Adaptation and Training Model of the Board Game *Untold* for Narrative Competence

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In this study, a training model of the board game Untold: The adventure awaits you was developed to teach narrative skills. The research was structured in three phases: analysis of the educational possibilities of board game-based learning; application of the game in a pilot experience with the participation of 137 Spanish first-year high school students; and proposal for the adaptation of the game mechanics and dynamics. The results offer a proposal with modifications of game dynamics and mechanics to facilitate the didactic use of Untold: The adventure awaits you. The main modifications have been: simplification of rules, previous training in the interpretation of dice and metaphorical meanings, and inclusion of the villain (or knot) as the starting point and central axis of the narrative. It is concluded that it is an effective resource to develop narrative competence in a playful way.

Keywords: narrative, writing, literature, game-based learning, board games

INTRODUCTION

Reading and writing in adolescence

The factors influencing reading habits and behavior are varied and complex. In general terms, we can highlight: Adult modeling and school support (Farstrup & Samuels, 2002); reading competence; access to reading materials (Elley, 1992); nearby libraries and reading programs; interest and motivation (Krashen, 2004); use of technology (Rideout & Robb., 2020), among others. However, the pandemic caused by COVID-19, and especially the lockdowns, has increased the importance of reading as a leisure activity, it is still too early to assess its medium and long-term impact on reading behaviors (Global English Editing, 2020). However, the Germán Sánchez-Ruipérez Foundation (2020) points out that these changes could last over time. The decline in reading and writing habits during adolescence remains significant (Federación de

Gremios de Editores de España, 2022). This fact contrasts with the increase in the use of digital devices by this population sector (Association for Media Research, 2021), reading in digital format, and audiobooks (FGEE, 2022). It is argued that this fact is due to several factors: the lack of interest produced by high school; the reading canon is far from the students' interests; there is an instrumentalist concept of reading; and the difficulty of assessing the reading habit (Cassany, 2013; García-Roca & De-Amo, 2019).

Nevertheless, this does not imply that young people lack narrative and cultural references. The audiovisual entertainment industries, such as video games and television series, are growing (Asociación Española de Videojuegos, 2020). This cultural trend is combined with the creation of transmedia productions in which the same narrative is dispersed in different media: literary sagas, films, series, video games, fragments in social networks, fandom (user-generated content), etc. (Jenkins 2008) and in which each of them squeezes the narrative possibilities it offers (Scolari, 2008). Some remarkable examples of this type of narrative are Harry Potter (whose hypertext is the literary saga), Naruto (Manga), Cowboy Bebop (Anime), Walking Dead (Comic), and Resident Evil (video game). Except for the first, these narratives are not usually found in schools, and proposals to promote reading, as well as efforts aimed at developing the reading habit, must necessarily start from the interests of students to have a tangible impact on the reader. Thus, it is observed that students are increasingly unmotivated towards reading and creative writing (Twenge et al., 2018), and schools with a reading canon that does not adapt to new narratives and textualities. The school canon, therefore, should be the result of the combination of literary quality, historical significance, adaptation to the reading itinerary, empathy with the readers' taste, and the capacity for the formation of a competent reader (Cerrillo, 2013).

Narrative and communicative competence

Communicative competence includes skills in understanding and producing oral and written communication in different contexts and situations, as well as the ability to adapt to appropriate interlocutors and social and cultural norms (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). It may also include problem-solving and negotiation skills in communication situations.

In this sense, the narration is one of the first forms of expression and closest to the child, allowing him to know the world around him, make sense of experience and construct their identity (Bruner, 2006; Bruner 1986). Throughout history, narratives have been the basis of the transmission of knowledge, development of identities, and socialization (Kusumawarti et al., 2020; Lluch, 2014). At present, the formative potentialities of storytelling for the integral and interdisciplinary growth of the individual in general and literate literacy, in particular, are already unquestionable. Specifically, previous research has shown that narrative competence is linked to improved language development (mother tongue or second language) (Nelson, 2011); cognitive development (Bruner, 1986, 2006); social and emotional development (Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, 2002); cultural enrichment (Mendoza, 2008) and memory improvement (Peng et al.,2018).

