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The effects of Total Physical Response by Storytelling and the Traditional
Teaching Styles of a Foreign Language in a selected High School

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A paper presented at the

Annual Conference of the Mid. South Educational Research Association

Knoxville, Tennessee, November 5-7, 2008

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of Total Physical Response by Storytelling and the traditional teaching method on a foreign language in a selected high school. The sample consisted of 30 students who were randomly selected and randomly assigned to experimental and control group. The experimental group was taught using Total Physical Response by Storytelling and the control group was taught using the traditional method. Data were collected using teacher made tests. Data were analyzed using independent samples t-test. The results indicated a significant difference between experimental and control group in overall performance. Significant difference was found between experimental and control group on vocabulary achievement. Total Physical Response by Storytelling appears to be a powerful tool to use in teaching a foreign language.

Literature Review

Human beings learn in many ways and use a multitude of strategies. Howard Gardner, a theorist proposed the theory of multiple intelligences. The theory claims there are seven main intelligences combined in a variety of ways to create the intelligence of one person. Each individual is different and no two individuals are the same. The theory of multiple intelligences was created in the late 1970's and 1980's by Howard Gardner who believed the concept of intelligence should be viewed from different perspectives other than Intelligence Quotient (IQ). From this perspective Gardner developed the multiple intelligence theory. He realized that his theory of seven intelligences was not the only combinations that make up a human's mind; however, they are the main intelligences (Sternberg et al., 1994).

Linguistic intelligence was one of the first intelligences espoused by Howard Gardner. The development of linguistic skills begins at infancy. It is the root of a spoken language that begins with the babbling of a child. As the child grows the linguistic skills progress as well. For instance, infant's babble, young children use one word and progress to two words together until they can put sentences together. An example of a sentence structure is "When I get up? Or "I no want to go to sleep," (Gardner, 1983). The linguistic intelligence mainly talks about poetry and writing and connecting with words, but can also relate with foreign languages.

Learning a foreign language at an early age is beneficial to all children. It helps children to expand their minds and help their mental growth. Also, it is a great way to introduce young children to different cultures (ACTFL, 2007).

Most students who learn a second language are either adults or students in a high school setting. Any person over the estimated age of 11 may have more difficulty in learning a second language because the mind is linguistically different than a child's mind. Rather than speaking the language, an adult may question about which grammar usage to use instead of focusing on the fluency of the conversation. It is harder for adults to accept a rule just because it is a rule. It is easier for an adult to question rules of a foreign language which makes it harder to learn. Languages come naturally to young children because their minds are like sponges that soak up all the information they can (Cook et al., 1979). Also, children are carefree and do not worry about making mistakes.

Foreign language teachers focus on the vocabulary words and what those words might mean to their students as individuals. Most individuals associate unknown vocabulary words they already know. For instance, in the Spanish language many vocabulary words are cognates. Cognates are words that sound and look similar to the English word. Students can easily relate the Spanish word with the English word and place it in their memory (ACTFL, 2007).

As introduced earlier, most students learning a foreign language are in a classroom setting. Goals of a foreign language teacher are to teach the basic knowledge of the target language in order for the student to carry on a conversation in the target language in the future. Also, the teacher tries to reinforce understanding of the target language so the student may one day regurgitate the information. True language learning and conversation of the target language occur because of real life applications. A strategy for teaching real life applications is Total Physical Response by storytelling (TPRS) (Warren, 2006).

TPRS is a stress free teaching style that creates a learning environment similar to that of a child's environment (Wolfe & Jones 1982). TPRS is a method taught by foreign language teachers to help students gain conversation skills and understanding of the target language (Asher, 1973). Conversation is a communication skill more commonly used in everyday life and is something learned at an early age to help people express themselves (Munkres, 1959).

