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# Using stories to help children learn a foreign language

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**Abstract:** This investigation is set to explore the possible advantages of using story books alongside a standard textbook inside the English as a Foreign Language (FL) classroom. The approach will be used to determine if it is possible to enhance the students' motivation, attention span and participation within the Primary School FL context. The approach will contain pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading activities to enable the students to achieve the highest level of comprehension possible. The results will be taken from answers of the students themselves and based on comments given by their habitual English teacher and the differences that have been easily noticeable.

**Key words:** Storytelling approach, Primary School Education, motivation, foreign language, participation, enjoyment.

## **Table of contents**

<b>1. Introduction and justification</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Literature review</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.1. Importance of storytelling</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.2. A teacher's role in Storytelling</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2.3. What stories to choose?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.4. The art of storytelling</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.5. What preparation is necessary?</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2.6. Post related studies</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3. Methodology</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3.1. Research questions</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3.2. Objectives</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3.3. Context</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>3.4. Stages</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>3.4.1. Pre test</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>3.4.2 Test: Storytelling approach</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>3.4.3. Post-test</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>4. Results</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>5. Conclusions</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>6. References</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>23</b>

## **1. Introduction and justification**

Starring wide eyes and open mouths, you can almost hear the imagination and wondering thoughts. Are these the effects of storytelling inside the classroom? I, an up and coming and enthusiastic teacher certainly hope so. Storytelling, is it important in a foreign language class? I believe so, however, is it used to its full potential? Definitely not! In the following paper we will see why, and maybe more importantly how, we should use the art of storytelling and the benefits it can bring to the children's experience inside and outside the classroom. According to Martínez (2007: 52-56), stories are one of the best ways for children to not only learn the language but also learn content, cultural aspects, how to solve everyday problems, etc. In addition, storytelling helps students acquire and develop individual reading tastes, skills and creativity. Stories inside the classroom don't only serve to educate the language and for the fulfilling of objectives, they can bring so much more to the students. Stories are read to us in our mother tongue ever since we are little and they are a way of unconsciously educating us, they are used in the majority of language classes for children yet very few teachers use them in the Foreign Language (FL) class. In most FL classes the children's learning process is based around a text book, but there are sometimes that to obtain the objectives that we have set a textbook is just not enough and a story can act as a means of support to our textbook.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Importance of storytelling**

Stories can allow the child's learning process to be amusing, entertaining and fulfilling at the same time. Stated by González (2009: 98), "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", storytelling allows the child to become part of their own learning process without realising, the idea that they can be relaxed and not be under any pressure will help them become more confident within the L2 classroom. In addition Martínez (2007) goes on state that:

Children enjoy listening to stories in their first language and are more likely to transfer that desire when listening to books read in a second language. Therefore, motivation and interest

increase. Furthermore, stories are a great way of introducing, practising, revising, and improving pronunciation skills and teaching culture using the target language.

Storytelling can be used to improve grammar or vocabulary but above that it needs to be exploited to intensify and strengthen motivation and interest, the students need a motive to want to learn English and stories can be a tool to encourage these aspects. In my short time and although I have very little experience inside the Primary school classroom I have heard many negative comments towards English, during the FL hours a number of bored faces lots of them looking at the clock and praying for maths, or PE, or anything to get them out of English class to arrive. These comments and faces that I have heard and seen are what have motivated me to bring some fun and entertainment to the FL classroom.

The learning of a new language should definitely not be focused solely on vocabulary and grammar, there are many more things to learning a language than knowing about the “rules” and “regulations”. Whilst learning a language children should be shown aspects of new cultures and how to accept and indulge in the diversity that a second language can bring. As said by Ioannou-Georgiou & Verdugo (2011):

Stories are windows open to the world. They bring in views about different people, new countries and diverse cultural values, can prepare learners for openness, awareness, tolerance and acceptance towards other ways of understanding life and stories about different cultures can help integrate children from different migrant backgrounds.

These thoughts are backed up by Gómez (2010) who expresses that:

Using stories is interesting as children become familiarized with other cultures and social contexts different from their own, the students will understand that there are different viewpoints and so they become more tolerant and finally that they realize that there are other cultures and theirs is not always the best.

All of these are positive facets that storytelling can provide the children with and that will serve them well in their future life.

To take full advantage and able us to capitalize on all of the above we must plan out our approach with great care. When planning a storytelling process there are many fine details we must keep in mind while selecting and designing activities, some global objectives we must remember for a storytelling approach are that;

- The experience should show the children that literature can be fun.

- It should inform the students of past and present literature culture.
- Allow the children to identify and appreciate everything a story has to offer.
- Permit them to think about and reflect on their personal problems and them of others.
- Finally to become critics, it must encourage them to compare and question what they read.

## **2.2. A teacher's role in Storytelling**

The main responsibility when using storytelling falls upon teachers, even if all of the previous has been followed perfectly the role the teachers plays personally is indispensable. For non-native teachers to be capable of telling stories in their classrooms there are some things that they must have a good command of, according to Madrid (2014: 396) some questions we should ask ourselves are;

- Pronunciation: Did I have any problems (vowels, consonants, diphthongs, etc.)
- Rhythm: Did I read too slowly or too quickly? Did I pause in the right place?
- Intonation: Did I sound interesting? Or boring? Did I use the right intonation in the right places?
- Variation: Did I vary the pace and the volume of my voice where appropriate?
- Pupils' participation: Did I pause in the right place? Did I ask appropriate questions to encourage pupils to participate?
- General impression: How did I sound in general? Clear? Expressive? Lively? What do I need to improve?

