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**TPRS and L2 Total Immersion:
Piloting a New Curriculum**

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TPRS and L2 Total Immersion: Piloting a New Curriculum

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Abstract

This paper describes the implementation of Total Physical Response Story Telling (TPRS) in a third grade French immersion classroom. The class is comprised of six boys and eighteen girls who entered the school in kindergarten, first, or second grade. (Two students entered the program in third grade this school year and were brand new to the L2 immersion experience.) The students are native speakers of English, with the exception of one new student whose native tongue is a West African language.

Although the majority of the students have experienced L2 acquisition using total immersion, the use of storytelling integrated with total physical response storytelling in immersion is a new experience for the students.

In this research, students and the teacher are engaged in daily TPRS lessons using pictures depicting each story. Daily lessons are described, physically acted out, and student responses are measured and discussed. A new text is being used which incorporates varied stories, vocabulary, gesture, as well as story pictures. Each lesson is followed by student interactive storytelling in the target language: true/false and fill-in-the-blank written activities; oral short answer and “Think About It” questions; story sequencing, and listening and reading comprehension tests. Examples of TPRS assessment tools are given. Quantitative and qualitative data are presented in an effort to determine the efficacy of this new academic venture.

This curriculum is being piloted in a foreign language immersion and cultural studies school in the city of Detroit, Michigan, USA.

Keywords: L2 Acquisition, Immersion, Methodology.

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Introduction

The Foreign Language Immersion and Cultural Studies School was a total immersion school from the late 1980's until the early 2000's. It has been stated (Curtain and Pesola, 1994: 30) that a total immersion program is one in which content is taught in the target language from 50% to 100% of the day. Due to mandatory standardized testing for K-12 students in America, and due to the national educational initiative "No Child Left Behind", the teaching of English Language Arts became heavily enforced in all American public school districts. Thus, The Foreign Language Immersion and Cultural Studies School currently teaches French, Spanish, Chinese and Japanese as a separate 50 minute class instead of using the foreign language as the vehicle through which all academic content is taught. This is a change from the school's original focus.

In an effort to remain true to the foreign language immersion focus, teachers at FLICS communicate with the students in the foreign language and often participate in special training opportunities to enhance foreign language instruction. Currently, the foreign language teaching methodology being brought to the forefront and implemented as a curriculum focus is TPRS-Total Physical Response Storytelling. The Total Physical Response method involves giving commands in the target language that students will follow, or act out (Asher 2000; Krashen 1982:140-142; Romijn and Seely 1989).

In the Total Physical Response Storytelling-TPRS method, students are taught the target language by acting out words and gestures that are central to the story (Ray and Seely 2015). The teacher facilitates the story telling and language acquisition process by modeling use of the words and gestures in the story, by adding vocabulary and varying sentences to augment comprehension.

It was stated that:

TPR Storytelling (TPRS), which was developed in the 1980s and 1990s by Blaine Ray of Bakersfield, California, provides the critical vehicle-storytelling-for utilizing and expanding acquired vocabulary. High-interest stories contextualize the vocabulary, enabling students to hear and see a story and then to act out, retell, revise, and rewrite it (Marsh 1998).

All grades-Kindergarten through eighth - received new TPRS text books (Gaab et al 2006). The teachers received new teacher manuals (Gaab and Loic 2006), a second book of TPRS stories of varying levels (Gaab et al 2006), along with accompanying CD's which contained pictures for each story, student and teacher books. Thus supplied and trained, the teachers began implementing the strategy with their classes. Each story begins with a series of terms in the target language, a picture or pictures that are used to tell the story, and are followed by listening, writing activities for each lesson. Assessments

are provided at the end of each unit. Each student had a textbook and foreign language notebook for class.

The students who participated in this study were in the Third Grade French Immersion class. Most of the students had attended the school from kindergarten. However, one female student left the school during the first semester and returned to the school after several months. Two new female students entered at varying times during the first and second semesters. One male student was in the Japanese cluster for most of second grade. He left the school, returned in the second semester of third grade, and was placed in the third grade French class. These lapses in enrollment in the foreign language program prove to be challenging in maintaining a high level of language acquisition, usage and understanding for the students, as well as proving to be challenging for the teacher in building base vocabulary for communication and understanding.

Method

Day one of the TPRS implementation began by announcing that the class was now in total French immersion – the classroom is declared an English Free Zone unless a subject is being taught in English - and the students were told that they would receive new textbooks with French stories.

