Summer 2023

Implementing TPR and TPRS in the Adult ESL Classroom with SLIFE Learners: A Teacher's Diary Study

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Implementing TPR and TPRS in the Adult ESL Classroom with SLIFE Learners:

A Teacher's Diary Study

By

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

Hamline University

St. Paul, Minnesota

July 2023

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DEDICATION

To all my adult students, your resilience, courage, and enthusiasm inspire me. Thank you to my professors, my fellow teaching professionals, and to my capstone committee. The things I learned from you continue to shape all my work.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction

The growing numbers of adult English learners in the US make it important from an individual, economic, and social perspective that adult education effectively supports their acquisition of English (Community College Consortium for Immigrant Education, 2022). However, actually doing so is complicated by a number of factors. Adult ESL classrooms may be composed of students with varying native languages. In this scenario, few, if any, of the teachers in adult ESL classrooms will speak all of the native languages of their students. In addition, over 49% of adult immigrants have had limited formal education (Pew Research, 2020) and over 40% of adult immigrants lack basic literacy skills (Migration Policy Institute, 2015). The limited literacy skills of these students are also a factor in how they learn best (Tarone et al., 2009)

Unfortunately, much of the research on best practices for teaching English as a second or additional language has been done with highly literate university students, such as teaching assistants or students at American universities (Tarone et al., 2009) and best practices for teaching reading are often based on studies done with children learning to read in their native language (Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). Adult English language learners with low-literacy skills are an understudied population, although this is slowly changing (Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). Consequently, evidence-based information regarding the best methods to teach English to adults with low-literacy skills is limited.

A teacher faced with a classroom of English language learners with different language backgrounds, limited English, and limited literacy skills needs to find a way to make English understandable to learners. Clearly, just writing words on the board and "explaining" them by writing a definition in English will not be sufficient and in some cases, will not communicate anything at all to students. Yet, in many adult ESL classrooms, the methods used still assume that learners have good literacy skills in their native language and simply need to acquire English language skills, even though this is not the case for a significant percentage of learners (Bow Valley College, 2018). Pictures can be helpful, but research has shown that, due to cultural differences, pictures may not always convey to students what the teacher intends (Miller, 1973; Rosselli & Ardila, 2003).

Clearly, additional methods to help beginning students associate words with meaning are needed. This is especially true for students who lack literacy skills. In this study, I explore using TPR (Total Physical Response) and TPRS (Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling) as ways to make English comprehensible to adult English language learners and help beginning students learn vocabulary and develop reading skills. TPR is a method of using physical movements to teach vocabulary and allow students to demonstrate comprehension via physical gestures. TPRS extends TPR to more complicated language via simple stories co-created by the teacher and the students. Stories are first co-created verbally by the teachers and students before they are written down. In addition, role plays and drama are often used to clarify the meaning of the stories. These methods provide alternative ways of understanding the vocabulary that

do not depend on literacy and aim to improve literacy skills by first establishing the meaning of words verbally and through actions.

TPR and TPRS have been used successfully in foreign language teaching (Asher, 1969; Dziedzic, 2012; Oliver, 2012; Ray & Seely, 2008; Watson, 2009), but to the best of my knowledge studies on TPR in adult ESL classrooms are limited and studies on TPRS in adult ESL programs are even more limited, despite the fact that teaching literacy skills is one of the key objectives of the vast majority of adult ESL programs. Therefore, the research question of this study is: *How can TPR and TPRS be used in the adult ESL classroom to teach vocabulary and reading skills?* This research focus was addressed through the following subquestions:

1. How does an adult ESL teacher experience the use of TPR and TPRS when teaching students with limited or interrupted formal education(SLIFE) learners?

2. What themes emerge in the teacher's diary?

Chapter Overview

In addition to the introduction above, this chapter outlines my personal and professional journey, the personal reasons I chose this research topic, and the significance of my research question for researchers and students. Finally, I summarize the main points of this chapter and give a preview of the upcoming chapters.

My Personal Journey

I would like to say I came to this point out of a desire to make the world a better place, but the truth is I started teaching ESL because I wanted to travel. At the time I began teaching English, my travel budget was limited and my personal responsibilities

meant that extended periods outside of the US were out of the question. Virtual travel was the only solution open to me, but I wanted a deeper experience than watching National Geographic videos. To really experience many of the benefits of travel, you need to interact with people of different cultures from all over the world.

Happily, I quickly realized that I could "travel" right here in my hometown because we are blessed with a very diverse population. Minnesota is home to the largest Somali population outside of Somalia, the largest population of Hmong-Americans in the US, a substantial population of Karen, and growing numbers of immigrants from all over Latin America, in addition to immigrants speaking Dari, Oromo, Russian, and many other languages. (Minnesota Legislative Research Library, 2022).

Consequently, five years ago, I began teaching ESL to adults at a community-based organization, which focused on providing services for immigrants from Latin America. Almost immediately, my students began to expand my view of the world, by sharing their ideas, recipes, customs, celebrations, and talents. It quickly became evident that adult language learners bring a wealth of experiences to the classroom (Parrish, 2004). As my interactions with the students in my class made my world a bigger and more interesting place, I became more and more motivated to improve my teaching to help them reach the English language learning goals they had set for themselves. Further, I wanted to find a way to leverage their many existing skills to help them learn English.

Although it did not seem like a simple task at the time, teaching at this first organization was the ideal experience for a novice teacher in many ways because it was

"easy" from a communication perspective. All of my students were adults who spoke Spanish, I also spoke some Spanish and if the combined English and Spanish skills of my students and me were not enough to clarify materials or answer questions, Google Translate was readily available and generally provided reasonable translations of English-Spanish or Spanish-English. Better yet, Google Translate provided spoken translations for both of these languages so the limited literacy skills of many of my students were less of a barrier to establishing a basic understanding of beginning vocabulary. In addition, since Spanish and English share some common roots, some words in English made sense to my Spanish-speaking students without any explanation because they sounded or looked like similar words in Spanish. Although some words that appear to be similar in Spanish and English have very different meanings, generally the similarity between the two languages provided Spanish-speaking English language learners with some important advantages. In addition, although there are many cultural differences between Hispanic countries and the US, generally when I showed my students pictures, it was a helpful way to convey meaning.

However, like most of the teachers at the organization, I taught the life skills curriculum we were given using a combination of the communicative method and grammar-based lessons, along with some songs and games here and there. Although my students made progress, there were days when I felt like what I was teaching was not clear to my beginning students and I was not always sure what I was teaching would be useful in their real lives if they did understand it. I could not help feeling like there had to

be ways to do a better job, if only I knew more. So, back to school, I went, beginning the

MATESOL program at Hamline University in January of 2021.

At this same time, I was using some of my pandemic lockdown time to improve

my own language learning, taking private Spanish lessons online. I took Spanish lessons

from many different teachers, but everything changed for me when I became friends with

one especially gifted Spanish teacher. Suddenly, through a combination of excellent

teaching and greatly increased motivation, my Spanish improved more in 2021 than it did

in all my years of on-and-off dabbling in Spanish classes. My motivation came from the

fact that suddenly I had a real reason to communicate in Spanish and someone I wanted

to communicate with. I wanted to hear the stories of their life and tell them mine. The

difference this made in my motivation to improve my Spanish cannot be overstated. This

lesson regarding how sharing stories can motivate language learning simmered in my

unconscious for the next couple of years and would later be one of the reasons for

choosing a research question that explores TPRS.

In July 2021, I made another decision that put me on the path of exploring TPR

and TPRS in my thesis. Ironically, just as I was learning new teaching methods via my

MATESOL program at Hamline and feeling more confident that I could communicate

with my English students in Spanish when my imperfect attempts to help my students

understand English failed, I took an ESL teaching job where the only foreign language I

speak was useless. In my new job, the students spoke a variety of different languages,

none of which I could understand, much less speak. They came from varied cultures in

Africa and Asia. Getting to know them, I quickly realized that some of the concepts I once thought were universal are actually only concepts that are valid in western cultures.

Although I felt I had more teaching knowledge at this point, there were still too many times when I was not sure I was conveying the full meaning of the lessons to my students. Worse yet, many of the tools I relied on to help me when I just couldn't convey the meaning of the materials in English, no longer applied in my new job. I couldn't speak any of my students' languages. Google Translate for their languages was much more prone to errors than it is in English-Spanish translations. In addition, even when it did translate correctly, Google Translate could not provide the translation to any of their languages in audio form, making it of little value to many of my students who don't read well in English or in their first language. Pictures were still useful to convey the meaning of simple words in many cases, but using pictures worked less well than it had in my old job because my new students and I shared fewer cultural assumptions.

Clearly, there had to be a better way. Although I thoroughly enjoyed my MATESOL classes and found them useful in developing my teaching skills, I could not help but notice that few of the research studies we read focused on low-literacy adults and some methods we learned seemed more useful for more advanced students than mine. The old tools I had relied on to teach beginning students in the past no longer worked in this new setting and I didn't know what to try next.

Luckily, two things happened that came together to help me improve my teaching in this new setting. I had always used gestures and actions in my classes to a certain extent, but now I was using them more, much more and I found them an effective way to

communicate the meaning of verbs. In addition, in my reading, I stumbled across TPR

and TPRS, two methods of making a new language comprehensible that did not rely on

existing literacy skills, but, rather, had the potential to help build these skills.

Professional Significance

Like myself, other adult ESL teachers may have students who have had limited or

interrupted formal education (Eyring, 2014). They often have classrooms of students who

don't share the same first language (Eyring, 2014). In classrooms of adult English

language learners, rarely does the teacher speak the first language of all the students.

Many adult ESL teachers are volunteers or have little formal training (Eyring, 2014;

Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). In addition, most adult ESL programs are not

well-funded (Eyring, 2014).

Due to these complex demands and limited resources, effective, inexpensive, and

easy-to-implement methods of teaching English to adults with low-literacy skills are

needed, but the research in this area is still limited (Bow Valley College, 2018.). The cost

to individuals and society when adult English language learners fail to develop literacy

skills is high. Literacy skills are directly tied to income (Nietzel, 2020.). On a national

level, adult illiteracy and lack of proficiency in reading cost the US economy a staggering

2.2 trillion dollars annually (Gallup, 2020 as cited in Nietzel, 2020).

Consequently, exploring the methods to make English comprehensible to students

who have not yet developed literacy skills to aid them in developing these skills is of

paramount importance. Studying methods like TPR and TPRS that do not require literacy

skills to make English understandable may have important implications for both adult ESL teachers and learners.

TPS and TPRS have been used successfully to teach vocabulary, even to very young students who cannot yet read (Çubukçu, 2014; Kara & Eveyik-Aydın; 2019). Although adults who do not read well are very different from children, learning vocabulary remains an important step in developing literacy. Vocabulary comprehension is an important foundation for listening, speaking, and reading skills (Croydon, 2005; Kurvers, 2006; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020; Tammelin-Laine, 2015).

In fact, according to Bow Valley College (2018), "Literacy is utterly dependent on language. Learners will not be able to learn to read English beyond what they can already speak and understand" (p. 20). TPR and TPRS are two methods that can be used to help students build these important foundation skills (Ray & Seely, 2008).

Through implementing TPR and TPRS in the adult ESL classroom with SLIFE learners, this study attempts to add to the body of research in adult ESL education for students with low-literacy skills.

Summary

This chapter provided an introduction to my research question: *How can TPR and TPRS be used in the adult ESL classroom to teach vocabulary and reading skills?* This research focus was addressed through the following subquestions:

1. How does an adult ESL teacher experience the use of TPR and TPRS when teaching students with interrupted or limited formal education (SLIFE learners)?

2. What themes emerge in the teacher's diary?

In addition to introducing my research question, this chapter also provided some context for this research, my personal journey to this research question, and an overview of the importance of this study to researchers, students, and teachers. The following chapter reviews the existing literature and places this research study in the context of earlier studies in the field. Next, Chapter Three details the methods used in this study. Chapters Four and Five analyze the results, draw conclusions and suggest areas for further study.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

This study analyzed classroom experiences using TPR (Total Physical Response) and TPRS (Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling) in the adult ESL classroom with SLIFE learners to teach vocabulary and reading skills. Here, the SLIFE acronym refers to students with limited or interrupted formal education.

