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 and unfamiliar contexts.

Mission statement:

Changing the lives of teachers and students through the power of TPRS®.
"Communication is the expression, interpretation, and sometimes negotiation of meaning in a given context. What is more, communication is also purposeful."

-Sandra J. Savignon

TPRS® has three keys.

**Key 1: Comprehension**

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.
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. Using multiple characters. Multiple characters enhance interest. 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. Do the same process of asking questions and verifying details with the student actor(s). This will build confidence in our students because it will allow them to hear accurate language more. Verifying the details with the actor(s) will also expose students to the other forms of the verbs used correctly and in context.
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.

However, 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) and other realia.
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.

"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 responses mean 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.

**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.

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*These word counts & percentages are approximations based on information found in *A Frequency Dictionary of Spanish* by Mark Davies (2006).*
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.
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.
**TPRS** uses repetitive questions, especially with Novice to Intermediate level students. It is one strategy to expose students to 90%+ of the Target Language.

**Circling** starts with a statement in the Target language. After making the statement, the instructor offers repetition of the language through varied questions. While the instructor focuses on the language being used in a narrow way, the learners’ brains are focused on the meaning and are given ample opportunities to process the language while focusing on the meaning itself. Through answering the questions, the students are forced to interact with the input in novel but repetitive ways.

**Circling** builds student confidence. Students don’t learn with one or two repetitions. Acquisition happens with extensive, varied, contextualized and rich language use. We only learn with extensive repetitions.

The two primary purposes of **Circling** are:

1) getting the students to respond to our questions chorally, &

2) building fluency. If they hear the language enough and it is comprehensible to their brains, speech will emerge.

Below is a **Circling** model:

1. Make a statement.
2. Question with a *yes* answer. (Verify)
3. Ask *either/or* questions. (Verify)
4. Question with a *no* answer. Restate the negative and restate the positive.
5. Ask: Who? (Verify)
6. Ask: What? (Verify)

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Visit [TPRSbooks.com/resources](http://TPRSbooks.com/resources) for FREE STUFF!

Download **Question Posters** and strategically place in classroom.

Download **Circling Spinner** to print on cardstock and use to help you Circle.
1. Circle in any order. Always going in the same order is predictable and therefore boring.

2. Circle a different part of the sentence, called a variable (i.e. subject, verb, complement, etc). Each variable has many alternatives. Think about several different alternatives with each variable. Mixing up variables and alternatives allows for variety as we ask repetitive questions.

3. Question words. Use the question words. Questions words are slowing processing so practice saying the question words and pausing.

4. Be sure to keep asking negative questions. Students need to hear the negative.

5. Add a detail. Do this by telling the class the new information or asking them a question and letting them guess. Circle the new detail.

6. Add another character and compare and contrast the two characters.

7. Do any combination of the above.

**PRO-CIRCLING TIPS:**

- Visit TPRSbooks.com FREE SECTION to download the Printable Circling Spinner to help you CIRCLE in your classes!
CIRCLING PRACTICE

STATEMENT: Bart wants a cat.

Circle the SUBJECT
Answer with yes ................................................................. (Verify)
Either/or ......................................................................... (Verify)
Answer with a no ............................................................... (Restate negative and verify positive)
Question word ..................................................................... (Verify)

Circle the VERB
Answer with yes ..................................................................... (Verify)
Either/or ......................................................................... (Verify)
Answer with a no ............................................................... (Restate negative and verify positive)
Question word ..................................................................... (Verify)

Circle the COMPLEMENT
Answer with yes ..................................................................... (Verify)
Either/or ......................................................................... (Verify)
Answer with a no ............................................................... (Restate negative and verify positive)
Question word ..................................................................... (Verify)

Get a new statement by asking when
Answer with yes ..................................................................... (Verify)
Either/or ......................................................................... (Verify)
Answer with a no ............................................................... (Restate negative and verify positive)
Question word ..................................................................... (Verify)

Add a parallel character (Coqui wants a phone.)
Answer with yes ..................................................................... (Verify)
Either/or ......................................................................... (Verify)
Answer with a no ............................................................... (Restate negative and verify positive)
Question word ..................................................................... (Verify)
THE STORY-ASKING PROCESS