Roles of the teacher in a TPRS classroom

TPRS is a method created by Blaine Ray after he studied Total Physical Response (TPR), developed by James Asher. Total physical response (TPR) helps students understand the target language as a whole rather than the rules of the language. For example, instead of saying the

word *lapíz* (pencil) and the students repeat the word, the teacher holds up a pencil and says this is a pencil (*Este es un lapíz*). Then, the teacher will use a series of commands to help the students grasp the word, for instance, throw the pencil, give the pencil to Shirley (Harris, 1989). TPR is mainly taught through commands. TPRS is a similar concept, however, also includes storytelling by the teacher (Slavic, 2007). Ben Slavic wrote a book called *TPRS in a Year!* that gives helpful hints to teachers who are considering TPRS. He explains that this method is both physically and emotionally exhausting. This method requires the full attention of the teacher in every creative way. It is the teacher's job to be excited and positive about the story being told throughout the lesson because then the students will respond positively (Munkres, 1959). When introducing the vocabulary list the teacher or the class as a whole creates gestures or motions in order for students to associate the gesture or motion with the Spanish word. Then, once the vocabulary is taught the teacher then uses those words to ask personalized questions to the student (Slavic, 2007).

Personalized questions and answers (PQA) in a high school setting are important because it makes the student feel important to the class and the teacher. Once the questions are completed the teacher moves on to a mini story. These mini- stories are acted out by student volunteers but dramatized by the teacher (Ray, 2006). The mini stories consist of two or three paragraphs written in Spanish. The stories are crazy and almost

unbelievable. However, when using this method, Spanish class becomes a time where anything can happen. In order for the students to follow along with the written story, pictures are provided that lay out what is happening in the story. Each story is unique and catches the students' attention.

Role of students in a TPRS classroom

The role of a student in a TPRS classroom is similar to that of the teacher. In order for the student to remain engaged the student must pay attention and participate in class discussions and the main story for the day. Almost always the students continue to be engaged in the lesson because the stories are fun and require student participation. Most students anticipate when they are called on by the teacher. The students must remain on their toes because the teacher may call on them at any particular time throughout the lesson. Calling on the students is a great way for students to participate in the lesson and practice the vocabulary words through repetition. Using TPRS in the classroom attendance is important because the method requires observation of the teacher for their pronunciation of the words and for the word associations. The word associations are the gestures the student or teacher creates in order to remember the specific vocabulary word. For example, a great way for students to learn general commands such as sit and stand up, the teacher

uses his or her hands to demonstrate a tiny person. This person is used to show how he/she sits or stands. When the teacher says *sientense* (sit down) then the students must show their little person sitting down on the side of their other hand. This is a great way for students to use gestures to explain the vocabulary word. In addition, many words in Spanish and English are cognates. Cognates are where the Spanish word sounds and looks like the English word, for instance, *loción* is the Spanish word for lotion and it looks and sound like lotion. Word association is a great way for students to learn a variety of vocabulary words. In addition, TPR is a great way to practice vocabulary. TPR, created by James Asher is where a word is introduced to the class and then that word is placed into commands. For example, *manzana* (apple) is the new vocabulary word. The teacher holds up a real or plastic apple and explains that this is an apple. Then, the teacher gives commands using an apple. For instance, give the apple to Jesse, bite the apple, or throw the apple on the floor. This technique keeps the students engaged because they do not know what is going to happen next and it helps students to remember the word because of repetition. If a student misses a few days of school the student may quickly fall behind depending on the enthusiasm of the student when they return. This method does not require homework because it is hard when students are at home completing homework that they do not understand. The students' job is strictly in the classroom. Most students

can recover from a day's absence however; it is difficult to receive the same instruction as the day before. Lastly, it is important that the student is creative in the process of telling stories. Being creative brings the stories to life and helps keep the class interesting (Oller et al., 1993). This method helps students to think for themselves and figure out the problem either alone or as a class which makes the lesson more meaningful (Harris 1989).

Traditional teaching method

In a traditional teaching method of a foreign language students begin taking classes in the eighth grade. The traditional approach is one of the only methods taught in the 70's and 80's. It relied heavily on grammar and the study of the language however, not the practice of the actual language. Grammar was the most important part of learning Spanish or any other foreign language and students were forced to memorize hundreds of vocabulary words and word tenses before they practiced the actual language (Resources, 2007).

Many schools are beginning to start teaching a foreign language in pre-school and kindergarten to immerse students in a second language at an early age. It is important for all children to be introduced to a language at an early age because it has a positive effect on their intellectual growth. Also, it will enhance children's mental development. In addition,

opening doors to new cultures is great for all children because it will broaden their horizons and their ideas of other cultures.