The writing of narrative texts in formal contexts has been subject to other objectives linked to textual adequacy and correctness (Fernández, et al., 2019; Sun & Asmawi, 2022) and other aspects such as character design and characterization, construction of diegesis and description of spaces, narrative structures (linear, non-linear, circular, interactive, in media res), plots and storylines, etc. have been left in the background. This is why creative writing develops as a vernacular legal practice (outside educational institutions) in affinity spaces (Gee & Hayes, 2014) despite the important formative opportunities it offers (García-Roca & Amo, 2019).

From this perspective, narrative competencies consist of skills that allow the child, adolescent, and adult to narrate (stories) and tell (themselves) from memories, mental representations, and individual experiences. This competence can be related to oral, written and media competencies. Therefore, linguistic, communicative, conceptual, semantic, and mnemonic competencies are integrated into this process (Iandolo et al., 2015). In this sense, Lomas & Vera (2005) define narrative competence as the ability to decipher and elaborate discourses that refer to an image of reality constructed as a temporal structure. Therefore, the development of narrative competence is linked to the ability to create stories and to the foundations of media education (Segovia, 2012). The real scientific and educational challenge lies in its measurement and evaluation. These studies can include the analysis of the structure, content, and coherence of a story, as well as the storyteller's ability to use effective and persuasive language (Nelson, 2011; Pantaleo, 2010; Fernández et al., 2019). These studies are common in areas such as education, psychology, and linguistics. As noted above, young people and adolescents are much more accustomed to audiovisual (and interactive) structures, formats, and narratives characterized by the synergistic relationship of different communicative codes and languages (Jenkins, 2008; Twenge et al., 2020).

Under this perspective, Del-Moral et al. (2016) offer an assessment model of narrative competence that includes six indicators related to the construction of stories: organization of turning points for the proper articulation of the plot; internal coherence of the story; creation of characters and settings of the story and invention of the characters' discourse; degree of creativity and adequacy to the communicative purpose pursued with the story (transmitting teachings, promoting reflection, values, etc.). To solve the psychological barriers of a creative nature that arise in creative writing in adolescents (embarrassment, blocking, lack of communicative competence, etc.), previous research shows the effectiveness of playful strategies (Carvalho & Skippe, 2022; Li & Wah, 2020) and of taking advantage of the textual possibilities of digital devices (and vernacular literacy practices) to enhance the creative process (García-Roca, 2021). In this sense, hypotexts can be used and fanfiction can be created since they are directly related to the interests of young people and adolescents (Black, 2008).

Game-based learning and cooperative learning

Recently, different educational strategies have been developed for the promotion and learning of literacy (Hooley & Thorpe, 2017); among them is game-based learning (GBL) (Sailer & Sailer, 2020). GBL consists of the continuous and strategic use of games in teaching. Both commercial and teacher-designed games, which can be adapted

to the needs of students, can be used to work on specific content or competencies (Manzano et al., 2022). The GBL pursues the fun and motivation of students, working curricular contents, and competencies through play (Budasi et al., 2020; Li et al., 2023; Plass et al., 2016). Similarly, it allows this learning to be done cooperatively since the game has a clear social component, and in its development, communication, negotiation, and emotional management skills are intrinsically worked on (Marín, 2018).

The use of games can be used at any educational stage, reporting benefits in academic performance from early childhood and primary education (Montero & Díaz, 2021) to higher education (Eltahir et al., 2021). Specifically, within the area related to reading processes, there are some experiences with GBL, reporting benefits in the acquisition or reinforcement of skills related to literacy (Ronimus et al., 2019) and reading habits (Tan, 2018). Manzano et al. (2021) combined the use of gamification and GBL with high school students for the development of reading processes for 7 or 15 weeks, obtaining statistically significant differences to the traditional teaching group, reporting a strong or moderate effect size in almost all the variables studied.

