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TPRS in ESL Programs: A Storytelling Approach

by

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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background

As a French and English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor, I think of myself as being a teacher with a foot in two worlds. On the face of it, the two fields do not seem drastically different; both involve teaching an additional language to students who have not yet mastered it or are emergent bilinguals. But a closer examination reveals significant differences in approach, curriculum, training, and stakes. In other words, being an ESL teacher is not just a matter of ‘being a French teacher, but in English’ or vice versa. Thus, most teachers in one field or the other do not necessarily know very much about the other discipline. Nevertheless, ESL and foreign language teaching both share a common goal, which is to better familiarize students with a language and culture they do not yet fully grasp.

In recent decades, K-12 educational theory has undergone large changes as teachers, researchers, and psychologists discover more effective methods of teaching and learning. Modern ESL programs in of themselves are one such change, representing a significant departure from the government- and church-run boarding schools for indigenous children, and even from the dominant pull-out method of years past. In the foreign-language world, one instructional model known as “Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling” or TPRS has become quite prominent and is being practiced in foreign-language classrooms around the world (TPRS Books, n.d., “What is TPRS?”). Briefly, it consists of a focus on specific vocabulary and functions, followed by the use of

a story to demonstrate and reinforce the material. I have employed it in my own French classrooms for four years, to good effect. On the other hand, I have never tried TPRS in an ESL class, and I don't know any ESL teachers who have. To me, this represents a missed opportunity, so I wanted to investigate: *how can TPRS be used to support English Language Learners and ESL programs?*

One Foot in French

In kindergarten, my parents enrolled me at a French-immersion school. Language immersion was a fairly new idea at the time, the goal being to immerse students in another language starting from a young age. From the first day I walked in the door and my teacher greeted me with a broad smile and “Bonjour!”, my classes were taught in French. Classroom decorations were in French, too. Homework was in French. School plays were in French. About the only thing that was not in French was, understandably, English class. The immersion program continued into middle school, albeit with a roughly 50/50 French/English split. By the time I was 13 and my family moved to a new school district, most of my education had been in French and I was, for most intents and purposes, bilingual.

I did not have many opportunities to continue with French in high school, but at college I was able to test out of all 100- and 200-level courses; from there, a bachelor's degree in French was only a handful of advanced courses away. I did not know I wanted to be a teacher yet, but even then I recognized that such a shortcut to a degree was a rare and valuable thing, so I took it. At the suggestion of a family friend, I spent two summers as a camp counselor at Concordia Language Villages, a program that runs language-immersion summer camps outside of Bemidji, MN. It was not teaching in the

conventional sense, but it represented my first foray into working with students in a foreign language. It also laid the foundation for teaching with TPRS, as many of our counselor-led activities at camp used similar premises and techniques. By the end of my time there, I found that I was enjoying the work. I had considered the idea of teaching before, but never very deeply or for very long. A few years later, when I finally decided to pursue a teaching license, it did not take me very long to consider my experiences and decide on French.

My first exposure to TPRS was probably as an elementary or middle school student, though I would not have known it at the time. My teachers simply did ‘teacher things’ and that was as far as I thought about educational strategies. At Concordia Language Villages, I learned how to teach vocabulary with gestures and stories, which was a large part of what TPRS is. Still, I did not really study it until I started my coursework at Hamline. I was drawn to it right away, not only because it offers so much room for creativity and imagination, but because it works so well. Through graduate school and professional development, I have observed sample TPRS lessons in Swedish, Russian, and Mandarin Chinese and come away extremely impressed. I learned a lot personally, and so did the students I observed. The schools I have worked at have embraced TPRS as well, and so it transpired that I have used it in one form or another since I greeted my very first class, smiled broadly at them, and said “Bonjour!”

One Foot in ESL

My path towards ESL began in graduate school as I was pursuing my K-12 French teacher license. Halfway through my coursework, Hamline announced that it would be shuttering its French department. Those of us already enrolled would be

allowed to finish our programs, but French was being taken off the table for future students. The announcement gave me pause, to say the least; if French was in such a state that Hamline was cutting it entirely, was there a future for me in it? In a conversation with my father, he mentioned the possibility of teaching ESL. He himself was a native speaker of German growing up in New York City, and he remembered struggling with English-language instruction during his early elementary years. At that time, there was no ESL program to enroll him in, so he was essentially left to sink or swim. He had the good fortune to be able to swim, but many other students, then and now, were not always so lucky. I looked into the K-12 ESL licensure and discovered that many of the requirements were identical to K-12 French. I decided to pursue both licensures in tandem. I student-taught and received my license in French, then I went back and finished my ESL license the following year. By the time I started my teaching career, I had some background in both fields.

My first several years of teaching were unpredictable as I was shuffled from school to school, district to district. Some years I was a French teacher, others I taught ESL, some years I did both. I learned first-hand about the similarities and differences between them. I also started seeing opportunities to use my knowledge of one to make me better at teaching the other. By way of example, my current school is an International Baccalaureate (IB) school, an internationally-minded educational movement with thousands of schools across more than 150 countries (IB, n.d., “About the IB”). Among many other things, we offer a Diploma Programme (DP) to 11th-12th graders. At the end of their senior year, they take a series of rigorous exams which they must pass in order to receive an IB diploma. For those students taking French, the DP exam is probably the

most difficult, highest-stakes French-language exam they will ever take. They need to be proficient in the four language modalities of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They need a strong command of academic French. They need to be able to work with formal and informal language. It is not the kind of assessment most foreign-language students in the United States are used to, and preparing students for a high-stakes exam was not covered in my French licensure coursework.

ESL, on the other hand, has been high-stakes from the beginning. Academic language is specifically targeted, formal and informal registers are frequently compared and contrasted, and every year English Language Learners (ELLs) take an assessment to measure their English proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. I know how to prepare ESL students for these assessments; I have done it for years. And with that background, I now have the opportunity to apply what I have learned, what works and what does not, to my DP French students. Without that ESL background, I would have had to learn how to teach in a high-stakes environment from scratch and start at the beginning. This is just one way being an ESL teacher can make me a better French teacher, and by investigating the possibilities of using a proven methodology like TPRS in an ESL class, I hope to demonstrate how the foreign-language world has something to offer the ESL world as well.

Next Steps

My goal is to demonstrate how TPRS can enhance and enrich ESL education. In my career, I have encountered a number of teachers similar to myself in that we teach both a foreign language and ESL. To my mind, that makes us very lucky. But I am looking to create a resource that all ESL teachers can use, regardless of whether or not

they teach or even speak a foreign language. I envision this project as one of sharing and collaborating, providing traditionally underserved students and teachers with a powerful language learning and teaching tool. I think of myself as being a language teaching success story: from starting my early years at a French immersion school, to majoring in French, to working at a language-immersion summer camp, to becoming a language teacher myself. Even the unexpected closure of the French program at Hamline worked to my benefit as I reevaluated my options and found a path that let me pursue two language-teaching licenses instead of just one. I would not be the teacher I am today without French and ESL; both are integral to my teaching identity, and even if I am only teaching one subject or the other, my experiences in both inform and enrich my craft.