It has been noted that:

Not only should course goals be specified, but experience tells us that whenever possible students can and should be informed as to the relationship between the goals and the particular methodology which will be used to attain these goals (Krashen and Terrell 1995: 73).

The teacher explained that the class would use storytelling and acting out stories to learn French. The teacher had used TPR before, but had not used TPRS as the main methodology of L2 acquisition. After participating in the TPRS workshops, the teacher was interested to determine if this method would stand alone as the sole L2 acquisition vehicle for the class.

The textbooks were distributed, assigned. Vocabulary for Mini-conte #1 was written and projected on the Smartboard. Vocabulary was written on the white board and left there for the duration of the lesson. Students wrote and illustrated flashcards, and wrote the vocabulary in their notebooks. The teacher guided the class through vocabulary introduction, hand signals, motions and physically acting out the movements for each verb. Students were put into groups, assigned roles to play, and were given time to rehearse the storytelling/story acting before presenting the story to the class. Each group presented and acted out the story to the class while other groups were the narrators. At the end of each presentation, the teacher facilitated discussion by posing questions to the class using the story vocabulary and the students

responded using the story vocabulary, as modeled by the teacher, at the end of each lesson. Students had the option to draw pictures and use story vocabulary to retell the story, or they could write their own version of the story. In order to gauge story understanding, and to expose the students to repeated vocabulary and grammatical structures through comprehensible input, the teacher asked varying levels of comprehension questions, circling back to the beginning of the story and using student responses to guide further questioning and discussion (Ray and Seely 2015: 148; December 2013).

The same procedures were used in each story in each of the subsequent units. Summative and formative assessments were given, included speaking, reading comprehension, writing and listening activities. Listening activities included hearing a story read by the teacher and responding verbally, by writing a response, or by choosing the correct phrase. For the purposes of this study, four writing assessments were chosen to determine if TPRS and Total Immersion worked well in the L2 acquisition of the French language.

Validity

In order to enhance the validity of this study, perhaps a longitudinal study of four semesters and evaluation of assessments over that period of time would provide data to show how using TPRS and L2 Total Immersion would be effective in other classrooms of the same grade level. Research could be done following one class for several years, or middle school grades six, seven, and eight could be studied to determine the effectiveness of this strategy née curriculum with older children. Four writing assessments were chosen to guide this study in that to write a retelling of a story well, one must comprehend what is read, heard, and acted out. One must understand how these parts fit together in order to produce output that is intelligible and that synthesizes input.

Results

The results of the four writing assessments were analyzed and evaluated as a class for each activity. Next, the results were disaggregated, analyzed, and evaluated for Mini-conté 1 Writing Activity 1, Mini-conté 2 Writing Activity 2, Mini-conté 3 Writing Activity 3, and Mini-conté 4 Writing Activity 4.

Figure 1. *Class Test Scores for Mini-conte 1 Writing Activity 1*

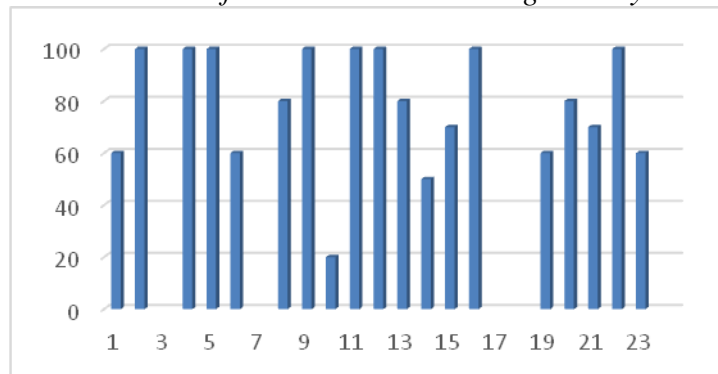
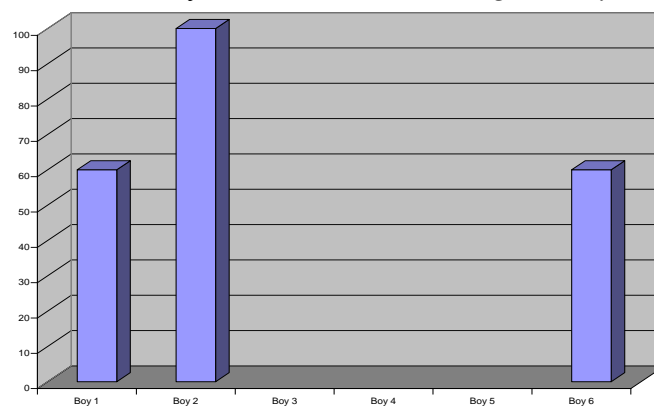
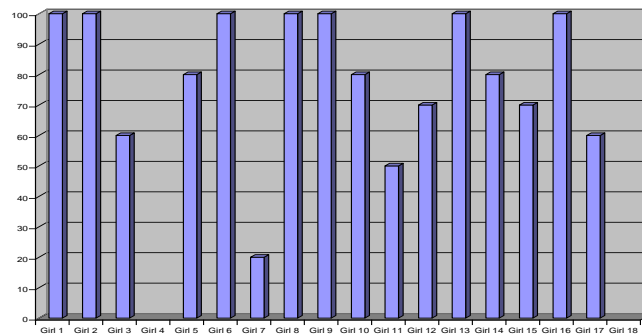