To position this study within the existing body of research, Chapter Two reviews the literature on the following themes: the challenges of Adult ELLs who are SLIFE learners, approaches to teaching adult ELLs who are SLIFE learners, and the gaps in research on how this group of learners acquires both literacy skills and linguistic competence in a new language. Next, Chapter Two presents research on the importance of vocabulary knowledge in developing both linguistic competence and literacy skills. Finally, Chapter Two reviews the literature on the use of TPR and TPRS in the language classroom to build vocabulary and literacy, respectively, and the research gaps regarding the use of TPRS with adult ELLs. The section on adult ELLS who are SLIFE learners examines some of the unique challenges of this population of learners, who may be becoming literate for the first time in a language they are just learning to speak. The next section presents some approaches to teaching reading to adult SLIFE learners who are also ELLs while acknowledging that much of the research that forms the foundation for these approaches has been done with children, not adults. Studies regarding how adults with limited literacy acquire additional languages and how adults learn to read for the

first time in an L2 are limited. The sections on TPR and TPRS review their use in ESL and foreign language classrooms, including their use with students who are too young to read. As TPRS has been studied almost exclusively in the foreign language classroom, an analysis of the literature on TPRS will reveal a gap in the literature regarding the use of TPRS in the adult ESL classroom.

To help add to the body of knowledge needed to address the research gaps identified above, I conducted a study where I implemented TPR and TPRS with adult SLIFE and then analyzed of my teaching diary and the TPRS stories co-created in the classroom with the students, as a response to my research question: *How can TPR and TPRS be used in the adult ESL classroom to teach vocabulary and reading skills?* This research focus was addressed through the following subquestions:

1. How does an adult ESL teacher experience the use of TPR and TPRS when teaching students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE learners)?

2. What themes emerge in the teacher's diary?

Adult English Language Learners with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education

Who are They?

To set the stage for the review of literature, it's necessary to first understand something about adult SLIFE learners. According to the Center for Immigration Studies (Richwine, 2017), 41% of immigrants are functionally illiterate, lacking even basic literacy skills in English. However, within this population, there is a great variety. Some immigrants cannot read and write in English, although they have learned to read and write well in their native language(s). Others have limited or interrupted formal education

in their country of origin. English language learners with limited or interrupted formal education may lack even basic literacy skills in their first language (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010; Bow Valley College, 2018; Frydland, 2022; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020).

According to Bigelow and Schwarz (2010), English language learners with weak literacy skills in their first language can be divided into three groups: preliterate learners, non-literate learners, and semi-literate learners. Preliterate learners may come from a language and culture without a written language or with a written language that has been developed relatively recently and is not necessarily in widespread use. Non-literate learners, on the other hand, come from cultures where literacy is widespread, but they are not yet literate. Semi-literate learners have some understanding that the printed word has meaning and corresponds to spoken language, but may have relatively little mastery of basic literacy skills.

Challenges Developing Literacy in the L2

These weak or non-existent literacy skills in the student's native language make it more difficult for these students to become literate in English (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010; Bow Valley College, 2018; Frydland 2022; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). While adult ELLS have many skills and experiences they can leverage (Parrish, 2004), English language learners lacking literacy skills, face the dual challenge of developing literacy skills for the first time in a language they do not yet speak fluently (or at all). This differs markedly from the experience of children learning to read in their native language as they have spent four or more years first learning to speak it (Tarone et al., 2009). Similarly, English language learners with strong literacy skills in their L1 can transfer many of these

literacy skills to English, allowing them to concentrate on the acquisition of English, greatly reducing the overall cognitive demand (August, 2006).

Before delving more deeply into the additional challenges faced by adult ELLs with limited literacy skills, it may be helpful to acknowledge some of the difficulties that all adult ELLs face. Both adult ELLs with limited literacy in their L1 and ELLs with strong literacy skills may face barriers to language learning such as the need to work one or more jobs, transportation, childcare, and trauma related to migration or experiences in their home countries (Bow Valley College, 2018; Peyton &Young-Scholten, 2020). In addition, all adult ELLs may be impacted by the types of programs available to them. Adult education is the "poor stepsister" of the US education system (Eyring 2014, pp. 16). This lack of resources and funding may impact program quality. In addition, teachers in adult ESL programs may be part-time workers, have other full-time jobs, or may be volunteer teachers (Eyring, 2014). According to Eyring, only 75% of adult ESL programs in the US had minimal requirements for full or part-time instructors. Training of adult ESL teachers is often limited (Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020).

However, while all adult ELLs must overcome significant challenges, adult ELLs with limited literacy also have additional issues directly related to their weak or non-existent literacy skills. Instruction in adult ESL classrooms, even when geared towards beginners, often relies on literacy skills these students lack, such as the ability to read and take notes (Bow Valley College, 2018). Students with low literacy skills may also struggle to understand charts, drawings, and graphs (Croydon, 2005). Understanding black-and-white drawings, stick figures, and other two-dimensional representations are

learned abilities these learners may not have. These learners may lack even basic print awareness skills, such as the ability to associate written words with meaning or to understand the functions and uses of print (Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). Students may also struggle with the mechanics of using writing implements, such as pens and pencils (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020).

Acquisition of an Additional Language(s)

Despite the challenges faced by these learners, relatively little is known about how they acquire additional languages (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004). Although there are 770 million adults who lack literacy skills, more than half of them women (UNESCO 2019), and increasing numbers of low literacy adults learning an additional language(s) (Tarone et al., 2007), very little research has been done on how they acquire literacy skills and linguistic competence in an L2 (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010; Bigelow & Tarone, 2004; Bow Valley College, 2018; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). Much of what we know about L2 language acquisition is based on studies of language acquisition done with highly literate learners and further research with low-literacy learners may challenge some of the assumptions that underlie second language acquisition theories (Bigelow & Tarone 2004; Havron & Arnon, 2017). In addition, much of what we know about how people learn to read has been done with children or with adults learning to read in their native language (Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). Learning to read for the first time in an L2 is usually a long and laborious process (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010; Kurvers et al., 2010). Further, Peyton and Young-Scholten (2020) argued that few illiterate adults becoming literate for the first time in their L2 have developed an extremely high level of

competency. However, it is clear that adults who lack literacy skills can and do acquire

speaking and listening skills in additional languages (Tarone et al., 2009; Pettitt & Tarone

2015).

Impact of Literacy on Language Processing

Although, as noted above, preliterate adults do learn additional languages, they

may do so differently from people who are literate. The act of becoming literate has

profound impacts on the brain and its neural networks (Ardila et al., 2010; Dehaene et al.,

2010). Learning to read literally changes the way the brain is organized and this change

occurs in both children and adults learning to read for the first time (Dehaene et al.,

2010). Literacy significantly increases the brain's response to both written and spoken

language. In the case of written language, the areas of the brain that are typically used to

process speech are activated by the written word in literate people, making this

processing very efficient. Literacy also boosts the brain's response to spoken language in

an area of the brain used in phonological processing.

According to Reis and Castro-Caldes (1997), literacy provides the ability to

mentally manipulate visual symbols representing sounds that have no semantic meaning:

> Literate individuals develop a strategy where visual-graphic meaning is given to
>
> units that are smaller than words, units with no semantic meaning. These
>
> segments are introduced sequentially in a working memory system with a new
>
> content of visual experience. Then we can play with those written symbols, each
>
> coded to a sound, for example, to form pseudowords with no semantic meaning.
>
> This involves conscious phonological processing, visual formal lexical

representations, and their associations – all of which are strategies available to literates and not illiterates. (p. 445)

Further, they posited that the lack of this ability to mentally manipulate language with no semantic meaning could negatively impact the ability of illiterate people to learn new words.

There is also evidence that literacy affects the processing of oral language in second or additional languages as well. Adult language learners with low-literacy skills process oral language differently from literate adults in a second or additional language (Bigelow et al., 2006; Havron & Arnon, 2017; Tammelin-Laine, 2015; Tarone, 2010; Tarone & Bigelow, 2005). Literate adults appear to more easily identify word boundaries in L2 spoken speech than illiterate learners (Havron & Arnon, 2017; Kurvers, 2015). This ability to segment a speech stream into words is associated with an ability to learn new vocabulary (Havron et al., 2018).

In a study of Somali adults learning English, Bigelow et al. (2006) found that learners with lower literacy were less able than those with higher literacy to correctly remember oral corrections to their speech when the teacher restated their erroneous utterances with the correct form. Significantly, this applied specifically to corrections that did not alter the meaning of the utterance, such as corrections in word order. Low-literacy learners in this study were able to correctly recall corrections to vocabulary, suggesting that low-literacy learners rely more on semantic processing than attention to form.

However, while the mental changes that come with literacy confer many advantages, it is possible that these changes also weaken certain abilities (Dehaene et al.,

2010; Havron & Arnon, 2017; Havron et al., 2018). Dehaene et al. (2010) found that the changes in visual processing resulting from literacy seemed to reduce the brain's response to faces and certain patterns, like checkerboards. In an experiment comparing the abilities of literate and preliterate children learning an artificial language, Havron et al. (2018) found that preliterate children were better at learning gender agreement, suggesting that preliterate children had an advantage in learning grammatical concepts. Further, they posited that literate children's enhanced attention to single words, while aiding them in acquiring vocabulary, made it more difficult for them to learn grammar, such as gender agreement, due to less attention focused on multi-word chunks of language. In addition, they speculated that the advantage that young children have over adults and older children in learning an additional language to native-like levels, may in fact, not be related to age, but rather to the fact that very young children are preliterate.

Literacy for Adult English Language Learners

Oral Skills are a Prerequisite for Literacy

As I turn your attention to the process of developing literacy skills in Adult ELLS, it is important to keep in mind that much of the research on the process of developing literacy skills has been done with children or with adults learning to read for the first time in their native language (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010; Bow Valley College 2018; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). However, young children learning to read in their native language and beginning English language learners learning to read for the first time in their L2 differ greatly in their understanding of spoken English (Bow Valley College, 2018; Peyton & Young-Scholten 2020). Young children learning to read typically

understand the meaning of 5000-7000 words in their native language (Lemset et al., 2010) and have spent four or more years developing oral skills (Tarone et al., 2009). Sticht and James (1984) called this store of oral language knowledge *reading potential* because oral language knowledge is a necessary foundation for developing literacy skills. In contrast to native speakers, beginning English language learners developing literacy skills for the first time lack oral skills in vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and grammar (Bow Valley College, 2018; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). It is impossible to read or write without first developing the corresponding oral skills (Bow Valley College, 2018; Croydon, 2005; Kurvers, 2007; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). For this reason, it has been suggested that oral skills should be taught a little ahead of literacy skills to adult English language learners (Bow Valley College, 2018). In general, it is important to keep in mind that listening skills form a foundation for the development of reading skills and speaking skills form a foundation for the development of writing skills (Bow Valley College, 2018).

Adults as Language Learners

In addition to supporting the development of oral skills as the foundation for literacy, the curriculum should respond to adult learners' concerns and questions (Bow Valley College, 2018). Adult learners need content that is relevant to their daily lives (Auerbach, 1992; Knowles, 1973). A supportive social environment where learners have opportunities to work together is also important (Bow Valley College, 2018; Finn, 2011; Peyton-Young Scholten, 2020). If possible, non-literate language learners should be in a different classroom than language learners who are literate in their native language

because nonliterate students have different needs and require different kinds of support

(Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010; Bow Valley College, 2018).

Adults must have an opportunity to share their experiences (Brod, 1999). Like all

adult learners, adults with limited literacy skills possess a wealth of important life skills

and significant experience (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010, Parrish 2004). They have

significant mastery of one or more oral language(s) and have successfully learned many

new skills, which they use to support themselves and their families, both at home and in

the workplace (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010). The life skills adults possess can be tapped to

help them learn (American Institute for Research, 2011; Auerbach, 1992; Parrish, 2004).

Balanced Literacy Model

To harness the many life skills and experiences of adult learners, a so-called

balanced approach to reading instruction may be used, which, among other things,

attempts to teach reading in context. In the past, there was debate about whether a

"top-down" (whole language/context-dependent) or "bottom-up" (phonics) approach to

literacy instruction was best, but there is now general agreement that a balanced approach

to literacy that includes both "top-down" and "bottom-up" literacy instruction is required

(Bow Valley College, 2018; National Reading Panel, 2000; Vinogradov, 2010). Without

phonics instruction, some students never learn to read at all (Bow Valley College 2018)

and others are unable to develop strategies to use alphabetic sound-symbol

correspondence to read new words; they remain dependent on recognizing entire words in

context (Kurvers, 2007). Explicit phonics instruction may be necessary for nonliterate

learners (Tarone et al., 2009). However, understanding how to decode words using

sound-spelling correspondence is not enough (Kurvers, 2007). Decoding words should unlock meaning (Vinogradov, 2010). Early phonics instruction should focus on words learners already know well (Bow Valley College, 2018). Meaning must be at the center of literacy instruction from the very beginning (Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). Without top-down instruction marrying meaning to the whole text, reading comprehension is impossible (Vinogradov, 2010). Literacy instruction must include both vocabulary development and phonics skills (Kurvers, 2007).