One important facet of this project is my positionality. As mainstream society becomes more aware and mindful of the impact of race, sexual orientation, and other social factors, it has become clear that people wishing to contribute to this discussion must acknowledge who they are. I am a white man descended from central European immigrants. I was assigned 'male' at birth and have always felt comfortable with that role and designation. I identify as straight and I grew up speaking English in a comfortably middle-class home. I have never experienced any permanent disability. All of these things contribute to who I am and how I perceive the world. For this project in particular, this is relevant because I am a very socially privileged man working with students who are almost never so privileged. They might differ from me in few, some, or many ways, but what they have in common is that they deserve a teacher whose methods and practice respect and encourage each one of them. I have concentrated on never letting that thought stray far from my mind during the writing of this project.

In the coming chapter, I will be examining the research that underpins this project. The first section will deal with ESL and the kinds of needs and peculiarities it entails. The second section will be similar, but focus on the language acquisition process, drawing from theories of linguistics and educational psychology. The third section will round things out with a detailed look at TPRS, along with a review of the studies that have been done on language programs using it. The third chapter will outline and explain this project's goals, philosophies, and parameters, and the fourth chapter contains a reflection on the process of designing and creating this curriculum.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Chapter Overview

This project is a set of curricular materials that seeks to answer the question, “*How can TPRS be used to support English Language Learners and ESL programs?*” To start answering this question, existing academic literature will be reviewed in three parts. In order to determine what the needs are, the field of ESL in the United States will be discussed, initially to establish its historical basis and then to present some of the realities and challenges facing ESL teachers today. Second, an understanding of language teaching best practices is essential when considering the application of a teaching strategy, so the field of second language acquisition will be reviewed, examining some of its principles and determining what sorts of best practices are in use. Finally, an evaluation of TPRS’ applicability must naturally explain what TPRS is in the first place, so a summary of TPRS and its methodology will be presented, along with the data and results revealed by studies thus far. All of these components will lay the foundation for considering how TPRS might be used in ESL classrooms in the United States.

ESL

In the United States, the ‘ESL’ acronym exists side-by-side with several variations, such as ELL for ‘English Language Learner’, EL for ‘English Learner’, and ML for ‘Multilingual Learner’. It is not necessarily clear at first glance which acronym is appropriate for which use. For the sake of precision and clarity, this paper will use the definitions proposed by the National Council of Teachers of English (Alvarez et al., 2017, as cited in Fleischer, 2017): broadly, the acronym ‘ESL’ is appropriate when describing

programs, curricula, and materials, but should not be used for students. The preferred term for a student would instead be ‘ELL’, though some places have opted for terms like ‘EL’ or ‘ML’ instead. Furthermore, it is common in the field of language acquisition to refer to a person’s home or native language as the first language (L1), with additional languages referred to as L2, L3, and so on.

Conventions and Past Practice

Like teachers of any other subject, ESL instructors are always looking for new methods and new research to better understand and serve their students. There are some challenges and constraints unique to the field, though. For instance, unlike other subjects, teachers and ELLs do not necessarily have an L1 in common. This is an important distinction to make: an ESL teacher in an English-speaking country cannot always ‘fall back’ on a shared language to facilitate communication, whereas an English teacher in (for example) Russia might well be able to communicate with his or her students in Russian if need be, although certain exceptions such as visiting foreign teachers do of course apply.

Another important difference lies in the degree of accountability and federal oversight. The National Research Council (2011), in a publication on fund allocation for state programs, explains that while each state has its own procedures for identifying, classifying, and exiting ELLs, all of this information must be reported to the U.S. Department of Education. Additionally, federal regulations require ELLs to be assessed annually by means of an ELP (English Language Proficiency) test and other optional criteria as each individual state sees fit. Therefore, while the processes and procedures may vary from place to place, the facts of assessment and data submission do not. By

contrast, although organizations such as the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages, or ACTFL, have devised standards intended for use by any school in the US, and while certain states have adopted these or similar standards, there is ultimately no federal legislation that mandates the classification, assessment, and data collection of foreign language learners (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015).

Taken together, the common language and national oversight represent two examples of meaningful differences between ESL and foreign language programs. Accordingly, ESL instructors need to take these unique challenges into account, and over the years, have done so in a variety of ways. Some of the earliest examples of ESL education in North America were found in the government- and church-run boarding schools for indigenous children. Smith, writing for *Social Justice* (2004) notes that while such programs had roots going all the way back to the 17th century, they became more comprehensive and organized in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These schools were expressly intended to stamp out the native culture and languages of their pupils, as was apparent from their stated purpose of “Kill the Indian, save the man” (Smith, p. 90). The means to this end were similarly blunt and direct: governments simply ordered students to be taken from their families and housed in the boarding schools. There, they were required to speak only in English and were forced to adopt new customs, dress, food, and culture (Woolford, 2015.) Such environments were rife with abuse and had a devastating impact on indigenous communities throughout the United States and Canada; some scholars argue that the term ‘genocide’ is appropriate when considered alongside other policies enacted by the American and Canadian governments (Woolford, 2015,

pp.21-22). Despite revitalization efforts in some areas, the future of many indigenous languages remains uncertain.

ESL programs today approach things very differently; one would be hard-pressed to find an ESL department openly advocating anything like “kill the _____, save the man.” Nevertheless, these early programs cast a long shadow, and teachers of ELLs still grapple with their legacy. How, then, can an ESL teacher instruct their students while still respecting their cultures and backgrounds?

The Challenges of Today

In the United States today, ESL instruction is provided using a variety of models and methods. Moughamian et al. (2009) identify several guiding questions used by practitioners and policymakers as they design programs, including the students’ amount of time in the United States, resource and assessment availability, the current teaching pool, and more. Programs generally fall into three categories: English-only, bilingual, and bilingual with transitional support. These in turn subdivide into further models: English-only programs might employ pull-out instruction (ELLs have a separate ESL class) or sheltered instruction (ELLs are grouped by proficiency level), while bilingual programs might make use of immersion or heritage language development models, which seek to develop students’ proficiency in both their L1 and L2.

It is worth noting that American public schools have been required by law to provide access to English instruction to non-native speakers for decades- in one pivotal case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that by *not* providing adequate language education and services to Chinese-speaking students, the San Francisco school district had in effect discriminated against them on the basis of national origin, which violated the Civil Rights

Act (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). Even so, not all teachers and districts are equally well-versed in ESL instruction. Combine this with the many other competing needs for a teacher's time, and the result is that ESL teaching is frequently limited, covering only content-specific vocabulary and rarely, if ever, aspects such as verb tenses or language functions (Baecher et al., 2014). At least part of the problem seems to lie in teacher preparation. In one study performed by Baecher et al., a group of ESL instructors and researchers examined over 100 lesson plans from teacher candidates enrolled in a New York City K-12 graduate teacher education program across a variety of grade levels and content areas.