1. GET A STUDENT ACTOR - can be a volunteer or chosen by teacher
2. MAKE A STATEMENT - see example to the right
3. CIRCLE STATEMENT - circle the statement with the class
4. ASK THE ACTOR - ask the actor questions about the statement (see example)
5. ADD A PARALLEL CHARACTER - introduce another character. The character could represent themselves or a famous person
6. ASK THE PARALLEL CHARACTER QUESTIONS - ask about themselves
7. ASK THE PARALLEL CHARACTER ABOUT ACTOR
8. ADD MYSELF AS A PARALLEL CHARACTER
9. ASK CLASS, PARALLEL CHARACTER AND ACTOR ABOUT ME
10. ADD A DETAIL AND REPEAT

The triangle is a reminder to talk to your student actor, to add a parallel character and to add yourself as a character for comparing and contrasting purposes. This is done as a tool to stay on a structure for more interesting and repetitive discussion, while using multiple instances of the first, second, and third person forms of a verb in context.

*Answers selected from student guesses or teacher provides surprise detail. Underlined information is determined by class responses.
HOW TO MOVIE TALK

In TPRS® MovieTalk,
  · take a short clip that is usually 2 to 4 minutes long
  · pause at deliberate points to discuss
    · character
    · plot
    · reactions
    · predictions
  · dramatize it / talk to student actors
  · interview student actors

The effectiveness of Movietalk is amplified by the TPRS® skills: circling, pointing and pause, going slowly, choral response & staying in-bounds.

When presenting a MovieTalk, show a short clip of a movie and pause it. Then build interest in the movie clip by discussing what is occurring with the class and student actors. The main goal is for teachers to describe the movie in such a way that is comprehensible to the students (via pointing, gesturing, drawing, slow repetitive speech, etc).

MovieTalk lessons in TPRS® are more than just simply telling or narrating a story. When we teach a TPRS® story we start with an oral story (ask-a-story) and then we do a reading. In MovieTalk, the reading and the oral story are both the same story.

READ
  · Teacher reads a sentence at a time.
  · Class chorally translates the sentence.
  · Repeat until the end of the paragraph.
  · Students write in words they don’t know.

DISCUSS
  · Ask questions about the information.
  · Ask background information.
  · Let students guess details about the reading and add parallel characters.
  · Add lots of surprise details and proper nouns to your discussion.

DEVELOP TWO STORIES
  · You develop two stories.
  · The first story is your reading.
  · The second story is the story about your parallel student character.
  · Add details from the students’ culture.

DRAMATIZE
  · Dramatize the story.
  · If there is time, dramatize the story about the parallel character.

POP-UP GRAMMAR
  · Highlight in reading BEFORE class
  · Focus on the MEANING
  · Pop-up often and frequently
  · Compare and contrast
  · Scaffold your questions
  · Hold your superstars accountable
  · Goal is to acquire over time

MOVIE TALK HACKS
1. Use MovieTalk sparingly.
2. Use Props.
3. Use Screenshots
4. MovieTalk Authentic Texts!
5. Grammar pop-ups
Hay un chico. Es Alex. Alex tiene un apartamento. Alex tiene un problema. No tiene músculos grandes. No está contento.

Alex está en su apartamento. No está contento porque no tiene músculos grandes. Pobre Alex. Alex tiene un plan. Quiere músculos grandes.

En el balcón hay una chica. La chica es Cecilia. La chica es súper bonita. Alex ve a Cecilia. Alex quiere impresionar a Cecilia. Alex tiene pesas muy grandes, pero tiene músculos pequeños. No tiene músculos grandes. Alex no puede levantar las pesas. Pobre Alex.

En su imaginación, Alex puede levantar unas pesas grandes. ¡Es fantástico! Cecilia está en el balcón pero Cecilia no puede ver nada.

Hay un chico. El chico es Alex. Alex tiene un apartamento en San Francisco. Alex está en su apartamento. Alex tiene un problema. No tiene músculos grandes. Quiere músculos grandes. No está contento. Quiere impresionar a las chicas, pero no puede porque tiene músculos pequeños.

Alex está en su apartamento. No está contento porque no tiene músculos grandes. Pobre Alex.

Alex tiene un plan. Quiere músculos grandes. Quiere levantar pesas. En el balcón hay una chica. La chica es Cecilia. La chica es súper bonita.

Alex ve a Cecilia. En la opinión de Alex, Cecilia es súper bonita.

Alex quiere impresionar a Cecilia. Alex quiere levantar las pesas porque quiere impresionar a Cecilia. Alex tiene pesas muy grandes, pero tiene músculos pequeños. No tiene músculos grandes. Alex no puede levantar las pesas. Pobre Alex.