Research Gaps Regarding How Adult ELLs become Literate in an L2

However, it is important to keep in mind how little we actually know about non-literate adults developing literacy in an L2 (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004; Havron & Arnon, 2017; Piccinin & Dal Maso, 2021; Smyser, 2016). According to Piccinin and Dal Maso (2021), we should draw conclusions from existing studies cautiously due to issues in the study design and/or the quality and completeness of the information provided in the study results. According to Smyser (2016), few of the studies which researched the efficacy of teaching methods with this population are peer-reviewed, and in general, these studies lack specificity on the abilities of students before interventions, the implementation of the methods used, and the number of hours of intervention required to obtain results. In Smyser's view, one notable exception to this was a 2010 study done on Dutch language learners by Kurvers, Stockmann, and Van de Craats. However, in general, Smyser contended that the lack of specific information from current research studies as of 2016 makes it impossible for classroom teachers to translate research findings into actual classroom instruction.

Materials for Adult Language Learners

In addition, teachers in adult ESL classrooms may also have challenges related to instructional materials. Due to their unique needs, it can be difficult to find instructional materials that are appropriate for adult ELLs learning literacy skills (Bow Valley College, 2018; Croydon, 2005; Huang 2013; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020; Vinogradov, 2010). Texts for ELL literacy-level learners should be at the appropriate reading level, be engaging, relevant to students' interests and needs, and contain content appropriate for adults (Vinogradov, 2010). Texts chosen for the classroom should support students in learning something they want to learn. Texts for literacy-level learners are often geared toward children and have content that is not appropriate, engaging, or relevant for adults (Bow Valley College, 2018; Vinogradov, 2010). Content that has been created for adults learning to read in their native language may contain vocabulary or assume cultural knowledge that ELLS lack (Bow College, 2018). Creating texts specifically for adult ELLs learning to read in English can be difficult as the learner population(s) who make up this group can change rapidly, resulting in learners who have different needs, interests, and cultural backgrounds.

Learner-Generated Texts

One solution to the difficulty of finding appropriate commercial materials for ELL literacy learners is to have the students generate their own texts (Bow Valley College, 2018; Croydon, 2005; Huang, 2013; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020; Vinogradov, 2010). Texts are created by transcribing the learners' oral language in response to prompts from the teacher (Bow Valley College, 2018; Croydon, 2005; Vinogradov,

2010). Often the teacher or tutor does the transcription of the learners' spoken words (Bow Valley College, 2018). According to Croydon(2005), the teacher must transcribe the learners' words as they are said, with as few changes as possible, even if there are minor errors. Texts generated from learners' oral accounts are, by their nature, at an appropriate reading level, engaging and interesting to students and relevant to their lives (Bow Valley College, 2018; Vinogradov, 2010). Learner-generated texts leverage adult students' knowledge and experience and connect speaking and listening skills to literacy skills (Vinogradov, 2010).

Language Experience Approach

While there are many ways for teachers to facilitate the creation of learner-generated texts (Croydon, 2005; Vinogradov, 2010), one established method of creating learner-generated tests is the Language Experience Approach (Bow Valley College, 2018; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020; Stahl & Miller, 1989; Vinogradov, 2010). In the Language Experience Approach, students participate in a shared activity, such as a field trip, and then recount their experiences to the teacher who acts as a scribe to write down the class's account. The teacher also asks the students questions about the experience to help the class build their oral account of their shared experience (Bow Valley College, 2018; Huang, 2013). Examples of shared experiences that might be used in the Language Experience Approach to generate learner-created texts include field trips to museums, libraries, shopping centers, government offices, or parks (Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). The Language Experience Approach can also be used

one-on-one with an individual student recounting an experience to a tutor (Peyton &
Young-Scholten, 2020; Wurr, 2002).

Once a text has been generated, it can be used for a variety of literacy activities
(Bow Valley College, 2018; Huang, 2013; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020, Vinogradov,
2010). In its original form, the Language Experience Approach was a whole-language,
content-based approach that did not incorporate phonics (Stahl & Miller, 1989). In this
form, Stahl and Miller found that it was best suited to beginning readers as part of a
pre-literacy program before formal reading instruction began, as it facilitated print
awareness and word recognition. Learner-generated texts can be used in activities, such
as individual, paired or group reading (Huang 2013; Vinogradov, 2010), cloze activities
where students fill in missing words, and sequencing activities (Huang, 2013; Peyton &
Young-Scholten, 2020). Learner-generated texts can also be used for phonics-based
activities (Huang 2013; Peyton & Young-Scholten 2020) and to build phonemic
awareness (Huang, 2013).

However, one criticism of the Language Experience Approach is due to the fact
that it was originally developed for students learning to read in their native language and
thus it assumes a certain level of oral skills, especially in oral and syntactic fluency
(Wurr, 2002). However, L2 literacy learners may lack these oral skills and be reluctant to
speak in class. Wurr (2002) argued that, with sufficient scaffolding, the Language
Experience Approach can still be useful with L2 literacy-level learners.

Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS)

In addition to the Language Experience approach, there are other methods of creating learner-generated texts. One alternative method of co-creating texts in the classroom is Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling (Ray & Seely, 2008). However, because TPRS was developed specifically to teach students learning a foreign language, it does not presuppose that students already have oral fluency in the target language. Although the TPRS method of creating learner-generated texts incorporates TPR, a method to teach L2 vocabulary that does not rely on literacy (Asher, 1969; Ray & Seely, 2008), it has almost never been studied in the adult ESL classroom. The study by Baustein (2006) is the only study I am aware of that was done using TPRS with adult ELLs. TPRS has been used extensively in foreign language classrooms and has been studied in this setting (Lichtman, 2015).

TPRS uses a method called TPR (Total Physical Response) to teach vocabulary, along with other methods to enhance comprehension, such as translation (Lichtman, 2015). TPR was developed by James Asher (1969) as a way to accelerate foreign language learning, based on the way children learn their first language by listening to commands and comments from their parents and responding to them non-verbally. According to Asher, when learning a language, it makes sense to focus on listening skills and receptive vocabulary first as these skills develop first in children learning their first language and listening skills always develop slightly in advance of the commiserate speaking skills. To incorporate more complex language, TPR was extended to TPRS (TPR-Storytelling) by Blaine Ray in the 1980s (as cited in Braunstein, 2006). The

acronym TPRS was later changed from TPR-Storytelling to stand for Teaching

Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling, to reflect a shift in emphasis to include

other ways of making language understandable, in addition to TPR (TPRS Books, 2021).

TPRS in the Language Classroom

TPRS has become a very popular method of teaching foreign languages

(Lichtman, 2015). According to videos made by the creator of TPRS, Blaine Ray (2013,

2016, 2018), the TPRS method of co-creating texts has three basic steps:

1. Establish the meaning of the target vocabulary

2. The teacher and students co-create a story using target vocabulary and
   other high-frequency words.

3. Students read the story

The meaning of the target vocabulary can be established via TPR. If TPR is used, the

teacher models an action or idea while saying the word(s), and after practice, the students

demonstrate their understanding of the words, by doing the action in response to the

teacher's word(s). According to Ray and Seely (2008), it is very important that students

can demonstrate their understanding of the new vocabulary. Making sure that students

comprehend the L2 language being used is at the foundation of this method.

The teacher provides scaffolding to the students in the form of an outline of the

story, which they use as a basis to co-create the story with the students, by asking the

students questions. Since the students are assumed to be language learners, many may

require a simple "yes" or "no" answer, and questions with similar format or language

may be repeated throughout the story creation process to drive understanding and

retention of vocabulary. The student's responses to the questions are used to drive the action in the story, keep the students engaged, and make the story more interesting. The questions are personalized as much as possible to the particular students in the class to make sure the story is relevant and interesting. While the class is co-creating the story, a few students are acting out the story in front of the class to help ensure all students understand the story.

Research on TPRS

When reviewing research studies on TPRS, it is important to keep in mind that TPRS has evolved over the decades that it has been in use, and due to their unique circumstances, different teachers have implemented it somewhat differently, according to Lichtman (2015). However, in general, TPRS includes co-creating stories with input from students, the use of high-frequency vocabulary, and an emphasis on lots of comprehensible input in the target language. The majority of studies done in the US have been done with middle or high school students learning Spanish as a foreign language (Lichtman, 2015). In a study comparing TPRS to traditional methods, Watson (2009) found that high school Spanish students taught via TPRS significantly outperformed students taught via traditional methods. In a study by Oliver (2012), high school Spanish students who were taught via TPRS scored higher in a final exam that tested reading, writing, and grammar than students taught via traditional methods. However, when Dziedzic (2012) compared achievement for students taught Spanish via TPRS to students taught via traditional methods, he found that both groups of students did equally well on

listening and reading, but TPRS students did much better on measures of writing and speaking.

In addition, there have been some TPRS studies done with students from other age groups. In a study of young adults with limited English proficiency learning English as a foreign language in Turkey, Asmali (2019) reported that students taught using TPRS outperformed a control group in vocabulary learning and grammar. In separate studies with preschool-age children, Kara and Eveyik-Aydın (2019) and Çubukçu (2014) found that TPRS was an effective method to teach foreign language vocabulary to very young children.

TPRS in the Context of Adult Language Learning

TPRS has some characteristics that may also make it useful and effective in the adult ESL classroom. TPR and TPRS aim to create a low-stress, supportive environment where students co-create stories that are interesting and engaging to them (Ray & Seely, 2008). Research on adult learners suggests that they do best in a low-stress supportive environment where students have opportunities to work together (Bow Valley College, 2018; Finn 2011; Peyton-Young Scholten, 2020) and materials are tailored to their interests (Auerbach, 1992, Knowles, 1973). Oral skills and vocabulary knowledge are prerequisites to literacy skills (Bow Valley College, 2018; Croydon, 2005; Kurvers, 2007; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). TPRS uses several means to develop oral skills and comprehension that do not require literacy such as TPR and role play (Blaine & Seely, 2008).

This intersection of the aims of TPRS and the recommended best practices for teaching adult learners suggests that TPRS could be useful in the adult ESL classroom, especially with literacy-level learners. However, as yet, there is almost no research on the implementation of TPRS in the adult ESL classroom. One exception is the study by Braunstein (2006) that reported that despite their initial preference for traditional, grammar-based methods of language teaching, adult Latino students taught with TPRS later reported that they found it useful, motivating, and enjoyable.

Summary

In this section, I have presented research regarding the challenges faced by adult SLIFE learners who are learning to read for the first time, in a new language at the same time they are learning to speak it. I have included research that shows adult ESL classes may rely on methods that presuppose print awareness and/or the ability to read and write, despite the issues this presents for this population. Research was presented on how this population acquires an L2 and how they acquire literacy skills. I have reviewed the gaps in the literature regarding what is known about these processes. Next, the literature establishing that oral skills in a language are a prerequisite for acquiring literacy skills is reviewed. Finally, the literature regarding how TPRS fosters oral skills in foreign language learners via methods that do not require reading or writing and how TPRS is used in the classroom to link oral vocabulary to the written word is presented. Lastly, the goals of TPRS are reviewed in the context of best practices for adult language learners.

This review of the literature aimed to place the research question of this paper in context. To help add to the body of knowledge needed to address the research gaps

identified above, I conducted a study of my teaching diary and of TPRS stories

co-created in the classroom with the students, as a response to my research question: *How*

can TPR and TPRS be used in the adult ESL classroom to teach vocabulary and reading

skills? This research focus was addressed through the following subquestions:

1. How does an adult ESL teacher experience the use of TPR and TPRS when

    teaching students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE learners)?

2. What themes emerge in the teacher's diary?

Chapter Three details the teaching context in which I conducted the study, the methods I

used to compile and analyze my teaching diary, and the TPRS stories created with the

students. I also detail the means I took to ensure credibility, confirmability, dependability,

and transferability. Chapters Four and Five analyze the results, draw conclusions, and

suggest areas for further study.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Introduction

This study examines classroom experiences implementing TPR (Total Physical Response) and TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling) with adult language learners with limited or interrupted formal education. TPR and TPRS were chosen as teaching methods to implement in this context because they do not rely on pre-existing literacy skills to teach a language and because the foundational ideas are straightforward, easy to understand, and do not require a textbook or expensive materials to implement (Ray & Seely, 2008). These factors were important in choosing the focus for this diary study because adult ELLs are often taught by teachers with limited time, limited budgets (Eyring, 2014), and limited training (Eyring, 2014; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). In other words, these students often have teachers like me. In addition, adult ELLs learning to read and write in English have complex needs (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010; Bow Valley College, 2018; Frydland 2022; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020; Tarone et al., 2009) and are often taught with methods that assume they already have the literacy skills they lack (Bow Valley College, 2018). Even though TPRS appears to meet some of the criteria that may make it suitable for the adult ESL classroom, it has almost never been studied in this context (Braunstein, 2006).