To determine whether or not the language objectives were clear and well-developed, the researchers devised two criteria:

1. The objective specifies the language knowledge, specific to the L2 learner, and the ability to use it that students will achieve by the end of the lesson.
2. Lesson plans with focused language objectives have the following characteristics: (a) one or more specific language functions, grammatical structures, microskills, learning strategies, or vocabulary that learners will learn about and be able to use in a period of instruction; (b) specific activities to either expose, introduce, and/or provide guided or freer practice to develop this understanding or skill. (2014, p. 127)

The authors then established a set of definitions by which to classify problematic objectives: vague or overly broad wording, quoted directly from state standards without interpretation, not feasible in a single unit of instruction, describing an activity rather than a learn goal, a mismatch between content and language goals, and describing an ELA

(English Language Arts) goal rather than ESL goal- the latter being an issue in that the objective was better tailored to general education students rather than ELLs. They also evaluated each plan on the basis of which aspects of language it targeted, such as vocabulary, syntax, and sentence starters.

The results of the study showed that most of the studied objectives were unclear or unsatisfactory. Furthermore, vocabulary tended to be focused on much more often than grammar structures, functions, or language-learning strategies. The authors concluded that teacher preparation needed to be more purposeful and specific with regards to creating language objectives, and called for more discussion on what kind of training that might entail (Baecher et al., 2014).

This uncertainty about how to teach language effectively has an effect on students as well. There have been many studies and surveys performed on ELLs and their language acquisition patterns over the years, and two such studies will be discussed here. The first, by Golberg et al., appeared in the journal *Applied Psycholinguistics* (2008). The second, authored by Soto-Corominas et al., was published in *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* (2020).

The Golberg study (2008) took place in and around Edmonton, Canada, and sought to measure how long it took for ELLs to acquire a vocabulary base in English as large as or larger than their native speaker peers. It focused on children around the age of five, and measured their abilities twice a year for two years. They found that the students they studied acquired vocabulary faster than some other studies would suggest. They identified two notable correlating factors: mother's level of education, and student age, with higher levels of each corresponding to an increase in vocabulary size.

The Soto-Corominas study (2020) was also performed in western Canada, but was focused on adolescents rather than young children. The study sought to determine ELLs' oral language abilities as compared to native speakers, and see if a language acquisition timeline could be established. Their findings were not as optimistic as the researchers from the Golberg study; ELLs generally scored below their native speaker peers in all measured areas. Furthermore, the data did not seem to support the proposed language acquisition timeline. It was even found that ELLs who had been receiving ESL instruction for more than seven years did not perform meaningfully better than students who had received 5-7 years of instruction. The data did support some external factors influencing the results, such as frequent use of English with friends and parental education levels. The researchers also noted, "Up to now, we have considered DLLs as one group, but this study also showed that DLLs are a highly heterogeneous group with wide individual variation, even beyond seven years of schooling" (Soto-Corominas, 2020, p. 715). The term 'DLL' here refers to Dual-Language Learners, and was used by the authors in place of ELL to specifically denote the fact that these learners spoke and learned a minority language such as Spanish at home.

On the whole, these studies do not point to a single, conclusive answer. ESL education, like any other field of education, is complicated and sometimes contradictory. ELLs acquire English more slowly than their native-speaker peers, except when they don't. More time in ESL is good for ELLs, until it isn't. Older students don't learn as quickly as younger students, except for when they do. Any given student's acquisition of English might be influenced by factors outside of the educator's control, like parents' levels of education or the marginalization of ELLs in many communities. Even factors

within education are not always easily addressed; the treatment of ELLs by mainstream teachers and the use of decontextualized instruction are not things that can be fixed with a wave of the hand. Add to this the assertion that incoming ESL teachers still struggle to write good language objectives, and it becomes clear that these are ongoing and far-reaching challenges to the entire field.

The Promise of Tomorrow

Sometimes, students and teachers are up to the challenges, daunting as they may be. In his 2014 dissertation, author Michael Bohensky interviewed and examined several ESL teachers and a half-dozen students who had succeeded in acquiring English and exiting ESL services in Texas. Although every student is different and tells a different story, common threads quickly emerge. Consistent with the previously-discussed research, some of these recurring themes are outside the control of educators: socioeconomic status, parental involvement, past experiences. Others, though, are very much in the domain of the educator: communication, consistency, interesting activities, effective teaching methods. The latter factor is particularly relevant to this paper.

Bohensky (2014) quotes one teacher as follows

I do a lot of a drama with them, like when I'm trying to teach them the difference between words, we do a lot of acting out....Sometimes I'll get real dramatic and they remember and they'll still come up and say, 'Listen, I remember what we used to act like.' I said, 'But you remember it, right?' (p.88)

The dramatic element being described here is a key component of TPRS, as will be further explained below. Clearly, the lessons were very memorable for students and teachers alike, which is, after all, part of the point.

Other studies have highlighted useful and effective practices in language instruction. Belhiah (2013) describes a vocabulary lesson with a particular focus on the teacher's gestures, which are analyzed in detail alongside the students' reactions and language use; the overall impression is that carefully selected and employed gestures add significantly to the students' comprehension of words like 'constituents', 'sever', and 'thaw'. In a different article for *TESOL Quarterly*, Johnson (2018) observes and documents some of the instructional scaffolds used by several ESL teachers recognized as exemplary. Said scaffolds are broadly defined in the article as provisions or references that support the language objective, and range from references to visible objects and multimedia to purposeful use of seating and student grouping (Johnson, 2018).

All of this shows that excellent teachers and proven practices can and do have an impact, even in a challenging field like ESL. The next sections will lay some foundation by examining some of the principles and practices of L2 acquisition, then move on to explain how TPRS works, as well as some of the studies that have been performed on it.

Language Acquisition

In order to evaluate TPRS against language acquisition best practices, it is necessary to understand what some of those best practices are and how they came to be. This section will focus on several theories of language acquisition, then examine some of the methods being used in foreign language classrooms around the world in the context of those theories.

The Critical Period

In the mid-20th century, linguistic researchers put forward a theory known as the critical period hypothesis. This hypothesis holds that a person's ability to learn a language

is significantly impacted by certain stages of brain development, with languages becoming more and more difficult to acquire as the brain specializes. Accordingly, the ideal time to acquire another language is during this critical period, which is generally stated to range from early childhood to the onset of puberty (Penfield & Roberts, 1959, as cited in Vanhove, 2013).

This hypothesis has generated significant debate among second language acquisition researchers. In a research article for *Psychological Science*, Hakuta et al. (2003) note that empirically, it is true that adult language learners are generally less successful than children. This is not particularly controversial. What is controversial is the precise cause of this effect. Proponents of the critical period provide the explanation given above, or a variant. Skeptics are, as the word implies, not so sure that's the real reason.

Researchers and studies have come down on both sides of the issue. David Birdsong, editor of *Second Language Acquisition and the Critical Period Hypothesis* (1999), cites a variety of models, explanations, and evidence supporting the hypothesis. Other studies dispute these explanations. For instance, the 2003 Hakuta study, using records from the U.S. Census Bureau, evaluated over 2 million immigrants to the United States with a Spanish- or Chinese-language background. They did not find evidence of a single cutoff point marking the end of a critical period; rather, English-language proficiency declined with age at a fairly consistent rate. The authors concluded that other factors such as socioeconomic status and level of formal education were just as contributory to these results as the age of immigration of the participants. To quote the study, "Our conclusion from these models is that second-language proficiency does in

fact decline with increasing age of initial exposure. The pattern of decline, however, failed to produce the discontinuity that is the essential hallmark of a critical period” (Hakuta, 2003).

