TPRS
BOOKS
&
WORKSHOPS

2018 Workshop Handout

What is TPRS®?

TPRS® is a method of second-language teaching that uses highly-interactive stories to provide comprehensible input and create immersion in the classroom. **TPRS®** maximizes the input in the classroom by making the input comprehensible, repetitive and interesting.

TPRS® stands for Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling.
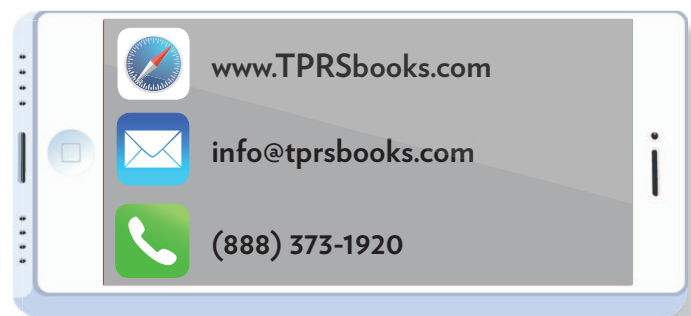
What is Proficiency?

Proficiency is the ability to comprehend and be comprehended across a range of familiar & unfamiliar contexts.

Mission statement:

Changing the lives of teachers and students through the efficacy of TPRS®.

Handout Contents

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Don't forget about our National TPRS Conference in July! www.NTPRS.info

Key 1: Repetitive

Repetition is directly linked to comprehension. As teachers learn to be repetitive, the students' comprehension will increase.

TPRS® makes the language repetitive in the following ways:

1. Asking repetitive questions, or "circling".

2. Going back and reviewing storyline.

3. Adding details to a sentence one at a time.

4. Using multiple locations.

5. UUsing multiple characters. Multiple characters allow us to ask a lot of questions by comparing and contrasting one character with the other(s).

6. Verifying the details to the class and with our actors. Verifying a detail means to repeat the correct answer after the students answer a question. This will build confidence in our students because it will allow them to hear accurate language more.

"Communication is the expression, interpretation, and sometimes negotiation of meaning in a given context. What is more, communication is also purposeful."

Sandra J. Savignon

Hay una chica.
There is a girl.

Clase, hay una chica.

¿Hay una chica? — OOH.

¿Hay un chico? — ¡Sí!

¿Hay un chico o una chica? — No.

¿Qué hay? — Hay una chica.

Hay una chica.

Key 2: Interesting

TPRS® teachers know that students cannot comprehend language that they are not paying attention to. Therefore, making the input interesting, compelling even, will optimize the input in the classroom. Each context, grade level, and age will have different criteria for interest.

Input can be made interesting by:

1. Personalizing the input. Talk about things that students are familiar with and have an emotional connection to. Ask open-ended questions and use student answers to add details to our conversations and our stories by suggesting what is interesting to them.

2. Acting out the story. Use interesting student actors to dramatize the action. Use props like fake noses, toys, etc. to enhance the dramatic experience.

3. Using realia. Incorporate music, video clips, art (including student art). Find culturally relevant materials that students find interesting. Implement the use of learner-centered authentic resources and other realia.

TPRS® has four keys.

Key 3: Comprehensible

TPRS® teachers make input comprehensible by:

1. Using vocabulary that students know. If a teacher uses a word they don't know, they then write it on the board with translation (the most efficient/effective way to make the new word comprehensible).

2. Speaking slow enough to allow students time to process what teacher is saying.

3. Continually editing our speech, making sure that teachers use words that students know or the use of cognates.

Key 4: High-Frequency

Traditional textbooks attempt to teach 3000 words per year. This means that during course of a school year, students on average would be learning 17 words per day. For decades, generations of students report that they have studied a language and can barely say anything. Limiting vocabulary to a few hundred words per year is a key to achieving proficiency. It allows the students to hear the most frequently used words in the language.

