



## Taking the Next Step with TPRS: iPod Integration

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### Abstract

*Technology is often seen as a privilege for students and a nuisance to teachers. Students enjoy multi-tasking and embracing the new-age technology as a part of social interaction and entertainment, whereas teachers feel threatened by technology. An increasingly high number of students have access to, or own, a hand-held device and frequently bring it to school. Some schools in the United States focus on the negative effects of bringing these devices to school and as a result, have banned them, whereas other schools have integrated them into the classroom as a learning tool or reward for good behavior. This paper discusses the use of hand-held devices as a pedagogical approach to foreign language learning in the United States to enhance second language acquisition, especially with the TPRS (Total Physical Response with Storytelling) method. The TPRS method has been used for over thirty years, stimulating language learning in a creative way and engaging students through the concept of a storyline and active participation. The paper will present a productivity analysis of both hand-held devices and the TPRS method through a case study of how this combination was implemented with over 100 high school students with various language proficiency levels in 2012 in Franklin, North Carolina (USA). The results will provide information on the adequacy of hand-held devices for second language acquisition and how to use them in a classroom setting, evolving the way teachers utilize the TPRS method and other language learning methods in general while maintaining student engagement.*

### 1. Introduction

The second millennium came with a great advancement in technology and brought about a digital revolution. Apple is one of the giants of this information age, as its products remain to be desirable by various age groups for digital input and output. Adolescents with earbuds have become ubiquitous, connecting them to their personalized world of music. The iPod has broken the awkward silence in the subway, where travelers were previously accustomed to dealing with boredom while they “wasted” time on the way to their destination. The hallways of schools are now filling with the new technology because of the interest of the young consumers’ interest in the latest gadgets. Students beg their educators to listen to their media players when they have extra time in class, and the multi-taskers even request to use them while completing assignments. The responses from the teachers have varied and some schools have even banned the usage of these devices while at school. On the other side of the fence are the educators who have integrated these devices as learning tools or as a reward for good behavior.

Far from advocating for replacing instructors with the latest technology, the purpose of this paper is to convey how the current technology of the Apple iPod and other media devices can help take the next new-age step with education. This paper presents a case study about how I used the iPod Nano to modify the second language acquisition method called Total Physical Response with Storytelling (TPRS).

### 2. Background on the TPRS method

I began using the TPRS method in 2010 as a pedagogical approach to teaching Spanish in the high school setting. The conversational results were astounding, so I began using this method with my students at the community college level as well. The method proved to work there too, and it was well received by the students, as their levels of engagement and interest increased. I realized the importance of developing conversational skills while learning a foreign language and how overemphasizing attention to grammar rules and form can impede the ability to communicate [4].

It is necessary to explain the basis of the TPRS before delving into the modification process. James Asher originally introduced TPR in the 1970s to increase student engagement with activities in a stress-free environment [1]. Blaine Ray introduced his modification of the approach by adding a storyline. Both TPR and TPRS utilize a cycle of questions and answers known as *circling* combined with physical actions.



Maintaining student engagement is imperative and when coupled with kinesthetic motion, learning is facilitated with a memorable experience. "By using your muscles you can remember. A person who doesn't ride a bike for 20 years can get on and ride away. The same is true in all sports as well as other skills involving movement. The basic memory is there years later. If our students use their muscles to learn language, they will remember better what we teach" [5]. The method of *circling* limits vocabulary and stresses repetition, emphasizing Stephen Krashen's notion of comprehensibility (i+1) [3]. Here, I offer an example of a typical *circling* conversation. (The English translation is provided for the readers' convenience, but it is not part of the activity):

- A. Statement is made (*El carro es rojo. 'The car is red.'*)
- B. Question is asked (*¿El carro es rojo? 'Is the car red?'*)
- C. Confirmation of correct answer (*Sí, el carro es rojo. 'Yes, the car is red.'*)
- D. Question provoking negative answer (*¿El carro es negro? 'Is the car black?'*)
- E. Confirmation of correct answer (*¡NO! El carro no es negro. El carro es rojo. 'No! The car is not black. The car is red.'*)
- F. Multiple choice question (*¿El carro es rojo o negro? 'Is the car red or black?'*)
- G. Confirmation of correct answer (*¡Sí! El carro es rojo. No es negro. 'Yes! The car is red. It is not black.'*)

After *circling*, students can be given a story to translate that utilizes the vocabulary from the lesson (typically from the foreign language into English). This is where my modification comes into play. Instead of giving the students a copy of the text in the foreign language, they must utilize their thirst for technology for a learning experience. The following is a summary of the case study I carried out in 2012 with 37 students at Franklin High School in Franklin, North Carolina (USA).

### 3. Case study on TPRS modification with the Apple iPod Nano

I hypothesized that the iPod Nano could be a useful teaching tool to modify the TPRS method. The participants in this study included a total of 37 students. This group comprised of one set of beginner Spanish students and one set of second-semester Spanish students. I carried out the case study after 30 total hours of instruction, which was equivalent to one month of school. Before the case study, I only used the TPRS method as my methodological approach. Students were given 60 minutes and an iPod Nano to complete a 5-step task to learn and reinforce learned material through translating a 299-word story in Spanish. The iPods were previously loaded with only an audio recording of my voice reading the story in Spanish. Students followed the instructions and received two types of grades: completion and marked. The marked grades for each step were averaged for their total marked grade. The steps were written on the board as follows:

- Step 1: Write down exactly what you hear in Spanish on your iPod.*
- Step 2: Check your paper with mine for accuracy.*
- Step 3: Translate your story into English.*
- Step 4: Check your paper with mine for accuracy.*
- Step 5: Record yourself reading the story in Spanish.*

### 4. Results

This case study produced both positive and negative results. All students completed the task. The marked average was 94%, with the highest score at 97%. During the study, 95% of the students were on task and I noticed the noise level was lower than normal. Positive comments from students were "Can we do this more?" and "This really helps me focus." Negative results included one set of earbuds breaking by a student accidentally, a low score of 87%, five percent of students were off-task, and a frustrated comment was made: "This is taking forever!"

From this case study, I concluded that the positive results outweighed the negative. The iPod Nano was effective in keeping students on-task and engaged in the learning process, making the iPod Nano a useful teaching tool for modifying the TPRS method. The hand-held device also allowed students to replay difficult words and phrases, an option not always available in a conversational setting.



Hand-held devices can be costly if bought new. The foreign language department received a set of 30 iPods with a charging cart in 2007 for participating in a portable technology pilot program in North Carolina's foreign language classrooms [6]. Cost will always be an issue when upgrading technology, however bolstering academic scores and the push for diversification of new-age education techniques may outweigh the costs. Used or refurbished devices can certainly be an option. It takes about two hours to get this 5-step activity set up, but the students are generally focused during the activity, allowing the instructor time for lesson planning or instructor tasks. Students must be responsible to not drop the devices, therefore maturity level must be considered beforehand.

## 5. Conclusion

Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences explains how every student has his or her own unique information processing operation [2]. The iPods and the 5-step process allowed the students to be kinesthetically and visually involved while simulating a conversation and practicing listening skills, catering to the variety of student intelligence groups. Not only were the students' hands busy writing and clicking the iPods, but they were also allowed to get out of their seats to check their translations. This 5-step process required the students to utilize all modes of learning a foreign language: listening, reading, writing, and speaking.

The use of hand-held devices opens a door of new opportunities for second language acquisition and education in general. As technology advances with tablets and video recording capabilities, teachers will continue to consider new options for educational techniques. The modification of the TPRS method with a hand-held device is only the beginning.

## References

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