European Journal of Social Sciences
Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales
ISSN 1450-2267

TPRS: Mastering the Basics and Incorporating Social Media

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This paper explores Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS), a unique language teaching method developed in the 1990s centered on co-constructing compelling stories rich in comprehensible yet challenging input. Key principles of TPRS are summarized, including establishing meaning of new vocabulary, use of repetitive questions to build class narratives, circling questions for depth of story comprehension, use of very short pop-up grammar explanations, and shifting control of the story to students. Practical guidance on TPRS lesson delivery components such as personalized questions, timed retells, and continual assessments are overviewed. A sample lesson plan illustrates TPRS in action, from target vocabulary introduction to asking personalized questions to asking the story. Finally, ideas for blending social media tools like Padlet, Snapchat, YouTube, and TikTok to increase student engagement with stories are detailed. Whether supplementing or central to curriculum, TPRS offers an interactive narrative approach allowing acquisition of language within low-anxiety, high-interest contexts.

Keywords: *TPRS, Comprehension-Based Approach, Storytelling, Social Media.*

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I. Introduction

Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) is an innovative language teaching approach developed in the 1990s that centers comprehension-based language acquisition around compelling, co- constructed in-class stories. Unlike traditional grammar-translation or audiolingual methods, TPRS lessons facilitate implicit acquisition of vocabulary, structures and cultural elements through highly contextualized and personalized narrative scenarios. After introducing essential target language vocabulary through gestures, images and translations, the instructor asks questions to incrementally build an evolving story saturated with repetition of key words and phrases. Pop-up grammar emerges organically from this approach focused on reconstructing meaning.

Unique principles defining TPRS include establishing meaning of new structures, the teacher asking repetitive story questions to continually advance the plot, circling or asking a question multiple times in different ways, and using pop-up grammar by implicitly reinforcing patterns that arise from student responses. Additional fundamental strategies include personalized questions directed at individual students, shifting storytelling responsibility to learners through voluntary story details, requiring quick timed partner retells, and continuous comprehension checks through the use of gestures and translations. By embedding grammar within compelling, humorous stories rich in repetitive yet varied vocabulary input, using TPRS lessens anxiety while offering optimal contexts for acquisition to unfold intuitively.

This paper outlines the TPRS approach and components in more detail. First, essential background on the method and its underlying premises centered in acquisition theory rather than skill

building will be summarized. Next, practical guidance on TPRS lesson planning, delivery and assessment will be provided, including an example of the planning for a sample TPRS lesson. Finally, ideas for seamlessly integrating social media tools into TPRS lessons for increased student engagement will be shared.

TPRS Overview

TPRS is a teaching method focused specifically on language acquisition through comprehension-based reading and narrative activities (Ray & Seely, 2012). The approach was developed in the 1990s by Blaine Ray, a Spanish teacher who found that his students were not reaching high levels of language proficiency using grammar-translation and audiolingual techniques that were common at the time (Ray & Seely, 1998).

The core principles of TPRS center on using interesting, repetitive stories to provide comprehensible input in the target language. The stories are acted out and personalized rather than explicitly "taught," thus allowing students to acquire vocabulary and grammar structures in a natural way (Watson, 2009).

In TPRS, teachers use various techniques to make these narratives highly engaging and comprehension focused, including drama, gestures, drawings, and student creativity (Ray &Seely, 2012).

Key strategies in TPRS lessons are establishing meaning, asking a story, reading, and circling (Adair- Hauck & Donato, 2002). Establishing meaning involves introducing key vocabulary words using translations, synonyms, and/or antonyms along with visual or gestural support. While introducing the vocabulary, the TPRS teacher makes us of PQAs, which stands for Personalized Questions and Answers. Personalized questions and answers are simple questions connected to the story content and vocabulary that the teacher directs to individual students to make personal connections. They allow each student to share their own genuine interests, preferences and reactions related to the fictional story scenario.

For example, if the class story involves characters going to the store, sample PQAs could be: "Jenny, do you like going to the store? Why or why not?"
"Andy, what store do you like to go to?" "Kim, who do you like to meet at the store?"

The teacher calls on students randomly with these personalized questions that demand a real personal response while still incorporating vocabulary from the fictional story. Students then answer in phrases, sentences or possibly with just gestures or single target language words if their proficiency level is low. PQAs increase each student's genuine engagement and investment in the lesson by highlighting their unique connections. PQAs also provide critical comprehension checks to ensure students understand key vocabulary necessary for comprehending the story. Additionally, PQAs continually review important vocabulary and structures from the story through repetition within a meaningful, personalized context. This repetition aids acquisition while circling key target language patterns. Moreover, PQAs allow teachers to assess listening and speaking abilities for each student related to the story vocabulary.

