



# Total Physical Response

An Innovative Strategy  
for the  
Second Language Classroom



Angela Kennedy

ISD 613

Summer 2000

Dr. Dempsey

# The Origins of Total Physical Response

- Dr. James J. Asher originated the Total Physical Response approach, known internationally as TPR.
- Dr. Asher observed that the dropout rate of second language students in a traditional program is often as high as 95%.
- He questioned why so many people have a hard time learning a second language when almost no one has any trouble learning his first language.

# Origins of TPR

- One explanation is that many teachers use methods that were not used while learning the first language.
- For example, infants and toddlers are not expected to speak until they are ready; however, they are constantly spoken to. When speaking to a toddler, one direction at a time is given for the child to follow, including statements such as: “Come here.” “Find Mommy.”  
“Don’t touch. It’s hot!” “Throw me the ball.”
- A second explanation involves the stress that’s often found in the second language learning environment.

# Origins of TPR

- Dr. Asher decided to create a stress-free approach to learning a second language that used many methods found in the first language learning experience.
- His work resulted in an approach that is now used in many classrooms around the world to help children and adults learn languages such as French, Spanish, English, Chinese, Korean, Hebrew, and even sign language!

# Goals for TPR

- TPR begins with a focus on large concepts.
- In the beginning, there is a wide tolerance for students' speech errors.
- The concepts are gradually fine tuned to focus on small details.
- As TPR progresses, the tolerance for speech errors narrows.
- This is similar to a parent's shrinking tolerance for his child's errors in speech, as the child grows.

# The Basic Guidelines of TPR

1. The teacher says and performs a command.
2. The teacher repeats the command, and the teacher and students perform the command.
3. The teacher repeats the command, and the students perform the command.
4. The teacher tells one student to perform the command.
5. Students give commands to one another and perform each one.

# An Example of TPR

1. The teacher and students practice the following commands: “Walk!”  
“Stop!” “Turn around!”  
“Point!”
2. The teacher and students expand the commands to include: “Walk to the door.” “Turn around.”  
“Point to the window.”
3. The teacher gives commands to individual students.
4. The students practice by giving command to each other.
5. Students are allowed to vary the commands:  
“Paul, point to Erica.”

# “Brain switching”

- The left brain responds to input such as:
  - analyzing
  - critiquing
  - discussing
  - explaining
  - talking
  - telling
- The right brain responds to input such as:
  - acting
  - drawing
  - games
  - gesturing
  - metaphor
  - physical movements

# “Brain switching”

- Dr. Asher suggests using techniques that allow students to switch back and forth between right-brain and left-brain thinking.
- New material is internalized in the right brain through TPR activities.
- Verbal exercises of speaking, reading, and writing allow the student to switch and use the left side of the brain.

# Some Myths about TPR

## 1. TPR will only work for children.

- Studies have shown that adults outperform children when using TPR. The only advantage children have is acquiring a near-native pronunciation.

## 2. TPR is limited to the imperative.

- The imperative is the “golden tense,” but research has found that students can make a smooth transition to all other grammatical features.

# Some Myths about TPR

3. TPR is limited to beginning students.
  - This strategy is a powerful tool that enables students to internalize a huge volume of the target language with high-speed; however, this achievement can exhaust students. The key is to switch back and forth to other techniques, therefore, using both sides of the brain.

# Additional Points of Interest

- Reading and writing are introduced as soon as the students have internalized the material. This usually occurs around the tenth lesson.
- If reading is introduced too soon, seeing the printed language may cause mispronunciations.
- One of the strongest features of TPR is the long-term retention it provides.
- A possible explanation for the long-term recall of TPR is the motor skills hypothesis. TPR has long-term recall for the same reason that bicycling or swimming has long-term recall.

# Additional Points of Interest

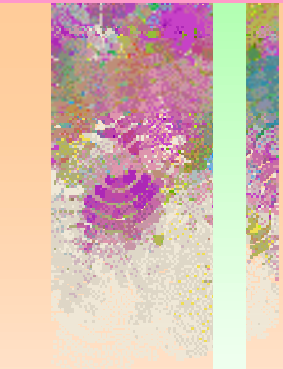
- TPR is successful when used as the core strategy of a course or as a strong supplement.
- Children and adults are highly motivated by TPR because of the continual and fast-moving action, the high rate of success, and the low level of stress involved.
- Teachers report enjoying TPR as much as their students!

# Implications for Instructional Designers

- TPR allows students to use the kinesthetic sensory system, which is the most powerful teaching aid available, and in a traditional second language classroom, it is only occasionally activated.
- New areas of TPR that are developing and call for more research include:
  - \*TPR-Storytelling
  - \*The use of TPR with the universal language of mathematics



# References



Asher, James J. (2000). Learning another language through actions (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Los Gatos: Sky Oaks Productions.

Neilson, J. and Ray, B. (1997). Helps and hints for beginning TPR-Storytelling. Los Gatos: Sky Oaks Productions.



# References



Total Physical Response. Retrieved from the World Wide Web on July 15, 2000.

<http://www.tpr-world.com>

Total physical response storytelling: a communicative approach to language learning. Retrieved from the World Wide Web on July 15, 2000. <http://www.tprstorytelling.com/story.htm>