Teachers can and should become a big part of the children's storytelling experience, but, parents have their role to play. It is of the up most importance that children have the opportunity to listen and to read stories at home. This brings a whole new dimension to storytelling. Teachers must bring the parents on board with the art of storytelling, and carrying on working with them at home. If a child can practice at home, on their own or with their parents, it will only increase their confidence and cause curiosity for this activity. We tend to relate storytelling to younger children, but, stories can be for all ages, it all depends on how we adapt the text to the readers. As stated once by Robert McKee (2013): "Stories are the creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, clearer, more meaningful experience". They are the currency of human contact. This, for a future teacher gives pause for thought, if this is true why are stories not used

more for teaching in general, not only to learn a new language. We have all been read stories in the past, all become part of and have imagined the scene we are being read. Children have a much bigger and wider imagination and are able to become immersed inside a story so much easier than adults. With somebody who is able thrive on and excel with these stories inside the classroom, my opinion is, the children will only enhance these traits and excel with their self-confidence and learning of their new foreign language.

### **2.3. What stories to choose?**

When preparing storytelling for the FL classroom not any story will do, when it comes to choosing a book to bring to the FL classroom, there are a number of aspects we must analyse before finalizing what story we are going to use. According to Madrid (2014:394), the most important criteria we must observe are:

- Is the text relevant to classroom topics and curricular objectives?
- Is the content appropriate to the children's age and intellectual level?
- Does it use language that is at or slightly above the level of the learners?
- Does it contain repeated, predictable language patterns?
- Are there clear illustrations that help tell the story?

These useful criteria allow us to choose an appropriate and adequate story for what we want to achieve and will give our students the greatest possibility of enjoying the learning process whilst unconsciously obtaining the uppermost results possible. In this study the book has been selected around a topic given in the educational curriculum. The storytelling activities will be used to compliment the textbook and to allow the students further their learning process.

### **2.4. The art of storytelling**

When we have successfully chosen the story we are going to present to the class we need to keep in mind that anybody can read a story, but it is all about how we tell them and bring them to life, as said by Smith from the British Council Spain (2013): "We can use authentic materials to motivate our children, these materials and stories encourage interaction between the children. These stories allow and encourage the children to talk to each other about what they have heard, positive or negative".

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRZSmZSnHoc>

The art of telling a story is so much more than just reading, there are many methods used when it comes to storytelling inside the classroom. Two important examples of storytelling methods that can be used inside the FL classroom are, firstly, *Total Physical Response Storytelling* (TPRS) the earlier method of *Total Physical Response* (TPR). The foremost idea of this model is that the child's learning process of a foreign language should be characterized as by being stress and anxiety free, this process should take place in a relaxed and friendly environment. TPRS improves this earlier method by adding the idea that a child should take on an active role and form part of his or hers own learning process. The main aim of storytelling is to enjoy. Stories enable children to interact with the teacher and between themselves without having to worry about their own errors or not knowing how to say something and understanding the whole story is not important. This is key for children to be able to feel relaxed and able them to take risks whilst learning a new language.

On the other hand another method that is used when talking about stories inside the classroom is that of the Artigal. This method suggests that the learning process of a language in this case English should be carried out collectively. This is because the level that a new learner can reach and use in groups and collectively highly surpasses that of and individual. The teacher should be the one who prepares the situation, reading will be the central key of the methodology and the children will be invited to help tell the story without any help from external material, they will be encouraged to use body movements, gestures, etc. (Artigal, 2015).

On the word of González-Martín & Querol-Julián (2011) the following aspects will allow us to capitalize on the benefits this method can bring:

- La lengua vehicular será únicamente la lengua inglesa.
- Los alumnos deberán implicarse en la narración desde el inicio, repitiendo o imitando con gestos al personaje que habla.
- Diferenciaremos claramente el énfasis que pondremos en los personajes ante el poco énfasis cuando hable el narrador.
- Ausencia de soporte visual al inicio de la narración, que aumentará una mayor participación por parte del alumnado.
- Tras varias escenificaciones podremos complementar los cuentos con algún soporte visual, pero escaso.

## **2.5. What preparation is necessary?**

No matter what method we select we must take into account that the art of storytelling is much more than solemnly reading the story, one of the main aspects of a quality storytelling approach is the preparation. The role of the teacher starts with what we have seen previously and the selection a good storybook. But this is only the beginning, we then follow by preparing activities to enrich the storytelling procedure. The process that is used is one of quality and continuity, therefore the preparation of activities before during and after the reading of the story are fundamental. These activities bring a sense of completion and meaning to the whole procedure. To enable us to organise and prepare these activities appropriately (Ellis & Breswter, 1991:130) state that we should ensure that the following aspects are true:

- It should provide a context for the story and present the main characters. In doing so, students will link their own experiences with those in the story.
- It should identify linguistic objectives, for example, what vocabulary and sentence structures the teacher wants students to learn for sound, word and sentence levels.
- Teachers should decide how long to spend on the story, for example, if it will be read all in one day or over the course of several lessons.
- Teachers should determine how to present, practice and revise language and vocabulary. For instance, students may match pictures with words or label pictures to present lingual aspects. Students can sound out letters and words and create a graphic representation using individual white boards. Students can also write sentences for each word and draw a picture in their writer dictionary.
- It should contain rhymes and songs that would reinforce the introduced language.
- It should contain links with arts and crafts.
- Teachers should decide on follow-up activities related to the topic.

As stated by Wright (1995), some activities we may use for each part of the process are;



Before the story:

- Vocabulary: This can mean introducing new word, simplifying the language that is used and the use of keywords.
- Prediction activities: These are all about the children talking about their expectations of the book that is going to be read, they can be based on the front cover, pictures that are in the story, keywords, relating the story with their own experience, the story being told in L1, etc.