It is recommended to deepen the design of playful strategies for these to be perceived beyond rewarding or punishing behaviors with different stimuli, but rather to achieve a fun experience that favors the intrinsic motivation of students (Kapp, 2012). Within GBL, each game has a series of established dynamics and mechanics that can be adapted so that there is a balance between the content and skills to be worked on, the game, and the player's ability to retain and apply what has been learned (Admiraal et al., 2011). This balance between competencies and skills can be known thanks to the fact that this methodology allows constant feedback, both from the student with the dynamics of the game and from the teacher with his students through the observation of the games. For students to be motivated during a GBL experience, it is necessary to set achievable goals, guide their strategies to accomplish the tasks, and establish metacognition strategies (Wan et al., 2021).
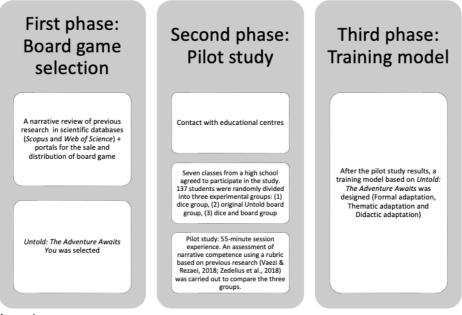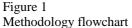
Research objectives

This paper analyzes the educational potential of the board games *Story Cubes* and *Untold: the Adventure Awaits you* as a tool for narrative textual creation. For this purpose, the following objectives are pursued:

1. To explore first-year high school students' textual productions energized through a game based on *Story Cubes* and *Untold: the Adventure Awaits you.*

2. To design a formative model of the game Untold: the Adventure Awaits for the development of narrative competence in high school students.

METHOD

To achieve the objectives set, a mixed research method has been carried out. It has been divided into three large phases that correspond to the previous objectives (See Figure 1):

Figure 1
Methodology flowchart

First, a narrative review of previous research that shared the objectives of this study was carried out in scientific databases (Scopus and Web of Science). A selection of board games was made based on previous research. In addition, the main board game sales and distribution portals were consulted to explore new possibilities. The selection criteria were based on the playful strategies used, the proximity to the interests and intertext (cultural background) of the participants, and the knowledge, skills, and attitudes linked to the narrative and communicative competence potentially developed in high school students. *Untold: The adventure awaits you* were selected.

In the second phase of the study, a pilot study was carried out in the form of quasi-experimental research with the participation of 137 secondary school students, divided into three experimental groups. The researchers made superficial adaptations to the game to operationalize it in the formal classroom context. The experience was carried out in a 55-minute session in which students participated in pairs.

Finally, in the third phase of the study, a formative analysis was conducted through a dense description of the mechanics and dynamics of the game. Given the results of the previous steps, a training model based on *Untold: The Adventure Awaits* is proposed with formal, thematic, and didactic modifications and adaptations for its application in formal education to develop narrative competencies.

Participants and procedure

For the second phase, the sample consisted of students in the first year of high school in seven classes from a center in southern Spain. The selection of the participants was made through a non-probabilistic incidental sampling, based on those schools and teachers who volunteered to participate in the study. The center that would participate in this pilot study was randomly selected in the sampling. To determinate which game mechanics could be most beneficial in the classroom for teaching narrative competence, the students were divided into three experimental groups of equivalent size (The first group of 46 students played only with Story Cubes, the second group of 43 students played only with the original Untold board, and the third group of 48 students played with the board and dice).

The pilot study consisted of applying the game for 55 minutes during school hours. Each subgroup received the same instructions on the realization of the stories, only the game mechanics proposed for each subgroup (dice, board, or dice and board) were differentiated. Students were divided into pairs to create the stories. The researchers carried out this intervention, accompanied by the regular teacher of the Language subject. The researchers assisted and energized, on average, four teams of participants simultaneously, and to systematize and homogenize the evaluation. Once the 55 minutes were over, the stories were collected and the evaluation rubric was applied.

Instrument

For proper coding and systematization of the data, an ad hoc rubric was created based on the research of Maryam, et al., (2018) and Zedelius, et al., (2018). This rubric analyzes the quality of the texts by dividing it into four main variables, which are divided into 11 qualities. The structure of the rubric was:

1. Construction of the diegesis: Fictional world and intertextuality and originality.
2. Characters and characterization: Characterization, subjectivities, and canonicity.
3. Narrative Structure, Plot and Plot: Structure, Coherence, and Conclusion.
4. Formal Aspects: Writing, Poetic Function, and Techniques.

