

GUIDE FOR USING TPRS – Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling™

TPRS™ THE METHOD

Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling: TPRS™ is a language acquisition method, created by Blaine Ray. TPRS™ is a complete language teaching method, not just an activity or series of activities. The main goal of TPRS™ is to produce fluency.

The method takes its theoretical support from the research and results of the Natural Approach as created by Dr. Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell. The Natural Approach method states that languages are acquired through comprehensible input. What Blaine Ray has added is that the input needs to be not only comprehensible, but also repetitive and compelling. The repetition is provided through the process of story telling and story asking using limited vocabulary and structures; and the compelling aspect is given through the personalization of the materials used in the class-room. In a way, the students are always the theme of the classes. As we say in TPRS™, we do not teach the book, we teach the students. The students provide the details for the stories and the teacher incorporates their ideas into the story. Furthermore, the discussions about the readings are always about the students' experiences and feelings in relation to the materials being read.

The Natural Approach and TPRS™ methods –both agree on the importance of keeping low affective filters. Students need to feel relaxed. Since the process of acquisition is subconscious, students should be focused on the storyline rather than learning the language. The teacher establishes this kind of environment by:

1. Having a caring attitude while teaching and correcting,
2. Motivating, praising, respecting and accepting the students, and
3. Using humor and inviting laughter through bizarre and exaggerated details.

Since TPRS™ is a method based on comprehensible input, students spend most of

the class time listening and reading. The output is the result of the acquisition. The output reflects what the student has acquired. In order to produce fluent conversation and writing the students need to understand what they hear and read. In TPRS™ writing and speaking are never forced. On the contrary, the teacher is encouraged to allow the students have a period of silence during which the students internalize the new vocabulary. The teacher should give the students the necessary time to feel comfortable before they are ready to produce.

TPRS™ has shown amazing results in students' understanding of the target language and students' ability to communicate. Students' participation is expected to be constant and consistent. In order to achieve students' understanding and participation, the teacher needs to train the students in:

1. Listening while the teacher speaks,
2. Answering ONLY in the target language,
3. Raising their hand every time they need or want to speak in English,
4. Responding to statements and questions during the storytelling step, and
5. Reading along and staying focused during the collective readings.

Must read: Ray, Blaine and Contee Seely. *Fluency Through TPR Storytelling: Achieving Real Language Acquisition in School*. Command Performance Language Institute, Berkeley CA, 2008.

For in-service workshops contact Piedad Gutiérrez at TPRSofNJ.com
For training workshops contact BlaineRayTPRS.com

Step 1 - VOCABULARY

The goal in this step is to teach the vocabulary by conveying meaning to the structures, words and expressions to be learned. The objective is that by the end of the class the students are able to understand and use the new vocabulary. Only THREE words or structures should be taught in each class.

The teacher accomplishes the learning objectives by using different strategies that reach students with different intelligences. Since we are working with students who have a common native language, the first strategy is to translate the new words. Then, the teacher writes the word and asks the students to write the word for proper spelling. The teacher draws or shows an image; and asks the students to draw or copy an image that represents the word or structure. The drawing can be done in the classroom or can be assigned for homework. The purpose being to relate the word to an image that can be easily stored in the long-term memory.

After introducing the words and conveying the meaning, the teacher provides the necessary oral repetition of the word. The teacher says the word or structure in affirmative, negative, and interrogative sentences in order to allow the students to hear it in as many intonations as possible. The students make connections between the sound of the word and images, previous experiences, everyday life, etc. The teacher uses one of the following strategies, according to which strategy is more effective for each word.

TPR- Total Physical Response. The teacher gives the command for the students to perform the action. This is used with words that have no doubt in the comprehension and the response. i.e. **corre**, only means run.

Gestos. The teacher and the students agree upon a gesture that represents the word and the teacher says the word for the students to perform. i.e. **avión**, the students will skim one hand against the other in an upward motion.

