

Teaching English through Stories: A Meaningful and Fun Way for Children to Learn the Language

La enseñanza del inglés a través de historias: una forma divertida y significativa para que los niños aprendan el idioma

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This article presents the results of a study on utilizing stories for teaching English as a foreign language to children in first, second and third grades. It was carried out in a Colombian public elementary school in Bucaramanga, Colombia. The proposal was initiated by a group of student-teachers at Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia, Seccional Bucaramanga. During the research process the student-teachers were required to plan the course syllabus, create their own stories according to the children's interests and likes, plan the lessons, and collect and analyze data. Although the student-teachers worked in different grade levels, the results of the study present similarities such as the children's motivation when the stories were told or read, increased participation in the different activities, comprehension of the stories, and acquisition of the new vocabulary.

Key words: Storytelling, story, reading, teaching, children

Este artículo presenta los resultados de un estudio sobre el uso de historias para la enseñanza del inglés a niños en los grados primero, segundo y tercero. El estudio se llevó a cabo en una escuela pública de Bucaramanga, Colombia. La propuesta fue iniciada por un grupo de docentes en formación de la Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia, seccional Bucaramanga. Durante el proceso de investigación los docentes elaboraron e implementaron una propuesta de intervención, y además recolectaron y analizaron datos. Aunque los docentes trabajaron en diferentes grados, los resultados del estudio presentaron similitudes, tales como gran motivación de los niños al escuchar o leer las historias, alta participación en las diferentes actividades, comprensión de las historias y adquisición de vocabulario.

Palabras clave: narración de historias, lectura de historia, enseñanza a niños

Introduction

The present study was carried out in order to implement children's stories for teaching English to young learners in a public elementary school. The study was part of the research project of a group of student teachers who will become elementary school teachers with a specialization in teaching English to young children. During the research process the student teachers became very interested

in making the English learning process fun, enjoyable and meaningful for children. They found stories to be a great tool for teaching English in context and developing children's cognitive and language skills. Teaching the language through stories allowed them to use varied strategies from different language methods. This combination had a great impact on learners because learning became fun, motivating, rememberable and lasting.

Before starting the process, the student teachers became familiar with the context through direct observations, surveys and interviews. Once they knew the school, the curriculum and the School's English program, as well as the classes they were going to work with, they began the research process. First they collected data in order to learn the context; then, they created and implemented a teaching proposal. During the implementation of the proposal, the student teachers collected and analyzed data which helped them improve their teaching practice. On the next pages there will be a description of some theoretical bases taken into consideration by the student teachers before starting the project, the procedure of the project, the results and the conclusions they came up with after finishing the research project.

The problem

Teaching English in public elementary schools in our country is a job that has been haphazard. English in these schools can be taught by people with no English language proficiency, not to mention any language teaching background. This situation is affecting the quality of the English programs in the schools and the approach to students' learning of that foreign language.

In order to make this situation a little better for a specific public school and its community, a group of student teachers at Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia decided to implement a pedagogical proposal for teaching English in the first, second and third grades. Although the fundamental purpose of the proposal was focused on teaching English in a fun and meaningful way for the children, it also included the donation to the school of all the teaching materials used in the teaching proposal and a workshop for the teachers in charge of teaching English in those grades. The proposal was called *Implementation of story reading and storytelling as a teaching tool for teaching English to young learners*.

The main objective of the project was to use story reading and storytelling for teaching English to young learners in a fun and meaningful way. The specific objectives were as follows: to create stories based on students' interests and likes, to teach the language in context around stories, and to make foreign language learning a fun and lifelong process for the young learners.

Theoretical Foundations

Children are considered natural language learners; according to second language acquisition theory, they can learn faster and with much less difficulty than adults, but they should be exposed to natural learning environments, to real communication situations and to special teaching practices that make learning a meaningful, enjoyable and lifelong process.

Teaching should be focused on children and on the development of their communicative skills that will enable them to communicate meanings and messages in real social contexts. Some outstanding methods such as Total Physical Response (TPR) and Natural Approach help children to learn the language in such a way.

Taking into consideration that language was going to be taught to three groups of young learners at the beginner level, the methods mentioned above were chosen as the basic ones in this project. The Natural Approach is based on the following five hypotheses: the input hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the acquisition - learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). For this study the input hypothesis took great importance since at the beginner levels, students develop receptive skills before starting to produce the language.