The 3 Steps of TPRS®

Step #1: Establish Meaning

Pick useful key structures (usually three) and establish meaning with written translation and TPR gestures for a few minutes. This is not "listen and repeat." Students are showing they understand with gestures. Begin to get it deeper into students' memories with novel commands, very short "mini-stories" and comprehension checks. Once students have the vocabulary and structures in short term memory, begin asking personalized questions (PQA) and then play with their answers. Depending on the interest you can spend a lot of time here. Hours. Days.

Step #2: Ask-a-story

Co-creating a class story is uniquely built by asking questions using the guide words often referred to as target structures. Ask-a-story or co-creating is an opportunity for students to contribute their ideas to the class. The communicative purpose of the ask-a-story is to provide compelling, comprehensible input. The story is short, simple and interesting—it contextualizes the target structures and provides repetitions. It is told slowly with constant comprehension checks and feedback from the students.

> "Language is too abstract and complex to teach and learn explicitly. As such, any approach to language teaching in the classroom must be different from approaches to teaching other subjects (e.g., history, science).
>
> Bill VanPatten

Step #3: Read

Reading is based on the material in the two previous steps—it reinforces the content in a different format. Reading can be at a slightly higher level than the spoken language in the classroom because students can comprehend and process more vocabulary and more grammar forms found in the written input.

01 Establish Meaning

02 Ask-a-story

03 Read

Strategies for engagement

The teacher says the following to the students:

Procedure 1:

> When I make a statement you will respond with an expression of interest. It sounds like this: OHHHHHHHHHH.

Give the students a visual cue to remind them to respond with an expression of interest. One possible visual cue is for the teacher to raise their hands. When something negative happens, react in a negative way. Say "Oh no, oh no, that's terrible!" and have the student do the same.

For variety, students can also make comments like, "marvelous", "wonderful", "fabulous", "wow", "amazing," "How terrible" or "I can't believe it."

Procedure 2:

> When I ask a question and the answer is known, your job is to answer out loud and in the target language.

This is a key procedure in the TPRS class. The primary purpose of asking questions is to get the students responding chorally. Their responding to our questions is evidence that they understand.

Procedure 3:

> When I ask a question and the answer is unknown, your job is to guess the answer, You can guess in the target language or using Proper nouns.

As students "guess" or invent answers, the teacher can judge which one creates the most interest in the students. This also makes the story a dynamic, organic, co-creative process rather than a story tell.

> Classe, il y a un taureau !

> OHHHHHHHHHH!

Understanding TPRS®

It is important to always use the **5 Basic TPRS Skills** whenever possible to facilitate acquisition for students. These skills/strategies include the following:

1. **Circling**, a strategy for repetition or frequency

2. **Pause and Point**, a strategy for processing

3. **Staying in-bounds**, which is another way of saying "limit vocabulary"

4. **Choral responses**, a strategy for interaction, engagement, and comprehension

5. **Slow speech**, a strategy for comprehension

All 5 of these simple teacher skills have a tremendous effect in creating optimal conditions for acquisition.

TPRS SKILLS — CIRCLING · POINT & PAUSE · STAY IN-BOUNDS · CHORAL RESPONSE · GO SLOWLY
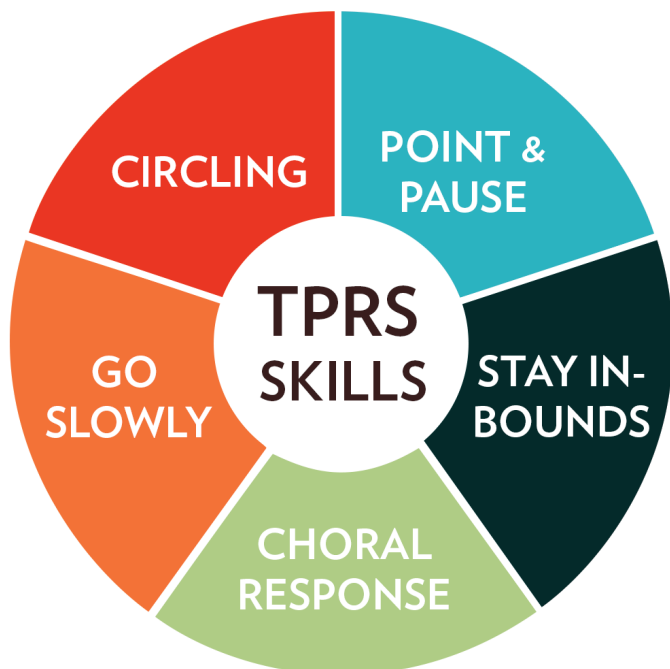
> "I believe people who are the most effective at TPRS don't tell stories, they ask questions, pause, and listen for answers from the students."
>
> Blaine Ray