A detailed analysis of the critical period hypothesis is outside the scope of this project. Nevertheless, it seems clear that as children typically show a greater aptitude for acquiring additional languages, best practices must necessarily be cognizant of how children’s brains interpret, process, and eventually acquire a language.

An Effective Affective Filter

Another take on language acquisition is presented in the form of the affective filter, one of five theories about L2 acquisition developed and articulated by linguist Stephen Krashen (1982) and subsequently debated and researched by scholars all over the world. The affective filter hypothesis holds that factors such as anxiety, apathy, and low self-confidence can act as a “filter” and block language input from being processed and ultimately acquired (Krashen, 1982, pp.31-32). In other words, the hypothetical best language lesson in the world taught by the most brilliant teacher will not be fully successful if the student is anxious, down on themselves, or simply isn’t interested in that moment. This state of things is referred to as having a “high” affective filter, while the more linguistically optimal attitude is called having a “low” affective filter.

Some researchers have embraced this hypothesis. Ling Wang, an associate professor at the School of Foreign Languages in Nanchang, China and writing for the *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, performed a survey among middle-school students learning English (Wang, 2020). The survey was designed to measure and assess students’ levels of anxiety, internal motivation, and self-confidence. She found that a

strong majority (~80%) both reported a problem in one or more of those areas and felt that their process of acquiring English, particularly vocabulary, was going slowly and painfully. Wang proposes measures such as team activities or lessons based on student interest to ease the affective filters of these students.

Other researchers report findings that are difficult to interpret or are inconclusive. Schinke-Llano and Vicars (1993), publishing the results of a study in *The Modern Language Journal*, were not able to determine with certainty what impact, if any, affective factors had on L2 acquisition. And still other researchers are critical of the theory. In the *Dhaka University Journal of Linguistics*, Zafar (2009) contends that Krashen's hypothesis fails to address a number of scenarios. He gives the example of children with high affective filters (stressed, insecure, etc.) being perfectly able to develop an L1, even though their affective filters should be inhibiting this acquisition. He further points out a lack of specificity in the hypothesis as to what physiological or psychological mechanisms are at work and how they might be measured. In conclusion, he argues that the affective filter hypothesis is overly vague, lacks empirical evidential support, and is difficult to test or verify (Zafar, 2009).

It is no secret that students are better able to learn when they find the subject interesting and are not distracted by fears and low self-confidence. It is also clear that the specific brain workings are still being researched and a unanimous consensus on the affective filter hypothesis does not yet exist. Whether or not these affective factors play a direct part in language acquisition, best-practice strategies such as fluency and drama tend to show that student mindset is an essential component in acquiring another

language. This is supported by a considerable body of research, particularly when the subjects are learning English as an L2.

Best Practices

In an article for *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, researchers Garbati and Mady (2015) performed a thematic analysis of literature pertaining to L2 acquisition, drawing from a variety of academic databases and journals. They focused specifically on oral proficiency, searching for methods and practices that produced the most consistently positive outcomes. Their goal was to establish a set of effective teaching strategies. They wrote their findings in the form of a list, which is as follows: explicit teaching, scaffolding, providing authentic encounters, planned & spontaneous presentations, task planning, fluency activities, questioning, role play, and assessment and feedback. It should be noted that these strategies are not mutually exclusive, and that lessons can and will frequently incorporate several of these strategies at once. The authors define the strategies as follows:

Explicit teaching in the context of L2 acquisition is providing specific instruction on the components of the L2 such as syntax, grammar, vocabulary, and so on. This might take the form of lessons in how verbs work, or an explanation of gender agreement in languages with that feature. This contrasts with implicit teaching, in which it is assumed that students will “pick up on” these nuances indirectly.

Scaffolding is a teacher-provided means of building up language skills, and as its name implies is meant to be temporary. There are diverse ways of providing that support, from vocabulary word walls to mnemonic devices to purposeful collaboration between

students. As students become more experienced and eventually master their language skills, the scaffolds become unnecessary, but they are a valuable aid for new material.

Authentic encounters entail situations in which learners have to use their language skills to deal with a real-world scenario or situation, such as meeting a stranger. For practical reasons, it is often difficult for teachers to set up these kinds of situations, but Garbati & Mady describe them as helpful when plans do come together. Planned and spontaneous presentations (on the part of students, not teachers) can take a variety of forms. Some activities can even incorporate both: one such activity might be a jigsaw reading activity, wherein separate groups of students read separate parts of a text, then come together to discuss and explain the whole. Another is a mock trial, in which students have to present prepared statements and also answer and react to spontaneous questions and events.

Task planning functions as a sort of rehearsal for using language to accomplish a given task. It involves giving students a chance to plan, strategize, and practice, and allows students to review their own work and correct or polish areas they are not satisfied with. This can be as simple as a student recording themselves giving presentations, then watching or listening to the recording to identify areas they still need to work on.

Fluency activities involve assessing how students speak the language, focusing on aspects like pause length, frequency, and rate of speech. Garbati & Mady identify three types of activities in particular: consciousness-raising, or making students aware of fluency patterns and areas for improvement; rehearsal or repetition, wherein students get the opportunity to repeat something many times over; and time-constrained, in which

students are initially given a long time to accomplish the activity, but then have to repeat the activity in shorter and shorter time frames.

Questioning is exactly what it sounds like and is flexible- teachers can question students, students can question teachers, students can question other students. The most effective questions are usually open-ended or require elaboration, rather than simple one-word answers (Garbati & Mady, 2015). This strategy is commonly paired with scaffolding of some sort in order to avoid the problem of students being put on the spot.

Role play requires students to put themselves in the shoes of someone else, and imagine how they might use their language skills as such. This helps students to think about conversational conventions, cultural elements, and behavioral structures, which students might not otherwise be asked to think very much about (Garbati & Mady, 2015).

Finally, assessment and feedback is common to all areas of teaching, but in the context of L2 acquisition, it was found that methods of feedback such as repetition or elicitation were more effective at student self-correction than simply correcting the student).

A considerable body of evidence exists to support these strategies' effectiveness, in addition to the sources cited by the authors. Sometimes, this evidence can come from unexpected quarters. One study of fluency took a technological approach, and sought to measure whether ELLs who participated frequently in English-language text-based online chats showed a greater development of oral fluency (Blake, 2009). The study group consisted of 34 university-age students from a variety of L1 backgrounds, and divided them into an internet chat group, a face-to-face group, and a control group. Each group had the same curriculum; it was only the instructional strategies that differed. The results

in the end were that all three groups showed improvement in fluency at the end of the 6-week session, but the greatest gains were made by the internet chat group (Blake, 2009). These findings suggest that development of oral fluency need not be confined to the classroom, but can be built and developed even in less traditional, more informal environments.