Preguntas personalizadas PQA (Personalized Questions and Answers). The teacher asks the students questions using the word, inviting the students to think about their own experiences or possessions. i.e. **sala**, the teacher asks questions like **¿Hay una sala en tu casa?**, **¿Es la sala grande?**, **¿De qué color es la sala?**, etc. After having a set of answers, the teacher asks the entire group about the first student's answers. The teacher may stay with one student or ask a few students the same questions, and then compare and contrast answers.

For each mini-story, we have divided the new vocabulary and suggested which

strategy to use, however every classroom is different and only the teacher knows which strategy is the best for each word. Some words and phrases may be taught using several strategies engaging multiple intelligences.

The goal of this step is to provide EVERY student with ALL the new vocabulary. The students need to hear each word many times before it is sent to the long-term memory. After the THREE new words or structures have been taught and the teacher considers the students understand their meaning, the teacher creates a Personalized Mini Story.

Note about cognates. We include cognates in every mini-story and lesson story, however they are not included in our vocabulary lists. We do not spend time teaching them, we use them in our oral and written stories. As long as students make the connection between the cognate and their native language, the cognate is an 'easily acquired' word and does not need the number of repetitions or extensive use of strategies for students to acquire it.

Recommended readings for Total Physical Response:

Asher, James. *Learning Another Language Through Actions*. Sky Oak Productions, Los Gatos CA, 2000.

Segal Cook, Berty. *Enseñando el Español por medio de accion*. Berty Segal Inc. Brea CA, 2001.

Garcia, Ramiro. *Instructor's Notebook: How to Apply TPR for Best Result*. Sky Oak Productions, Los Gatos CA, 2001.

Personalized Mini-situation

Once the students know the meaning of the THREE new structures and words, they are ready to create the story with the teacher. The goal of this step is to set the vocabulary in context and to place it into the long-term memory. The students should be focused on the storyline, not in learning the language. The story is the means to give more repetitions and to play with the language. This step is completely interactive.

The Personalized Mini Situation should be kept simple and short. The storyline should

be concentrated on the THREE words/structures. Students portray characters in the story. The teacher asks the characters questions to obtain necessary information to create sentences or uses previously obtained information from the PQA (Personalized Questions and Answers.)

The teacher starts by making a statement. Then continues by making questions about the same statement. This is called the *circling technique*. The first two questions call for a “yes” and “no” answer and the third question calls for an “either or” answer. Then the teacher repeats the statement.

Statement: **Josefa va a la escuela.**

Question 1: **¿Va Josefa a la escuela?** – Answer: **Sí.**

Question 2: **¿Va Josefa al hospital?** – Answer: **No.**

Question 3: **¿Va Josefa a la escuela o va al hospital?** – Answer: **Va a la escuela.**

Statement: **Ajá, Josefa va a la escuela.**

The target structure is **va a la escuela**. The teacher wants to use it in as many situations as possible, therefore the teacher continues asking questions related to the same statement, **¿Quién va a la escuela?** and **¿Adónde va Josefa?** This technique is called *parking* and provides the most important element in the method, the interaction between teachers and students. After each initial answer, the teacher goes over the same answer with the four questions. The teacher never goes to the next statement before doing the circle of questions.

The teacher should use a variety of questions to address different level of students, the questions go from translation and low-level to open-ended. For the first type of questions the students have all the necessary information. Then the teacher moves to questions that require a more creative answer. Any new detail depends on the level of vocabulary the students have. i.e. **¿Con quién va Josefa a la escuela?**, **¿A qué hora va Josefa a la escuela?**, **¿Cómo va Josefa a la escuela?**, **¿Cuándo va Josefa a la escuela?**, **¿Por qué va Josefa a la escuela?** The teacher uses the information that s/he has learned about the students to personalize the story.

Then the teacher moves to the second word/structure and repeat the process. And

finally, the teacher does the same with the third word/structure.

Extended reading

After the students have had the opportunity to listen many times to the new structures and words, the next step is to read. For each set of three word/structures the students should read a complementary story in the classroom and translate it and/or illustrate it for homework. This text must be provided by the teacher and should be a simple and repetitive story that uses the THREE structures/words targeted in the lesson.

Step 2 – MINI-STORY

After four days of working on three words/structures per day, the students are ready for a Mini-story. Since they already know the vocabulary, the teacher goes directly to tell or ask the story. We provide the skeleton for the story. The teacher follows the same process as in the Personalized Mini Situation. The teacher presents a statement and starts the *circling*. Then the teacher starts *fishing* for details by asking the students, and *circles* each new statement.

The teacher gets actors from the class to dramatize the story. The student-actor performs after each statement. In the interaction between the teacher and the student-actor, the teacher has the opportunity to use second person singular each time s/he asks the student to confirm the answer other students gave or when the teacher uses the answer the student-actor provides i.e. **Jorge, ¿vas a la escuela?**; **Clase, ¿va Jorge a la escuela?**; **Jorge, ¿adónde vas?**

It is important to set three locations or three physical areas in the classroom where the story develops. When the teacher introduces the second structure, the teacher moves to the next location and asks the student-actor to move. Physically and mentally the students are transferred to the next part of the story.

Bizarre, exaggerated, and personal or *BEP* are the key elements that keep the story going. The students need to be engaged and interested in the story, otherwise their minds will drift. The students provide the details of the story, therefore their participation is crucial in

the development of the plot. Rather than storytelling, this step has become *story-asking*. The teacher selects the best, cutest, most exaggerated or bizarre answer and goes back to the *circling technique*. The teacher must insist from the beginning that only answers in Spanish will be accepted. The responses the students give are a clear demonstration of their understanding. If only a few students answer, the teacher must provide more repetition, translations, or more interesting details.

Retells

After asking the story and developing the plot by telling/asking the story to the students and using student-actors, the teacher retells the story. This time the teacher adds more details and does not use actors, however it is important to continue the *circling technique* every time a new detail and/or a new word or expression is introduced. The goal of this second telling is to continue repeating as many times as possible the target structures or words.

The students have then heard the story twice and should be familiar with the plot. Now it is time for the students to tell the story. This retelling can be done in many ways: as a whole class, in small groups or pairs, to the wall, to their hands. The goal of this step is to provide the students with a low-risk environment to begin speaking. Students should be able to follow the sequence presented by the teacher with as many details as possible.

Translation

The student page for each mini-story includes six boxes where the students will illustrate the story for homework. The students demonstrate their command of the vocabulary in context by translating the text into images.

Grammar

In TPRS™ we do not ever shelter grammar. The teacher always speaks smoothly, normally, and fluently in the same way a mother talks to her child. The teacher uses simple and short sentences, but always properly.

Grammar is taught the same way as the vocabulary. The goal is to convey meaning. It should be repetitive and comprehensible. Therefore it will be translated for meaning and any explanation should last no more than 30 seconds. This technique is called *pop-up meaning*. The teacher interrupts the telling of the story and the reading of the text in order to clarify a verb ending, a pronoun, an agreement, a syntactic element, etc. The teacher focuses in one particular element per class. The goal is to master through repetition the correct use of one speech element in each class, lesson or mini-story.

In the teacher page for Step 1, we have created a section with suggested grammar questions to remind the teacher of the proper way to teach grammar via TPRS™.

In TPRS™ we believe the knowledge of the rule is not necessary for acquisition or fluency. Even at the highest levels we do not recommend to spend time learning the rules. In order to complement the *pop-up meaning* for grammar, we suggest covering the walls of the classroom with posters that act as visual guides. The posters may have verb conjugations, pronouns, questions words, etc.

Writing is one of the most appropriate times to emphasize grammar points. While doing collective writing, the teacher points out the proper conjugation, pronouns, agreement, order, etc. The teacher asks the students what a specific element means. When giving back corrected edited writing, the teacher selects one or two common mistakes, explains what the mistake is, and shows the right way to say it. It is important that the teacher shows the incongruence or the miscommunication in the message. i.e. **un libros** or **yo come** causes confusion to the listener.

Error correction needs to be done with a very caring attitude after the student has communicated and the teacher has responded to the meaning of the message, not while the student is speaking. The teacher does not want to embarrass or discourage the student, however the student needs to know his/her communication causes confusion. The teacher tells the student why it is confusing and ask him/her to rephrase it; or offers the student a choice as to a better way to say something, for

example, “Did you mean **yo como una manzana** or **él come una manzana**? As in the *pop-up meaning*, this should last only 15 seconds.