The quantity and quality of the input children receive during their first learning stage is really important because it helps them to lay the foundation for their future learning. This is the reason teachers should give them a lot of qualitative input, which means that children should be surrounded by lots of listening and reading materials that will allow them to get familiar with the new language. This input should be comprehensible, natural and meaningful, and should be introduced little by little. A teacher should help children to understand the information they are exposed to, and also include new elements that permit children to advance in their learning process.

Two main sources from which students receive input are listening and reading. Storytelling and story reading become two powerful strategies in the early stages of language development because they provide learners with a lot of interesting and enriching input.

Storytelling

The use of storytelling in the L2 classroom creates a good learning environment and provides meaningful and comprehensible input. Through stories, the language acquisition device is activated and it is easy for children to induce the language elements from the data provided by the stories (Krashen, 1981).

Storytelling has special pedagogical values for the foreign language classroom, as Rossiter (2002, p. 1) points out below:

Stories are effective as educational tools because they are believable, rememberable, and entertaining. The believability stems from the fact that stories deal with human-like experience that we tend to perceive as an authentic and credible source of knowledge. Stories make information more rememberable because they involve us in actions of the characters. In so doing, stories invite active meaning making.

Language learners can benefit from storytelling because stories help them to develop the ability to understand spoken language and engage in thinking skills. In connection to this, Castro (2002, p. 52) reports on a study carried out in Colombia and stresses that "Listening to stories develops children's listening and concentration skills and their ability to receive and understand information expressed in words. Besides, with the stories children develop learning strategies such as listening for general meaning, predicting, guessing meaning and hypothesizing".

Through the stories, the learners become aware of cultural values different from theirs, sharpen their memory and develop the ability to predict and infer. Telling stories provides the opportunities for students to speak the foreign language creatively, integrate information and knowledge they learn from other sources, and become more confident in the ability to express themselves spontaneously.

According to Curtain & Dahlberg (2004), storytelling can provide experience with the interpretive mode for children, even at very early stages of language acquisition, when the stories meet the following criteria: the story is highly predictable or familiar to the children from their native culture, with a large proportion of previously learned vocabulary. In early stages it is especially helpful to choose stories that include vocabulary representing the home and the school environments of the children.

The story is repetitive, making use of formulas and patterns that occur regularly and predictably. In the best stories chosen, these repeated elements provide language that children can use later for their own expressive purpose. Cameron (2001, p. 163) defines this repetitive pattern in a story as parallelism. "The pattern of predictability + surprise, or repetition + change is often reflected in patterns of repetition of the language. This repeated pattern, or parallelism, creates a way into the story for the active listener, as well as providing a natural support for language learning." The stories are memorable, as the language is repeated, and this encourages students to participate. This recycling of patterns incites students to predict what is coming next in the story and, at the same time, exercises their imagination. In addition, Lipton (1998, p. 129) echoes the idea of active participation on the part of the students by saying that the ideal story "should have a short refrain that is repeated periodically throughout the story, so that after a while the children naturally chime in and repeat the refrain without being asked".

When stories meet these criteria it is much easier for students to make meaning clear not only because the stories are related to their real life environment but also because the use of pantomime and body language makes the story more comprehensible for the students. On the other hand, stories contain patterns that help students to get familiar with and internalize the new language.

Story Reading

Reading stories aloud allows children to make connections between oral language and the print that represent that oral language. While reading aloud, the teacher should point to the word or line to emphasize those connections. The purpose of reading stories is to give students oral language input and a bridge to literacy in the new language. For reading stories in the early language stages, the teacher should first do a lot of pre-reading work which prepares the learner to be able to understand the story. This pre-reading work is focused on building up vocabulary through different kinds of activities such as games, puzzles, matching activities, songs and other sorts of activities that help students to become familiar with the new language. After reading the story aloud, the learner can be involved in a variety of post-reading tasks and language activities which can make the story more comprehensible and move them from receptive skills (listening and reading) to productive skills (speaking and writing).

A very good tool for reading stories aloud is the use of big books. Curtain & Dahlberg (2004) describe what a big book is:

"A big book is an enlarged piece of commercial or student-made literature, intended to recreate the intimacy and good feelings of one-on-one "read-aloud" sessions

with an entire class. So they are large enough so that the entire class can see and share in the experience. Most big books have a predictable story line with strong rhythm, rhyme, repeated patterns, logical sequence and supportive illustrations."