The use of drama to teach a language innately incorporates some of the best practices identified by Garbati and Mady (2015) such as role-playing and task-planning. In an article published by *Advances in Language and Literary Study*, Gill (2016) advocates for the use of drama to teach ELLs (specifically ELLs of Asian descent and language backgrounds) The author, a professor at Bond University in Australia, notes that ELLs from Asian countries often face specific hurdles in their English studies: a preference for a passive learning style, anxiety and shame around usage errors, lack of self-confidence, and more. Drama, Gill argues, gives students a chance to escape that high-pressure mental space. When they don't feel the weight of those expectations, he notes that students are much more likely to interact spontaneously in English, take risks, and otherwise engage with the language. By increasing English oral output and learners' confidence, their oral English output increases, and their potential to grow in areas such as fluency and clarity, voice projection, and kinesics (body language.) Gill ultimately concludes:

In essence, drama is a truly comprehensive and holistic way of learning because the mind, body and emotions all work in unison. There is a certain everyday humanness about it that can help Asian ESL learners become more confident and

enthusiastic about using spoken English communicatively. Through regular speech output, they may, in time, be able to speak English comfortably. (p.244)

The final sections of this chapter concern themselves with TPRS, with an eye towards how it might support best-practices in language acquisition for L2 learners in general, and ELLs in particular.

TPRS

TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling) is a teaching methodology that centers around the use of stories and repetition to teach a language. The first half of this section will explore some of the theory behind TPRS and how it addresses the needs of language learners from both a linguistic and a psychological perspective. The second half of this section will examine how TPRS and similar methods are used in classrooms around the world and outline some of the debate that has taken place around when and how it should be used.

Methodology

According to its website, TPRS was developed in the late 1980's by Blaine Ray, a teacher of Spanish (TPRS Books, n.d., "What is TPRS?"). The acronym initially stood for Total Physical Response- Storytelling, but has been known since the mid-2000's as Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling. As its original acronym suggests, it began as an outgrowth of TPR, or Total Physical Response, another language-teaching approach advanced by Dr. James Asher some twenty years prior (Asher, 1966). In this approach, the teacher accompanies each new vocabulary word with a physical action such as a gesture, a facial expression, use of a prop, etc. The students begin by listening to the word, watching the action, and mimicking the action. For example, if a lesson

involves teaching prepositions of directions, the teacher might choose a handful of words such as ‘around’, ‘next to’, ‘below’, ‘above’, etc. Each of these words would have a specific gesture or action associated with it, with the students taught to perform that action when they hear the word. They might do this several times before ever being asked to vocalize the word. In time, the students are also taught how to sound out and pronounce the word, and after that they learn the written form as well. Over the course of a lesson, a unit, or an entire course, the teacher introduces new words and more complicated structures as desired.

TPRS teaches its new vocabulary in much the same way initially, but expands on that base significantly. In an analysis on TPRS, Brune (2004) states that the method combines TPR with many of the linguistic theories proposed by Stephen Krashen and subsequently expanded upon by other scholars. One such theory, which Krashen calls “comprehensible input”, is centered around ensuring that the target language provided to learners is easy to understand and acquire. This can include speaking more slowly than usual, articulating clearly, using high-frequency vocabulary and fewer idioms, and using short, simple sentences (Krashen, 1982). After teaching the new vocabulary with standard TPR techniques, the signature storytelling component begins. Brune explains:

At this stage, the teacher tells a story, or describes several situations, using the target vocabulary of the day. S/he chooses students to be actors during the telling of the story, who then actively represent the story told by the teacher. By translating the language used by the teacher into actions, the actors help to ensure that it is comprehensible. This helps students to understand the language without

necessarily having to translate it into their native language, thereby fostering more fluent comprehension. (p.22)

To help grab students' attention and interest, stories should be written so as to be exaggerated, silly, and unpredictable. It should also incorporate constant repetition as a means of easing students into new grammar structures and helping them acclimatize themselves quickly. This also helps to maximize the degree of comprehensible input, allowing students to learn vocabulary and structures in a memorable context.

Another equally important and distinct highlight of TPRS is its use of questions. In order to help engage the entire class, throughout the storytelling process the teacher is asking questions of the non-actor students in the target language, focusing specifically on the new vocabulary and structures. Through constant repetition and use of TPRS, students quickly become familiar with this new material (Brune, 2004).

In later stages of a TPRS lesson, the focus starts to shift from input to output. Using the newly-acquired language skills, students are tasked with retelling the story in the target language. This can be done in a number of different ways, with possibilities such as having one student retell the entire story orally, students working in pairs to rewrite the story, students taking turns telling parts of the story, etc. Finally, if the teacher wants to introduce more advanced language structures such as changes in perspective or verb tense, they retell the story yet again, but emphasizing the different pronouns, conjugations, or whatever grammatical differences are significant (Brune, 2004, p.23).

The above represents a basic TPRS lesson. In recent decades, other scholars have further developed the theories and hypotheses that underpin its workings. In an article in *Foreign Language Annals*, linguists Lichtman and VanPatten (2021) argue for an update

to some of Krashen's theories. Comprehensible input, for instance, is now better understood as something Lichtman and VanPatten call communicatively embedded input, reflecting the notion that learners are actively seeking meaning and comprehension, rather than passively absorbing input. They further argue that the explicit teaching of grammar does not necessarily translate to implicit knowledge, and suggest that such time and energy would be better spent on whole-language activities in which learners focus on communicating (Lichtman & VanPatten, 2021). It is natural to expect that individual teachers will make their own changes, additions, and modifications to best suit their students and classrooms.

Outcomes at Home and Abroad

A significant body of research has coalesced around TPRS and comprehensible input, with studies and analyses of its effectiveness on students of all ages from all over the world (TPRS Books, n.d., "TPRS Research"). This frequently entails comparison of TPRS against other methods, or was designed to evaluate if TPRS is suitable for students with particular needs. Some of their findings and insights are presented below:

As part of her thesis, researcher Marissa Garczynski (2003) studied middle-school beginner Spanish students in a middle-class southern California school. Working from the same curriculum and textbooks, she taught one group using TPRS and another using the audio-lingual method, then compared the performance of the two groups on pre- and post-study assessments after six weeks of instruction. She found that the TPRS group scored only slightly higher than the audio-lingual group when only the post-study assessments were compared. However, when considered against the results of the pre-study assessment, the TPRS group showed much more consistent growth over the

course of the study, with 63% of students having improved by two or more grades as opposed to 49% for the other group, a difference of about 14% (Garczynski, 2003, p.33).

TPRS has also been attempted when teaching very young children. One study took place in Istanbul, Turkey, and studied four-year old children who spoke Turkish as a first language and had about six months' worth of exposure to English at the time of the experiment (Kara & Eveyik-Aydin, 2019). These children were given a pre-assessment, then about five hours worth of instruction in English using TPRS methods over a period of five weeks, followed by immediate post-assessments and additional assessments two weeks later to measure how well the children had retained their vocabulary. There was not a control group or other group receiving a different method of instruction. The researchers were particularly interested in whether students retained more receptive language skills (input) or productive language skills (output). The study found that the children retained the vast majority of the language they had learned, particularly with regards to their receptive skills. The researchers determined that the results of the study supported the use of TPRS with preschool-age children, and found that the storytelling aspect helped to increase students' interest and engagement. They write, “ It can be concluded that TPRS methodology is appropriate to use with very young learners, as it provides them with concrete concepts, familiar context, and plenty of kinesthetic and explorative activities that are essential for their learning” (Kara & Eveyik-Aydin, 2019, p.142).

