Storytelling in Libraries and Play Centres for Education Students: A Work Experience from Service-Learning Methodology[*]

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Abstract: Storytelling — communicative and narrative competence that future teachers must develop, especially in Childhood and Primary Education period — is one of the communicative abilities that teachers have to acquire for daily use on their future job. Not only the publisher market has considered this genre as a motivational type of texting for written and oral language learning, but also Primary Education teachers have used it to present different knowledge fields. In this sense, listening, knowledge and activities derivative from storytelling must become into a positive and gratifying experience, not only for students but above all for teachers who will use it along their professional career.

Key words: storytelling and the service-learning methodology, development of reading competence and literacy, learning and teaching

1. Introduction

Tales are a type of narrative text that allows teaching and learning the basic structure of narration: beginning, development and ending of told facts (Albuquerque F., 2000). For this reason, in the framework of a teaching and learning context, storytelling means the development of reading and literary competence that brings about the correctness of text interpretation both for the teacher and the student.

As *Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development* suggest Reading competence consists on "the comprehension and use of written texts and the personal reflection about these texts having as a purpose achieving the own goals, developing the personal knowledge and possibilities, and taking part of the society" (Cerrillo P., 2003). Concurrently, in the words of Bierwisch, the literary competence is "the capacity of human being of producing and interpreting literary texts" (Cerrillo P., 2007).

Telling and listening a tale narration is, above all, provide texts with personal sense inasmuch as loving it as a personal learning source.

To talk about literary competence and tale genre is referred to the fact that both the narrator and his/her public come to understand the characteristics of literary language of this type of narrations. For this reason, it can be said that story telling contributes, in the first place, to the major comprehension of the text because the narrator must understand it to communicate it with some sense. In the second instance, it increases his/her oral expressivity: diction, volume, intonation and distinction of shades. Thirdly, it enriches his/her capacity of global communication as it helps to lose fear and overcome inhibitions, to dare to raise his/her voice when the texts needs to, and to impose himself/herself to the listeners when the communicative situation requires it.

As far as the narration listener is concerned, the development of the literary competence will be related to the effort of imagining for recreate the scenes, the places, the characters and the time of the tales on their minds, and so, to be able to characterize properly these narrative elements.

In this sense, it is essential that the Education student acquires a meaningful experience and s/he is a specialist in telling stories' art and working from the stories narration. It is also necessary for the students to do an intensive practice in real educational contexts and to explain a huge amount of tales in their university period.

Only that way s/he will be able to think about this practice from the observation and will be able to analyze his/her storyteller ability. Furthermore, s/he must be able to come to such good conclusions that will make him/her possible to improve day by day in this teaching practice.

The Service-learning (APS) (Colomer T., 1995) is an educational methodology that combines the academic curriculum with a service to the community. As a pedagogic method is part of the experience education philosophy, as it integrate the community service with education and the own knowledge as via to enrich the educative experience and the learning of certain competences that takes the risk of remain in an exclusive theoretical level (Cone Bryant S., 1983).

The practice carried out by the Education students in community and social places as Libraries and Play Centres during the different training periods established by Study Plans of Education Faculties is an opportunity for living professional experiences in the real scene where the profession is practised.

Alternation of periods at University and at these pedagogical places is a strategy, compulsory in the initial training of future teachers, which is very appreciated by both students and faculty professors.

These practices place the student in a privileged observation position and afterwards in a good intervention position in classrooms for develop teaching capabilities that will allow him/her to confirm his/her professional choice in teaching field.

From what we have seen, storytelling is an open way for Education students to work their own communicative competence and also to improve their class-group management.

So much it is so it, with no doubt, seems a suitable activity to place themselves in front of an audience to practice this teaching act — storytelling — to observe themselves, to reflect and to make possible self assessment about their intervention in this communicative situation so special as storytelling in front a group is.

Referred to teachers, the APS methodology in a learning context as the one has been explained, facilitates the evaluation of certain competences, improve the classroom coexistence as the student can apply what has been explained and it benefits the peer relationships in their class-group and the community where they live.

Finally, the educative and social organizations who receive the university student, towards this type of social and learning-teaching practices they spread their educative values and reinforce their transforming actions as educative being they are.

