



## Oral tradition as a pedagogical strategy to strengthen communicative competencies in third grade students in a region of Córdoba (Colombia)

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### Summary

This study describes an experience of strengthening communicative competencies in third-grade students of a rural educational institution, located in a region of Córdoba (Colombia), through the integration of oral tradition as a pedagogical strategy. The research was developed under the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, following a cyclical process of diagnosis, planning, action, observation and joint reflection. A mixed design was used to assess the evolution in the students' oral expression, listening, reading and writing, as well as their appropriation of local stories. Throughout the phases of the PAR, myths, legends, couplets and tongue twisters typical of the region were incorporated, which generated a motivating environment and an increase in participation. The findings show significant improvements in oral fluency, text comprehension, and cultural awareness. It is concluded that oral tradition, by connecting the school with the collective memory of the community, has a positive impact on the development of communicative skills and promotes the appreciation of the local context.

**Keywords:** oral tradition, pedagogical strategy, communicative skills, Research-Action, rural education

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### 1. Introduction

In various rural contexts in Colombia, the formation of communicative skills (reading, writing, oral expression and listening comprehension) faces limitations related to socioeconomic factors, insufficient resources and the lack of contextualized pedagogical strategies (Ministry of National Education [MEN],

1998). In particular, the region of Córdoba presents conditions in which the educational infrastructure and family accompaniment do not always respond to the needs of students in the first grades of schooling. These deficiencies are frequently reflected in poor verbal fluency, difficulty in writing coherent texts and poor performance in reading comprehension, aspects that have a negative impact on academic performance and, in the long term, on the social integration of schoolchildren.

The problem described acquires special relevance when attending to groups in the third year of primary school, a stage in which fundamental habits and skills for later learning are consolidated (Storrs, 2015). It is in this stage where motivation and interest in reading and oral communication can make the difference between smooth progress and the perpetuation of academic lags. The lack of pedagogical strategies that recognize and value the cultural heritage of the Córdoba region becomes an additional obstacle, since many students do not find a link between their daily reality and the content taught in the classroom. By not seeing their local customs, histories and expressions represented, the teaching-learning process can be perceived as distant or irrelevant, limiting the active participation of children (Cano Roncagiolo & Claux Alfaro, 2009).

In contrast, the oral tradition of this region—composed of myths, legends, couplets, and proverbs—constitutes a potentially valuable pedagogical resource. Over the decades, these events have served as a vehicle for the transmission of values, knowledge and worldviews, which becomes an opportunity to strengthen cultural identity and enrich reading and writing practices. However, the integration of these stories into the school curriculum has not always been a priority, despite the fact that the General Education Law (Law 115 of 1994) and curricular guidelines such as those of the MEN (1998) underline the importance of contextualizing teaching and promoting community participation in training processes. Hence, the need for a pedagogical project that revalues the oral tradition and turns it into an axis to develop and enhance the communicative skills of third grade students emerges.

This research, framed in Participatory Action Research (PAR), seeks to address precisely this challenge. Through a collaborative process in which teachers, students and families actively participate, the aim is to transform the educational dynamic and generate better results in children's oral expression, reading, writing and listening comprehension. In addition, it is expected that, by incorporating native stories and narratives in class sessions, students will strengthen their sense of belonging and appreciation for the local cultural heritage, which has a positive impact on their comprehensive education (Ramírez Poloche, 2012).

The conceptual basis of this study is based on the idea that communicative competencies transcend mere linguistic ability and are based on the interrelation with the sociocultural context and the values shared within a community (Hymes, 1964; Halliday, 1979). From the perspective of communicative competence, not only grammatical correctness is important, but also pragmatic and sociolinguistic adequacy, as well as the ability to use language to construct meanings and relate to others (Arango, 2014). In the school environment, consolidating these competencies is essential for students to be able to express themselves clearly, interpret texts critically and participate in different types of discourses.

On the other hand, oral tradition, understood as the set of stories, legends, couplets, and knowledge transmitted from generation to generation, allows learning to be articulated with local identity (Ong, 1987). It is considered that oral narratives not only store historical and cultural information, but also condense visions of the world and values that the community has preserved because of their relevance to coexistence and social development (Vansina, 1967). As it is a highly attractive means of transmission for students—due to its narrative nature, its use of mental images, and its proximity to everyday life—oral tradition has been recognized as a powerful pedagogical resource to motivate reading and written production (Hernández & Lozano, 2011). Thus, school content is linked to the cultural experience of the students, reducing the gap between formal knowledge and community reality.

The choice of PAR as an approach responds to the need to involve the actors directly affected: students, teachers, parents and local leaders (Fals Borda, 1999). Instead of applying a vertical educational model where the teacher acts as the sole provider of knowledge, PAR proposes the collective construction of solutions, based on the problematization of practice and the recognition of cultural diversity (Freire, 2001).

This approach favors constant observation and critical reflection on the results, making it possible to adapt pedagogical strategies as progress or difficulties in the development of communicative skills are identified.