Still other studies of TPRS have focused on older high-school age students. One study, undertaken by Printer (2021) of the University of Bath in England and published in *The Language Learning Journal*, aimed to measure the effectiveness of TPRS along a

different track than language acquisition. His study centered on motivation from the students' perspective. Specifically, he sought to understand if TPRS was effective in bolstering students' levels of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which he identified as the three central components of self-determination, which was itself cited as being instrumental, if under-studied, in language learning (Printer, 2021). Printer assembled a focus group of twelve students, aged 14-15. Each of them was enrolled in Spanish at an international school in Switzerland. The study took place over a two-month time frame, with students periodically reporting their feelings towards TPRS and towards language acquisition in general. The results were, in short, that TPRS was a big hit. The students unanimously had a positive opinion of the experience (Printer, 2021). Students felt that this method allowed them greater degrees of autonomy, competence, and relatedness than previous language acquisition experiences. Printer determined that this result was linked to increased intrinsic motivation, a finding particularly interesting to educators seeking to bolster this in their classrooms. Furthermore, he notes in his discussion that TPRS works best when the stories stay true to the teacher's personality and character, as it forms stronger bonds between the teacher and students (Printer, 2021). This highlights the importance of the student-teacher bond as a crucial element of language learning, and echoes some of the ideas of the affective filter hypothesis as proposed by Krashen (1982).

The results of these studies present TPRS as a method with significant potential. It is not the magic bullet of language teaching; Printer (2021) and Garczynski (2003) both note in their studies that additional data is needed before an empirical consensus can be reached. Nevertheless, the data we do have generally trend positively with regards to

language acquisition, and its status as a memorable and enjoyable method is well-attested to in studies of all kinds of students from all over the world.

Conclusion

ESL educators in the United States face distinct challenges, from the lack of a shared language with their students to confusing data about what works best to early ESL's unhappy past. ELLs, besides not speaking the language of power, are not always taught by teachers who are aware of their needs. Since second-language acquisition is a complex process that continues to be studied, reviewed, challenged, and revised, some of the discussion surrounding how brains acquire language was reviewed. As expected, much is still being debated, but a set of best practices can nonetheless be distilled from available data. Finally, to start outlining how TPRS might respond to these needs, the methodology and theory behind it was outlined, and the current state of TPRS research was presented.

The research question guiding this entire project has been *How can TPRS be used to support English Language Learners and ESL programs?* The previously cited studies have studied language classes in countries around the world with students of all ages. It is worth pointing out, however, that none of these studies focused on the use of TPRS in ESL programs in the United States. This is because, simply put, that research does not yet exist. Few American ESL educators have even heard of TPRS, let alone used it, unless they also happen to teach a foreign language. This was one of the observations that led to undertaking this project in the first place: ELLs and their teachers need every edge they can get, and it's possible that TPRS might provide such an edge.

One further distinction should be made between ESL and foreign language teaching. Whereas foreign language education tends to be centered primarily on communication, ESL programs are increasingly moving towards a more content-targeted model in which instruction is tailored to support ELs in their content-area courses. WIDA, an organization that publishes a great deal of ESL content, reflects this shift in their 2020 English Language Development (ELD) Guide, in which the language of content areas such as science and social studies figure prominently (WIDA, 2020).

With these needs and goals of ELLs and of language programs in mind, the discussion now turns to how TPRS might serve to meet those needs. The following chapter will outline the thought process behind this project, then walk through the creation of a TPRS-centered curriculum. Among the questions answered will be the scope and sequence of the unit, the assumed parameters under which the unit has been developed, and the audience for which the unit is intended.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

The goal of this project is to discuss, *How can TPRS be used to support English Language Learners and ESL programs?* As such, this chapter will be organized by first describing the project itself, namely what it entails and which research supports it. Next will be a description of the setting and intended audience of this project- in short, the people for whom this project is most likely to be relevant. Then the timeline will be discussed, going over the time frame both for the project's creation and the project itself. Following that will be a description of what kinds of assessments and data collection could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of this curriculum, then finish with a summary, conclusion, and a change of focus towards the next chapter.

Project Description

I have chosen to study the applicability of TPRS to ELLs (English Language Learners) by way of creating a sample curriculum unit. This unit will heavily emphasize TPRS and the variety of language skills and concepts it can be used to teach. As ELLs and ESL programs can vary tremendously in their needs and constraints, I will endeavor to create a curriculum that is powerful and flexible enough to be modified to suit a wide variety of ages, places, classrooms, and programs.

This unit envisions a middle-school (grades 6-8) environment, with ELLs from any variety of language backgrounds. The lessons will be created for a sheltered instruction model, wherein ELLs are grouped by proficiency level and taught together, generally with a focus on content and employing gestures, manipulatives, visual aids, and

so on (Moughamian et al., 2009). This type of model is sometimes seen on a school-wide level- the LEAP Academy in St. Paul, MN is one such school. This curriculum could equally be useful in teaching SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education), a category of students who, for a variety of reasons, have not had as much school as expected for someone their age. States have begun responding to these students and their needs. In Minnesota, the LEAPS Act of 2014 was passed to add greater support and accountability for ESL programs all over the state, with new accountability and provisions for SLIFE (MN Department of Education, n.d.). Finally, these lessons could be used in schools that continue to use pull-out models of ESL education, whether because combined classrooms are impractical or in niche situations.

The students I have in mind should not be assumed to be total beginners, but as having no more than a year or two of English instruction to date. Their English proficiency level is assumed to be in the beginner-intermediate range. The lesson plans themselves will be adapted from the Middle Years Programme language acquisition template proposed by the IB. These unit planners have been influenced by a number of ideas, with particularly strong contributions from approaches such as inquiry-based learning and understanding by design. For instance, the start of the unit planner contains fields for describing the unit's purpose, statement of inquiry, and a number of guiding questions. The purpose of the unit is explored here, along with a description of what skills students will be building and why they are building them. In IB parlance, this is the domain of ATL (Approaches to Learning) skills, which serve as the basis for the unit's instruction and assessment. There is also a discussion of the unit's final assessment,

known as a summative assessment, and the criteria used to evaluate student work. A blank template of this unit planner can be found in Appendix A.

Although the unit will be written with middle schoolers in mind, I will have prioritized flexibility while creating these stories, lessons, and materials. With a few modifications and some refocusing, this unit can be taught to students of all ages. This is because the framework of TPRS doesn't need to change very much to accommodate different ages or levels, which is a big advantage for a busy teacher!

In deciding how to incorporate TPRS into this curriculum, I have created three “free form” stories. These are not prescriptive stories that have been written and prepared ahead of time. Rather, by asking questions in the target language, the teacher elicits answers from the students, which are then used to invent the story as the class goes along. Characters, conflicts, resolutions, and drama are thereby a collaboration between the instructor and the students. There are a few benefits to this approach. It is extremely malleable and can be adapted to suit everything from students' linguistic needs to class moods. It's also a great way to keep students engaged, as they are in a very real sense co-authors of their own learning. It's their characters and situations that are being discussed, and as previously discussed in the review of the literature. This kind of student-centered instruction is also a key component of culturally responsive teaching, as students are given the opportunity to make their own experiences, on their terms, rather than being expected to conform to a system they may or may not be familiar with (Brown University, n.d.). It is, after all, no secret that highly motivated students tend to be successful students as well.