Teacher's Role in the traditional teaching method

The role of the teacher in a traditional teaching method is to share the information with the students. For instance, most classrooms follow a textbook that contains all the examples and worksheets for the student students to follow. The teacher must share the vocabulary and grammar with the students; however, it is up to the student whether they grasp the information. Teachers use a variety of activities in the traditional method such as, a tape recorder in order for students to hear the language from a native speaker. Also, to sing songs or crossword puzzles to try and remember the vocabulary. Most written drills in a foreign language classroom come right from the textbook (Stack et al., 1966). However, there are four steps to the traditional approach and writing is the last step. The first step in a traditional approach is hearing. The teacher talks almost the entire period in the target language in order for the students to hear the pronunciation of various words. Also, the teacher may have the students listen to another person on a tape or CD in order for students to hear someone else speaking the language with an accent. Then, the next step is speaking. Students are put in groups or asked to read allowed to practice their own pronunciation of various words. At times students may

feel uncomfortable speaking out loud in the target language because they have not had enough time to practice the language or the accent of the language. Next, is reading where students are given various sentences to read and interpret what they have read. More than likely, a teacher will accompany the reading with a few questions in order for the students to follow the reading. Lastly, the students practice their writing skills of the target language. Writing is one of the last steps in a traditional approach to learning a foreign language because it is the hardest to master. In general, it is difficult for anyone to master a foreign language if it was not their native language because there are rules of the language that are hard to comprehend and there are many accept ions to all languages (Dutton et al., 1965).

As a foreign language teacher it is important for teachers to remember that just because they have taught a rule does not mean that the students comprehended all of the material that was taught. More often than not, students will not say they do not comprehend the lesson because they do not want to feel inferior to their other classmates. However, most of the time there are more than one student who does not understand the lesson and if one student confirms that they do not comprehend then four or five others will also confess that they too do not understand. In a traditional method students have more responsibility in

learning the language rather than the teacher has in teaching the language.

Roles of the student in a traditional foreign language classroom

Students have more responsibility in a traditional approach classroom because everything taught must be memorized. For instance, vocabulary, grammar, and rules of the grammar must be memorized in order to learn the target language. In the end, it may be difficult for some students to put those rules and vocabulary to the test of real life because they are only memorized. The students' job is to listen to the spoken language by the teacher or person on the radio to try and acquire the accent of the language. Next, the students practice speaking to each other in different situations and try and memorize the vocabulary. Also, speaking will help students to pronounce various words of the target language. Then, the student must practice reading the foreign language either in sentence form or through paragraph form. Lastly, the student practices their writing skills through exercises in the textbooks or by writing small papers in Spanish (Steckler).

Conclusion

James Asher, the founder of Total Physical Response has done various studies over the past twenty years and studies have shown the significant difference in test scores of those students taught by TPR. For example, a study done on college students in a beginning Spanish class was taught using TPR and the control group was taught using the traditional teaching method. Both groups were administered the Pimsleur Spanish Proficiency Test and those students taught by TPR showed a significant increase in their test scores (Wolfe & Jones 1982). This literature review expressed the differences between the two different teaching approaches to teaching a foreign language. Also, it shared the effects of Total Physical Response by storytelling and the traditional teaching style of a foreign language in a selected high school. Everyone has his or her own opinion on teaching styles of a foreign language. Fortunately, there are a variety of methods to choose from. This study showed the effects of both TPRS and traditional methods and which one has more benefits to the students.

Methodology and Procedures

This study was conducted in a public high school in Northeast Tennessee with approximately 450 students. The surrounding area of the school was rural and contained mountainous areas with little industrialization. The school was

predominately Caucasian who comprised of 98 percent of the total population. Also, the school consisted of a majority of low to middle income families.

The school included three main paths for the students to choose from in order to graduate. The first path was college prep, meaning the students were planning to go to college and must have a certain number of classes including a two years of a foreign language. Then there was the technical path which included various opportunities for students to learn about agriculture, industry, auto mechanics, information technology and craftsmanship. The last path was for the students who were not clear on what path to take. This path included the basic classes a student must take in order to receive a diploma.

The sample for this study consisted of 30 randomly selected students from a total of 60 students from a Spanish I classroom. Out of 30 students selected, fifteen were randomly assigned to experimental group and the other fifteen to a control group. The experimental group was taught a unit using Total Physical Response by storytelling (TPRS) while the control group was taught using the traditional method. Both groups were administered a test after the end of the unit.