After introducing the vocabulary that will appear in the story and asking ample PQAs, the teacher beings asking the story. This refers to the teacher narrating a story to students using questions to elicit detail and pique interest. Asking the story includes circling, during which the teacher asks a series of questions about key parts of the story to maximize comprehension (Adair-Hauck &Donato, 2002).

Unlike much language teaching approaches, TPRS presents grammar points implicitly within compelling stories rather than through explicit instruction. Advocates argue that this facilitates acquisition better than isolated grammar rules and paradigms (Krashen, 1982). Students focus on meaning-making around a narrative rather than analyzing grammatical forms (Lichtman, 2016). The stories are repetitive but constantly changing through student input and questions, providing recurring but not redundant exposure to target structures (Krashen, 2004).

TPRS lessons embed target structures organically within compelling stories flooded with highly repetitive familiar vocabulary. Key grammar forms emerge naturally through teacher questions driving

story co- creation. Pop-up grammar flows directly from personalized questions and student responses requiring application of structures for accurate communication. The teacher introduces no explicit grammar rules. Instead, while moving forward in the story through comprehensible yet challenging input, the instructor isolates and highlights useful patterns that pop up. For example, if a student response necessitates use of a past tense verb conjugation, the teacher emphasizes this structure through gesture, intonation and eliciting repetition from the full class. This quick pop-up focus implicitly reinforces the grammatical form within a meaningful story context. The evolving plotline demands consistent application of the structure for accurate responses. Over time patterns emerge that the teacher explicitly names and defines only after sufficient implicit repetitive modeling. In this acquisition-focused approach, grammar emerges intuitively from communicative necessity within compelling input-rich stories, as opposed to traditional bottom-up rule teaching isolated from meaning.

This emphasis on repetitive exposure within communicative story-based scenarios before naming any form as a rule resonates closely with language acquisition processes in young children. Comprehension always precedes production. TPRS provides the optimal ingredients for implicitly "catching" structures in high-interest low-anxiety contexts. Learners acquire structures naturally when the focus remains on getting the message through stories rather than perfect grammatical accuracy in output. Complimenting implicit TPRS strategies, brief grammar explanations usually 10 seconds or less - reinforce noticing of useful patterns.

TPRS Lesson Planning

Although the process of making a TPRS lesson is not overly complicated, it is quite different to the way a typical communicative lesson is made. Thus, the following tips are provided for new teachers who wish to make an effective TPRS lesson:

Select a Story Theme and Title

Carefully choose an intriguing, funny or suspenseful story theme that will hook learners and make cultural connections. Develop creative target language titles incorporating recent vocabulary structures. Fun titles focused on students' interests or popular topics make stories more relatable for engagement.

Build a Vocabulary Foundation

Identify essential vocabulary words or phrases central to your chosen story theme. Frontload these by introducing images, short videos, or realia. Use gestures, translations, examples, or movements in a Total Physical Response (TPR) approach to communicate the meaning to students. Check understanding by having students point to visuals and repeat words or answers. Repeat new structures constantly once the story begins.

Develop a Basic Story Starter

With key vocabulary established, begin crafting your simple story starter. Lead with an intriguing short paragraph using familiar repetitive structures focused on your new target vocabulary. Create silly scenarios, funny occurrences, tensions, or mysteries to resolve to compel student investment.

Ask Comprehension Check Questions

Once your basic story starter has been introduced visually and orally, begin asking simple, repetitive story comprehension questions targeting learners' new vocabulary knowledge. Continually check understanding and force early verbal responses from students using the new language. Model rephrasing questions using gestures if needed for support.

Add to the Story through Questions

Keep extending the short starter story through more teacher questions that add descriptions, characters, locations and plot points. Apply repetitive questioning structures with familiar vocabulary.

"What color is the... ? Who else was...? Where else did they go...? What did he eat?" This questioning forces students to constantly reconstruct meaning while you collect short verbal responses. React positively with praise to motivate.

Circulate Questions among Students

Once your questions have built a sizeable evolving class story filled with tension, begin asking individual students the story questions to check listening comprehension. Encourage one word, short phrase, or gesture responses. For less confident students, provide sentence stems or scaffolding. Switch randomly among students with new questions to drive more verbal responses and story engagement.