Consequently, to help address this gap, this study asks the following question:

How can TPR and TPRS be used in the adult ESL classroom to teach vocabulary and reading skills? This research focus was addressed through the following subquestions:

1. How does an adult ESL teacher experience the use of TPR and TPRS when teaching students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE learners)?

2. What themes emerge in the teacher's diary?

This chapter presents methods for the study including information on the following: the setting for the study, general information about the students in the classroom, the research paradigm chosen, the particular research method used, the data collection tools, the procedures followed, and details on how the data that was gathered was analyzed.

Setting

To provide important context for the methods chosen, it is necessary to begin with a description of the setting where the study took place. The institution where the study took place is a community-based organization, organized and run by Hmong immigrants, who were originally forced to leave Laos as a result of their support of the US in the Vietnam war. In addition to offering English classes and citizenship classes, the organization also offers classes in traditional musical instruments, cultural awareness classes for the wider community, and runs a small museum. Not surprisingly, the budget of the organization is modest. Due to the needs of the students and the way the English language program is funded, the curriculum used in English classes adheres to CASAS standards. CASAS standards specify competencies that underlie abilities students develop

in life skills and workforce development programs for adult education, including adult ESL programs (CASAS.org, 2009). CASAS standards and assessment tools are widely used in adult education and are recognized by the US Department of Education (Public Service Alliance, 2016). For this reason, CASAS standards are used as the basis for curriculum development in many adult ESL settings, including the organization where this study took place.

The organization's strong ties to the Hmong community result in English classes where the majority of the students are Hmong. However, some students from other large immigrant populations in the city also attended English classes during the study period. In addition to students whose first language is Hmong, there were also students whose first language is Somali, Spanish, Oromo, and Vietnamese. The size of the class fluctuated from 3-12, with a median class size of 7. The students ranged in age from 16 to 72, with most students in the 25-40 age range.

In addition to speaking a variety of languages, the vast majority of students in the beginning English class included in the study had limited or interrupted formal education. The average number of years of formal education for the students is four years and this is somewhat skewed by the fact that one of the students had graduated from high school in his home country. Most of the students had received less than three years of formal education in their countries of origin and several had never attended school.

The students' performance on CASAS reading tests were used to assign students to English classes. The beginning-level English class that was the focus of this study was made up almost entirely of students whose CASAS reading scores were less than 180.

According to CASAS.org (2022), a score of 180 or less on the CASAS assessment of reading indicates that the student may not be literate in any language. The class included only three students who scored above 180 on a CASAS reading test, who were placed in the beginning English class, due to an informal assessment of their speaking and listening skills. Their CASAS reading scores were 196, 200, and 203 respectively. According to CASAS.org (2022), these scores indicate that they can recognize a limited number of sight words in English and may be able to read phrases commonly used in daily life.

Students may retake the CASAS test after 40 hours of instruction, but unfortunately, it was not possible to meaningfully compare students' CASAS scores at various points in the study. This is due to the nature of the study, which made use of archival data, as well as the nature of the class and the patterns of attendance. The class is open enrollment and students can register for and drop the class at any time. In addition, even for students who attended the class during the entire data collection period, most students were not able to attend every class during the data collection period. However, it is worth noting that no students moved from the beginning English class to the intermediate level class during the data collection period.

The Rationale for a Qualitative Approach

As noted above, the student population was in constant flux, almost all students missed at least some classes, and class sizes were small. This situation is common in adult ESL classes and contributes to the difficulties in studying this population (Mathews-Aydinli, 2008). Consequently, a research paradigm that relied on the consistent collection of measurable data with large sample sizes would not be suitable. The nature of

the research questions, which focused on *how* I, as a teacher, experienced the implementation of TPR and TPRS with adult ELLs with limited and interrupted formal education, required insight into my internal thought processes regarding this experience. The focus of the study is on my lived experience as an individual teacher using TPR and TPRS in my adult ESL classroom and how these methods were used in my classroom to teach vocabulary and reading skills in the adult ESL classroom to SLIFE learners. In addition, the TPRS stories co-created with the students in the classroom were also analyzed to add depth and expand on the subjective information contained in my teaching diary.

Given these factors regarding the nature of the study and the setting, a qualitative research approach was chosen for this study. A qualitative research approach is suited to research that seeks to understand the lived experience of research participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Flick et al., 2004; Watkins, 2012). Qualitative research takes place in natural settings, not in the laboratory, and is less concerned with testing a hypothesis than with discovering themes and adding rich detail to our understanding of human experience. The inductive nature of qualitative research allows for uncovering new or surprising ways of understanding. It is particularly suited to answering questions such as "How" or "Why?" (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Flick el al., 2004). Qualitative research can provide context and include data on meaning and purpose; something that is not possible using purely numerical measures (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Capturing the subjective experiences of research participants is an important strength of qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Flick et al., 2004, Watkins, 2012; Widemann et al.,

2019). This is one reason that the use of qualitative research has spread from its roots in

the social sciences to use in fields like healthcare that once relied almost exclusively on

quantitative research (Wideman et al., 2019).

However, while the collection and analysis of subjective data is a significant

strength of qualitative research, it also raises important questions regarding quality that

must be answered. Early in the development of qualitative research, there was an attempt

to define the quality of qualitative research based on standards first developed for

quantitative research: validity, reliability, and objectivity (Lincoln, & Guba, 1988).

According to Lincoln and Guba, these measures are not appropriate for qualitative

research, due to the nature of the paradigm and they propose instead that good qualitative

design should address credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability.

Credibility refers to the truthfulness and the ability of the researcher to clearly

link the data and findings (Cope, 2014). Credible qualitative research should elicit a sense

of immediate recognition in individuals sharing the same experience (Cope, 2014;

Lincoln & Guba, 1988). Confirmability refers to the attempt to minimize the researcher's

bias and accurately represent the views of the study participants, rather than the

researcher's own (Cope, 2014; Watkins, 2012). Dependability is perhaps the most

difficult criterion to achieve in qualitative research because it is virtually impossible to

exactly replicate qualitative research (Watkins, 2012), but prolonged studies with data

analyzed by more than one researcher can make qualitative research more dependable

(Cope, 2014) as can the analysis of multiple data sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2017)

and sufficient information regarding the care and consistency in data collection and

analysis (Ulin et al., 2005). Transferability refers to the ability to transfer the findings of a qualitative study to other situations (Cope, 2014; Lincoln & Guba,1988; Watkins, 2012). This judgment of transferability is made by the audience for the study, not the researcher, however, this judgment is made possible when the researcher includes sufficient detail and description for the reader to make this judgment (Lincoln & Guba, 1988).

Diary studies, as a form of phenomenological qualitative research, must address issues of credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability regarding the choice of participants, the data collection process, and the analysis methods chosen. Studies that analyze documents, such as the TPRS stories created with the students in the classroom, must also address these same issues.

Consequently, in the sections below, I first describe myself as a participant, detail the data collection process, and the methods used to analyze the data. Finally, I detail the means I used to address issues of credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability.

Researcher as Participant

This study examined my teaching diary as I implemented TPR and TPRS in my adult ESL classroom with SLIFE learners. Clearly, when the researcher is also the participant in the study, an outside perspective and distance between the researcher and the subject are lacking (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). However, when the researcher and participant are one and the same, there is information regarding the subject's internal thought processes and decision-making that may not be available otherwise (Bailey, 1983; Schumann & Schumann, 1977). By definition, the subject's viewpoint is presented

accurately when the researcher is analyzing their own diary (Schumann & Schumann, 1977). However, the background of the researcher/participant becomes more important in accessing the findings of the diary study and it is helpful to include rich detail about the background and prior experiences of the researcher/participant as was done in the diary studies by Schuman and Schuman and by Leung (2002).

Consequently, in addition to general information on my background as an adult ESL teacher provided in the introduction, I have included here specific information regarding my experience with TPR and TPRS, the methods I attempted to implement during my diary study. My own prior experience and knowledge of TPR and TPRS were extremely limited before I began my teacher diary documenting my experience attempting to implement them in my adult ESL classroom. I had used actions to attempt to convey meaning in my beginning adult ESL classes for several years, but I had not systematically used them and only sometimes asked students to perform the same action along with me. I had not used it regularly to teach vocabulary and had not taken a step crucial in TPR of asking students to perform the action solely in response to a verbal prompt, without also modeling the action myself.

My prior experience with TPRS was non-existent. I was only vaguely aware that it was a method used in foreign language learning, which seemed to make use of storytelling to make sure students understood language in context, something that I urgently needed to do now that I was faced with a class of beginning students whose literacy skills were far lower than those of students in the beginning ESL classes I had taught previously.

To prepare myself to implement TPR and TPRS in my adult ESL classroom, I bought no materials and spent only a total of about 10-15 hours watching videos by Blaine Ray, founder of TPRS, and others, and reading books and articles on TPR and TPRS. This 10-15 hours of "training" time was spent trying to understand the most important features of these methods, especially as they were explained by James Asher, inventor of TPR, and Blaine Ray, who developed TPRS. While using only free materials and spending a limited amount of time preparing to implement TPR and TPRS in my classroom may seem lackadaisical, it was a conscious decision. As a graduate student and an ESL instructor at a community-based organization, the time and monetary resources available to me personally and professionally were limited. Constraints on time, resources, and training are typical for adult ESL instructors (Bow Valley College, 2018; Eyring, 2014; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). My experiences implementing these methods in my classroom with only a limited investment of training time and no investment of money may arguably make the findings of this study more transferable to other adult ESL settings.

Social Identity Position Statement

In addition, it is necessary to note facets of my social identity, given the qualitative and subjective nature of the data examined in this study. Social identity may be especially important in a study that examines classroom experiences through a teacher diary, where the teacher is both a participant and the researcher. Literacy is central to both my personal and professional lives and its importance to individuals and society is a core belief that has influenced both the choice of subject for this study and the choice of data

collection methods. Both my teacher diary and the TPRS stories created in the classroom are text-based sources of data.

My background and prior experiences as a language learner myself also inevitably affect my perception of classroom experiences analyzed in this study. As a middle-class, relatively well-educated person my language learning experiences have been very different from those of my students in terms of the types of resources and tools available to me for language learning. In addition, the only additional language I speak relatively well is Spanish, which has more in common in terms of syntax, vocabulary, and grammar with English than the African and Asian languages spoken by the majority of my students. The level of difficulty of their language learning task as they work to acquire English is not something I can truly understand. My students are also living in a country where English is the primary language and at the time of this study, I had never lived in a Spanish-speaking country nor experienced any of the many issues that can make language learning more difficult for adult ESL students, such as trauma, forced relocation to a new country, poverty, and culture shock. Obviously, I can only analyze my teacher diary and TPRS story data created in the classroom from my own perspective, while keeping in mind that my perception of classroom experiences is influenced by my social identity and my perception may differ markedly from my students' actual classroom experiences for the reasons listed above.

Data Collection & Data Analysis

I collected data for this study in two ways: by writing entries in my teaching diary and by compiling the TPRS stories that were co-created by the students and me in the

classroom. Therefore, the next two subsections detail the data collection and analysis methods used for my teacher diary. Following these subsections are two subsections that explain the data collection and analysis steps I took for the TPRS stories co-created by the students and me in the classroom.

Teacher Diary: Data Collection

I wrote entries in my teaching diary every day I taught the beginning adult ESL class from October 12, 2022-December 21, 2022. I taught the class from 9 am-1 pm Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays and recorded my notes, impressions, observations, and thoughts in my teaching diary as soon after each class was finished as possible. Since I used TPR and TPRS to both introduce new material and expand on what students had learned in earlier classes, at least part of each class used TPR and TPRS and it was these experiences that were recorded in my diary. I did not record detailed observations regarding other activities done during class time, such as digital literacy activities.

The diary entries were guided by the following questions:

1. What seemed to result in student engagement?

2. What seemed to work well?

3. What seemed to result in student learning?

4. What didn't work?

These guiding questions were intentionally kept very general, to allow for the discovery of unexpected themes and to attempt to minimize the risk of seeing only what I expected to see. In addition to answering the guiding questions, I also noted down any other observations, details, or problems that seemed pertinent as well.