During the story; these activities take place at any moment the teacher feels the need to stop the story and invite the students to participate in the telling of the story, they can involve; drawing pictures, asking what comes next, creating an atmosphere, imagination of the situation and pictures in their minds, what would they do in this situation, repetition of words or phrases, etc.

After the story; these are used to evaluate and determine the understanding and comprehension of the students. These activities will enable us to get an idea of if the children have captured a global idea of the story. Some of the activities we are able to choose from are; gap-filling, whispering the story, continue the story, relate with their own experience, draw and describe, throw a ball and continue, re-order sentences, etc.

## **2.6. Post related studies**

In the following paper we are going to see past parallel studies and take a look at what information has been found when using stories inside the FL classroom. There have been different research questions offered about this topic and we will see a number of examples and what advantages they found. I will enquire into three different research questions and propose possible pre-reading, during reading and post reading activities related to a given topic that we can use when faced with difficulties while teaching English to young learners. The storytelling approach will be used alongside the textbook to compliment as this is the main tool used inside the FL classroom. The process of these activities will be followed and notes will be taken of the results using constant observation and specific tools that have been prepared explicitly for this paper, and finally the results that have been obtained will be shown and personally commented on.

The use of stories in L1 language class is very common, however storytelling in the FL classroom is not that popular, especially in Primary Education. After having

reviewed some similar studies such as (Gómez, 2010; González, 2010; González-Martín, & Querol-Julián, 2015; Kalantari, & Hashemian, 2015; Martínez, 2007; Sulaiman Al Harrasi, 2012; Tellez, 1996; Yildrum & Torun, 2014) From what I have been able to perceive, studies that have investigated the effects of storytelling related to the learning of a foreign language inside a classroom have all found a number of positive results.

Firstly, (González-Martín & Querol-Julián, 2015) discuss a more common situation for a storytelling approach, the importance of stories to learn English inside an Infant school classroom. In their investigation they discuss and compare the use of two possible methods TPRS and Artigal's. They question that if the use of stories can improve the attention and participation of the children and if both general understanding and the students' vocabulary can both be increased by using these methods.

In addition, Sulaiman Al Harrasi (2012) at the Rustaq College of applied sciences, Sultanate of Oman also enquired into drawback frequently found when teaching English to young learners, the conception of the children towards the L2 and their attitudes and lack of motivation to learn a new language. The study is an attempt to explore the effectiveness of stories when trying to promote positive approach and emulate the enthusiasm of the teacher in the students. In this paper they offer a gran variety of activities that can be used when working with stories.

Moreover in Iran, (Kalantari, & Hashemian, 2015) investigated the effects of storytelling when it comes to improving EFL learners' vocabulary. The questions that they queried were the following; Does a storytelling approach help improve young Iranian EFL learners' English vocabulary? And can the storytelling approach make young EFL learners more interested in learning the L2? Obviously these questions are focussed directly on Iranian children but the main ideas behind the interrogations are very similar to that of the study I am seeking to carry out. They also use pre, during and post reading activities, their results on both the children's interests in L2 and learning of vocabulary had considerably increased.

Furthermore, as said by Illán Martínez (2007) within her study of English language teaching asked herself questions like: would storytelling help students learn the English language and could storytelling be used to motivate English-learning students? Her studies were based in Madrid and worked with children in the first grade

in a bilingual school. The problem that she found was the idea that the textbook used to base her classes on was not enough for the children to become motivated and reach objectives. She decided to use storytelling as a tool to compliment the textbook. The lessons were based around a topic that was present in the textbook and presented the theme using various pre, during and post reading activities.

Finally and maybe the most comparable study that I have been able to find, is found in a piece of work by Yildrum & Torun (2014), whom investigated the role of animated stories in teaching English as a Foreign Language. They examined the effects that stories would have on the teaching of vocabulary, grammar and functions of the target language in context but besides these basic objectives the study was centred on the notion of generating and maintaining a high level of interest and positive attitudes amongst students towards learning English. The investigation involved 31 grade six students aged 11-12 in Turkey, they used five different stories that had been selected especially for this study and viewed each story three times doing pre, during and post reading activities. Using a mixed-method research technique and such tools as an open-ended attitude questionnaire, interviews, lesson evaluation forms and a structured attitude test, the data that they collected was both qualitative a quantitative.

When teaching a FL, there is always the question on how often and at what point to use the mother tongue, there are many opinions for and against the use of the students' native language whilst learning English. Some approaches believe that everything should be taught in the FL and the mother tongue should never be used inside the classroom, there are others that believe that for children to learn and understand as much as possible there are something that should be taught and spoken about in the language they are most comfortable with. Obviously the more we use the FL the more the children will become familiar with new language, they Brewster will become accustomed to hearing and thinking in the FL. Also as stated by (Ellis & Brewster, 1991: 23-26) "Although children are used to listening to stories in their mother tongue, understanding stories in a foreign language is hard work. Pupils' enjoyment will increase enormously if the teacher ensures that their understanding is supported in several ways". There are particular situations where use of the mother tongue can be very helpful for children to acquire a more over-all understanding of the story which will allow them to appreciate and benefit from the whole process, some of these according to (Ellis & Brewster, 1991:25) are the following:

- When setting the scene for the story we must relate it to the children's experiences and their knowledge about the subject or language.
- During the activities there are moments that can be vital when it comes to their general understanding of the story, for example when asking about what might happen next, when talking about what has happened so far, whilst asking for specific vocabulary.
- The actual explanation of the activities may have to be repeated in their mother tongue.
- When reflecting on the story and discussing more global aspects of the story.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research questions**

For the current study there will be three core research questions:

- Does storytelling motivate young children more inside the FL classroom?
- Does the use of storytelling enable young students to learn vocabulary and basic grammar more easily than merely with a textbook?
- Will storytelling improve the attention span and participation of young learners inside the FL classroom?