Shift Story Control to Students

Invite brave student volunteers to come to the front of the class and control the story direction through their own new questions. Whisper guidance and prompts into the ear of the first student, directing the question creation if needed. Students' unique questions will allow fresh student-driven perspectives and entertaining new details. Praise students for all attempts and contributions to lower the affective filter.

Require Quick Retells

Frequently stop the evolving story to request fast high-level student retells. Say "Retell the story to your partner in 30 seconds!" Partners state the main characters, events, problem and resolutions in just one or two target language sentences to reinforce meaning and story reconstruction. The teacher selects random pairs to share with the whole class.

Review Key Target Structures

Conclude each class story session by visually displaying your short list of key vocabulary structures focused on that day either on the board or screen. Use gestures, visuals, and translations to rapidly reinforce the target words and phrases central to comprehension of the full story. Quick comprehension checks through hand signals or choice responses ensure retention.

Finish with an Exit Slip

End class with a simple written story exit slip incorporating the key structures. This allows you to assess comprehension of the most important vocabulary needed to understand the full story plotline. Simple prompts include: "Retell who, where, and what happened in the story in 5 sentences" or "List the main events from beginning to end in bullets." Gather these slips to guide vocabulary and storytelling focus areas in subsequent lessons.

This sequence moves logically from introducing essential repetitive target structures to co-constructing an evolving class story propelled forward by constant teacher questioning to finally assessing core comprehension. A TPRS approach centered on an engaging teacher-created storyline told through compelling visuals, gestures and high repetition of structures provides optimal input flooded with contextual meaning. This engages students while allowing acquisition through high levels of personalized, meaningful target language interaction.

Sample Plan for TPRS

The following TPRS story was created using target words that are underlined. To make the story more personally meaningful for my Korean students, I asked students to each write one word in their native language that they wanted to learn a week before this lesson. They did this on exit slips at the end of class. Then I created the story using the target words.

Story

An orange rhino wants to play dodgeball. He needs a ball. He goes to the playground. There is no ball on the playground. [super hero] is at the playground. Together they go to school. There is no ball. So they go to *Emart. Emart has no balls! Then the orange rhino and [superhero] fly to China. In China, they

meet a princess. She has a purple balloon. They play dodgeball with the purple balloon. The orange rhino throws the balloon at the princess. It hits her tiara. The balloon pops! They all laugh. Then they eat hotdogs. They are really happy. The orange rhino feels awesome.
*Emart is a common department and grocery store in South Korea.
Below I classified the vocabulary items into familiar and new words. For the new words, first language translations are provided. These were used when introducing the new words on the white board along with matching visuals.

known	unknown
orange want play ball go no fly Emart superhero have purple hit really happy feel hotdog meet	rhino -코뿔소dodgeball - 피구playground - 놀이터China -중국 pop -터뜨리다together -함께princess - 공주tiara - 왕관balloon -풍선laugh - 웃어요awesome -대박need – 필요하다throw -던지다

Possible PQAs

(When asking these to class, address Ss as "class" or nominate Ss by name.)
Who likes dodgeball? Who plays dodgeball? Where? Do you play dodgeball in your house? Do you play dodgeball inside a classroom?
What do you do on the playground? You two… what do you do together?
Who likes a movie with a princess? What princess do you like? What is something you can pop? What do you pop, [name]?
When do you get balloons?
What makes you laugh? / When do you laugh? Who do you know that laughs the most?
Who laughs the most in this class? Who doesn't laugh a lot?
Who feels awesome tonight? Why?
Who doesn't feel awesome tonight? Why not? When do you feel awesome?
What do you need?
What do you like to throw?
What can we throw in this classroom?
Does your brother or sister throw anything at you?

Asking the Story

Include yes/no, either/or, and L1 translation Qs.
A possible "asking" script is shown in the graphic below. Black text is the main story; blue represents circling, and purple indicates pop-up grammar.

A rhino wants to play. **What color is the rhino?**
An orange rhino wants to play. **Is it a blue rhino? No, it's not a blue rhino. It's an orange rhino. What is orange in Korean?**

What does the orange rhino want to play?
The orange rhino wants to play dodgeball.
Does the orange rhino want to watch dodgeball? No, an orange rhino does not want to watch dodgeball.
The orange rhino wants to play dodgeball.
Does the orange rhino want to play basketball?