En su imaginación, Alex puede levantar las pesas grandes con un beso de Cecilia. Cecilia le da un beso a Alex y Alex recibe el beso. ¡Es fantástico!
PLANNING WITH TPRS®

When planning a TPRS® story, determine:

1. The conflict of the story
2. The target vocabulary (optional)
3. The background info. Here are some tips:
   - Can include multiple characters, names, places, setting
   - Is useful for compare and contrast
   - Can be used for practicing any word or structure
   - It doesn’t need to pertain to the story necessarily
4. Locations where the protagonist can go to solve the problem
5. The possible resolution of the problem
6. Some potential variables and additional details (though these can change based on student responses during the actual Ask-a-story)

PRACTICAL PROFICIENCY ASSESSMENTS

Assessment Task Characteristics:

- All tasks are meaning-based
- All depend upon comprehension of input
- Time-pressured (a condition that favors reliance on implicit knowledge)
- Quick to administer and easy to score
- Provide objective, quantitative data

1. Timed writing
   - Students write for 5 minutes
   - Goal: over 100 words in Target Language

2. Speed Reading
   - Timed reading
   - Answer 10 multiple choice Qs

3. Listen and Timed Rewrite
   - Listen once and take notes or give 3-5 minutes to read story
   - 5 minute timed rewrite or retell

4. Content-based tests
   - Traditional-like tests that assess about the content of story in the Target Language
   - 25-100 questions, T/F, Multiple choice, and/or short answer
CIRCLING STRATEGIES

TEACHING ONE SENTENCE AT A TIME.

A. CIRCLING questions after a statement

1. Y=Ask a “yes” question
2. E/O=Ask an “either/or” question
3. N=Ask a “no” question
4. W=Ask a “W” question

Example: Bart habla con las niñas en bicicletas. (Statement)

1. TEACHER: Does Bart speak with the girls on bikes?
2. TEACHER: Does Bart speak with the girls on bikes or tricycles?
3. TEACHER: Does Bart speak with the girls on tricycles?
4. TEACHER: Who talks with the girls?

B. CONVERSATION questions

1. State the sentence
2. Ask the actor a question
3. Coach the full sentence response
4. Confirm to the actor
5. Report/Verify the sentence to the class.

Example: Bart habla con las niñas en bicicletas. (Statement)

1. TEACHER: Bart speaks with the girls on bikes. (Statement)
2. TEACHER: Bart, do you speak with the girls on bikes? (Ask the actor)
3. ACTOR: Yes, I speak with the girls on bikes. (Coach, if necessary)
4. TEACHER: Correct. You speak with the girls on bikes. (Respond)
5. TEACHER: Bart talks with the girls on bikes. (Restate)

KEY:
Stay on the verb by circling, and adding parallel characters.
STATEMENT:
Bart speaks with the girls on bikes.

Circle the SUBJECT
Answer with yes ___________________________ (Verify)
Either/or ________________________________ (Verify)
Answer with a no ___________________________ (Restate negative and verify positive)
Question word ____________________________ (Verify)

Circle the VERB
Answer with yes ___________________________ (Verify)
Either/or ________________________________ (Verify)
Answer with a no ___________________________ (Restate negative and verify positive)
Question word ____________________________ (Verify)

Circle the COMPLEMENT
Answer with yes ___________________________ (Verify)
Either/or ________________________________ (Verify)
Answer with a no ___________________________ (Restate negative and verify positive)
Question word ____________________________ (Verify)

Get a new statement by asking when
Answer with yes ___________________________ (Verify)
Either/or ________________________________ (Verify)
Answer with a no ___________________________ (Restate negative and verify positive)
Question word ____________________________ (Verify)

Add a parallel character
Answer with yes ___________________________ (Verify)
Either/or ________________________________ (Verify)
Answer with a no ___________________________ (Restate negative and verify positive)
Question word ____________________________ (Verify)
A. Ask the class circling questions about the statement.

Yes

E/O

No

W

B. Ask the actor conversation questions.

Statement

Ask

Coach

Restate

Report

C. Add a parallel character.

Question

New statement about new character

D. Ask the class circling questions about parallel character.

Yes

E/O

No

W

E. Ask the parallel character conversation questions.

Statement

Ask

Coach

Restate

Report
F. Add yourself as a parallel character.