Figure 2. *Boys' Test Scores for Mini-conte 1 Writing Activity 1.*



*Boys 3, 4 and 5 did not complete the activity. Boy 3 was new to the immersion program.**

Figure 3. *Girls' Test Scores for Mini-conte 1 Writing Activity 1.*



Girl 4 and Girl 18 were not yet enrolled in class.

Figure 4. *Class Test Scores for Mini-conte 2 Writing Activity 2*

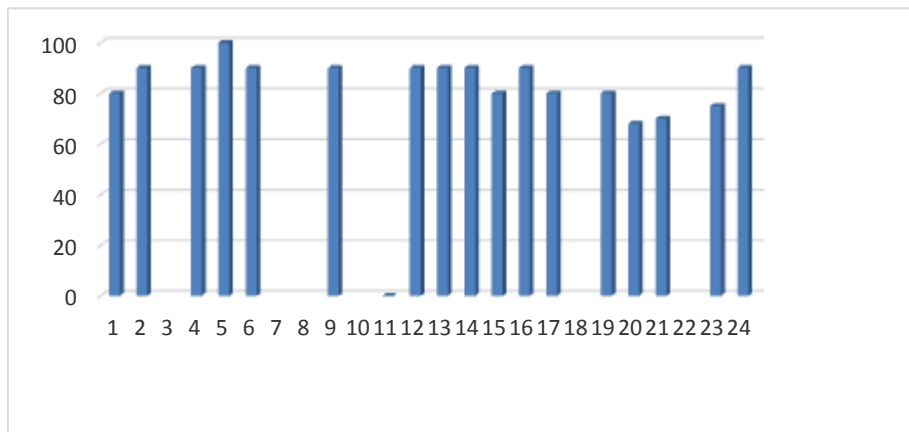


Figure 5. *Boys' Test Scores for Mini-conte 2 Writing Activity 2*

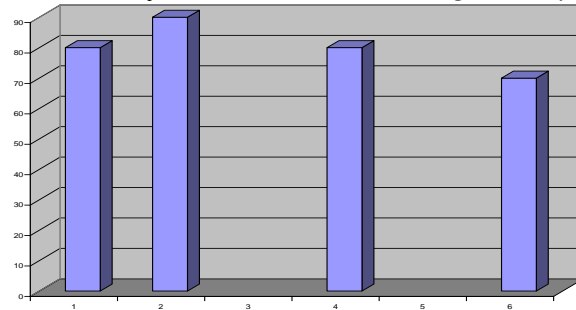


Figure 6. *Girls' Test Scores for Mini-conte 2 Writing Activity 2*

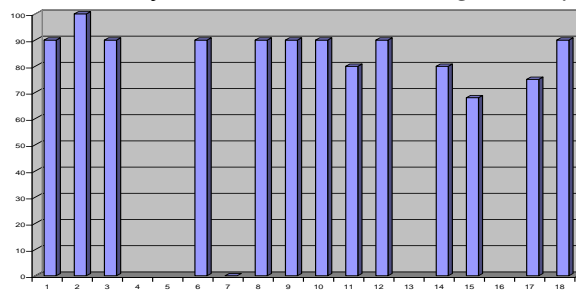


Figure 7. *Class Test Scores for Mini-conte 3 Writing Activity 3*

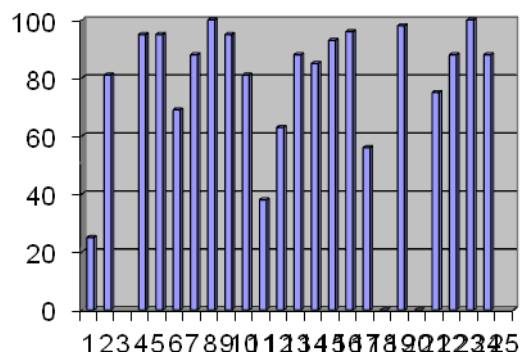


Figure 8. *Boys' Test Scores for Mini-conte 3 Writing Activity 3*

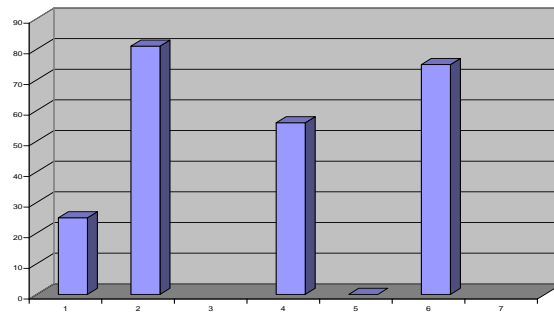


Figure 9. *Girls' Test Scores for Mini-conte 3 Writing Activity 3*

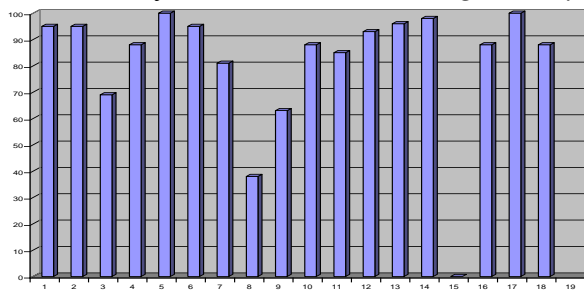


Figure 10. *Class Test Scores for Mini-conte 4 Writing Activity 4*

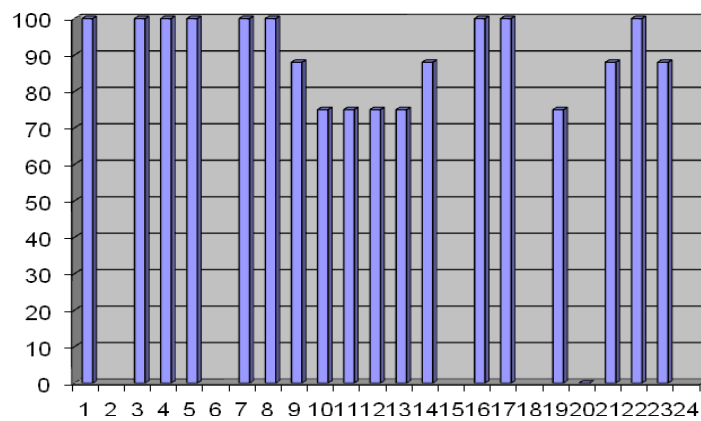


Figure 11. *Boys' Test Scores for Mini-conte 4 Writing Activity 4*

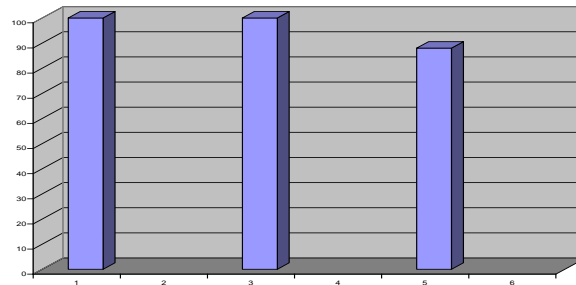
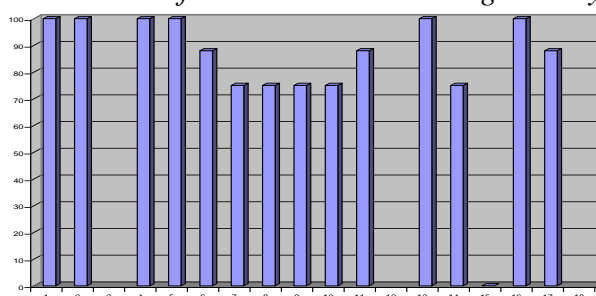


Figure 12. *Girls' Test Scores for Mini-conte 4 Writing Activity 4*



Discussion

For Mini-conte 1, the results show that the class mean was 78.3, the median was 80, and the mode was 100. The lower quartile was 58.8, and the upper quartile was 97.7. The boys' test scores showed a mean of 73.3, a median of 60, and a mode of 60. The lower quartile was 60, and the upper quartile was 80. The girls' test scores had a mean of 79.3, a median of 80, and a mode of 100. The lower quartile was 61.25 and the upper quartile was 107.5. Overall, the girls scored higher than the boys and higher than the class average for this introductory writing assessment in the target language using French immersion and the TPRS methodology. The median for the class and for the girls' test scores was 80, while the median for the boys' test scores was 60. This suggests that the girls' comprehension of the task was stronger than that of the boys', thus manifesting in higher test scores for the girls. The girls' test scores bolstered the class average test score. Should the TPRS and L2 immersion methodologies work synergistically, one would expect to see an upward trend in the total class test scores and in the disaggregated data for the writing assessments. The range between the girls' upper and lower quartiles can be explained by the several extremely low test scores.