In addition, each diary entry included the number of students that attended that class, their names, and any details about their classroom interactions that seemed relevant to the implementation of TPR and TPRS. The names of the students were redacted, along with any identifying information in the final version of the teaching diary to protect students' privacy.

TPRS Stories: Data Collection

The TPRS stories co-created in class by the students and me were also collected and dated, so it is easy to see the stories and the corresponding diary entries for the same day. The TPRS stories were included in the data collection to provide a different but related source of information regarding the implementation of TPRS in my classroom.

I collected all of the TPRS stories co-created by the students and me in the classroom during the period October 12, 2022 - December 21, 2022. The TPRS stories were collected during the same period that I made entries in my teaching diary and at least one TPRS story was co-created in class during each class period documented in my teaching diary. The TPRS stories were dated so that it is easy to correlate the stories with the corresponding diary entries. The stories were co-created by the students and me during the class periods in one of two ways. One way used the TPRS "story asking" method where students are asked simple questions (often yes or no questions) so they decide on and direct the trajectory of the story. In this case, I started with a general idea for a story beginning, using themes relevant to the day's topics or to interests the students had expressed previously. Next, I asked the class simple questions and their answers

shaped the story. While the "story asking" took place, I or a group of students also acted out the oral story. Finally, I wrote the oral story on the whiteboard.

Occasionally, students were confused by the "story-asking" process described above. In these instances, stories were co-created in a slightly different way. The second way stories were created was when I or students acted out a story and students orally narrated the action they saw and then the stories were written on the classroom whiteboard by me or by a group of 3-4 students who could print Roman letters and could write simple words. Other students, who were still learning the alphabet, actively participated by narrating the story. When a student did the writing, they literally transcribed the oral story as they heard it repeated a second or third time. Once the students fully understood the original story, we reverted back to the "story-asking" method so the class could have input into creating new versions of the story by answering questions.

In both methods, the completed story was written on the classroom whiteboard. To collect the stories, I took pictures of each story on my phone. Later the stories were transcribed so that text files could be analyzed.

Teacher Diary and TPRS Stories: Data Analysis

To analyze entries in my teaching diary and the TPRS stories created in class, I used the method suggested by Van Manen (2016) for analyzing phenomenological data, with some minor modifications. In general, Van Manen suggested analyzing phenomenological data using three different levels: wholistic, selective, and detailed. A wholistic analysis attempts to describe the dataset as a whole with one sentence. A

selective analysis extracts themes from a single episode or event by examining a single passage or paragraph. A detailed analysis attempts to extract salient information by examining the text on a line-by-line basis. I followed this method, generally, in that, I analyzed the data at each level, wholistic, selective, and detailed. However, instead of attempting to capture the meaning of the entire dataset in one sentence when doing a wholistic analysis, I extracted major themes, as has been done in various other diary studies (Bailey, 1983; Schumann & Schumann, 1977; Leung, 2002).

I used all three of these levels of data analysis: an analysis of the data as a whole, a review of passages and/or episodes, and a line-by-line analysis. To attempt to analyze the data as a whole, I re-read all of my diary entries several times and noted general themes. For something to be considered an overall theme in the data, it needed to be supported by quotes in diary entries from at least five different class periods across different dates. I then re-read all of the data again, concentrating on passages and lines in the text that supported the development of the major themes. However, after this, I re-examined the data again at the passage and line level to extract salient, pertinent, or startling quotes or details that enriched the overall understanding of the experience, even if they did not relate directly to the major themes identified earlier. This was done, partly to add to the thick description of the experience presented in the findings and partly to avoid seeing only what I expected to see in the data.

Once themes had been identified in my teacher diary, I examined the TPRS stories co-created by the students and I to see if the TPRS stories could add rich detail and examples related to the patterns seen in the teacher diary.

Addressing Credibility, Confirmability, Dependability, and Transferability

In addition to detailing the data collection and data analysis methods, good qualitative research needs to address the issues of credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. I will address each of these below in turn.

Establishing credibility can be done by asking study participants to confirm the findings accurately represent their point of view (Watkins, 2012). In this study, I am both the diarist and the study participant. Consequently, the findings represent the participant's point of view accurately, so the establishment of credibility depends more on sufficient information about my background and establishing clear links between the data and the findings (Cope, 2014; Watkins, 2012). I have addressed this by choosing data analysis methods that result in rich, thick narrative details to support findings and by providing background information about myself as a researcher and participant in this chapter and in Chapter One.

Issues of confirmability can be addressed by showing there is adequate distance between the researcher and the participants (Cope, 2014; Watkins, 2012), but this method obviously cannot be used when the researcher and the study participant are the same person. Instead, I have made my teaching diary and all TPRS stories co-created in class available online, after editing them to protect students' privacy (Bailey, 1983). Anyone interested can examine the raw data and make their own judgment regarding the study's findings. The diary and TPRS stories from this study are also available for use in future studies by other researchers.

Dependability is the most difficult of these issues to address, especially when the researcher and the participant in the study are the same person. However, dependability can be demonstrated by careful, consistent data analysis and collection and by demonstrating parallels between different data sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Watkins, 2012). I have provided detailed information on my data collection and analysis process. In addition, I have collected data from two sources: my diary entries and the TPRS stories co-created in the classroom. These data sources were triangulated in the data analysis process to identify common themes and supporting details.

The transferability of a study's findings is a judgment made by the audience of the study, not by the researcher (Bailey, 1983), but I have provided a detailed description of my background and the setting to help the audience make this assessment. In addition, I have chosen data collection and data analysis methods that allow for a thick description of my experience implementing TPR and TPRS in my adult ESL classroom with SLIFE learners. This wealth of detail aims to aid the reader in determining if the findings of this study apply to other settings.

Institutional Review Board

In this study of my diary and the TPRS stories created in my classroom, I was both the researcher and the study participant, so there are no ethical considerations regarding participants' rights that must be addressed. To protect the privacy of the students in the classroom, I have edited my teaching diary and the TPRS stories to remove any identifying information (Bailey, 1983). I submitted my research proposal to

the Institutional Review Board and this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board.

Summary

In Chapter Three, I have described the setting of the study and my reasons for doing a diary study and document study. I situate the diary study within the research on qualitative methods and discuss the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of diary studies and the issues and advantages of the diarist as a researcher. I have described the methods I have used to analyze my teacher diaries to extract broad themes and salient details. In Chapter Four, I discuss the results of the study and in Chapter Five, conclusions and suggestions for further research are provided.

CHAPTER FOUR: Results

Introduction

This chapter presents data from my 10-week diary study that answers the following research question: *How can TPR and TPRS be used in the adult ESL classroom to teach vocabulary and reading skills?* This research focus was addressed through the following subquestions:

1. How does an adult ESL teacher experience the use of TPR and TPRS when teaching students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE learners)?

2. What themes emerge in the teacher's diary?

As I wrote each diary entry, I used the following questions to guide my reflections, although I did not attempt to answer all of the questions explicitly:

1. What seemed to result in student engagement?

2. What seemed to work well?

3. What seemed to result in student learning?

4. What didn't work?

In addition to my diary, I analyzed the TPRS stories that were co-created by me and the class as a whole. These stories used general scripts created by me, with the students making simple choices at various points in the story to drive the action.

In this chapter, brief summaries of the TPR and TPRS methods and the ways I implemented them in my classroom are outlined to provide important context for the discussion of the study results that follows. Next, the themes that arose from the analysis of the TPRS stories created in the classroom and my teacher diary are discussed.

TPR and TPRS as Implemented in My Classroom

To provide context and a foundation for understanding the discussion of the study results that follow, a brief discussion of TPR and TPRS and how they were implemented in my classroom may be helpful. Both TPR and TPRS emphasize making sure language input is understood by students, student demonstration of this understanding, repetition, and active engagement by all students in the classroom as they interact with the teacher. TPRS, in particular, also stresses the need for the class-teacher interaction to be engaging and personalized, using surprising, interesting and relevant details in stories, as well as students' participation in story creation to achieve this. However, it is important to note that while I followed these key principles of TPR and TPRS, some modifications from the more modern form of TPRS were necessary to use it with adult SLIFE learners in my ESL classroom.

TPRS from its inception has emphasized three main steps: (Ray, 2008, 2013, 2016, 2018)

1. Establish meaning of target vocabulary
2. Teacher and students co-create a story using target vocabulary and other high frequency words
3. Students read the story

The subsections below outline the ways that I modified these three steps.

Establishing Meaning of Target Vocabulary

While establishing the meaning of target vocabulary was always one of the key steps of TPRS, the means that TPRS uses to establish meaning have evolved over time.

Originally, TPRS was inspired by the work of Dr. James Asher in the development of

TPR (Asher, 1969), which teaches language via the teacher demonstrating an action

while saying a word, followed by the students responding with the appropriate action

while the teacher is speaking the word and modeling the action until, eventually, students

are demonstrating their understanding of the spoken word(s) by executing the correct

physical action, in the absence of a demonstration by the teacher. Consequently,

originally TPRS used TPR to establish meaning by pairing physical actions with the

spoken word. Over time, however, the use of physical actions to establish meaning was

somewhat deemphasized in TPRS (TPRS Books, 2021) in favor of translations that could

be read by the students. There is also an underlying assumption that accurate translation

from a language the students already understand to the target language being taught is

available.

　　For example in a video of Blaine Ray teaching beginning Spanish to Chinese

students in China (Ray, 2014), Ray uses written translations of the target Spanish

vocabulary in Chinese and in English presented on the whiteboard in front of the

classroom, so students can refer to the translations while he co-creates a story with them

in Spanish. Since he and the students both already speak English, he uses English to

check the comprehension of the students as the story creation process continues.

　　In an adult ESL classroom where the students speak many different native

languages, none of which the teacher speaks, and many of the students are not yet literate

in any language, obviously the role of translation in establishing meaning is different than

what was described above. I did teach some students in my classroom with relatively

stronger literacy skills to use Google Translate, with the caveat that it may not be accurate for their native language, as Google Translate may be more developed for some languages than others. I generally only taught students with relatively stronger literacy skills to use Google Translate because, with the exception of two students who spoke Vietnamese and Spanish, none of the native languages of my students were translated to audio forms. Obviously, if the Google translation is only available in written form, it is not a useful tool for a person who does not yet read or who reads at a very low level.

Consequently, in my classroom, the meaning of target vocabulary was established almost exclusively using TPR actions, realia, and the role-playing of TPRS stories. For example, in the lessons on clothing, we established meaning of clothing words using pieces of clothing that I brought into the classroom such as scarves, sweaters, coats, hoodies, shirts,etc and by using TPR actions to establish meaning for words, such as "put on" and "take off", "hang up", "fold, etc. I created a simple TPRS story script using the target vocabulary and other commonly used words, which was used to co-create stories with the class. Students acted out the story as it was related verbally. Translation played a very small, but important, role as we shall see in the discussion of the results later in this chapter. In essence, I used the methods of establishing meaning for target vocabulary, and TPRS stories that were more in line with the older versions of TPRS than with the more current implementations.

In my classroom, no words were provided in written form until after the meaning of target vocabulary or a particular TPRS story was firmly established and students could demonstrate their understanding. As we will see in the discussion of results, sometimes

this understanding was less firm than I thought, but I tried to use the establishment of meaning of spoken words or stories as a prerequisite before I or the students wrote them down.

Timing of Speaking

Another important difference between the implementation of TPRS as described by Ray (2008, 2014, 2016, 2018) and the implementation of TPRS in my classroom is the timing of student production of verbal output in the target language. TPRS emphasizes listening, understanding, reading, writing and *eventually speaking* (Ray, 2016). In this view, students should not be pressured to speak until they are ready and in fact, Ray actively discourages students from repeating what he is saying in at least one video of his TPRS class (Ray, 2014). This emphasis on students speaking *eventually,* not necessarily right away is also a tenant of TPR, because it is an outgrowth of Asher's observations of the way children learn to speak their native language, first demonstrating that they understand their parents' speech by responding non-verbally and only responding with words after a considerable period of time and a considerable amount of verbal input from more proficient speakers (Asher, 1969).