When reading aloud, big books play an important role since they can be a good source for teacher and students to make connections between the pictures and the written text. The pictures in the big books help children a lot because they can associate pictures and words and arrive at a better understanding of the story. A story is more memorable if it can be related to a sequence of pictures.

Big books become a very engaging tool for reading aloud; they are made up of great illustrations that help students make sense of the story as well as make predictions. They include short texts with repeated patterns that allow students to internalize the new vocabulary and structures in an enjoyable and unconscious way.

Children like listening to stories over and over again; this repetition allows them to acquire certain language items and reinforce others unconsciously. Using stories allows teachers to introduce new vocabulary by exposing children to the language in different contexts, thereby enriching their thinking skills and introducing them to the productive skills. Also, as noted by Ellis & Brewster (2002), many stories have natural repetition of key vocabulary and structures that helps children remember details and learn to anticipate what is about to happen next in the story.

Repetitive stories are particularly easy for children to memorize. Repetition helps children learn the patterns and structure of a story and, eventually, word recognition. Repetition makes books predictable and helps develop vocabulary and sequencing. Repetitive patterns can be the schema for students' comprehension of the children's story and for being able to predict the action in the plot and the ending. The recurring phrases and events can aid their understanding and memory. In addition, the repetition featured in the text is a great way for children to improve their reading skills. It also gives them a strong base to develop the confidence to move on to more interesting and complex texts.

Research Methodology

This research can be classified as an action research project. According to Cohen & Manion, cited in Nunan (1990), action research can be utilized as a means of remedying problems diagnosed in specific situations, or improving in some way a given set of circumstances; as a means of in-service training, providing teachers with new skills and methods and heightening self-awareness. Also, it can be used as a means of injecting additional or innovative approaches to teaching and learning into a system which normally inhibits innovations and change. The purpose of the project was to implement a proposal with innovative language teaching methodologies in order to make the language learning process fun and meaningful for children. During this process the student teachers reflected on these new practices, analyzed what worked or did not work, and made changes based on the reflection.

The research project was carried out by eight student teachers at Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia who were divided into three groups. They started their research project a year before its actual implementation. During this time they became familiar with research techniques, syllabus design, and story teaching methodology. Once they became acquainted with the process and theoretical background, they went to the public elementary school to familiarize themselves

with the context and meet the children they were going to share this research and teaching experience with. After meeting the kids, the student teachers performed the needs analysis through direct observation, a survey and a diagnostic test. The test was designed in order to ascertain students' prior knowledge in the foreign language. It examined basic topics and had two parts: the first part consisted of vocabulary games planned for creating a relaxing environment and making students feel more confident. The second part consisted of a handout with different vocabulary activities selected according to the grade.

Once the student teachers analyzed the results of the needs analysis, they started to design the course syllabus and create the stories, thus designing the proposal. As mentioned before, the proposal was made taking into consideration children's interests and likes. The stories were created around characters selected by the children such as cartoon and fairy tale characters. After creating the stories, the student teachers designed a syllabus around those stories and then started the planning stage. During this stage the teachers chose strategies from different teaching methods such as TPR, Natural Approach, CLT and Whole Language.

The purpose of the proposal was to teach the language in a meaningful, funny and interesting way for children. In order to reach this goal, the student teachers planned classes around the stories which they wrote and illustrated as big books. For reading each story, the student teachers followed the steps of pre-reading, while reading, and post reading. During the pre-reading stage they created a good environment to introduce the story by decorating the room with big posters about the story. Then they did some vocabulary work through games, songs, poems and matching activities. After that they started reading the story using body language and pictures in order to help students understand better. Also during reading, the students activated their prior knowledge by making connections between the story and their life, making predictions about what could happen next, and answering questions about the story. Through predicting and questioning, the student teachers could check comprehension and determine which students started using the new language (speaking). After reading the story, follow up activities such as little books were utilized where guided writing was introduced.

During the implementation of the proposal, one of the student teachers was in charge of teaching the lesson while the other one(s) observed and took the field notes about the process. The next lesson they exchanged roles. After each lesson the student teachers met, analyzed the notes in the journal, discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson, the activities and strategies that worked or did not work, as well as the children's learning process. Based on this information the student teachers wrote a reflection about the lesson. If they found any difficulties during the lesson related with classroom management or teaching strategies, they needed to implement new strategies in order to improve and get better results next time by reading new bibliography or by following their supervisor's advice.

