

CONCLUSIONS

Although TPRS may look complex, it is not. The novice TPRS teacher should simply choose those skills that appeal, and then focus on CI and personalization to the exclusion of everything else. Circling and SLOW, of course, must come into play, but as long as one is doing CI and personalization in some form, the requirements for doing TPRS are met. One can always add more skills later.

This book was written with one thing in mind – to create a greater sense of safety for the novice TPRS teacher. Nothing could be more important to the novice teacher than a feeling of being on safe ground at the beginning of a storytelling class.

Nothing could be more satisfying to the novice teacher than the knowledge that the story is going to develop naturally with little fuss, that it won't have to be forced, that they can pull a story with only CI + P as described in Sample Story C, and that there will be little worry involved in preparing for a TPRS class. These things will happen if you know that:

- ✓ you are safe because you know that you don't have to do all the skills, but only those that appeal to and work for you.
- ✓ you are safe because you know that in signing/gesturing, PQA, and extended PQA you have very powerful tools that will effectively establish meaning, not to mention a sense of fun in the room from the very beginning of class.
- ✓ you are safe because you know that you can spend as much or as little time as you wish doing PQA and/or extending it. You feel confident knowing that you can move away from them into a story at any time.
- ✓ you are safe because you have a scripted story completely written out in front of you. All you have to do is replace the information provided in the scripted story with your own and let the story build, *sentence by sentence*. The first sentence in the scripted story becomes the first sentence in your story, with personalized variations. The scripted story sits in front of you like a good friend, waiting in the wings with the next scripted sentence for your story as soon as you are ready for it.
- ✓ you are safe because you have nothing to focus on except personalizing each new sentence from the story script in front of you. In Sample Story A one single word - "smiles" – was repeated for 45 minutes amidst frequent laughter. Then, when it felt right all I had to do was start the story, letting facts emerge as natural extensions from the scripted story, and so a strange looking dog looked at Elizabeth and smiled, Simon threw a chicken at the dog, etc., and everything evolved *sentence by sentence*. I did not think of these things before the class. They just emerged as I tried to personalize each new sentence from the scripted story. Thus, because our discussion was not pre-fabricated, it was *alive*.
- ✓ you are safe because you know that you don't have to get anywhere during class. You don't have to stay in or leave PQA/extended PQA at any certain time. You don't have to do anything but speak in the target language while

keeping the focus on your students. At its base, teaching a language is a very simple thing that unfortunately has been made complicated, but now is becoming simple again.

Here is a visual metaphor that helps me feel safe. At the start of a class I sometimes think of a little TPRS “room” in my mind. The floor is tiled. Each tile, in order starting in the upper left hand corner of my field of vision, has one of the sentences from the story I will be using in my scripted story:



So the story is metaphorically the floor, the *foundation*, for the work I am trying to do. I go from tile to tile, from *sentence to sentence* in creating the new story.

Then I look to the wall to my left. It has a bunch of picture frames on it, each with an imagined photo of each of my students in that class:



This reminds me to *personalize the sentence I am on*. Thus, if the story script says, “A boy wants to buy his mother a gift,” it becomes through personalization, “Alex (from French class) wants to buy his dog a car.”

Then I look to the wall to across from me. It has a bunch of circles on it:



I start circling the new personalized sentences. I remember to point and pause when I circle. Next, I become aware of the wall to my right. On it is one of those “Slow – Children Playing” signs:



It reminds me to *circle the personalized sentences slowly*. Whenever I finish the process with one tile I go to the next one. The story unfolds in a stable way, thanks to my visual metaphor. Of course, the ceiling is made up of CI, which keeps the lid on the class, so to speak.

Here is a detailed example of how these steps can be applied to the following scripted story:

There is a short monkey. He's in Denver. His name is Bucky because of his teeth. Bucky feels like traveling to Paris.

Begin by circling the first sentence until it changes into something personalized, then take the second sentence, and so on:

Class, what is there? (suggestions are dog, cat, hippo, clown)

You choose the suggested response “clown” simply because it strikes you as the right one, the one that potentially can generate the most humor and interest.

Class, that's right! There is a clown!

Heap the praise on the student who came up with that suggestion, then circle the sentence:

Class, is there a monkey or a clown? (clown)

That's right, class, there is a clown! (ohh!)

Class, is there a monkey? (no)

Correct, class, there is not a monkey. There is a clown! (ohh!)

Class, is there a dog?

Remember that if this is a class that is just beginning its study, and they haven't yet seen the word “dog”, the teacher must go to the board, write the word down in the target language and in English, pause and point to the new word for five seconds while the new word is absorbed, and only then return to the circling:

That's right, class, there is not a dog. There is a clown. (ohh!)

Finish up the circling with:

Class, what is there? (a clown)

Then, to finish the sentence, since the scripted story was “There is a short monkey” and you are just circling in a parallel fashion from what is offered in the scripted story, you circle the adjective:

Class, is the clown short?

“Yes” and “no” are offered. You choose “no”.

Class, the clown is not short! (ohh!)

If a student insists that the clown is short, tell them clearly with a grin on your face that this is your story.

Class, the clown is not short. He is tall! (ohh!)

