principle of a storytelling network in English, so that more practitioners and professors will express their views, constant reflections and insights about how to enhance and maximise the

use of storytelling in different educational, academic and professional scenarios.

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