Each of these 11 qualities can be assigned a variable score from 1 to 4 to quantify the qualitative aspects of the text.
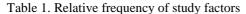
Data analysis

Two researchers independently coded each of the texts produced during the pilot study with the rubric. Subsequently, the researchers pooled each of the texts and discussed the aspects in which there was no coincidence in the coding (degree of discordance 14%). Once the qualitative aspects of the text had been quantified, a study was made of the relative frequencies of each of the aspects studied in the rubric.

FINDINGS

Pilot study

Table 1 and Figure 2 show the frequencies of each of the variables. In general, it is observed that the Story Cubes and the adapted game give higher scores in all the study variables. Regarding the Story Cubes, they have shown higher scores in the aspects of Construction of the Diegesis and Characters and Characterization, while the original Untold Board, while has scored higher in the aspects of Narrative Structure, Plot, and Storyline.

Table 1. Relative frequency of study factors

	Story Cubes	Original Untold Boad	Board and Dice
Construction of the Diegesis	33,14	28,00	38,86
Characters and Characterization	33,03	29,64	37,33
Narrative Structure, Plot and Plotting	26,26	34,01	39,73
Formal Aspects	34,56	28,49	36,95

Figure 2
Frequency of each of the formal qualities of the text

Selection and training analysis of *Story Cubes*

Nowadays, several board games can be found in Spanish that can dynamize the process of textual-narrative creation: *Fábulas de Peluche*, *Colores de cuento*, *Érase una vez*, *Quest Stories* or *Sí Señor Oscuro*. The scientific literature describes two board games at the educational level: *Dixit* and *Story Cubes* (SC). Both follow the same mechanics: the images act as dynamic promoters of the players' creativity. The challenge lies in the recomposition and interpretation of the sequence of graphic texts. *Dixit* is a well-known board game awarded with different prizes (game of the year in Spain 2009, Spiel des Jahres 2010) that is based on a visual storytelling system with which the user interacts iteratively to compose a short story from a sequence of illustrations. Previous research shows its potential for the development of short- and long-term memory through the

manipulation of terms (Chao-Chu et al., 2019) for the development of linguistic and communicative competence in Spanish as a foreign language (Revuelta, 2020) and it has even been adapted for the reconstruction of concepts linked to breathing (González, 2020). *SC* have also been the subject of study of different research showing the benefits of this resource for the procedural creation of stories (Fernández-Rufete & Fernández-Rufete, 2019), language stimulation, and foreign language learning (Amodei & Strong, 2021), as well as for the analysis of reflections on individual experiences and perceptions of children and adolescents (Nemeth, 2019; Weder, et al., 2019).

Thus, *Untold: The adventure awaits you* is based on audiovisual narrative structures, especially television series, to encourage the textual creation of the players supported by the *SC*. It is a cooperative storytelling game to embody the heroes of a series of adventures. The game begins with the construction of the diegesis and the narrative world in which the experience will unfold, to do so:
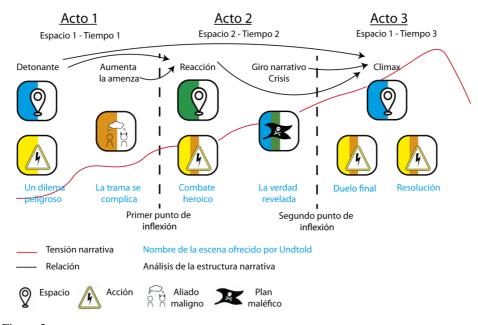
- The players must fill in the "Episode Guide" sheet in which they must detail paratextual elements such as the name of the episode. From the narrative perspective, this same sheet must be placed spatiotemporally and according to the characteristics of the fictional universe. Furthermore, formal aspects such as the narrative tone or style (depending on the audiovisual classification) and a brief synopsis must be specified. Finally, the characters, objects, spaces, and other elements that may be relevant to the development of the narrative shall be previously established.

- The characterization process is carried out individually: each player must create and play at least one character (future hero). In this phase the name of the adventure, his occupation or role, and his specialties are detailed.

Once the narrative universe and the characters-protagonists of the narrative have been established, the board of *Untold: The Adventure Awaits You* is divided into five major phases (approach, first turning point, second turning point, climax, and resolution) that correspond to the classic linear narrative structures in the cinematographic story.

1. A dangerous dilemma: The approach and trigger of the story in which the place, the characters, and the threat are contextualized and presented.

