

2014 Sabbatical Proposal

Project Summary:

I am proposing to do a full year of depth study and exploration of a dynamic, creative, and highly engaging second language teaching method known as TPRS (Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling). Numerous studies have indicated that TPRS is much more efficient and effective than traditional teaching methods. I intend to spend the school year studying this method, observing it in action, developing ways to integrate it into my own practice as well as the means to introduce the theory and techniques of TPRS to other World Language teachers in the Ithaca City School District. I anticipate being able to continue to use our current textbook program (Prentice Hall: Realidades) but to enhance it with TPRS techniques. Because TPRS is gaining popularity so rapidly, Prentice Hall has recently published an ancillary to our Realidades textbook program that incorporates TPRS stories consistent with the grammar and vocabulary of each unit. This will help me adapt and expand our current program. If granted this opportunity, I will be able to develop an understanding of the theory of TPRS, build some proficiency in its methodology, create an integrative model incorporating TPRS into the existing district methodology, and serve as a resource for other instructors wishing to incorporate this effect 'cutting-edge' method into their own teaching practice.

History and benefits of TPRS:

Blaine Ray, a Spanish teacher from Bakersfield California, developed TPR Storytelling in 1990. TPRS evolved from Total Physical Response (TPR), a second language learning technique invented by Dr. James Asher, Professor of Psychology at San Jose State University. This approach is based on the second language learning theories of Stephen Krashen, Professor of Education at the University of Southern California. Proponents of these theories claim that the best way to help students develop both fluency and accuracy in a language is to expose them to large amounts of comprehensible input. Cognitive psychologists have long argued that story or narrative is the means by which people make sense of their own experience and the world around them and have demonstrated that people incorporate information into narrative structures from a very early age (Bruner, (1990). *Acts of Meaning*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge.) Stories guide people in deciphering the world around them and organizing and remembering events and information. The steps and techniques in TPR Storytelling build upon this innate capacity for comprehension by helping teachers to provide this input in story form thereby making the language spoken in class more comprehensible and engaging. The focus of this approach is communication, and proficiency is achieved thorough reading, writing, telling, and dramatizing stories in the classroom using gestures to reinforce key vocabulary and grammatical constructs.

In empirical studies which compare TPRS to traditional approaches, TPRS consistently demonstrates superior results. (Ray, B. and Seely, C. *Fluency Through TPRS Storytelling: Achieving Real Language Acquisition in School*- 6th edition, 2012). In their book, Ray and Seely cite numerous research projects, master's theses, and doctoral dissertations that support student achievement and long term retention in programs that utilize TPR and TPRS.

The many benefits of the method include:

- TPRS is highly engaging and fun. Students actively participate in the development of outlandish and humorous stories and the content of these stories are then dramatized in class.
- TPRS is a systematic, entertaining, low stress way of internalizing vocabulary and grammatical structures. Because the stress level is low, students feel comfortable producing the language, which increases confidence and motivation. This supports Krashen's affective filter hypothesis which states that a learner's ability to acquire language is constrained if they are feeling fear or embarrassment.
- Consistent and comprehensible exposure to grammatically-correct language in context helps students develop an "ear" for the language.

My Experience with TPRS:

I first became interested in TPRS while in attendance at a workshop on TPRS at the annual ACTFL Conference (American Counsel on the Teaching of Foreign Language) in Boston in October, 2010. While there, I attended a workshop on TPRS and was very impressed with the presentation. The presenter demonstrated a TPRS lesson in German to an audience that did not know any German. I was amazed by how quickly we learned the vocabulary and how enjoyable the process was. After that workshop I met Contee Seely, a major publisher of TPRS teaching material, and director of Command Performance Language Institute in Berkeley, CA. Our conversation inspired me to continue exploring TPRS. After doing some additional reading about TPRS-reading that convinced me that this approach might increase the effectiveness of the approach currently being employed within the World Language Department in The Ithaca City School District-I decided to attend a workshop in San Francisco in August, 2001. At this workshop, I was very inspired but felt that in order to really integrate it effectively I would need to observe other teachers in action and then plan and rehearse lessons with colleagues. At this workshop, I had the opportunity to work in a small group and teach a mini lesson. I was impressed by how enjoyable and engaging the TPRS teaching and learning experience was. Many of the teachers in attendance were already beginning to use TPRS in their classrooms and seemed very pleased with the results. I then joined a TPRS internet listserv in search for teachers in the Central New York area with whom I could discuss, observe and network. Unfortunately, I was unable to find any local opportunities to support my development.