#### **3.2. Objectives**

Whilst using the storytelling approach I will look to achieve various objectives:

General:

- To work with storytelling in a Primary school classroom.
- To see if using storytelling as a resource inside a FL Primary School classroom affects the children in a positive way.

Specific:

- Prompt children to think positively about English and generate a personal belief and self-confidence when it comes participating in the FL classroom.
- Enable children to learn in a more enjoyable way.
- To inspire the children to further their reading experience in English.

Thus, the current study is going to observe if the introduction of storytelling inside an FL classroom can help the children become motivated and interested in this whole new experience of learning a new language.

### **3.3. Context**

The study of a storytelling approach inside the Primary school classroom will take place in the last semester and will be based around a unit taken from the usual text book. The investigation will last between two and three weeks and will be used in a total of 6 classes of forty five minutes each. The subjects that have been selected for this study are two classes of 25 students in the fifth grade of Primary Education, the school in question is Cristo de la Yedra of Granada which is known for its level of inclusive education. The fact that the inside the same class there is a wide range of levels will make the study all that more challenging and interesting.

### **3.4. Stages**

I will be working with three grade 5 classes alongside their usual English teacher, the stories will be introduced and used alongside the usual textbook. The story has been carefully chosen and related to one or more units that the students will study this term in English.

#### **3.4.1. Pre test**

Before introducing the children to the idea of using stories inside the class I wish to get a more exact idea of their thoughts and experiences inside the FL classroom. Amongst foreign students of all ages English is commonly thought of as being tedious, awkward and a thorn in the spine of even the top students. To get an insight into the children's thoughts and attitudes towards this subject we will ask their customary English teacher will also be asked a sequence of questions about her views on her students and their attitudes concerning English as a FL (see appendix 1), also the children themselves will be asked what they think about and why they have these feelings towards English. The group will be encouraged to interact with a series of questions about their personal thoughts and experiences with English as a FL. The discussion will take place inside the classroom in their mother tongue and they will be persuaded to be honest and reassured that their comments will not have any negative consequences. In the pre-test the following questions were asked:

On a scale from 1-5, 1 being the lowest and five being the highest:

- What would you say is your level of enjoyment inside the English class?
- Level of participation?
- What are your thoughts when it comes to English class?
- Put in order the following five subjects, (Maths, Spanish, P.E, Music and English) depending on how much you enjoy them.
- Have you ever read or been read a story in English?
- Do you feel embarrassed when talking in English in front of equals?
- Do you think that it is important to learn English?

The story that has been chosen is “The Pirate Cruncher” by Jonny Duddle (2010), it’s about a pirate captain who is so keen to get his hands on the treasure that he has heard about he forgets about his crew and is overcome with greed. This story has not only been chosen because of its relationship with pirates and inclusion of the vocabulary being seen in class at the time, it contains numerous rhymes and jingles which will appeal to the elder children and finally it contains an important message about greed. This message will be linked to the students day to day lives so that they can relate to and think about the importance of greediness. The story has been adapted in limited areas so that it links in perfectly with the grammar and vocabulary being taught in the class at this very moment. Because of the age of the students a substitute for the typical storybook will be used, they will have their own little storybook but also pictures will be utilised alongside the storybook to help tell the story, the PowerPoint presentation of the different pictures will be employed to keep the students level of attention as high as possible.

### **3.4.2 Test: Storytelling approach**

Throughout the storytelling process we will use a variety of activities, some pre reading, during reading and post reading to help bring the whole experience to life. The lessons will be led by the teacher but will provide numerous situations where the students can interact with the teacher and the equals.

The vocabulary and grammar that will be focused on are:

Vocabulary:

- Greed
- Gold
- Wavy
- Chest
- Treasure
- Sand
- Silver

- Scared
- Crew
- Dead
- Head
- Dreams
- Fiddle

- Shiver me timbers
- Me hearties
- Arrrgghhh
- Aye-Aye
- Land A-hoy

The grammar in this unit consists of using regular and irregular verbs to ask and answer different questions about the physical appearance and actions of the pirates:

- Want
- Hear
- Use
- Wear
- Have
- Forget

- Brought
- Find
- Eat
- Begin
- See
- To be scared

The pre-reading activities that have been chosen and will be used to introduce and motivate the students are the following:

- Introduction of new vocabulary and grammar using a PowerPoint presentation with visual aid.
- Introduction to rhymes: The children will be read two of three limericks about pirates to introduce them to the idea of rhyming in English.
- Take a look at the front cover and make predictions about what they think might happen, this will be carried out in both English and their mother tongue.
- Introduction of the characters: We will introduce the protagonists and talk about key aspects of each of them.
- Spot the difference activity. (see appendix 2)

During the reading experience the children will be asked to intervene when seen necessary by the teacher, they will be asked to:

- Produce parts of the story that are repeated throughout.
- Answer questions about key vocabulary.

The teacher will not stop after every sentence or page to translate the story, the children listen to the story with the visual aid of images taken from the book to help guide them through the story and they will each be given storybook to facilitate the following of the story whilst the teacher the story aloud.