Similarly, it is assumed that language is not a neutral mechanism, but a vehicle that reflects and shapes culture (Halliday, 1979). By involving stories from oral tradition, linguistic diversity and the students' ability to interact with discursive forms that combine the local with the academic are affirmed. This conception is in line with the vision of the MEN (1998) on the teaching of the Spanish language, which promotes the exploration of different types of text and the active participation of students in the construction of meanings.

In short, the theoretical foundation of this study merges the relevance of communicative competence in primary education with the pedagogical potential of the oral tradition and the participatory approach of PAR. It is expected that this combination will allow the design and implementation of a sequence of activities that enhances the integral development of third grade students, reinforcing their discursive skills and strengthening the relationship between the school and the local culture of the Córdoba region. Through this process, the classroom becomes a space of exchange where the word, collective memory and learning form a fabric that promotes social transformation and the empowerment of the school community.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Approach and type of research**

A Participatory Action Research **approach was implemented**, with a **mixed design** that included quantitative data collection (surveys, reading tests, structured observations) and qualitative data (interviews, focus groups, field diary). The main purpose was to improve communication skills by integrating the oral narratives of the region.

#### **3.2. Context and population**

The project was developed in the third grade of a rural educational institution located in a region of Córdoba. 21 students (between 8 and 10 years of age), 2 teachers and parents participated, who collaborated in the collection of oral stories. The population is characterized by a strong presence of traditional customs and an economy based on agriculture and fishing.

#### **3.3. Collection instruments and phases of the PAR**

To articulate the research with the pedagogical practice, the phases of the PAR were followed:

##### **1. Diagnosis:**

- Application of a test of communicative competences (comprehension of short texts, oral exercises, dictation)
- Initial survey of students and parents to explore their relationship with the oral tradition (knowledge of coplas, local tales)
- Classroom observations to identify participation dynamics and possible language barriers.

##### **2. Planning:**

- Collective workshops with teachers and community representatives to select local narratives (myths, tongue twisters, couplets) and design reading, debate and writing activities around them
- Definition of progress indicators (fluency in oral expression, accuracy in reading, cohesion in writing)

##### **3. Action:**

- Implementation of weekly sessions focused on storytelling and analysis of stories from the oral tradition
- Exercises in adapting stories to written texts, dramatizations, creation of couplets by students
- Participatory observations and field diary recording of classroom interaction

#### 4. **Remark:**

- Data collection using tracking cards in each session
- Identification of progress, difficulties and reactions of students
- Feedback to teachers and adjustments in methodology according to evidence

#### 5. **Reflection:**

- Application of the final test of communication skills
- Focus group with students, teachers and parents to evaluate the experience and discuss the results
- Systematization of findings and proposals for improvement or continuity

### **4. Results**

#### **4.1. Diagnostic Phase**

- **Initial competency test:** 60% of the students showed low fluency when reading short texts, while 50% showed little coherence when presenting ideas orally. Only 20% managed to write paragraphs with a basic structure.
- **Survey of students and families:** 70% of the children did not recognize local verses or stories; most were limited to narratives that had little to do with the regional culture. Parents agreed that children had little reading habit and rarely listened to native stories at home.
- **Initial classroom observation:** Participation was small, with students shy to express themselves out loud. Oral language was used in an instrumental way, without delving into the local linguistic richness.

#### **4.2. Planning Phase**

- **Selection of narratives:** In workshops with teachers and community leaders, myths and verses typical of the area were chosen, as well as tongue twisters that had characters and places recognizable to the students.
- **Design of activities:** An eight-week didactic sequence was defined, with sessions dedicated to reading or narrating legends, group discussions, rewriting exercises and dramatizations. Evaluation indicators were established for oral expression (coherence, intonation), reading (accuracy, comprehension) and writing (organization of ideas, spelling).

#### **4.3. Action Phase**

- **Strategy implementation:** During the first four weeks, local stories were read aloud. Students completed literal and inferential comprehension exercises, supported by guides and open-ended questions.
- **Storytelling and workshops:** In subsequent sessions, two bearers of the oral tradition (grandparents of the community) were invited to narrate verses and stories. This aroused great interest, as the children recognized elements of their environment. Debates and stage performances were generated.
- **Written production:** Students developed illustrated versions of the stories, including alternate endings and incorporating vocabulary from the region. The teacher supervised the cohesion and clarity in the paragraphs.

#### **4.4. Observation Phase**

- **Record of progress:** In each session, observation rubrics were applied for the level of participation and quality of oral interventions. A progressive rise was noted: from 30% to 65% of the students were able to express themselves with greater confidence and coherence.
- **Analysis of notebooks:** Written productions gained in length and coherence. For example, if at the beginning a student wrote two disjointed sentences, at the end of the sixth week he achieved a short narrative with a beginning, middle and end.

- **Field diary:** More fluid interactions between students were reflected, who corrected each other constructively. There was also greater use of vocabulary related to the local culture (names of places, animals and customs).

#### 4.5. Reflection Phase

- **Final test of communicative skills:** Compared to the initial evaluation, it was observed that 70% of the students improved a level in oral expression, going from "low" to "basic" or "basic" to "high". In reading, 40% raised their score by at least one range, showing improvement in the comprehension of short texts.
- **Focus group with teachers and parents:** They agreed that the use of native stories aroused the children's motivation, relating better to the content and promoting meaningful learning. Parents were interested in sharing more verses and anecdotes with their children, prolonging the experience at home.
- **Lessons learned:** The PAR approach allowed activities to be adjusted on the fly. It was suggested to continue with the integration of other artistic forms (songs, local music) to further strengthen orality and creativity.

#### Discussion of the results

The results presented reveal the effectiveness of incorporating oral tradition as a pedagogical strategy to enhance communicative competencies in third grade students. From the perspective of communicative competence (Hymes, 1964; Halliday, 1979), the advances observed—both in oral expression and in reading and writing—suggest that when school content is linked to cultural expressions close to children's experience, they respond with greater motivation and interest. In the diagnostic phase, poor verbal fluency and weak coherence in written production were evident as significant obstacles to learning; however, at the end of the intervention, 70% of the students improved their level of oral expression and 40% increased their reading performance. These data show the potential of local orality to resonate in the daily lives of students and make communicative practice transcend traditional language classes.

The progression from 30% to 65% of active participation in the classroom corroborates that motivation increases when activities are based on their own cultural references (Vansina, 1967; Ong, 1987). The fact that several students commented, dramatized and rewrote the oral stories denotes not only their acquisition of language skills, but also the appropriation of a sense of identity and belonging (Hernández & Lozano, 2011). According to the sociocultural theory of learning, language is consolidated and enriched by sharing meanings in a collaborative environment (Halliday, 1979); In this study, the participatory intervention of the community—especially grandparents and parents who narrated songs and stories—functioned as a catalyst for the exchange of knowledge, promoting the development of oral expression, listening comprehension, and written production.

Participatory Action Research (Fals Borda, 1999) was essential to adapt the didactic sequence to the emerging findings. The record in the field diary and the systematic observations showed how, session after session, the students overcame the initial shyness and became involved with more confidence. This ability to reflect, adjust and re-implement pedagogical actions is in line with Freire (2001), who stresses the importance of praxis: a reflective practice that responds dynamically to the real needs of the educational community. In this way, the workshops with oral narratives were constantly reconfigured, reinforcing the areas where the greatest gaps were detected and enhancing the strengths found.

Improvements in written production, for example, went from short and disjointed texts to narratives with a beginning, middle and end, evidencing a growth in the capacity for discursive organization. From the perspective of Van Dijk and Kintsch (1983), textual comprehension and production are enriched when the student can access coherent structures of meaning and relate them to their previous schemas. In this case, legends and couplets served as scaffolding for the construction of written texts that incorporated vocabulary typical of the region, reflecting significant learning in which the linguistic and cultural dimensions were integrated.

Finally, the involvement of families and their greater willingness to share stories at home point to the prolongation of the formative process beyond the school environment. The finding coincides with those studies that emphasize the relevance of community collaboration in the strengthening of communicative skills (Ramírez Poloche, 2012), since children find coherence between what they learn at school and the knowledge that circulates in their immediate environment. In short, the initiative demonstrated that oral tradition, when articulated with sociocultural theories and with a participatory approach, favors the acquisition of communicative skills, revitalizes local identity and enriches the fabric that unites the school with the community.

## 5. Conclusions

The findings of this experience confirm that the oral tradition, due to its cultural proximity and narrative potential, offers a highly propitious framework to strengthen communicative competencies in third-grade students from rural contexts. The linking of stories, couplets and local tongue twisters allowed students to establish deeper connections with school content, increasing their motivation and interest in the use of language in its oral, written and reading comprehension dimensions. At the same time, the active participation of the community, in particular families and bearers of the oral tradition, enriched the pedagogical dynamic by contributing knowledge and stories close to the reality of the children, contributing to the strengthening of cultural identity and social cohesion.

From the methodological perspective, Participatory Action Research demonstrated its effectiveness in promoting collective reflection and the continuous adjustment of didactic strategies. This approach facilitated the integration of the voices of teachers, students and families, which not only favored the relevance of the interventions, but also encouraged a sense of co-responsibility in the training process. The progressive increase in students' oral expression and written production, as well as the improvement in their reading skills, shows that language teaching has a greater impact when it incorporates the local culture and responds to the specific needs of the educational community.

In summary, the pedagogical proposal focused on oral tradition not only enhanced the development of communicative skills, but also strengthened the bond between the school and its environment, promoting a revaluation of the region's own cultural heritage. These results suggest the relevance of replicating or adapting similar initiatives in other rural contexts, combining the richness of oral expressions with participatory approaches that promote the comprehensive training of students and their active insertion in the cultural and social life of their community.

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