Class, is the clown short or tall? (tall)

Correct, class, he is tall. (ohh!)

Class, is the clown of medium height? (no)

That’s right, the clown is not of medium height, he is tall. (ohh!)

Notice that you are using vocabulary that has been drilled over the course of the previous five steps so that there is no difficulty in comprehension, thus propelling the story forward with ease.

Notice also that the circling need not be in some sort of perfect order, in fact it should not be. It should be fluid, not mechanical, responding to the communicative needs of the students. As long as it is comprehensible, all of this input can be circled in any fashion.

Once you feel comfortable that you have created something new but still parallel to the original story script first sentence, you go on to the next sentence, creating the story. Remember to have the original story script in front of you so that when you end a sentence you have the model right there to begin building the next new sentence.

Eventually, the story morphs into something like:

There is a tall clown. He’s in Oz. His name is Face because of his big face. Face feels like traveling to Kansas.

Believe it or not, the above four sentences could require up to one hour of circling to establish. As each sentence, one by one, reflects more and more the personalities of the students who suggest the cute answers, the students’ interest is heightened, and so it is an hour well spent.

Of course, it is possible to create a new story of four sentences in just a few minutes. But why hurry? TPRS is about slow repetitive comprehensible input, and as long as that is occurring, CI is being done and the kids are acquiring the language.

In this example it was not necessary to introduce an actor, because everything developed in a clear fashion, but to ask a student to pretend he was the clown was certainly possible.

This room metaphor may not appeal to all readers, but it has proven very effective for many teachers just beginning TPRS. It works to remember the idea of going sentence by sentence while personalizing and circling slowly.

Some teachers may wish to construct a visual metaphor in their own minds that is unique to them. Such images can function as stabilizing devices that keep the teacher from going too wide or out of bounds during a story's creation.

Knowing that your scripted or "guide" story will see you through, you focus on CI and personalization, using circling and SLOW, with no desire to force the story to go anywhere in particular. Use as few or as many skills you are comfortable using, and just have fun with the kids.

Blaine once expressed this idea in this way:

When we teach kids, we glorify their responses. We are so interested in them. We laugh at the cute things they say. We enjoy their humor and have fun with them.

Finally, avoid prescribed ideas, lists of questions, and rules about TPRS. There are no rules! Whether a story gets acted out or not doesn't matter. Whether the structures for the day are signed or not at the beginning of the class really doesn't matter. Whether there are three locations doesn't matter. What matters is:

- ✓ that at some point meaning of structures is established, *by whatever means the instructor prefers.*
- ✓ that the structures of the day be repeated over and over and over in personalized form.
- ✓ that there be a lot of reading in the target language.

The form that the above takes is completely up to the instructor. As long as there are lots of repetitions, CI, and personalization, with large amounts of SLOW thrown in for garnish, TPRS is being done, and your students will show excellent gains.

Our students are not dumb, and they are not humorless. They are waiting, as we have been, for a way of unlocking their jokes and their joy. Comedy is like a subterranean river that runs through all our classes, waiting to surface, and TPRS is

the shovel that brings it to the surface. Such a thing is worth all the hard digging required to learn the method.

What does the future hold for TPRS? New skills will of course arise, but CI and circling will always provide the chassis and the wheels of each new model of TPRS as the years go along. Pause and point are the windows of the car, as they allow clear vision and comprehension. The TPRS car itself will always be made of a new and yet ancient metal, that of personalization.

This is from a listserv post written by Susie Gross in April of 2007:

“As I listen to teachers, I hear that something is missing. In our attempt to spell things out and to do TPRS step by step, we have missed the big picture. The big picture is the relationship with kids. The big picture is having a love-fest in class. The big picture is letting go of curriculum and just teaching students.

“A teacher is NOT a moron; a teacher knows that the kiddos need all six conjugated forms of verbs by the end of level one. A teacher knows that they need to say "going to do" and not just "does." A teacher knows that numbers and colors and agreement are important in this particular language. We don't need a schedule, We don't need "going to plus infinitive" this month, forget it, then "wants to plus infinitive" next month. We need to get it all in, but that is easy to do if we speak the language every day and ask lots of questions! Just keep recycling all of the important stuff all of the time all year long. That's the content and we need to teach it.

”But the BIG PICTURE is the relationships among those in the classroom. That's what real teaching is all about. If the relationship is healthy, the kids will learn better. If the relationship is shaky, the learning is shaky. Only the teacher has the power to fix classroom relationships.”

Thus Susie points to the future of TPRS. I would add that the only way we can do what she describes above is by continuing the open and honest dialogue we currently enjoy with our TPRS colleagues.

Other groups of teachers in foreign language education do not seem to display this kind of collegiality, nor passion for change. Blaine and Susie have themselves modeled this kind of openness for years, but in the final analysis there is no substitute for our sharing ideas with each other in the spirit of what Mother Teresa of Calcutta said:

Do not wait for leaders; do it alone, person to person.

It has been the intention of this book to offer only *some* of the possibilities to be found in TPRS. We need to keep digging. TPRS is really an inexhaustible well which provides us all with ever deeper insights into the art of teaching which will differ from teacher to teacher. We will all pull different things from the well, but it will always be the same delicious water.