Step 3 – LITERACY

Daily reading – Extended reading

Reading is a core part of TPRS™. After teaching a Personalized Mini Situation, the teacher gives the students a printed version of a story with the new three structures/words of the day. The teacher and the students read the story. The teacher reads in the target language, especially at the lower levels. The purpose is to give the students smooth pronunciation and rhythm. The students translate the story. This can be done one sentence at a time asking randomly a student to do it, or by using the most advanced students.

Reading along requires students to listen actively to the target language and also to confirm the exact meaning. If the student translates word by word and the English comes across awkwardly, the teacher asks the student to rephrase it in better English. The students need to know the meaning of each word (semantics) and also the correct order of the words in the sentence (syntax) in both languages.

For a collection of TPRS Avancemos Extended Readings contact your McDougal Littell sales representative to order *Avanzacómics*, *Lecturas para todos* and *Lecturas para hispanoablantes*.

If teachers are interested in sharing stories developed in the classroom, they may send them to TPRSofNJ.com where Piedad Gutiérrez has created a page for this purpose.

Lesson Story

After three mini-stories, the students are ready for a complete story. The students are supposed to know 90% of the vocabulary in order to understand individual reading, and 75% of the vocabulary to understand guided reading. The lesson story includes most of the vocabulary

learned during the three mini-stories, and recycles vocabulary from the previous lessons and chapters.

During this activity the teacher or a student reads and the students translate. After each paragraph, the teacher engages the students in a conversation by asking questions that require the students to think and share their own experiences and how they can relate to the text being read. Remember, nothing is more important to a teenager than him/herself.

Novels

From the beginning, the students need to be exposed to longer texts, however a novel or even a short story written by natives for natives includes more vocabulary than a beginner or intermediate learner possesses. Blaine Ray has written a series of short novels for each level, which use the basic vocabulary in a repetitive and compelling way. At this point our experiences demonstrate that for longer reading sessions, it is better if the teacher reads and the students translate. The teacher explains and corrects when necessary. The novels provide a topic for the teacher and the students to interact. After reading each paragraph or section, the teacher motivates and engages the students in a conversation about their own experiences in similar circumstances and his/her reaction in relation to those of the characters.

Novels written and published by Blaine Ray:
 Level 1: Pobre Ana, Patricia va a California, Casi se muere y El viaje de su vida.
 Level 2: Mi propio auto, ¿Dónde está Eduardo?, El viaje perdido y ¡Viva el toro!
 Level 3: Los ojos de Carmen

Real texts

The teacher needs to become familiar with online and printed newspapers and magazines from where to select articles for each level. The articles need to be appropriate in themes and the use of the language. The teacher copies the article and brings it to the classroom and follows the same technique as explained before. The teacher reads and the students

translate. The teacher asks for comparisons, similarities or differences between the storyline and the students' own lives. The reading can be done with the entire class or in small groups.

Kindergarten day

The teacher sits with the students surrounding him/her the same way it is done with pre-readers and beginner readers in the native language. Using a big book, transparencies, slides, or a regular book, the teacher reads aloud the text of each page and uses the images to ask questions about the characters, the background, etc.

Reading along

The teacher reads or sets an audio recording of a story and provides a printed version to the students. The students listen and read following the text. This activity does not have interruptions; the students infer the meaning of the unknown words or simply move along and catch up.

FVR Free Voluntary Reading

FVR is one of the most valuable techniques in language acquisition for its stress free and total input characteristics. The students select a book and read silently for 10 to 20 minutes a week. The students may keep the book for as long as they want to or might switch books as frequently as they want to, as long as they do not disrupt the others. The goal is to encourage reading for pleasure. The teacher creates a classroom library with a diverse collection of children's books, comics, magazines, etc. The collection should include books of different levels and also some bilingual books. It is recommended to design a reading log for the students to keep records of author, title, favorite and least favorite parts of the book. The teacher should also read during this time.

We recommend the following post-reading activities to ensure the students' comprehension of the language.