For Mini-conte 2, the results show that the class mean was 80.16. The median was 90, and the mode was 90. The lower quartile was 69.2 and the upper quartile was 91.1. The mean for the boys' test scores was 80. The median was 80, and the mode was 80. The lower quartile was 75 and the upper quartile was 85. The mean for the girls' test scores was 80.2. The median was 90, and the mode was 90. The lower quartile was 69, while the upper quartile was 91.4. In this lesson, the test score mean for the class increased by 1.86%. The boys' test score mean increased by 6.7%, and the girls' test score mean increased by .9%. This increase in average test scores would lend support to the theory that TPRS and L2 immersion are effectively combined methodologies when acquiring a second language. Foster (May 2011) states that continuous input is needed for lasting gains in written fluency.

For Mini-conte 3, the class test score mean was 73.78, the median was 88, and the mode was 88. The lower quartile was .08 and the upper quartile was 93.9. The boys' test score mean was 47.4. The median was 56 and the mode was null. The lower quartile was 40.5 and the upper quartile was 78. The girls'

mean test score was 81.1. The median was 88 and the mode was 88, the same as the median and mode for the class score. This can be attributed to the girls' test scores as combined in the total class score.

The girls' lower quartile was 66.6 and their upper quartile was 95.5. The extremely low scores account for the 28.89% range between the upper and lower quartiles. The class test score mean decreased by 6.48%. The boys' test score mean decreased by 32.6%. The girls' test score mean increased by .9%. In this lesson, the girls' test scores continued to increase. However, the boys' test scores were extremely low and contributed to the lower class score average. During testing, there was no apparent reason for the sharp decrease in the boys' test scores.

For Mini-conte 4, the class test score mean was 89.7. The median was 88 and the mode was 100. The lower quartile was 80.7 and the upper quartile was 98.6. The boys' test score mean was 96. The median was 100 and the mode was 100. The lower quartile was 94 and the upper quartile was 100. The girls' test score mean was 82.6. The median was 100 and the mode was 100. The lower quartile was 68.8 and the upper quartile was 97. The class mean increased by 15.92%. The boys had a dramatic test score increase of 48.3%. The girls continued to increase their test scores by 1.5%. Again, the range in upper and lower quartiles for each data set – whole class and disaggregated – can be explained by the lower test scores.

Implications

The introduction of the combined methodologies of TPRS and Total Immersion showed an upward trend in test scores from Mini-conte 1 to Mini-conte 2. In Mini-conte 3, the girls showed continued increase in their test scores while the boys' test scores suffered a significant drop, thus lowering the overall test score for the entire class. At this foreign language immersion school, there is one grade level per language cluster. There are significantly fewer boys in the third grade French immersion class than there are girls. Two of the boys joined the immersion program late in the school year. Could these factors have contributed to the drop in scores for this particular test, on this particular day? Were the newest members of the class experiencing immersion language fatigue, thus shutting down mentally and emotionally during this assessment? Perhaps these are questions to consider and to address when enrolling new students or when reenrolling students who have been out of the immersion program for an extended period of time. The teacher can address these challenges by providing immersion resources for the new and returning students to use at home.

In Mini-conte 4, the class test scores increased just as dramatically as they had fallen in Mini-conte 3. The boys' test score increase of 48.3% increased the class test scores. The girls maintained a steady 1.5% test score increase.

Based on this research sample, the French writing assessments for the third grade French immersion class show a general upward trend in test scores. An

extended study is necessary to determine if the upward trend in assessment of second language acquisition will continue when combining TPRS and L2 Immersion as the sole or the focal methodologies of this foreign language curriculum. Also, teachers may use TPRS stories from many sources to augment the curriculum, to increase the body of stories used in TPRS, and to help maintain interest as students matriculate through the curriculum. Olliphant (1991) and Denny (2000) have produced a variety of stories that well augment the TPRS curriculum.

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