However, in my classroom, students were willing and eager to attempt to speak right away, often repeating the words to themselves as they did the actions or viewed objects. Although I did not prompt them to speak, or insist that they speak, most of my students seemed to seek and enjoy opportunities to speak the words they learned at the same time that they mastered the meaning. Consequently, to provide speaking practice to all students who wanted to do so, it was routine in my classroom that once students

understood the meaning of a given word or group of words, they were given the opportunity to use it. One routine students seemed to especially enjoy was "being the teacher" where a student, rather than me, would give commands for other students and me to respond to. Because my classes were small (less than 12 students, with an average class size of seven), it was possible to do this on a regular basis,with all students who wanted to do so, having the opportunity to be the "teacher".

Story Asking in my ESL Classroom

Another key difference between TPRS as explained by Ray (2008, 2014, 2016, 2018) and TPRS as implemented in my classroom was a modification in the process of co-creating the TPRS stories themselves. In TPRS stories, the teacher starts with a story outline prepared beforehand, and the students generally respond to simple questions (often yes or no questions or choices between two options) to demonstrate comprehension, drive the action of the story, personalize the story according to the students choices and maintain participation and engagement. Student actors are also chosen to act out or role play the action of the story. Typically, this TPRS story-asking process is explained to students beforehand in a language both they and the teacher speak fluently, not in the target language. Since my students were beginning English students who spoke a variety of native languages, none of which I spoke fluently, explaining the story-asking process in a language we shared was not possible.

Consequently, I explained the concept of "choose" using TPR to my students and I had some success in getting them to make simple choices at various points in the stories, but sometimes this process seemed to confuse them. In these cases, the story-

asking took place after they understood the initial story and later they would make changes in the initial story by making choices, so we had multiple versions of the same story, with all the versions except the original formed by student participation. Students demonstrated comprehension by acting out the stories, suggesting choices for the later versions of the original story and by asking questions using both spoken language and nonverbal language (such as pointing to a body part when they wanted to include it in a story about a trip to the doctor, for example).

Student input and Agency

In addition to the modifications noted above in the story creation process, my students also had more input into the themes of the stories themselves than might typically occur in a TPRS classroom. The class generally followed a curriculum outline based on CASAS content standards (CASAS Organization, 2009) for a life skills ESL class. However, as adult learners living in the USA, they often had urgent needs for certain types of English vocabulary or concepts. If the class as a whole was in agreement, we might, for example, change the order of the themes presented. For example, we moved the unit on weather forward several weeks when we had a big snowfall and the students wanted to learn relevant vocabulary. The TPRS concept of using story outlines with commonly used vocabulary, plus new or target vocabulary, made responding to this type of request simple, since the preparation of class materials needed beforehand was minimal. I simply reviewed the target vocabulary, created goals around it, chose any necessary realia and TPR actions to teach the target vocabulary and then created a story

outline incorporating commonly used words, any words I wanted the students to review and the new target vocabulary.

In summary, while I implemented the key tenets of TPRS, I made several changes in order to make TPRS work in my adult ESL classroom with SLIFE learners. According to Litchman (2015), this is not uncommon. Litchman states that teachers often make modifications to TPRS when they implement it in their classrooms. However, in order to make the results that follow meaningful and allow the reader to make their own judgment about the transferability of these results, it was necessary to explain what implementing TPR and TPRS meant in the context of this study.

Themes in Diary and TPRS Story Data

With this context in mind, we begin an examination of the themes identified during the data analysis of my teacher diary and the TPRS stories co-created by the class and me using a modified version of the 'story asking' process, as explained above. In this section, my experience teaching vocabulary with TPR and TPRS is examined, along with the ways that students demonstrated their understanding of the vocabulary taught. In addition, themes relating to my use of TPRS to teach literacy skills are explored as well as profiles both of students who appeared to benefit most from TPRS as well as a profile of students for whom TPRS did not seem to be a good fit.

Teaching Vocabulary with TPR and TPRS

The first themes that emerged in my analysis of my teaching diary and the TPRS stories co-created with the class were related to the ways I taught vocabulary. This, in itself, is not surprising, as one major focus of the study is how I experienced teaching

vocabulary in my adult ESL classroom to SLIFE learners, using TPR and TPRS. However, the ways that I taught vocabulary changed in ways that went beyond simply using TPR and TPRS to establish the meaning of target vocabulary.

Vocabulary in Context: Stories as Scenarios. In analyzing my teacher diary, it's clear that the process of creating TPRS story scripts forced me to teach vocabulary in context. In order to prepare the class to co-create TPRS stories on a given theme, I needed to make sure I pre-taught target vocabulary that included related things (nouns) and actions (verbs or phrasal verbs). It's impossible to create an interesting, or even coherent, story without three key elements of a story: protagonists, the things in the protagonists' worlds and the actions the protagonists take. Although in retrospect this seems obvious, it's clear from my teacher diary that planning for the creation of story scripts forced me to consider teaching words in context in a way I had not done before. This can be seen in quotes from my diary like this one: "Hmmm I seem to have taught a lot of words for clothes, but thinking about creating a story, what are we going to DO with the clothes?" Although it may seem absurd not to include related actions when we teach a series of lessons on clothing or any other group of nouns,this omission may not be uncommon in adult ESL programs. At all of the community organizations where I have taught English to adults, the unit on clothes for beginning students was limited to naming clothes and describing what someone is wearing. Things we do with clothes or situations we encounter with clothes were not included. The extremely simple TPRS story below that the class and I co-created in Week 3 of the study for our unit on clothes serves to

illustrate how creating a scenario for a story naturally includes both nouns (clothes) and *related* actions, demonstrating for students how we use the words in context:

I wake up. I choose clothes. Red sweater or black sweater?

I choose the red sweater. I put on the red sweater.

Jeans or black pants? I choose black pants.

I put on the pants. I choose shoes. I put on the shoes.

I go to work. I take off my sweater.

Vocabulary: Repetition and Extension. Another theme that emerged from the analysis of my teacher diary was how using TPR and TPRS seemed to help me solve a long-standing problem I had had in my beginning classes: that of trying to find an engaging way of reviewing previously learned terms and helping students extend the use of those terms to new situations. Reviewing previously learned vocabulary was a particularly pressing problem, not just to keep the terms fresh for existing students, but also because the class was open enrollment and new students could join the class at any time. I needed to get the new students caught up to the rest of the class, without wasting the other students' time. In my teacher diary of Week 7, I say:

I have to admit my heart sank a little bit when I saw we had two new students coming today for the first time who have never had formal schooling and have been in the USA only two weeks. I was pretty anxious that either they would be totally lost in today's class or the other students would feel I was wasting their time as we reviewed the vocabulary they needed to understand before we could move on to co-creating a TPRS story. To my surprise, all the students today

appeared to really enjoy today's class, laughing, learning or reviewing words with TPR. Students who have been attending class for a while took turns 'being the teacher' and energetically shouted out the TPR commands for the rest of the class to do. One of the students even moved over to stand near the new students so they could clearly see her modeling the actions and she could whisper clarifications to them in Hmong when they appeared confused. By the time our ten minute break rolled around all the students, even the new ones were able to perform the correct action in response to a verbal command alone. One of the new students even played the queej, a traditional hmong instrument, for the rest during break, appearing to feel at home in the class already.

In an entry from Week 9 of my teacher journal I noted:

In preparing students for today's TPRS story, it appeared that some of the students had forgotten the meaning of the word 'drop' that we learned back in October and there are also students who joined the class after then, but after about 10 minutes of TPR all the students could execute the correct action in response to the command; in this case they could drop a scarf, a paper, or a pencil from their desk.

TPRS stories also provided a way to revisit previously learned vocabulary in new contexts. For example, some words and actions for clothing learned in earlier classes, were also used in later classes to create TPRS stories regarding going to the doctor as we can see in the TPRS story below:

I go to the doctor. The doctor says "What's the problem?"

I say "My arm hurts." The doctor says "Take off your shirt.

I need to see your arm."

I say "No! My arm hurts," The doctor says "Why?

I say " because I fell." The doctor says" I can cut your shirt off, ok?

I say "ok."

The story above also illustrates that the TPRS stories provided a natural way to introduce more abstract concepts like "why" and "because" that really only have meaning in context. In this way, I felt I stumbled upon a way to incorporate very common vocabulary that I had struggled to teach to beginning students in the past.

Another example of a word that really only has meaning when presented in a group of other related sentences can be seen in the use of the word "still" in following TPRS story:

I wake up. I'm cold. I put on a sweater. I'm still cold.

I put on a hoodie. I'm still cold. I put on a red vest. I'm still cold.

I put on a coat. Now, I'm hot! I take off my coat. I'm happy.

Teaching abstract concepts happened almost by accident as I did not set out to teach concepts like "why", "because" or "still" but I added them to the story scripts to make the stories flow more naturally. It was with these more abstract concepts that the use of translation by more literate students was helpful. As I noted in my teacher diary:

This same process happened with "why", "because", and other more abstract

concepts i.e. students who could read well, looked up the definition, using the

context provided by sentence(s) in the story, explained to the other students in

their native language and the other students demonstrated their understanding, through actions or speech.

Ways Students Demonstrated Understanding of Target Vocabulary

Some of these ways that students demonstrated their understanding went beyond what I had experienced using other methods.Although I expected my students would be able to demonstrate their understanding of the material presented in class, these ways of demonstrating understanding had not happened (or happened very infrequently) in classes I had taught in the past using other ways of teaching vocabulary. This finding is significant as listening skills are the language skills that are used most often in daily life (Mendelsohn, 1994). Listening comprehension of spoken words is also a necessary prerequisite for reading them (Bow Valley College, 2018; Croydon, 2005; Kurvers, 2007; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). Speaking provides the foundation for the eventual mastery of writing (Bow Valley College, 2018).

I fully expected that my students would be able to understand and execute commands they were taught using TPR and that they would understand the TPRS stories that we acted out in class if I created good story scripts, appropriate to their level. They did, indeed do all these things but they also told me their stories, asked me a ton of questions, and communicated with me non-verbally on a regular basis to fill in the gaps for vocabulary they had not yet learned. In my experience, this level of student-initiated conversation in a beginning English class was something new, especially with students who had little or no formal education in the past.

For example, students clearly grasped the theme of a lesson and actively worked to extend their understanding of the topic. As case in point can be seen in this excerpt from my teacher journal in one of the early weeks of the study:

Wow! I think every single student asked me questions today, even the few who don't yet feel comfortable attempting spoken English. It seemed like everyone had an additional body part I hadn't included in the lesson that they wanted to know. All of the students pointed to different parts of their bodies to ask me the English word for that body part and 2 even drew pictures to show me because they wanted the name of an internal organ. This was an extremely lively class for a group of beginners! I'm not sure if seeing me communicate with them nonverbally when I used TPR or role play a TPRS story has made them feel they have permission to 'talk' to me with gestures or exactly what's happening here?

In addition, students began telling me their stories, which is not something I had experienced with beginning students before. By Week 6 of the study, episodes like the one below were a common occurrence:

Today, after a TPRS story on falling at home and calling 911, during break one of the students told me about her recent experience falling on melted snow at work and hurting her back. She used a lot of the vocabulary from today's story but also recalled and used words from earlier lessons like "snow", "melt" and "back". Other students were interested in her story so after break she told her story to the class…in English! Filling in with actions and gestures where she lacked some English words. This generated what I can only describe as a class discussion

about workplace hazards, injuries and traditional hmong medicine. All of the

students appeared engaged, following the story by nodding or shaking their heads.

Most of the students participated in the "conversation" contributing questions

verbally or nonverbally with gestures, drawing pictures to help describe

traditional treatments, grabbing objects from around the room to simulate falling

over a broom, for example and learning new English words to help them say what

they wanted to say. Somehow both the desire and the ability to communicate

caught fire today. Quite possibly the happiest day of my teaching career yet!

Students enthusiastically told stories of their own on a regular basis after that. For

example, to explain Hmong New Year celebrations to me, the students created the

following story, with some scaffolding from me to fill in some new words:

Hmong New Year is a holiday. We eat chicken and pig.

 Except one lady, doesn't eat pig. She eats fish and chicken.

We eat rice and eggs. We play a ball game. We throw the ball.

We catch the ball. We wear special skirts.

We wear special shirts and hats. We hang fake coins on our hats.

We hang fake coins on our belts. We hang fake coins on our shirts.