2. An Experience Justification, Description, Aims and Methodology, with Education Students

The implementation of this educative experience with Education students is a pedagogical act which is carried through Faculty of Educational Sciences of Universitat de Lleida since two decades ago. It is about an actuation proposal that pretends to develop one of basic competences that our students must consolidate before ending their university studies: the literary competence and, for extension, the communicative one.

This competence supply a lot of discursive aspects, among them we can include storytelling.

In this sense, this intervention project has as principal aim to optimize the academic learning of students and teaching practice quality.

It is developed in non-profit educative communities (Libraries, Play Centres and Civic Centres) where the Education students can practice real narrations. Logically, this theoretical and practical proposal is conditional on negotiation with each educative community where it takes place to do a contextualized implementation based on particular needs of this centres. Storytelling — what brings also about its drama — takes places once a week. Establishing an intervention calendar where each social and educative community has a day is needed for the people who take part of it could remember easily the date and allow narrators to concentrate on their interventions.

Every session each student prepares this narrative activity worked in class to develop a group of competency abilities in each Study Plan of Education Bachelors of our Faculties.

The sessions are often realised in the same space of each educative community where the space is adapted to create a suitable environment to make the activity.

It is necessary to take into account from lighting to furniture distribution, which must be appropriate to recreate a warm meeting point.

In addition, every narrator must select a story based on certain guidelines related to imagination and creativity stimulating texts, which awaken and develop sensibility, cause reflection and critical sense; texts which help to know themselves and the environment; which open new horizons and awake hobbies and interests towards new fields of cultural, social and artistic life; which encourage trust on themselves and the future; which strengthen thinking capability; which assist tolerance, respect and solidarity attitudes; which are funny and stimulating to reflection and have literary quality for their language, their content and form.

Referred to this educative practice aims, firstly we can talk about one of the most general ones related to general competences that a teacher must acquire, and secondly, about primary school teacher specific competences. Among first ones, can be highlight the following:

(1) To know the social and educative institutions' organization and the diversity of actions included on their functioning as pedagogical training space. Thus is wanted the benefit of image and use of educative communities as live and dynamic cultural spaces as well as their bibliographic and documental funds.

(2) To reflect about practices out of university rooms to innovate and improve the teaching practice, to acquire habits and skills to autonomous and cooperative learning and to promote it among their future pupils.

(3) To understand the function, possibilities and limits of education in current society and the fundamental competences that influence to educative spaces where kindergarten children are.

(4) To correct and to improve the own written and oral communication.

Referred to specific competences of Primary School Teachers which are related to this project can be highlight two of them:

(1) To narrate properly a specific type of literary genre — tales — which not only must entertain but also stimulate their pupils' fantasy and conscientiousness of world around. Thus is expected to recover the oral narrative charm and the literary values of traditional tales and short stories pushed into the background by other genres and often reduced to children's audience.

(2) To analyze how this activity has been developed as of observation done by audiovisual recording to extract some conclusions wrote weekly on an individual portfolio.

From this point of view, what is pretended is that students learn to do and to be from own observation and reflection in both educative contexts: University and Social educative communities.

The **working methodology** is clearly related to storytelling didactics. A good told story fills with action, develop the story comprehension told from different points of view, spread and propagate the child's knowledge, and provide children with joy, fun and feeling of learning something good. To tell stories must contribute, definitely, to discover the world, the people and the characters that live on it.

Generally, tales belong to narrative genre. For a correct narration, the university student narrator must use a set of linguistic and cognitive abilities and capabilities that contribute to offer quality of narration. Among these abilities, these can be highlighted:

(1) Abilities to organize events around a common theme and a main topic. The construction of this meaning emerge the typical and specific content of each statement and allow build and tell a coherent story.

(2) Ability to arrange in sequence narrative events on telling time.

(3) Ability to fix and introduce causality relations among the story events, thus get a cause-effect typical from stories.

(4) Abilities of strictly linguistic nature: proper syntax, varied vocabulary and every class of linguistic constructions.

According to Sánchez Lobato (2006, p. 342), narration is "the story of facts placed on a certain time and a certain place, intertwined by some characters that generally are heroes of the action" (Dijk T. A., 1972). Therefore, in all narrative text is essential that our students place their story on a certain time and space, as they build an image of narrator and characters. Telling stories must mean narrate or relate stories referred to facts already passed, either invented or real.

Thus narration is defined as the whole of verbal expressions by means of every narrator tells the story of a real or fictitious, daily, scientific or literary fact.