Once the story has been read the children will be asked to reflect on the message that they think the story has tried to convey, this activity will be imparted in their mother tongue as that they can express their feelings and thoughts entirely. In addition to this there will be a number of follow up activities explained entirely in English that the children will be asked to take part in and these will include:

- Pirate competition: The class will be split into groups of five students, The original story will be adapted and each group will be given a part of the story, the group will assign a part to each member of the group, individually they will read their part and along with typical pirate sayings they will deliver the story to the rest of the class.
- Make a pirate map, they will be asked to make a map in class and using the vocabulary they will complete their map.
- Discussion about greed.
- The children will be asked to take their booklet home and complete the blank pages with their own drawings or images (see appendix 3).
- Gymkhana (see appendix 4): The class will be separated once again in groups and each group will be a given a picture of a pirate. The children will be asked to follow a series of clues that are written in English which will lead them to a teacher whom they will ask a question about their pirate (Do you have a sword for me?) the teachers will then give them the corresponding object plus another clue, there will be a total of seven objects to collect to dress up each pirate, once all objects have been found they will have to verbally describe their pirate using the verbs and vocabulary seen in class. A final clue will be given and they will use a map of the school to find their treasure chest (see appendix 5). For all of the activities used for the duration of the storytelling process it will be ensured that the students fully understand what is being asked of them and that whole class are in some way involved and encouraged to participate.



### **3.4.3. Post-test**

The evaluation instruments that will be used once the storytelling process has come to an end will consist of students answers and comments to the same series of questions as they were asked in advance to starting, comparisons will be made between the answers given from before and after the storytelling approach in addition to direct observation and comments of their English teacher (see appendix 1). These different sources of information will be used to determine the outcomes and answers to the aims and objectives set prior, which will then lead to a final conclusion and personal judgement.

After having finished all the activities seen previously the children were not asked for a couple of days about what they had made of this new approach inside the English class. The questions that were asked were similar as before and then they were also asked to make some personal comments on what they thought about not working solely with the textbook.

## **4. Results**

As part of the post-test evaluation the pre-test questions were used once again to enable myself to compare the students' answers from before and then after the process. The children were asked about what they thought their personal level of participation was, out of the three class that took part in the investigation the average mark that the children gave themselves had risen by 40%, this is obviously a major increase which shows that the children were both motivated and felt less under pressure when completing the different activities. Secondly they were all asked once again to put into order depending on which they enjoyed most, (Maths, Spanish, P.E, Music and English) 85% of the students from all three classes individually decided to move English from third to second place after having completed all the activities. Furthermore we asked the students about if they still felt embarrassed when asked to speak in front of their peers, almost 95% of them agreed that if they had to speak about what they had worked on in the unit they would feel less nervous than before, although there was a low percentage that still felt a level of anxiousness when talking in English. When asked to comment personally on their experience and if they had enjoyed English in the last two weeks a high percentage said that they had enjoyed these different activities and the reality of using additional sources of information other than the textbook. Some comments that

were put forward were such as, they had learnt more because it's easier to learn when you are having fun. They would like to do different activities for each unit, some said that it was too easy, it was very different not using the textbook, etc.

Finally an extra question was added at the end about if individually they felt they had understood more by using different types of activities as to the sole use of the text book. The majority of the students said that they had understood the same or more but 5% of students said they had understood less and that they would prefer to work with the textbook, when asked why this was the case they answered that it was "because that that is what they are used to".

The students' English teacher was asked similar questions to the ones in the pre-test questionnaire (see appendix 1), before she thought that stories could be a very interesting tool to use in the FL classroom and that these would help the children to become more involved because of the relationship children have with these tales. Her previous thoughts were obviously backed up because when asked after about if she thought that the storytelling approach had been a success she replied by saying the children loved the idea of using English whilst reading and becoming part of a story. Also the level of participation had been a surprise because even students with a very low level of English wanted to take part and contribute in any way possible. When speaking about the what the students' thoughts were when it came to English as subject inside of school she believed that at lower levels where stories and games are used the students' have positive thoughts about English and enjoy this subject however, this changes as the children get older and more grammatical aspects are looked into. Finally she was asked about if the children knew the importance of learning English, she viewed it as an idea that depended mostly on the individual and importance that the child's family gave to the idea of learning English. Her final thoughts were that the activities that were used were very useful and in her opinion achieved all objectives that were set prior, they story motivated and enable all children to participate without the usual fear and nervousness that we see in most people when learning a new language, on the other hand she said that we must be careful not to over use stories to a point they would become boring and lose some of their magic and also that one big disability the English teacher has is that she has to prepare many different subjects and also a form tutors duties, this makes it very difficult to use stories on a regular basis because of the preparation that is necessary.

As part as the continuous evaluation throughout the process I observed that the children enjoyed taking part in the activities even if their level of English was very limited, the idea that they wanted to learn and were not afraid to make a mistake was very pleasant to see. All of the children worked together in a team when asked to and helped each other out when it was necessary,

After taking into account all the percentages seen beforehand I strongly believe that using stories inside the classroom has many advantages when it comes to the enjoyment and participation of the students. When it comes to if they actually learn and understand more all depends on the time dedicated to the preparation and the relativity of all the different activities and materials, the choice of book and variety of activities is crucial because this is what is going to bring the story to life and enable the children to learn and capitalize of all the possible benefits. This preparation is an immense job for the teacher but if done well can be very beneficial. Obviously it is easier for a teacher to get out the textbooks, read and translate, but personally I think this is not really an option nowadays, at least not as a lone technique. For a teacher to be able to prepare these types of activities it is necessary to have a substantial level of English as well as an understanding of the children and their own level and capabilities.

## **5. Conclusions**

The storytelling approach was a major success even though it was a huge change for all the children, there were things that could be changed depending on the level of English and context of the school to make it better and that to ensure that it would run more smoothly inside the classroom.

Inside the classrooms where the investigation took place, children are used to a very traditional way of learning English. Every day they get out their textbooks and students books, read through the unit, translate and do the corresponding activities. I believe that it came as a big surprise to them when five classes in a row they were asked to leave the books on the shelf, pay attention and participate as much as they possibly could. When the approach was explained to them, it came as a surprise and although it was potentially a beneficial change for them and should be a more enjoyable way to learn, it started out as harder work and so for some a less favourable option, as they were used to merely using their textbooks. At first they didn't know what to do or how to act when asked to actively participate in English and not just to translate. After the

first session the majority were aboard and wanted to know more and take part in the “project”. I would strongly suggest that if and when the children became familiar with this approach to learning the benefits would be even more evident and much more long-lasting.

Taking into account the different sources of information that have been used to evaluate the children’s progress and whether or not the objectives have been met and achieved, If we take into account the three most central aims: Prompt children to think positively about English and generate a personal belief and self-confidence when it comes participating in the FL classroom, enable children to learn in a more enjoyable way and to inspire the children to further their reading experience in English we can clearly see that via the use of a story children are able to learn in a more pleasurable way and that their fears and insecurities are forgotten at least whilst they are involved and taking part in the storytelling process. The idea of not using solely the textbook was a major change and one that I believed helped the children to think about exactly what they were doing become part of each activity as much as they could, by using activities such as a treasure hunt and spot the difference you allow for the maximum level of participation and create a positive and pleasant environment, these activities along with the reading of the book with the help of pictures have encouraged the children to read more English books, relating the book with their own lives and helping them see that even though we are talking in English what we are learning is very applicable to their own lives, I believe that this has help them to start thinking that English is not such a boring or tedious subject and that it is very important for their future.

Every student has had subjects over the course of their school lives that have been full of “important concepts” nonetheless we have forgotten ninety per cent of them, yet, I’m sure everybody knows an “insignificant” story heard many years ago yet one is still able to recite it almost perfectly, I believe that if stories are used correctly this idea can be used to teach a gran variety of items and make them relevant so that the students remember and use them in the future. Stories should be taken advantage of and used to their full potential, it’s not possible, feasible nor practical to teach everything via stories nevertheless, there are many things, especially as a Primary school teacher we could attempt to. People hear stories constantly, on the street, at home, at work, etc. They play a massive role in our daily lives, however teachers must be able to pick and choose the right story for the right age at the right time to wreak the benefits.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1: Questionnaire**

#### **BEFORE:**

***Do you think that using stories will be more enjoyable for the children?  
And do you think that they will learn more?***

Las historias conviven con nuestros alumnos desde pequeños. Están acostumbrados a relacionarlo todo con historias fantásticas e imaginables y con sus propias experiencias, que terminan transformándolas en nuevas historias que a veces no terminan siendo tan reales.

Luego pienso que es importante situar los aprendizajes desde cuentos y relatos ya que son las pequeñas anécdotas las que más se recuerdan.

En el caso del idioma es importante relacionar tanto los aspectos gramaticales como el vocabulario desde historias cortas. El uso de imágenes, que siempre acompañan a los cuentos, facilita mucho la comprensión de los aspectos trabajados, principalmente del listening y vocabulario.

***In “normal” class do the majority of the students tend to intervene in some way or other?***

En el nivel que estamos (5ºEPO), a veces se hace difícil que sean todos los alumnos los que participen en las diferentes secciones de la clase. Son clases muy numerosas (25-27 alumnos) y con un tiempo bastante reducido. Luego se intenta dar participación al mayor número posible de alumnos pero no a todos. A veces, motivar a una parte del alumnado cuyo nivel de vocabulario y comprensión es muy bajo con respecto al currículum establecido también resulta difícil y suelen estar bastante perdidos en el desarrollo de la clase cuando ésta se lleva a cabo en la segunda lengua (inglés).

Es frecuente que una clase habitual de inglés, la mayor participación esté a nivel gramatical y escrito.

***What idea do you think the children have towards English as a subject? Do you think that storytelling would improve their thoughts?***

En cursos inferiores, donde el inglés se trabaja solo a niveles orales y de juego, y principalmente mediante cuentos, la motivación y participación de los alumnos es mucho mayor. A los niños les encanta. Sin embargo, conforme al currículum se le incorporan mayores aspectos gramaticales dentro de la evaluación, son bastantes menos los alumnos motivados hacia esta asignatura. Se les hace cuesta arriba y tienden a rechazarlo. También la presión social sobre la necesidad del aprendizaje de este idioma y principalmente, sobre la necesidad de pasar determinados exámenes que gradúan tu nivel y condicionan el ámbito académico y laboral, hacen que las familias presionen, a veces en exceso, a sus hijos con experiencias poco motivadoras hacia ese aprendizaje.

En cuanto a la segunda pregunta, tal y como he comentado anteriormente, considero que los cuentos e historias son imprescindibles para situar los aprendizajes que se van trabajando con los alumnos en las diferentes sesiones.

***Do they know the importance of English? Are the Children embarrassed to talk in front of equals?***

En este nivel los alumnos conocen, por las familias y los maestros de la importancia del inglés. Sin embargo son solo unos pocos los que son conscientes del verdadero interés social y de la verdadera necesidad para poder competir laboralmente en un futuro.

En cuanto a la comunicación entre iguales en la segunda lengua, no surge de forma espontánea a estas edades, salvo casos excepcionales. Las diferentes intervenciones son dirigidas por el docente de inglés. La mayoría del alumnado se muestra decidido y los pocos que muestran mayor timidez suelen ser ayudados por sus compañeros o por el docente.