The main data collection instrument was a unit test. The experimental group was taught using TPRS while the control group was taught using the traditional method. The TPRS method consisted of mini-stories and the commands of vocabulary, while the traditional approach consisted of vocabulary and grammar. After covering the unit that contained the material for one week in

both experimental and control group, a test was administered. The test contained matching the vocabulary words and translation of sentences from Spanish to English. After data were gathered, they were analyzed.

Procedure

Before the beginning of this study, permission to perform the study was granted from the administration of the specific high school. In addition, permission was obtained from the parents of every student to participate in the study. Each subject was informed prior to the study that participation was voluntary and that he or she could withdrawal from the study at anytime without penalty.

Once permission was granted, the study began. Thirty students were randomly selected and randomly assigned into experimental and control groups. Fifteen students were randomly assigned to the experimental group and fifteen randomly assigned to the control group. The experimental group was taught a unit using TPRS while the control group was taught using the traditional method. The unit lasted for a week. After the end of the unit, both experimental group and control group were administered a test. Data were collected and analyzed to determine the differences.

Results

Two research questions were used to guide the analysis of data. All data were analyzed at .05 level of significance.

Research Question #1: Is there a difference between test scores when students are taught using TPRS and when using Traditional method?

Research Question #2: Is there a difference between the vocabulary test scores for the students when they are taught using TPRS and the Traditional method?

Each research question was followed by a research hypothesis. Both research questions were analyzed using independent t-tests. The results of research question 1 yielded significant result. The students taught using TPRS scored significantly higher than students taught using traditional methods ($t(14)=3.23, P<.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The results are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

**Independent t-test for TPRS (experimental) and
Traditional Style (control)**

Style	M	Sd	df	t-value	sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	93.87	8.442	14	3.23	.005*
Control	77.87	16.945			

Note * $P < 0.05$

The results of research question 2 also yielded significant results. The students taught using TPRS scored significantly higher than students taught using traditional methods ($t(14)=3.993$, $P<.05$). The results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

**Independent t-test for TPRS vocabulary (experimental) and
Traditional Style vocabulary (control)**

Style	M	Sd	df	t-value	sig. (2-tailed)
TPRS	96	8.281	14	3.993	.001*
Traditional	76.33	17.270			

Note. * $P < .05$

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to determine if TPRS had an effect on the academic achievement and vocabulary skills in Spanish I classroom in a Northeast Tennessee high school.

Research Question 1 stated is there a difference between test scores when students are taught using TPRS and when using the Traditional style? In regard to Research Question 1 an independent Samples t-test was conducted. The results showed a significant difference between the test scores ($t(14) = 3.23, p=.005$). The results of this study were similar to the study done by James Asher in 1982 which indicated that students who were taught using TPRS were superior in their performance than students taught using the traditional method.

In this study, the students who were taught using TPRS appeared positive and engaged in the lesson. The students remained motivated throughout the lesson and were excited to get started at the beginning of the class period. When the students were taught using the traditional style, they appeared bored and unmotivated. The students knew the routine of the lesson and were not engaged the entire lesson.

Research Question 2 focused on the difference between experimental and control group's performance on vocabulary when they were taught using TPRS method and the traditional method. The results indicated a significant difference between the scores of the students taught using TPRS and those using traditional method ($t(14) = 3.993, p = .001$). The results of this study were consistent with the study conducted by James Asher (1982) that indicated that TPRS had greater impact on the student's vocabulary than the traditional methods. In this study, the students who were taught using TPRS tended to remain positive and continued to remain engaged in the lesson. The students were excited to enter the classroom and volunteered new gestures for the new vocabulary words and volunteered to be a part of the mini stories that were acted out. They were not afraid to fail. The students perceived learning to be fun. When they were taught using the traditional style, the students tended to not be fully engaged.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine the effects of Total Physical Response through Storytelling and the Traditional Teaching styles of a foreign language in a selected high school in Northeast Tennessee. The results indicated a significant difference between TPRS and the traditional style on the overall performance of the students. Similarly, significant difference was found between TPRS and traditional style on vocabulary. The students taught using TPRS performed significantly higher than the students taught using the traditional method. Further study is needed to determine if this difference exists in other schools.

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