As a student teacher supervisor and project coordinator, my role consisted of guiding student teachers in the research process and also supervising the implementation of the teaching proposal in the school. At the beginning of the whole process, I helped student teachers locate and study resources. Then I guided them in the design and implementation of the teaching proposal. Once the student teachers started implementing their lessons, I was in charge of supervising their work and helping them in the reflection stage. My being involved in this process allowed me to get information and data to systematize the experience.

Findings

After implementing the pedagogical proposal, collecting data through direct observation and journals, and analyzing the data, the following two main categories arose:

Table 1. Categories drawn from the analysis of data

Teaching English through Stories	
What helps children learn in a fun and meaningful way	What allows children to comprehend and show comprehension
1. Stories created based on children's likes and interests	1. Reading process
2. Games and other kinds of motivating activities	a. Pre-reading stage
	b. While reading stage:
	- Connections
	- Predicting
	- Questioning
	c. Post- reading stage
	Oral and written activities

What helps children learn in a fun and meaningful way and what allows children to comprehend and demonstrate comprehension? Each category will be explained and supported by field notes taken from the student teachers' journals below.

What Helped Children Learn in a Fun and Meaningful Way

Stories Created Based on Children's Likes and Interests

The needs and interests analysis was very important because knowing students' preferences and interests helped to implement a pedagogical proposal that children found meaningful and interesting. Children got involved in the process. Learning was interesting and enjoyable for them because the teachers took into account their likes and interests, and also because they connected the new learning with their real lives.

(O) Then Juan Carlos asked the children¹:
(T1) Do you like the stories?
(O) And the children answered all together:
(Ss) Yes!
(O) And Juan Carlos took the story "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" out and when they saw it, a girl said: (Ss1) Hooray! They are going to read us a new story!

Most of the characters in the stories were familiar to the children. This helped them to understand the stories because they already had some prior knowledge about them in their first language. The children's schema let them have a better comprehension of the stories and allowed them to succeed when reading because they made connections from their previous experience with the text.

According to Curtain & Dahlberg (2004, p. 85), "Meaningful reading experiences in both first and second-language classrooms are dependent on students' oral language comprehension and also on the students' existing background knowledge

and experience. As students develop their listening comprehension, they begin to make connections between the oral language and the print that represents this oral language".

In order to help students have a better comprehension of a reading text, it is very helpful to prepare them by activating their schemata or prior knowledge, not only in the target language but also in their first language. Reading comprehension depends a lot on previous experiences and information already stored in the students' memory. On the other hand, there must be intensive work through different kinds of oral activities before reading to ensure students' understanding and comprehension of what they will read. Once the students are familiar with the new language through oral activities, they are ready to face the written text.

Games and Other Kinds of Motivating Activities for the Children

Games were also a great help because while children were playing, they felt relaxed and comfortable and learned easily; games allowed them to interact not only with the teachers but also with their classmates, which helped them to develop their communicative, social, and thinking skills. Curtain & Dalhberg (2004) state that games and gamelike activities are among the most natural means available to develop a context for communicating with children. Play is often described as a child's work, and games form a natural part of the child's most important work setting, the classroom, as shown in the following sample:

(T1) Let's play the wolf, let's make a circle and sing the song of the wolf. When I whistle, everybody comes and makes the circle again.

(T1) Let's play in the forest to see if the wolf is there. Is the wolf there? What is he doing?

(T1) I'm taking the shower...

(O) [...] Later they started to play Simon Says. The students had to mime the action Viviana said. This way, they started the activity.

Games were a very good tool for students to practice and reinforce the new vocabulary needed to achieve a better understanding of the stories. We could observe that the use of games in the classroom has many advantages: they are a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class; they are motivating and challenging; they provide language practice in the various skills- speaking, writing, listening and reading; they encourage students to interact and communicate; they create a meaningful context for language use; and, equally important, games involve the productive and receptive skills simultaneously.

The games used in class also helped the student teachers to create a relaxing environment. After presenting and practicing the new vocabulary, the children had the opportunity to use the language in a non-stressful way thanks to the games in which they could participate.

What Allowed Children to Comprehend and Demonstrate Comprehension

During the implementation of the proposal, the student teachers followed three stages for reading the stories: a pre-reading stage, a while-reading stage and a post-reading stage. These stages allowed student teachers to prepare children for reading the story and checking comprehension.