An orange rhino wants to play dodgeball. He needs a ball. **What does he need? Yes, he needs a ball. Does he need a bat or a ball? Yes, he needs a ball. Does he have a ball? No, he needs a ball.**

He needs a ball. **He goes somewhere… where does he go? to the playground. Yes, he goes to the playground. Where does he go?** He goes to the playground.

Does *she* go to the playground? No, he goes to the playground. (pop-up grammar: our rhino is a boy. A boy is he. A girl is she.)

He needs a ball. He goes to the playground. There is no ball on the playground. **Is there a ball on the playground? No, there is no ball on the playground.**

Where is there no ball? On the playground.

A superhero is at the playground. **Is a superhero or an animal at the playground?**

Which superhero? Yes…

Integrating Social Media with TPRS

While TPRS may most often be used with young learners, it is not limited to any particular age group or proficiency level. Also, whether teaching young learners, teens, or adults, integrating social media, particularly as a way to extend learning outside the classroom, is an effective way to increase student engagement. Below are 10 practical ideas for integrating social media with TPRS:

Creating an Instagram account for a class character or someone from a story is an engaging way to have students interact more with the narrative. The teacher can take on the role of posting daily about the character's whereabouts and activities. Students are then responsible for commenting, asking questions, or expressing reactions entirely in the target language. This mimics authentic social media interactions.

Facebook pages developed for different characters from story characters will allow students to send friend requests and communicate with these fictional people. Once "friended," students can post comments, questions, photos, videos and more on the character pages, enabling fun target language interactions with their new Facebook friends.

When a teacher summarizes an engaging story on Twitter from the perspective of a key character, students can follow along and reply to the tweets as if communicating directly with that character. Replying in the target language encourages recycling of key vocabulary and structures. Additionally, a hashtag for the story helps students follow the thread.

Creating funny Snapchat videos tied directly to vocabulary words or target phrases studied in class gives students a different medium for interacting in the target language. Students can craft Snapchat responses to teacher videos, prompting creative applications of what they are learning. This takes advantage of the widespread use of Snapchat among teens.

Posting the first sentence or paragraph of the story on Padlet, then having each student take turns adding the next line of the story impels collaborative storytelling totally in the target language. Building

off each other's sentences, learners are compelled to apply vocabulary and structures as they develop the story.

Pinterest boards centered on vocabulary themes, characters, places, and other content from class stories or materials engage learners visually. When students are challenged to find and pin relevant, meaningful target language images to these thematic boards, it increases their knowledge, both cultural and linguistic.

Posting short silly captions on TikTok related to class content allows the teacher to challenge students to respond through TikTok's duet or stitch features. This engages learners on a platform already familiar and fun for them, while demanding language production.

Instagram or Facebook story polls or questions about a dilemma a character is facing in an unfolding story promotes target language discussion. As learners vote and justify their opinions on the direction of the plot, they negotiate meaning and process story details at a deeper level through comprehensible input and output.

A YouTube music playlist curated by learners with songs connected to themes, characters, places, or emotions that emerge during a story promotes cultural connections with the target language. Students can add music selections and provide rationales for choices using the target language.

Student-developed YouTube vlogs encourage acting out characters, describing interests or daily routines, or reacting to developments in ongoing class stories. This encourages oral and written production centered on course themes and vocabulary, as classmates comment with responses using expected structures.

II. Conclusion

TPRS offers language educators an impactful alternative to traditional grammar-translation and audiolingual approaches that often fail to generate meaningful communicative abilities. Unlike methods focused on accuracy in language production and explicit grammar rules disconnected from authentic contexts, TPRS focuses on language learning through message comprehension within compelling in-class stories. Vocabulary and structures are acquired implicitly over time through co- construction of highly engaging class narratives accompanied by repetitive personalized questioning focusing learner attention. This comprehensible input flooded with familiar patterns facilitates intuitive acquisition rather than technical skill-building.

While requiring creativity and practice for effective orchestration of class story co-creation, TPRS principles grounded in research on natural language development provide optimal language learning conditions. TPRS offers an inclusive student-centered path that returns second language acquisition to its natural implicit beginnings in meaning-making and interest-driven social interaction. TPRS eases learner anxiety through stories resonating with their interests, personal experiences, and cultural contexts. Additionally, adding a social media extension activity encourages students to continue engaging with the language outside the classroom.

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