I have discovered that there are numerous language teachers in Northern California that are using TPRS in their classrooms and that there are regular meetings, workshops, and support groups that meet often in the Bay Area. I concluded that in order to gain an in depth understanding of TPRS and how it is practiced in the classroom setting I would need to observe and mentor with experienced teachers.

I contacted Contee Seely to discuss my proposal ideas and he very enthusiastically supported my project and helped me make the necessary contacts. He provided me with a contact list of over one hundred World Language teachers using TPRS in Northern California. I made some inquiries and have already found five teachers that are willing to become mentors and have invited me into their classrooms for observation.

Procedures:

During the 2013-2014 school year, I propose to do the following:

Fall 2013 and Spring 2014:

- Observe: Laurie Rubin (Spanish teacher in Bodega Bay, CA), Ben Lev (Spanish teacher in Santa Rosa, CA), Sharon Bontrager (Spanish teacher in Napa, CA), Julie Gilbert (Spanish teacher in San Ramon, CA), Greg Stevens (Spanish Teacher at Tamalpais School District in Marin), and Brooks Geiken (Spanish Teacher in Berkeley)
- Create video clips of TPRS language classes in action to share with World Language teachers at ICSD
- Take advantage of all TPRS networking opportunities and meetings in the Bay Area
- Meet with Contee Seely at Command Performance Language Institute in Berkeley and explore his extensive library of TPRS teaching materials and related software
- Attend all local TPRS workshops
- Attend at least one national workshop and one webinar led by Carol Gaab. Carol is an internationally recognized presenter specializing in TPRS.

Spring 2014

- Attend *Istituto Estelar Bilingue* in Liberia, Costa Rica for a 2-3 week-long Spanish language and cultural immersion experience. Being in the role of a student learning Spanish in a school that utilizes TPRS methodology and offers a “highly interactive, dynamic, and kinesthetic learning experience” will give me the opportunity to experience TPRS from the student’s perspective. I will be able to design my program to support my level of expertise, and will have the opportunity to deepen my fluency and expand my vocabulary in this immersion experience. After four hours of intensive study in the mornings, I will participate in a volunteer program which is designed to help students contribute to the city of Liberia, and offers opportunities such as assisting in teaching English at local elementary schools and assisting in adult literacy programs. I am hoping to establish a partnership with a Middle School in Liberia for the purposes of establishing a e-pal/pen pal and classroom Skype exchange when I return. This cultural exchange will provide my students with an opportunity to develop their writing skills while bringing more meaning and purpose to their study of Spanish. I intend to stay with a local family, which will help to expand my fluency in a natural setting.

- **Project Outcome:**

I am confident that utilizing TRPS methodology will improve student performance in all four communication skills-listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The main focus of TPRS is to develop communicative proficiency and fluency by introducing a lot of auditory input and utilizing storytelling to make this input more comprehensible and engaging. The key techniques include utilizing a lot of repetition, pairing the target language with visual support and gestures, simplifying and repeating key terms, and checking often for understanding. When students are physically engaged in their learning through the use of gestures that are paired with the vocabulary and grammar, and the content is comprehensible, engaging, interesting, and narratively coherent, student success will be maximized.

In addition, establishing a pen pal and classroom exchange program will provide students with additional purpose and motivation for learning Spanish as students really enjoy being able to correspond with and respond to their peers from another country.

Materials needed:

- Access to laptop supplied by ICSD
- Access to a video recorder for taping TPRS lessons, workshop highlights, and classrooms and community in Liberia, Costa Rica.

Documentation:

- I will create a TPRS resource kit that will contain detailed reports about each classroom observation experience, and include DVDs containing video footage of TPRS in action in the classroom. I will share these in my PLC meetings and with all World Language and ESOL teachers that express an interest in exploring TPRS.
- I intend to expand our Realidades units by creating and incorporating stories that utilize unit vocabulary and grammar. I will create supplemental materials to share these ideas with my colleagues and add suggestions for gestures to use for key vocabulary words and grammar concepts in each unit.
- I intend to collect TPRS materials in the form of books, readers, and software, and will establish a lending library for my World Language colleagues.
- I will also share my insights in the form of notes from networking sessions and conference reports and include any useful handouts collected in networking sessions and conferences. I will keep these in a binder with the resource kit.

Conclusion:

Having the time to observe and be mentored by master language teachers utilizing state-of-the-art teaching methodology will provide me with a valuable opportunity to thoroughly focus on and master the craft teaching Spanish. In addition to being able to learn from and master teachers and practice what I learn in their classrooms, being immersed as a student in a TRPS-based classroom in Costa Rica will allow me to experience TPRS from the perspective of the student and enable me to become a more sensitive and empathic instructor. I expect to return to my job with new skills and proficiencies and a wealth of ideas, strategies, and resources to share with my colleagues.