Pre-Reading Stage

The student-teachers arranged the classroom for story reading which allowed more interaction not only with the teacher but also with the text. Before reading the stories, the children received interesting and comprehensible input through teacher's talk, games, reading and listening activities which helped them to become familiar with the new language. During this time, the children did a lot of vocabulary and syntactic practice through a variety of activities which prepared them for the approach of the stories. As can be seen in the following excerpt, once children identified the new words, the student-teacher started reading the story.

(O) Amparo continued reading and asking questions while she was reading the story.

(T1) What part of the house is it?

(Ss1) Living room, it is a dining room.

(O) Children answered the questions depending on the part of the house she pointed out.

In connection to new language we might find in a story, Cameron (2001, p. 169) states:

A story can include some new language, but not so much that the story becomes incomprehensible. The number of new words that listeners can cope with within one story is not clear cut; it will depend on how well the pictures and discourse organization support the meaning of the words, how central the new words are to the plot, and the overall total of new words, which should not be too high. In preparing to use a story, new words and phrases that are crucial to understanding the story should be pre-taught, and support offered by pictures and context for the meaning of other new language should be checked to ensure it is adequate. If necessary, further support can be provided.

Bearing this in mind and in order to facilitate reading comprehension, the student teachers selected certain words that were essential for the understanding of the story and pre-taught them through different activities. This step was very important as it allowed the children to understand better a given part of the story and get involved in the reading process. Student teachers worked on helping students to understand the meaning utilizing a variety of activities such as visuals, puzzles and games. This made the reading process proceed smoothly for the children, allowing for involvement, participation and a more meaningful reading experience.

While-Reading Stage

In this stage the student teachers introduced and read the stories. While reading them the student teachers focused on the following three main strategies: *the connection between illustrations and written text, predictions, and questions*. First, the student teachers introduced the text, making comments about the story and asking students about it in order to assess their prior knowledge. Then they started reading the text. While reading they pointed to the words and showed the pictures to make connections between the printed text and the illustrations. All the stories were written and illustrated in big books. The student teachers considered big books a powerful tool to help children understand because they allowed them to read the text of the story as well as easily see the pictures. This connection helped children understand the story better, as can be read in the following excerpt:

(O) At the end of the matching activity Viviana asked:

(T1) Do you like stories?

(Ss) Yesssss!

(O) Immediately, Viviana pulled out a big book called *The pig who was a hog* and showed it to them.

In regards to this practice, Cameron (2001, p. 168) states that "The role of the pictures in combination with the text to form the story as a whole should be considered. If the pictures are indispensable, as is often the case, then somehow there will need to be enough copies or they will need to be made big enough for everyone to see". In the stories, pictures had a central role to play. They were a stimulus for forming hypotheses, predicting, sequencing and exercising memory. In the stories used for the project the pictures were closely related to the text, sometimes even structuring the text. This supported the children's understanding and guided them to the key points of the texts. Also, the pictures were a useful tool for the design of activities, especially oral or written ones.

A second strategy used in the project -mainly for checking comprehension while reading- was *predicting*. It involves thinking ahead while reading and anticipating information and events in the text. This strategy engages students and connects them to the text by asking them what they think might occur in the story. Making predictions activated children's prior knowledge about the text by helping them make connections between new information and what they already knew. By making predictions about the text before, during, and after reading, children used what they already knew as well as what they supposed might happen to make connections to the text. Through the predictions children made during and after reading the stories, the student teacher could verify children's comprehension of the stories.

Owocki (2003, p. 14) considered that in order to predict, "readers must activate their prior knowledge and use it to think about what they are about to read. In this way, predicting helps readers connect what they are reading with what they know already and brings meaning to the text in order to get meaning from it. Background knowledge used for predicting comes not only from the reader's previous experience but also from meaning that is built during the reading. Throughout the text, readers continually generate new predictions". By applying this strategy, students were given the opportunity to integrate what they knew not only about the stories but also about the language with the new knowledge presented in the stories and then build comprehension of them.

The third strategy taken into consideration for checking children's comprehension of the stories while reading was that of *questioning*. According to Owocki (2003), questioning is an important strategy because it helps children move deeply into a text, think more about what they read, organize their thinking, frame the pursuit of new understandings, locate specific information, and think about unstated ideas such as themes, author goals and intents, and underlying meaning. This can be illustrated as follows:

- (O) Juan Carlos started reading the story and asked the children,
(T1) What color is it? What will happen next? What is her name?
(O) And the children answered the questions Juan Carlos was asking. Suddenly a boy said,
(Ss1) Teacher I do not understand anything.
(O) And a boy started explaining to him what was happening in the story.