Teaching Literacy skills with TPRS

As illustrated above, TPR and TPRS were used to teach understanding of verbal

English as a necessary prerequisite for reading and writing, but I also attempted to use

TPRS stories to teach literacy and pre-literacy skills more directly as well. After

establishing the meaning of target vocabulary using realia and TPR, TPRS stories were

created verbally and acted out in role plays by the students and me. Generally all students had an opportunity to act in the role play of the story multiple times. Once all the students seemed to understand the story, we could begin writing the story on the whiteboard at the front of the room. In the early weeks of the study, I wrote down the stories on the board, acting out key words as I wrote them to help students make the connection between the spoken words they had learned and the written form of the words. Then the students could practice some pre-reading skills as I noted in my teacher diary from Week 4 of the study:

> By this time all the students had memorized the verbal form of the story, so it was not a problem to get someone to volunteer to come to the board and "read" the story to the class by following the written words on the board one by one with a pointer while saying the words out loud as they pointed to them. Most of the students wanted to try this. For some of the students, they were actually reading (decoding and comprehending) but for most of the students, it's really more like what I did as a kid when I "read" stories I had had read to me so many times I had memorized them. Not really, reading, but following text left to right and connecting spoken words to a written form.

As the study progressed, I also began asking students to circle specific words in the story. From Week 6 of the study, I made this observation in my teacher journal:

> Today, it finally occurred to me that I'm wasting a valuable opportunity to help students recognize specific words in print. So today, after we wrote today's TPRS story on the board and everyone who wanted to had a chance to "read" it out loud

to the class, I began asking students to come to the whiteboard and circle specific words wherever they saw them in the story. I asked different students to circle all the instances of "I", "We", "fall", "call", "see" and "broken" in today's story. I tried to have students with less developed reading skills take the shorter words, but all of them could do it. I don't think this necessarily means that they would recognize these same words in a new story they had never heard before though. I wish I had formal training in teaching reading, I'm sure I'm missing valuable opportunities here, but I'm hoping that seeing the same words that they understand verbally over and over in different stories will help continue to strengthen the connection between the written and spoken word

Indeed it did appear that seeing written and spoken language in the same context over and over may have helped students understand some of the uses of print as well, as is illustrated by this excerpt from my teacher journal on the last week of the study:

Today one of the students who reads and writes pretty well was re-reading old stories from his notebook and the other students crowded around to listen and relive the stories. Later in the class, during break, one of the women began talking about how it was difficult to remember all the items she needed at the grocery store when she needed a lot of different things. This was a big problem because she had to walk to a store quite a ways away and it wasted a lot of time and energy if she had to return for something she forgot. Another student mentioned that she had seen other people using lists at the grocery store. The first women

seemed to have an epiphany of sorts and exclaimed in Hmong. One of the other students told me she said, "Teacher, we write things to remember them!"

This was totally unexpected, but it was a happy, exciting outcome that she made this connection. I never really thought about this before, but if you come from a place or a family where few people have had the opportunity for formal education, writing things down as an aid to memory is probably not an obvious thing to do. Weeks later, this same student showed me her "grocery list" of pictures cut from Aldi fliers to help her remember what to buy when she went shopping.

The results above are significant because the development of print awareness, including the ability to map spoken words to their corresponding written forms and understanding the uses of print are skills that preliterate learners need to develop and practice as a foundation for future literacy(Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020). Further, the repeated practice of these skills as discussed above may also be important. Ray (2014, 2016, 2018) argues that the repeated use of language skills in a variety of contexts is a prerequisite for the development of listening, reading, writing and speaking in an additional language.

In addition to the literacy skills discussed above, in Week 7 of the study, I also began giving students that could already read and write to some degree the chance to get some basic writing practice. Instead of writing the day's TPRS story on the whiteboard myself,I dictated and acted out the story while a student wrote the words as I said them. Interestingly, this also became a group activity. The class followed the writer's progress carefully, with all the students who could read and write giving them help and advice on

spelling when they seemed to need it. Occasionally, I needed to help with spelling or add a word that was missed, but often the class working together was able to come up with the correct written form of the words of the story. This gave students an additional opportunity to use their listening skills and also provided an opportunity to reinforce the relationship between the spoken and the written word.

Effect of Class Composition: Modeling, Translation, and Translanguaging

Another interesting pattern that can be seen in much of the data already presented is the positive effect of at least a few students with somewhat more advanced literacy skills in a class where most of the students have no or very little literacy background. This is an interesting finding as much of the literature recommends that students with no or low literacy skills be taught in a separate classroom that students who are already literate in at least one language (Bigelow & Schwarz, 2010; Bow Valley College, 2018). However, in my experience, at least in the part of the class that used TPR and TPRS, the presence of students with more advanced literacy skills provided a model to the other students on how school works as the following excerpts from my teacher journal illustrates:

> I realized today that many of the beginning literacy students can never find the
> materials from previous classes because they don't open their notebooks
> consistently from the front or consistently right side up. So a week's worth of
> lessons is sort of randomly scattered through their notebooks, on non-successive
> pages, with some pages upside down or beginning at the back . I have not given

enough thought to the fact that this, too, is a pre-reading/pre-writing skill we learn in school.

Once I was aware of this problem, I tried modeling the way we open the notebook multiple times, but it was the example of other students that seemed to be more helpful. Several days later I noted in my teacher journal that:

It seems to help to have the beginning literacy students sit closer to students who consistently open their notebooks rightside up and from the front. I'm seeing the beginning students do this more consistently now that they can see someone doing it in front of them over and over again everyday.

In addition, having at least one student in the class who could read and write could help make more abstract material in TPRS stories understandable, because, if needed, they could use google translate to translate a sentence or group of sentences to understand the meaning of words, like "still", "why", and "because". If they could also speak the language of all of the other students, as happened on occasions when all the students in the class were Hmong, they could explain what they had learned from the translation to the rest of the class in their native language. I never planned lessons to take advantage of this translation and translanguaging because the composition of the class varied from day to day and often there were students who spoke a variety of native languages in any given class, all of them with beginning literacy skills.

Although translation and translanguaging played a very small part in establishing meaning in my classroom, the experiences above seem to support the findings of Ray (2014, 2016, 2018) that translation and translanguaging (Carroll & Sambolin Morales,

2016) can play a meaningful role in helping students understand new material in classes where students speak the same native language.

Changing the Idea of the Successful Student

However, although the discussion above demonstrates that students with more advanced literacy skills could be valuable sources of information and helpful role models to students lacking literacy skills, the converse was also true. In my past experiences, using other teaching methods, these students sometimes appeared reluctant to participate in class and rarely assumed leadership roles. Using TPR and TPRS, students lacking literacy skills had the opportunity to participate fully in the class and to provide help to their more literate classmates. In my teacher journal from Week 2 of my study, I noted:

Two of the students without any formal schooling seemed to be the ones who picked up today's vocabulary fastest. After repeating a TPR action only a few times or hearing the word for an object less than 5 times, they could respond to my verbal commands. I even noticed that some of the other students were sneaking glances at them to see what they were doing by the end of the class when the entire class was trying to respond to my verbal commands alone (i.e., without me demoing the action(s). This felt pretty exciting and the daughter of one of these ladies told me when she came to pick up her Mom that her Mom is not afraid to come to class anymore!

On another occasion, I wrote the following in my teacher journal:

Today we played a little game in class to review some of the commands that students had learned previously. We had two teams and all the students tried to get

on the same team as 4 of my students who don't yet read or write, because these 4

have phenomenal verbal memory. The idea of the game is that one member from

each team will execute a command and earn a point for their team by doing so,

but the commands get more and more complicated as the game goes on. For

example, the first student on each team might hear the command "Go to the

kitchen" and then execute the command. However, each time the commands get

longer. For example the second student on each team might need to execute a

two-part command like this:"Fix a broken plate, wash the plate." Until in the final

rounds of the games, the verbal command might have 6-8 steps. These 4 students,

despite their lack of literacy (or because of it?) consistently can execute even

these more complex multi-step tasks. All the students seemed to enjoy this game,

but these 4 students really appeared to shine.

The anecdotal findings above seem to be in line with the findings of Havron et al.

(2018) that students who have not yet learned to read may actually have some advantages

over their literate counterparts in language acquisition. In particular, my findings seem to

support the findings of Havron et al. that learners without literacy skills may have an

enhanced ability to remember multi-part phrases.

Profile of Students who did not Appear to Benefit from TPR and TPRS

However, although TPR and TPRS appeared to have benefits for both literate

students and those lacking literacy skills, there were students who seemed to receive

relatively little benefit and who seemed to actively dislike these methods. For some

students, TPR and TPRS seemed to be too different from what they expected school to be, as this excerpt from my teacher journal illustrates:

> Today was not a good day. I feel like I'm failing some of the students and I'm not sure what to do about it. Two students kept interrupting the TPRS story creation to say "Too much laugh, Teacher!", appearing to object to both the laughter of the rest of the class and to my acting out the story. Since I have no way to explain to them why what we are doing in class is so different from what they might expect school to be, I'm not sure what to do.

This seems to amplify the findings of Braunstein (2006) that students' initial impression of TPRS in adult ESL classes may be negative simply because it is so different from what they expect traditional teaching to be. In that study, students' attitudes towards TPRS improved markedly as the study progressed. The difference, unfortunately, between the experience documented in Braunstein's study, where the study author and the students both spoke Spanish, and my experience was that I had no language in common with my students that I could use to explain to students the rationale behind TPRS and convince them to give it a chance.

Some students also seemed visibly bored by the repetition which is part of the TPR and TPRS methods. These students were assigned to my beginning class based on their lack of literacy skills and/or lack of formal education, but their spoken English was more advanced than the rest of the class. For them, the emphasis on building up understanding of spoken English appeared to provide them with very little new learning. I noted in my teacher journal:

Today's class really reinforced my feeling that TPR and TPRS aren't for every

student. There are three or four Somali women who come to class occasionally

before they go to work and I feel like I am wasting their time. Their listening and

speaking skills are much better than the other students, so most of the material I

presented via TPR and TPRS, today they already know, so they keep asking me

for worksheets. However, since they haven't had the opportunity to learn to read,

they really learn nothing working independently with even the simplest materials

I can give them and I don't have a volunteer to help in this class. It doesn't help

that these students usually need to leave to go to work before we've done a lot

with the written form of a TPRS story and today, even though they stayed long

enough to see the written form of today's story, they had a lot harder time

"reading it" (ie reciting the story and pointing to each word written on the board

as they said the word) than the other students. This appeared to be because they

had not memorized the verbal form of the story, like the other students had, so

they had no idea what words they might expect to see in the written form of the

story. For example, in today's story about going to the doctor, one student guessed

"apple" when she saw the word "arm" and another student guessed "black" when

she saw the word "back" in the phrase "back hurts".

Summary

This chapter presented the results of my 10-week study and answered the research

question. The chapter began with an explanation of the key differences between how I

implemented TPR and TPRS in my adult ESL classroom and the ways these practices are

explained by the founders of these methods. These minor modifications were necessary to meet the needs of my students and it was necessary to explain them to provide context for the results of this study. Next, the themes that emerged from the analysis of my teacher diary and the TPRS stories co-created in the classroom were discussed in the context of the research question: *How can TPR and TPRS be used in the adult ESL classroom to teach vocabulary and reading skills?* . These themes included the ways that using TPR and TPRS changed my approach to teaching vocabulary to present vocabulary in context, and allow for repetition and review of vocabulary in ways that appeared to engage students.and the unexpected ways my students demonstrated their understanding of that vocabulary. Additional themes discussed included the ways these methods influenced the way I taught pre-literacy and literacy skills, the effect of class composition on the understanding of the material presented and profiles of both students who appeared to benefit from TPR and TPRS and those who did not.

Chapter Five discusses the results of this study in the context of the literature regarding how adults acquire additional languages that was reviewed in Chapter Two. Major findings are presented and the factors that influenced them are considered. Implications of these findings are explored as well as the limitations of this study. Next, some suggestions for future research are presented, followed by the plan for the dissemination of this study. Chapter Five closes with my personal reflection on the capstone process.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Introduction

This diary study posed and answered the following research question: *How can TPR and TPRS be used in the adult ESL classroom to teach vocabulary and reading skills?* This research focus was addressed through the following subquestions:

1. How does an adult ESL teacher experience the use of TPR and TPRS when teaching students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE learners)?

2. What themes emerge in the teacher's diary?

To answer these questions, I documented my experiences teaching vocabulary and reading skills to adult ELLs with limited or interrupted formal education in my teacher journal during a ten-week period. I also collected the TPRS stories co-created in the classroom with the students. These stories began with story scripts created by me, while the students made choices at key points in the story to drive the action. These two sources of data were analyzed to uncover themes that appeared to capture my experience teaching vocabulary and reading skills using TPR and TPRS.

This chapter will discuss the major findings of this study in the context of the literature regarding how adults acquire additional languages. Next, the implications for teachers and teacher-educators will be considered and the limitations of this study will be addressed. Suggestions for further research will be explored and means of disseminating this study will be identified. The chapter concludes with my personal reflection on the capstone process.