1. Talk about the text, ask questions and discuss the answers.

2. Create graphic organizers about the book, article or chapter.
3. Develop oral or written sequencing exercises.
4. Create a storyboard.
5. Write book reports.
6. Develop creative projects such as a new cover, a different ending, a diorama, etc.

For more information on reading activities, book clubs, and lists of books for classroom libraries, go to TPRSofNJ.com

LISTENING

Besides listening to the teacher for at least 75% of the class time, the students should be exposed to other voices. However, the other voices, tapes, videos, etc. must also be comprehensible. If the material the students are listening to is above their understanding, they will not acquire any language or focus on the material for long. The teacher stops frequently and asks questions about the characters, the plot, the topic, etc. according to what the students are listening. It may be a skit; a scene from a movie; a TV program; a commercial; a song; or a book.

SPEAKING

A TPRS classroom is completely interactive.

1. The students speak in the target language every day when they respond to the teacher's questions during the story telling/asking step for the Personalized Mini Situations and the Mini Stories.
2. The students speak in the target language when they retell the mini stories.
3. The students read in the target language to the class their book reports and their edited writings.
4. The students speak in the target language when they create stories based on images, pictures, cartoon strips, etc.

WRITING

At least once a week, students should have a free writing exercise. In this activity, in a limited time frame, the students write about a specific topic or using specific vocabulary given by the teacher; or are completely free to choose the theme. The number of words the students produce is the only aspect that counts. The objective is to develop fluency; therefore it is never edited or corrected. The goal is to write 100 words in 10 minutes. After the goal is achieved, the teacher reduces the time by 30 seconds or increases the number of words. The only rules are: no English, no blanks, no stopping.

Edited writing is also important, however it should not be done in the classroom. The teacher assigns for homework a written composition on a specific topic, using specific vocabulary or the student's choice. The students need extended time to produce, revise, correct and edit their work. The goal of edited writing is accuracy. This work should be corrected and reviewed with the students, either individually or collectively. At least once per lesson, the teacher and the students should have a collective writing activity. It may be an original story, a parallel story to a mini story, or a mini story from another point of view. The teacher writes and projects the text. The students provide the details following the teacher's questions and prompts.

ASSESSMENT

TPRS™ addresses the four basic skills in acquiring a language: listening, reading, speaking and writing. Therefore we need to consider formal and informal assessment instruments for the four of them.

During Step 1 - Teach to the eyes. This means constant observation of the students' reactions. Look for confused faces and repeat the command and ask for a translation. If what the teacher says is not comprehensible, the students are not receiving the message.

Informal: When the teacher uses *TPR* and *gestos*, s/he asks the students to close their eyes and perform the action. The teacher is the only person who sees if someone is wrong. The

teacher translates and then repeats the commands until everybody responds correctly.

Formal: Vocabulary quizzes should be frequent, brief, unannounced, and focus on meaning rather than spelling. Some ideas are:

1. matching pictures with statements,
2. matching actions with commands,
3. translations of words into English,
4. drawing a command or a word,
5. acting out a command or a word,
6. real/surreal or logical/illogical statements.

During Step 2 – Informal: While telling and asking the stories, select a barometer student who will help you to slow down and ensure that you are 100% comprehensible. A barometer student is one at the 40% in your class, not the lowest, but a student who struggles to learn and is motivated to learn. Listen carefully to the answers, translate and repeat if there are minimal answers from students. Look for confused faces and translate or ask for translations.

Formal: Give periodic listening comprehension tests with true/false statements, fill-in- the blanks, and simple questions.

During Step 3 – Informal: Pay attention to the students' translation during the readings and to their answers during the discussions. Be sure the students are understanding the text.

Formal: Give periodic reading comprehension tests.

Tests – Formal test should include one section per each skill.

1. Listening:
 - a. identification or matching
 - b. comprehension
2. Reading:
 - a. identification or matching
 - b. comprehension
3. Writing:
 - a. identification or choosing from choices
 - b. answer questions
 - c. rewrite passage from someone else's point of view
 - d. write an original story
 - e. write a different ending to a given story
4. Speaking:
 - a. from visual prompts
 - b. from given topics