The chief obstacles when using this approach are time and energy. TPRS is a fun and effective method of teaching and learning a language, but is also very demanding of one's time, labor, and mental energy. Prior to the lesson, the teacher has to create good language goals. During the lesson, the teacher is very much on-stage and has a lot to do. They must keep the story going, check for comprehension, constantly ask questions, manage the classroom, and ensure that things are still going on-track. It doesn't necessarily look very hard from the perspective of an outside observer, but can in fact be very tiring. For the purposes of this project, my freeform story lessons will not be entirely freeform, but rather a sort of hybrid. The basic framework of the story will be given, but with gaps. The lesson will consist of filling in those gaps and the rest of the story in a freeform manner. I think of this method as the "Mad Libs" method because it is set up very similarly to that word game series.

Linguistically, this project will demonstrate using TPRS with a variety of language objectives, big and small. Over the course of several weeks, this unit will include lessons designed to teach vocabulary, the language functions and forms of the interrogative, and the use of the past tense. In many cases, these aspects aren't starkly separate, but blended together seamlessly. By aligning with the best practices identified by Garbati & Mady (2015) such as scaffolding, questioning, authentic encounters, and role-playing, I hope to demonstrate that even a "fun" method like TPRS can actually be an extremely effective way to teach in such a way that is not only efficient, but sticks in the minds of learners.

Setting and Audience

The intended audience for this project is ESL instructors as a whole, with a particular focus on K-12 educators in the United States. They might teach different levels and age groups at different institutions and under different circumstances, but part of the beauty of TPRS is that it's widely applicable to all kinds of situations. More generally, any teacher looking to teach an additional language to students might find something of value in TPRS, and so this has applicability beyond the bounds of the United States and even the English language.

Besides providing a usable curriculum for teachers to use with students, my hope is that it also serves as a useful framework and model for instructors as well; something with which to teach the teachers, as it were. This unit is written to be approachable and easy to follow for precisely this purpose. As with any new teaching strategy, a teacher wishing to use TPRS regularly will undoubtedly encounter frustrations and hang-ups, but this unit aspires to prove that TPRS in an ESL classroom is not an impossible pipe dream, but a goal that can be met if pursued with diligence, deliberateness, and creativity. This project is one method of teaching an ESL class with TPRS, but it is certainly not the only way. If an ESL teacher new to TPRS was to see this project and think to themselves, "Interesting, but I'd do it like _____ and _____ instead," I would consider it a mark of success. After all, every teacher has to adapt to accommodate their own styles, students, and timelines.

Timeline

On the subject of timelines, this project will be created during the fall of 2021. My intention is to create three or possibly four stories to serve as the core of the unit;

establishing the precise number will be one of my first tasks. From there, I can begin to outline a scope and sequence based on the linguistic features I've already selected: vocabulary, interrogative functions, and past tense. If other adjustments become necessary during the course of development, I will address those as they arise. This project began in the summer of 2021, with the first three chapters written around the end of June, July, and August respectively. I intend to finish in late November or early December of 2021.

Assessment

No curriculum plan is complete without an assessment, and this project is no exception. I will be including a variety of assessments to use with these lessons. Some will be formative assessments, which tend to be informal and lower-stakes rehearsals. They vary widely in time usage, from ten seconds to ten minutes or more. They may or may not be entered into a gradebook. The final assessment of this unit is known as a summative assessment, which is more formal and figures into the students' grades. The assessments will be aligned with the language objectives of each lesson. The final summative assessment will be for students to create their own stories, and will be assessed using IB's Criterion D in language acquisition, which concerns itself primarily with components of writing. This includes use of vocabulary and grammatical structures, organization of information in a clear and coherent manner, and communicating relevant information with a sense of audience and purpose.

Summary

This project aims to be a complete unit of TPRS lessons for a middle-school ESL class. This class is envisioned as part of a sheltered-instruction program, but could be

adapted to a variety of similar ESL instruction models as well, including SLIFE programs. The unit is envisioned as lasting several weeks and will include all of the necessary language goals, instructional materials, activities, practice, and assessments. These lessons will be created in an IB format with a special focus on student-led storytelling and co-constructed teaching. This approach also meshes well with principles of culturally responsive teaching, and has been designed to maximize exposure to comprehensible English while still respecting the experiences and cultures of ELLs.

The final chapter of this paper is a reflection on the process of creating this curriculum. The implications and limitations of this project are considered, and finally avenues of further research are discussed in light of some of the unanswered questions that remain.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

With this project, I set out to answer the question, *how can TPRS be used to support English Language Learners and ESL programs?* This chapter discusses the process, conclusions, and implications of those conclusions with regards to my research and project. First I will reflect on the process of research and writing. I will discuss how my thoughts changed over the course of the literature review and chart how my perspectives evolved, from the uncertainties that were never far from my mind to the resolutions that presented themselves as time went on. Next, I will discuss some of the implications of my research as I presently see them, both in terms of my classroom teaching and some of the potential paths it could take moving forward. I will also explain some of the limitations of my project and how those impact my goals; the implications upon the implications, in a manner of speaking. Finally, I will end this paper with some ideas for further research, a mention of some benefits this work could bring to the field of ESL education, and a final conclusion.

Reflecting and Revisiting

Throughout the process of researching, writing, and assembling this project, I've come away with a much deeper knowledge and appreciation of all that entails. Some of what I learned took me by surprise, some did not, but without a doubt my perspective on the topic has matured significantly over the past several months.

I began this project in the summer of 2021 with a number of unresolved questions. What was I trying to do? Who was I trying to teach? What did I need to know

before I tried to teach them? As I delved further and further into the research and writing process, I was eventually able to resolve those questions. Sometimes it took longer than it would have liked, and things only became clear near the end. Other questions are still not entirely clear even now, the foremost of these probably being, “What will I do moving forward as a result of this research?” Nevertheless, I am finishing this project with a significantly better understanding than when I undertook it, and I will begin by describing the most notable changes.

The single biggest shift in my thinking about the project came during the fall of 2021, when my professor and capstone project facilitator pointed out that the Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) model could be particularly effective in settings like sheltered learning programs, or programs specializing in SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education.) Before that point, I had struggled to articulate just which students I was hoping to serve, beyond the obvious factor of being ELs. This gave me a much clearer picture, and a great deal of my approaches and decisions fell into place by having a firm understanding of who my prospective students were.

Related to the above was the idea of incorporating principles from Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) into my planning. Although I knew of CRT, I had not thought of trying to weave it into TPRS before; an oversight I feel foolish for having overlooked. As it turns out, the two frameworks mesh very well with one another, and my project is the stronger for it.

Another thing I learned a lot about was TPRS itself. Despite having been learning and using it for several years, doing this kind of deep-dive taught me a great deal and

gave me a lot of ideas on how to best employ it in my own teaching. By way of example, I gained a renewed interest in the process and potential of the personalized questions-and-answers stage of TPRS; it is something I had experimented with in the past, but never felt like I had a good idea of what to do and how to do it, and I was never fully satisfied with how it went. I learned a lot about the process during the course of my research, uncovering ideas I had either forgotten about or never known in the first place, and it is not an exaggeration to say that it has changed the way I feel about TPRS. To me, the feeling is akin to reading a difficult book and finally coming to understand a particularly tricky chapter.