2. The plot is complicated: The first turning point in when the threat to the protagonists (and the world) increases through an evil ally, a *Terrible Secret*, an *Evil Plan,* or a *Master of Evil*. The type of complication will be defined by the result obtained in the *SC*.

3. Heroic combat: In a new phase, the knot of the story begins: the characters will have to face for the first time the threat defined in "A dangerous dilemma" following the next structure "The Episode continues in [this new place], where now [this Threat] [Pursues/Attacks/Accuses/has Captured] us."

4. The truth revealed: Regardless of the denouement of the previous scene, the board offers the possibility of an unexpected narrative twist: the true intentions, powers, or evil plan of the villain or menace are shown.

5. The final duel: In this phase, the narrative climax develops, and at this point, all the facts, scenarios, characters, conflicts, and obstacles converge. The character players must use ingenuity and creativity to end the threat definitively.

Figure 3 shows an example of the internal structural connections existing in narrative development. It is a network of mutually dependent relationships between all the component elements of a whole (final text). The same spatiotemporal contextualization defined in "A Dangerous Dilemma", for example, corresponds to the setting of the final duel. In this sense, the player-narrators must fit together all the actions and reactions (defined by the randomness of the *SC*) to close the primary and secondary plots.

Figure 3
Adaptation of Untold: The Adventure Awaits You

The results of the player's 'actions will be determined by their score on the dice. There are six possible outcomes: incredible success; success; success with reservations; failure with a positive side; failure; and disastrous failure. . Lastly, there are possibilities for the introduction of explanatory analepsis (*flashbacks*), paralysis of the narrative-creative development, introduction of narrative or paratextual modifications (results of the dice)587uggestionns in the players' action and interpretative questions and issues.

The training model of *Untold: Adventure awaits you*

Since Untold: The adventure awaits you is a commercial game, it does not allow a direct didactic transposition to the classroom, but can be adapted to formalize the knowledge and skills that are developed by playing. Therefore, the aim is to promote the motivation generated by this activity and at the same time develop narrative competence. Thus, with the results found in the previous phases: analysis of board games and pilot experience, a series of formal, thematic, and didactic adaptations are proposed to enhance the training possibilities of this board game in high schools.

Formal adaptation

Besides the modifications before the pilot experience presented in the second phase, the game allows for several changes to be made to its training model:

- The construction of the diegesis can be limited to a brief presentation and spatiotemporal contextualization specifying supernatural elements (if any) or technologies that stand out.

- The character sheets should be expanded and detail aspects of the characters' personalities that may be relevant to the development of the events. Likewise, in addition to the qualities, knowledge, or powers, weaknesses or aspects that could limit their capacity for action should be specified.

- As seen in the introduction section, narrative constructions are based on the problem-solution dyad in the scenario in which the participants find themselves. This is why we suggest the inclusion of a new tab describing the threat or villain: goals, motivations, personality, and skills/powers. Although this aspect would break, in a way, one of the bases of the game (improvisation), it has been detected that the narrative development slows down abruptly when there is no clear pre-established threat.

Thematic adaptation

Untold: The adventure awaits you establishes the narrative structure and the theme or film subgenre into which it is inserted, while the *SC*s guide the story content. In the pilot experience, *SC* expansions were used to provide thematic variety. Despite this, literal interpretations of the dice were made and it was not easy to create a coherent story. Therefore, two thematic adaptations are proposed:

- Villain: the original game favors the creation of narratives characteristic of a role-playing game: the characters must develop in different situations, and the challenge is to resolve the plots in the most canonical way possible. However, the diegesis created at the beginning does not allow the inclusion of the literal elements presented in the *SC*. This generates too abrupt fictional changes that end up breaking the narrative coherence for the students. Therefore, one of the proposals for thematic adaptation is to change the original characterocentrism for the design of a narrative focused on problems, mediating elements, and solutions linked in a complex way (Protagonists and aspects of the diegesis). In this sense, the grid structure of the

board favors the creation of more complex narrative arcs and the design of meaningful actions (changing the fate of the protagonists). Defining the problem or the villain beforehand will allow the creation of more coherent narratives and help the less literal interpretation of the dice. Although the randomness and unpredictability of the narrative game aresignificantly reduced, textual coherence and cohesion are improved.