**AFTER:**

***Do you think the Children enjoyed the whole storytelling experience? And did they learn the same, more or less than with solely the text book?***

La experiencia de iniciar la unidad didáctica con una historia a modo de motivación y presentación del vocabulario a usar, ha sido muy valorada por el alumnado. La temática fue muy cercana e interesante para los alumnos. Las diferentes actividades presentadas ayudaron a que los alumnos se implicaran en la trayectoria de la historia y que asimilaran de una manera lúdica el nuevo vocabulario presentado y se impregnaran de la gramática que posteriormente tuvieron que trabajar.

El aprendizaje fue más significativo ya que se partía de una temática y situación (el cuento) de gran interés y las actividades propuestas fueron muy lúdicas lo que hizo que el alumnado tuviera un mayor interés y participación en las diferentes sesiones.

***Did more children participate in class than normal? (Talking, asking questions, answering).***

La participación fue más significativa ya que el alumnado se sumergía en la historia y las actividades propuestas y se olvidaban de la vergüenza de hablar en esta segunda lengua.

Las características de las actividades propuestas (interpretación grupal de gritos, ordenar partes de la historia, recitar, entre otras como la búsqueda de un Tesoro) despertaron una mayor motivación incluso en aquellos alumnos que su nivel académico era inferior, logrando esa mayor participación en los procesos de speaking y comprensión auditiva.

***Do you think they would think differently if stories were used in the classroom?***

Considero muy interesante el uso de historias y cuentos en el aprendizaje del idioma, ya que se amplía la motivación del alumno hacia la magia que cada historia



entraña. Esto les proporciona una mayor actitud ante el aprendizaje y ante la asignatura en general. Sin embargo, el cuento es un recurso muy valioso que no debemos agotarlo con un uso abusivo del mismo.

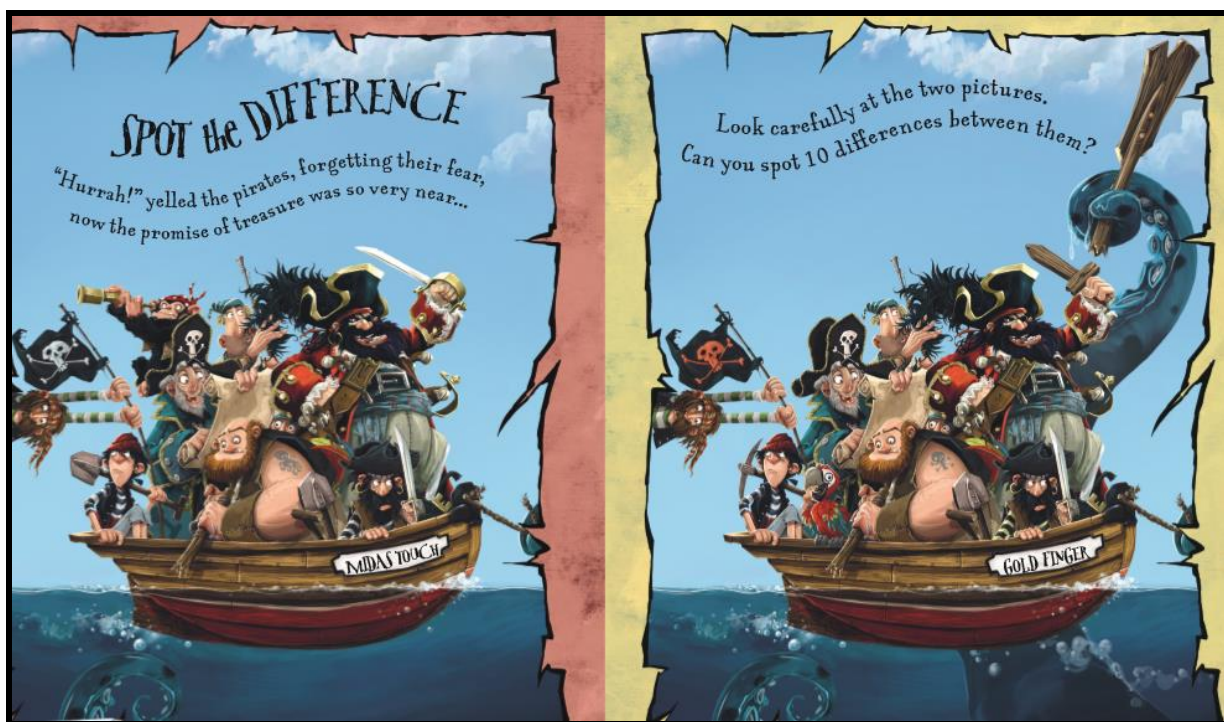
***Do you think that stories could help to make students feel more relaxed when talking in English?***

Sin duda, el modo en el que el alumnado es capaz de sumergirse en una historia o cuento va ayudar a que éstos reduzcan su vergüenza ante el uso oral del idioma. Sin embargo no podemos olvidar que la temática estas historias debe estar siempre adaptadas al nivel e interés del grupo de alumnos a quien vaya dirigidas. Igualmente las actividades que las acompañen deben estar muy estudiadas, preparadas y abiertas con diferentes niveles y respuestas ya que las clases suelen ser muy heterogéneas y los ritmos de aprendizaje muy variados.

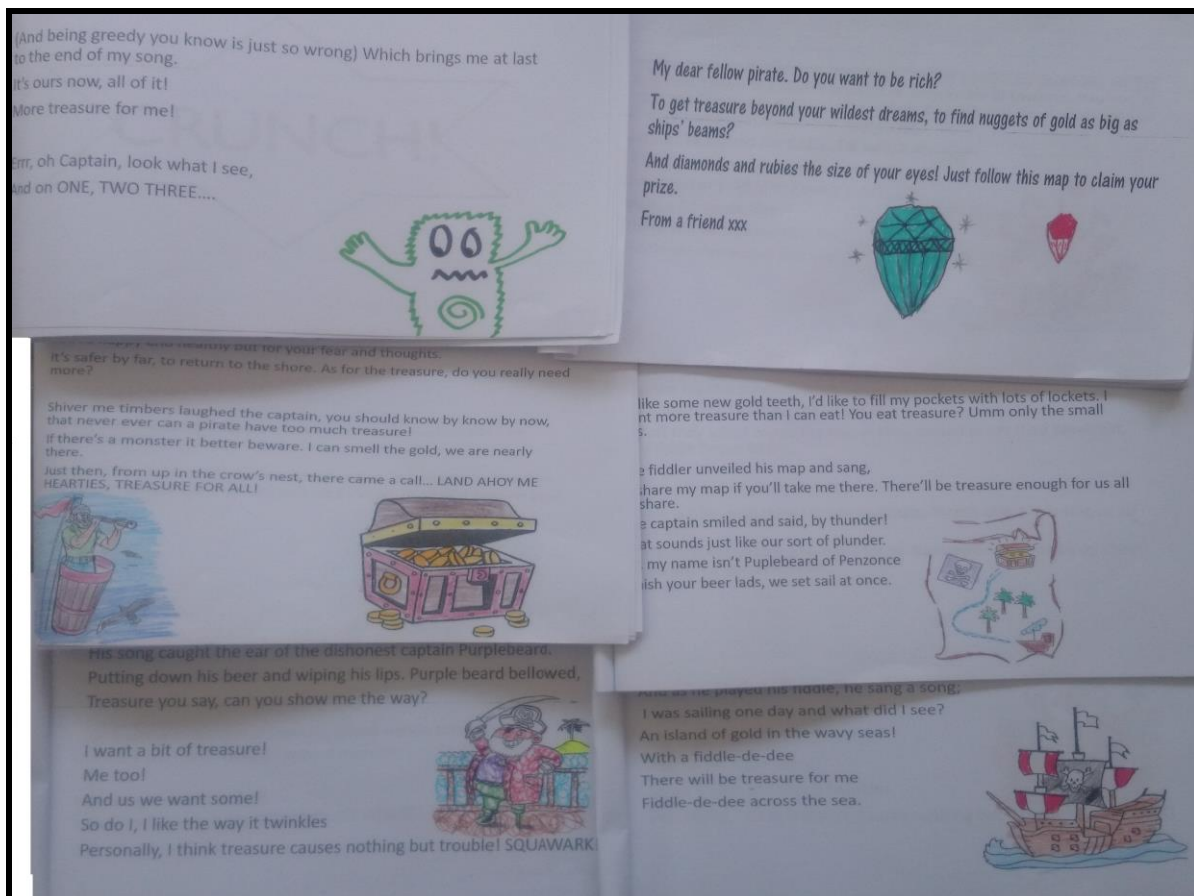
Muy interesante es la programación de actividades que traspasen el aula y las paredes de esta. La preparación de actividades fuera del aula donde los niños puedan ver una mayor utilidad de su aprendizaje en inglés es fundamental para su motivación y actitud positiva hacia el idioma.

A veces, el mayor inconveniente que encuentra el especialista de inglés, es la falta de tiempo para la preparación de sus clases ya que no suelen impartir únicamente el idioma, sino que asumen una tutoría donde las demás áreas y dinámicas de clase y de centro impiden una mayor dedicación. El número de alumnos y los tiempos de clase tampoco ayudan. Por eso es importante programar algunas sesiones muy diferentes a las clases habituales.


**Appendix 2: Spot the difference**



Appendix 3: Individual picture books




My dear fellow pirate. Do you want to be rich?  
To get treasure beyond your wildest dreams, to find nuggets of gold as big as ships' beams?  
And diamonds and rubies the size of your eyes! Just follow this map to claim your prize.  
From a friend xxx




I like some new gold teeth, I'd like to fill my pockets with lots of lockets. I want more treasure than I can eat! You eat treasure? Umm only the small ones.

The fiddler unveiled his map and sang,  
Share my map if you'll take me there. There'll be treasure enough for us all share.  
The captain smiled and said, by thunder!  
That sounds just like our sort of plunder.  
My name isn't Purplebeard of Penzance  
Wish your beer lads, we set sail at once.



...the fiddler, he sang a song;  
I was sailing one day and what did I see?  
An island of gold in the wavy seas!  
With a fiddle-de-dee  
There will be treasure for me  
Fiddle-de-dee across the sea.



**Appendix 4: Questions used for the gymkhana**

The image shows a vertical strip of six colored paper bands, each with a different pirate-themed icon and a text instruction. The bands are arranged from top to bottom: green, grey, pink, orange, purple, and green. The instructions are as follows:

- Green band (top):** Icon: A cutlass. Text: "Your pirate needs a cycle for it. , go and ask the teacher Carlos in the porch of the 2<sup>nd</sup>
- Grey band:** Icon: A skull and crossbones. Text: "Your pirate needs a year classes) , go and ask the teacher Sensi in her class for it. (5<sup>th</sup>
- Pink band:** Icon: A telescope. Text: "Your pirate needs a you have lunch for it. , go and ask the teacher Montse for it in porch where
- Orange band:** Icon: A pirate hat. Text: "Your pirate needs a , go and ask the teacher Elvira in infant 3 years
- Purple band:** Icon: A pair of sunglasses. Text: "Your pirate needs a class for it. , go and ask the teacher Antonio in the computer
- Green band (bottom):** Icon: A beard. Text: "Your pirate needs a the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle for it. , go and ask the teacher Noelia in the playground of

**Appendix 5: Map used in gymkhana**