In order to have quality of narration is necessary to consider other aspects as important as others commented before. It is required, for example, that according to knowledge and experience of each narrator is used a suitable tone of voice. What is narrated is called "happening" and include everything happened in the story, either told in present, past or future. It is very important that happenings are significant and they are told in a dynamic way to get and keep the listener attention. Furthermore, it is necessary to have in mind the audience characteristics as the age, in order to contain suitable ethic and aesthetic values.

In narrative techniques, it is possible to tell happenings from the beginning, from the middle or from the ending. However, what each narrator must have in mind is that children tales have to be tangible. This means shortness, simplicity, tenderness, flair and beauty.

Referred to the meaning of the used words by the narrator, these ones will have to refer to familiar and well-known objects (family, animals, food, etc.). Even this does not mean necessarily the use of new words; the explanation of their meaning will be required to be given, immediately but not stopping on it.

Referred to the narration style necessary to make sure, direct form gives more vigour to the story and turn it into real situations and living characters.

The evaluation of this educative practise must be done based on some functional and practical indicators that each narrator student knows before his/her intervention. Only this way s/he can prepare an intervention and set design with success guaranties.

These indicators are arranged in sequence based on an evaluation flourish detailed bellow. It is taken as a starting point the fact that a good narration will practice all variables appeared on VR (Very good) column to get a good reception according to the effort that narration means. Logically, each observation category is related to the aims detailed above.

Category	MB Very Good	B Good	R Fair	I Unsatisfactory
1. Story embracement.	The narrator includes all principal points and several details of the story.	The narrator includes all principal points and one or two details of the story.	The narrator includes all principal points of the story.	The narrator forgets some principal points of the story.
2. Knowledge about narrative sequence.	The narrator tells the story taking care of its narrative sequence without leaving important parts.	The narrator tells the story omitting some of its narrative sequences.	The narrator tells the story omitting, at least, two or more of its narrative sequences.	The narrator tells the story without taking care of its narrative sequences.
3. Highlighted of principal action.	For the audience it is very easy to understand what kind of problems the main characters face and why they happen.	For the audience it is very easy to understand what kind of problems the main characters face and why they are a problem.	For the audience it is rather easy to understand what kind of problems the main characters face but it is not so clear for them why they are a problem.	The audience does not know clearly what the problems the main characters have to face are.
4. Use of tone of voice.	The narrator always talks loud, slow and clear. S/he is easily understood by the whole audience.	The narrator talks loud, slow and clear. S/he is understood by the audience almost every time.	The narrator talks loud and clear. S/he talks so fast that sometimes the audience has some problems to understand her/him.	The narrator talks too weak or mumbling. Often the audience has several problems to understand.
5. Set design.	The narrator uses voices, facial expressions and consistent movements to make the characters more believable and the story easier to understand.	The narrator often uses voices, facial expressions and consistent movements to make the characters more believable and the story easier to understand.	The narrator tries to use voices, facial expressions and consistent movements to make the characters more believable and the story easier to understand.	The narrator tells the story but s/he does not use voices, facial expressions and consistent movements to make the characters more believable and the story easier to understand.
6. Contact with the audience.	The narrator looks and tells the story to each member of the audience.	The narrator looks and tells the story to some members of the audience.	The narrator looks and tells the story to one or two members of the audience.	The narrator does not try to involve the audience.
7. Characterization of the characters.	The main characters are mentioned and clearly described through words and/or actions. The audience knows and can describe how the characters look like and how they behave.	The main characters are mentioned and clearly described through words and/or actions. The audience has a good idea about how they are.	The main characters are mentioned but the audience knows very little about them.	It is difficult to know who the main characters are.
8. Story ending strategies.	The narrator highlights the end of the story explicitly.	The narrator highlights the end of the story half explicitly	The narrator almost does not highlight the end of the story.	The narrator does not highlight the end of the story.

This evaluation table is the one has been used by every Library and Play Centre, where stories have been told, to evaluate the intervention of the students based on the evaluation indicators specified. The results obtained[1] after the practice of this Teaching Innovation Project throughout four academic years are the following:
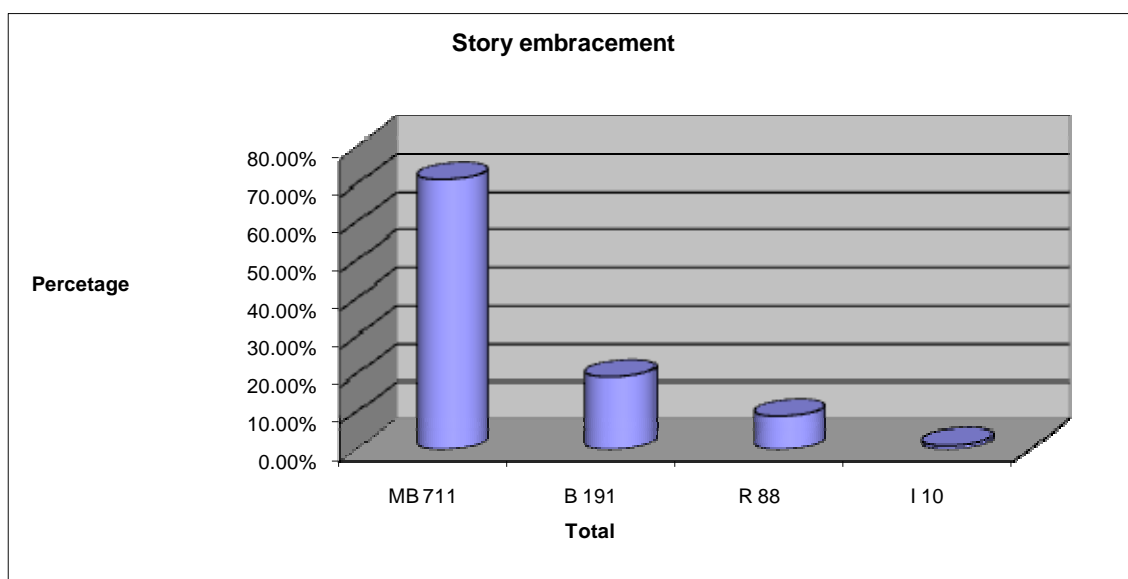

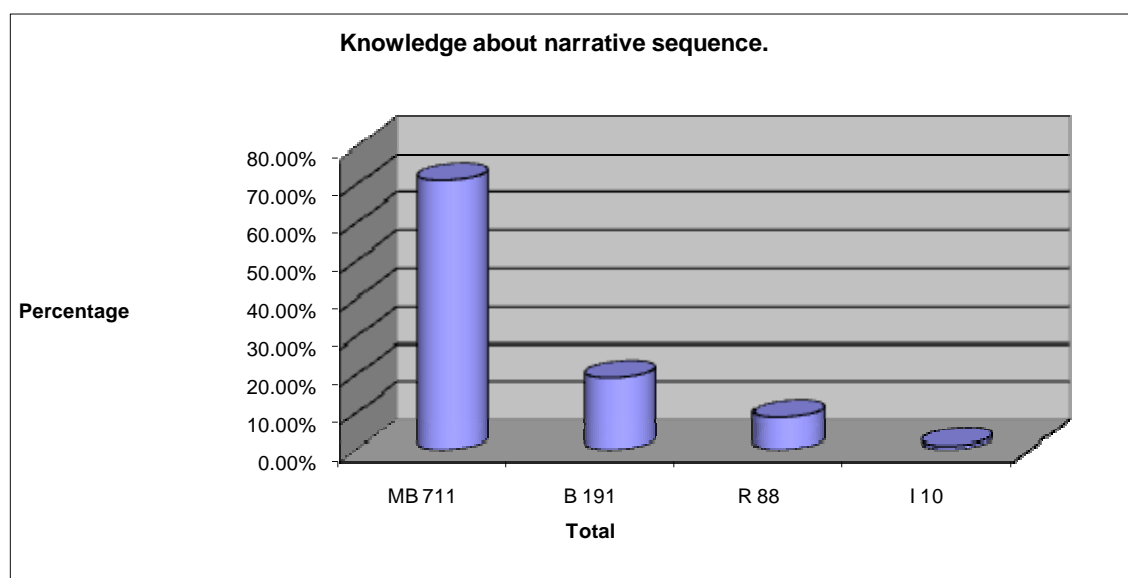**Figure 1   Story Embracement (MB: 71.1%, B: 19.1%, R: 8.8%, I: 1%)**

Figure 2   Knowledge about Narrative Sequence (MB: 64.2%, B: 19.3%, R: 11.7%, I: 4.8%)

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[1] The sample used to get the presented results has been made from 1000 evaluations done from the academic years 2009-2010 and 2012-2013, so 4 academic years.
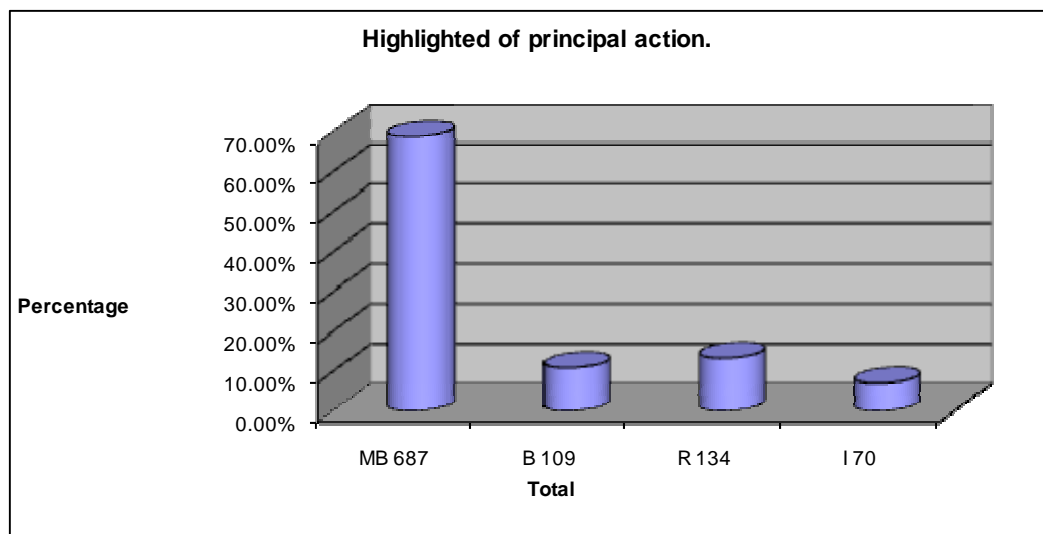
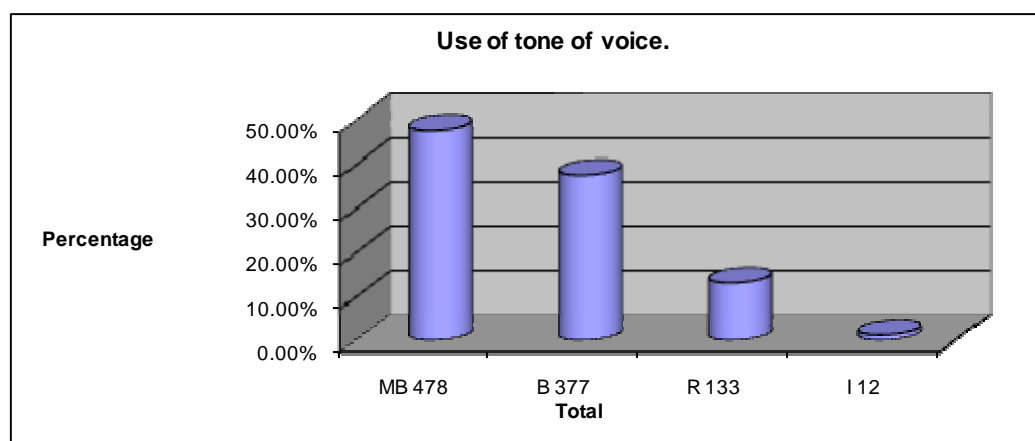**Figure 3   Highlighted of Principal Action (MB: 68.7%, B: 10.9%, R: 13.4%, I: 7%)**

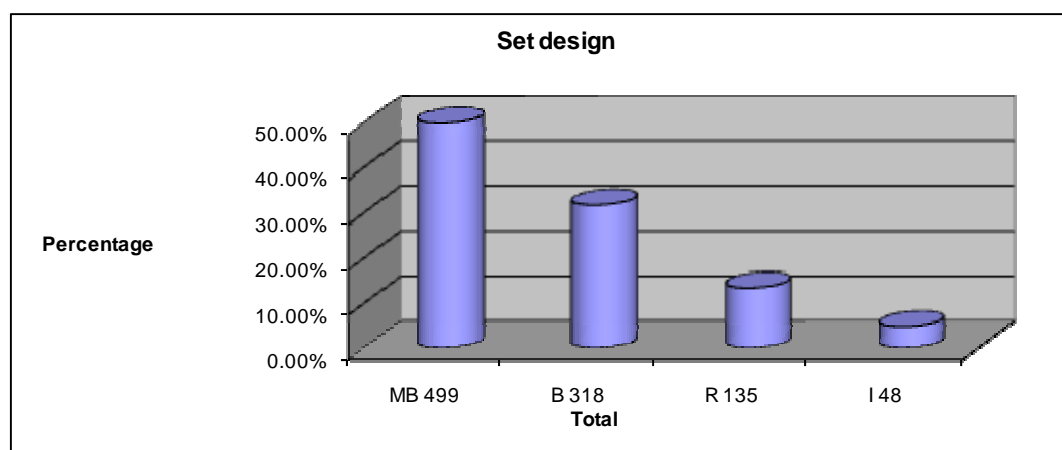**Figure 4   Use of Tone of Voice (MB: 47.8%, B: 37.7%, R: 13.3%, I: 1.2%)**

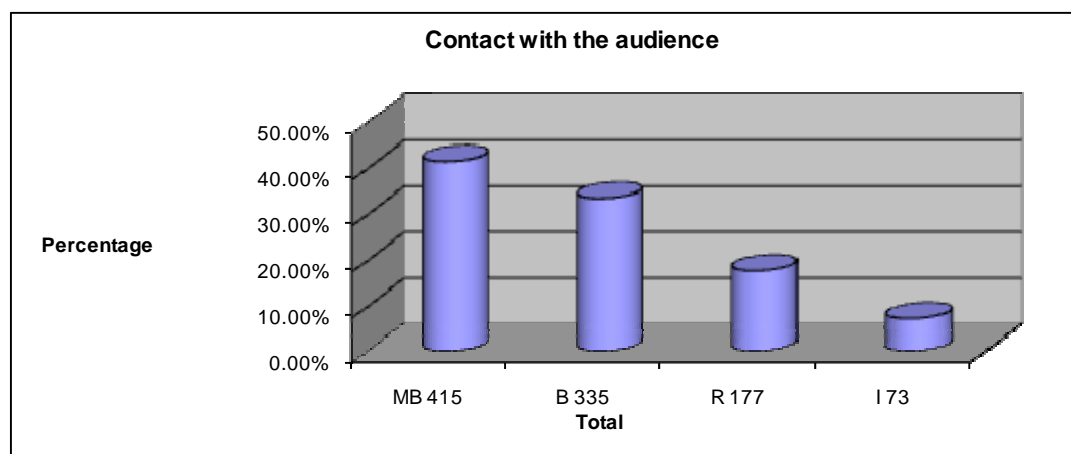**Figure 5   Set Design (MB: 49.9%, B: 31.8%, R: 13.5%, I: 4.8%)**

Figure 6   Contact with the Audience (MB: 41.5%, B: 33.5%, R: 17.7%, I: 7.3%)
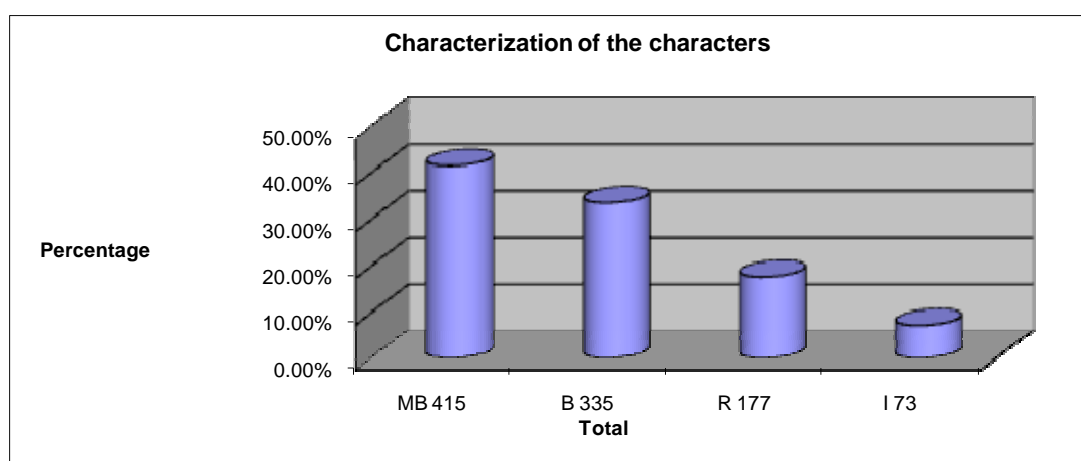