Pointing and pausing at the question words and words written on the board (or displayed somehow) is highly beneficial to language learners. Humans are wired to receive information and data through their eyes. When teachers Point and Pause students are allowed time to process and comprehend words they are being exposed to. Overlooking the skill of Point and Pause may explain why teachers sometimes feel that a comprehension-based approach doesn't work for them.

Choral Responses help ensure that the group is getting what is being said. Choral response means that when the teacher asks a question to the class, every student is expected to respond. This type of engagement creates conditions for high levels of interaction, engagement, and gains in acquisition. As students respond, teachers are gauging comprehension of students individually and of the group.

Speaking slowly is such a simple yet highly effective strategy for creating conditions for high levels of comprehension. A pause between words allows students to both comprehend and process language input. Speaking slowly is an acknowledgement that acquiring a new language is not easy and that it happens over time.

> "Input provides the data for acquisition. Language that learners hear and see in communicative contexts forms the data on which the internal mechanisms operate. Nothing can substitute for input."
>
> Bill VanPatten

Staying in-bounds or limiting vocabulary in the early stages of acquisition leads to students that can comprehend and produce language. Acquisition of the most common grammatical features can take place by focusing on the most common words in the target language, many of which are function words such as pronouns, conjunctions and the most common prepositions. For example, in the first week of teaching a language, students can be exposed to the past tense and some more advanced features, like noun-verb agreement and adjective-noun order and agreement.

Shelter (Limiting) Vocabulary

In the book *A Frequency Dictionary of Spanish*, McEnery and Lancaster assert that "60% of speech in English is composed of a mere 50 function words". Paul Nation has shown that "the 1000 most frequent words account for 85% of speech". Mark Davies' work has also shown that this holds true for Spanish and German. Therefore, a goal of TPRS® is to limit the amount of vocabulary to a few hundred words/year. Thus, teachers can be repetitive enough for students to acquire language within the classroom time constraints.
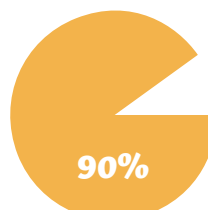
60% 50 most frequent function words 60% of speech
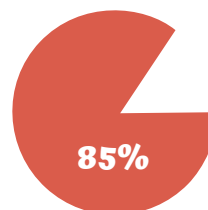
85% 1000 most frequent words 85% of speech

These word counts & percentages are approximations based on information found in A Frequency Dictionary of Spanish by Mark Davies (2006).

90% 2000 most frequent words 90% of speech

These word counts & percentages are approximations based on data found in the article Vocabulary Range and Text Coverage by Mark Davies (2005).

Don't Shelter (Limit) Grammar

TPRS® teachers teach grammar as vocabulary. Grammar is taught through meaning by getting students to "feel" the grammar. The goal is to try not to shelter tenses or structures. Introduce whatever tense or structure is necessary to tell our story.

Often times classes start by using the past tense. Have them do readings in the present and past tenses. This gives students continual practice in both the present and past tenses. Use other tenses when needed for whatever meaning in order to create authentic communication. Students focus on the details of the story or conversation, not the language. Students pick up the structures unconsciously. Learning the structures by feel is the key to learning how to speak a language.