In terms of research, I had some idea of what to expect based on prior knowledge. In general, my prior ideas were borne out. With licensures in both French and ESL K-12 education and several years' experience in both fields, I am reasonably well-versed in the kind of work being done there. Once again, TPRS was where things got more complicated. I was not expecting to find very much material about it, having always had the impression that although it was popular in the K-12 language acquisition community, higher education and academic researchers had shown comparatively limited interest. My finding was that this was at least somewhat true- much of the U.S.-based research I found was undertaken and performed either by K-12 teachers or by candidates for master's or doctoral degrees working in K-12 settings. Outside of the U.S, though, TPRS has garnered a fair amount of interest from academia. China alone seems to have conducted quite a bit of research into TPRS efficacy with a variety of learners of all ages, and I was able to find similar studies from all over the world: Turkey, Australia, and Mexico, to name just a few. What's more, many of these countries were using TPRS to teach

English, which was of particular interest to me given the nature of my project. The metaphorical pot of gold, of course, would have been to find research on the efficacy of TPRS when teaching a country's language of power to non-native speakers. In the United States, this is English; in China, Mandarin Chinese; in Turkey, Turkish; and so on. As I noted in my literature review, unfortunately, no such research seems to exist.

Moving on to other parts of my literature review, I found myself again and again referring to the best practices articulated by Garbati & Mady (2015.) They are by no means the first people to attempt to identify, describe, and gather all of these practices in one place, but I found their work particularly useful when trying to explain some of why TPRS is such a powerful method. Moreover, their best practices lined up very well with the principles outlined in the culturally responsive teaching approach. They may not be world-renowned researchers, but their work provided a sturdy and well-founded platform on which to base my own idea.

Implications and limitations

The largest implications resulting from my project are probably going to be reflected in my own teaching. I have been learning and using TPRS for several years, but as mentioned in the above section, I was still shaky on some aspects such as the personalized question-and-answer step. Having brushed up my understanding considerably, I am looking forward to trying out my new-and-improved ideas in my classroom. Beyond that, although I am not teaching ESL in my current role, it is something I would like to return to someday. When that happens, I fully intend to apply what I have learned during this project to my teaching. I may or may not use this material specifically, depending on what happens and what I learn between now and then; given

the history and developmental processes of educational approaches, it is only natural that the first few attempts should fall short. Either way, I am coming away from this project convinced that there is some merit to this idea, and the thought of possibly having to make significant changes does not overly dissuade me. If it is better for my students, then it is worth it.

Broader implications of this project are hard to discern at this point. Since this project does not really relate to policy, it seems hard to imagine my work here having much effect in that sphere. I have considered speaking to the ESL teacher at my school to see if she is interested in an approach like this. I have not done so yet for fear of seeming presumptuous, but if the circumstances permit it would certainly be something I would be eager to see. Beyond that, my professor and content facilitator suggested at one point that I present my project to the annual MinneTESOL conference, which is attended by ESL professionals from all over the state. The idea is terrifying in the extreme, but, I must confess, intriguing also.

Part of the reason for my reluctance to present my work to a broader audience lies in its limitations. As I have said elsewhere in this paper, I am not currently teaching ESL, and therefore do not have a way to develop this research further. I have no data, no findings, no results, and no prior research to build on. I cannot say for certain that TPRS works well for ELLs because I have never done it and am not in a position to do it now. I am, in effect, doing nothing more than proposing to the ESL world a teaching methodology, albeit one that has been used in its sister field to great effect. In my own French teaching, I have used TPRS for several years, and continue to be impressed at how well my students learn- it is not uncommon for students to be able to read an entire

page of French in the form of a simple story after only a few weeks of instruction.

Particularly gifted students are able to read it out loud and create their own written and spoken sentences, too. If this kind of success can be replicated among ELs, and there's no reason to believe that it couldn't, this could make a real impact for a lot of students.

What's more, this culturally responsive approach is an excellent model when working in SLIFE programs. These students have a number of disadvantages to overcome, but the beauty of TPRS is that it meets them where they're at and enables them to engage with their own learning in a way that isn't always possible with other approaches. Since these students have needs above and beyond "ordinary" ELs, I find using TPRS with them to be a particularly exciting prospect.

Further research, possible benefits, and summary

The most obvious path for the further development of this idea lies in gathering data. That necessarily involves some kind of study of using TPRS to teach the language of power to non-native speakers, which to the best of my knowledge has never been done. I am curious as to whether this absence is unique to the English-speaking world, or if there is perhaps some Turkish or Chinese academic journal filled with relevant data that is simply beyond the language barrier. I do not know for sure, but I am inclined to doubt it. In all of my research, I never once came across so much as a hint of trying to use TPRS for that purpose. This was not altogether surprising, since this absence was part of what motivated me to research this in the first place. Even so, it was a little disconcerting to find that there was nothing at all in the research world, not even a curt dismissal of the idea. Either it has never before occurred to anyone else, anywhere, which I find hard to believe, or else it has but not to the extent that anyone is writing about it. Either way, it

would be extremely interesting to learn how other ESL educators feel about the idea. Whether positive or negative, their reactions would be instructive.

In terms of benefiting the field, I would echo what I said before about how even if the first attempt at an approach goes awry, further revision and development might serve to create something that is of real benefit. Even if the idea has to change substantially, even if TPRS as we currently practice it turns out not to be as effective for ELLs as I hope, the process of trying new things is key to keeping education a vibrant, ever-growing field. Failure, as many a K-12 science teacher can tell you, can often be just as or even more instructive than success. There is also the possibility that in pursuing the use of TPRS in ESL classes, I or someone else might stumble upon some other, even more effective approach. To me, this would represent a success just as much as a complete vindication of my original proposal. At the risk of repeating myself, if it is better for the students, then it is worth it.

In conclusion, ESL is a complex and dynamic field that is neither easy to teach nor to learn, and TPRS represents an intriguing new possibility for teachers and learners. Although it is clear that ESL is not foreign-language acquisition and foreign-language acquisition is not ESL, I believe, as a teacher of both subjects, that the two have a lot to offer one another. TPRS has made a big difference in how students learn languages, and it is my hope that this might one day be leveraged to help ESL students in such a way that their humanity is honored and their needs are respected.

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Appendix A: Sample IB Unit Planner

Teacher(s)		Subject group and discipline			
Unit title		MYP year		Unit duration (hrs)	

Inquiry: Establishing the purpose of the unit

Key concept	Related concept(s)	Global context and Exploration
Statement of inquiry		
Inquiry questions		
Factual— Conceptual— Debatable—		
Objectives	Summative assessment	
	Outline of summative assessment task(s) including assessment criteria:	Relationship between summative assessment task(s) and statement of inquiry:

Approaches to learning (ATL)		
In order for students to: (objective/assessment criterion strand, learning engagement, or assessment task)	they will need to (skill indicator listing category and cluster)	The skill strategy/strategies that will be taught and practised is/are: (specific strategy/strategies)

Action: Teaching and learning through inquiry

Learning Process <i>Learning experiences and teaching strategies. Connect to content and ATL skills.</i>				
Progression of Learning	Content: Objective/Skill/Standards	Teaching Strategies/ Differentiation	Learning Experience/ Activities	Formative Assessment/Feedback
Lesson 1				
Lesson 2				
Lesson 3				