Figure 7   Characterization of the Characters (MB: 45.6%, B: 37.8%, R: 12.9%, I: 3.7%)
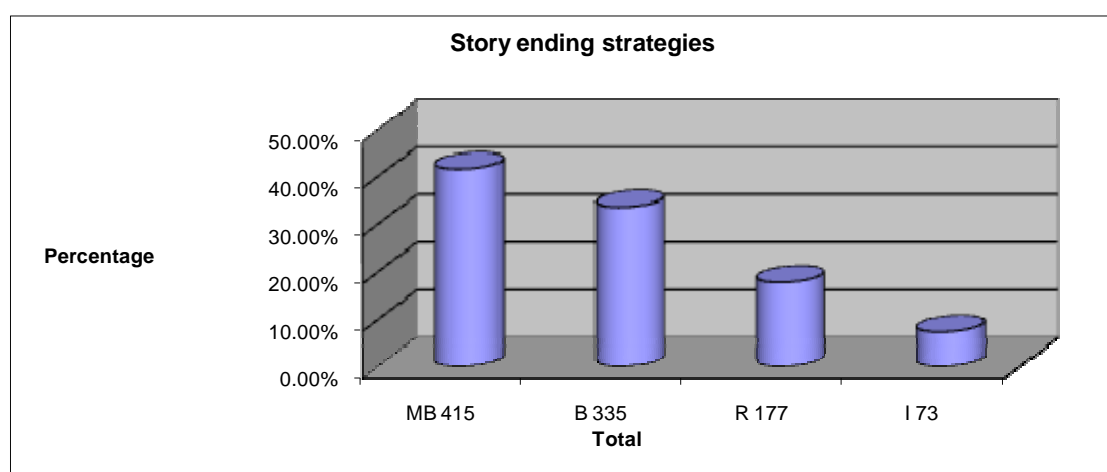

Figure 8   Story Ending Strategies (MB: 71.6%, B: 16.6%, R: 10.9%, I: 0.9%)

In light of obtained results, it seems evident that what our students must improve the most facing toward future interventions and, above all, toward story telling in contexts as schools are evaluation items which have to

do with communicative competence, as paralinguistic (use of tone of voice, set design, contact with the audience and characterization of characters as of actions they do). Thus, it is clear that communicative competence also encompass the whole of communicative abilities which go beyond the strictly linguistic message.

By other hand, evaluation items related to strict knowledge of the story (story embracement, knowledge about narrative sequence, highlighted of principal action) are the better evaluated. This is so because we are conscious about the fact that every intervention is preceded by a linguistic and literary elements study of the story which will be told. Even though the knowledge of the story is fundamental, it is also true that its well interpretation helps so that message of the story told is fully understood by the audience.

3. Conclusion

The Teaching Innovation Project presented and practiced since the academic year 2009/2010 allows us to formulate some conclusions about our student practices.

Firstly, the regular contact with libraries and play centres have facilitate to every member of this project — teachers, students and educative communities — to value it as functional and meaningful for the communicative competence training of university students. From this point of view, it must be highlighted the fact that implementation and practice of this project have allowed an individual observation of each university student to guide better his/her training referred to communicative competence. In consequence, as teachers we can formulate proposals to improve for every student having as purpose the improvement of storytelling competence.

Secondly, each student appreciates objective, corroborated and quality information about their learning process. Thus, teachers have the willingness to promote the student autonomy and his/her critical and reflexive thinking related to his/her intervention as storyteller.

Thirdly, this project has collaborated to promote a type of cooperative work between a student and a professor. Not only will be the professor who drive interventions for his/her students, but the student himself/herself is aware of practise s/he needs in a real learning scene, as story telling is in our case, which is essential on the university training of future teachers.

At last, the development of communicative competence is closely related to the capability of using a language correctly to express and to understand messages. This development, a central concept in literature didactics, means an approachment to real use of literary language, as it is essential to consider in our case stories as communicative tools, not only as study object.

Communicative competence, in contrast to pure linguistic competence, must keep in mind acting and social rules that manage communication, as it is subject to turns and flexible conventions that exceed simply command of codes of a language.

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