Major Findings

The results of this study align with the findings of earlier studies that found that

TPR and TPRS can be effective ways to teach vocabulary (Asmali, 2019; Kara &

Eveyik-Aydin, 2019; Oliver, 2012; Watson, 2009). While there has been a great deal of

research on the use of TPR with adult ELLs, little previous research has been done on the

use of TPRS in adult ESL classrooms like mine, especially with students who have had

little or no formal education(Braunstein, 2006). While by its nature a diary study is

subjective, anecdotal evidence captured in my teacher journal indicates that beginning

students in my class, including those who cannot yet read in any language, were able to

demonstrate their understanding of target vocabulary in a number of ways, including

executing TPR commands, giving TPR commands to other students, acting out TPRS

stories via role play, asking questions to gain additional information through spoken

language or via gestures, and telling their own stories using the target language. This

occurred despite the fact that I was unable to explain the TPRS story-telling process to

students in a language we both speak fluently, as might typically be done in a TPRS

classroom. This is an important consideration for teachers who may be reading these

results because it may often be the case that students in adult ESL classrooms speak a

variety of languages, none of which the teacher speaks fluently(or at all).

In addition, my study also appears to add anecdotal evidence that coincides with

the results cited in research by Ray and Seely (2008) that demonstrates that TPRS can be

used to strengthen students' understanding of the connection between spoken and written

words and stories. After acting out a story and memorizing it in verbal form, my teacher

diary recorded many instances of students demonstrating their understanding that spoken words also have a corresponding written form. Students used the written form of the story on the whiteboard to do this. They demonstrated their understanding of the connection of spoken words they understood to their corresponding written form by pointing to each word of the story as they recited the story out loud. While for students who had no previous literacy skills, this was not "reading" in the sense of decoding words to comprehend new material, it was a demonstration of foundational pre-reading skills.

However, while the results discussed above aligned with those of other researchers, some of the themes uncovered in my analysis seemed to provide anecdotal evidence that differed from the findings of others. Findings in previous studies by Havron and Arnon (2017) and Kurvers (2015) suggested that literate students may enjoy an advantage over non-literate students in acquiring new vocabulary. Reiss and Castro-Caldes(1997) suggested that this may be because learning to read allows students to hold a visual as well as auditory version of words in memory, strengthening their ability to recall vocabulary.

Analyzing my teacher journal seemed to indicate just the opposite. Students with no or very little literacy appeared to learn vocabulary taught via TPR more quickly than peers with more developed literacy skills. In addition, students who were not yet literate appeared to be especially proficient in recalling and executing in order a long string of TPR commands. Since this study is by its nature subjective and qualitative, naturally caution should be used in interpreting these results, but this finding may provide anecdotal evidence in support of findings by Havron et al. (2018) that preliterate people

may also have some advantages over their more literate peers, especially in recalling phrases and groups of words.

It's also interesting to note that while a review of many previous studies of TPRS by Lichtman (2015) indicated that students generally found TPRS stories to be engaging, enjoyable and useful and typically preferred TPRS to more traditional methods of language learning, in my analysis I found this to appeared to be true for many, but not all of my students. It's important to acknowledge that this finding is based only on the observations I recorded of student behavior. There were numerous instances recorded of students laughing, participating in story creation, helping their fellow classmates, asking questions, initiating discussion and seeking out opportunities to tell their own stories. These students all began the class with very little knowledge of spoken English. It may be that these students benefited from the emphasis on the development of listening and speaking skills that were the core of my implementation of TPR and TPRS, although this cannot be said with any certainty given the nature of this study.

In contrast, there were a few students who participated very little in story creation, seemed to object to laughter in the classroom and repeatedly requested worksheets during the spoken part of TPRS story creation. These students had much higher listening and speaking skills than the rest of the students, but had been placed in my beginning classroom, based on lack of literacy skills. Although this is speculation, it may be that these students, who already had good knowledge of spoken English, learned little new material during the verbal part of TPRS story creation and were not a good fit for TPRS, at least as it was implemented in my classroom. Alternatively, it is possible that these

students disliked TPRS because it did not fit their expectations of what classroom instruction should be, as was initially the case for students in the study by Braunstein (2006).

Finally, the results of this study indicated that the implementation of TPR and TPRS changed the way that I taught vocabulary and pre-literacy skills in my adult ESL classroom. TPR provided a way to review previously learned vocabulary in a way students seemed to find engaging and TPRS allowed me to incorporate previously learned vocabulary in new contexts, providing both review and new learning opportunities. TPRS, in particular, forced me to teach words in context,simply because you need protagonists, the things in the protagonists' world and actions to create a meaningful story. TPRS stories, once learned orally, could be written on the board to provide a way for me to teach students to connect the spoken and written word. While these changes in the way I teach may seem trivial, they provided a way for me to reach a group of non-literate students who previously struggled in my ESL classroom, an experience which may not be unique for non-literate students in adult ESL classrooms in the US.

Implications

Although the scope of this study was extremely limited due to its design as a diary study, it may still have implications for teachers and teacher educators. As the number of adult ELLs with limited or interrupted formal education continues to increase,the teachers of these students, their mentors and teacher educators may need to consider additional methods of teaching English that do not presuppose existing literacy skills. Although

TPRS was created for use in the foreign language classroom, when combined with the use of TPR and realia to establish meaning, this study suggests that it may provide one option for teaching this population. When the meaning of target vocabulary is linked to actions via TPR, to realia, and finally presented in context in TPRS stories that students act out, students lacking literacy skills have an opportunity to learn the verbal skills that are the prerequisite for future literacy.

While TPR is already commonly used in adult ESL classrooms (Bow Valley College, 2018), the addition of TPRS could give teachers the opportunity to continue to engage the entire class in using TPRS story asking to co-create stories with the teacher. Learner-generated texts can be one way of ensuring that classroom materials are meaningful, appropriate and relevant to students (Bow Valley College, 2018; Croydon, 2005; Huang, 2013; Peyton & Young-Scholten, 2020; Vinogradov, 2010). My experience suggests that TPRS' emphasis on including commonly used words could also provide a way to use already learned vocabulary in a variety of contexts and to teach common collocations in English.

However, when considering any method for the adult ESL classroom, it's important to acknowledge the limited resources available to many educators who work with adult ELLs who lack literacy skills. These educators may be volunteers, work part-time or have other full-time jobs. In addition they may work for organizations with limited capacity to provide classroom materials, teacher training or staff development. Given these constraints, the fact that it was possible to implement TPRS in my classroom

without any investment of money and an investment of only 10 hours of "training" time, may make it an especially practical option to consider.

Limitations

To allow readers to assess the implications and findings of this study, it is important to also discuss its limitations. The major limitations of this study are due to the research design and data collection methods chosen. A diary study where the researcher and the participant are the same person is obviously affected by the biases of the researcher, which limits its transferability to other ESL classrooms. In addition, only two data sources were used in this study. While including both the TPRS stories co-created with the students and my teacher diary as data sources was an attempt at triangulation of data, including additional and more varied sources of data would have resulted in a richer and more reliable dataset. Perhaps the most serious limitation of this study is that it included only my impressions and there was no data directly from students on their thoughts and impressions.

Further Research

To address the limitations of this study, further research on using TPR and TPRS with adult ELLs with limited or interrupted formal education is indicated. Studies modeled after the many studies of TPRS in the foreign language classroom (Lichtman, 2015) could add rigor to the discussion on its use in the adult ESL classroom by providing findings that may be more generalizable. For example, future studies could incorporate pre- and post-testing of students and control groups who were not taught via TPRS as was done in studies by Oliver (2012) and Watson (2009) in the foreign language

classroom. These studies assessed students' reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills both before and after a foreign language class and compared these scores across two classes, one taught with TPRS and one taught with more traditional methods. Study designs that incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data, especially feedback directly from students, might also provide a richer dataset for analysis

Studies like those above are often designed to answer the question of whether TPRS is better than other methods in improving scores on standardized tests of reading, writing, speaking and listening. While this is an important question to explore in the adult ESL classroom, both to support student learning and because funding for adult ESL programs may be based partly on student level gains on standardized tests, studies that ask more targeted questions could also add to our knowledge base, regardless of the scope of the study. Even a further teacher diary study or a study where actual video footage of the TPRS story asking method was recorded live in an adult ESL classroom could help answer questions regarding the use of TPRS stories to teach specific aspects of language, such as use of grammar in context, use of phrasal verbs or pragmatics. It may be especially interesting to explore phrasal verbs since these are used so often in natural speech and may be best learned in context (Ganji, 2011). The fact that TPRS stories emphasize context may also suggest that exploring the teaching of pragmatics with this method might prove fruitful.

Dissemination of the Study

I plan to disseminate the results of the current study in several ways.To share the results of this study with a wider audience, I plan to submit a proposal to the 2023

Minnesota English Learner Education Conference. In this presentation, I plan to emphasize the steps I took to implement TPR and TPRS storytelling in my adult ESL classroom with SLIFE learners and my experiences using these methods to teach vocabulary and pre-reading skills.

In addition, I will submit a proposal to the public school in the small town in Argentina where I am currently teaching regarding a presentation for teachers here who teach English as a foreign language. Since the students in the public school here are already literate in their native Spanish, this proposal will emphasize the steps I took to implement TPR and TPRS in my classroom and the ways that I used it to teach target vocabulary.

Personal Reflection

Working on this research has helped me develop my skills as both a teacher and a researcher and also revealed to me just how much there is still to learn. I'm finding that both the things I learned and the gaps in my knowledge are continuing to shape my choices today.

Today, I'm working with children teaching English as a foreign language in Argentina, but the things I learned about using TPR, realia and TPRS stories to establish meaning of target vocabulary are still useful to me in my current setting. For example, in preparing for this research project, I learned that the way I had been using TPR in my classrooms in the past, left out the key step of checking student comprehension by asking students to demonstrate their understanding of target vocabulary. By adding this

additional step, I can see whether or not students comprehend and remember the words they are taught.

The TPRS story-asking technique I learned for this research project also continues to be part of my teaching toolkit in my current classroom. Students appear to enjoy making choices to drive the action in the story and it gives me a way to keep all the students in the class actively engaged, which I find is especially important when teaching children. The TPRS emphasis of using common vocabulary repeatedly in different contexts provides me with a way to teach common words, phrasal verbs,etc in a way that students appear to find enjoyable and useful.

While I developed some useful teaching skills during this project, working on this research project also revealed some gaps in my knowledge that continue to be relevant in my teaching today. It was clear to me as the research project proceeded that I knew very little about teaching reading and this lack kept me from fully meeting students' needs. For example, I knew that I needed to include some phonics instruction, and I did, but I was not able to integrate a systematic approach to teaching phonics with the TPRS stories created in class. Instead, I taught phonics in a separate part of the class after the TPR and TPRS portion of the class concluded. This was a missed opportunity to integrate phonics practice with words students already understood well that a more skilled teacher could have taken advantage of.

This lack of knowledge in how to teach reading continues to be a problem in my current classroom. Although my students are already literate in Spanish, my lack of a deep understanding of how to teach phonics and word attack skills in English means that

I am not yet teaching them how to recognize sound/spelling patterns in English in a systematic way. I'm currently exploring ways to address this gap in my knowledge in both the short and the long term, so I can better meet the needs of my students, both here in Argentina in an EFL setting and especially when I return to the US and once again am teaching adult ELLS with limited or interrupted formal education. Although this has been a painful realization, I think it is one of the most important learnings for me personally from this research project.

In my final meeting with the thesis committee, my peer advisor also pointed out a way I could have made vocabulary I was trying to teach easier to learn by incorporating words the students indicate that they use or want to use in their daily lives as English speakers. While I could not ask my students this directly as I spoke none of their native languages, the majority of my students in the study were Hmong speakers and I did have access to bilingual staff at the community organization where the study took place that could have helped me gather this information, at least for the majority of the students. While I wish I would have done this during the study, it is a suggestion I can use going forward. In my current teaching setting in Argentina, where I can ask students directly what they want to learn because I speak Spanish, this has proven to be a popular strategy and students seem motivated by having the ability to make sure content is relevant to them.

In addition to aiding my development as a teacher, I've learned that I really enjoy the research process, including reading current literature, identifying gaps, forming a research question and collecting and analyzing data. Despite my lack of formal standing

as a researcher, I want to find ways to consider doing my own research in the future or

helping other more experienced researchers with their research. I hope to explore ways of

doing this with my current mentors as well as exploring other avenues, such as seeking

volunteer opportunities that might provide avenues to do further research.

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