Questioning was a strategy used before, during and after reading a story. The student teachers constantly posed questions in order to verify children's understanding. Questions helped children clarify and deepen understanding of the text they were reading. This was a very good strategy for the student teachers

since it allowed them to check comprehension. While reading, the student teachers would stop and ask questions about the characters, the setting and the pictures. The answers the children gave allowed them to verify comprehension.

Post-Reading Stage

After reading the text, learners did a variety of speaking and writing activities related to the text. Although the speaking and writing production in these grades is guided, this helped the student teachers better assess students' understanding and comprehension of the reading process.

During the implementation of the proposal, student teachers observed that children really enjoyed the lessons and began to communicate in English. Although they only produced words and small phrases, they noticed the children understood most of the input they had received. Children not only produced the language orally but also in writing. At the end of each story, children had to dramatize the story and complete a little book where they used the language learned during the teaching process, thus allowing the student teachers to verify comprehension. In this way, the student teachers could integrate the language skills around reading one text; first with the receptive skills of listening and reading, then the productive skills of speaking and writing. This can be observed in the following example:

(O) Viviana started to show the flash cards and some students answered.

(Ss) Sleeping... Having lunch.

(O) Juan Carlos gave some handouts to the children with the same story Amparo had just read. The story had blanks that children had to complete according to the story. The children started.

Although comprehensible input played a great role in the understanding of the stories, it was also necessary to engage children in post-listening or post-reading tasks and language-related activities in which they talked and wrote about the stories. Such activities made the stories more comprehensible while helping the children to move from receptive competence needed for listening and reading to the productive competence necessary for speaking and writing.

The variety of activities made the lessons interesting and fun and motivated the children to participate in an active way. They wanted to sing, answer questions, play the games, and be part of all the activities. The combination of all the elements mentioned above let teachers observe that the learning process was really meaningful and interesting for the children who could make great progress in learning the language while enjoying the process.

Reading stories was a very useful strategy for teaching the language to children for many reasons. First, they knew and liked the characters in each one of the stories and each caught their attention and got them involved in the lessons. Also, thanks to the stories, the teacher could contextualize the new language, and students could get meaning easily and understand the use and functions of the language.

Conclusions

Based on the diagnosis, analysis, and implementation of the research process, the following can be noted:

Teachers should select the appropriate methodology and didactics in order to make learning interesting and meaningful for children. The use of stories and the ludic methodology around them made the language learning process meaningful and fun for the children. During the implementation of the lessons, students showed a lot of motivation for learning; first, because they loved playing the games and second, because the stories were appealing and interesting to them.

When the children were playing games, the student teachers could verify that when using well-planned games with a pedagogical purpose, children learn while having fun. Games also helped the student teachers to create a confident and stress-free learning environment where children felt secure and relaxed during the learning time.

On the other hand, stories became the central component of the process. At the beginning of the process the student teachers thought stories could be a good tool for children to learn the language, but once the proposal was implemented, they were surprised by the children's response every time they read a story. The children were not only motivated by the stories but, also, they demonstrated their understanding of the stories and their language learning. The great success of using stories was due to the fact that first, they were created taking into account children's likes and interests; and second, because the student teachers followed each stage of the reading process appropriately.

Another important consideration is that in the early learning stage, children need to be surrounded by a lot of meaningful, interesting and comprehensible input to help them grow in the learning process. The great amount of input received by the children before and during the story time helped them to become more successful while reading and after reading the stories. It also helped them predict, infer and answer questions, thereby showing comprehension and understanding of the stories.

Stories were an ideal tool to utilize in learning the language as they were the central axes of the whole process. Stories made the children's learning the foreign language more interesting, amusing and memorable. Students have an amazing ability to absorb language when activities are familiar and enjoyable to them. Hence, teaching foreign language using stories as a basis creates a learning environment that is both familiar and fun.

Finally, it should be stressed that research is a very important way for teachers to improve their pedagogical practices. Through this project the student teachers could reflect on their practice, be aware of what works or does not work when teaching the language, as well as discuss, analyze and find ways to create better lessons. All of the above helped them to improve their teaching practices by finding better strategies in order to help children become successful in their learning process.

¹ The samples from the student teachers' journals were gathered in Spanish and translated into English.

The following codes were used to register information in the journals:

O = Observer; T = Student teacher; Ss = Students; Ss1 = Student 1.

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