- Hyper textuality: During the pilot experience, some participants, more or less directly, relied on audiovisual hypertexts. This means completely re-signifying the activity: it would be a matter of elaborating fanfic in the form of constructive hyperfiction. The diegesis and characters are created and defined, and the challenge lies in the development of actions in which the characters act canonically. To do this, they must know in detail the personality, characteristics, and weaknesses of each character. All this is directly related to reading and narrative competence.

Didactic adaptation

The process of formalizing recreational activities is complex due to the possibility of neutralizing the aspects that characterize it if the educational design is not well-planned. Therefore, it is a matter of finding a balance between motivational and formative activity (Rodríguez-Ferrer & Manzano-León, 2021) and, in turn, a balance between the challenges posed and the capabilities of the students (Marczewski, 2015). From this perspective, *Untold: Adventure Awaits You* can be an effective resource for developing narrative competence. Therefore, to maximize the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes linked to this competence, the pilot experience has highlighted the importance of systematizing the development of the story and characters through the proposed game mechanics. From this perspective, previous research and validated instruments to assess narrative competence are linked to creative written texts (Gamboa et al., 2016; Pantaleo, 2010). This is because narrative competence and creative writing assess narrative aspects (story), such as the canonicity of characters (actions and reactions), coherence, narrative cohesion, formal aspects (discourse) linked to textual appropriateness, the poetic function of language and the sequencing of the narrative (dispositio).

As noted above, the goal of this activity is not related to the complex and deep construction of narratives, but to the combination of different narrative aspects through collaborative and creative problem-solving. Implicitly, the narrative (audiovisual) structure followed by most fiction films and series is worked through a specific genre: adventure, fantasy, action, or science fiction.

DISCUSSION

Playful strategies in general, and board games in particular, have important formative possibilities for developing reading habits, implementing creative writing activities, and developing narrative competence. Recent literature shows the strengths of ludic strategies for story development (content plane) (Fernández-Rufete & Fernández-Rufete, 2019). Even so, narrative structure (and other elements belonging to the expression

plane) is relegated to the background despite its importance for the development of narrative competence (Del-Moral et al., 2016; Iandolola, 2012).

From the results obtained in the pilot study, it can be concluded that the formative design and proposal are adequate in terms of the narrative productions made by the students. Better results are observed when using the adapted board and dice than in the other two conditions. These results agree with Putu (2018), who obtained statistically significant improvements in English learning after applying an adapted board game. The pedagogical redesign of the board game *Untold: The Adventure Awaits You* favors flexibility and narrative construction by the students. From this perspective, the main strength and distinctive feature of Untold: The Adventure Awaits You lies in the process of transforming the story into discourse through modularization, temporalization, and spatialization. In this way, narrative concepts such as narrative action, hero, villain, acts, problem-solution binomial, narrative arc, plot twist, climax, macrostructure, and other narrative elements are addressed and applied practically and this is one of the difficulties encountered by Fernández et al. (2019) in their study on narrative competence in basic education. The integration of random, or partially random, visual elements that complement the written text become sources of inspiration that activate students' participation, communication, and creativity. These results are consistent with previous research (Ikiz and Béziat, 2020; Segovia, 2012; Vitancol and Baria, 2018).

Regarding the limitations of this study, it should be noted that this is a pilot experience with a small sample, which does not allow for generalizing the results. Larger studies would be necessary to explore with greater rigor and control of the study variables the potential benefits of GBL for narrative competence in secondary education. This study opens new lines and perspectives of research linked to the application of this resource as integrated activities with the modifications suggested in the results; to check what type of complementary competencies are developed; or to expand the sample and evaluate what type of texts are constructed.

CONCLUSIONS

The pilot experience demonstrated that the dynamization achieved through the adaptation of the board game *Untold: The Adventure Awaits you* and *SC* you can favor the narrative competencies of Spanish secondary school students. The narrative (re)construction stimulated the dialogic exchange of intertextual narrative references that served as a model for the design of diegesis, protagonists, and villains. The evaluation of narrative competence carried out during the pilot experience and the analysis of the texts have guided the process of formal, thematic, and didactic adaptation. These changes formalize the contents, skills, and attitudes linked to the narrative competence developed with the game, maintaining its ludic nature.

FUNDING

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