Question ________________________________

New statement about me
________________________________________

G. Ask the class circling questions about me.

Yes ______________________________________
E/O ______________________________________
No ______________________________________
W ______________________________________

H. Ask the actors circling questions about me.

Yes ______________________________________
E/O ______________________________________
No ______________________________________
W ______________________________________

I. Ask actors questions about each other.

Yes ______________________________________
E/O ______________________________________
No ______________________________________
W ______________________________________

Review any of the above questions. (pick any 11 ?s from the ones already written)
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
1. **el, la** the
2. **de** of, from
3. **que** that
4. **y** and
5. **a** to
6. **en** in, on
7. **un** a
8. **ser** to be
9. **se** himself, herself
10. **no**
11. **haber** to have
12. **por** for
13. **con** with
14. **su** his, her
15. **para** for, in order to
16. **como** like, as
17. **estar** to be
18. **tener** to have
19. **le** to him, her
20. **lo** it
21. **todo** all
22. **pero** but
23. **más** more
24. **hacer** to do, make
25. **o** or
26. **poder** to be able to
27. **decir** to say
28. **este** this
29. **ir** to go
30. **otro** another, other
31. **ese** that
32. **la** it
33. **sí** yes
34. **me** to me
35. **ya** now, already
36. **ver** to see
37. **porque** because
38. **dar** to give
39. **cuando** when
40. **él** he
41. **muy** very
42. **sin** without
43. **vez** time, instance
44. **mucho** a lot
45. **saber** to know
46. **qué** what
47. **sobre** on, about
48. **mi** my
49. **alguno** some
50. **mismo** same
51. **yo** I
52. **también** also, too
53. **hasta** until
54. **año** year
55. **dos** two
56. **querer** to want
57. **entre** between, among
58. **así** so, as such, thus
59. **primero** first
60. **desde** from, since
61. **grande** big
62. **eso** that
63. **ni** neither
64. **nos** to us
65. **llegar** to arrive
66. **pasar** to pass
67. **tiempo** time, weather
68. **ella** she
69. **si** if
70. **día** day
71. **uno** one
72. **bien** fine, good
73. **poco** little bit
74. **deber** should
75. **entonces** then
76. **cosa** thing
77. **tanto** so much
78. **hombre** man
79. **parecer** to seem
80. **nuestro** our
81. **tan** so
82. **donde** where
83. **ahora** now
84. **parte** part
85. **después** after
86. **vida** life
87. **quedar** to remain
88. **siempre** always
89. **creer** to believe
90. **hablar** to talk
91. **llevar** to take
92. **dejar** to leave, let
93. **nada** nothing
94. **cada** each, every
95. **seguir** to continue
96. **menos** less
97. **nuevo** new
98. **encontrar** to find
99. **algo** something
100. **sólo** only

*This list of the 100 most frequent words in Spanish comes from are A Frequency Dictionary of Spanish by Mark Davies (2006).*
Administrator Checklist for observing a TPRS Classroom

Teacher: ___________________ Date: ____________

Mark the areas you observe with an X.

The teacher speaks the target language.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>less than 50% of the time</th>
<th>50% of the time</th>
<th>75% of the time</th>
<th>90% of the time</th>
<th>more than 90% of the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The teacher checks for comprehension.

| Asks individuals to demonstrate comprehension | Carefully observes all students in class | Asks individuals to demonstrate comprehension | Listens for responses from the whole class | Asks for translation from individuals or class |

The teacher raises the level of student attention.

| Involves students in the narration | Allows student input to direct part(s) of lesson | Talks to one or two individual students | Talks about one or two specific students | Refers to places/locations/people of interest to students |

The teacher offers opportunity for sophisticated language use.

| Embellishes basic statements | Asks a variety of questions in multiple formats | Invites students to create in the language |

The teacher models pro-active classroom management.

| Remains calm and in control | Moves close to possible disruption | Uses appropriate facial expressions for situation |

The teacher tailors the tasks to individual student ability.

| Asks many types of questions | Expects multiple levels of answers to questions | Requires longer, detailed, and accurate narration |

The teacher demonstrates appropriate correction techniques.

| Models accuracy: rewording the student's attempts | Demonstrates the value of accuracy | States the meaning of the inaccurate construction |

The teacher promotes grammatical accuracy.

| Explains the meaning of unfamiliar or new items | Asks students to predict correct grammatical usage | Requires increased accuracy throughout the year |

The teacher promotes higher-level thinking.

| Asks students to synthesize the language in a retell | Asks students to create imaginative situations |

Students are actively engaged in the lesson.

Students are held accountable for lesson.

Students are actively engaged in the lesson.

Comments: