

# THE BIG CI BOOK

A Step-by-Step Guide for  
World Language Teachers

by

**Ben Slavic**

Distributed by Teacher's Discovery

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Ben Slavic

*“This book has made it much easier for me to transition away from using grammar methods in my classroom to using Spanish to communicate with my students. When I learned that I didn’t have to use stories and instead could just use any of the strategies outlined in this book, I was relieved. The focus is on communication in the target language. Everything I need to do is clearly explained. Now I feel good about making the transition to teaching in this new way.”*

Jennifer Green

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FOR TEACHERS, BY TEACHERS  
SINCE 1978

You can't teach a class that feels fresh and exciting  
without leaving elements of it to chance.

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# Introduction

There are as many ways to do comprehensible input as there are teachers. There can be, in my view, no blueprint, no one set of prescribed materials, no single plan of instruction if comprehensible input is to work in our classrooms in the real way. Therefore, the entire content of this book is intended to merely *suggest ideas*, and not to lay down some kind of curriculum. The language is the curriculum.

Teachers are asked to pick and choose from the ideas presented here with the intention of building a fluency program that reflects their own strengths, their own preferences and their own goals with comprehension-based instruction.

Teaching should not be a cookie cutter experience driven merely by the delivery and collection of data – it should be a fun and expansive personalized journey for both teacher and student, one that is different in each class on each day. Teaching the same thing all day is a proven ingredient in teacher burnout. In this way of teaching, each of us gets to fashion our own comprehensible input crown, and set the strategies that work best for us, like jewels, in it.

If there is one single valid criticism that has been leveled against TPRS, comprehensible input, and all the other things that have grown out of Dr. Krashen's research, it is that they have been represented by too many people as a mystery. It's not a mystery; it's simple.

If comprehensible input were not simple, then how could small children get to fluency without any visible effort? They just listen to the language for a number of years and then they can speak it and later write it. What is complicated about that? As long as the input is comprehensible, they learn it and there is no memorization involved.

It is the purpose of this book to simplify everything into doable form so that the teacher who may be skeptical of comprehensible input can make it work for them.

We must redirect the chaotic light beams that TPRS has become into one continuous and focused beam so that comprehensible input can now shed a genuine bright light directly on the difficult work of teaching a foreign language. The time for this work of redirecting TPRS, whether we like it or not, has arrived.

The strategies described in this book are easier to do than stories. They prepare the teacher in the art of using comprehensible input (CI) in a general way, and not just comprehensible input as it is done in stories. The strategies show the teacher how to set up:

1. a strong and vibrant classroom management program.

2. a personalized classroom.
3. an assessment program that works and saves time.
4. lesson plans based on images.

The caution to new teachers is that, without skills, strategies, classroom management tools and assessment pieces in place first, it is difficult to make CI instruction work in their classrooms.

Why is it better to avoid starting the year out directly with stories and instead use the strategies outlined in this book? Here are some reasons:

1. The entire system of TPRS storytelling is hard to learn and many people give up on it within weeks or months of trying it.
2. Most students don't know how to interact with their teachers in class and must be trained using more simple comprehensible input strategies before trying to do stories.
3. The term "story" has been misused and misapplied for so many years that it is largely misunderstood by most teachers. These teachers' careers might benefit greatly from the use of stories, if only comprehensible input was rightly understood.
4. The unintentional misrepresentation of Blaine Ray's original vision by so many teachers requires that we now reframe storytelling in terms of what it has now become, which is so much more than stories, and which we label now not as TPRS but as Teaching with Comprehensible Input.
5. Training has been insufficient. It is folly to ask teachers to attend a summer training in the area of comprehension based instruction and then go in and make the bucking bronco of comprehension based teaching work in their classrooms in the fall.

Strategies that simplify and make comprehensible input instruction work for you can be found in these pages. After you read and practice the strategies found in this book, you will be able to do CI instruction, including stories, in your classroom, with confidence and even joy.

# Overview

When students interact with a book or computer program to learn a language, only a very small percentage of students demonstrate gains. Even in those few students, the gains reflect mere learning and memorization, not real acquisition. Students trained in this old way exhibit spoken and written language that is stilted, labored and inauthentic.

Unbelievably, there are still teachers who preach memorization in the language classroom. A teacher recently wrote an email to me about an experience she had in a summer training:

“I’m at a standards based unit world language conference and the presenter has been telling us about the importance of memorization. Even the guy next to me who is against TPRS was shocked. I’ve already thrown into the discussion the whole language acquisition vs. learning piece, but she insists that memorization is critical when starting to learn a language in middle school. The presenter has been on the board of ACTFL.”

This position is unconscionable. It is false and aligns with no research whatsoever. There is much false information out there against which we must guard ourselves, information fronted by “experts” who in fact represent the interests of the textbook companies which remunerate them handsomely. Rome is now officially burning for those so-called experts who have clouded the vision of so many teachers for so long.

Those of us who already know that we want to teach using comprehensible input, and thus align with current best practices in foreign language education, face a decision. Do we go against the odds and try in a determined way to make comprehensible input work in our classrooms, or do we fold and go back to the old ways of doing things that we know don’t work?

On one side at the extreme end there are those who think that immersion in *incomprehensible* input can work, and at the other extreme end there are those who still think that we can learn a language by memorizing forms of verbs on sheets of paper.

The arguments presented by both sides are specious. Immersion in incomprehensible input doesn’t work (Rosetta Stone proves it) and the old traditional 20<sup>th</sup> century textbook-based approach still used in most American universities and secondary schools doesn’t work either – all it does is shame kids into making them believe that they cannot learn a language.

Is there a middle ground to be found somewhere away from all the insanity, somewhere we can meet our secondary school kids and rock the house with them in the target language? Is there something we can do so that our jobs are actually fun and so that our kids really learn? What can we do to make our students want to come to class and stay in our language programs no matter what misperceptions they have been given about their language learning ability?

Everything in this book is based on the premise that acquisition of a language is a deeply human thing, and, as in all things human, right adjustment to others in the classroom must define everything. Students must be trained to behave socially in the foreign language classroom, and so must the teacher, because we learn languages in social settings.

We now require teaching strategies that address *how we can interact* with our students in the target language in our classrooms. If we are to become successful with retooling our instruction over to comprehension-based instruction, we must endeavor to cultivate a feeling of happiness and mental health in our classrooms via these strategies. This is not something that textbooks or computer programs can do.

Using comprehensible input to teach a language is not a method – it’s a process. It’s not math. It doesn’t involve reasoning. It involves much more of the unconscious mind than teachers who stress grammar want to admit, because they don’t know. Students learn language because they want to. It has nothing to do with thinking.

Because comprehension based instruction is a process and not a method, students can be truly involved, and the instructor is able to go into class with much less preparation and a much lighter agenda. Each lesson creates itself anew each day. Emotional chasms between students and teachers disappear and it all becomes fun as the kids learn to focus on the message and not the words. This frees teachers up to spend more time relaxing and not be consumed by their jobs.

The greatest of all the many benefits of comprehension based instruction is not the massive proven gains that we bring to students, gains that are beginning to attract attention worldwide, but that language teachers do not become victims of teacher burnout and also that the precious time of their students is not wasted in futility.

At the time of this writing, people are finally rallying behind the crucial but largely ignored ACTFL Three Modes of Communication and their 90% Use Position Statement. Standards Based Grading actually can mean something now. The Communication standard is taking its rightful dominant place in language classes across the country. It’s all becoming more human, and a lot more fun!

Where is the research supporting the use of the book and computers and videos and mixing in large doses of explanatory English? There isn’t any. And who even has the money to purchase such materials anymore? Who even *wants* to continue to use English in their classrooms? It is assumed that we teach our languages because we love them, so why not use them in class?

Suddenly, the job security of a teacher, not to mention her mental health, depends on her learning how to get students to focus on the language as a whole and not just in pieces in the left hemisphere of their brain. When that happens in a classroom, when the student is focused on the *meaning of words in context* and *not just on individual words in lists*, etc. the language can actually be acquired.

Perhaps the greatest barrier currently facing the teacher investigating comprehensible input is a failure to

appreciate the depth of the statement that we learn languages unconsciously. That is what keeps the illusion going – conventional teachers miss the entire point when they fail to fully grasp that languages are acquired without relying on the analytical participation of the conscious mind.

Some language teachers who are aware of the power of comprehensible input think that they can throw little bits of comprehension based instruction into their predominantly conscious analysis of the language. This also is a mistake. It brings the same gains a yoga student would get by merely reading a book on the various yogic postures instead of actually doing them.

No wonder traditional teachers are skeptical about this new and refreshing way of teaching – it blows up what they do!

I have seen Dr. Krashen's ideas work in my classroom in ways I could never have imagined since I began working with comprehensible input fifteen years ago. After twenty-four years of reaching just a few smart kids as an AP French Language and Literature teacher before that, I now reach almost all of my students in ways I could only dream of before.

# Acknowledgements

It would be impossible for me to have stayed in teaching without the help and guidance of Susan Gross. She is now retired, but still involved, so if you get a chance to get to a workshop, don't miss the opportunity. Susan saved my career as a language teacher.

Thank you also to Diana Noonan, Coordinator of World Languages in Denver Public Schools. When Diana took over in DPS, only 2 or 3 among the 100 DPS WL teachers were even experimenting with comprehension-based instruction. Now, ten years later, over 80 teachers base their instruction on comprehensible input. Those who don't are retiring or leaving the district, if they can find a job, because most DPS administrators now require comprehensible input backgrounds in their new WL hires.

I would also like to thank the story script writer from Maine, Anne Matava. Anne has provided us with countless direct pathways into the minds of teenagers in the form of story scripts that can grow wings and fly in class in sometimes sensational ways. Anne's stories have more than a sense of humor; they also have heart and magic.

All of the material in this book is of my own creation except the following:

1. The blockbuster classroom management tool that is the Interpersonal Skills Rubric, which represents teamwork by me, Robert Harrell in Los Angeles, Jen Schongalla in New Hampshire and Annick Chen here in Denver. Thank you Robert and Jen and Annick.
2. The basic skills described herein are from Blaine Ray, as is the information on the concept of Read and Discuss. I express my deepest appreciation to Blaine for all he has done for language teachers around the world. For us in the field of comprehension-based instruction, Blaine invented the formula for Coca Cola in the form of the Three Steps of TPRS.
3. I learned from Karen Rowan that free writes were adapted by Blaine and incorporated into TPRS after research by Adele McGowan Gilhooly from CUNY.
4. I borrowed Dictée from the French educational system because I knew it would be of immense help in my comprehension-based classroom and I was right.

A few of the ideas in this book were included in earlier writings. They are included here again because they are so important. They, notably the classic Circling with Balls strategy, have stood the test of time in helping teachers navigate the initial channels that lead out to the vast sea of comprehension based instruction. Likewise, the many newer strategies presented here have been proven to work via daily testing and development and refining by the hundreds of passionate teachers who work with me as members of my online Professional Learning Community. I love them and thank them for their courage.

# SECTION ONE:

## Fourteen Skills

### Skill #1 - Circling:

Students become strongly engaged when you get enough *repetitions in context* on the words you are trying to teach them, because then they understand. There is a strong link between student engagement and good circling. In the early stages of learning this skill, you will probably refer frequently to your circling poster, which you can put up in the back of your room until you are ready to circle on your own, first in the following mechanical way:

Statement

Question

Either/or

Negative

*Optional are:*

Throw In

Ask a detail

Who

What

When

Where

Why

An example of circling:

Statement: “Class, there is a boy!” (ohh!)

Question: “Class, is there a boy?” (yes) You add: “That’s correct, class, there is a boy.”

Either/Or: “Class, is there a boy or a girl?” (boy) You add: “That’s correct, class, there is a boy.”

Negative: “Is there a girl?” (no) You add: “That’s correct, class, there is not a girl. There is a boy.

Throw In: “Is there a monkey?” (no) You add: “That’s correct, class, there is not a monkey. There is a boy.”

What: “Class, what is there?” (boy) You add: “That’s correct, class, there is a boy.”

Who: Class, what is the boy’s name? (David) You add: “That’s correct, class, the boy’s name is David.”

If it is true that listening to comprehensible input is the pre-eminent focus of all foreign language instruction, *circling is the pre-eminent feature of comprehensible input*. The astounding results gained by students trained with comprehensible input would be impossible without some form of circling, or repetition in context.

The focus of circling in each sentence is on the part of the sentence that is new to the students. When you say the part of the sentence that is new to them, you can even highlight it with an increase in sound and change of inflection in your voice.

A single thought must be in the forefront of the instructor’s mind when circling: the word or structure that you want the students to know must be repeated and repeated again *in each successive utterance*. If you leave the targeted structure out of the sentence, you are not circling.

Some instructors focus more on the circling than on the structure, thinking that there must be a “right” way to circle. Circling is not a formula to be blindly followed. Rather, general repetitive questioning that accentuates and repeats the structure to be learned is proper circling. The quickest way to lose a class is to circle mechanically.

By focusing less on the circling itself as a formula and more on the structure being circled, the structure quickly becomes comprehensible to the students. It then becomes instantly recognizable to the students when it occurs later in more complicated language settings.

## Check for Understanding When Circling

Always check students' eyes for what they are *understanding*. If your students look as if they do not understand, it is because they do not. Go back to the beginning of the pattern, slow down, circle more deliberately, and stay in touch with what is happening with all of your students.

## Circling All Three Parts of the Sentence

It is possible to get ten or more questions from one sentence by circling all three parts of the sentence. If the structure that you want to teach is:

*avait l'intention de* (intended to)

I might ask Jesse if he intended to drink some milk yesterday. I could care less if he intended to do that or not, but I want to teach the structure, so I act interested. If he nods his head yes, I have the green light to go ahead and start circling, so I first make the statement:

“Class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday!” (ohh!)

Then I ask the question:

“Class, did Jesse intend to drink some milk yesterday?” (yes)

And then I continue on as per the pattern above. *I have the option of circling either the subject, the verb, or the object.* Most teachers for some reason only circle the object. They should focus their circling on the subject and verb as well, to keep things mixed up and therefore unpredictable and therefore more interesting.

A template for circling the subject:

Statement: “Class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday!” (ohh!)

Question: “Class, did Jesse intend to drink some milk yesterday?” (yes) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

Either/Or: “Did Jesse or Eric intend to drink some milk yesterday?” (Jesse) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

Negative: “Did Eric intend to drink some milk yesterday?” (no) “That’s right, class, that’s absurd. Eric did not intend to drink some milk yesterday. Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

Question Word: “Class, who intended to drink some milk yesterday?” (Jesse) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

A template for circling the verb:

Statement: “Class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday!” (ohh!)

Question: “Class, did Jesse intend to drink some milk yesterday?” (yes) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

Either/Or: “Did Jesse intend to drink or eat some milk yesterday?” (drink) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

Negative: “Did Jesse intend to eat some milk yesterday?” (no) “That’s right, class, that’s absurd. Jesse did not intend to eat some milk yesterday. He intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

Question Word: “Class, what did Jesse intend to drink yesterday?” (drink some milk) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

A template for circling the object:

Statement: “Class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday!” (ohh!)

Question: “Class, did Jesse intend to drink some milk yesterday?” (yes) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

Either/Or: “Did Jesse intend to drink some milk or some tea yesterday?” (milk) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

Negative: “Did Jesse intend to drink some tea yesterday?” (no) “That’s right, class, that’s absurd. Jesse did not intend to drink some tea yesterday. He intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

Question Word: “Class, what did Jesse intend to drink yesterday?” (milk) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

It is not intended that you circle all the possibilities above in the order given above. That is mechanical circling, and is given above as merely a set of circling training wheels, to be discarded when the time is right. Practice with the training wheels on first, so you don't get bruised. Know that when the wheels are off (when you can circle randomly and not lose your students), your overall instruction will take off in the real way, just as riding a bicycle with the training wheels off allows you enjoy the ride much more.

You have mastered this aspect of the skill when you can mix up your questions and circle at will in random order without glancing at the chart.

### Adding in Details

Let's review the steps of circling, because they are so important:

Statement

Question

Either/or

Negative

*Optional are:*

Throw In

Ask a detail

Who

What

When

Where

Why

If Mark ran, the instructor can ask the class:

Statement: Mark ran! (ohh!)

Question: Class, did Mark run? (yes) That's correct class. Mark ran.

Either/Or: Did Mark or Ryan run? (Mark) That's correct class. Mark ran.

Negative: Did Ryan run? (no) Correct class, Ryan did not run. Mark ran.

Throw In: Did Eric run? (no) Correct class, Ryan did not run. Mark ran.

Now here we can add in a detail. You could tell the class a “secret” (explained later) that Mark ran *quickly*:

Class, did Mark run quickly?

You can see how your adding just this one simple detail *greatly increases the number of questions* you can now ask. With this addition of a single word into the circling, you can use Point and Pause (explained later) to ask if Mark ran quickly or slowly or to the left or to the right or up the hill or down the hill, etc.

But be very careful when you add in such details at the very beginning of the year. Make sure that the students are ready for new sounds that are unfamiliar to them. Wait to add new language in. Asking if Mark ran quickly, for you as a speaker of the language, is only a simple detail, but to the average student it is a detail of immense auditory complexity.

### Circling Vortex Image

Here is one way to look at circling:

Imagine a vortex/funnel cloud to which, with each next completed circle of the vortex, you can add a detail. You start at the top with the simple original sentence and then begin circling down through the statement, the question, the either/or question and the negative question, and then start adding in details.

Soon, you reach a point where the details become too numerous. There is no room in the sentence for any more details. Arriving at this point of saturation signals the end of the circling possibilities for that particular sentence and you now know that it's time to move on to another set of questions. In this way stories are built.

Blaine Ray is the inventor of this vortex/funnel cloud image. Blaine explained to me that this is how he conceives of circling in a story. Later, when you are doing stories, you will learn that the vortex image applies as well to groups of sentences. They, too, can get saturated. When that happens, you just *add in a new character or event* to the growing and expanding discussion you are having with your students.

With that new character or event, whatever you are talking about will go off in a different direction. It is the job of the teacher to allow the story to develop in this way, but to never stop using the original two or three structures associated with the story. Those structures, and nothing else, are what you are trying to teach via all your circling in any particular lesson.

Don't forget that in this vortex work you always have options about what part of the sentence to circle, as explained earlier. If you are trying to teach the verb "sketches" (the purpose of circling is to teach targeted vocabulary), then, as long as you include the target structure in each sentence, you may wish to start by circling the subject of your sentence:

Statement: "Class, Jerome sketches!" (ohh!)

Question: "Class, does Jerome sketch?" (yes)

Either/Or: "Class, does Jerome or Micky Mouse sketch?" (Jerome) "That's correct, class, Jerome sketches."

Negative: "Class, does Mickey Mouse sketch? (no) "Correct, class, Mickey Mouse doesn't sketch, Jerome sketches." (ohh!)

Question Word: "Class, who sketches?" (Jerome)

etc.

Or you may wish to circle the verb:

Statement: "Class, Jerome sketches!" (ohh!)

Question: "Does Jerome sketch?" (yes)

Either/Or: "Does Jerome sketch or sleep?" (sketch)

Negative: "Does Jerome sleep?" (no)

“That’s right, class, Jerome doesn’t sleep. Jerome sketches!” (ohh!)

Throw In: “Class, does Jerome vomit?” (no)

“No, class! Jerome doesn’t vomit! He sketches!”

Question Word: “Class, what does Jerome sketch?”

etc.

(Since there is no object in this sentence, we would leave our third option out.)

In this example, the last sentence invites a detail from the class – “What does Jerome sketch?” At this point, you can encourage cute answers in the target language from the class. In doing this, you are not committing yourself to anything more than adding one detail to your original sentence, but you can add more if there is room in the vortex (i.e. if the students aren’t saturated with the circling yet).

It is a good idea at this point to make sure that your students are comfortable with and like that detail before accepting it. Once you accept it, keep circling it until you are sure that the students understand it. Don’t add, in rapid fire, another and yet another detail. Unlike real funnel clouds, circling vortexes are slow moving to allow for full comprehension by your students!

Don’t forget that you can bail out at any time. Sense what is happening. If you sense that your students are tuning out, go to something else: another student, another sentence, a brain break, one of the bail out moves listed in this book, etc.

Learn to follow and bolster the flow of a discussion without knowing where it may be going. Keep repeating your target structures while doing so. Let chance into the equation. Learn to respond intuitively and fluidly to what is happening in your classroom. Always stay on your target structures.

Even after circling and adding details to even just one sentence, you will have shared a lot of *understandable* language with your kids. They will have understood and responded with one word answers to lots of sentences, which will all have been generated down through the vortex from just a single sentence.

In time, you will find more and more cute little details merging into and transforming the sentences you started working with. This will signal a gain in the confidence of your students that they are getting better and better at playing what Blaine calls the “game” of adding cute answers into the conversation. Circling and adding in details is an organic process, and takes different forms in each class you teach.

The sentences will become cute and personalized and funny if the students have been trained in what it means to

provide cute answers into the classroom process as per the Classroom Rules. This way of teaching assumes that students were made to provide cute answers and laugh at how clever they are.

Each time you act astonished at how clever they are, your students offer even more cute answers. In a flash, once they know what their job is in the game, they become masters of transferring your old boring teacher questions into marvelous new things. Of course, you let them think that they are the ones doing that.

Your students' cute answers bring humor and trust to the process, and strong human bonds are built between the teacher and her students.

When you see interesting discussion with lots of details being generated from just a few sentences in this way, you begin to see the alchemy of this way of teaching, without ever having to even do any strategies or PQA or stories. Just circling is enough to make this method work in your classroom!

### Problems Arise With Too Much Circling

We must know that this circling vortex image is merely a template, something to work from, to riff on. As mentioned earlier, if we were to actually follow it by circling our way down through all its possible layers, we would bore our students and our classes would not work.

The vortex is more a theme to which we provide variations. If our class clearly grasps the target structure that we are trying to teach after three rotations around the vortex, our adding in three more would be too much.

To demonstrate the truth of that statement, here is an example of taking the circling too far:

Rotation #1:

Statement: "Class, James works!" (ohh!)

Question: "Class, does James work?" (yes!)

Either/Or: "Class, does James work or play?" (*work*)

Negative: "Class, does James play?" (*no*) "That is correct, class, James doesn't play, he works." (*ohh!*)

Throw In: “Class does James run?” (*no*) “Correct, class, James doesn’t run, he works.” (*ohh!*)

Here is where we would add in the first detail to complete the first rotation around the vortex:

Add a detail: “Class, *where* does James work?” (various cute suggestions are offered and the teacher ends up accepting *Burger King*)

With this adding of the detail about where James works, the teacher faces a decision to either start another rotation or to leave it and add another sentence with another target structure in it, or, if it is a story, to add in another event or character, as mentioned earlier. Whether you add in a) another sentence with another target structure or b) a new character or event depends on whether you are doing PQA or a story. This will all become clear as you get deeper into this work.

The mistake would come if everyone in the class first responded with strong choral responses (the words in parentheses above) but those strong choral responses started to fade and, failing to recognize that, the teacher would head off into another rotation of what is essentially the same information:

Rotation #2:

Statement: “Class, James works at Burger King!” (*ohh!*)

Question: “Class, does James work at Burger King?” (*yes*)

Either/Or: “Statement Class, does James work at Burger King or does Barry work at Burger King?” (*James*)  
“That’s correct, class, James works at Burger King!” (*ohh!*)

Negative: “Class, does Barry work at Burger King?” (*no*)

Throw In: “Class, does Antoine work at Burger King?” (*no*) “That’s right class, Antoine doesn’t work at Burger King; James works at Burger King.” (*ohh!*)

By now the students are getting tired of hearing the same verb all the time in class. There is no interest being generated, and this is only the second rotation around the vortex. Asking for a detail at the end of this second rotation around the vortex would be a mistake. The structure has already been circled enough, the kids get it, and they want something new. To take it one more level down to a third rotation would just be too much:

Rotation #3:

“Class, *with whom* does James work at Burger King?” (various cute suggestions and the teacher ends up accepting the Ghost of George Washington, a character from a story done earlier in the year in that class)

Statement: “Class, James works at Burger King with the Ghost of George Washington!” (ohh!)

Question: “Class, does James work at Burger King with the Ghost of George Washington?” (yes)

Either/Or: “Statement Class, does James work at Burger King with the Ghost of George Washington or does Barry work at Burger King with the Ghost of George Washington?” (James) “That’s correct, class, James works at Burger King with the Ghost of George Washington!” (ohh!)

Negative: “Class, does Barry work at Burger King with the Ghost of George Washington?” (no)

Throw In: “Class, does Antoine work at Burger King with the Ghost of Thomas Jefferson?” (no) “That’s right class, Antoine doesn’t work at Burger King with the Ghost of Thomas Jefferson; James works at Burger King Ghost of George Washington.” (ohh!)

By now the students are getting dismally tired of hearing the same verb all the time in class. There is no interest being generated, and this is only the third rotation around the vortex! The vortex has bottomed out after only three rotations, and the instructor must move on to another structure or event or new character, anything to start a new circling vortex with a new verb.

One further note of explanation here: this entire process of going around the vortex and adding details at the end of each rotation is also called “parking” in TPRS. It is the same thing as the vortex image, which could very well be a parking garage in which the teacher drives around until the car arrives at the next ramp down. To gain access to the next lower level a ticket is needed – the detail serves as the ticket to move the gate up so the car can move on down to the next level of the parking garage.

Mark Mallaney in Denver Public Schools told me that the vortex image is what brought him clarity in circling. It is an excellent image to convey the idea and how circling works mechanically. As long as it is not overdone, and as long as the teacher uses it as a template from which to work intuitively only, it is a useful image.

## Circling Protocols

When circling, certain protocols must be established immediately about what kind of comments are acceptable in response to your questions. *The student is always the star.* We must always keep in mind the fragile nature of the egos of most of our students, in spite of how they may behave in class.

Kids in secondary school are arguably in the most sensitive years of their lives. Therefore, if you are circling information about a certain student, and another student makes a comment about his real life girlfriend or some other personal bit of information that is private to the child, divert the discussion and caution the students about keeping things in the realm of the imagined.

Any comment that is made at the expense of someone must be refuted by the teacher in a lighthearted way in front of the class, but it must be made clear, even if a parent conference is necessary, that no such comments will be allowed.

Always keep comprehension-based discussion firmly in the realm of fun possibilities and odd ideas. Teach the class that attempts at humor at a classmate's expense will not be tolerated. If a student does not feel safe in your classroom, she cannot learn.

## Circling Sends Messages

By starting the first class of the year in the target language using circling, I send many messages to my students:

1. By slowly circling all the time in class, I send the message that slow circling will be the norm in my classroom all year. I also send the message that it is my job to make my message clear, and that all they have to do is sit back and listen and try.
2. By taking time to stop and laugh if something is funny, I send the message that we will laugh and enjoy each other in class.
3. By requiring that my students react every time I state something, I send the message that everything I say is totally fascinating to them, and that it is their job to make sure that I understand that they know that.
4. By clarifying meaning by writing but not speaking translations, I send the message that we will use English only *in written form* on the board as a basis for clarifying the meaning of words in class.
5. By featuring only the targeted words during class, I send the message that I know how hard it is for my students to keep the basic structures in their minds. The message sent is that I will not make my students feel as if they can't learn by my going out of bounds when I teach.

6. By praising them at every turn, I am sending the message that they will not be criticized on even the smallest level in my class this year, and that any hostile or controlling personality they may have brought with them into my class as protection won't be needed.
7. By making constant eye contact with each of my students, I send the message that I care if they are learning. By talking about *them*, doing so with joy and a sense of great interest, I send the message that they are very important to me.
8. By speaking French in such a simple and straightforward way on the first day of class, I build good will and ensure my students' success, thus insuring myself against the "October Collapse," which happens when the kids' gas tanks of good will that were full in August are empty because the teacher has insisted on teaching a simple and joyful thing in a complex and boring way to the wrong part of their brains.

### Circling Using Emotions

Sometimes I repeat the same exact circled question three or four times in a row using different emotions. One would think that this would bore the kids, but the kids can be fooled into focusing on the same sentence multiple times by my asking them questions in different ways using differently voiced emotions, including whispering.

*Emotions override meaning in languages*, and the students don't notice that the words are the same. This keeps interest up in the structure, resulting in more meaningful repetitions and thus greater acquisition. The effective language teacher will explore the role of emotions in their voice to convey meaning in their classroom.

### Parallel Sentences

Another way to create input that is meaningful to the students using circling is to add a parallel sentence to the one you are already circling. A parallel sentence is a sentence which has the same verbal core, but whose subject and object are different.

For example, if you are trying to teach *voudrait avoir*/would like to have, instead of circling just one sentence around that expression, you introduce a similar sentence about another sentence and circle both of them.

If your original sentence is:

*Classe, Jennie voudrait avoir une voiture! / Class, Jennie would like to have a car!*

You add another, parallel sentence into the circling:

Class, *Jennie* would like to have a car and Susannah would like to have a boat!

Who cares if Susannah really wants a boat or not? Adding this second parallel sentence expands the size of the circling “field” in which you are working. It instantly adds many more possible questions to your circling, because you can do more with two sentences than you can with one.

Creating parallel sentences and comparing and contrasting facts extends reps and all we have to do is remember to keep each sentence on “would like to have” instead of taking the discussion somewhere else by using other verbs. This is because the class will immediately become confused when you go out of bounds by dropping the target structure in that way. In circling the information changes but the structures always stay the same.

I consider this technique of bringing in a second sentence to mirror another one, and comparing and contrasting facts in general, to be excellent little tricks in comprehension based language instruction. You will feel immediately more relaxed when you have that extra sentence to ask other questions about. The effective language teacher will explore the use of parallel sentences to compare and contrast information in their classroom when circling.

### Weak Responses

Our students are always providing us with information. It is the job of the instructor to read that information properly. The minute we sense what Blaine calls a “weak response,” then that is the time to figure out what word they are weak on, do some circling on it to give them some reps on it, and then move on.

### Power of Circling

Alisa Shapiro has said:

“Circling incorporates all the other language embedded in the question, and helps gets those pieces/chunks acquired, too. This is particularly critical for novice/beginners. The circled questions include all kinds of morphology and syntax, plus students get tons of modeling of the phonetic system. The implicit instruction that gets in the way of prepositions/clause language, object pronouns, reflexive pronouns, etc. also gets laid in via circling.”

Alisa continues:

“I’ve noticed that I can get away with much less circling for my oldest/most experienced TCI group. I assume that’s because they’ve already acquired the ancillary language, and we’ve (hopefully) also accelerated their processors – so they can listen more effectively. Then we have tons of other ways to get the repetitions in, other than circling, and we can mix it up with PQA etc. sooner.”

In one middle school CI class in Denver Public Schools, I saw first year 6th graders in February require absolutely no circling. Most understood almost all of what their teacher said, which was proven by their tremendous amounts of unforced output.

However, that lack of need for circling in February was directly connected to a ton of directed, more mechanical, circling back in the fall. In that particular class as well, the students had done truly excessive amounts of TPR and verb slam work (both described later in this text) in the fall. Since the greatest need for circling is on verbs, and since the teacher had taught verbs so heavily for five months before, there was a lot less need for circling in the middle part of the year.

Over time, circling becomes intuitive and you will find that you won’t even have to remember to even think about circling once that happens. You will find yourself just asking the next logical question simply because you want to know the answer to it.

### Auditory Focus

Auditory focus is a unique quality of awareness of the language that we see in our students’ faces when we are circling well. It happens when we don’t leave a structure until we feel that the class has moved the information from their ears into their eyes. What does this mean?

Sometimes, when you say a word chunk, it goes into their ears, and, instead of going on with the discussion, you *wait until the sound goes all the way into their brains* and then shows up *visibly in their eyes*. Only until you have seen that recognition do you know that you can go on. Class works better when we circle while looking for auditory focus in our students.

James Hosler has said:

*...the concept of “auditory focus” fascinates me. I have been lucky to experience my students “getting it” in this way a few times now. [Looking for auditory focus in my students] is totally and radically and almost scandalously different than what it felt like teaching with grammar-based methods. It’s one of those things I could read a whole book about, even though I know it all comes down to a “gut feeling” and getting those structures to go “ka-thunk” ...*

## Skill #2 – SLOW:

Are you speaking slowly in your classes? Many people consider SLOW to be the most important skill in comprehension-based instruction. I agree.

Speaking too fast disempowers students. Speaking to your students at a slow pace indicates respect. When you speak slowly you acknowledge that you appreciate how hard it is for your students to understand the new and quite foreign language.

To quote Blaine Ray:

“The reason we have to go so slowly is that we can’t feel how hard it is. We have a feeling that the language is easy because that is our experience. By slowing down much more than we believe is necessary or possible, we are getting close to the best speed. We can only feel this by learning another language.”

Blaine implies two things here:

1. that the proper speed is going to feel awkward to us, and
2. that empathy is a necessary ingredient in delivering comprehensible input to a class. One must put oneself in the position of the learner, and feel how hopeless one can feel when one does not understand what is going on.

Much of the current training of new teachers reflects this idea. There are hours and hours at the national conferences in which novice teachers are asked to take classes in languages they don’t know. This truly opens their eyes to the importance of SLOW and to the emotional investment (rigor) needed from the student in the comprehensible input process.

One day I was watching my classes being taught by a teacher new to the method. She was working on circling and I was coaching her from the side of the room.

Being new to it, she went extremely slowly. The kids responded so beautifully, due to the excessive slowness. I felt the truth of SLOW at that moment. Those same kids didn’t respond to me like that because I had forgotten SLOW.

One student, whom I perceived as something of a jerk because he didn’t pay enough attention in class, and whom I had given up on as a barometer student, was really hanging in there with this particular student teacher and her slower circling.

I had to recognize that his problem was not in fact his but mine. His failure to understand in my class was

my problem. If comprehension based teachers could just get that one idea, their relationships with their jobs would change.

By slowly circling, this teacher was really getting some good teaching done. I watched in amazement at the power of the two things, circling and SLOW, when synchronized together in a natural flow of language.

To put it simply, when the kids are with you, you are going slowly enough. If your speech is too fast for even one student who is trying to learn (the barometer student), it is too fast.

I have learned through practice to speak in “chunks” of sound lasting three or four seconds. I have found that if I do not limit myself to that amount of time per utterance, I lose the kids. When I frame an image or an idea in these smaller “chunks” of sound, the kids understand me.

It is quite difficult to slow down in English, so why would we think it easy to do so when speaking to our students in the target language? SLOW requires strict self-discipline by us. The feeling should be of driving 10 miles an hour in a 45 mile an hour zone. If each word we say is comparable to a house in a row of houses, there should be a football field between each house and not just a few inches.

Many of us work very hard at mastering all the other skills involved in learning comprehension based instruction, but when we forget SLOW, we *miss the entire point* and *invalidate all our efforts* in learning the other skills. The other skills have no effect unless we go slowly!

If only one sentence could be repeated over and over and over in this book, it would be this one:

*...we must speak to our students at all times in a way that makes us feel as if we are putting very large pauses, pauses that seem as if they are up to four or five seconds long, between each word we say....*

In fact, I would suggest that one of the reasons for many of the failures in the American educational system is that teachers routinely speak to their students, in all subjects, using rates of words per minute that exceed the capacity of high school students, to understand them.

Students are always exactly where they are, and if we express something in three seconds, and they need four, it is up to us to slow our speech down to their level and not expect the reverse to magically happen.

We must develop compassion and empathy for what the student is experiencing. If we could develop and put into practice this empathy, we would derive results we could not have predicted or imagined.

The best TPRS/CI teachers are real pros at the skill of SLOW. Linda Li paces so slowly, and with such patience, that one cannot help but learn Mandarin by just being in the room! Hers is a perfect pace and her students seem to hang on every word she says.

Linda knows how to pause between words. That constant pausing effect allows her to actually think about things that are suggested. So, if something strikes her as funny, she takes the time in class to laugh. This slows the class down even more. Yet she never leaves the target language.

During those short pauses where laughter occurs, Linda is careful to let the class know who the funny suggestion came from. This builds the human element in the classroom up to an even greater extent and so we learn from Linda that SLOW plays a factor in building community in a classroom, further increasing classroom focus and management, and, with them, class enrollments.

Linda actually takes the time in class to laugh with her students. Linda's laughter has the effect of slowing down the class because it is a wonderful slow kind of laughter. It is honest laughter, and not only slows the class down but also provides a great tool for personalization because Linda's laughter is authentic and about the students. The class suggests things to her and it often strikes her as funny. Linda lets herself actually think about it and when she laughs for real they all laugh.

Linda doesn't say, "No, that isn't it, I'm looking for some other cute answer to my question." She considers everything her classes suggest to her, and the group grows immediately in trust and relaxation. Laughing at funny things at the right moment is an advanced skill in storytelling, and it happens more spontaneously when the teacher is teaching slowly in a relaxed way that focuses on the students.

*We should seek genuine laughter in our classrooms*, not only because true learning is fun, but also because of the enormous neurological benefits it has to the students and the teacher. Dr. Krashen has addressed that topic:

"The path of pleasure is the only path. The path of pain does not work for language acquisition."

Another way Linda Li slows her classes down is to whisper some of the input to her students. She uses whispering in the same way professional storytellers do.

Can one go too slowly? In one class, I asked the students if I was going slowly enough (I knew I was), and one student said, "Mr. Slavic, do you know how when you ride a bike, if you go too slowly, you fall off? That's what this is like!"

But that was a superstar fast processor who said that. So I asked her to understand that people process at different speeds and that I needed to reach all the students in my room, not just the fast processors like her. She understood and did not learn any less because I was speaking so slowly.

In fact, we are beginning to think that she probably learned more but that is not the subject of this discussion. Suffice to say that it is best to err on the side of caution by staying in constant contact with your slowest processor; the faster processors will be just fine – they will definitely benefit from the slower pace and must be told to just continue listening and trust that to be true. If those fast processors don't like it, they can go read a book in the TL in the back of the room.

It seems like a simple thing to go slowly, but it is not. In fact, for most of us, it has proven to be nearly impossible. Nobody ever goes slowly enough. Moreover, it seems that most teachers, no matter how much experience they have, repeatedly forget this skill after even a few days. So to say that SLOW requires constant vigilance is a tremendous understatement.

If the *word we are using* is on the board or on a poster, we can guide our students to it until they *find* it. We help them do that with a laser pointer. We must give the student the time to process what they see before moving on. If the word is not visible in the room, we must still make sure that they understand it by simply making eye contact with them and observing what we see.

At the end of the first year, and if the students stay with you in their second and third and fourth years (they will because they can understand you), the gains curve over the four years will be exponential, as acquired words add up like falling snow and students in level 3 show up (typically) at Intermediate Low and very often higher on the ACTFL proficiency scale after just three years, without much effort and often without forced homework, because you are using your classroom instructional minutes so effectively.

Very often, gifted kids who come to class and learn how to listen in the real way (listening is the key to all of this work) score at Intermediate Low after level 2, as long as the teacher has indeed stayed in the target language at least over 95% of the time during those two years. That point kind of shoots down any argument against comprehensible input.

One student, admittedly something of a genius but with no prior background, scored a 4 on the AP French exam at the end of level 2, with some extra private coaching in the months before the exam. If you are an AP language teacher new to comprehension based instruction, then that is encouraging news.

I was once demonstrating Look and Discuss (described later in this text) with a French 3 class because the picture was still up from a previous French 1 class. (I often use the same material for all my classes because I don't enjoy planning classes and see no need to, which is a testimony to the power of the comprehensible input approach.) Since I had just been speaking very slowly to that beginning class, and possibly since an administrator had just slinked in just as I was starting to talk about the picture for a second time, I began to speak very slowly to my French 3 class about the picture, to make sure I got class buy-in.

I was totally surprised when that so-called advanced class got totally involved in the very simple (in my mind) French I level speech that I was presenting to them. I thought, these are advanced students, why would they respond in such a positive way to such simple and slow language? I thought that they would bristle at my slow pace.

What had happened? It could have been the presence of the observer (comprehension trained kids always seem to be wanting to show off their talent to people who come into the classroom), but I sensed it was not, because I had never seen those students react in this way whenever we had been observed in the past. Surely, something was going on to explain the strong positive reaction of the class to the discussion.

I believe it was that these advanced students were *happy to understand* so clearly because of how slow I was speaking. We talk so often about what *we* are going through in this method, but we rarely talk about what the students are experiencing. Either they understand or they don't. If they do, the class is a success to them and they like it. If they don't, it is a scary failure.

My past training as a teacher included the idea that I should always be challenging my students, always pushing them to the next level, and so in upper level classes that took the form of speaking faster than I should. Of course, they did what all students do in situations when they don't understand – they lie about it and pretend that they do understand, and that creates distance.

The truth is that at that point, my level 3 students had only a few hundred hours of comprehensible input under their belts in their young careers as students of French. People need thousands of hours to be able to easily understand the language, so why should I have differentiated in speed and vocabulary choice between a level 1 class and a level 3 class? That class was an eye-opener for me about how important it is to speak clearly and slowly to even so-called advanced students, because in fact they are not advanced at all. Relative to the time they need, they are still babies.

Jim Tripp (author of *Tripp's Scripts*) had this to say about SLOW in a follow up discussion to an NTPRS conference in Chicago:

*... [the importance of SLOW] became obvious to me while learning Tamil and Gaelic and Turkish. I don't even mean SLOW as in speed of speech necessarily, though that is surely part of it. But also important to me was the speed at which new structures were introduced. If the teacher put up too many words on the board too quickly I got nervous. I also got nervous if I felt that the teacher was going to leave the target structures too quickly and not stick with them for as long as I needed in order to feel comfortable with them. I remember that I was most comfortable when one teacher stayed on "limpia" (cleans) for ten minutes straight without even saying another single word, but saying it in varied and interesting contexts. That took skill and courage....*

SLOW, then, is not just about speaking slowly but also about keeping the lesson uncluttered. If we write a target structure on the board we should *work with it and nothing else* for as long as it takes us to feel in our students that "kathunk" of recognition each time we say it.

The skill of waiting to "feel" that our students are comfortable with a certain structure is very rarely seen in comprehension based instruction. Sadly, when our comprehension based students become confused by too much information delivered too fast, the method is perceived as ineffective due to a simple failure on the part of the teacher to *just slow down*.

Back to Linda Li. If she is in fact the only TPRS/CI teacher who has truly mastered the skill of SLOW (not just my opinion but one shared by a lot of people), perhaps we should investigate what she does a little more closely.

Linda's Mandarin sessions at national conferences are always filled to capacity and often include Dr. Krashen in

the audience. Linda often includes Dr. Krashen in her stories. The two masters have a little routine worked out where Linda creates a mini story (explained later) in Mandarin around Dr. Krashen’s ubiquitous cup of coffee:

*has*

*looks*

*wants*

*gives*

[ed. note: Linda doesn’t work from a script when doing this demo. If she did, this is what it might look like, as taken from my notes at various conferences when she has done this story with Dr. Krashen. It is certainly what the reading created from the story would look like]:

Dr. Krashen has coffee. Marie (person in the class) looks at Dr. Krashen. Marie wants coffee. Dr. Krashen gives Marie coffee.

(Personally, I think that four is too many verbs for a first day class in Mandarin Chinese, but Linda pulls it off primarily because she spends the entire one and one half hour long session getting personalized reps on only the four sentences above.)

The story begins with Dr. Krashen sitting there with his coffee.

Dr. Krashen has coffee. [ed. note: you could just give a student a Coke or something to make this work in your classroom.]

Linda is already in slow motion with a very happy, almost mischievous look on her face – one that signals the class that fun and laughter are going to be a part of the instruction. Targeting the first verb, she goes around the room asking questions like “Who has coffee?” etc.

Staying perfectly in bounds, Linda continues circling that first sentence. Everybody glances back and forth from her over to Dr. Krashen who just sits there with a contented look on his face holding a big cup of coffee from Starbucks. Linda, milking the image for repetitions, doesn’t rush to the next sentence. She hangs out with the image of Dr. Krashen sitting there. He basks in the attention.

People smile. They cannot help it. Something in the way Linda treats the image brings a kind of lightheartedness of instruction that we sometimes see in CI teachers. It’s not that funny; it’s just a man holding a cup of coffee. But the people continue to smile throughout the class. It’s because the teacher is happy about someone drinking coffee.

That is what sets Linda apart from the many of us – she takes joy in simple things while teaching. She is not so serious about her teaching, she’s not in a hurry to go anywhere with the story, and this validates something Dr. Krashen himself has said that is most important for all of us to keep in mind when we teach:

*...in literacy and language development only the path of pleasure works. Those who are committed to increasing student suffering (for whatever reason) or who are committed to self-flagellation, will be disappointed in the research results. The research, in my view, points strongly in the direction of the Pleasure Hypothesis: What is good for language development and literacy development is perceived to be pleasant by the acquirer and the teacher....* (Pleasure Reading, Young Learners SIG Spring Issue, 2006)

So the source of Linda's CI magic is found in her sense of pleasure in teaching, in her appreciation of others and in the effortlessness that she brings to her teaching. Each quality has its foundations in SLOW. Without the slow speed of the instruction, the pleasure for the teacher and the students will not be there because their sense of being in touch with what is going on will be weak, the affective filter will rise, and the class will get clunky. That is how important SLOW is!

To repeat, and we need to repeat it because it is the single most important point of all in using stories to teach languages: it is in Linda's sense of play and deep appreciation of simple things in a period of slowed down time that feels pleasurable to the members of the group that the language gains lie, even if the topic for over an hour is simply that of a man drinking a cup of coffee.

Having gotten sufficient reps on the first verb, sensing that the class is ready to move on, Linda starts doing the same process with the second sentence:

Marie looks at Dr. Krashen.

She circles this second sentence in the same slow and happy way as the first. As she does this, she turns and points to a pre-prepared posted list of all the words (question words, the word "has," the word "coffee," etc.) that she will use in the story. Each word of each sentence is thus made comprehensible with the laser pointer.

Linda is sure to bring others into the conversation. Do they have coffee? Who has coffee? What does Dr. Krashen have? Does (student in the class) have coffee or does Dr. Krashen have coffee? The class is focused on the message; Linda is focused on the verb. It doesn't occur to her to go out of bounds because she is so focused on getting reps on the verb.

Next, when it is time to circle the next statement, having gotten to the bottom of the "has" and "looks" vortexes, we go to the third structure "wants." As discussed, when and how to do this is something we sense/feel rather than something we decide intellectually. There is no mechanically correct time to stop circling one structure and start circling another – we just know it's time to move on and circle something else.

Marie wants coffee.

Linda circles that for a long time, but her pleasant demeanor, again, is what brings the interest in a way that one must see to fully appreciate. Since it is Mandarin, every single person in the group – except Dr. Krashen, who has

done this scene with Linda many times over the years – is inwardly yelling “thank you” for each repetition.

It’s true - we *cannot get enough reps* on the one word being circled. All teachers should be required to experience the difficulty of learning a language in this way when the teacher goes too fast without getting enough repetitions. It will make them go more slowly and get more reps on the targets.

Thus, we can say that Linda Li, by creating a pleasurable environment via slow and extremely simple sentences (Dr. Krashen has coffee, Marie looks at Dr. Krashen, Marie wants coffee.) is showing us slow simplicity that is both natural and enjoyable for those in her classes, as per:

*...language acquisition is a natural and enjoyable process for anyone as long as the right kind of input is provided (Krashen, 1985)....*

Once Linda had someone call her out of the room on some pretext and asked a fluent Mandarin speaker from a Chinese university who was already in the class to continue on with the same story. In on the joke, this teacher spoke to the group so fast that the group went into a state of mild shock.

True of most students, for some reason the group of teachers felt as if *they* were supposed to be able to understand and that if they didn’t it was their fault and not that of the teacher. Students really don’t know any better; they think it’s their fault when they don’t understand. They then naturally assume that they are just not good at languages.

The history of language learning is littered with students who have quit their language learning careers far too early because ignorant teachers confused them daily in almost every school building in America, without taking responsibility for their own role in creating the confusion.

We should go five to ten times slower than we think we should, so that it hurts, and then we probably need to slow down some more. There is no reason to even begin to master comprehensible input based instruction unless one makes a firm commitment to try, at least, to teach as slowly as Linda Li.

Next:

Dr. Krashen gives Marie coffee.

The coffee goes to Marie’s hand via the group, which now has ownership in what is going on. Linda has spun a web of connectedness among the group with the coffee. She is now narrating a scene with actors. A series of simple images is in the process of being created in a very slow and very enjoyable way. That’s all there is to this work.

Once Marie has the coffee in her hand we experience a ton of repetitions on “gives.” As we hear the previous verbs (absorbed unconsciously while focusing on the story), we *still cannot hear enough reps* on them, and as we approach the end of the session our brains are as totally loaded up with new information as they can be. Ten reps?

Not enough. One hundred? It's a start. That's how the brain works!

At this point, all the verbs and all the other little words that have come to us as attachments that we weren't aware of in the CI flow that Linda has given us are still on the desktop of our brains.

After we leave the class, we will notice a “din” of language in our minds. This is the “din in the head” proposed by Dr. Elizabeth Barber and Dr. Krashen (Barber 1980; Krashen 1981). The four verbs in Mandarin Chinese will jump like bandits from our unconscious minds into our conscious minds for the next twenty four hours and there is nothing we can do to control it. That is the sound of a new language system being built. This din will come and go throughout the day and when we go to sleep it will all be arranged by the super computer that is the unconscious mind in a way that goes far beyond conscious understanding.

This dropping down into the hard drive and its processing during sleep is nothing short of a mystery. It is an infinitely complex language arrangement process that can only occur in the unconscious mind.

However, if the deeper mind is not given enough comprehensible input in the way we see when Linda teaches in this way, no language can be acquired.

That's it. Almost two hours have gone by in pleasant harmony, a harmony that defines Linda's own teaching style and that we would do well to try to emulate. There has not been a single word of English in this class except the visual translation input from the charts behind Linda. English translation has required less than 2% of the instructional minutes that Linda had available to her at the start of class, and even that was presented visually and not spoken.

So also should our own story scripts be simple enough to allow us to go slowly. We should never want to “finish the story.” That is not our students' need. It is better to finish only one sentence of a story in a class period than to try to finish the story. We are teaching language, not stories, which are merely vehicles to language.

Those of us who want to start the year with the best comprehensible input may want to consider using Linda's story above as our own first story, only with a Coke or something like that as suggested above. If we go slowly enough and enforce the rules at every turn, we will have a fantastic experience with trained kids who know and like each other, where interesting things are said, with 98% of the class happening in the target language, and that 1% or 2% clarification in L1 happening only visually as the teacher points to, does not say, the words in translation, with no L1 use from the kids at all.

We will thus learn to enjoy our jobs, and our students will effortlessly acquire, just by focusing on the message, because they want to.

### **Skill #3 – Staying in Bounds:**

In any comprehensible input classroom, the board or screen we instruct on should ideally have no new words on it (maybe one or two) at the end of each lesson. Why?

At the end of each class, we want to have introduced *sufficiently few* new structures (ideally, none) that our barometer student(s) – the student who wants to understand but process information more slowly than others in the room – will have had no trouble understanding us. He cannot do that if we add new random vocabulary in and ignore the target structures for that day during our lesson.

*If we introduce no new words into the lesson except the target structures, we will have 100% stayed in bounds.* That is the goal. However, if the board is cluttered with new words at the end of class, then we will have gone way out of bounds.

That may not be such a bad thing for us, but it is a disaster for the kids. The skill of Staying in Bounds, along with SLOW, is the most important of all the skills there are in this work of using comprehensible input in our CI/TPRS classrooms.

We simply cannot allow new words and word chunks to force their way into our classes. The students cannot handle them. Students are already busy trying to deal with the repetitions we are getting on the structures that we are working with that day. Those are the structures we are teaching, and not others.

Many teachers new to CI don't think that makes much sense. But if you spend 45 minutes repeating one structure in various contexts, saying it over 200 times, that is STILL not enough for the students. And have no doubts that attached to that one structure in all those sentences would be a host of smaller related contextual words, resulting in huge language gains.

How important is the point made in the last paragraph? It is important enough to say that if you go out of bounds, which is what allowing new unknown structures into the flow of the conversation is, you are basically sabotaging the entire class.

Put yourself in your students' position. New sounds are everywhere in class, and it is likely that they are being presented a bit too quickly, because of the great difficulty most of us have in going slowly enough. We need to target only our new structures for that class and make them clearly accessible to our students in everything we say.

We don't target stories. We don't target the overall discussion. We don't birdwalk around throwing in different structures because we feel like it. The discussion is there to allow us to feature the structures we are trying to teach. We don't target a generalized form of comprehensible input. Language is too big. We target only certain words or structures within the stories and the discussion and we repeat them with the intent of teaching only them throughout the class.

When you go out of bounds and when you overly use the Point and Pause skill to bring new unknown structures into the discussion, the kids will acquire neither the base targeted structures being introduced nor the new terms that worked their way into the conversation. Point and pause to the structures for that day! If you do not, you will find yourself being stared at by uncomprehending faces. You will be getting the "look" that reveals that your students simply do not understand.

Start simple and stay simple. It is better to just continuously repeat one sentence of comprehensible input in various forms that everyone understands than to try to deliver a generalized form of comprehensible input that they won't be able to grasp. The rule to always keep in mind is: never ask a question or make a statement without at least one of the target structures for that day in it.

Dr. Krashen's idea of non-targeted input may make sense in the theoretical world, but there is the question of available time. Most of us only have three or four hours per week with our students. How can we immerse our students in a sea of non-targeted input in that amount of time and expect real language gains?

Add to the problem of time the sea of unmotivated students who walk into our classrooms every day, and we can see that if we are to be successful in our work we must target and feature a very limited number of structures in each class that we teach.

### What Do I Want to Teach?

I find it very helpful to ask myself before each class, "What do I want to teach today?" or "What am I teaching today?" The answer should be some short chunk of words, or two or three chunks, and that's all for the whole class period.

Let's say I want to teach these structures:

*assis(e) en face de* – seated across from

*ressemble à* – looks like, resembles

*il ne faut pas* – you must not, one must not

*That's what I want to teach that day.* I don't want to teach a thematically organized list of words via a computer or book program with the latest bells and whistles. That just confuses everyone. I am not trying to package a product for my students to consume, because language acquisition cannot be packaged. I target only a few structures during the course of a class period because that's all my students can handle.

The nightmare is that, when students are not taught in this way, they have no results to show for their efforts, and they most likely end up hating the language and its culture, most having quit as soon as they satisfied whatever their requirement was for course credit.

What do I want to teach? I want to teach those structures. I want to stay in bounds.

## Rebar Image

A rebar (short for reinforcing bar) is a steel bar used in reinforced concrete structures to hold the concrete together. In that way, two rebar rods in a piece of concrete would be like the two verbs we use to hold a story together.

If we wanted to teach “is hungry” and “shares” we could write a simple script up to do that:

James is hungry, but he shares his oatmeal with Jenny.

Then, going through the process described above to make the story come alive in class, the verbs “is hungry” and “shares” form the rebar rods in the concrete floor of our story. The chunks of concrete that naturally adhere to the rods would be the rest of the words in the script. The success of the story would depend entirely on the strength of the rebar, which depends entirely on how many repetitions the students hear of them before (PQA), during (story) and after (reading) the process.

It cannot be stated enough that the speed at which the students can identify the verbs in the midst of all the other words in the story will determine their success in this work. The most important factor in mini stories is how many times the students have heard the verbs before the story is begun. Those repetitions determine the strength of the story.

If I repeat each structure over 100 times – by asking personalized questions to my students before starting the mini story, then the story will be, as it were, made of tempered, fired, very strong steel. I have noticed many times in regular stories that students absent for the PQA sessions on the verbs, when hearing just the story, do not understand the story as much as students who were present for the PQA.

All of this sounds simple enough. We pick a few verbs, tell the kids what they mean (establish meaning), get a bunch of repetitions on the targets by asking personalized questions to our students, then we organize them into what is basically a one sentence story through the process described above, and that’s it.

However, what happens if we don’t stay in bounds? What happens when we make the common mistake of adding too many new rocks/words to the concrete/story? Doing so overloads the rebar and the concrete fails – the story doesn’t work – because there are too many new words for the kids to understand in the story.

That is why we not only have to make the rebar strong via massive preparatory repetition of the target verbs (PQA), but we must also ideally use in the story only words that the students already know. By doing that we avoid the chances that the concrete (the story) will fail.

So we must keep three things in mind when setting up our mini stories:

## 1. SLOW

2. Getting repetitions on the target structures before starting the story.

3. Limiting the amount of new words (random chunks of concrete) allowed into the discussion when creating the story.

If that is true, then we must limit the use of the skill of Point and Pause (presenting new words, more rocks). Each time we present and translate a new word, it puts stress on both the rebar and on the concrete by adding, as it were, another rock to the concrete. The kids' minds can only bear so much weight.

Since we already speak the language, we cannot appreciate how hard the work we are asking our students to do is, unless we ourselves have tried to learn a new language before from a TPRS teacher in a workshop. How motivated and happy our classes are depends entirely on how many reps we get on the target structures prior to the story, on the speed of our speech, and the degree to which we stay in bounds.

This is in keeping with what Dr. Krashen says to do – make the process of learning a language a largely effortless, largely unconscious process. All that is required is that the language be presented in a way that the learner feels relaxed and capable – that is only the job of the comprehensible input teacher.

Meaning becomes clear within the context of chunks of sound, not of individual words. That is why we teach this way. The process of language acquisition is about the forest, the story, its meaning, and not in the little pieces of those things that make them up, the leaves on the tree or the chunks of concrete that make up the building.

### Ask Personalized Questions to Stay in Bounds

One of the best ways to guarantee that you stay in bounds with whatever target structures you have chosen to teach that day is to ask questions that are personalized to your kids. If you are trying to teach the verb “runs,” you can ask if one of your students runs, and where they run, with whom, etc. They can make up funny answers to make it more interesting. This is PQA, described in the next section of this book.

You can even have a student draw the images the students create of a student running with Ronald McDonald on the moon (see chapter on interactive whiteboards later in this text). You can use the picture to get even more reps on the verb. It's interesting to them because they made it up, and when kids think that they are directing the class, obviously the class will stay in bounds. Just don't let them ever ask the question, “How does one say?” It invites the use of English, which is the last thing we want in a comprehensible input class.

Later, when you start doing simple stories (described later in this book) you might even want to make students in your class into the main characters. This makes things more interesting to the kids, and why not? The kids can't wait to see who the next story is about!

## Mental Alarm

One way to prevent yourself from going out of bounds is to install a sort of internal “mental alarm system” which constantly monitors your word choices while teaching. If you are teaching “to read” and you have a little scene going where a person is reading and in the flow of the discussion you decide to say “Stop reading!” you must know before saying “stop” that the class *knows that verb*. If they are new to it, or if you get a “weak response,” your mental alarm would trip your mind before saying it and you wouldn’t say it. You would say something else.

This may seem like a minor strategy, but having a mental alarm system has saved me countless times from making the critical error of using words that my students don’t know. It happens in a flash. You are just about to say, “Stop reading!” to your actors but the mental alarm goes off and says, “They don’t know *stop!*” And so you avoid it, because you are not teaching “stop” but “reading.”

### Skill #4 – PQA:

In Step 1 of TPRS we tell our students what the word or structure means, and then we ask for a gesture to help us remember it. After that we move quickly into PQA (Personalized Questions and Answers) of the structure in order to set up the story by getting plenty of repetitions of the structure in the form of personalized, lighthearted discussion. After that comes the story (Step 2 of TPRS) and the reading (Step 3).

So PQA has three parts:

1. Establishing Meaning (1 min.)
2. Signing and Gesturing (just a few min.)
3. Personalized Questions and Answers - PQA (can go from one minute to an entire class period or more)

### Establishing Meaning

Here is how we do the first part of the three parts of PQA:

We present the word in L2 with its translation and say, “Class, \_\_\_\_\_ means\_\_\_\_\_.” Some teachers just point to the word in English to stay in the TL. That’s how simple establishing meaning is – it takes just a few seconds per structure you want to teach that day. You say and/or point to the written translation of the word on the board. It’s fast and easy and you’re done in about ten seconds.

When you establish meaning there is *no expansion or pontification* beyond telling or pointing to what it means. There are especially no comments whatsoever about grammar. Spare your students this waste of time. Just tell them what it means and move into signing and gesturing.

### Signing/Gesturing

This second part of PQA should never go longer than just a few minutes.

Signing and gesturing is just TPR, which is described in greater detail later in this book. It involves asking the class for a gesture for the word or structure you are teaching. To avoid speaking English, we can grab a sign that says “Show me!” in the target language. We hold it up so that all the students can see it. Using this process to ask for a gesture for the target structures helps us stay in the target language.

### Using Show Me Cards to Teach Indirect Object Pronouns

Whenever using the Show Me card to ask for a gesture, the teacher can use the other imperative forms as well. Instead of just saying the same “Montrez-moi/Show me ...” each day the teacher could say:

Stacey, show Jimmy. (the gesture).../ Show him.../ Show us.../ Show her.../ Show the class.../ Show the group.../ Show them.../ etc.

This gives varied short daily practice in all the imperative forms over the course of the year. Having six or seven color coded Show Me Cards for each pronoun and using different ones every day for an entire year would go a long way in teaching indirect object pronouns in the imperative *and negative* (because they also naturally occur in the circling process as well) imperative forms, and, since the forms would be taught during speech in meaningful context in short bursts, they would be remembered.

### Importance of a Sense of Play When Gesturing

Signing or gesturing the words “pumps up” the students. Much more than merely teaching meaning, it immediately builds a sense of trust through fun.

Imagine that it is the beginning of class and you have just written *a dansé/danced*. Students agree on a sign for “danced” and then sign or gesture it when you say it.

Next structure: *n’avait pas de chaussures/didn’t have any shoes*. Students agree on a sign for “didn’t have” and

“shoes,” and then sign it when you say it. My classes generally sign “not” by shaking their head “no” before gesturing the verb.

Next, simply say the expression with lots of quick repetitions as they sign it. Enjoy yourself. Monitor the barometer student, the slower one who tries.

First sign one structure, then two together. Play a memory game with your students. Then do the same with students’ eyes closed to check for acquisition. If students can sign the words with their eyes closed (not imitating other students around them), they know it. If they can’t, they don’t know it, and they need more practice.

Do not over gesture. It’s fun, but time in CI classes is so important that getting into the third part of the PQA process, the questioning and answering part, is the most important part of this step. Besides, the target structures are left on the board during class so that there is immediate referral to them with the laser pointer when needed. (That skill is called Point and Pause.)

We should also try to remember to gesture our target structures throughout the PQA process and during the story that follows it. Remembering to do so in the midst of everything else we are doing, however, is very hard to remember to actually do. I think of remembering to gesture through the creation of an entire story as a skill indicating mastery on the part of the teacher.

Sometimes we even see students gesturing words back at us, which is a wonderful thing, because it shows that our instruction is going to the part of the brain that actually learns languages – the deeper mind.

The skill of gesturing brings to the mix of a CI class some wonderful things:

Meaning is put into the students’ *bodies* via the TPR involved, and not just their minds. As such, it is more deeply acquired and thus easier to access later in class during the contextual flow of the story.

1. Gesturing is a fun memory game, and it creates an upbeat mood in the classroom right away. The classes start with laughter and interest, since it is a memory game.
2. With the “eyes closed” aspect of signing and gesturing, the message is sent that every student is going to have to show knowledge of the structures and not just copy someone nearby.

An article in *Science Daily* (July 28, 2007) described the work of Susan Wagner Cook in using hand gestures to teach new concepts. The research indicated that using hand gestures dramatically improves the ability to retain that concept. (Credit: Richard Baker, University of Rochester.) It turned out to have “a more dramatic effect” than expected.

In Cook’s study, 90 percent of students who had learned algebraic concepts using gestures remembered them three

weeks later. Only 33 percent of speech-only students who had learned the concept during instruction later retained the lesson. And perhaps most astonishing of all, 90 percent of students who had learned by gesture alone - no speech at all - recalled what they'd been taught.

Signing and gesturing:

1. employs proven ways of increasing memory
2. gives auditory practice on the structures
3. establishes that the class will be fun
4. sends the message that the teacher is fully in charge of the classroom.

All the other skills become easier and the class becomes easier to teach simply because of the mood, the overall effect, that gesturing creates.

Avoid telling the students what you think the sign should be. Ask them to come up with their own offerings. Attention is drawn to certain kids as we look at what they offer (which can approach slapstick), and invariably we laugh, and camaraderie is created instantly.

Working with American Sign Language is done by some CI teachers, but in my view it is too complex and prescribed. Moreover, it represents yet another language to learn on top of the one being learned in class.

But there are no rules in this work.

### Lightheartedness through Gestures

How do we ask our students to show us the gesture? Do we just ask for a gesture and move on, or do we go deeper into the gesture with our class? I think that most of us do the former – we skate right over the potential fun in the gesture and miss it.

Gestures contain potential merrymaking. We can get silly with gestures. We can significantly lower our own affective filters and those of our students by pushing these first moments of using comprehensible input in our classes into a realm of pure fun.

How do we do that? One way is via exaggeration. If a student provides a gesture, and we accept it, we can then exaggerate it. We can make the gesture extremely physical while saying the word it represents in really loud or soft or emotional or dramatic ways. We can also whisper the word. We say the word in these exaggerated ways while at the same time trying to remember to gesture it each time that we say it.

It must be noted that this kind of exaggerated exploration of sound and movement in our teaching, so effective in driving meaning deeper into the minds of our students so that the words can be much more quickly and easily recognized later, cannot be planned. It must be spontaneous and we must just try to be open to that fact and take the risk. This involves getting out of our fearful selves.

Instead of merely saying, “Oh class, that is a good suggestion for *la clé*! Now do it once and let’s move on,” we instead do anything that comes into our minds that has to do with a key, perhaps saying it while turning our hand as if to start a car, or doing that three times with three cars, focusing only on the word, following serendipity, singing/chanting *la clé*, saying the word as an exploration of the sounds in it, playing with the sound in the way actors do.

We do anything we can think of to make the word association physical and not just stuck on the desktop of the brain where there are only thoughts. We do what we need to do to move the word from the desktop to the hard drive, the body, the deeper mind, the place where language sticks. And we try to do all that in just a few minutes!

If we have played up the fun in saying the word in funny and exaggerated ways, by now we have a classroom full of kids wanting to say the word in all sorts of zany ways, where we didn’t before. This is the beginning of speech. But the biggest benefit of doing gesturing in this way is a better, lighter mood in the classroom than may have existed before our conscious efforts to do this step.

### The Master of Gestures

Some of us may not feel like doing gesturing on certain days, or may not have the personality for it. In that case, we may want to solicit the help of a student in this process. This could be a job for a student – the Master of Gestures. This student could stand next to us during the process described herein, pick from the suggested gestures, and do all the extreme stuff that we don’t feel like doing.

The Master of Gestures may be a student who may have a background in acting, but that certainly wouldn’t be a requirement for the job. It goes without saying that the Master of Gestures must be the “right” student for the job, and not one who will abuse the position by drawing attention to himself and thus away from the word being gestured.

## Gesturing Should Be Exaggerated

Perhaps the best example I have ever seen of the use of hyperbole and exaggerated TPR to establish meaning of a word occurred once in a Turkish lesson. The teacher was establishing meaning of the two key structures of a variation of the Anne Matava story “Talks Too Much” – *too much* and, in this variation, *laughs*.

Targeting *chok/too much* – sounds like choke - and *gülüyor/laughs* in Turkish, the teacher began to model in an extremely sincere way those two words. He formed an exaggerated form of *chok* with his hands and repeated the word over and over until his hands were fully extended above his head. He then did this again and again. It never seemed boring because he made it fun each time.

What was my mind doing? It was saying very intensely in my inner mental chatter, “Chok does not mean choke! Chok does not mean choke! Chok does not mean choke!” I was trying, and I succeeded, to drive away from my mind the cognate in English and drive into my mind the meaning of the word being gestured in Turkish – “too much.”

When the teacher then did the same process with “laughs,” modeling and having the group do it as well, this time by having us laugh each syllable of *gülüyor* into existence while pretending to lift a barbell over our heads, my belief in the power of exaggerated TPR greatly increased.

Due to the fact that we received enough reps on the two targets that day, and because the instruction was so sincere and interesting, and since I got to do the same motions for both words myself as well, to cement them into my own body, I found myself going around saying, almost against my will, *chok guluyor! chok gülüyor! chok gülüyor!* at the oddest times of day, knowing exactly what I was saying and in need of only huge and massive amounts of more of the same to one day have very strong command of the entire Turkish language!

I hope this point is clear. Passive gesturing of “laughs too much” in Turkish with a feeling of disinterest floating around in the classroom that day would never have resulted in the proud command I retain of that expression even now, a year later after the workshop I learned it in. Sincerity and a sense of play are of supreme importance in this work.

Sean Lawler has spoken to the overall point made in this chapter:

*...I think you nailed it, Ben, in having us focus on teaching our students how to feel and taste the vocabulary structures as we established meaning with our students. If we don't do that, we lose many of our students. I know I have a history of losing students because I don't adequately establish meaning with them, every day for every new structure. There is so much joy that can be shared when helping students feel and taste the vocabulary. That joy is in us all, we just need to exercise expressing it....*

Teachers who add this skill set to their comprehensible input teaching will definitely see it move quickly into their overall comprehensible input instruction. The joyfulness and sense of play will continue beyond just these first

steps of PQA and into our entire lesson if we start things out with joy and playfulness in this way, as long as we are not tied to some kind of prescription in this work, as long as in each class we are open to serendipity, reflecting the truth about CI instruction that we can't teach a class that feels fresh and exciting without leaving elements of it to chance.

On that last point of not being formulaic in this work, I once observed a fantastic CI teacher closely with her urban kids and after two classes came away with a wonderful insight – *it's completely up to the teacher to set the mood in the class*. The students cannot and will not do it. The kids will respond almost like a mirror to what the teacher does in her classroom's affective realm. The teacher has an almost sacred responsibility to keep the mood up no matter what is going on in their personal life. (One way to do this successfully is to stay 99% in L2, but that's another topic.)

That said, we must remember that there is no one way to do this work, and that even the most reserved teacher can reach her students as long as the input is comprehensible.

At a conference, a young Chinese teacher shared her honest concern after watching a very animated story demonstration by an experienced TPRS teacher whose ability to bring emotion into a story is virtually unlimited. She said, "I don't think Chinese women can teach this way." She loved the presentation and clearly exhibited a longing to be expressive like him. In the ensuing discussion, Sean Lawler said:

*... I'm certain that this teacher will find her expressiveness in her classroom. I think that the expressions that come from the heart of a reserved teacher can be just as or more powerful than the expressions of a more outgoing teacher....*

I fully agree with Sean's wise sentiment. For many years now, I have seen how this approach to teaching seems to always reflect the individual personality of the teacher in unique and varied ways. This includes subdued, even shy, teachers. We must always be comfortable with what we are doing in our comprehension based classrooms, and we must always trust that the approach is strong and supple enough to support the various aspects of our own teaching personalities.

So when we establish meaning and sign and gesture the word or word chunk:

1. We write the word down on the board only in L2, saying it slowly, with feeling, tasting it, etc. and inviting (never requiring) our students to do the same.
2. We write the word down on the board (or do so electronically) in L1, explaining to them what it means.
3. We ask our students to show the word to us, also in exaggerated fashion.
4. Once we have a gesture, we ask our students to say the word with exaggeration and emotion all over the place, first out loud and then to a neighbor, just having fun saying and gesturing it.

Over the years, I have seen proof of the power of doing the above. Each time I ask my students at the end of the year how they remembered a lot of the words used that year, they often tell me that they remembered them because of the exaggerated strategies described above. Gesturing gets the class off on the right foot.

### CI Classes Don't Always Have to be Fun

To expand on the point made above, we must keep in mind that, while we are establishing meaning and creating stories with our students, we don't need to entertain them. If we think of ourselves as entertainers and then we slump in our desk chairs at the end of the day exhausted, without energy and sometimes losing our voices, then we are doing something wrong. We are making the very common mistake of thinking that CI/TPRS instruction is all about being funny and entertaining.

Robert Harrell has said this on the topic of evaluating our teaching using comprehension-based methods:

*...ask yourself the following questions:*

- 1. Did I stay in the target language? For how long? (Goal is somewhere over 90%, but don't worry if you miss it one day; there's always tomorrow.)*
- 2. Did my students understand the target language? (Goal is total comprehension, but be happy with 80% of your students understanding 80% of what you said.)*
- 3. Did I hold students accountable for doing their 50%? (Note: the "50% Rule" is discussed later in this text.)*

*Don't even ask if the class was fun. Of course, we want it to be enjoyable and engaging, but not every day will be fun. If you can give positive responses to the three questions above, the day was a success, whether it felt like it or not.*

*In addition, don't base your perception of success on visible student reaction. I have had some students whose outward demeanor made me think that my class was somehow odious or unpleasant for them, only to have them tell me later that German was their favorite class, and they learned so much. They were too cool or too shy or too introverted to be willing to display their pleasure and even enthusiasm, but it was there nonetheless. Teenagers. Go figure....*

Ultimately, this work is about simplicity and joy. Before, much of our instruction was about clutter and a kind of seriousness centered in our heads that did not allow us to reach out to our kids in authentically human ways, but rather in robotic ones. There is no better example of cluttered teaching than asking our students to look at the

unendingly boring pages of a textbook. Now we have finally uncovered a way to simplify our instruction and bring some happiness and fun into our classrooms. It's worth a try!

I spoke to that idea at a recent conference:

*...in my view the need is to simplify and protect ourselves from too many techniques and strategies. We must learn simple teaching because if what we do is not simple then it cannot be elegant. And all of us want our teaching to be elegant, whether we are aware of it or not. When we worry about our teaching and try too many things, we become confusing. And if we are confused then our students will be confused. So we want to remain simple. The main ingredient of simple teaching, elegant teaching, is joy, in my opinion. How can we find our own joy so we can help our students enjoy what we teach them? If we could do that, the result would be employment that we truly enjoy doing, not to mention the gains in acquisition that far surpass the gains made in classrooms that are taught in a robotic manner to only the left hemispheres of the students' brains.*

I conclude this chapter with this text originally published in *TPRS in a Year!* –

“TPRS brings a sense of play into the classroom. Chris Mercogliano, writing in ‘Paths of Learning’ (Issue #17, p. 12, 2004), states that there is considerable evidence for ‘a classical link between education and play.’ He points out that the ancient Greek words for education/culture (paideia), play (paidia), and children (paides) all have the same root.

“Chris asks us to consider the following remarkable conversation in Plato’s *Republic* between Socrates and Plato’s brother, Glaucon:

*“Well, then,” Socrates begins, “the study of calculation and geometry, and all the preparatory education required for dialectic, must be put before them as children and the instruction must not be given the aspect of a compulsion to learn.”*

*“Why not?” asks Glaucon.*

*“Because the free man ought not to learn any study slavishly. Forced labors performed by the body don’t make the body any worse, but no forced study abides in the soul.”*

*“True.”*

*“Therefore, you best of men, don’t use force in training the children in the subjects, but rather play. In that way can you better discern toward what each is naturally directed.”*

### Part Three of the PQA Process

We have discussed the first two parts of the PQA process, establishing meaning and signing and gesturing. So, here is how to do the third part of PQA, the questions and answers part, whether or not it is being used in PQA to set up a story or just to teach whatever vocabulary the teacher wants to teach.

If the targeted structure is “dances,” we could first ask “Who dances?” When we find out from Jessie that she dances, we express our happiness to learn this important information. We circle that phrase and then see where it goes. Maybe Jessie dances with a celebrity on the beach in Los Angeles! As long as the kids make that up, it will be interesting to them and we will be able to get lots of reps on “dances” that they won’t notice, being caught up in the discussion.

Immediately, Jessie dancing personalizes the class. Without personalization, classes tend to drag. Students are always most interested in things that directly concern them, with the added bonus that personalization makes it much easier to establish comprehensible input.

Many gifted TPRS teachers don’t even think about doing a story. They just stay in Step 1 and focus on providing comprehensible, interesting, and repetitive input via PQA, staying with that as long as they can. They talk about the kids, making fun things up that capture the kids’ attention.

When that happens, the students think that our primary goal is talking about them, and yes that is an important goal. But it is really a trick. Our primary goal in asking personalized questions is to deliver comprehensible input.

So while our students are completely focused on images and not on the language, the language is sneaking past the guard dogs of their conscious faculties and going directly into the language engine in the unconscious mind, which is the only place where language can be acquired. In that engine, out of the awareness and meddling of the conscious analytical faculty, input is slowly turned into fluency. That is how teaching using comprehensible input works.

The little personalized conversations we have with our students in PQA can really be helpful to the novice teacher because they don’t involve the pressure of trying to make a full-blown story happen. PQA is really at the heart of all comprehensible input instruction. Stories are great, but they aren’t as important as PQA in this work.

Blaine has said this about personalizing the class:

*...I believe people who are the most effective at TPRS don't tell stories. They ask questions, pause, and listen for cute answers from the students. The magic is in the interaction between the student and teacher. TPRS is searching for something interesting to talk about. That is done by questioning. Interesting comprehensible input is the goal of every class. If we are there to tell a story, we will probably not make the class interesting. We will be so focused on getting the story out that we won't let the input from the kids happen....*

Thus, if someone in the class dances, or is dancing in the talent show next week, etc. the teacher makes this discovery one of supreme importance! Remembering that the goal is to repeat the structure as many times as possible, because it is through repetition that we learn languages, the instructor would want to know when the talent show is, how long the person has danced, if they have dancing shoes, what color their dancing shoes are, etc. – always using some form of the word “dance” in each utterance.

The repetition of words that have to do with dancing guarantees that the input is comprehensible. We don’t leave the verb. We speak slowly, getting lots of comprehensible repetitions on “dances” while personalizing the class so that real acquisition can occur.

One of the added benefits of doing PQA is that it gives students practice in first and second person singular verb forms, whereas stories are largely told in the third person. The best PQA strategies suggested in this book for getting such first and second person repetitions are the Special Chair (Strategy #18) and the Star of the Week (Strategy #19).

Sometimes it happens that each student in the class, as a result of the questioning done in PQA activities like Circling with Balls (Strategy #2) actually gets a class identity. Through the questioning, they earn a kind of provisional ego as a dancer, an equestrian, a wrestler, an accordion player, a runner, etc.

When this happens, you can compare students to each other. You can include them in stories as either major or minor characters. You can come back to their identities over and over during the year, comparing your students to celebrities, sports stars, musicians, etc.

To have an identity, to be known by others in the class for activities that they do in life, is a great thing and a major motivator for kids. When it’s about them, they listen. Just make sure you excitedly “discover” each student’s identity. Ignore no one and keep things appropriate and equal.

A neat trick is to always add into the discussion that you also do that activity but that the student is of course *better at it than you*, and in fact they are *the best in the world at it*. Except in singing. I am better than them in singing. Then when I threaten to do so, they protest. Then I sing anyway. My students know the verb “sings.”

Don’t say one student is better than another. They are all always the best. Only students in a rival school or in some other language class are not as good as them. If they don’t want to play, spend brief amounts of time with them anyway, darting in and out with close in questions, then retreat. In that way you teach them that life is about showing up.

The establishing identities in class piece is one of the biggest keys to successful PQA. The personalization between you and the student naturally creates plenty of comprehensible input. Since the discussion is focused on the students’ activities, students quickly develop a strong grasp of many verbs – the hearts of sentences.

The trick in PQA is to flow with what you find out from the students and not to impose anything, and to stay in the target language, because blurting ruins PQA. You stay in the language and respond to what you learn as if it is the most interesting information you have ever heard. You get details while laughing and having fun.

That is all that PQA is – enjoying the kids and speaking the target language. The process is one of enjoyment – what Blaine calls the “game.”

Joe Neilson has said:

*...I think that the essential three elements of this work are: comprehension, interest and involvement, and meaningful repetition. As long as any activities have these elements, the students are learning....*

When doing PQA, remember to:

1. speak slowly.
2. circle each sentence, because it is necessary for your students that you do so.
3. point to the question words when you say them, pausing when doing so.
4. point to the structures on the board when you use them, and pause when you do so.
5. avoid putting new words on the board; stay with the two or three structures you are working with. Your focus must be on the student, and what they do, and introducing new words causes confusion, taking your class quickly out of bounds.
6. clearly show that you are happy to be learning such wonderful things about such wonderful students.

What are you accomplishing? You are getting personalization and comprehensible input. You are getting interesting, repetitive input. Everything else is too complicated for the kids at the beginning of your time together. If it's not about them, it's too complicated.

PQA is by far the best way to personalize the class. Ask stories later, when your students trust you completely to always be interested in them.

PQA contains infinite possibilities. The reader is referred to my book *PQA in a Wink!* for a much more detailed discussion of this skill.

## Two Kinds of PQA

It is important to be clear that there are really two “categories” of PQA. The first category is that of PQA as an integral part of Step 1 of TPRS. This is specifically to set up a story. In this first kind of PQA, two or three structures are presented that are repeated to the students in the form of personalized questions and answers with the goal of leading to *ease of recognition of the targets* when they occur later in the story.

So in this first kind of PQA, if the three targeted structures for the story are “took the train,” “at the station,” and “was embarrassing to him,” then the instructor would personalize the first expression with questions to the students like, “Have you ever taken a train?” and “Where did you take the train?” etc. The second questions would be to talk about the word “train station,” and the third set of personalized questions would be to get reps on various forms of “embarrassed.” The instructor’s goal in doing this would be to make the story more comprehensible to the students.

The second kind of PQA evolved over time from the first, as more and more teachers realized that they could “PQA” any word that they wanted to teach, and that it didn’t even have to be connected to a story. They started doing this when they realized that PQA was a great way to drill any target deep into the unconscious mind for real acquisition. PQA thus became in their minds an equally powerful way to do comprehensible input teaching, if not a more powerful one, than stories, and could be connected or not to stories.

In fact, this second category of generalized PQA has now become so popular that some very successful teachers rarely even do stories. They know that they are perfectly effective with comprehensible input instruction without the stories precisely because of the power of the PQA process alone. This newer kind of PQA works best with Power Point slides and will be discussed later in this text as “Visual PQA.”

## When PQA is Stale

**Q.** When I try to extend PQA into a little scene, it just doesn’t seem real and the kids sense it, and I sense it. How do you make PQA seem less stale?

**A.** Make it believable. If the teacher starts out class with an enthusiastic:

*Class, John is a frog!*

The kids groan and slide down into their seats. It is not genuine. The teacher is trying too hard and kids are mercilessly quick to pick up on that. John is not a frog and they know it. But when the teacher is able to pull cute answers from the kids, inviting *their* creativity to dominate the class, then things stay interesting. This kind of teaching only works if the kids are allowed to toss their ideas into the classroom process and have the teacher catch them and use them and, if they aren’t used, the teacher should at least praise them for their cute suggestions.

This question about how to make a PQA discussion “real” to kids is of huge importance and should not be glossed over. Many teachers don’t listen to the cute answers from their students because they think it’s all about them, the teacher. They don’t really want to know and sometimes they don’t care what the kids think. Instead, teachers must ask questions that reveal a true interest on the part of the teacher (the kids aren’t stupid – they pick up on things).

The teacher must, as well, constantly encourage lots of levity, lightheartedness and bizarre answers. They don’t always have to *model* those things, just encourage them. In spite of what most school settings have done to them, kids are human and as such cannot help but respond to personalized things that are funny in nature.

### Personalized Statements and Answers (PSA)

One thing we can do with reticent kids is to get them involved in the PQA without their permission. What does that mean? It seems an anomaly to say such a thing, but the fact is that with some walled-off students we are not going to get anywhere unless we find a way, a loving and humorous way, to tear down the walls they have put up.

Anyone who has ever felt this sting of passively aggressive distant students (students who are afraid) in their instruction is strongly advised to also use the tool of Personalized *Statements* and Answers (PSA) to help rectify this problem.

PSA is an effective tool that can keep a discussion going when PQA fails. All you have to do is *tell the students what they do*. When you ask a question, the power is with the student. They may answer or they may not. Very often they cave. But when you *tell* them what the deal is, the power is with you.

How does PSA work? Assuming that you want to get some reps on “had warned” and “became” (from an Anne Matava story), instead of asking if anyone had warned anyone, which is kind of awkward, you just say:

*...Class, I had warned Erik yesterday not to sleep in class and he became angry!...*

Why leave that? Stay on it and aim for thirty or forty reps – you need hundreds – using just that one sentence! And you never had to ask a question. Erik, who may have been having a bad day (always a lame excuse for not showing up in class like a human being) is now involved because you, the teacher, have *told* him that he is involved. You imposed a statement on a student in the class that he did not agree to. Big deal. It’s fine.

We are not here to entertain our kids. They sense that and can turn on us when we go into weak clown mode, as we weakly beg for cute answers because we heard at a conference that that’s what we do in CI instruction. Our only real job is to get our students to understand what we say to them in class, and PSA is really good for that.

Here is another example:

If you want to teach “is going out with,” don’t ask who is going out with whom in your classroom in real life. That’s forbidden ground. Just lighten things up by telling the students that (your student in that class) Sandra is going out with (your student in that class) Erik.

Even better, have a *student* make up the new fun fact about Erik, of course without stepping on anyone’s toes. What is fun and appropriate in one class may not be in another, so there are no rules in doing PSA except that the things you make up can’t be offensive or insulting to anyone.

Take PSA statements as far as you can. It’s not true, so there is no threat, just a bit of humor and you have gotten some reps on your targets. Avoid using Sandra and Erik if that feels at all dangerous to those two students emotionally.

As long as everybody stays in the target language when sorting out the verity or falseness of your circled statement, and as long as everybody knows that the discussion is all in good fun, then you are doing your job of staying in the target language with your students when regular PQA is not working for whatever reason. Just don’t break into English when doing *any* comprehensible input.

You will notice that when using PSA as opposed to PQA, things get more personalized in funnier ways faster. Strong humorous personalization can indeed happen in PQA, but it happens faster in PSA. Just pick the right kid, the one who can take a little ribbing. When we state to the class that William works in a strip club (we have one around the corner from our high school so we use that location a lot all year) we see everything ramp up.

So, if you are not ready yet for PQA or stories, use PSA.

### Creating Engagement via the Annoying Orange Technique

Another way to involve students in PQA who don’t want to be involved in PQA is to use the Annoying Orange Technique. This is a tool that under the right circumstances can be very effective with distant or passively aggressive kids.

Here’s how it works: I sense, as I am explaining what the structures mean, the distance between me and some kid in the room that day. I don’t want to have to deal with it, because kids like that one can drain energy from me as I try so hard to reach them. Certain distant kids, luckily very few, seem to take a kind of perverse pleasure in sucking air out of the classroom. In the invisible world of the classroom, they therefore become our enemies. Sometimes such kids even take other kids with them, even from across the classroom. Such silent suckers of energy must be dealt with most, but not all, of the time.

After I have established meaning of the structure in the usual way, at some point into the PQA, I start in on the kid, as per:

“Class, Jeremy wants to be Mickey Mouse for Halloween!” (circle that)

The kid’s hackles go up. He is shocked that all of a sudden I am talking about him in the target language in a way that is amusing to the class. *I keep at it* until the kid responds in some way, either by answering or sitting up taller, because by now I am at his desk with my finger on it. I begin to hammer the kid with that one fact, speaking to him in the way that the YouTube Annoying Orange hammers away at Apple.

The class may get into it. A few comments in English from the class might be directed at Jeremy. I ignore the English and encourage that, but *only if Jeremy can take it* (some students can’t, but they think that we teachers can). This is a tightrope we walk on, but it is worth it. We just have to be able to know when to leave the questioning about the kid when it gets too close to him. We have to be sensitive to that.

When employing the Annoying Orange technique, I speak the student’s name and Mickey Mouse and Halloween with an American accent but the other words are in French, like “Jeremy! Hey Jeremy! Jeremy! Jeremy do you want to be Mickey Mouse for Halloween! Hey Jeremy! Jeremy! Hey class, Jeremy wants to be Mickey Mouse for Halloween!” Doing this prevents Jeremy from acting like he doesn’t understand, since half the question is composed of cognates.

What is really happening when I am playing the role of the Annoying Orange? I am telling Jeremy that he will not suck the air out of my classroom. I am letting him know that if he tries, I will find a cheerful way, a smile-filled way, to reveal to him how indignant I am that a child wants to sit there and not help us learn the language. I have my own form of humorous passive aggression in my teaching style. I have to have that in order to survive in my urban classroom.

Teachers who teach languages who also have a degree in psychology may be quick to point out problems with this technique, but, because it is one that is housed in cheerfulness, I think it is just fine. I just pick the students I target with this technique carefully and know when to cut out of the questioning and take it to someone else. Whom to choose? I usually choose those really smart kids who don’t want to play.

There has to be something that we teachers can do to defend ourselves in classrooms where kids routinely bring negativity into our classrooms. We have no choice but to deal with it.

What usually happens after Jeremy has been peppered by enough questions about him wanting to be Mickey Mouse for Halloween? At some point his shoulders slump and he smiles and gives in and pays attention. Those are great moments, when an uncooperative kid comes around to playing the game.

It’s in the play. I have decided that in my career I am going to have fun no matter what. I refuse to crawl through the days, wishing I was doing something else for a living. So I pick on kids but within safe boundaries. I use this technique with love.

I understand that too many students opt out of the language creation process because, sadly and somewhat

pathetically, they have never been taught by a teacher how to participate in a class. Who can blame those kids, when all their lives they have been told by teachers that learning is such serious business and they have to memorize and work hard or they will fail?

Here is another example of the use of the Annoying Orange technique:

Let's say you have a glarer – a smart kid who glares – named Alan. Alan may not even be aware of the fact that he glares. There are kids like that. *Only if you have a strong enough bond with Alan*, start in with the annoying questions. If the text is about a character in a reading named Bill who likes Sprite and drives to Florida, you can start in with:

*...Class, Bill likes Sprite. Alan, do you like Coke? Alan, do you like Sprite or Coke? Alan, hey Alan! Do you like Sprite? Alan, does Bill like Coke? He drove to Pennsylvania, right? Did he drive to Texas? Alan, did Bill drive with you to Florida? Did you go to Florida with him? Hey Alan, did you drive to Florida last week? Hey Alan, come on, did you drive to Florida or not last week?...*

Just keep hammering away at Alan. He's either going to relax and cave and stop glaring, but he will only do that if the bond between you and him is strong enough to withstand the constant lighthearted peppering of questions.

Do not underestimate this technique. It prepares kids for the workplace – we teach more than language – and is a very strong classroom discipline tool to deal with the hard nut cases, and it works, and in a humorous and almost stealth-like manner so that the kids don't see what is really going on, what teaching is really going on. Annoying Orange not only brings fearful kids into the classroom process, it is also a way in which the teacher can show who is really in command of the classroom.

Search YouTube for “Annoying Orange” if you are open to using this technique in your comprehension based teaching practice.

### A Teacher Describes How She Does PQA

Keri Biron is a teacher in her second year of working with comprehensible input. She describes how she does PQA now, after experimenting around and trying different things since beginning this work a year ago:

“I teach 84 minute block classes and meet the kids every other day. As far as PQA is concerned, I will introduce the structures, establish meaning and do gestures. This lasts for about 5 minutes. Then I will take each structure and PQA it for 10 to 20 minutes each.

“Before I begin, I hand three different students a counter used in baseball and assign each student a structure to count. Then I begin with structure one. I will start out small just to get as many reps in as I can. For example, the

last structure I did was “Nadie te ha amado como yo” (No one has loved you like I do). I started by saying “Have you ever loved someone?” “I have loved someone, etc.” I make small talk and ask individual students questions at this part of my initial PQA which lasts about 2-3 minutes.

“Then, I start with an interesting fact...and I act extremely interested as well. “Someone in this class has loved someone! Who in this class has loved someone?” Now, we are in March so my students hands shoot up in the air, they have huge smiles on their faces, because they can’t wait to share their answer and know how to play the game.

“Whenever a name of someone in the class gets thrown out there, I then turn to that student and ask if it is true. I don’t think I’ve ever gotten a “no” because they all understand what we are doing by now. I just still confirm with the student because I don’t want them to feel uncomfortable.

“So, then we start creating a mini story about this student. I go through basic questioning such as “Who has s/ he loved,” “When,” “For how long,” “How did this student say ‘No one has ever loved you like me’ to the other person,” etc. Again, this process takes a good 15 minutes because I ask a lot of yes/ no questions before using the interrogative “Who...”?

“For example, I’ll say “Has this student loved...Michael Jackson, Miley Cyrus, Adam Levine, etc.” This is in order to get a lot of reps. One of the funniest things to do is to ask “how.” Did this student say it loudly, softly, slowly, fast, as if s/he were angry, sad, in a nervous way, etc. The students get a kick out of one student screaming to another one across the room “No one has loved you like me!” And then in the end of the first PQA structure session, we usually have some type of ending to our story. We then do the same type of thing for the second and third structure.

“I used to try to incorporate all the structures into one bigger story. This worked well with one exception...I wasn’t getting enough reps for each structure. I then felt that I had to circle that much more the following class when we did our story. I find that the kids just want to get on with the story and not be asked so many questions. They never said anything, but you could just feel it. So now, not only do I not have to circle as much (I still do), but I see that the kids are really remembering the structures from the previous class because they’ve heard them so much (like at the very least 70-80 times!).

“I used to do PQA and story in one class since I have 84 minutes but I recently found that if I want quality PQA, then it is way too much to do both. It’s a lot for me and the kids. So this works well for me now and we have time for a free write after our “story asking” session in the second class.

“In the class after our “story asking” session, the kids read a story about one of their classmates (or two) being the main characters. They really love this idea and it makes the story much more interesting to them. After we spend the class reviewing meaning, doing more PQA while going over actual content of the story, reviewing grammar in the story, etc, then we act it out. The kids really get a kick out of it and, of course, I always make them the heroes in some way.

“I have found that if you pick the structures right, it is very easy to create a story out of PQA! I have found that nothing is quite as interesting to teenagers as love! I, of course, do not want this theme in every single story but lately I’ve found that there’s something about this that just never gets old and boring for the kids. So, my advice is to give structures that lend themselves to relationships, dating, etc. if you are struggling, because this is a hot topic for teenagers!”

## **Skill #5 – Checking for Understanding/Choral Responses:**

One way to check for understanding in our classes is to simply ask the students two questions during class:

The first is:

*“What did I just say?” (credit: Blaine Ray)*

At certain points in the story, when the instructor senses a lack of understanding or a weak response from an individual, the instructor simply asks “What did I just say?” (I personally ask the question in the target language in keeping with my desire to keep the class as completely free of English as possible. The first few times I ask that question in the target language are a bit difficult, but after a week or two of going to the board and writing the English below the French each time I say it, the kids are able to process it right away for the rest of the year without written help.)

It is helpful if the instructor acts as if the responsibility for the lack of comprehension belongs to him or her, as in fact it does in the majority of instances.

This skill is used to guarantee that everyone understands what was just said and to maintain focus. At times you will use it to help a daydreamer get focused, but it should really be used to verify that everyone hears and understands the input. If the student can answer the question, go on. If not, recycle some or all of the discussion/story up that point.

This skill keeps a class on its toes, because the students who really want to know what is going on in the discussion put a kind of invisible, and often visible, pressure on those who cannot answer this question.

Just make sure that you convey to the class that the reason for asking this rather strong question is simply to guarantee everyone’s understanding – not to “catch” an unfocused kid. Good teaching requires that our intentions be based on caring about the kids to help them succeed, and not finding fault. So use the expression “What did I just say” in a positive way.

Make sure, also, that the whole interchange involving this technique lasts fewer than five or six seconds.

A second question we can use to check for understanding in our class is:

*“What does \_\_\_\_ mean?”*

Again, I ask this question in the target language.

Note that the students respond to both of these questions in English. These are the only two situations in class that I allow a student to speak English in my classroom. This decision about use of English by my students is the final answer for me in my own journey to making my CI classes work for me and is just my own opinion. I am not saying that it is the only way to do it.

For me, I cannot allow blurting by my students. By making it crystal clear to my students that they may not under any circumstances interrupt my L2 instruction with English of any kind except in response to the two aforementioned questions, it all works for me. This discussion will be continued later in this book.

One final point on the use of these two clarification questions: they must not be overused. It is best to use them only two or three times in a class period. Once we start asking those two questions too many times in class, it shreds the flow of L2, and that is the last thing we want to happen in our comprehension based classrooms.

### Choral Responses

It is not enough to maintain contact with individuals. We must also retain visible contact with the group as a whole. We stay in touch with the class as a whole by requiring choral responses from it. We must try to orchestrate our instruction so that every question we ask receives a response from every student in the class, in choral form. What does this look like?

We verbally verify that the group is understanding what we are saying, understanding all the repetitions, by asking more yes/no questions or questions that require one word answers than we ever thought we could ask. We do not ask just a few yes and no and one word answer questions; we ask very large amounts of them, so many that we don't go on to the next thing until we see that ideally every single student in the room has fully understood the question we just asked, because every single student in the room has looked at us and responded to us in single words that we could hear. (The single words are usually yes or no but on occasion can also be single words like “green” or “house” or “happy” in response to various content questions that we might ask.)

Only when everyone in the room has given us a choral answer to show that they have fully understood do we move on. We look for comprehension in our students individually and work with them individually, yes, but we

also check on the group by insisting that we hear with our ears the strong choral responses that we require in response to every single question we ask.

What happens, how most of us circle, is that we continue to circle halfheartedly without ever really feeling convinced that the kids fully understand us. The class is too quiet and we don't do anything about it. Many of us don't seem to be able to remember to follow through on our stated requirement that they let us know when they understand or when they don't understand.

A few kids get what we say, leading the response process for the rest of the class, and we foolishly let that happen, taking these responses by a few to mean that the entire class understands. The other less focused students ride those students' answers to the end of the class period, since they are not being held responsible. And we go on like the Tarot fool about to walk off the cliff with his faithful dog following right behind him as the class plummets into dysfunction.

Here is an example of a way to get good choral responses. I was once using the structures *works*, *lazy* and *the boss yells* to set up the Anne Matava story *Lazy*:

I was in Step One doing PQA to teach the first structure "works." I started the circling in the usual way, making a statement (PSA) about my student Malcolm, sitting in the back of the room and clearly not engaged, to start things off:

Class, Malcolm works at Wal-Mart! (ohh!)

Class, does Malcolm work at Wal-Mart? (yes)

Class, does Malcom or Mickey work at Wal-Mart? (Malcolm)

My intent was important here. I had to stay with "Malcolm works at Wal-Mart!" until I got a strong *choral response that indicated full clear eyed understanding and spoken, fully audible one word answers* from every student in the class, even if it meant repeating that one statement for the rest of the class period.

I wasn't getting the group choral response I wanted, so I waited the students out. I have taught myself through years and years of doing stories to ask the same question I just asked if the group choral response is in any way weak. When I do that, I:

1. demand that each kid be actively involved with me, which is the best and most powerful form of classroom discipline ever devised. I wait them out; they don't wait me out.
2. wait for the class to "turn" on the few kids who think – wrongly – that they can wait me out with their non-responses. When most of the kids in the room have to wait for a small group of uninvolved students to

decide to climb onto the choral response bandwagon, they get so frustrated with waiting that they will turn on the non-participants, providing me with an instant classroom police force. When this happens, and it happens often if you consistently require choral responses from everyone, it is a beautiful thing.

This is what we haven't done in the past, most of us. We haven't waited the students out to get a full group choral one word response from them. These loudly spoken responses are the best indicators of whether they have understood what we asked them, along with the two individually directed questions of "what did I just say?" and "what does \_\_\_\_ mean?"

From the moment we have finished the first round of circling about Malcolm described above, we often add a few details. We use only previously acquired structures, nothing new, to our questioning while still staying on the original statement to a *much greater degree* than feels natural by asking and insisting on strong responses, as per:

Class, does Malcolm work at Wal-Mart with me? (*hand or laser point to the word "works"*) (No! – strong choral response and if you don't get one wait for it or repeat the question.)

Class, does Malcolm work at K-Mart with me? (*hand or laser point to the word "works"*) (No! – strong choral response and if you don't get one wait for it or repeat the question.)

Class, does Malcolm work at Wal-Mart? (*hand or laser point to the word "works"*) (Yes! – strong choral response and if you don't get one wait for it or repeat the question.)

Class, does Peyton Manning work at Wal-Mart? (*hand or laser point to the word "works"*) (No! – strong choral response and if you don't get one wait for it or repeat the question.)

Class, does Malcolm work with Peyton Manning? (*hand or laser point to the word "with," now focusing on the preposition*) (No! – strong choral response and if you don't get one wait for it or repeat the question.)

Class, does Malcolm work at Wal-Mart? (*hand or laser point to the word "works"*) (Yes! – strong choral response and if you don't get one wait for it or repeat the question.)

Class, does Malcolm work at Wal-Mart with Mickey? (*hand or laser point to the word*) (No! – strong choral response and if you don't get one wait for it or repeat the question.)

If you ask five to ten questions per minute in this way about the same sentence, insisting on a strong choral response each time before moving on to the next sentence, you will see good things happen in your classroom.

## Skill #6 – Point and Pause:

We have stated that if a word or structure has not been previously introduced to a class, we don't let it into the class discussion that day. Our focus is on using the structures for that day. But some – a very few – words must sometimes be allowed into the discussion in order to make the discussion work.

On those rare occasions when a new word or structure works its way into the discussion, we use the Point and Pause skill to bring those new words in. We write the new word or words on the board, then we turn and laser point to it each time we say it. If we don't do this, our students will not understand. Any previously taught structures that we use but on which we get a weak response during class must be pointed to and paused at as well. We use Point and Pause by writing the weak word on the board or by laser pointing to it somewhere on a wall.

We even use Point and Pause with the question words. We cannot assume that our students know the question words – they are often confusing in the context of stories because often the kids are so focused on what is going on in the rest of the question that they have trouble processing the question word.

In my view it takes about six months at least into a first year class for the students to fully acquire the question words, after at least two or three thousand repetitions on each one.

As long as Point and Pause is not used as an excuse to introduce too many new words into your instruction, it assumes its place as a good reminder to point to and pause only at the target structures being introduced for the first time that day only, plus a very limited amount of any previously taught words that may have found their way into the discussion. If a few new words slip in because they are truly necessary to the developing story, point to and pause at them. The general rule is that we use Point and Pause only with the target structures. If we do that we won't go out of bounds and everything will be fine.

If your board is covered with new words in the target language after a class, you have misused Point and Pause. All you will have done is confuse kids throughout the entire class. Covering the board with too many words is a common error made by people new to the method. It may be the most common one besides going too fast.

This is an especially big problem because, as stated, in many schools we have not taught our students how to self-advocate. If they don't have the personal power to stop us in class by using the stop sign when they don't understand, then that is a problem unless we are experts at staying in bounds.

To restate, because it is so important: in theory, there should be absolutely no new words or structures on the board at the end of class. In practice, however, a few new words might creep in that are absolutely necessary to what we are trying to communicate. If, at the end of class, you turn around and look at the board and see any more than two or three new words or structures, then that is unacceptable, in my opinion.

Over time, we develop the ability to somehow “know what our kids know.” When we can do that, we are able to naturally steer the discussion away from words that they don’t know (haven’t acquired). It’s a skill that comes with practice.

The mechanics of this skill sound complex but are not. When you say a word and get a weak response, which happens about 95% of the time, you point to the word wherever it is, on the walls or on the board, then wait for a few seconds, looking at your students to gauge their level of comprehension, before going on. What you are waiting for is the “kathunk” moment in the invisible world during which you “feel” that the word has come into focus for the child.

It is our choice. We can teach with the intention to make sure that our students understand us by limiting new words in our classes to the new target structures, or we can just assume they understand whatever we are saying. Doing the latter pretty much guarantees that they won’t understand.

## **Skill #7 – Teaching to the Eyes (credit: Susan Gross)**

Are you making eye contact with your students? In any class, the students are constantly making decisions about how engaged to become in their learning process depending on the degree their teacher seems interested in them.

Engaging students visually requires courage and honesty. By establishing a “two-way visual street,” many good things happen, not the least of which is that your students have less of an opportunity to act out.

When your students understand that they will be engaged in fairly active eye contact with their instructor, a look of trust can often be seen in their eyes. It is an almost invisible response – only you can see it – as if they are saying to you as you continue on through class, “Thank you for caring about me in this class. Thank you for making this material comprehensible to me! Thank you for making sure I don’t get left behind!”

Teaching using comprehensible input is part of a revolution in the very concept of classroom management. Up to this point, the teacher was often seen as the force in the room, requiring students to pay attention. There was a kind of tacit understanding that certain children were intrinsically flawed and needed to be “guided” into proper behavior by a capable adult. In this new model, eye contact becomes the key ingredient in an entirely new way of how teachers and students interact in a classroom.

The key to teaching to the eyes is to teach to *all* the eyes. The teacher must make eye contact and go slowly enough with everyone in the room. In the rare case of a truly disengaged student, the first required action by the teacher is to take a few seconds from the class, go to the student’s desk, kneel down, and make eye contact with the student. Whisper to them they must do their part.

If this fails, discussion with the child outside of class and phone calls to parents are required. Besides that student, others (other students, parents, administrators) will then see the clear intent of the instructor to ensure proper decorum in her classroom.

## **Skill #8 – The Barometer Student**

There is often at least one student who just doesn't get it. The student who doesn't get it but wants to is your barometer. These students must be included in the class. Initially, they are hard to teach, and many TPRS teachers let them go in the midst of juggling all the other skills involved in this work, but these kids hold a big key to your success!

When you work with your barometer, other students get a chance to rest and review. The barometer student makes you go slowly. That student is in fact a major factor in your slowing down.

In no way does the barometer impede the progress of the class. All students are generally happy with any extra repetitions they can get, and there is nothing like being able to include all of your students in the flow of the class.

My belief is that if we don't include those barometers from the beginning of the year, establishing clearly in their minds that we care for them and for their success in our classes, we may as well not even use this method. We will have discipline problems.

Barometer students are not extra baggage who must be dragged along. That is not the message to convey to such students. Instead, root for the barometer. The "A" students may not be aware of them, but many kids in the class are silently rooting for the barometer kid, perceiving him or her as a sort of fellow soldier who needs to be taken care of by the group. Join the support group for barometer students in your classroom and watch your CI classes improve!

## **Skill #9 – Pop Up Grammar**

If it is true that grammar is nothing more than correctly spoken language, then we need do nothing else but speak properly in the TL to our students, and they will learn proper grammar. However, teachers sometimes still like to explain grammar to their students, even though most students have no idea what they are saying. In those cases, it is best to limit all explanations to a few (3 to 5) seconds without all the explanation that was characteristic of grammar lessons of the last century.

The CI/TPRS community in general allows these short bursts of grammar explanation in stories and other spoken situations. My position is that pop up grammar should be limited to reading classes only, either when using

Reading Option A or Read and Discuss (both are explained later in this text).

Let's look at a few examples of what pop up grammar looks like:

Example A:

The class reads a text in which they see the following sentence:

*Les filles marchaient*/The girls were walking. The pop-up should be: "Class, why is there an 'nt' on *marchaient*? Correct, there is more than one person."

There should be no mention of grammar terms such as "3<sup>rd</sup> person singular or plural," and there should be no digression into other related grammar ideas like the difference between "*er*" and "*ir*" verbs. The entire point was made in four seconds.

Example B:

The class reads:

*Elle lui a donné du chocolat*/ She gave some chocolate to him. The pop-up should be: "Class, what does '*lui*' mean? Right, it means 'to him.' What does '*du*' mean? Right, it means 'some.'"

There should be no mention of direct and indirect object pronouns, nor should the term "partitive structure" be mentioned. It only confuses the students.

If a child asks what "*pourrait réussir*" means in a reading, say it means "could succeed" or "would be able to succeed." Point to the verb "*pouvoir*" (to be able to) on the verb wall and say it is just a form of that verb, like "*peut*" (is able to). Or say that the "rr" makes it mean "could" instead of "can." Just do not say, "Oh, that is the conditional tense and it gets conjugated like the future tense but the endings are different and blah blah blah." Just go on with the reading.

When we make the mistake of focusing our teaching on vocabulary lists, grammar rules, and all the different pieces which as a whole comprise a language system, we are in effect giving our students only the parts of a car without teaching them how those parts fit together. But by speaking the language to them and having them read it as a whole, without breaking it down into parts, we allow our students to know what the whole car feels like, and how it drives.

So when doing reading classes, we just frequently ask questions like, "What does this mean?" or we point out similarities with other paragraphs, and that is the extent of pop up grammar in our classes.

## Skill #10 – Recycling:

Recycling means summarizing what has happened so far in the story. It is like a mini-retell during the story. Recycling need not last more than a minute or so, but it gives the students a chance to comprehend multiple sentences. It is also fun for the instructor to see the gains in instruction up to that point.

In the hard work of building a story and remembering all the other elements that go into that process, it is easy to forget to recycle. But when things get complex and a little weird, that is the perfect time to do it.

In fact, recycling serves a tremendously important role during the telling of a story: it allows everyone to regroup and refocus and perhaps provide a new direction for the story, one possibly missed without this necessary pause.

A good recycling should occur every five to ten minutes, and requires only a few seconds. It is always surprising when a story that required thirty or forty minutes to build can be recycled in less than a minute. When this happens, the students and the instructor are reminded of how much they have accomplished via the circling process.

## Skill #11 – Almost!

Almost! (*jCasi!* or *Presque!*) is a fun skill and is very helpful in learning numbers. Easily mastered, the skill merely involves responding to a suggested numerical answer from a student with the word “almost” in the target language.

When you do this with a sly smile, the kids always know that, as the expert whose story this is, you are about to inform them that the number of pigs in the pool is not 8 but 8.75. This results in great practice in numbers and possibly in this case body parts. Simply say “almost” after any number given to you during a story to practice numbers!

## Skill #12 – Comparing Colors

When a decision is made about the color of something in a story (a red car in this example), ask the class if the car is “red like... an apple?” (*rouge comme... une pomme?*) or some other object: “red like... a heart?” (*rouge comme... un coeur?*), or “red like... a strawberry?” (*rouge comme... une fraise?*).

If you have a student who can call up each of those images on google really fast, add that in, or pull little plastic props of strawberries, apples, etc. out of a basket or prop box when you say them.

To get further practice, suggest incorrect color facts. Ask, for example, if it is “red like... a pineapple?” This can lead to creative discussions about the differences between apples and strawberries and pineapples, how absurd to think that pineapples might be red, etc.

Some possibilities:

*rouge comme* (red like...): *un poisson rouge* (a goldfish), *une tartine de confiture* (a jam sandwich), *les pantoufles de Dorothée* (Dorothy’s ruby slippers), *une voiture de pompiers* (a firetruck), etc.

*jaune comme* (yellow like...): *le maillot jaune* (the Yellow Jersey), *une banane* (a banana), *un ciré* (a raincoat), *une jonquille* (a daffodil), *un canard* (a duck), *un citron* (a lemon), *des crayons* (pencils), etc.

*vert comme* (green like...): *des balles de tennis* (tennis balls), *du raisin* (grapes), *une grenouille* (a frog), *les feuilles d’un arbre* (the leaves of a tree), *des pois* (peas), *des légumes* (vegetables), etc.

*bleu comme* (blue like...): *un jean* (bluejeans), *le ciel* (the sky), *la mer* (the sea), *un tiers du drapeau français* (one third of the French flag), etc.

*orange comme* (orange like...): *une coccinelle* (a lady bug), *une mandarine* (a mandarin), *une citrouille* (a pumpkin), *des carottes* (carrots), *un lys* (a lily), etc.

This skill provides vocabulary practice on objects besides a lot of repetitions on the colors.

However, it is hard to remember to incorporate this skill into the myriad other things we do. In that interest, it is suggested that you write on a 3 x 5 card COMPARE COLORS or some other message which you then attach to your prop box. Then, whenever you ask the class what color an object is, you pull out a prop of the same color and use this skill.

For example, if the class suggests to you that the submarine is yellow and you decide to accept that new bit of information into the story, go over to your prop box, grab a rubber duckie, and ask, “Yellow like a duck?” or grab a piece of plastic broccoli and ask, “Yellow like broccoli?” and clarify accordingly.

So just remember that the best way to bring this skill into your teaching is simply to connect any questions that have to do with color over to some object in your prop box.

## Skill #13 – TPR the Prepositions

Prepositions need lots of repetitions. They will be automatically learned without outside help in the classroom that is free of English, as is true with all aspects of this work. Everything can be taught as long as English is not in the picture and as long as the content is comprehensible. Context is always the best teacher.

However, there are a few ways to teach prepositions separately, almost as brain breaks.

### TPR the Prepositions with Hand Signals

This first one is something I remember to do whenever I am being observed because it is impressive to watch.

Standing in front of the class so all can easily see you, place your left hand out in front of you in a fist. The students do the same and imitate what you do. (Reverse if you are left-handed.)

Next, put your right hand flat on top of your left fist. Say the word “on” in the TL. Ask them to repeat the sound loudly with enthusiasm. Then place your right hand under your fist and say “under” in the TL. They repeat. Then point to inside your left fist and say, “in.” They repeat. Stop there.

Some days or weeks later, when you feel that they have had enough reps on the first three prepositions, you are ready to add in three more. Place your left fist out and go through the first three and then add the next three.

The first is “in front of.” Put your right hand in front of your left fist. They repeat in the TL. Then for the next one (the fifth one in the overall sequence) move your hand just under your fist and say “under.” The next (the sixth) involves your pointing with your right hand (left fist stays in front of you) to a point just next to your right shoulder. Say “next to” in the TL. They repeat with enthusiasm.

Then, when you think that your students are ready, add four more prepositions. The next (seventh) preposition you want to TPR is “near.” Here you place your right hand next to your left fist, flat with your palm just next to the fist. Say “near” in the TL. They repeat. After that, say “very near” in the TL and move your right flat hand that is just to the right of your fist against the fist even more. That is “very near.” Then, quickly moving your right hand way out to the right of your fist and to the right of your body, say “far.” They repeat. The last preposition in this section is “very far.” They repeat.

When you feel that the class is ready, introduce two more. Preposition #11 in this sequence is “above.” Place your right hand far above your left fist. They repeat. Then, for preposition #12, put your right hand far below your left fist and say “beneath” in the TL. (“Beneath” is far below your fist compared to “under.”) They repeat.

When they are ready for two more, prepositions #13 and #14 are presented. Here you flatten both hands out and, similar to the airline employees with the big flashlights bringing in airplanes, point out “across from” with both hands. They repeat. Next, point your right hand behind you and say, “in back of” which is different from preposition #2 “behind” as represented earlier in the sequence.

End this activity with three more prepositions. The first is “against.” Push your fists together. They repeat. The next is “with.” Clasp your open hands together like in a victory hand clasp. They repeat. Finally reach out as if you are asking for a hug and say with a big smile, “together.” They repeat.

Do this whenever you think of it. Don’t forget to do it when visitors are there – it is probably far more impressive to visitors than it is effective as a teaching tool because it is really just a list. Its benefit is that it has the physical movement/deeper neurological training piece to it.

Here is the order of presentation of the prepositions with hand signals:

#1 – on	#7 – near	#13 – across from
#2 – under	#8 – very near	#14 – in back of
#3 – in	#9 – far	#15 – against
#4 – in front of	#10 – very far	#16 – with
#5 – behind	#11 – above	#17 – together
#6 – next to	#12 – beneath	

### Body Slam the Prepositions

Here is another way to teach prepositions that can also serve as a brain break. However, know that students may hurt themselves physically when doing this one. I don’t actually do it for that reason, but rock star Colorado CI teacher Michael Miller of Cheyenne Mountain Junior High in Colorado Springs does. He keeps his students on their toes, literally! Every once in a while during class, he shouts out a TPR command in German.

Examples:

“Over the desk!” (*All the kids immediately move their bodies over their desks in an attempt to be the first to do so and thus win the extra credit point available with this command.*)

“Next to the desk!” (*Same drill. Winner gets the point.*)

“Under the desk!” (*They all dive under their desks.*)

“On the floor!” (*They dive.*)

“In the corner near the window!” (*There they go.*)

“Left hand on the table – and make some noise!” (*Hands slam.*)

Michael has an easy way of marking the extra credit points down. In a clear plastic folder he has the seating chart for each class. Each student’s name is on a sticky note on a piece of paper inside the folder. He walks over to his podium, losing no teaching time, and simply puts a mark on the clear plastic over the student’s name. He puts it in the grade book later.

This TPR command game done occasionally during the week not only provides a very physical break for the kids, but is also a great way to get repetitions on prepositions. It especially gives fidgety boys a moment to shine, and, when it is time to return to the story, the focus of the class is increased due to the fun break just experienced.

## **Skill #14 – Class, a Secret!**

This skill is from Jason Fritze. Whenever we need to move things along, if things are a bit slow in our discussion with our classes, whatever the activity, we can just lean forward as if we are whispering to our students and say in the TL: “Class...a secret!”

We instruct them, upon hearing that cue, to lean forward, cup their hand behind their ear, stomp their foot in unison on the floor of the classroom (it must be in unison) and look at us with great interest. We then proceed to tell them the secret.

For example, if we have asked the class a number of times what color the house is, and they keep throwing out different colors, slowing everything down, we just tell them that we have a secret, they lean in to hear what it is, and we tell them that the house is blue and we can go on with our discussion.

(An option to this way of clarifying and moving things along is to ask the student whose job is to be the “Professeur” what color the house is. This job is described later in this text in the section on Jobs for Kids.)

## SECTION TWO:

# Twenty-Seven Strategies

### Strategy #1 – TPR

Total Physical Response (TPR) is based on the idea that language learning is a whole brain process that does not involve analysis, that it is learned primarily by listening, and that it should not involve stress.

How does TPR work? The instructor gives commands and students respond to these commands with physical actions in a fun way.

TPR was developed by James Asher. It is based on coordination of language and physical movement.

The process provides a way for students to quickly recognize meaning in the language. It should be used by all CI teachers at the beginning of the first year of study in TPRS programs. Five minute sessions or less are recommended.

Sabrina Janczak adds:

“Doing TPR to start the year sets the mood of fun using our bodies. I always do TPR with parents at the beginning of the year and they always love it. It works, at least for a little while before it gets boring. It helps with the visual/kinesthetic learners as well.”

Sabrina provides below a list of the verbs that she always does TPR with to start her year. The verbs are given here in third person form and in English:

goes	talks	laughs
goes towards	says	sleeps
stands up	stops	takes
sits	dances	puts
walks	draws	throws
jumps	writes	kisses
sees	eats	cries
turns	drinks	drives
touches	scratches	claps
goes up	yells	swims
goes down	hits	has
sings	shows	

Examples of TPR commands in first few months of French 1:

*prend un crayon rouge rapidement et jette le crayon dans la poubelle*/take a red pen quickly and throw it in the wastebasket

*caresse l'ordinateur romantiquement*/caress the computer romantically

*gratte la tête d'un garçon blond*/scratch the head of a blond boy

*met ta main gauche sous la table*/put your left hand under the table

*embrasse ton épaule droite*/kiss your right shoulder

How to present the words? Most people have a Word Wall. They just put a big list of words on the wall of about 50-70 words at the beginning of the year. The verbs obviously should be high frequency, about 25 to 35 of them, including these in particular: to be, to have, to want, to go, to like, there is, and any of the other “big” verbs in the language.

However, if a big verb is missing don't worry! You can add it later if you see in class that it is not on the wall. Moreover, if you just keep doing stories, the most common verbs will occur naturally anyway.

Besides the verbs on the wall there are some adjectives and nouns, etc. so you have a nice mix of words. The wall will be used not just for the TPR activity but also for free writes, during class, the Word Chunk Team Game described later, etc.

I leave the same word wall up all year. I want reps on those words and I find that working with the same word wall all year not only provides me with those reps as I laser pointer to them in various situations in class, it also rains words down into our class in a general way. It is a very useful tool in my CI classroom.

We don't TPR a lot of verbs all at once. With TPR we generally limit each class to a few verbs, or even just one, over just a few minutes of TPR. That's all that the brain can handle.

What often happens with a lot of teachers, as a word of caution, is that they have so much to do that they end up dropping the TPR practice with verbs. We should not let that happen. Gesturing verbs, acting them out physically, is one of the most valuable and fun things we can do to get our CI program going.

## Strategy #2 – Circling with Balls (CWB):

Many teachers use the Circling with Balls activity to start off their academic years. Its purpose is not so much to teach the language as much as to personalize the classroom and to establish the Classroom Rules (see Chapter 6) in the classroom.

Once the kids know that the class is about them and what the rules are, things are set up for success.

The Circling with Balls activity is easy to do. Each student has a half sheet of colored card stock, folded lengthwise so that it can stand up on the desk in front of the student. (I use a different colored card stock for each class that I teach.)

The students write their names clearly in large letters on the left hand side of the half sheet, and to the right of their name they draw a picture of a sport or musical instrument they play or want to play, or a drawing of a favorite pet or animal. They can draw more than one thing if they want. They prop the half sheet lengthwise in front of them so that the teacher can easily see their name and what they drew.

By asking the kids to do this on the first day of class, I catch their attention. The students see that *their* interests, and not a textbook, are going to be the subject of the class.

For the next several days, I ask the kids to place their cards on their desks facing me. This and TPR begin my year. I just walk around the room, expressing interest in what I see while engaging the class in circled conversation in the target language about what they have drawn.

As I walk around, I may notice that LaVonne has drawn a volleyball to the right of her name. So I say:

*Classe, LaVonne joue au volley!*

Next, I go to the board and write:

*LaVonne joue au volley* - LaVonne plays volleyball!

Then, pointing to and pausing at each single word I say, I begin a series of circled repetitive questions based on the original statement. This is the first comprehensible input of the year, on the first day of the year, so it has to be done right.

I require that the class respond chorally to each statement I make, as indicated below in bold in parentheses and as explained in the previous section on Choral Responses.

Statement: *Class, LaVonne plays volleyball! (ohh!)*

Question: *Class, does LaVonne play volleyball?* (yes)

Either/Or: *Class, does LaVonne play volleyball or does LaVonne play soccer?* (volleyball) *That's right, class, LaVonne plays volleyball!* (ohh!)

Negative: *Does LaVonne play soccer?* (no) *No, class, LaVonne doesn't play soccer. She plays volleyball!* (ohh!)

3 for 1: *Class, does LaVonne play basketball?* (no) *That's right class, that's ridiculous, LaVonne doesn't play basketball! She plays volleyball!*

What: *Class, what does LaVonne play?* (volleyball) *That's right, class, she plays volleyball!*

Who: *Class, who plays volleyball?* (LaVonne) *Correct, class, LaVonne plays volleyball.*

When, where, why and other details can be slowly added into this process as the kids start to acquire the most necessary question words. You will eventually find that the most powerful question word is “where.” Another great spark question in the Circling with Balls activity is the question “with whom?”

This is the time to encourage silly responses that are personalized to the part of town your students live in, or to the very school building you are in, like in the principal's office or in the basement. When you do this you will sense a kind of lift off to the discussion. We can personalize locations as well as people!

With the cards propped up in front of the students, all I have to do is ask questions as I walk around the room looking at and marveling at my kids' cards. I look my students in the eyes. I turn and proudly share with the class what I have learned about a particular kid.

In this way, I get to know the students I will be teaching that year, in a non-threatening way, focusing only on their strengths and interests, and the class gets to know them. They start to become a member of a community.

This is huge for a kid, to be known to the class. If they are known in this way, they won't have to work so hard to get the attention of the class in other ways. And of course they are going to want to understand what I am saying to them in the target language. It's about them!

I always give my students time to absorb all the words I say by including long enough pauses, up to five seconds or more. I point to the words I use and their translation on the board. This processing time is crucial to make everything work. It also sends the message that you care if your students understand. When they leave the class on that first day of using the Circling with Balls activity they often blurt out, “I understood everything!”

As the students' familiarity with the question words gradually increases, I stop pointing to things that they easily comprehend, but I continue pointing to anything that they do not yet easily understand.

The entire process is very slow. Acquisition takes months and many thousands of repetitions. The easy question word “who,” for example, is usually still shaky in the minds of many students in March or April, and yet they have heard the word in meaningful context every day since August.

It’s just that way. It’s how the brain is wired. The brain needs to hear everything thousands of times *if not tens of thousands of times*, which really impacts the assessment piece in language classrooms.

The process that we call acquisition means that the language has been *absorbed by the unconscious mind* and that *neural connections have been made* that easily bring that information into the conscious mind to be instantly recognized when they are eventually heard again in random fast speech. *The conscious mind cannot do this work.* The conscious mind can learn, but it cannot acquire.

Learning implies forgetting. Acquisition means that it stays in there forever. Acquisition is such a deep thing. In comprehension-based instruction, we teach for acquisition, even while knowing that we have a fraction of the time needed to reach it. At least we can turn the kids on to the language and not make them hate it because of all the grammar worksheets.

As long as the instructor:

1. honestly listens to the students’ cute answers (which ideally are received in the target language),
2. makes certain that student-provided information drives the class,
3. points and pauses to all question words and any new words that may have slipped into the discussion,
4. checks for comprehension (discussed in detail below),
5. stays in bounds,
6. speaks slower than seems possible and in a way that is almost painful,
7. uses absolutely simple language,
8. conveys a genuine sense of wonderment that these students do such wonderful things,

then Circling with Balls will do its job in setting up the stories that will happen later, when it is time.

There are YouTube videos where I talk about this activity as well.

## Matava Questionnaire

I recommend fitting Anne Matava's Questionnaire onto the back of the Circling with Balls cards. This puts in one place, on one card, these two powerful personalization tools. Don't forget to color code the card stock per class.

Downloadable versions of both cards can be found at [www.benslavic.com](http://www.benslavic.com) on the posters page (TPRS Resources) for your use. Click on:

Circling With Balls Template - Side A

Circling With Balls Template - Side B

Once, while looking at the reverse side of the CWB card, my eyes fell on A Name That You Wish You Could Have in response to which a shy student had written Her Majesty. Instead of just being a cardboard cutout in my class, this student suddenly and wonderfully became Her Majesty (back of card) Who Dances (front of card). I felt humbled to be able to call her that, and the effect was that a previously shy student took on a kind of regal air in class. This stuff happens in comprehension-based classrooms.

So the questionnaire can bring important personalized details about a student into play much earlier than when we just circle with balls in the normal way.

If you learn that another student, Catherine, has two horses, whether it is true or not, you can develop it into all kinds of imaginative personalized comprehensible input over the course of the year to greatly strengthen Catherine as an important member of the class that year.

You could ask Catherine questions about the horses: which is bigger, what are their names, what color they are, which one runs faster, which one Catherine prefers, etc. You could make them really big or really small, teeny weeny horses. You could spend a week asking Catherine questions about those two horses – she would be happy to answer all of them.

If you are a middle school teacher, expect lots of horses and cats and dogs and narwhals that are rainbow colored and whose first names are usually Bob.

Think of the Circling with Balls cards and the questionnaires, when they are placed back to back on a piece of card stock, as a sort of foundation on which you can start your year building truly personalized and meaningful classes.

Below Anne describes how she uses her questionnaire at the beginning of the year:

"I do not start the year with stories per se; rather, I work intensively with material provided in the students' responses to questions on my questionnaire. I scan the questionnaires for an interesting piece of information and spin little scenes out of it. I choose one or two students to talk about each day. In this way, I cover structures such

as likes, is, wants, goes, has, eats, and plays, in the first 6 to 8 weeks of school. This creates a body of acquired language from which we may begin working with story scripts. It also gives me a chance to get to know the students, and communicates to them that they are important in my class. Below is an example of what one such scene, circled out of the information that ‘Chris plays bass guitar’ and ‘Big Boy sings.’”

*Chris plays bass guitar in a band. Big Boy sings in the band. The band is called “Mr. Rogers’ Band.” It is a gospel band. Big Boy sings in Pig Latin. The concert is in jail. Mini-Me is in jail because he is too short. Mini-Me cries and dances the Macarena.*

I asked Anne to elaborate on the above:

**Q.** *How long do scenes like that take to create?*

**A.** That little scene probably took about one 40-minute period, very early in the year.

**Q.** *Do you work with two kids per class like this for three academic weeks (15 classes x 2 kids)?*

**A.** The two kids per class thing is not carved in stone. With music, it was easy to find two kids and put them in a band. When I talk about what someone likes to eat, for example, I might make it only about them. I don’t really know going in. Normally I start each class having chosen one fact about one kid from his questionnaire. Sometimes others get added in, sometimes they don’t. Three weeks is not long enough. It’s more like four to six weeks.

**Q.** *In other scenes, do you get into more or less detail than in the scene you described above?*

**A.** The amount of detail is about right. Maybe more as time passes.

*Q. Is it possible to get a first silly name for a kid from this activity?*

**A.** A silly name? I never thought about it. Why not?

Notice very importantly that Anne said this: “I don’t really know going in [what will happen].” This is huge. The teacher who succeeds with comprehensible input must be willing to give up teaching a preset body of information (always boring to kids) and instead work with information that the kids make up (always interesting to them).

Anne concluded:

“I call the use of the questionnaires my first quarter curriculum. It’s easy to write a curriculum guide with it. Students will be able to tell where they live, how old they are, what they like, etc. Sounds just like the old textbook days, doesn’t it?”

What usually happens is that the students don’t initially take the questionnaires seriously because they see it as an assignment for school and not for what it is, an honest request to find out about them in a lighthearted way. So after handing them in without really caring what they wrote, when the students realize that you really want to learn about them and talk about those things in class, they ask for their questionnaires back.

When that happens you can then use the questionnaires to maximum effectiveness all year, and you will know that your classroom is well on its way to becoming a strongly personalized classroom. Your interest in them sparks their interest in each other. Facts from the cards and questionnaires end up in stories. You can use them all year, injecting facts into stories and readings, keeping things personalized and thus interesting.

The kids can’t wait until you get around to them, to their cards and questionnaires, but you won’t be able to get to every student’s card in the first months of the year. There is just too much information to discuss and working only with the questionnaires can lead to boredom.

I suggest working with the cards and questionnaires of perhaps one or two kids in each class period, making no attempt to discuss everything on the card. In this way it is entirely reasonable to extend the CWB/questionnaire activity all the way until the end of the year in May.

The CWB card is on one side of a piece of card stock, the Questionnaire on the other. Each class has color coded card stock which makes it easy to find them at the beginning of class.

Don’t be afraid to write up the little scenes that get created as you ask questions. Present them as readings the next day. This is a great way to reinforce prior learning and to set the foundation for more complex reading later. Just project the reading the same day or the next day and read the first sentence with them, then circle the content, and go to the next sentence and continue on that way getting repetitions on what was said. Because of the previous day of comprehensible input, they will be able to process the reading based on sound processed the day before.

While things are being discussed, the class artist can draw what is being discussed and in that way we can get even more reps on structures beyond the time spent discussing and reading. All we ever try to do is get reps on target structures, in any way we can. The role of the class artist in a CI classroom will be discussed later in this text.

It is easily possible that an entire class period could be spent reading texts based on the discussion generated by only two cards from the previous day. That is time well spent. Why? Because when kids read things that are interesting to them (and nothing is more interesting to teenagers than themselves), they will focus on the message and not on the structure of the language. We know that focusing on the message and not the words is the key to our work with comprehensible input.

Just make sure that you talk about each student before the end of the year! At least briefly mention those kids who are painfully shy and don't want to engage with you in class. They aren't so shy as to want to be excluded from the group!

As stated, all along, the students don't even consciously notice that everything is in the target language, as per Krashen's position that only when the mind of the student is focused on the meaning and not on the individual words can real acquisition happen.

I have received lots of good questions about the Circling with Balls activity over the years and present discussion about some of them here:

The first question is from a teacher then new to this work who asked me about applying the technique to upper level students who had never done comprehensible input before and whose entire language learning experience had been from a book.

**Q.** *Should [these students] be spoken to in more complicated tenses since they already knew the present tense, and what would that look like?*

**A.** Students consider the present and the past and really all verb tenses as not different in terms of difficulty. Once they know that a certain sound means a certain thing, that's it. There are *no levels of difficulty* in comprehension-based instruction – there is only how fast we speak and how clear the message is in context. We as grammar teachers made up the idea that complex verb tenses are more difficult. For proof of that statement, look to how small children learn complex grammar all the time. Nothing is harder or easier to understand in the target language for beginners as long as they know what it means, so in comprehensible input we teach grammar by just saying what it means. That's all they need to know.

The real concern with upper level classes just beginning comprehensible input instruction is that they will revolt at being pried out of a comfort zone that they have known for years, one that has worked very well for them thank you very much in terms of the grade but hasn't actually taught them anything except how to manipulate the language on paper, like solving a jig saw puzzle, and even that grammar is all jumbled up in their minds. I would suggest that

you stop using CI with these kids and continue teaching them as they have been taught in the past. A few students may embrace the shift, but for the others there will be a heavy feeling in the room as they try to find the place in their brains where languages are actually learned. Some classes may be able to do it, if you play your cards right, because who doesn't want to talk about themselves? This reminds me of that beautiful passage in *Le Petit Prince* about taming and friendship where you pull your chair closer to someone just a little bit every day in order to tame them and become their friend. It's like that. Then maybe they will give you the green light to spend a few minutes at the end of class asking them questions about their cards and so on. I would introduce Circling with Balls to an upper level class which has never before experienced comprehension based instruction in that way just at the end of class for a few weeks to start. I would not start the year off with them by making a big speech about how this year we are going to try a new method and it's going to be really neat and we're going to laugh and have fun and speak in the target language and all that. I wouldn't even say that to a level 1 class. So with these kids sneak CWB in a few minutes a day and it may grow. If it doesn't, cut your losses and teach the class the old way. I wish someone had told me that. Once I inherited a fourth year grammar class of privileged kids that no amount of early morning donuts could win over to comprehension-based teaching. I tried for a year. All I had to do if I had only fully grasped the enormity of the task at hand was to fall back on my twenty-four years as an AP French teacher and start spouting grammar rules and doing worksheets and everybody including me would have been much happier.

**Q.** *In Circling with Balls, what do you do if there are five kids in the same class who play basketball?*

**A.** This has happened to me. I just make each one of them the best player *in their region*. I can teach geographical expressions that way. Each athlete has a region or a maybe a country that they are the best in. Connecting a place to a student is a powerful aspect of CWB and of the overall personalization process that we use in comprehension based instruction.

Another thing is to compare the five players to major stars in real life, but never with each other. Leonard who plays basketball better than Tim Duncan is the best player in the Western Conference of the NBA and Landen, a guard, plays better than Eastern Conference guard Deron Williams of the Brooklyn Nets. Leonard is the best player in the West and Landen is the best player in the East. Leonard is never better than Landen; students in any activity are always better than someone not in class. You can see, just from the above discussion about only two students who play basketball, how rich the discussion can become very quickly, with so many facts that you could spend a week just talking about those five basketball players. It would be a good use of time.

**Q.** *Are the sports balls necessary? What about those kids who ski, dance, skateboard, etc. where getting props for those sports into a classroom is difficult? Also, what about the students who do activities that don't involve athletics at all, like reading?*

**A.** So the history is that the original reason I created Circling with Balls was for those physically rambunctious athletic types who, in eighth grade especially, can't even stay in their seats. Many teachers have run into immediate problems by ignoring such students. I need to tame them immediately in the first days of class. So I start things off on the first day of school by holding a football in my hands and engaging them in the TL about

their interest in football. I use the football as a carrot, dangling it in front of him, pretending to be about to give it to him, then withdrawing it. It is very much like taming an animal. My goal is to control the dialogue with that student before he even thinks about trying to control it with me. During this time I teach the student the rules and everybody learns them by seeing them modeled. It can take up to an entire period to tame that one potentially difficult student, but what options do you have?

To your point – of course we don't need props when doing this activity. The balls are just there to deal with potential troublemakers. With other kids, we can just say that Jenny reads or that Jeff skates without props. As long as we can convey the image of reading a book with our hands or through physical motions with an imagined skateboard, we don't need the real props. Everything we do when we use comprehensible input is based on conveying meaning in whatever way we can.

*Q. I just want to be able to reach my students with this activity and not be boring.*

**A.** We are all different and when we use comprehensible input all we really have to do is speak to our students in ways that they can understand and that are interesting to them. That is all we have to do. First you try and then you succeed. It's part of the magic of the process. All we have to do is try.

### **Strategy #3 – One Word Images (OWI):**

One Word Images is a term that I use to describe another way of using comprehension based techniques to set up Invisibles for later.

OWI is a lot of fun for the kids and is a lot of fun for me, one that I could do for hours and hours on end, just to see what the kids come up with.

To start, just pick a noun. It could be a car or a house, but animals are the best, especially with younger kids.

Write the word down on the board, translate it, ask a student to pretend to be the object or animal and sit down at the front of the room on one of the stools we will use in our stories later, and then start asking the kids the following specific set of questions about it:

its name	rich or poor	where it is
its quantity	mean or kind	what it is doing
its size	hair color	when this occurred (time, day of the week, etc.)
its color	eye color	other physical characteristics
its intelligence level	its mood	

Just see where the class takes it. As you ask more and more questions, the image will develop almost like a photograph in the minds' eyes of the students. To middle school students in particular, and especially when it is an animal, and especially when they create it, and when the animal has a silly name, and does strange things, the image becomes very compelling.

I have a laminated copy of the above questions on my desk so I can grab it fast if I need it because something else isn't working. It is my prompt sheet for this activity.

The process of creating these images can last from a few minutes to an entire class period. Of course, the story writer and artist should be used when doing this activity, as explained in the section Chapter 3 of this book.

Doing OWI is actually very much like asking a story, but without all the action. It gives the students and the teacher a chance to warm up to the task of making stories later on.

Building confidence in new teachers is not something that TPRS is known for. So, if you are new to teaching using comprehensible input, it is nice to know that you can just take a word like "*casa*" and work with it in a very simple way. All you have to do is say "*casa*" in front of the class in a tone of expectancy, showing that it is a special word that you and the kids are going to talk about in a special way that day.

Of course, we establish meaning in the usual way, writing *casa* on the board and then in English. We then slowly put our hand next to the word first in the target language and then in English and then we pause to let it sink into the students' minds.

This word - *casa* - is just the first word in a series of words that the class will build into an image that is unique to them, to their class. It may or may not become a scene, but for now it is just an image, and when the building of it becomes boring, just like small children, we turn to something else that might be fun. Why? Because we know that we are not in that school building to be bummed out all the time at how lazy our students are. They are not lazy, they have been blocked, and this way of teaching unblocks them.

Having made up a sound or a gesture or anything that we can think of to help the students remember the base word *casa*, you now need a student to pretend to be the house for the duration of the activity. You are going to train your first actor.

So you say "I need a *CASA*!" and then just wait for a student to come up and sit on one of the acting stools and pretend to be a house. What does acting mean in a comprehension-based classroom? It means that a child comes up and sits on a stool and occupies space. There is no acting involved. Actors are there to follow directions and not draw attention to themselves. If their character moves locations in a story, they do that when you say and not before or after you say it, as per Rule #7 of the Classroom Rules poster ([benslavic.com/TPRS Resources](http://benslavic.com/TPRS%20Resources)).

There is usually no shortage of kids wanting to act, but too many times kids come up who just go up there for

the attention. *We need to know who those kids are and not let them get on that stool.* I encourage quieter kids to act, the ones who know what is going on and are mellow. If no one comes up, which would be very rare, I just go to another activity, or back to the CWB cards (always a good bail out move because it takes a long time, many months, to get through all the cards, and often require doing CWB periodically until the end of the year).

Be clear that the building of the image, as in the building of stories later, must always be done by the group, and certainly never by the teacher. The teacher only gets to ask the questions; the kids provide the answers. They are learning here how to build things together in the language. The skills they learn doing this will be needed in the Invisibles stories.

In the work we do with comprehensible input, we are not teaching images or stories, we are teaching little chunks of language. The kids think that they are making an image, because they forget that the instruction is in a foreign language. While they are focused on the developing image, your focus is on the structures being used and getting loads of repetitions on them.

All the while this is happening, the child is beginning to acquire the language in the real way, by focusing on meaning and not on individual words, freeing up the unconscious mind to do what *only it can do* – turn sounds into meaning without the involvement of the conscious mind.

Slow repetition is the key to this work. If you were really to go slowly enough while getting these reps, you could conceivably take more than one class period to create just one image, because you repeated things so much. This would be painful for you but great for the kids.

Working on the image the next day would allow you the time needed to then take the notes in L1 from the story writer and turn them into an early-in-the-year reading. This is highly advised because the students will then transfer the meaning of the sounds they heard on the previous day into actual reading. Why not start the process now?

Of course, the icing on the cake for this activity comes when, once the process is over, you unveil the drawing done by the artist as the image was being created. That is a great moment, a moment of pride for the artist, and an opportunity for us to get mega reps on everything we just talked about as we use the laser pointer to recycle and highlight and restate details.

Just remember that the kids are brand new to the language and so we cannot therefore afford to get complicated on them when doing one word images. Just hang out in the language with them and speak so slowly that it's painful for you. It's not painful for them.

A house becomes a little red house. If it develops into anything more than that, great. If not, the kids are hearing and understanding simple language via interesting, repeated and slow questioning, which is the entire point of everything we do.

To repeat, and this is the radical part for those who do not yet fully grasp what comprehensible input really is: we try to *get the students so focused on the image that they forget the words* that are being used, so that it all goes into the unconscious mind where languages are really acquired in the truest sense.

## Strategy #4 – Word Chunk Team Game (WCT):

It would be nice for teachers if communication via language could be done via single words only; their jobs would be much simpler. Unfortunately that is not the case. Languages require that words be grouped together in order for communication to occur.

So we definitely want to learn the art of grouping words together in chunks in our early year comprehension based instructional strategies. Doing this offers students a more robust version of language instead of mere word lists, which is what textbooks provide. Word chunking thus paves the way for more complex language in the future, eventually leading to stories and strong passing rates on exams like the AP.

In this activity, word chunking has been made into a game. It is used in exploratory classes and at the beginning of the year in regular classes, usually on Fridays as a reward for good efforts at listening (which is very rigorous), or any time a break in routine is needed.

The Word Chunk Team Activity makes use of the word walls. It builds a sense of play, builds group trust and group identities, and motivates the kids to listen for meaning.

Here is the process:

1. After teaching, gesturing, and working individually with the words on the Word Wall for some weeks, you put the kids into groups and ask them to come up with a silly group name, plus a gesture and/or sound to go with that name.
2. Then, referring to the Word Wall, make up bizarre little combinations (chunks) of words from the Word Wall, keeping those chunks really simple at first. For example, you look at the Word Wall and see the word “hand” and you also notice the word “yell.” Both words have already been presented in the Word Association activity prior to doing this activity. Putting the two words together, you say, “The hand yells!” in L2. It doesn’t have to make sense, and is better if it doesn’t, because it teaches the students to pay greater attention. So make the images bizarre.
3. Each group then tries to translate what they heard by consulting with each other, working together to come up with the correct translation.
4. You call on the first group to raise their hand. Once recognized, they must *first do their group sign* in totally synchronized fashion before answering. If they are successful, they get to answer the question. Then they give you the answer in English and, if correct, that group gets six attempts at a basket (in under one minute) or six attempts at hitting a circle on the board with a paper ball, or something like that. Basketball is best, because they all want to shoot for points and show off for their classmates.

5. Their group name and sign is a big part of this process. When I call on them they have to make their group sign *in perfect synchronization* between all group members. If they can't do that, they don't get the question. I know that sounds over the top, but if you see it in action you can see what this sign synchronization detail does for the game.

This activity does all sorts of things for class chemistry. It is fun, highly personalized, the time goes by quickly, there is lots of laughter, and there is a tremendous level of auditory focus on L2, with readily apparent auditory gains early on in the year, setting the stage for successful stories later in the year.

For example, the group that has decided that it wants to be known as the “*Conquistadores*,” when I say something like “the house is not red” (house and red having already been taught in class from the wall) each group member jumps up and, exactly at the same moment, claps and yells “¡*Olé!*” together. That is their group sign. All have to do it. If it isn't perfect, the class bemoans them for their slackness, and other groups vie for the question by putting their hands in the air.

Eventually, a group answers two questions correctly, and so they earn a group trip to “the line” at the basketball hoop, to take three shots for every correct answer they have provided, or six shots. Of course, the kids take the scoring very seriously, as you have told them that it is for extra credit. (That is where we have arrived in education – some kids won't even play a game unless it is for extra credit!)

Of course, I rarely put anything in the grade book to reflect points made during the game, because I don't want to and because they normally forget that they even earned those points when class is over.

In the rare case that kids come up at the end of class or at the end of the grading period wanting their extra credit, I throw a few points into the book for their group members and move on with my day. I tell them that the onus of remembering how many points they have is on them and that they have to come to me with their extra credit requests. Most just walk out of the classroom at the end of the period and forget all about it.

Chunking words in this way sets up an early capacity to focus on meaning and not individual words, which process, as stated, must occur if acquisition is to occur.

You should see the level of involvement. The kids are simply aware of playing a game, but they are doing some serious, in fact rigorous auditory decoding of sound chunks in the first weeks of the year. This work is preparing them in excellent fashion for stories.

I once wrote a response to a question on this Word Chunk Activity from a colleague who asked about sourpusses – how to get them involved in the game. I include part of it here:

“Whenever the team has to synchronize their team sign, little Joyless Johnny, bless his heart, is put on the spot by the rest of the group to participate. Even if his mind is clearly not going to participate, he must do the sign, or face the wrath of the group. The synchronized sign keeps the sourpusses in the game.”

But, if there is a *real* sourpuss, or someone who can't work well in a group, I just bring them to stand next to me to judge the synchronicity reactions of the teams. That student sits on a stool – one of the two stools in my classroom for actors in stories - and is given this job and with it a bit of power and he decides for me which group had their hand up first. This one job brings distant kids into the class process in marvelous ways.

There are three such jobs – one kid tells me which group had their hand up first, another tells me if the group did their sign in perfectly synchronized fashion, and the third keeps score on the board. Working with these three normally ill-behaved kids in this way breaks down walls between the teacher and the instructor and builds trust.

When joyless students have a job that I need them for, our relationships change. This is what I want. My goal as a teacher is to always find a way to bring every single student in the room into some kind of participatory role with me. I also authentically need these judges to see which group got their hand up first and if the synchronicity was there.

This asking of kids to judge the action also works for native speakers. I put the native speaker in front of the room with me and they pick out which group was first. They also help me by making up questions. They just look at the Word Wall and make up questions just like I do and they alternate with me in directing the action. The native speakers really get into making up Word Chunk questions and being judges in choosing the first group to get their hand up and, really, doing everything the teacher is doing, which is what native speakers should be doing in classrooms that they shouldn't, in the first place, even be in.

Even though English creeps into this game, I highly recommend it as a powerful tool for CI and for team building. It works best in seventh grade exploratory classes, whose (usually six to twelve week classes) are too short to get stories going, but eighth graders also like to play it every day and when I say no they sometimes view it as a form of punishment!

When we are further into the year, I still allow my classes fifteen minutes or more of this game at the end of the week as a reward for good storytelling work. But if a really fast processing kid fails to work with her group and dominates so that she is the only one answering questions, we just don't play.

By the way, this activity, along with dictation, also serves to keep the kids focused at the end of the year when many kids and teachers have checked out already.

Every once in a while, as a bail out move, when you arrive at one of those moments in teaching when you just don't know what to do, you can create word chunks to reinforce vocabulary without actually getting into all the details of the Word Chunk Team game.

Just point the laser pointer at one of the columns of words on the Word Wall. First just go down the list with the kids chorally translating. Then make up a few outlandish chunks and have them translate. It's just another bail out move possibility.

Of course, instead of using the word wall, you can use vocabulary chunks from a recent story or reading, or anything really, as long as you are keeping all your questions in bounds to known vocabulary.

## Strategy #5 – Dictée:

Dictée is a tool to teach writing, a tool to improve students' listening skills, a bail out move, and a tool to calm down the kids and get them doing what they have been taught to think school is about - writing.

We connect dictée to a recently created story, a novel, or a projected image. When this is done, the subject matter for the dictée is not random, which is a huge factor in the kids' confidence, as they are able to write based on known vocabulary that was taught in the past twenty-four to forty-eight hours.

So on the day after a story or after the reading of a novel, I have the option to go to the LCD projector or document camera and ask the students to take dictation on a passage from the just completed story or from the novel we are reading.

The key point in dictée is that there cannot be any speaking by the students. This must be enforced 100% of the time, or dictée is completely ineffective. Students speaking during dictation is much more egregious than their speaking during stories – it entirely defeats the purpose.

Neither must you, the instructor, speak English during dictée, for any reason, ever.

As long as absolutely no English is involved, dictée creates a wonderful flow of language, and spectacular connections between sound and writing occur in the minds of the students. The students can now see what sound looks like on paper. They must have heard and understood it with their ears first before turning it into writing output that they can see with their eyes. This is real writing, not memorized junk.

Dictée bridges the gap between sound and writing, melding the two, moving information back and forth across the hemispheres, processing, in the deeper mind, all sorts of connections as they lay the ground for original and authentic writing later.

All punctuation must be given, of course, in the target language. I always remember to teach punctuation terminology before doing the first dictée.

Here is the dictée process:

First, I give the students a half sheet of paper with groupings of three blank lines on them. Then:

1. On line 1, I read chunks of sentences and give the students time to write each chunk. I read each sentence chunk three times. The first time I read at a normal pace and they listen. The second time I read very slowly as they write. The third time I read at a normal pace while they check what they have written. I do not read it a fourth time. You will learn how to pace this. I simply *do not allow a student to ask for a repetition* of anything at any time.

2. Next, I show the students the correct version of the text, phrase by phrase, or chunk by chunk, and not sentence by sentence, which is too complex. They look at it and make their corrections on line 2 as I successively reveal each new correctly written chunk on the LCD or document camera.
3. The students bring down onto line 2 any corrections of the text only if any are needed, but the teacher may want to require that they copy the entire correct text on the second line. I grade both lines, whatever is correct from line 1 as well as any corrections made on line 2. In this way, the students are graded on what is correct, and not on what is wrong. They are graded on how well they can copy!
4. Line 3 is just a line space to make everything clearer and easier to read, but the teacher can opt to make them write the English version of the text on that third line as well.

The dictated version of the story doesn't have to align perfectly with the story passage it came from. In fact, intentional inaccuracies as you recreate the story force deeper thinking by the students, and allow you to perhaps introduce a limited amount of new vocabulary.

The benefits of doing this are obvious. The kids participate to a very high degree, because they know that working hard at the task of processing sound into writing will bring them an easy grade, which increases their overall motivation in the class, increasing classroom discipline.

Sean Lawler in the Chicago Public Schools offers an extension activity on dictation:

*...dictate 10 sentences, all of which are sentences from the story but are scrambled. After the dictation students then place the sentences in order...*

Sequence-of-events exercises lead to fast and strong gains in reading in our comprehension based classroom.

## **Strategy #6 – Look and Discuss**

Look and Discuss (L and D) has the advantage of being easy to do for teachers new to comprehension based instruction. If done slowly enough and with enough repetitions, the kids engage at a very high level. Why?

Because when students have a concrete image to support what is being said, they seem to understand more. They also seem to respond more strongly with their one word/yes or no answers than when there is no image. L and D classes somehow seem more “real.” Moreover, L and D helps us slow down (I don't know how but it just does) and so is a very valuable CI tool indeed!

Let's assume that we want to teach “plays guitar” (assuming that that expression had not been taught when we did

the Circling with Balls activity). We might find - on the internet or anywhere else - a picture of Peter Townshend playing the guitar with his right arm in the air and his left hand on the guitar.

The projected image attracts the students' attention as they enter the classroom. Then, all we have to do is start asking questions around the word or words that we want to teach, going very slowly and circling and not allowing ourselves to be distracted by anything else in the picture. If our target structure in that picture, what we want to teach, is "plays guitar," we stay religiously focused on repeating it in our circling, including that expression in everything we say, each question we ask, helping things along with a laser pointer.

It bears repeating that target structures are what we teach in this approach. Ideally, all the other words we use in our speech *have been previously experienced as target structures by the class*. This point is a subtle one, as many teachers try to teach too many words at once and invariably fail to make their input comprehensible.

So our intent when we begin the class by talking about a picture of Pete Townshend playing the guitar would be to get as many repetitions as we can on "plays guitar" and then to move on to target some other structure or word in the image or to move on to a new activity.

We may want to move on to discuss other things going on in the picture:

Class, does Peter Townshend *have long hair*? (circle that)

Is he *wearing a watch*? (circle that)

Doing that, of course, depends on what we know about what our students know and, obviously, what level they are in. If the kids already know "has long hair" and "wears" and "a watch," then we would use those terms. If not, we would avoid such expressions, because *it is enough for beginning level kids to focus on the single targeted structure* of "plays guitar" when listening to our instruction.

If you have a group of kids that can't be denied, and you choose to leave the safety of questions that only include the word "guitar" and other words that they already know, then that is your decision. Just know that going out of bounds and introducing too many new words using Point and Pause can lead to student apathy because nothing shuts down a brain faster in a language class than not understanding what it means. Why does this happen? Because the teacher is not putting into the mix of their instruction the four basic skills of circling, SLOW, staying in bounds and choral responses.

It bears repetition even to the point of being overstated - if there is a single most common error in this work besides *failure to speak slowly enough*, it is in *using words that our students don't understand* when we instruct them. These are the two greatest generators of student apathy in comprehension-based classrooms. We think that our students understand because we do, but they don't. Never assume anything in this work, *even with cognates*. (Cognates are easy to recognize in reading but not in speech.)

Simply put, we can say that if we let the water leave the banks of the river, we will have a flood of too much information and the students will shut down and our classroom will become flooded with words. This happens far too often in CI classes, and the blame is very often wrongly placed on the approach, rather than on the person using the approach.

With the Look and Discuss activity, I am always amazed at the power of the image to convey meaning. With L and D I am able to:

1. stay in bounds where before, and especially in stories, I was often out of bounds. There is something about the picture that keeps all of us in bounds.
2. insist on a strong response of one word, mainly yes and no, answers from the entire group all the time. Before I didn't have the strength of character to insist on a strong group choral response, and, again, I think that the picture "stabilizes" the instruction in the Look and Discuss activity more than in other forms of CI instruction so that it is easier for me to get a strong choral response from my class.

Now that I can stay in bounds and avoid weak class responses, while speaking much more slowly than is comfortable for me (a good sign), I can enjoy working with the Look and Discuss activity a lot more than in the past.

Why is Look and Discuss a proven winner in the comprehension-based classroom for teachers who have command over the CI skills? It is because the picture is right there in front of them. Many if not most students have had their imaginations and ability to visualize things beaten out of them in school, and so the pictures are easy for them to respond to in a positive way. We will apply the truth of that statement in many of the other CI strategies offered in this book as well.

Especially when the images are beautiful, the students seem so grateful and excited to connect L2 sounds with real images. Consider what it would be like to use Google Earth to talk about Paris in class. Who is not interested in Paris?

A caution with Look and Discuss is that students tend to get so excited about what they are seeing that they begin to try to sneak in questions and comments in English. This happens more in L and D than in other comprehension-based activities. Vigorously enforce the no English rule.

## Pre-AP Strategies

Look and Discuss is a lot like what our students are asked to do on the AP exam. By speaking to the students about an image and then having them read what was discussed, we are training the students how to write and speak about an image.

Administrators like terms like “pre-AP strategy.” They actually think that we plan the class to that goal. But comprehension based instruction is so powerful that we don’t have to plan anything. All we have to do is speak to our students in the target language and have them read, and all sorts of lofty educational goals that have fancy names that we who are in classrooms don’t even care about are met automatically.

So if you ever do the Look and Discuss activity with your students and an administrator comes in to observe, be sure to explain in any post-observation conference that in the observed activity, in this case Look and Discuss, you were addressing pre-AP strategies.

Then, when the administrator points out that the students neither wrote nor spoke during your class (they always have to find something wrong), you then point out how input precedes output by many years in language learning, unlike in other classes the administrator may observe in her building. Training administrators about what we do is one of the hardest parts of our jobs.

### Steps of Look and Discuss

Here is a review of the steps involved in Look and Discuss:

**Step 1:** Pick out an image from the internet that contains some vocabulary that you would like to teach your kids. Erin Bas provides an example:

*“The New York Times has a learning blog. Every Monday, they post a photo without a caption as a Common Core look-for-evidence activity. (Students are encouraged to observe and comment about their opinions.) The next day, they update the post with more information. Some of them are quite interesting – a fat Spiderman in Madrid with a crowd of tourists looking at him, a smoking protester in Ukraine playing a bright blue piano to a crowd of riot police. Once you get to the site, search ‘What’s Going On in This Picture?’”*

[ed. note: There is another nice term to drop on an administrator – Common Core “look-for-evidence.” And yet all Erin wanted to do was talk with her students about a fat Spiderman in Madrid with a crowd of tourists looking at him.]

**Step 2:** After you have chosen a (hopefully compelling) image, your next step is to establish meaning of the vocabulary you want to teach, aligning with thematic units if you are forced to do that, but keeping it simple even for upper level classes, because CI students always understand less than we think. (Please note that the quickest way to lose student interest in a comprehensible input class is to attempt to align your instruction with a thematic unit. When you do that, the kids immediately sense that you are trying to force their minds into a box, instead of releasing them from one.)

Again, establish meaning on only a very limited number of new structures. One is enough per image. When you

try to present too many terms you lose the kids. In comprehension based instruction we always limit vocabulary and offer tons of properly spoken language (grammar) to our kids so that they hear and process *the language* and not just isolated words.

**Step 3:** Begin circling the target structure while you and the students look at the picture. Always remember to include the target structure you are trying to teach in each question you ask. Do your best to stay in bounds, go slowly, and insist on strong one word choral responses from the class.

If, in twenty minutes of slow circling, you only get five sentences built around the target(s) you started with, that is fine. When you circle in this slow and deliberate way about just a few structures, while at the same time enforcing the Classroom Rules, you will see something. There will be crystal clear comprehensible input happening all over the classroom.

When that happens you will find yourself beginning to enjoy your job in a new way, and your students will, in spite of their teenage selves, begin appreciating in a genuine way what they are learning from you.

Isn't that our goal, to be happy in our work as teachers and to provide instruction for our students that makes them want to participate and learn more every time they come into our classrooms?

**Step 4:** Of course, we have to assess, and since formative assessment is more efficient than summative evaluation in comprehension based instruction, we can at this point, after discussing the image, give a quick quiz.

That is how simple Look and Discuss is! All you have to do is establish meaning of one or a few targeted structures, discuss the picture using a target structure in every single slowly circled sentence you say to your students while they look at the picture, then give a quiz!

### Free Writes and Look and Discuss

If time permits, with ten or fifteen minutes left in class, after the quiz, you may want to ask the kids to do a free write of what they can remember from the discussion of the projected image. They can refer to the words on the board that you may have written during the discussion. They can use any other posters you may have in your classroom to help them write. (Free writes will be discussed in detail later in this book.)

Then, after the free writes written about the picture just discussed, if there is still time, you can put a few writing samples from the kids' free writes up for general classroom discussion. [credit: Keri Colwell]

When discussing these free writes, absolutely do not correct the grammar. Why waste time? It doesn't help them. Instead of criticizing their grammar, praise them at every turn for being able to communicate an idea in another

language! Ask for rounds of applause from the class from time to time for work that really does an excellent job of communicating ideas in the target language. Think about how wonderful it is that students can even do that! And think how wonderful it is to be so recognized by their teacher!

### Grade Less

You can collect the free writes to use as a grade, but what I usually do is toss them. I am into the experience of teaching, not the assessment and categorization of it. I also value my time. I don't want to go running to the gradebook to enter another set of grades so that some unknown administrator, who may likely be gone the next year, can be impressed with how many grades I have in my gradebook. They don't care. Just put something (quick quizzes and jGR grades as discussed later) in there. You don't have to grade everything that you collect and you don't have to work yourself into a frazzle. It's just not necessary and you will know the truth of that statement when you grade less of the things that you collect from your students, because when you diminish the amount of time and energy you spend grading, your mental health will improve.

### Using Specialized Pictures

James Hosler has added a twist on how we can use pictures in the Look and Discuss format to raise the bar even higher from merely interesting to compelling input.

As usual, we choose an image and project it on the board and lead the class through a discussion in the target language in order to provide comprehensible input. The normal rules apply: the teacher is trying to speak comprehensibly in the target language by using slow circling and personalized questions and answers (PQA) throughout the discussion.

This first specialized activity from James is called "What's Wrong with This Picture?" We choose pictures that contain unexpected or wacky details in an otherwise normal picture. This brings the kids more deeply into the discussion.

For example, we would ask, "Would the boy be happier if the fish tank were on the ground? Of course he would! He wants to feed the fish but he can't reach them up on the ceiling!" That amount of language could take up to an entire class period for an upper level class.

Google some combination of [pbskids.org/berenstainbears/games/wrong](http://pbskids.org/berenstainbears/games/wrong) to find a site that contains some good pictures to use for this activity. Search the term "What's Wrong with This Picture?"

The second activity from James is called “What Are the Differences?”

For this we choose two pictures that resemble each other. We ask the students what is in one picture but not in another picture. All we have to do is ask questions like: “Is the girl happier in the first or the second picture? Of course! She is happier in the second picture, because in that picture she has two scoops of ice cream!”

Google some combination of [highlightskids.com/double-check](http://highlightskids.com/double-check) to find a site that contains some good pictures to use for this second activity. Search the term “What Are the Differences?”

## Strategy #7 – Verb Slam Activity (VSA)

Verbs, above all other aspects of language, determine the success or failure of our work using comprehensible input. We focus on them in a way that we focus on nothing else in our instruction. Along with TPR and numerous other activities, VSA allows us to do that. How does it work?

1. Find a picture of some verb you want to teach, some verb that you feel your students need repetitions on, some verb you *really want your students to know*. (In Denver Public Schools, we have two lists to refer to that we distribute to all new teachers as the DPS Scope and Sequence. It is basically a list of what we want them to teach for acquisition that year. One list has 100 verbs and the other, for upper levels, has 200.)
2. Establish meaning just as you would do in any comprehension based activity.
3. Ask for a gesture from the class, or use the same one from your first period class so that you don’t get confused throughout the day.
4. Start circling the verb.
5. Say the verb in every single statement or question you make, “slamming” it into your students’ minds. Get as many reps as you can in the short period of time – no more than fifteen minutes – that you have before they become tired of the picture.

How does this activity differ from Look and Discuss?

1. L and D is general discussion about a picture. VSA focuses only on verbs.
2. L and D can last more than a few minutes. VSA cannot last too long because of its intense focus on only one verb at a time.

3. We make a verb wall from VSA that stays up all year. That is the main function of VSA, to get a verb wall built in our classrooms that has on it only verbs that our students have *full command* over.

To make the verb wall, put a big sheet of empty paper (butcher block, etc.) on the wall. Work with a verb as described above. Do not add the verb to the wall until your class has acquired it. If certain students have acquired the verb, that is not enough. Just keep slamming a verb, one verb for a few minutes a day for a month or more if necessary.

Delaying the ceremonious addition of the verb to the poster paper until only the entire class has clearly acquired it frustrates the faster processors but keeps the class together. The extra reps don't hurt those faster processors anyway. By doing it this way, you avoid classes where some kids know the verb and some don't, which unravels programs over time.

Over time, the growing butcher block lists are added to spaces near the ceiling of the classroom for reference during writing activities.

I always put the third person singular form of the verb on the verb wall, while obviously using various forms of the verbs in various tenses during the VSA discussion.

Here is an example of how to slam a verb:

1. Write the new verb down on the board: *travaille* - works
2. Say to the students, "Class, '*travaille*' means 'works.'" (Note: all we do when we establish meaning is to say or write down "this means that." We don't explain any more than that. We just say "this means that." That's all.)
3. Ask the class what "*travaille*" means. The students all say "works."
4. Next, we say to the class, "Class, show me *works*!" Use the Show Me cards. The students suggest possible gestures and you accept one, praising the kid whose idea it was, insisting on a round of applause from the class for that kid. We try to remember to gesture the verb whenever we use it all year, while also looking at the inventor of the gesture in an approving way each time it is used. Kids learn to take ownership in certain verbs when they were the one to suggest a gesture for it. Whatever gesture the first period class uses, use that one throughout the day to keep things simple.
5. Now we have established meaning. At this point, just as in all the other comprehension based activities, we are ready to discuss and personalize the verb using PQA or PSA. Ask general questions. Does (your student) William work? Circle those questions exhaustively in the normal way.

By now your single baseball pitch counter or PQA counter – see Jobs for Kids section - who is counting repetitions on that single verb, will tell you that you have, perhaps, 50 reps on the verb. Thank them. When the discussion wanes, move on to something else.

## Strategy #8 – Mini Stories:

There is a point in the year when students are ready to create stories that are so short that they consist of only one or two sentences. Mini stories invite a gradual and balanced transition into regular stories from the earlier strategies described earlier in this text. They are training wheels for success later on with regular stories.

(Note: the term “mini story” is a shortened version of the original term “Personalized Mini Story” by Blaine Ray and is connected as well to the concept of “Extended PQA” as discussed in *PQA in a Wink!*)

Leigh Anne Munoz has said about mini stories:

*...Circling with Balls is great, in doses. Mini-stories excite the kids much more....*

Unlike the Verb Slam Activity, which targets single verbs using Look and Discuss, mini stories target verbs in combination. The key to creating interesting mini stories is to find a good mix of two (at the most three) verbs. The verbs chosen must “fit together” to create an interesting scene for the students.

Here is an example. The target structures are:

*is thirsty*

*drinks a lot*

The story script is:

*A dog is thirsty. The dog drinks a lot.*

The underlined words are the variables – they can change. They are the words that you can replace with cute answers from your students. If your class wants to make the story about a walrus and not a dog, they can, because the word is underlined. Note that the target structures are *never underlined* in a script because they are the words you want to teach.

The teacher starts in the usual way by establishing meaning and asking for gestures and doing a little PQA with the target structures.

Then the instructor starts circling the first sentence. Assuming that the class has kept the word dog, the following personalized spinout discussion based on the above script might occur:

*So the dog is thirsty, correct, class? (yes)*

*Jenny, are you thirsty? (yes)*

*Class, Jenny is thirsty, right? (yes)*

*So the dog and Jenny are thirsty? (yes)*

*And are you hungry, Jenny?*

But there is a problem here. The fifth question has in it a verb – is hungry – that is not a target structure and that the class may have never seen before. The teacher has gone out of bounds.

The key to creating stories that work in your classroom is to use *only verbs that your students already know* as a result of having heard them hundreds of times before in meaningful context in activities like TPR, the Verb Slam Activity, etc. So try to avoid doing what happened in line 5 of the above spin out discussion.

It is best to avoid adding details to the mini stories – just the verb is enough for the kids at this point. The greatest responsibility of the level 1 CI teacher is to provide her students with constant contextualized repetitions on verbs. The resulting simplicity holds their interest and keeps everything in bounds, thus building the students' confidence.

### Suggested Class Sequence A

In any mini story, we:

1. Establish meaning of the verbs.
2. Decide with the class on a gesture for the verbs.
3. Get contextualized reps on the verbs.
4. Create the mini story, circling line by line from the script.
5. Give a quiz written by the Quiz Writer\*.
6. Discuss any art work created by our Story Artist\* (either on the document camera or on an interactive whiteboard).

7. Collect the story (written during class in English by the Story Writer\*), translate it and present it to the class the next day.

\*jobs explained later

What happens when we do comprehensible input as described in the above paragraph cannot be repeated enough. It is the formula for Coke. Why? Because when you go through the above sequence your stories work just fine, as long as you create the story line by line with slow in-bounds circling. Bring up actors if you want, but follow the guidelines given in this book about working with actors.

### An Internal Drive Train Process

The storytelling process is always about:

1. **establishing meaning** (just say or write “this means that,” getting gestures from the kids and then practicing the targets via PQA, etc.).
2. **getting reps** on the targets (now via the mini stories, later via full stories, MovieTalk, Look and Discuss and the rest of the CI arsenal described in this book).
3. **reading** the story or whatever you created with them.

So we learn that when we do mini stories and when we do comprehensible input in general the external form that the story takes is the only thing that changes. The underlined variables change in each class, but the story is the same.

Our template is to always use, in some form, the same internal drive train process described above, to provide our students with comprehensible input instruction when doing mini stories. These are the famous Three Steps of TPRS that make stories work.

After you master these, you will start to create other strategies that reflect your own teaching personality, and you will create them not because you have to but because you want to. But use the above steps – the seven or just the basic three above – as training wheels first.

Far too many people think that there are rules to follow when teaching using comprehensible input, which really confuses people and leaves our work on the fringes of language education. But there is no external formula. There is only the process described above, camouflaged in many different ways and packaged under different names.

## Suggested Mini Story Class Sequence B

In the same way that three steps can take the form of seven steps (mini story class sequence A), so also, like an accordion, can they also be expanded out to nineteen steps. We offer these more detailed steps for any readers who may wish to go even deeper into the overall process.

All steps added in below are merely suggestions that I have found to work for me in my classroom, and are not meant to be prescriptive in any way. However, printing out these nineteen steps and putting them somewhere you can see them when you are just starting out with mini-stories could help to keep you on track as you start learning how to teach this way:

1. **Establish meaning** for each structure. (Just say or write, “Class, this means that.” It takes five seconds. Avoid pontificating when you do this.)
2. Ask the students to **show you a gesture** for each structure. Say in the TL, “Class, show me \_\_\_\_\_!” Use the cards.
3. **Practice the gestures** a few times in a spirit of fun and amazement about how clever the students are. Try to remember to look at the student who provided the accepted gesture with approval each time you mention it in class during the mini-story.
4. **Ask some personalized questions** using the structures. Keep things light. If the students are tight lipped during this time, use PSA.
5. In mini stories, work with seated students as **actors** or bring actors up to the front of the room.
6. If the first sentence in the script is “John wants to buy a car!” (“John” and “car” are the underlined variables and “wants to buy” is the target structure), **ask the class to replace John** with a) the name of a student in the class, or b) a name that the class makes up for the actor. This can be a celebrity, the school principal or anyone.
7. **Say** that John “wants to buy” (try to remember to gesture it when saying it to make it easier for the class to understand you – this is hard to remember but is worth it to the kids. They will even start gesturing during the story back to you if you forget, which is a wonderful thing.)
8. **Ask** what “John” wants to buy. With beginning CI students, always laser point to the question word on the wall when you ask the question.
9. You now have a personalized sentence along the lines of “Class, Big Eddie (student in your class) wants to buy a nutcracker!”

10. Now don't go to the next sentence right away! **Spin** whatever details you can from this sentence using circling. Remember what is happening here – the class is focusing on an image that they think they have created but you are focusing on getting as many repetitions as you can on “wants to buy.” Keep them focused on the image while you stay focused on repeating the structure. Don't forget that you can circle in questions about the subject, the verb, or the object. In addition, you can also constantly personalize the questions by asking parallel questions about other students in the class as described above.
11. Do the same process whenever a sentence in the script gets exhausted – just **go to the next sentence**.
12. With the story now created, ask for a **round of applause** for the actors.
13. Now is the time to **process the artist's work** done using an interactive whiteboard program or on a sheet of paper for the document camera. Ask lots of questions about the images – they provide greater and greater amounts of repetitions, which is the entire point of storytelling, to drive the language deeper and deeper into the minds of the students.
14. During this time of processing the artist's work, remember to **praise** the artist for their work. Also try to get into the habit of asking for rounds of applause whenever merited. How many teachers require students to applaud their classmates in class?
15. An option at this point is to use the image created by the artist to **ask for a retell** by someone. You can use a cloze technique to do this with the entire class or you can ask for a retell by an individual student.
16. Give a **quick quiz** on the story at the end of class. Remember that these are one word yes/no or true/false questions. Avoid asking questions that are not y/n or t/f unless you have a lot of extra time to grade the quizzes. Give the quiz at the end of the class and not the next day while the information is still fresh in the students' minds. Success on quizzes is key to student buy-in in this work. (I am happy that we in this work are finally changing the face of testing to be honoring and not shaming to students.) As the students leave the class, collect the quizzes and the story in L1 from your story writer. Don't forget to toss the quizzes in the trash if you are busy that day. Only keep and grade quizzes when you need a grade. There is no contract with your students that requires you to grade and enter a quiz into your gradebook. Workaholic teachers, of course, can ignore this suggestion.
17. The next day, having written up the mini story in L2 (this takes about one minute to do for mini stories), **present the reading** to the class using Reading Option A.
18. At this point another quiz option is to ask the students to **translate the story** for a really easy grade. This builds confidence and trust in the students that you are on their side. It will pay off in higher enrollments later. And when the students are doing real stories, you can ask them to write possible optional endings to the story in the TL.

19. If you want yet a third grade at this point and have time to do it (two minutes), throw in a **self-evaluation grade** according to the form available at [benslavic.com](http://benslavic.com) on the TPRS Resources posters page.

Note that these nineteen steps represent just one way to expand the Three Steps of TPRS, which provide us with the basic sequence of instruction that makes comprehensible input work in our classrooms. Those three steps are at the core of everything we do. Over time, teachers develop their own way of applying them – the above are mine.

The Three Steps may be the core of this work conceptually, but creating and implementing strategies to make them come to life *is* the work. With the Three Steps as a reference point, and as long as we are doing comprehensible input in the form of listening and reading with our students and waiting for output in the form of writing and speech to occur when they naturally emerge, we are doing our jobs and we will see results in the form of greater course enrollments and in greater job satisfaction.

#### Steps 4 through 6 in Suggested Story Class Sequence B

Let's take another look at the three of the nineteen steps listed above in Sequence B, steps 4 through 6:

4. Ask some personalized questions using the structures. Keep things light. If the students are tight lipped during this time, use PSA.
5. In mini stories, work with seated students as **actors** or bring actors up to the front of the room.
6. If the first sentence in the script is "John wants to buy a car!" ("John" and "car" are the underlined variables and "wants to buy" is the target structure), **ask the class to replace John** with a) the name of a student in the class, or b) a name that the class makes up for the actor. This can be a celebrity, the school principal or anyone.

In these three steps hides a kind of "no man's land" which can be very confusing to people who are new to the (here expanded) Three Steps of TPRS. After all, in these steps we are going from signing and gesturing, which is a fairly easy task, to telling a story with our students, which is not so easy.

Step 4 above is the PQA part at the end of TPRS Step 1.

Step 5 is, in the expanded Sequence B, really the first part of Step 2 of TPRS. This bringing up of an actor represents the official leaving of PQA and the beginning of a story.

Step 6 is the beginning of a story in earnest. We start asking questions with an actor up and we start to create a story. This can be done by asking questions within a general framework or, as is described above, or by working from a script.

(Either approach can be used, to ask a story in general without a script, or to use a script. For new people I recommend working with a script. Creating a story with a class is a lot safer with a script.)

Let's look at how to develop a story from PQA:

### Bringing Up Actors

As stated, PQA ends and stories begin when you get an actor up in front of the class. You can get hundreds more reps on targets when you leave PQA and start a story. The definition of a story is when you stand up an actor after doing PQA.

Let's say you want to teach the following target structures because they are in the Scope and Sequence and you don't just want your students to memorize them for a test and forget them – you actually want students to learn them:

*is*

*is afraid of*

You write a cute little script that you can use to teach those two target structures:

John *is in* Cuba. He *is afraid of the* cigars.

First PQA the two structures, because that is the first step of TPRS. Establish meaning and get gestures and ask a few questions to get reps on the structures. If it gets boring, go to your script.

Now your students don't know who John is, they could care less if he is in Cuba, and they might wonder why someone would be afraid of a cigar. So don't tell them any of that. It's just a script. It's a template.

Since there is no ownership of that script by the class, bring ownership to the class by replacing the underlined variables in the original script with words your class offers in order to make it their own.

The only way to find out what the class thinks is to ask them. So why not bring up some actors to find out what they might suggest? Get something going that is more interesting to them than just general PQA about a few random words!

Ask for an actor to stand. I just say in French, "I need an actor." Then I wait. Sometimes they run right up and sometimes they just sit there. If no one gets up to act, wait them out. An actor will always come up if you just wait long enough. It's true.

When the student is standing up things will change markedly, almost unbelievably. You will feel the power of that moment when you experience it.

Let's say that a girl stands up.

The first utterance in circling a story is always a statement:

*Class, there is a girl! (ohh!)*

Then the questioning part starts:

*Class, is there a girl? (yes)*

*Class, is there a boy or a girl? (girl!)*

*That's right, class, there is a girl. (ohh!)*

At this point the students probably require no further circling on that first sentence that there is a girl. If you "over-circle" it, boredom is waiting in the wings to cast its spell over the class. The class knows what "There is a girl" means, so drop it and move on with a question word to get things going into the second rotation around the vortex as described earlier in this text.

*Class, where is the girl? (on the moon!)*

*Class, is the girl is on the moon?*

At this point some students yell yes and some yell no. The class is learning to play the game of suggesting cute answers in a lighthearted atmosphere. If you don't feel like deciding, ask the Professeur to decide (all the jobs are discussed later in this text), or you can have them lean in for a "secret" – described elsewhere – and the decision is made whether the girl is on the moon or somewhere else.)

Eventually via constantly circled questions as you work your way further and further down the vortex they may become something like this:

*Sarah (student in class) is in Mexico. She is afraid of a bean.*

Now do you leave the circling on this? The answer lies in how strong the students seem with the new story that you all created together. If the answers to your questions feel weak, keep asking more until their answers and their eyes reveal strong comprehension.

You could ask Sarah if she is afraid of beans in general. You could ask what kind of beans she is afraid of. Is she afraid of beans or one bean? etc. That would be just collecting more details (more vortex rotations) to the two sentences you have so far. The story would be expanded out in space with more details if you did that.

Another way to expand the story at this point, if you wanted to, would be to expand the two sentences not into space with more details but in linear fashion forward, by adding more sentences to it. You would just add another event or character. That is the way Blaine says to expand a story once the earlier-discussed vortex gets too full of details and reaches a point of saturation.

### Extending Mini Stories

Here is what the cigar and bean mini scripts might look like if thus extended. We would allow the verbs in bold letters into the story only if the students were familiar with them:

*John is in Cuba. He is afraid of the cigars. He **sees** a cigar. He **yells**.*

*Sarah (student in class) is in Mexico. She is afraid of a bean. The bean **runs** towards Sarah. She **falls down**.*

There is only one thing that the instructor has to do when making the on-the-spot decision to extend a story in the above way – decide if the students already know the new sounds, which are usually verbs. If they do, go for it. If they don't, end the story and go to the usual options you have at that point (listed earlier in this text).

### Three Locations

We can even extend a mini story script into a regular story as well. All that are needed are three locations and actors and that the second and third location contain exactly the same verbs as those in location 1. The entire reason for the three locations is to get reps on verbs, not to introduce new material.

The awesome power and ability to hold the students' interest of stories is precisely because no new material is presented in the second and third locations. We write the scripts so that our students can understand.

The general formula is:

1. There is a problem.

2. The actor tries to solve it in location 1 and fails.
3. The actor tries again and fails again in location 2.
4. The problem is solved (or not) in location 3.

For example:

*is*

*is afraid of*

To extend our mini story, we have added:

*yells*

The extended mini story can now become a regular story with three locations:

Location 1: *John is in Cuba. He is afraid of the cigars. He yells.*

Location 2: *John is in Hawaii. He is afraid of the hula dancers. He yells.*

Location 3: *John is in the Atlantic Ocean. He is not afraid of fish. He smiles at three fishes. A fish yells.*

We introduced a new verb, “smiles” in location 3. This only represents a breach of the rule about staying in bounds if the class *has not worked with that verb* before in word associations, TPR, or a verb slam class.

If the class can handle additions into the script, then the class could not be said to have been taken out of bounds. If the instructor *really* wants the additional verb in the story because it adds in a compelling element (the teacher cannot know this before the class starts), then she can use Point and Pause to introduce the verb in question. Doing that usually works because anything that is contextually compelling is usually remembered.

Again, it is up to the teacher and not to any curriculum to decide where to take the class next. The teacher knows her students better than any curriculum.

When enough mini stories have been done, and the class starts to exhibit a sort of restlessness for more details and more depth and more action, they can then be said to be ready for stories, and they would be taken through the process described above.

What are the best scripts to work from? The Anne Matava and Jim Tripp script books are the best I have seen. Anne's two books are called *TPRS Story Scripts Vol. 1* and *TPRS Story Scripts, Volume 2*. Jim's book is called *Tripp's Scripts*. Over 70% of the instruction I have offered my students over the past ten years has been based on Anne's brilliant and teen-friendly scripts.

I use pre-written scripts because I am lazy, but one can also write one's own script or scripts as was done above with the cigar story. This process is described by Anne in her script books, where she explains how to backwards plan to read a novel as well as to write a script out for general use.

The teacher need only have a script in hand to get from the beginning of the first sentence to the end of the script, after having established meaning. This process is described in the sample stories (A through D) of *TPRS in a Year!*

## Review

To review a few important points about starting a mini story:

1. Remember when establishing meaning to do that in less than two minutes by simply saying or writing to start class, "Class, this (in L2) means that (in L1)."
2. Then simply ask the students to show you each target as a gesture - e.g. "Show me 'is afraid of,' class." Use the cards.
3. Then do the same with the next structure.

You can:

1. establish meaning on all three target structures first and then PQA them all.
2. establish meaning on only one target structure at a time and then do PQA on each one before repeating the process for the second target structure.

I prefer the first option because it allows me to mix the discussion up with three verbs. It is fun to try to see if I can say two or, on a rare occasion, all three structures together in just one PQA sentence.

Again, there are no rules in this work. If a teacher is doing some TPR around a single verb and senses (i.e. sees inwardly) a potential mini story involving one of the students in the class, why not explore that thought to see where it goes? All that is needed are a few questions.

The two most effective questions in terms of bringing cute responses from the kids are “Where?” and “With whom?” The place that you accept has to be bizarre and perhaps localized, some place that has meaning to the kids and that they see every day. The person chosen to accompany the student doing the action should be someone like a celebrity or some other interesting character to the kids.

We and our students are constantly being prompted intuitively when we ask and answer questions and it is a very good thing to respond to those inner promptings, to bring them into the story. They make this work lots of fun. It is common to see students who appear shy and withdrawn become the star of the class because of their ability to suggest really high quality cute answers in the questioning process. When we taught the old way, we often missed that talent and creativity in our students.

When we stop being so nervous about what question to ask next, and rather let ourselves be guided in terms of where to take the discussion, the stories are always better. I have always felt that avoiding the desire to tightly grip the questioning process invites more group process, and so the story that is created is always a product of a kind of “mind meld” of the group and not something the teacher does by herself. Certainly, the teacher who alone provides the answers to the questions for the class will see her story go quickly down the toilet.

You want reps on the targets – that is all this work is. Your students think you are talking about Sarah and beans but you are getting reps on “is” and “is afraid.” They are focused on meaning; you are teaching grammar and vocabulary. Your little story script was enough to fake the kids out into learning the language you teach. Congratulations!

### When Actors Become Distractions

Be cautioned that when actors are up the students may become distracted, since so much of the human experience is visual and since (sorry to break the news to you) you are not as interesting to your students as their friends are. How to keep the students’ attention on your words? How to keep them fully listening with such a major visual distraction right there in front of them?

The key with actors is to prepare them in advance, but out of class. This entails a brief hallway conversation with any students who you think could do a good job. What does it mean for an actor to do a good job? All actors do is sit or stand there and listen. Bad acting is when students don’t listen and don’t keep still. That’s how complicated this work with actors is.

What to do when an actor starts to become a distraction during a story? It is improper to shame a child who is acting out by firing him right there on the spot, since when you shame one student in a class you shame them all. There is a much more effective way to correct actors’ behavior during a story. Just laser point to Classroom Rule #7: “Actors, synchronize your actions with my words.” (Find the rules at [benslavic.com](http://benslavic.com) on the TPRS Resources

page). Do this without fail in every instance that that rule is breached. If you don't, the story will not survive the actor's antics.

Here is a passage, taken from *TPRS in a Year!* that further explains the synchronicity rule:

“Synchronize, link, the words of your story with the actions of your actors. Very few TPRS teachers actually do this. If the six kids pretending that they are a bus start driving to Thermopolis before you say they do, for a moment they are taking the story away from you. So the bus must start moving when you say so in the target language and not before. *This skill really helps stories work.* The action must be aligned with the words.

“The common error is to let the bus start even if the words are not aligned with the action. The instructor thinks, ‘Uh oh, I may not finish my story! The bus has to get to Thermopolis!’

“Again, this is one skill that demands real effort on the part of the instructor to remember, but the rewards are great. The story progresses in very crisp fashion when this skill is done.

“Blaine has repeatedly stated that finishing the story is not the point, but going slowly in the interest of high quality CI is the point. When we practice the skill of aligning actions with words in real time, this precise slow motion dialogue guarantees a clear story for everyone in the room. The instructor, not the students or their busses, drives the class.

“Not a few storytelling teachers have been derailed because they failed to train their actors and especially because they allowed anyone to jump up, who then were so distracting that the teacher's efforts at this crucial time in setting up a story were undermined.”

Whether or not you choose to get an actor up for the mini stories will often depend on the capacity of the class to handle the privilege. Remember that the purpose of these really short stories is to set up regular stories and the class may therefore be best served by keeping the actors in their seats when doing mini-stories. Caution is always the watchword with actors.

### Choice of Verbs/Combining Verbs

The choice of verbs to target in these little stories can be key to their success. If the verbs fit together well, it makes a simple script more interesting.

Here is a combination of three verbs (provided by Angie Dodd) that work really well together:

*wants to buy*

*goes*

*buys*

We can create a little script from those target structures:

*John wants to buy a horse. He goes to the horse store. He buys a horse.*

Slowly circled questions could produce this story from this script:

*Shelly wanted to buy three very small horses. She went to Burger King with an elf. They bought four horseburgers.*

Notes on the above:

1. All the answers were provided by the students via the circled questioning process.
2. Since the class suggested that Shelley went to Burger King, one child suggested that she bought a horseburger and not a horse. The answer was clever and accepted even though it was given in English. With clever answers we can do this. We can ignore the fact that the answer was given in English and accept it. (We would not reject it because we didn't know how to say it in the TL – we would just say it in the TL.)
3. Even though the scripts are written in the present tense, I advise that you create the story with the kids in the past tense. This is a point of major discussion (and contention) in the CI/TPRS community. I am giving my opinion here that we must ask the story in the past tense and write it as a reading in the present. I stand by that position even though it seems counterintuitive. Step 2 is done in the past and Step 3 in the present. In the long run, the students learn both tenses better and faster this way. (The past tense dominates much of spoken and written language, and because it has more than one form, it should get lots of attention from us in our CI classrooms from the beginning. We certainly don't learn tenses in any kind of "order.")
4. We find out from the class how many horses and who the student goes to Burger King with and what they buy by asking questions with a laser pointer in our hand so that the students can see as well as hear each question word. When we ask a question, we never assume that our students understand the question word and so we reinforce it with the laser pointer pointing to the question word on the wall. We make sure that they understand. It is our responsibility to make certain that our students understand. For that we use the Classroom Rules, the jGR (ISR) poster, the question words teaching to the eyes, etc.

## Creating a Class Folklore

Once these little stories have later been made into little readings, they, like so much other information collected during the course of the year, can become part of a class folklore. Stories are very often more fondly remembered when looked back upon than when they were created. Details from earlier stories often creep into new stories.

Things like Shelly and the four horseburgers are often remembered years later by the students. Bonds between people are built. This doesn't happen in grammar classes. Students have an amazing capacity to remember details because they spend their days in such boring surroundings as a general rule, staring at screens in what has become a practice synonymous with the term education.

Like regular stories created later in the semester and over the course of the year, mini stories can also be made into books to contribute to the class library for future classes to enjoy. The making of book collections of class stories is best done as a project in May when the kids need something to keep them focused and when the teacher needs a break as well.

The job of illustrating the little books, of course, goes to the students. If not published in book form, they can be published on [blurb.com](http://blurb.com) or [snapfish.com](http://snapfish.com). The possibilities in making books for others to read from stories created in class are endless.

Why buy books that we can't afford and that are too complex anyway (children's books can contain complex language), when our students, so tired in the last weeks of school, can themselves create something compelling to offer future generations of students to read at no cost to the school?

In that way, in later years, younger kids in the school may:

- a. know the authors of the books they are reading.
- b. know the locations in the school buildings the stories may have happened in.
- c. know the adults in the building who may be mentioned in the stories.
- d. know the city connected to some of the events in some of the stories.

## Recipe for Success

With the simple mini scripts, all we have to do is establish meaning, PQA the target structures using our PQA counters, then take our first sentence and start getting circled reps on it until it fades out in interest level. Then we

do the same thing with the next sentence. Everything depends on what the students already know.

None of the above suggestions are carved in stone and the teacher must constantly monitor and adjust the instruction to the variables presented by each group being worked with. The only thing that matters is if the story is comprehensible to the students. Constant repetition of the target structures guarantees that.

### Adding a Written Ending

This story from Katie Holder gives us an example of another excellent mini story script:

*goes to the circus*

*sees*

A boy goes to the circus. He sees an acrobat.

Katie adds: “If you have time at the end of class, it is possible to ask the students to write an ending for the story on the back of their quiz. The next day’s reading could include one or two of the suggested endings.”

For example (written addition by a student is in italics):

Jake goes to the circus. He sees an acrobat. *The acrobat is reading a boring book. He sees Jake. He gives the book to Jake. Jake eats the book.*

The student was able to write the above ending because the verbs “is reading,” “gives” and “eats” had been previously taught in earlier stories, and because they are most likely on a verb wall somewhere in the room. Asking the students to write in an ultra-simple way like this does wonders for the students’ confidence for future writing and sets the tone for free writes. Success in reading sets the tone for success in writing, reflecting the key idea in comprehension-based instruction that input must precede output for true acquisition to occur.

### No Problems in Mini Stories

Problems drive the larger stories and give them their form. Mini stories, however, are best scripted without a problem, to keep things completely simple. A mini story script is usually just a one or two sentence event.

The entire point is that the students leave the room having fully understood what was created in class, before any regular stories are attempted. We leave the problems out until the students can understand them. What we think is a simple story might be too much for our students to handle, again because we can't feel how difficult it is for them.

Whatever we do, we must keep our focus on comprehensibility, and not on how interesting the story is. We must stop ourselves from adding too many interesting details into mini stories. If our students can't understand them, they are not interesting at all. We should save the problem and all the details for regular stories.

### Need for Extreme Simplicity

Here is an example of a really simple mini story, the kind we should start with when first doing mini stories:

*hears*

*jumps*

Ellen hears a cat. She jumps.

So with this, we may think that it is possibly too simple. But if our students are only in their tenth or twentieth hour of comprehensible input learning and we have decided that they can start with the mini stories, then they can't handle scripts that are any more complex than the one given above as an example.

Sheltering our students from incomprehensible input has to be our top priority with our beginning level kids when we are on the road to success with full stories.

A good thing to keep in mind when you are doing comprehensible input is the famous adage from Susan Gross – shelter vocabulary but do not shelter grammar. This means that we use fewer words (i.e. shelter vocabulary) because too many can confuse the students, and we weave them into a rich and varied fabric of spoken language (i.e. not sheltering grammar).

### Strategy #9 – Textivate:

We can't be expected to just talk to our students or have them read in comprehension based classrooms all the time. We are expected to use technology. We may need a break from talking. There is an online program called Textivate that seems to be perfectly designed for comprehension based classrooms:

<http://www.textivate.com/rsdjnl> or <http://www.textivate.com/>

Textivate allows us to plug into its various programs any written texts that we have created from comprehensible input that was created in our classrooms with our students. All we have to do is cut and paste text into the program from whatever discussion we had that day or on previous days.

Any text that we have available as a Word file will do. The mostly fill-in-the-box activities are excellent and can really get the kids involved. They teach reading primarily, but when the students are focused on the reading they learn writing as well.

I have noticed that whenever a teacher uses Textivate in a comprehensible input setting, they find that it is a powerful tool in their work, and a great break from purely auditory input. However, the point must be stressed that Textivate is only useful if some sort of auditory or reading comprehensible input has preceded it with which the students are familiar. It's best used after we have created a reading from the notes given to us by the story writer and gone over it in class, for example.

The different functions of Textivate line up with the various goals of language learning that we have identified in our comprehensible input approach. James Hosler, on our online PLC, has described how Textivate does that:

*There is an activity on the Textivate site that allows the teacher to scramble a text – perhaps of a completed story - for students to un-scramble. Doing this lines up with the skill of reading, because it forces the students to re-read the text and then make the changes necessary for comprehension.*

*You can do this scramble activity in a whole-class setting with only one computer and a projector. You can do a few paragraphs together as a class and then have the students complete one or two sections individually on their own paper.*

*The students will get the most out of the Textivate activities if they themselves are able to use the computer and click around. This could be a very good use of some time in a computer/language lab.*

*Textivate also offers what is essentially a “guided-writing” activity in which the students can use their own paper to write on. Students get some help, but most of the spelling and grammar will be up to them to supply. This is especially true in languages like Latin, Spanish, German, etc. where the words change frequently based on grammar. For example, if the last three letters of a Latin verb are missing, the student must make the choice as an author whether they should be **-bat** or **-vit** or whatever else based on the context. This all feels a lot like that power-house activity known as “dictation,” but is based on reading instead of listening.*

David Maust says about Textivate:

*I just tried Textivate this week and really enjoyed it. The biggest kick I got out of it was hearing my Latin I classes say the Latin words for me to fill in (without them really thinking about what they were saying!).*

*I joked around telling them that I had tricked them to speak the Latin, but of course we agreed that we were all impressed that the Latin was in them and then just started coming out. It was a cool way to hear some production in a completely safe setting.*

*I also gave the Textivate assignment to a student I have on home teaching because they are not able to be at school for a couple months due to health reasons. I'm excited to see how it helps them out.*

David Talone adds:

*I normally project the text and do a couple of the activities with the whole group. In that setting, I like the second set (particularly the one with three sentences to choose as the next line) best. I have also used the fill in the missing letter writing exercises with the whole class. I love the enthusiasm that is often fostered there, and the opportunity to do grammar pop-ups and to work on spelling. However, I do think in that setting the stronger students tend to dominate. I hadn't thought of having them write it down as an assignment. It's not as fun or "techie" but you would get a stronger sense of what they know.*

*The more I think about it, the whole class activity could be seen as a form of differentiation. The stronger students are focusing on the writing aspect of it, while the weaker students are simply reading and hearing the words (the key there being that it is a comprehended text that they have already read).*

*I also have used the cloze activity (you can make up your own if you want to focus on any particular words). We either do this as a whole class, or we do it "knock-out" style which the kids like because they think it is a game. We go around the class and each student needs to fill in the next word or get eliminated (easier in small classes because there are more opportunities). I let kids get back in the game if they can identify a word that someone else has just missed on, to keep their focus on it.*

*Honestly when I have done this it has almost always been done in a very limited time, like 5-10 minutes after reading the story. I have seen it as a supplementary activity that is great if I have time, but not a huge loss if we can't do it. Also, since I have access to a laptop cart, it can be a good sub-lesson.*

Andrew Edwards adds:

*Today I did the three sentences, pick the one that comes next option. I just numbered the three lines and told the students to jot down on their paper the number of each line as we went through. As David stated above, it seems like the strong students dominated so I was wondering what other strategies people have used to make sure the slower processors have the time to read it and I can make sure they are on board.*

*Next we did the fill in the missing vowels option so we could work on accents in the past tense. I was wondering if just having them write out the paragraph on their own and do the best they can with spelling is a good idea. I was worried it may have been a big jump. When we went over it, of course the strong kids took over and gave me the*

*impression that it was easy. It seemed valuable because the concept of verb endings changing meaning in Spanish is difficult for these kids because they have all been taught traditionally save the level 2 kids I had in Spanish 1.*

The Textivate site keeps expanding. At the time of this writing, we can now add videos, images and parallel texts to our Textivate resources to do things like create interactive dictée, MovieTalk, etc. with varying levels of support.

## **Strategy #10 – Writing Strategies:**

In my view, students are not at all ready to write until, at the very earliest, the third year of comprehension based instruction. But no one in a school building would agree with that. I guess they know the research better than the many teachers using comprehension based instruction who take that position. So write we must, even if it is like asking a two year old to write properly.

However, even if we know that forced output too early brings no actual and real gains, there is still a reason to ask our students to write.

We can still use writing when all we want to do is get to the end of the class period or to just give ourselves and our students a break. Sometimes teaching is about self-preservation and not just about language gains. That fact is something that many burned out comprehensible input teachers would have done well to consider before they gave in to the illusory thought that this way of teaching requires a frenetic outlay of energy. Teaching in a way that is frenetic and bordering on frenzy is *the opposite* of what comprehensible input teaching requires, if properly understood, and as best modeled by Blaine Ray.

I do not advocate any other forms of writing in comprehension-based instruction than free writes and dictées. Both have been discussed in detail earlier in this text. The superior form of writing is always going to be free writes. Not only do free writes allow for the creation of connections in students' brains with previously taught auditory input, they also have the distinct advantage of providing parents and administrators with artifacts (the collected free writes and the bar graphs) that quantify progress and are perfect for end of year meetings with both parents and administrators, who think that if something can be seen and measured then it has value.

If the students balk at writing (there is much shame associated with writing in school settings), tell them that grammar and spelling don't count and that they are to write simply to see if they can communicate an idea by expressing on paper what might be rolling around in their heads from all the auditory input you have been giving them. People learn to write based on sound and on previous reading, and not on conscious analysis of grammar.

It's over for the grammar teachers. The breaking news is that students who are just beginning their study of a language don't have to write perfectly, all they have to do is try to communicate an idea, no matter how clumsily.

We don't penalize three and four year olds for their spelling either, and they have heard the language for tens of thousands of hours more than our students have. Just ask your students to write from the rich din of words in their heads that was put there by all the spoken and read comprehensible input that they have experienced in your classroom.

You will see astounding results if you teach writing in this way. Massive input leads to massive high quality output over time. Wasting students' time with needless instruction focused on early forced writing output that is based on grammar rules is highly suspect. It has never lead to strong gains in the past and it will never lead to strong gains in the future. It has proven itself to be a failure.

When they are doing a free write, your students can get help, of course, by looking at wall words or verb walls. I have a chart of connecting words that is very important for my level 2 classes and above. Lists of prepositions also help. Anything in the room is permissible to help the students write, except looking in the novels/chapter books, where things can be copied, which defeats the purpose.

If you have no space on a wall for word walls or verb walls, or if the classroom in which you teach is not your own, Catharina Greenberg has offered this idea:

*...keep a laminated page with most frequently used verbs and connector words on the kids' tables as a reference during free-writes. I picked up the idea from third graders who use it to help write in L1. Each set of tables shares a sheet. This may be useful for floating teachers who have no wall space...*

Writing in level one, especially, is not a desirable thing, and for very good reasons based on what humans are capable of doing at certain stages in their language development. As stated earlier, I recommend avoiding writing altogether in the beginning levels, if you can get away with it within your school's culture of judging teachers' effectiveness by analyzing what students can output, even if it is too early for quality output to occur.

Indeed, why waste precious input time on the output skill of writing when it can't lead to real gains, but only to gibberish? It has been stated many times in this text that thousands of hours of listening input must precede speaking output, which should never be forced anyway. Similarly, thousands of hours of reading input must precede writing output if the speaking and writing are to sound and look at all authentic, and not contrived.

Again, the only time we should focus on writing in the first few years of language instruction is when we need to keep our jobs because somebody who is judging our job performance doesn't understand how languages are actually acquired, or to give ourselves and our students a break from all the input, or just to get to the end of the class period.

## Grouping Students to Practice Writing - OWATS

It is a fact that when we teach using comprehensible input, grouping students does not work. We are the only person in the classroom who knows the language and our students should be receiving as many instructional minutes as possible from us in the form of comprehensible speech or reading as possible and that's it.

However, there are a few ways to practice writing. Dr. Robert Patrick has invented one which works best at upper levels but can be used also at lower levels. It is called OWATS – One Word at a Time Stories.

Thus, OWATS represents a third writing strategy for teachers who use comprehensible input besides dictée and free writes. These three writing strategies are the only ones I advocate for CI classrooms. They help students transfer language from what has been programmed into their unconscious minds via stories and reading onto paper, and that is why they work.

Other writing strategies fail to connect the process of writing to the unconscious mind and that is why they fail. Writing must emanate from the unconscious mind if it is to be authentic. Krashen has spoken to this point in his Monitor Hypothesis. When the conscious analytical left brain faculty is in charge of the writing, all it can do is try to apply a few learned rules to structuring the language. It is like an ant trying to reason with a genius. Let the genius do it.

Dr. Patrick explains:

“Recently, I tried something with my Latin 4 and Latin 3 students that seems to work really well. I will describe the process below, but I want to say that already I am seeing more than one way to apply this. I don't have a name for it except ‘One Word at A Time Stories,’ or OWATS.

### DESCRIPTION

“I work backwards from a story or reading that I want them to do. I identify the new words in it. Recently, this was a fable linked to Roman virtues. Based on a list of virtues, students searched through Laura Gibbs' 1001 Fables and identified the story they wanted to read.

“I could see that there were 21 words or phrases that they either didn't know or were not very familiar with in the fable they were to eventually read. I put the words into a table using a large font, and cut out miniature flash cards. The Latin was in large block with English in small font underneath it. Remember, these were new words/phrases. (Don't panic. I don't use flash cards.)

“I had students sit in groups of 3 or 4, and explained the process to them:

1. Each group will **receive a word**.

2. Working together on one sheet of paper with a pencil, they are to **write one good sentence** using that word.
3. When done, they call me over to **approve the sentence**. If there is a problem, I give a pop-up grammar kind of fix for it, and then give them another word from which to craft another sentence.
4. That next sentence has to begin to make a story based on the first one.
5. The process continues: they write a sentence, call me over, receive any pop up grammar help, and then a new word, and a new (third) sentence to advance the story.
6. When I run out of words to hand out, they find their next word from another group and give them one of theirs.
7. With 5 minutes left in class I tell them that with their next sentence or two, they should bring their story to a surprising end. This is the one piece of the process I do not preview for them. This last instruction about writing a surprise ending is a surprise itself. That does not give time for overthinking and adds energy to the process at the very end.
8. I collect the stories and type them into a PowerPoint. The next day, we read the stories together.

*[ Ed. note: Three points to be made here: 1) 20 words may be too much unless it is a talented upper level class - 10 might be a better number for lower level classes. 2) Instead of handing them out, put the words on the table and let them choose and return them when they are done. 3) Don't try to use OWATS with anything lengthy, like the entire chapter of a novel. It can only work with shorter texts like fables, etc.]*

## OBSERVATIONS

1. Students were very excited about this work. It was like asking a story but in a much smaller group, and each student had more control over the story. This work was COMPELLING.
2. Because they only received one word at a time, we ESTABLISHED MEANING and kept the work SLOW.
3. Because I did this with more advanced students, the STRESS over language production was rather LOW.
4. They got individual attention from me for anything they were not clear about. The work remained COMPREHENSIBLE and every group became a kind of BAROMETER student.
5. GRAMMAR happened only in POP UP fashion.

6. They naturally begin to repeat the use of new words in subsequent sentences. So, in this activity there was much REPETITION. On the next day, reading and discussing the stories provided more COMPREHENSION. The stories remained COMPELLING because the students not only got to see their story on the “big screen” but others’ as well.
7. I had fun! (that counts....)
8. I shared this with a colleague who teaches Spanish 2 and one “trailer” course of Spanish 2 students who all failed last year. He tried this same activity today with them but only with words they had already been introduced to. He said it went over extremely well and that his most struggling students managed to put together a nice story.
9. This strikes me as the kind of activity that could be done with new words for more advanced students and as review, repetition with any level. This activity is flexible.

“The process, establishing meaning of each word, keeps things SLOW, is compelling, provides repetitions, can create embedded readings from the bottom up, and involves backward design.”

Don Read says about OWATS:

“I did the OWATS exercise with my French 1 (7th grade) and French 2 (8th grade) classes. Big success! I used 24 words chosen from the 200 Most Common/High-Frequency Word list. (I had given the 8th graders the list and I had asked them to identify the words they didn’t know.) I used the same words for both grades.

“All the groups produced 5-6 sentence stories. The 8th grade stories were better than the 7th grade stories, but all were good!

“All classes and almost all students were very engaged. And I was rushing around from group to group giving them the new words! One student said that it was really fun and we need to do this again. Yay!”

Laura Cenci says:

“I did the OWATs activity and the kids LOVED it. Thank you so much Bob for sharing this activity! My students really want to make their own stories. Giving them the focus of the key structure cards, plus the lists on the walls, kept them in bounds. Letting them group with their friends allowed them to use their own micro-personalized clique-styles, but they’re using vocab that the other groups were using too. So tomorrow when we share, everyone will understand the story and get to enjoy the uniqueness of other groups’ special stories, while getting the opportunity to show off their own.”

## Free Writes

A free write is simply a period of time lasting ten minutes during which the students write as many words as they can in L2 in the form of sentences that *communicate an idea*. This can be done any time it is needed, and should be done two or three times a month at least. It cannot be done in the first two months of the first year, however - the kids don't know enough.

Free writes have the magical quality of shutting kids up because the pencil in their hand is like a magic quieting wand, getting them to do what they always do in school – write quietly. So you may want to use free writes as a bail out move (discussed later in this text), when everybody needs a break from auditory input.

Free writes are more than busywork, however. They are activities that deeply connect to acquisition in that they access any comprehensible input that the students have heard in class before and bring it into form as writing. I have said that I shun output work in the first two years of studying a language, but I make an exception to my reserve when it comes to free writes.

The rules for free writes are:

Write without stopping for 10 minutes.

When time is up, count the number of words you wrote.

No English words in the story except for names.

Keep the sentences and story line simple.

Get your story idea ahead of time.

Use lists if you have them.

Use words that you already know.

If you don't know a word, don't use it or reword the idea.

Use as many adjectives as possible.

Spell as accurately as you can and then move on.

Add another character when you get stuck.

Use posters from the room as help.

Illogical stories are o.k.

Note also that some students need to be told clearly not to meditate on their responses, or to think too much about what they are writing. If students get stuck, they can add a new character or event to keep their writing going.

One teacher once told me that the biggest buy-in he has got all year in his very traditional building came from a stack of free writes collected at three week intervals over the course of the just-completed first semester.

Students formerly skeptical about CI had to admit that they learned something when faced with the reality that they, in one case, could write 180 word eight minute free writes after just four months in a Latin 1 class.

Every few weeks, we can collect and track word counts in our students' ten minute long free writes. Students can make bar graphs of their progress. Then, at the end of the term, we can ask our students to stack up their free writes chronologically and refer to their bar graphs to write a response to what they see. Does it look like they learned anything?

This is the brilliant part, from Bob Patrick. We make them respond narratively to the gains that are there right in front of them. They see what they can do. They have to admit that even though they didn't think they were learning much from their (unnoticeably effective) CI classes, the gains visible in each successive writing prove otherwise.

Asking for a stack of free writes from a student at the end of each term and then looking at it in front of the class, perhaps putting them on the document reader to share with the class, while heaping praise on the student, is a way that we can show concrete proof of gains. We really should keep the stacks of free writes from previous years to share with parents at parent's night in the fall.

Why not? Since most parents don't know how languages are acquired, and so need to have provided to them some proof of gains, this is a great way to do it. We can tell parents that in our classroom their child can expect similar gains at the end of every semester.

## **Strategy #11 – Sentence Frames:**

Another excellent tool to develop writing besides free writes, one that is effectively used after a vacation to get back into the swing of things, is from Robert Harrell. There is nothing wrong with starting back after a break with stories, of course, but personally I have found out that when starting in after a break with purely auditory or reading input, the students tend to grouse. So, many CI teachers start back after breaks with writing.

Classes devoted to writing and reading make the kids value stories more. After a week or so of framing sentences, the kids are in better "space" for stories. Of course, this is just my opinion. It's true that students' minds crave novelty, as Carol Gaab has said, and it is certainly true that students don't appreciate stories when they get to

create them all the time.

Here is Robert's description of sentence frames:

"I put up a series of 'sentence frames' so we could talk about students' experiences over break. Here are some examples:

I went to....

I saw....

I received....

I ate....

I played....

"After we establish meaning and I model what I am looking for, students copy the start of the sentence and then write down something to finish the sentence. Then we talk about the different things that students did during the break. In most classes we talk primarily about the first two frames with some references to the others. Most students go to the cinema and see a film during vacations, so we talk about the films they saw and whether or not they were good. We touch on 'receiving' – most students received clothes\*. In one class we learned that one student went to Five Guys (a hamburger chain) and ate five double cheeseburgers and French fries and drank Dr. Pepper. (After students write down their answers, classes that are small enough sit in a circle. While I have to keep reminding them to speak German and have a single conversation, the students are engaged.)

"We continue the conversation the next day if we aren't quite through. Then I have them do a timed writing on the subject of 'My Christmas Break' and see how well the classes do. I of course provide them with connector words.

"After they have written, I use the document camera to put up some of their writing for the class to read and discuss. (That would normally be on Wednesday.) When things start to wind down, we'll get back to some reading of novels."

To sum up what Robert does with sentence frames, we can say this:

1. Teacher establishes meaning of the five frames above.
2. Students write out what they can to complete the frame.

3. Discussion in L2.

4. Timed writing on “My Christmas Break.”

5. Samples of student writing on the document camera for general discussion.

I asked Robert how he processes the kids’ writing on the document camera with his kids after they write. He responded:

“In my 4/AP class we do a lot of discussion of the grammar. All of the students are engaged and several of them often say, ‘Except for the embarrassment factor, I really like putting things together so I can see how it works.’ In other words, they are ready to get the filing system because they have a lot of language. After we have gone over a paper, I hand it back and say, ‘Correct whatever you think is important to correct.’ I eventually re-collect all the papers.

“In my level 3 class we do less discussion of the grammar and more discussion of what people wrote (content), comparing that with what others did. I correct only what truly interferes with comprehension.

“Level 2 is much like level 3, but with even less discussion of grammar and more discussion of content.

“In level 1 I simply tell them that as I read I will instantly change any mistakes into correct German, so what they hear might be different from what they wrote. Then we talk about the content and compare what was written with what others had done. After we finish I go to each student whose paper I had shown on the document camera to thank them and tell them that they had done a good job.”

To simplify what Robert wrote above – in levels:

4/AP – He discusses structure/grammar but only has them correct what they feel is important. I like that level of grammar response for the advanced kids.

Level 3 – Grammar correction is made only when the writing interferes with comprehension. There is lots of discussion of content in L2.

Level 2 – There is even less grammar and more discussion of content than in level 3.

Level 1 – There is no grammar correction whatsoever at this level. As he reads, Robert changes mistakes into correct German. There is only discussion of content. Praise abounds.

Sentence frames are an elegant form of CI mixed with writing. Because they are highly personalized, they keep the kids involved. Another reason the kids are involved is that, as in a story or often with PQA, the quiz writer is always busy writing a five or ten point quiz on the information being processed, ready to give to you to keep your class honest.

## Backward Planning Using Sentence Frames

Dr. Robert Patrick (Atlanta) writes on sentence frames:

“I have barely been able to fit in any stories lately because I too have become a big fan of this great idea from Robert Harrell which combines writing with auditory input. We may be talking about what they did over the holidays until June! I shared this idea immediately with my colleagues and we’ve all been doing sentence frames this week. I simply took words that are coming up in stories tomorrow and Friday, and created this story frame:

*Olim ad tabernas Inventionis* (Once at the Discovery Mall):

*Nimium cupiebam...* (I was wanting \_\_\_\_\_ too much). \_\_\_\_\_ *me duxit ad...* (\_\_\_\_\_ led me to...) *Ibi vidi...* (There, I saw...) *Subito* \_\_\_\_\_ *iecit* \_\_\_\_\_... (Suddenly \_\_\_\_\_ threw \_\_\_\_\_) *Tandem* \_\_\_\_\_ *mihi* \_\_\_\_\_ *ostendit*. (Finally \_\_\_\_\_ showed me \_\_\_\_\_) *Ego* \_\_\_\_\_ *dedi*. (I gave \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_)

“On Monday, after I introduced the vocabulary and these sentences with my own examples, students spent about half the period writing their sentences. I urged them to write interesting, fun, crazy sentences. We spent the remaining half with me calling on individuals to read their sentences. I stopped them, asked questions, circled words, did some PQA, etc.

“On Tuesday we spent the whole period with me asking them to read their sentence with more of the same questioning from me – exploring the mini story, circling, asking questions, having fun (oh the number of stories this created!).

“Today I put 3 examples in power point slides which I culled from all the papers taken up yesterday. I went for the most interesting, funny, outrageous. It was just wonderful. As a whole, the students knew the target words (the point of the instruction) and had great fun exploring these mini stories. The three students in each class were clearly very pleased that their work was chosen.

[*Ed. note: Normally we don't ask for output in our comprehension based programs, but this is a good example of how good a little bit of output can be. Sometimes I think that we get carried away with the idea of input, input, input. There is a place for output in this work. It just has to be connected in some way to input. What is described above is output that Bob invites from his students. There is a difference between forcing and inviting*].

Bob continues:

“I did make a change over what was reported from my students – when I wrote the examples into power point slides, I wrote it with correct grammar. I did not mention this at all. The students’ whose work this was did not question it, either. The changes were largely subtle. It modelled the kinds of word order and some inflections that they see the next day in the story. A colleague asked students to swap theirs with a partner. The partner was to circle anything that was not clear and then return. Students were given a minute to make any changes they wanted to before reading their sentences aloud. She

said that the act of reading another student's work seemed to help them listen and understand better when read aloud."

Judy Dubois comments:

"I've also found that silently correcting a student's work in order to project it as an example is very effective. After all, we're interested in the content and giving them good models to look at. And it makes the experience so much more positive for the student."

Diane Neubauer also comments on processing sentence frames in the above way:

"I took student writing, cleaned up errors and added more details, and they still thought of it as theirs. Classmates were saying positive things like, 'Hey, yours made it!' etc. when it became apparent whose was on screen. There is a much higher interest level in reading as a result, and each student whose work was chosen got an extra pat on the back."

Jeff Brickler also comments on this idea:

"This is so awesome! It's mad libs, but set up so that the kids can do it. They get to have input and there is so much to circle. I can use some of the structures that we are using now. This is pure gold!"

I like sentence frames because they provide us with a template which can *expand*, where so much in education is about learning a limited set of information. This is the way education should be, an inductive inquiry into things in the Socratic sense. With sentence frames, we shift the perspective of writing as a school subject to writing as a way to tell one's own story or to explore what one thinks and feels.

## **Strategy #12 – Interactive Whiteboards:**

Interactive whiteboards electronically capture your voice and handwriting to bring to life just-completed stories in your comprehensible input classes. Students can use an interactive whiteboard app on the iPad to visually re-create stories just as the classroom artists do. I use both in my classroom. They each have their charm and purpose.

Once the panels of the drawing are complete, the student working with the iPad hands it to the teacher who then records her voice throughout what is really an electronic comic strip to produce a narrated story that is then shared with the students at the end of class. A written story line can be added onto each panel as well.

In theory, if all the students in the classroom had iPads, they could all produce a version of the story, but that would be extremely difficult to narrate and process. It would also pull the attention of the students away from the story during its creation.

For those of us who feel pressured to use technology, these interactive whiteboard apps are absolute jewels. They will almost certainly in the future become a standard part of how we use our instructional minutes in our TPRS/CI classrooms. It almost seems as if interactive whiteboards were designed specifically for what we do!

In the little stories made on interactive whiteboards that review the stories created in class we have:

1. changing images
2. printed words
3. spoken words
4. emotions

When we learn from a chapter book/novel, we don't only have printed words. We have no or very few images, and therefore little or no emotion. So, without the changing images, without the emotions and without the teacher's narrated words, with only the printed words in the book to cobble together the interest of our students, our classes stay largely flat. Who gets inspired teaching chapter books?

When students watch the projected image of a student-created story that was created on an interactive whiteboard, and (1) see the changing comic strip panels, and (2) read it, and (3) listen to it, and (4) hear the emotion in the reader's voice, we at that point are approximating for our students something akin to normal speech. The high number of repetitions that occur in the rest of our lesson lead to excellent gains in reading, greater gains than those that occur in the reading of novels.

Interactive whiteboards move the language acquisition equation in our classroom from one or two dimensions to many. The image supports the speech, the emotion in the narrated voice supports the focus on meaning, and the speech supports the reading. The fact that the little film was drawn by a student about something that the *students* created speaks directly to our curricular objectives of more and more student involvement in our classes.

What happens with interactive whiteboards is what happens in stories – the students think that they have full artistic control of everything going on but all they are doing is answering our questions and drawing what happens. When they are thus engaged, discipline problems evaporate.

Here are the names of some interactive whiteboard apps that are currently on the market:

Explain Everything\*

Doceri

ShowMe

Whiteboard HD

Syncspace

Jot!

BaiBoard

Groupboard

Educreations

\*David Talone says about this app:

*... Explain Everything allows you to narrate over each individual slide, and you can also edit the narration, which is impossible in some of the other apps. I had success exporting the movies as mp4s and sharing them with the kids on Google Docs and projecting them for the class....*

As soon as the teacher new to comprehension based instruction and stories has a minimal handle on how to create a story with her class, she is urged to start exploring interactive whiteboards. They are a perfect strategy to wrap up any and all comprehensible input on any given day on a high note, and to set up a reading class. Interactive whiteboards have the potential to bring students into the classroom process in new ways.

## **Strategy #13 – Three Ring Circus:**

The Three Ring Circus is easy and fun, and it is an effective tool for establishing meaning at any point of any class. It is especially effective at the beginning of the year, and is an excellent first month activity. It is not challenging for the students, and it gives some of them a chance to move their bodies and have fun.

To start, simply write three verbs in the imperative on the board in both the target language and in English. For example:

1. Raise your arm!
2. Jump!
3. Touch your nose!

After a minute or so of signing, ask that Student A stand up and go to a corner of the room (one of the three rings of the circus) and perform the actions you command.

The student at this point may balk, or at least give you a goofy look, and this is the signal for the fun to begin! Just encourage the child to continue the action as you command.

Get a lot of repetitions before going on to the second and third students, and then just go around to each “ring” encouraging the kids. Keep all three rings going until you ask for a stop. By doing this, you are conveying to the students the idea that class will be fun and that you are in charge of the class.

It is a good idea to avoid any verbs that may be dangerous or may lead to a fall, like “turn” or “spin” or “run.” Remember, as well, to choose only students who can do this without making a spectacle of themselves. If you make it clear that you are the one in charge during the first days of class it will set the tone for the year, and Three Ring Circus certainly puts you in the role of the “ringmaster.”

Once things are clear, it is time to alter your commands. Do this in a very energetic way, as one would play Simon Says. The students must change their actions as you alter the commands, never going “out of bounds” with new verbs, only the ones you have already taught.

Make sure that if you use a new word (left, right, slowly, quickly, raise, lower, leg, hand, etc.) that you write it down on the board with its English translation so that it is clear to all the students.

This activity usually dies down naturally after five minutes or so. When the circus is over, you can always ask circled questions of the students about the activities in the three rings. Three Ring Circus is truly an “oldie but a goodie” in TPRS!

## **Strategy #14 – Jobs for Kids:**

How many teachers have you seen who have had to deal with burn out? Why have they burned out? Many would say it is because they simply have too much to do, too much to think about, during the day. Then they had to carry it home.

I agree that that is true, but I think that the principle reason for teacher burnout comes from what happens inside the classroom *during class* and is a result of grueling emotions, and fighting back the desire to just tell kids to shut up so that the teacher can just teach.

Some kids are great at being defiant but in a passive way. Translation: they don’t do their 50% and they don’t want to take any responsibility for assuming any kind of role in the class other than that of watcher. They don’t do this on purpose; they have been trained that way for years in schools. Passive defiance is a way of life in American schools.

Such passively defiant behavior doesn't feel innocent to the teacher, nor does it feel good. So the teacher ends up working in a situation that resembles herding cats or pushing a knowledge ball up a hill with no help even though there may be thirty people in the room who could be helping. However, when kids have clear jobs with clear responsibilities in their CI classrooms, things change.

So, at the start of each class, I review which kid will be doing which job they have chosen or earned in my classroom. In an instant, attitudes change as the kids know that they are needed in this class and that they will get extra credit from doing it.

The jobs don't change everyone, but they change the general tenor of the passive defiance in the classroom so that it is reduced. This is of supreme importance in the comprehension-based classroom, which relies so much more heavily on group dynamics and trust and open communication than other classrooms.

At the beginning of each class, I sometimes write who is doing what job on the board to remind the kids and so that they can see their names on the board. It is a discipline tool and keeps the kids focused. It reminds them that they are important to what the class will be doing that day.

Since I introduced the jobs piece into my teaching over ten years ago, I have noticed that with each passing year my classroom management has gotten better and better. I feel that the jobs have helped both me and my students move into proper adjustment to each other so that we can focus on our work better.

Jobs must emerge organically. You can't just assign a job. It has to be chosen by the kid. The better jobs have to be earned. The superstars who occupy the best jobs enjoy a kind of "second teacher" status in the classroom, which is a win-win for both the student and the teacher. Superstars are constantly pulled down by so much negative mental mass in the classroom that it is a wonder that they don't just quit school and stay home to learn, so when they constantly hear messages of appreciation from the teacher, almost every day, it makes them want to be in school more.

What does the job application process look like? You offer it. If no one wants it, *don't assign it*, as stated above. Wait. There are two jobs of utmost importance that you must fill right away, however, and they must go to the two best and most enthusiastic students in the classroom: the Quiz Writer and the Story Writer.

When eight or nine kids are working at their jobs each day in class, your in-class instructional moment-by-moment workload feels as if it has been reduced by as much as half, which is a fantastic thing.

Overall, the jobs have proven to be an astonishing way to get a class facing with you in the same direction, and not facing against you.

Here are a few of the most important of the 62 jobs listed at [benslavic.com](http://benslavic.com):

**PQA Structure Counters (3)** – Kids love to count things. The PQA counters tally repetitions of target structures for you during PQA, not stories. You explain to them that you absolutely need their help to set up stories, that you can't start a story until you know that you have enough reps on a target, at least fifty but preferably more than that.

Once the meanings of the target structures for that day have been established, the PQA counters begin to count. So the process with these students becomes one of you working together with them towards a common and important goal of getting sufficient repetitions to make the upcoming story work. They take it seriously. I usually award these jobs to students who are quiet but like to be involved in some way.

The PQA Counters can make five group tick marks on a sheet of paper, but you can also give them a little mechanical device called a pitch counter, available at sporting goods stores for under ten dollars. These are hand held devices that pitching coaches use to count pitches in baseball games. All the student has to do is press their thumb down once each time you say the target they have chosen to count. Then, as class rolls along, you periodically ask them how you are doing, how many reps you have on the target they are counting.

Working with your PQA counters in this way greatly diminishes the seemingly natural oppositional defiance that haunts most high middle and high school classrooms. Note that the pitch counters are not your only option. There are free apps on iPhones that will tally as well and it shouldn't be too difficult to get a few students to bring out their iPhones or iPads in class. Of course, that may be a reason to go with the pitch counters.

Think about this, a teacher asking a student for help in class. The students are working with the teacher, not against her. The process of counting reps taps into the good will of the students doing this job, and the balance of effort tilts more toward 50% when this happens. In this way, the PQA Counters function as a kind of social glue. They bring the class together in pursuit of a common goal, shoulder to shoulder with the teacher.

More jobs:

**Story Writer** – Along with the Quiz Writer, this is the most important job of all. This student has to be a superstar. Their job is simple – all they have to do is take notes in English on what is said during class. Generally, they don't take notes during PQA, only stories. The reason for that is that PQA can go all over the place and be kind of confusing, but stories are more linear and easy to follow. The Story Writer doesn't have to write all the details that occur in class, just the basic story line. At the end of class they hand it to you and all you have to do is write out the story in the TL, with limited embedding of new words, and have it ready for the TPRS Step 3 reading class the next day.

**Quiz Writer** – During class, just like the Story Writer, the Quiz Writer creates the powerful classroom tool called the Quick Quiz. This quiz can be on PQA, the story, Look and Discuss, or anything else discussed in class, but it is most often written about the story. When the class knows that a quiz is being prepared for them and that

it will probably be given at the end of class, or earlier, they pay more attention. From time to time during class, as with the PQA Counters, I ask them how many questions they have ready at that point. Though a seemingly casual question, it reminds everyone in the classroom that a quiz is on its way. Since everything I do in my classroom is based on a scale of ten points, I generally keep teaching until twelve questions are ready (in case I have to throw out a few questions) and then give the quiz. In that way, the Quiz Writer working together with me gives a certain pacing feel to the class – we are always working towards an assessment goal.

**Story Artist** – This is the coolest job. Instead of giving this job to a superstar, I give it (it is earned by) one of those quiet listeners who knows what is going on in the story and can draw well. But it can be stick figures as well, as long as the student pays attention as they draw to convey accuracy in their work. I have enjoyed the work of the story artist for years. Processing her drawing – usually on an interactive whiteboard app – is usually the brightest spot in class. Like the students writing the story and the quiz, and the pitch counters, the artist serves to glue the class together toward a common goal during the classroom process.

**Class Photographer** – This job idea is from David Sceggel. The teacher assigns a class photographer whose job is to quietly take a few pictures of scenes developed in class and then send them to the teacher, who then projects them the next day for discussion and review. For example, if Jim rode a bike to the moon in some scene the day before, and it was acted out in class, the photographer sends the photo of the class acting that out to the teacher, who then has the option of not only sharing it with the class the next day but also choosing to create and share a short reading of the scene as well. Thus the scene from the previous day serves as a trick to get more interesting repetitions on the target structures, as well as bring in the reading piece in a way that gets the kids focused on the message and not the words because of the high interest involved.

Here are a few of the other jobs found at [benslavic.com](http://benslavic.com), so that the reader can get a feel for the kind of jobs kids do in my classroom:

**Class Secretary** - This student has a class roll and records students' positive efforts to communicate with the instructor in the TL, not blurting. Noting such efforts throughout the class period provides us with a document to show the “evidence of students' responses” that administrators look for. Such documentation may be necessary and is good to bring up at follow up meetings to observations.

**Distributor of Pencils** - the eternal pencil battle is one that I won't fight; I buy them and hand them out like candy.

**Professeur** (there can be two of these) - this is one of those jobs that really bring shy kids who are intelligent into the classroom process. These are deciders who quickly decide on things like if the house is red or blue so that the teacher doesn't have to lose time when students suggest cute answers to simple questions. Either Professeur 1 or Professeur 2 (if Professeur 1 is absent or can't decide) takes pride in making decisions when I ask them to.

Another thing we can do with this job is to compare and contrast other students with the Professor. If we are doing an interview with a student, asking questions and finding out things, we can ask the Professeur if she or he also does what the student being interviewed does. Comparing and contrasting is huge in this work with CI.

**Word Chunk Team (WCT) Controller 1** (this is the most left out kid in class who couldn't even get into a group for the WCT game) - He gets to pick which team raised their hand first as described above. He goes from being left out to being a decider.

**Word Chunk Team Controller 2** (this is another kid in need of feeling needed – this one judges synchronicity of signed group responses as described above.)

**Word Chunk Team Controller 3** (keeps score during the game and also watches – very important – to see if all the heads in the group go together to consult before the hands are raised, to keep one member from dominating the group as described above.)

## **Strategy #15 – Reading Strategies:**

We in Denver Public Schools have taken the position that, in a properly balanced CI classroom, auditory input should be given about 50% of available instructional time and reading should be given the other 50%. This balance is what we strive for in our district and we feel that it works extremely well for our students.

Being able to read is based on visual recognition of previously *spoken* language by the deeper mind. We know this because our students can read well after lots of stories. In fact, the third and final step of the Three Steps of TPRS as designed by Blaine Ray is reading, and not the other way around.

In our classrooms, we start small with the skill of reading but it plays a bigger and bigger role in our instruction as time goes by. Eventually, at the upper levels of instruction, reading plays a larger role in our instruction than auditory input.

In fact, reading actually begins in level 1 classes for the first time on the first day of classes when you write on the board the first word you say to them in the target language (most people start with the CWB activity so it will be something like “Johnny plays football”).

So if you learn on the first day of class that Jasmine plays basketball on the moon with Channing Tatum, you write that information on the board as part of the establishing meaning process described above. *Because they understand what it means when they hear it, they can read it.*

So our students' reading careers begin on the first day of school in level 1. Why not? If they understand it when

you say it, and you write it down on the board with the English, then they are reading in the target language.

How is teaching recognition of written words (reading) done more effectively by instruction in grammar? Where is the research on that? It's not more effective, and there is no research that shows how instruction in grammar leads to gains in reading, and we have a century of failure to prove it.

At some point, maybe after the first week of instruction, you can ask your story writer to begin handing you notes from what happened in class that day with *whatever activity you chose* for that day, no matter how simple, and you will be able to create readings from it.

Once this happens, it never stops. The notes your story writer hands to you at the end of each class start the process of reading for your students and by the end of four years of instruction they are reading authentic texts in the target language and many are passing the AP exam without much effort and without having done any forced homework or big tests or written or forced output.

But, in the same way that the auditory input we deliver to our students must be comprehensible, so also must the reading input be comprehensible. If the auditory input has been comprehensible and the reading is based on that auditory comprehensible input, then the reading will be comprehensible.

Based on that reasoning, I believe that it is best to begin reading texts that have been generated from stories and general PQA type of auditory discussion that have happened in class, rather than chapter books. It makes sense. Then, at a certain point in that first year of instruction, enough vocabulary has been taught to form a rich bed of words so that our CI-trained students can pick up a chapter book without a dictionary and start reading it.

It really is quite a magical process and supports the idea that students taught using comprehensible input make significant gains in the language simply by starting out listening to the language all the time, and then they can read.

And that statement is true not just for a few of the "smart" kids in the class. It is true for the majority of them. Reaching all the students in our classrooms is one of the defining characteristics of comprehension-based instruction.

### Reading Option A - A Gold Mine

Here is a specific technique that I created explaining how to present readings based on discussion that happens in class as recorded by the storywriter. Suggestions about how to read chapter books/novels are found in the section after this one. This is a gold mine.

When reading a text created by the teacher from notes taken by the story writer on a story or general PQA, it is suggested that you follow this process:

It is reassuring to be able to refer to this list of steps in class, which I always have printed and sitting next to me when I teach a class using Reading Option A. In my opinion and for me in my classroom, these steps provide the highest quality instruction possible in reading because it has been based on discussion that happened earlier in class. There are two versions of ROA, a short version and a long version.

#### ROA - Short Version

Because of time limitations, I normally use a shortened version of only five of the activities:

1. **Teacher Writes the Story** (ROA Activity 1 - see below for details)
2. **Choral Translation with the Reader Leader** ((ROA Activity 4 - see below for details) combined with **discussion of the grammar** (ROA Activity 5 - see below for details)
3. **Reading from the Back of the Room** (Step 6) combined with **Readers Theatre** (ROA Activity 7 - see below for details)
4. **Dictée** (ROA Activity 13 - see below for details)

#### ROA - Long Version

There is not enough time in one class period to do all of the twenty-one long version ROA activities in a single day. The teacher would have to extend the Two Day Sequence to a third to get them all in.

#### 1. **Teacher Writes the Story**

The instructor has the L1 version of the just completed story as given to her by her story writer. She projects a blank Word file and sentence by sentence types the text in while the students observe the creation of the written story. The students learn to write in this way. They can see words that up until now they have only heard in the process of being spelled correctly, with each accent being added in. (The teacher working on a Mac knows that accents are instantly available by simply pressing down on the letter for about one and a half seconds - a menu will pop up and the correct accented letter can be inserted into the text almost effortlessly.) It is an amazing thing to see a group of students sitting silently, reading attentively with a certain visible pride while their story comes to life on the screen in front of them. When doing this, try to embed about 10%-15% new vocabulary to keep the kids on their toes and expand their vocabularies. Sometimes I distort facts while writing for the same reason.

Note: You may not be able to do this activity if your class is too big or too rowdy. If the class cannot sit still for this writing process by the teacher, come in with the reading already done in advance and just read it with the students.

2. **Instructor Reads in L2**
3. **Pair Work** - The students translate together. I only do this if being observed, to get the box checked.
4. **Choral translation** - Use the laser pointer or put your hand on the words as they read with loud voices. Usually a student steps up - the Reader Leader - to guide the class along with a strong and measured voice. If not, the instructor leads the choral reading and everybody else follows.
5. **Discussion of grammar in L1**. - Finally, this is when closet grammar teachers get to do what they want. They can point out spellings on verb endings, comparing, for example, a first person singular ending with a plural form, whether it can be seen in the reading or not. They can laser point to their favorite grammatical details and share them with the four percenters in the classroom who also love grammar. They can ask students what certain words mean. They can even point out adjective agreement and even spelling changes in boot verbs! This is the time to go for the grammar! What a great way to explain possessive adjectives! Use English! Just keep the grammar explanations down to under four seconds and never mention the actual grammar terms – the kids don’t want to even hear terms like adverbs. Most kids intensely dislike grammar terminology. They just want to know what it means. And never test them on the grammar. What use does that serve? Just point things out, as they observe. Over time, many stories, they will see patterns. This is true acquisition of grammar, not the fake kind where they memorize and fill in blanks on work sheets, which doesn’t bring any gains.
6. **Reading from the Back of the Classroom** - [NOTE: *this step occurs simultaneously with Step 7 - Reader’s Theatre.*] It is clear so far that each of these steps in ROA have significant pedagogical value. But this step has the most. This is where you get the most bang for your buck from the reading. In this Step 6 work, we keep the story projected but physically turn the kids away from it to where you are sitting in the back of the classroom. They have to turn away from the text. Their bodies and eyes have to be facing me. Then, starting from the first paragraph of the reading, I start an in depth repetition of the entire story (i.e. intensely circled with very clear and slow yes/no questioning of individual students during the group discussion). I stop at the end of each paragraph to let them turn and face the text for a moment to “reload” their knowledge of the text in order to get ready for the coming R and D on that new paragraph.

This process piles repetition upon repetition. We can play with each line in many ways, asking direct content questions about the text but also creating parallel questions by bringing in discussion of how a student in our class may compare or not with the characters in the story. Slowly we work our way through the text. This is big work, a great new addition to ROA. I feel that when I am doing this step of ROA I am doing the best job of teaching my language that is possible. The students look at me providing answers to what are some very sophisticated questions in the TL. I hold each kid accountable and have super contact with my barometers. Bam!

*There is an entirely different dynamic when they face you and not the projected text. When they read it they interact with the text but when they can't see it they are forced into *interacting with you verbally in the language*. This is real conversation in the TL, set up beautifully by all the narrow and deep reps gotten up to this point in the ROA process. When they face you and discuss the text that is right behind them it is the real deal.*

In Step 5 above the students are looking at the text and interacting with you verbally and in terms of the grammar, whereas in Step 6 you have switched from being in front to the rear of the classroom as per the above. The difference in what is learned is huge. Step 5 sets up Step 6. In Step 6 you teach for real output. It's thrilling!

7. **Reader's Theatre (RT)** - it is actually done *during Step 6*.

*[Important Note: I no longer do Reader's Theatre from scenes in novels, which, unless the scene is being directed by the one and only Jason Fritze, don't work and are boring and awkward for everybody in the room. I now generate all Reader's Theater scenes only from stories created by the students. Why? It is because the students are not invested in the novels in the way they are with stories.]*

The instructor directs the action. This is one of the best parts of ROA and will make you glad you are a teacher. *Classroom Rule #8 must be fully observed in this step*. This is your chance to use the Director's Cut technique. I leave the story projected because the kids refer to it when acting. The kids like to try to outdo each other with their lines. So if Marc has a line where he says, "You are fired! Leave this place. NOW!," tell them, just like a director of a play would, to say their line using different adverbs that you can remember if you put them up on the wall. After a student delivers a line, see if anyone else can say the line with more gusto, more romantically, more quietly, more to the left, more to the right, more with one foot off the ground, with head more forward, with head more back, whispering, etc. Even the shiest kids want in on this and it can be marvelously entertaining. I have a list on my wall above the projected text to refer to when doing the Director's Cut work.\*\* When you do this, when the kids' focus is on the fun of saying it in different ways, the reps are piling up! The emotions allow those many extra reps. It can get a little loud, though, so you have to be the one in charge. I like to sit in one of the big armchairs in my room and pretend I am a director. Once, a student next to me said, "Now that is going to be going around in my head all day!" So this is a Din-creator! This is output with a purpose (building a culture of fun in the classroom, not to mention the reps.)

8. **Jump into the Space!** – This is another technique for encouraging speech output without force and can be lots of fun, IF the class tendency to blurt is fully controlled by you in a kind yet aggressive and complete way:

With the story up, as you are proceeding along with Steps 6 and 7 above, instead of accepting one word answers (which currently in TPRS is largely the rule) invite the students to answer in fuller sentences, as they wish. Ask them to respond with good mimicking sentences in the TL as per:

Teacher: Class, does Ann have a very small light blue castle in Italy, in the suburbs of Rome?

Student: (knowing that in the text we are reading the castle is indeed in Italy, some creative student yells out plaintively) No! It's in France!

Teacher: You think it's in France?

Student: Yes!

Another student: It's in Germany!

Teacher: You think it's in Germany! It says here (pointing to Italy in the text) that it's in Italy!

etc.

The kids know that the castle is in Italy but you have trained them to say untrue things in a spirit of play with the words as in the above example.

How to invite such interaction? I use the expression, said in English, "Jump into the space!" and hold out my hands to the common open space in front of me there in class and invite them to fill it and then I wait.

Don't forget to wait, sometimes for up to ten seconds or more because the kids need time to formulate what they are going to say.

Some play, some don't. Those who do often rock the house. Far from thinking about accent or proper construction of the language, they just try to communicate for meaning. I ask them to put style and swagger into their sentences and feel as if they are French and make that pout thing with their mouth and spit R's from the back of their throats all over the place.

The kids like it because they finally see the payoff of all the listening and because kids have a natural desire and inclination to express themselves in class.

This may be new thinking for some of us. It is for me because in the past I thought that the comprehensible input theory should dominate all activity in a foreign language classroom but now I realize that in schools that is impossible.

So we need to start developing an initiative for output in our work, an initiative that has been muted up to this point. As long as there is no forced output and it is fun there is no harm and plenty of benefit, even if only on an affective (still very important!) level. The affective aspect of our work is huge and cannot be underestimated.

#### Setting Up Jump Into The Space:

I highly recommend doing the following set up activity before doing the actual Jump into the Space! activity. It is a counting game that most of us probably do in our classrooms in some form already. It has the effect of tuning kids into each other so that they know that they can't blurt. This game is an excellent brain break activity as well. How does it work?

The students try to count to ten as a class, but according to strict rules. One person starts by saying the number one. There is a pause in which no two students can say the number two - only one person can say it. Usually what happens is that the kids can't get past the number five.

They enjoy trying to get to ten in this way but naturally get frustrated. When two or three kids all say "three" together at the same time of course they have to go back to the beginning. In the general frustration, usually a dominant student takes over and tries to point to kids to say the next number, or get an order going around the classroom, or somehow directing things. This of course is not allowed.

Use the failure at this game to challenge the class to apply the lesson learned in the counting game to the Jump into the Space! game (some of my classes think it is a real game). I have found that it works wonderfully in that regard.

The big caution, as usual, is English blurting. Only teachers who have the intestinal fortitude to simply not allow blurting in their CI classes will be able to make the Jump into the Space! activity work.

### 9. **Running Dictation -**

Here's the process:

Take five sentences from the completed story and cut them into strips, putting each sentence up around the room in random places on the walls. The font should be fairly large to make them easy to read.

Next, pair up the students. One student writes and one runs. The runner finds a sentence on the wall and runs back to tell the writer what the sentence is, who then writes it.

Once the students have found and recorded all the sentences, they try to arrange them in the proper order. The game is not over until both students have been both scribe and runner.

(Drawing Dictation is similar. A copy of a simple drawing is handed out to each student. An artist goes to the whiteboard. The students as a class describe the drawing to the artist. When done, the students and artist compare notes. This is a good activity to teach prepositions. Since this drawing activity, and running dictation as well, require some degree of output, it is best to avoid using them too much in first year classes.)

10. **Work On Accent** – Just read to the kids and let them repeat word chunks. This can be a very special time as we finally are able to hear, after a lot of constant input and relatively little verbal output, how our students' brains have organized the language in the now emergent output. It is too early to expect anything exact in terms of their accents, but they love reading a text that they already know aloud in the TL so that is enough reason to do it. Be sure to not make this feel like a forced activity. They love to read out loud in this way.
11. **5 Minute Write** of the story, in which the students answer the questions: title, who, where, what happens, what is the problem. I give them the following template in the TL to fill in each time:  
This is the \_\_\_\_\_ story (fourth, tenth, etc. - teaches them to write ordinal numbers). The name of the story is \_\_\_\_\_. The main character is \_\_\_\_\_. The story takes place \_\_\_\_\_. What happens in this story? \_\_\_\_\_. At the end of the story, \_\_\_\_\_.
12. **Process the work of the class artist.** This does not require much time. We pretty much just enjoy the drawings and I use this time to get more reps on the structures, but in a different context. Fun!
13. **Dictée** -

Here is the dictée process:

First, I give the students a half sheet of paper with groupings of three blank lines on them. Then:

On line 1, I read chunks of sentences and give the students time to write each chunk. I read each sentence chunk three times. The first time I read at a normal pace and they listen. The second time I read very slowly as they write. The third time I read at a normal pace while they check what they have written. I do not read it a fourth time. You will learn how to pace this. I simply do not allow a student to ask for a repetition of anything at any time.

Next, I show the students the correct version of the text, phrase by phrase, or chunk by chunk, and not sentence by sentence, which is too complex. They look at it and make their corrections on line 2 as I successively reveal each new correctly written chunk on the LCD or document camera.

The students bring down onto line 2 any corrections of the text only if any are needed, but the teacher may want to require that they copy the entire correct text on the second line. I grade both lines, whatever is correct from line 1 as well as any corrections made on line 2. In this way, the students are graded on what is correct, and not on what is wrong. They are graded on how well they can copy!

Line 3 is just a line space to make everything clearer and easier to read, but the teacher can opt to make them write the English version of the text on that third line as well.

The dictated version of the story doesn't have to align perfectly with the story passage it came from. In fact, intentional inaccuracies as you recreate the story force deeper thinking by the students, and allow you to perhaps introduce a limited amount of new vocabulary.

14. **Textivate.** Download this program for \$40 - it's worth it - from the internet to work more deeply with the written story – it plugs right in from Word and you can eat up lots of class minutes with the cute things Textivate offers for us to do with any reading we create from a story. <http://www.textivate.com/>
15. **Sacred Reading** of the text. After all the opportunities they have had to both listen to and now read the same basic text, the students know the material. So, to conclude the Reading Option A process, and this is a most special time with your students in class, I read it to them slowly with meaning, dramatic tone, artistry, in a quiet, sacred kind of setting, as if I am gently reciting poetry. I was told by one teacher that one day she read with such drama and emotion that her students told her that she should have been an actress. I generally do this step without the text in front of the students, turning off the LCD or document camera so that they can just listen and not be distracted by the words on the screen. The students are really pleased when they can understand a foreign language read to them in this way. (Highly recommended because you and the students will enjoy it so much.)
16. **Translation Quiz** - pick any paragraph from the reading and have the students translate it into English for a quick and easy grade.
17. **Content Quiz** - have ten yes/no questions prepared before class. I no longer employ quiz writers. They just couldn't make good enough tests.
18. **Free Write** based on completed story - student write for ten minutes for ten minutes as per the Free Write Rules posted on this site. They enjoy making up their own stories based on the structures and plot of the story just completed.
19. **Process the Artist's Work.** In the past, we would do this at the end of the story (Step 1), but why not do it after the kids have benefitted from reading/discussing/writing/talking about the story for one or more class periods. I wait until ROA is over to go back and do some Listen and Discuss with the artist's work and then, the big celebration when one or more kids are able to retell the entire story as they look at the depiction of the story in a four or six frame panel setting.
20. **Process the work of the L2 story** writer if there is one in your class. Project it up and see how fast the class can fix the grammar, having done all the steps above.
21. **Student Retells** - paired or to the class.

\*\*French: (is used in Reader's Theatre as well)

avec enthousiasme	rapidement	soulagé
d'une façon romantique	lentement	avec remerciements et inclinations
en play-back	très rapidement	victorieux
à droite	très lentement	d'une façon embarrassée
à gauche	en mangeant	grincheux
en haut	en buvant	qui gratte
en bas	en se tournant	d'une façon mystérieuse
en riant	les mains sur les genoux	épuisé
en hochant la tête	les mains sur la tête	fatigue
avec pudeur	comme un roi	en train de s'endormir
un pied dans l'air	comme une mitrailleuse	vexé
la tête an avant	comme un robot	avec du calme
la tête an arrière	dans une voix élevée	marrant
les bras dans l'air	dans une voix profonde	avec douceur
en chuchotant	legato	câlin
à haute voix	six fois	avec de petites mains
à voix basse	quinze fois, etc.	à petite bouche mais les yeux grands
avec de grandes dents	en touchant la couleur jaune, etc.	comme un lapin, une vache, un serpent, etc.
les yeux fermés	en courant sur place	les mains sure les épaules
le nez fermé	avec peur	
d'un ton sévère	fier	
tout à coup		

**English:	really fast	thankfully
with gusto	really slow	victoriously
romantically	while eating	in an embarrassed way
quietly	while drinking	grumpy
like a Munchkin	while turning around	itchy
to the left	with hands on hips	mysteriously
to the right	with hands on head	worried
looking above	like a king	calmly
looking below	like a clown	happily
laughingly	with certainty	proudly
sheepishly	in a staccato voice	relieved
with one foot off the ground	in a high voice	in a silly way
with head forward	in a low voice	thankfully
with head back	in a legato voice	victoriously
with arms in the air	six times	sweetly
while whispering	fifteen times, etc.	cuddly
loudly	while touching something	with tiny hands
with face scrunched	yellow, etc.	with big mouth but small eyes
with eyes closed	unevenly	like a bunny, cow, snake, etc.
severely	nervously	hands on shoulders
suddenly	obediently	
fast	proudly	
slow	relieved	

### Summary of ROA Steps:

1. Teacher Writing
2. Instructor reads aloud
3. Pair work
4. Choral translation using laser pointer
5. Discussion of grammar in L1
6. Read from the Back of the Room
7. Readers Theatre
8. Jump into the Space!
9. Running Dictation
10. Accent Work
11. 5 minute write
12. Class artist
13. Dictée
14. Textivate
15. Readers Theatre
16. Translation quiz
17. Content quiz
18. Free Write
19. Process Artist's Work (it will sound like L1 to them by now.)
20. Process Work of Story Writer
21. Student Retells

What about reading novels/chapter books with our students?

### Read and Discuss

Here are suggestions about how to read novels:

1. Susan Gross advocates just plowing through the novel, asking questions from time to time, but generally having the students put their finger on the word as the teacher translates the text back into English like a snowplow.
2. Blaine Ray advocates reading a paragraph, one at a time, and discussing it with the class, sometimes spinning out ideas that are parallel to those in the text but more personalized to the students in the class and therefore more interesting. Blaine calls this Read and Discuss. It takes more time but has the advantage that the discussion of each paragraph exposes the students to more auditory input of words that are immediately fresh in their minds and permits going deeper into the text.

I personally have decided that what is best for me resembles more what Blaine does than what Susie does. Here is what I do when reading novels/chapter books with my students:

Step 1 – Take the chapter paragraph by paragraph, translating one paragraph at a time with the kids. This is straight CHORAL translation. The Reader Leader leads the translation. I do not read the text to them or translate for them and I am very strict about *insisting on hearing their voices* during the choral translation. By strict I mean that I stop the class when kids just sit there, explaining that I expect to hear the voices of all the students in the class. I wait them out. Of course, I can't force this, but I do connect what I hear them doing in their choral reading with their jGR (ISR) grade after class, which helps but does not completely solve the problem.

Step 2 – Discuss in the target language the specific content of the text we just read. I follow the usual questioning process, again insisting on a strong choral response from everyone to my yes/no/single word questions. I stay on that paragraph for the rest of the period, or I spend just a few minutes on it - how long depends on how much energy there is in the discussion, which we can say is a general rule in all CI based discussion.

Step 3 – PQA the text whose facts were just discussed in Step 2, comparing the facts in the chapter book to made up things my students feed me about their own lives. When you do this you are creating parallel information. If Brandon got Marianne's attention by driving his father's blue T-Bird in the novel, I ask one of my students if he has a T-Bird. If he doesn't want or know how to play the game by lying to me and telling me that he has, for example, a red T-Bird, or a blue Subaru, then I stop and repeat to them in English the instructions (they are children and need to be told) about how to play the game by making up cute answers to my questions. When Edward ends up telling me that he drives a red T-Bird, or maybe a green one, no matter how long it takes of tense dead air in the class to wait the class out for an answer, I register great approval about what Edward has told me and off we go into some PQA/PSA based on the paragraph in the novel we just read.

Step 4 – Give a dictée on the paragraph. I already have the text; there is no need to write it out as in Reading Option A because the students can make their corrections from the book.

Step 5 – Give a quick quiz, which has by now been written for me by my quiz writer. (If the quiz writer has not prepared a quiz, here is a trick: just look at the book and ask the students five questions that have all yes or all no answers. Then I double the grade since everything I do in my grade book is based on ten points. By making all the answers either all yes or all no, I know what the key is, and I don't even have to remember the questions, because the kids don't really want to know the right answers after the test, they just want the grade.)

The steps described above work nicely in a block class. Both Reading Option A (stories) and Read and Discuss (chapter books) are major TEAs - Time Eater Uppers.

## Skipping Text

I suggest that we only try to spin discussion from the reading *when the text has energy*. If it's boring we should just keep doing the R part, the aural translating. But if it's interesting, we can then spin some D. If the reader is familiar with the CI strategy called Reader's Theatre, where only scenes from the novel are chosen if they are charged with potential for high energy theatre, it is the same thing here. We must learn to read only the parts of the book that are interesting to the kids and if the book is not interesting at all we simply don't read it. When we skip over boring paragraphs or entire chapters, we just tell the students what happens in English in a few sentences and then move on to the next interesting part of the book, if there is one.

## Parallel Information

To expand on the idea of spinning parallel information out of chapter books/novels to create classroom settings that mirror what is going on in the novel, I offer these ideas, some of which have been mentioned earlier in this text but which are discussed here in more detail.

If Brandon in the novel drives a blue T-Bird and picks up Marianne at 5:30 p.m. to go to the Café du Jour, I ask a student during the D part of R and D what he drives and with whom he goes out (a girl in class piques everybody's interest) and what time he picks her up to go to what restaurant. All of a sudden we are talking about an imagined date of one of our students, and we have the vocabulary to do it because it is still fresh and right in front of the kids right there in the text about Brandon getting ready for his date.

Thus we have instant personalization of the content of the chapter in the novel when we turn our own students into parallel characters to mirror the ones in the novel. Just don't get too real with the stuff you create. Don't set up a real date with real kids in the school – teenagers are the most easily offended people on the planet as we all know since many of us work with them.

I used to think that parallel novels meant that I had to create an entire novel from the one we were reading, with parallel plots and all sorts of details. But now I see how impossible that is, due to time limitations. So I use the term "parallel information" for this kind of brief spinning of information in class about our own students from a text, in the interest of using an accurate term. My real goal in spinning out new and personalized information from any text is just to throw out some parallel light banter about my kids when the paragraph we are on lends itself to that, and then extending it for a minute or two before returning to the task at hand of reading the novel.

In general, novels are easier to teach than stories, but less interesting. So I teach novels when I don't really feel like teaching on any particular day, and stories when I do. I actually use Read and Discuss more now than I did a few years ago because it is perhaps the simplest form of CI available to us along with the snow plow technique. I think that all people new to the process should take advantage of how simple Read and Discuss with spin-outs is

to use in a comprehensible input class, and how much simpler the snow plow technique is than that.

On one occasion I had a story ready to go, but didn't quite have the energy level needed for it that day, so I distributed the novel and we read together, translating chorally into English. I popped up a little grammar, we discussed each few lines in L2, then I asked a few questions trying to connect the text to my students' lives, got some silly made up answers because I had trained my students to play the game, and we had a fun and relaxing class that went by very quickly.

On the other hand, we have to be psyched up for stories. They are not difficult, but they require that we be in fairly good mental space, which cannot be said for us every day, when you consider the nature of our jobs.

### Compact Read and Discuss

By limiting what we choose to read with our students to only certain paragraphs that have energy and skipping over the rest, we give new meaning to the term "narrow and deep." When we limit the amount of text we choose to read, we can expand the same sentence or structure much more than we would do normally and therefore we move our instruction up to completely new levels of efficiency and ease for our students. It's kind of like a spoken "explication de texte" process.

When we really get into one paragraph (or even one sentence!) and read in this narrow and deep way, reading just one paragraph or even just a few lines over the course of an entire class period, I call it Compact Read and Discuss. Because Compact Read and Discuss goes so deeply into a small amount of text, we launch the understanding of our students forward much further in one class than we ever thought possible. I think many of us can agree that normal Read and Discuss can be too shallow and wide, as there is just too much amorphous language in the text for the students to deal with.

But if we spend up to half an hour or more on one sentence, if it is the right one, the one that has energy, comparing and contrasting, then that sentence will bring the greatest language gains to our students because of the sheer amount of repetition we are able to bring into the discussion. It is good if we can always remember that in our reading classes we are not teaching the novel, we are teaching the language.

### A Question

Here is a question that is germane to this discussion about reading:

"I am struggling with the D part of R & D. I can't seem to come up with very many questions that don't come off

as too obvious. Sometimes I feel like I am insulting my students' intelligence and I can see an annoyed look in some kids' eyes. On the other hand, some kids just go about answering the questions. So I really don't know what to do.

"An example might be:

*Pearl was thirsty. She drove to Texas because she wanted a Coke. She went to Kmart. The waiter gave her a drink and she drank it. It wasn't Coke. It was gasoline.*

"Is it ok to ask questions like:

*Where did she drive? Why did she drive there? Did she go to Walmart? Did the waiter give her food? etc.*

"Hopefully I'm just overthinking this process. I would appreciate any suggestions."

My response:

"The trick in this work, obviously, is to ask the questions that make the discussion interesting, that get the right amount of repetitions on one verb or target structure so that the slower students can understand and the faster ones aren't bored. It's quite a trick to pull off!

"I suspect that you are doing a good job of going slowly enough. The average speed processors are hanging with you, and the faster ones are getting upset, which is normal for them, because they have learned that in schools they are the smart ones and that you, the teacher, need to favor them and no one else in the room. They have learned that through countless classes over many years.

"The problem then, I would suggest, becomes not your questioning technique but rather the fast processing kids who glare at you to indicate their impatience. Your job is to guarantee the comprehension of all the students in the classroom, so if you stay on one verb and hammer it over and over as long as you need to for all your students, then there is nothing wrong in what you are doing. Therefore, do not allow the fast processors to split the class.

"We have created a culture of survival-of-the-fittest in schools, which always mirror our society in general, and it is time for that to end. We contribute our part by telling the fast processors that any little glares they send our way will not be tolerated and that they can and will listen patiently to the class so that it stays together. I would then slap a grade of 2 or 3 for the glarer's jGR grade that day, to drive the point home in a concrete way, because most students function in their classrooms primarily in relationship to their own grades, and not to other students and to actual human requests by you that are made for the benefit of the group as a whole.

## Quick Read-Alouds

One nice way to start class from time to time to strengthen our students listening and reading skills is to read to them one of the stories or Movie Talks done earlier in the year. This idea is from Eric Herman, who explains that starting class by reading a text aloud to kids who already know it: a) provides review, b) builds listening fluency (i.e. you can speed up your reading of a story that is so familiar), and c) provides practice in visualization— some students close their eyes and listen. The teacher can also stop a few times during the reading to ask a student what is going on (they can respond in English).

Another option to this idea is if you are using the binder organization ideas offered herein on page 190, your students will also have (in Section 4 of their binders) packets of all the stories/MTs done that year and so you can start class off by giving students 5-10 minutes to independently read from the packets.

To build student confidence and show them the size of their listening vocabulary, cut and paste the text into this word frequency counter:

[http://rainbow.arch.scriptmania.com/tools/word\\_counter.html](http://rainbow.arch.scriptmania.com/tools/word_counter.html)

(We should do a quick “replace all” for accents before cutting and pasting because the frequency counter requires that we get rid of accents or it will divide a word in two, e.g. “comía” becomes “com” and “a.”)

## Strategy #16 – Listen and Draw:

Diane Neubauer has developed an activity that we should all use in our CI classrooms, both as a strategy and as a bail out move.

Diane reports:

“This is my favorite comprehensible input activity. I have to keep from doing it too often so that my students don’t get tired of it. You ask a story that the kids draw as you go, which means that you tend to go slowly enough (they’ll complain because they are drawing the details). Then afterwards you can grade the drawings and use them for a lot more. Later, type up the details everyone drew (with a few twists) and you are ready for Read & Discuss.

“I developed Listen and Draw once while trying to engage a lethargic, sleepy group of eighth graders in Personalized Question and Answers. We had introduced three or four new words, made some gestures to help recall them, and then I began to ask questions. Silence. Students sinking in their chairs.

“In a moment of inspiration, rather than try to drag interpersonal communication out of them, I asked myself, ‘What can I do that will still cause these chatty kids to listen to these words in meaningful context?’ And I gave

each of them a blank piece of paper. I left our new words on the board and began, slowly, to describe a scene. The students sketched what they heard, somehow visually including every detail.”

Diane’s target structures were:

*cross the street*

*waiter/service worker*

*chocolate milkshake*

Slowly Diane described a scene using no other new words:

*There is a person. He’s a man. He’s a waiter. He can speak Mandarin. He likes milkshakes. He’d like to have a chocolate milkshake. He’s beside a street. The street is pretty: there are a lot of flowers. Across from the waiter, there is a small restaurant. The restaurant sells milkshakes. The waiter is about to cross the street to buy a chocolate milkshake. I rephrased things after they’d heard it all, such as: There’s a Mandarin-speaking man who is a waiter. He’s beside a pretty street... etc.*

Diane continues:

“Describing and sketching such a detailed scene took about 20-25 minutes. As a follow-up, I asked the students to show a classmate and describe it in Chinese for one minute. Then, I took volunteers who re-told their sketch to the whole class, pointing out features in their drawing. I collected the drawings and graded them out of 5 points for including all details. Grading the drawings makes them take this seriously, but they enjoyed it, and wow, what an improved level of engagement. They were asking me to repeat and the focus level was very high.

“The next day I had scanned in several drawings and showed them on screen. I asked the students questions about each. They loved looking at (and laughing at) their classmates’ drawings. Even students not yet ready to speak can be highlighted with Listen and Draw, and using their sketches both encourages them and gives them status with more vocal classmates.

“Since then, I’ve found it helpful to shorten the description and include two sketches of about 4-6 sentences, and maybe 5-8 minutes needed to complete each sketch. With classes that know how to play, story-asking for the specific details is great. My current 7th grade class is excellent at that. One scene recently created with them ended up with a student from the class at (recurring character) Apple Juice Man’s house watching SpongeBob on TV on Sunday (targets: *watch TV, weekend, with*). The kids added who and what and really owned it. There was passion when they saw each other’s versions of Apple Juice Man!”

I say congratulations to Diane. What she describes above is real comprehension based teaching. It’s “monitor and

adjust” with style points thrown in. This drawing idea is indeed a gem of a CI strategy and also it is a gem of a bail out move. It slows the kids down and focuses them. David Talone said, after trying it, that it “eliminated the need for me to be so interesting. And it does what all comprehensible input should do; it focuses the kids on the language.”

Diane continues:

“With my distracted, bouncing-off-the-walls class I think this might become a permanent part of the PQA process in my classroom. I almost always try to review some of the drawings the next day as a class warm up before the story.”

James Hosler has added an excellent suggestion to Diane’s idea: “Use student pictures as the basis for a quick quiz, e.g., in L2, ‘In this picture, class, does Albert want to eat vegetables?’” (Such questions can be made up on the spot, as long as the questions have one word answers and as long as the quiz writer records the correct answer for grading as each question happens.)

What Diane has come up with here illustrates and defends how what we do is not a method but rather an ongoing, ever changing process. Yes, we need the skills to make the process work, and the strategies and techniques mentioned in this book have proven helpful to many, but when we can adjust on our own, without relying on a book or computer program, in constantly different ways, we have made significant progress into this way of teaching. When we are faced with chatty kids, we would do well to remember Diane’s perfectly phrased question to herself right there in the middle of class: “What can I do that will still cause these chatty kids to listen to these words in meaningful context?”

### Listen and Draw Follow Up Activities

Diane shares some of the follow-up activities that can be done after a Listen and Draw session:

- teacher describes a detail and has students point out that feature in their sketch.
- brief pair work: students describe their finished sketches to another student.
- volunteers retell the description to the whole class while pointing out features of their sketches.
- use particularly entertaining images the next day (asking questions about the picture and discussing - they love seeing these).
- teacher types a description and the class reads it together.
- teacher types a parallel storyline and compares and contrasts it to their pictures.

- teacher or students write up true/false statements, read them together or silently, and have students write their answers.
- students type or hand-write a description of another student's picture the next day.

### Classic Six Panel Story Boards

For over twenty years now, CI/TPRS teachers have had their students draw six panel drawings as a follow up activity to a reading, or as something the class artist draws during the creation of the story. Such a simple idea is certainly an oldie but a goodie, but one that is often forgotten in the sea of ideas we keep coming up with in comprehension based instruction.

What is great about these is that after listening so intently during the story creation process in Step 2 of TPRS, and after reading the story, the kids are primed and ready to do some drawing, and they really enjoy it. Just put the reading up and let them start drawing! Then share their work with the class and you get even more reps on the story! Of course, keeping in alignment Listen and Draw, the story could be read to the kids while they draw. And yes, stick figures are fine.

### Strategy #17 – MovieTalk:

MovieTalk (MT), developed by Ashley Hastings, is a winning classroom CI strategy and a heavy hitting option to stories. It keeps things fresh and keeps the kids engaged at a high level by providing compelling comprehensible input to the students that is often better than can be found in stories because of the power of the images presented in the short video clips. The downside to MovieTalk is that it is not as effective as stories in personalizing the discussion in the classroom. Both strategies have their respective strengths.

In MovieTalk, the teacher describes the content of short (1 minute) video clips. Most come from YouTube. The audio track of the video is not used. The teacher provides the audio track in the form of in-bounds comprehensible input, narrating the action and describing things.

The amount of structures targeted in MovieTalk, just as in stories, must be limited, obviously. A teacher using a MovieTalk clip from YouTube, for example, can't just start talking to a level one class about anything in the clip. The teacher must plan what structures she wants to target beforehand. She can discuss objects, characters, and action and compare what is happening in the video with the interests of students in the classroom.

One way to think about Movie Talk, according to Dr. Hastings, is to pretend you are talking to someone who can't see the picture. The key in MovieTalk, as in any comprehension based instruction, is that the teacher provide repetitive and slow comprehensible and contextualized input.

## Preparing for a MovieTalk Class

Diane Neubauer says this about preparing for a MovieTalk class:

“Be familiar with the clip, including where a scene breaks. I think it’s critical to show it without comment once, then slowly narrate that same segment. I write down the times beforehand in a document and follow that as a guide. I then try to think through how I would describe what’s on screen during that scene in language that students almost completely already have. A teacher could write questions in advance if that helps. I check their comprehension with a few questions before moving on, and one word choral answers are required just as in stories.”

## Staying in Bounds in MovieTalk Classes

As Diane indicated, most of the vocabulary in any MovieTalk video clip must be known by the students. This frees us up to concentrate on presenting just a few new structures that the students don’t know. This is what we do with stories and with everything we do in comprehensible input. It is in limiting new structures and mixing them with older known structures that the CI gains are achieved.

The key element in comprehensible input instruction is that the texts (scripts for stories, MovieTalk clips, readings) be below the level of the kids, so that they understand almost all of what is going on while a few new structures rain into the discussion and thus are acquired. We want the students oblivious of the fact that they are getting reps on structures.

Thus it is important to review a MovieTalk clip before showing it to the kids. There can be no “noise” (unfamiliar words beyond the few structures being introduced) in the discussion of a MT clip. We are the only ones who can tell if a clip is at the right level for our students. (If there is to be any noise in a CI class, it should be more in a reading class where the student can stop and analyze and make associations with known vocabulary, etc.)

And don’t forget that you can skip over some parts of a MovieTalk video if it’s too difficult to narrate or just plain boring. We do this in stories and chapter books and it is perfectly acceptable.

## Comparison of MovieTalk Clips and Stories

Two very strong teachers have commented on the value of MovieTalk to them:

John Bracey:

*...as a teacher in his first year of teaching entirely with CI, I have found MT's to be by far the most successful [strategy for me]....*

Laura Cenci:

*...last year I had the MOST success and felt the most confident with MovieTalk....*

I am sure that stories will not go away. Both of these supercharged techniques offer unique advantages.

In stories:

1. We can personalize.
2. We can get the kids up acting.
3. We can get our artists involved.
4. We can create something new by asking not telling.
5. It is easier to stay in bounds with stories.

In MovieTalk:

1. We have visual access to and can therefore get frequent repetitions on previously taught vocabulary, something not as easy to do in stories.
2. Establishing meaning is done faster since we need merely point to an image in an MT class and meaning is established.
3. Working with TPR to establish command over verbs in our students' minds leads naturally into video clips, where the verb just worked on takes on life in an instant. We use TPR in stories but it is less effective because less immediately visual.
4. We can use an MT clip as a jumping off point into PQA, thus connecting the clip to a potential story created by the class.
5. Videos captivate kids' attention effortlessly.

MovieTalk is a proven winner and many newer teachers to CI say that MT works better for them than stories, because stories are harder to do. MT therefore has the potential for teachers who are just dipping their toes into CI waters to get them lots of quality instructional minutes.

### Movie Talk Clips by Students

Michele Whaley has created a low-tech but highly personalized version of MovieTalk:

“Here is a twist on MovieTalk. First, my classes read some simple Russian anecdotes/short stories together. Then small groups make a storyboard of a story with plans to make short *wordless* videos ranging in length from 20 seconds to two minutes. I tell them that the video-making has to take less than fifteen minutes, once in the lab, because I don’t like it when bells and whistles take away from input time.

“Each group has to have at least one student who knows iMovie. The kids choose different ways of getting the movies made, but since they have to plan the shots and (minimal) props in advance, they can get it done quickly. They can just use the built-in cameras on our lab computers. I ask them to try to make the action slow enough so that I can talk all the way through.

“An example of a 30 second video is about a boy packing to go on vacation with friends on a river shore. He takes what he thinks he needs, but when his mom says he has to take his toothbrush, he decides he doesn’t want to go after all.

“Another story lasting a minute and a half is about a girl who goes to buy gloves. A salesman tells her that the pair of brown gloves she wants costs a kiss. She tells him that’s fine. She’ll take three pairs, and her grandmother will come pay for them later.

“I just MovieTalk the stories. The kids love watching their classmates, and they love retelling the story. They don’t care that there isn’t much in the way of high-tech editing.

“Without requiring sound, it’s easy to have a bunch of kids making videos in the same room. If there are any techie kids out there, they might be inspired to make better videos on their own.

“Concerning the choice of vocabulary when I talk about the clips, the kids have seen some of the target vocabulary before in the readings since we read them in advance. All I have to do is tell versions of those stories and folk tales in class in Russian that is appropriate to the level of the kids. With time, we can get to reading the real things, or watching videos of the tales that are produced by Russians, but they’ll have a knowledge basis for them. Otherwise, I tend to push kids too hard into culture that they’re not yet ready to absorb.

“The students’ versions of the story have to follow the story unless they have a really good reason not to. Figuring out what scenes they need to show in the story requires very close reading of stories that they have already read a few times.

“They have to be done with this project with time to export it from iMovie and load it onto a thumb drive or they won’t get credit. (Exporting to Quick Time takes the least time of the options on iMovie.)”

### Reversing the MovieTalk Process

Instead of starting with a YouTube video clip, one could reverse the process by showing the clip last. We would start by isolating out the target structures we want to teach in the MovieTalk clip and then using them to write out a story script.

Once the story was created and enjoyed by the class, including a Step 3 Reading, we would only then show the MovieTalk clip to the students. To their amazement they would understand everything they heard in the clip.

In writing the script out, the characters in the clip would be the underlined variables. Thus, if a Mickey Mouse clip starts with Mickey and Donald Duck running through town, our first sentence in the script would be “Mickey is running next to Donald.” Then, when we ask the story before showing the clip, Mickey would be replaced by a student from our class and the personalized mini story would begin sentence by sentence in the usual way.

If a targeted structure in the clip is “next to” we would circle to get repetitions on it. If not, we better have already taught it, since we cannot include non-targeted structures in a clip unless they have already been acquired. Once the story has been created in class, we follow the normal order of the Three Steps and write the newly created class story up as a reading.

Readings can be embedded if we wish to use the same clip with different levels. The more advanced classes could work with the more advanced embedded texts while the less advanced classes would work with the simpler texts. Doing this saves time.

After the reading, we simply show the clip and the students would understand it as long as:

1. our instruction was slow enough.
2. the clip chosen was simple enough, with lots of action and few words.
3. we didn’t target too many new structures (2 or 3 only).

4. we didn't go out of bounds.
5. we enforced our classroom rules so that the students were rigorously focused on our instruction.
6. we gave sufficient brain breaks.
7. the clip we chose wasn't more than one minute long.

### Use of Screenshots

Another way to work with a MovieTalk clip is, before showing the video, we prime the pump by taking a limited amount of screenshots and showing them to the kids. Each screenshot can be chosen to highlight one of the target structures we originally chose. By thus isolating the targets, we create a strong foundation for the showing of the actual clip.

Diane Neubauer on using screenshots in MovieTalk:

“If you find screenshots helpful, but want to minimize the prep time involved, here are some ways I’ve used them:

Aural input-based:

1. Use screenshots for Look & Discuss before seeing the short video clip, basing aural/oral discussion & PQA around students’ interests based on what they see.
2. Use screenshots for retells of the film clip the day after MovieTalk. Show the screenshot and have the whole class, partners, or small teams retell what they see. If they like competition, tally how many statements the students (either the whole class or in small groups) can make about each slide.
3. Use screenshots for follow-up another day. Using PowerPoint, the teacher displays the slides in PowerPoint’s “Slide Sorter” view so that many of the pictures are in view on screen at the same time. Say a statement that matches one or more of the slides and play a game of Smack! by having a student come forward and “smack” the matching picture with a soft stuffed animal. Students could play in small teams for a group activity.

Reading input-based:

1. Use screenshots to ask for students’ suggestions on how to caption them. Type them then and there, then re-read the captions together as a group when finished. This builds student ownership in the instructional process.

2. Use the screenshots to create a reading version of Smack! in a PowerPoint slide show. On paper, give the students a list of numbered sentences (in random order from the captions you typed together). On screen, the teacher displays the screenshots in PowerPoint's "Slide Sorter" view so that many of the pictures are in view. Call out a sentence number from their sheet. Student pairs read it and figure out which picture matches. Again, you can turn it into a game and have them "smack" the match with a stuffed animal or something else that won't harm the projector screen.
3. Use screenshots for independent student writing by computers. They get a copy of the slideshow and add their own captions to each slide.
4. Use screenshots to create writing. Using the pictures as more general prompts, the students write about what happened in the short film (not captions, but paragraphs, using the pictures to remind them of the flow of events)."

### Working with Full Length Movies

One can take an entire film and break it up into 5-15 minute chunks and work on one periodically through the year. It would be a fantastic thing to show the entire movie at the end of the year after breaking it into pieces and getting reps on everything in it. The only drawback is that working with even a five minute section of a film could easily take at least an entire week of instructional time.

But if the movie chosen were simple enough, with a limited amount of speech, it could be a worthwhile project. The caution is to avoid working with too much film with younger kids. Adults and very focused older high school students might be able to keep focused, but for most younger kids it is best when doing a full length movie to parse just one complete film out over the course of the entire year as described above.

(This work with full length movies actually describes MovieTalk as originally conceived by Ashley Hastings. Out of necessity, the TPRS community adapted the idea into the use of short clips.)

### Suggested MovieTalk Sequence

Here is a recommended MovieTalk class sequence that could require from two to three days of class time (90-150 minutes):

1. Choose a short and simple clip that is just a few minutes in duration.
2. Isolate the (2 or 3) new expressions in the clip that you want to teach.

3. In class, establish meaning of the target structures.
4. Show a few seconds of the video to the class.
5. Freeze the frame and use Look and Discuss to talk about the image.
6. Use the image to do some PQA with the students.
7. Repeat the sequence in steps 4 through 6 throughout the class.
8. Play the video without interruption.
9. Present the reading using Reading Option A.
10. Give the quiz.

When doing MovieTalk: Remember that there is no way we can teach everything that is going on in even simple video clips, so avoid trying. The old way of teaching involves a kind of exhaustive effort on the part of the teacher to teach everything into the analytical side of the brain, to get the highest score, but this effort exhausts the kids who, especially in language learning, can only digest a few sounds – the target structures – in one class period. The truth of less is more/narrow and deep must be respected and we must teach accordingly. So when doing a MT clip, *pick a limited amount of structures* and stay with them. Just gallop over or, with beginners, skip completely, sounds that involve verbal structures that your students don't yet know. Don't forget to do this. Limit yourself. Break away from the old exhausting way of teaching. Teach to the whole brain and learn to relax.

#### Advice from Dr. Hastings

Michele Whaley in Alaska has worked extensively with Dr. Hastings on MovieTalk and shares:

“The parts that Dr. Hastings keeps emphasizing when he watches me and others use MT are:

1. use 1-3 minute scenes
2. play the scene first (gives you a break and lets the kids see it).
3. explain to the kids that MT is not for entertainment, but to develop listening comprehension.
4. don't depend on dialogue; pretend you are telling a person who can't see what's in the picture.”

## Success on the First Try

Don Read in California used the above sequence in his first try with a MovieTalk class. He reports:

I followed the suggested order:

1. Previewed the video.
2. Chose structures (eggs, falls in love, feels guilty) and added other important expressions to help in our discussion (has an addiction, has a powerful urge, is addicted to, and a couple of others).
3. Assigned jobs.
4. Told the students (in L2) that I would not be showing the entire video until we had finished discussing it (so don't ask!)
5. Established meaning on the three key structures.
6. Started the video and I stopped every few seconds to discuss what was going on and to do some PQA.
7. Finished the discussion and showed the video non-stop.
8. Took the script writer's script and typed it up for discussion the next day.
9. Reviewed the artist's drawing.
10. Gave the 10 question quiz.

We gave the characters names and a little backstory also. We were in L2 the entire time. As I said before, it was a good break from storytelling, but now I will go back to storytelling next week.

## Strategy #18 – The Special Chair/La Silla Especial:

This original genius idea about asking students questions when they are seated in front of the class during the creation of a story is from Jody Noble. It has since taken many forms. Here is Jody's description of the original "Special Chair":

“Four legs on the floor. Wooden seat. A back. It’s a chair, just a chair. Is that so? I asked my sixth graders to give me their thoughts on ‘the chair.’

*Antonia and others:*

“It’s cool. It’s different than any other chair in the room. It’s higher. You can swing your legs and they don’t touch the ground. When you sit in it, you’re higher than everybody else. You can see everything. You feel empowered. It’s the chair the teacher sits on sometimes, so it’s kind of prohibited or something.”

*Pierce:*

“When you are on the chair, it is a safe environment. You can be whoever you want to be. It feels natural that it’s in Spanish. You just think about making the story better. Other people add to the story when you’re up there. It’s like a circle. You have to listen and then you think about how to make the story better. I don’t have to think how to say it. I just think about how to make the story better.”

*Jody’s own thoughts on the chair:*

“I had always known that having young children come to the front of the room to stand while I circled and helped to weave the story/mini-story/PQA was a disaster in the making: the fidgeting, the fiddling with stuff on the chalk tray, the turning around, the goofy behavior of all kinds. Yikes! So, I have always hauled a chair or two from behind their desks to the front of the room. It was always a pain and most of the other students couldn’t see the kids anyway.

“However, it kept me from losing my mind and having to redirect behavior every three seconds. The kids in the front stayed still, got up to act only when directed to do so, and returned to home base after each location. The rest of the class focused more easily since the target wasn’t moving all of the time.

“When my friend, Beth, gave up teaching to live a life of sanity and happiness outside the classroom, she left me her teacher chair. It was really a stool with a chair back. It was tall and kind of cool looking. It changed my life.

“For each class I have some sort of small container with their class number on it. Inside each container lives a small binder clip and a ticket with the name of each student written on the back.

“Each time we do a story, act out reading, or do a parallel story based on a reading, I choose a kid’s ticket out of the box (sometimes more than one). It is truly random. I ask the child if they would like to participate. It is not mandatory.

“Rarely does a child refuse. It’s only a matter of time before they will ‘kill’ to get picked out of that box. I still marvel. They come to the chair while I put their now used ticket into the binder clip. They are now ‘a clippie’ until

everyone else gets a chance to do something in class. Keeps it fair. This is important to them.

“Having the kid sit in a ‘high’ chair means that when I stand next to her/him and talk, we are almost at eye level – a small, but very meaningful detail when communicating with another human being.

“The chair has rules, of course:

1. No dissing of the person in the chair, not ever, no way, no how.
2. You do not have to tell the truth while sitting in the chair. It’s up to you.
3. People may disagree with you, but they may not change your mind. Only you do that.
4. You have the final word and then Profe has the final word after that.
5. You may only do what you are told to do or risk being replaced by the next lucky person.

“If you think they follow the rules just because the rules are explicitly stated, you would be mistaken. We practice them and practice them and practice them. Much modeling, much ‘replay’ when mistakes are made, much elation and praise when rules are followed.

“Emotional SAFETY is my #1 concern. When it is protected, the affective filter is reduced tremendously and language has a chance to be understood. The affective filter not only affects language production, it greatly affects language ‘ingestion.’ If it doesn’t get in, it can’t come out!

“Please read more of the students’ reflections about the chair. I got a beautiful peek into what their experience in Spanish class has been like. They think it’s the chair! They are sold. My students were very pleased to know that I would include their thoughts here:

*Colin:* All of the attention is on you. (Me: Is that always a good thing?) YES.

*Omar:* When you go up there (on the chair), you wonder what’s going to happen. It’s exciting when it’s like that – like a mystery.

*Benny:* Going on the chair is an incentive. We want to get picked. We start thinking about the things we want to add on to the story – which makes us want to know more words in Spanish. Going in the chair inspires you to want to know more.

*Karson:* We learn so much Spanish in the stories that we don’t think about it. It just comes out.

*Ellie:* We don't have the chair in any other class. It reminds us of when we were little and when we got to do 'make believe.'

*Jeannie:* You don't have to tell the truth when you are sitting on the chair if you don't want to; and that is really fun. People don't really argue with you and make you stay in reality. I like that.

*Anna:* After class, I can't remember if we were speaking Spanish or English. I am not aware. It's weird, but cool. I just 'know' what we talked about.

*Alex:* When you sit in it, it turns into a magical, wonderful chair.

*Henk:* The spotlight is on you when you sit in it.

*Jack:* Sometimes you get a little nervous, but it's ok. It's much easier to be on the chair if the class is behind you (rooting for you).

*Gloria:* You never have to do it if you don't want to. You always tell us what things mean.

*Cameron:* When you're on the chair, it makes you feel powerful. I like the acting the best.

*Byron:* You get to be in charge when you're on the chair. There should only be ONE special chair.

*Nicole:* When you get to contribute to the story personally, with your own ideas, putting yourself in the story, you remember it. It's fun to share a bit of yourself (fantasy or real) with other kids in the class when you're on the chair.

*Griffin:* I enjoy the experience of sitting in the chair and making 'new worlds' that the class helps you create.

*Sam:* I think the chair is important, but I think there's something else that is more important – the teacher - because you make it all work out; you help us make the story good; you ask the questions; you repeat the things so much that we feel like we know stuff. (I reminded him that none of this can happen without the students' cooperation and willingness to play the game. Without them, there IS no story.)

*Sam:* Even though the story stuff we make up is crazy, we can use the things we learn to talk about other regular stuff. (Sam gave examples and got extra points for his reflections.)

*Jody continues:*

"I often begin the story (after the child is seated) going over the expectations and reminding the class how brave a

student has to be to come up in front of their classmates to be in a story that hasn't even been created yet.

“When a child (for all of their bravado and inappropriate remarks) is in the chair, they are still vulnerable. All eyes and ears are on them. They have a lot to win or lose in front of their peers. All kids make mistakes – it is what children do.

“They also say things that horrify me sometimes. But I learned something from Susan Gross that is effective when this happens: the private whisper.

### The Private Whisper

*Jody continues:*

“When a student in the chair speaks in English, says something awful for effect, etc., I stop for a moment, crouch down a bit, and whisper in their ear. It usually goes something like this: ‘I notice that you are blurting out in English. (Or, ‘I notice you said something that you shouldn’t have.’). Did you notice? I really want you to be in the chair today because you are such a good actor and you really make it fun for the class. It would be a terrible shame if you lost that privilege and had to go back to your seat. Do you think you can control the blurting out?’ They always tell me that they believe they can control the outbursts. And they usually do. If not, I follow through. Softly, quietly, swiftly.

“No one knows what we talk about in the private whisper. They get a chance to ‘fix it.’ They know that I am in charge of the class. They know they are in charge of themselves. I don’t let too much time pass before I notice that they are controlling themselves. I give them a thank you whisper with some specific feedback about what they are doing that is making the story work well. As Susie says, ‘After you make a withdrawal from the love bank, you will need to make several deposits.’

“When a child blurts out, we often do an instant replay of certain scenes. If I notice an off tone or inappropriate remark, I call it out and say, ‘Let’s try that again.’ We just play the scene again – this time in a more positive way. I often tell them exactly what I had in mind. I am not convinced that all of these kids really get it. They are so used to making and receiving unkind remarks from peers which are immediately followed by, ‘Just kidding!’ Anyway, this is just my own take on things. Every situation and child is different for sure.

“What I have noticed over the years is that little by little, they get the message: In this classroom, each one of us is the very best, the most intelligent, the most beautiful being that exists. (I can’t make them believe it; I can just make them practice it. It starts to work.) It has made me a better person, too.”

Other details about the Special Chair activity:

1. Kids do leave the chair to do acting, but they always come back. So there are in fact three chairs, two in addition to the primary one next to the teacher at the front of the room. Both are available if a story goes to a second or third location.
2. Circling, review, and summarizing all happen better when actors are seated because there is much less fidgeting and more focus.
3. The Special Chair technique can be used at any level. It is powerful in the lower levels because younger students often focus much better when there's a real person in front of them who is being talked about. In that sense, the technique is very much like the One Word Image strategy. It is powerful in the upper levels because when questions are directed at upper level students the way is opened up, like in the Two Truths and a Lie activity, for shifting of person from first to third, thus giving the students practice in hearing and doing output in those other forms.
4. For teachers who don't have their own classroom and therefore don't have a special chair, it is possible to solve that problem by carrying decorations in to transform the teacher's chair into a throne... a fancy pillow, a cape, a crown, etc.

## Strategy #19 – Star of the Week:

Jody's Special Chair Technique and the Circling with Balls technique have both taken form in the Denver Public Schools as a highly successful CI strategy called Star of the Week (*"Etoile de la Semaine"* or *"Estrella de la Semana"*). Here is the process:

### Step 1:

Give a handout with about ten questions to your students (sample provided at the end of this section). There are four columns on the sheet:

The first left hand column is labeled *"Anglais/English."* It asks the question in English.

The second column is labeled "Question." It asks the question in the 2nd person in L2.

The third column is labeled *"Ta Réponse Personelle/Your Personal Answer."* Note carefully that this box gives only the first part of the response to each question in the TL. The student copies that first part of the answer on the back of the sheet in order to then complete the sentence with their own answer in the 1st person singular in L2. They thus learn first person spelling and how to speak in the first person during the discussion that follows.

The fourth column is labeled “*Sa Réponse (il ou elle)*/His or Her Answer.” The student uses the first part of the answer to then note in the TL the answers provided by others in the class. This is done in the 3rd person singular in L2 on the back of the questionnaire, in similar fashion to what was done in the third column with their own answer. By taking these notes they thus learn the third person forms.

First example:

In the first left hand column is the question in English, “What famous person would you like to go out with?”

In the second column is the question in L2, “*Avec quelle personne célèbre tu voudrais sortir?*”

In the third column the student finds the first part of the answer that she needs to then respond to the question. In this example, the student would see, “*Je voudrais sortir avec...*,” flip the sheet over and complete her answer in L2.

In the fourth column the student finds the first part of the answer that she needs to note how her classmates respond to the question. In this example, the student would see, “*Il/elle voudrait sortir avec...*” She would then enter that information into her notes.

Second example:

In the first left hand column is the question in English, “Do you cheat when you play games?”

In the second column is the question in L2, “*Est-ce que tu triches? Quand?*”

In the third column the student finds the first part of the answer that she needs to then respond to the question. In this example, the student would see, “*Je triche quand.../Je ne triche jamais...*” then flip her sheet over and complete her own response in L2.

In the fourth column the student finds the first part of the answer that she needs to write out in her notebook her classmates’ responses to the questions. In this example, the student would see, “*Il/elle triche quand il/elle...Il/elle ne triche jamais..*” She would then flip the sheet over and complete the sentence with the answers given by the other students in the class.

In this activity, the student answers questions, takes notes, and participates in a class discussion about her own responses and those of her peers to the questions on the Star of the Week sheet. Everyone is included in the discussion, however briefly.

As usual, the Quiz Writer and Artist are constantly busy, although obviously the Story Writer is not. Whenever the class needs some redirection, the teacher can quickly give a quiz or share the work of the artist.

## **Step 2:**

Once the students have answered all the questions, they turn in their sheet and the teacher keeps those in the classroom at all times.

As happens with the Circling with Balls activity and the Anne Matava Questionnaires, most students, when they understand that this is not a joke assignment and that people are really going to be talking about what they wrote in class in the target language, ask for their sheets back.

## **Step 3:**

The next step in the process is that the teacher asks, on Monday, for volunteers to be the star of the week for that week. As soon as that person is chosen, he/she comes up to sit in the special chair for the interview process as it is done in the Special Chair activity.

During class, the teacher goes through questions and circles. There are many variations possible and the work is very free form. It is best to drill students with follow up and compare/contrast questions. As usual in CI classrooms, the goal is to get the students focused on an image/idea so that they are not aware of all the repetitions that the teacher is getting via her circling of the questions being discussed.

Note that this process can take as much or as little class time as the teacher wishes. It can be a nice fast ten minute discussion on just one question after the SSR period to start class, or it can take the entire period. The objective of the teacher is to finish all the questions by the end of the week, along with related discussions that bring in the (fourth column) answers provided by the other students.

This activity can be done at all levels, as long as the teacher stays in bounds and goes slowly enough. For first year students, it is pure listening and answering simple questions. Obviously for upper level student the discussion can indeed become quite lively, with lots of output.

The teacher circles. The students take notes (in their notebooks, not on the back of the questions sheet). The Quiz Writer writes the quiz. There can be as many as two quizzes or day, or just one at the end of the week. The Artist draws. When a particular question loses energy or whenever the teacher wants, a quick brain break is given.

The artist draws what she wants. She can be consulted at any time, and her work, whether seen through the document camera or from an interactive whiteboard, always provides a nice break for the class. After that, the teacher moves to the next question. It's an instant mega CI lesson plan.

#### Step 4:

Throughout the week the teacher can share with the class a Power Point presentation of the child with his or her photo taken when the student came up to be the star. On each slide is the photo of the student, along with the question, as well as a picture of what the questions represents.

If there are ten questions, ten slides would be prepared. Each would have the photo of the child, the question, and a related picture. The stage is set for all kinds of questioning, comparing/contrasting during the process. The photo of the student stays up all week and appears on each slide.

Stay in bounds. Since each question has a verbal core structure, all you have to do is remember to repeat that core every time you ask a question or repeat something that the star has said. Don't leave that verb. (This is one of the keys to all successful CI instruction. Repeating the target every time you say something is your only hope to keep from going out of bounds.)

So this strategy is wide open, in a way, because of all the different information being shared, but the verb is always the same, which allows the kids to be able to track the discussion as long as you do that repeating of the core in everything you say.

If you think about it, you may be asking the same question to up to thirty-five kids - that's hundreds of reps. Just stay in bounds by repeating the core verbal part of each question. With ten questions, ten structures on each sheet, that is a lot of in-bounds CI.

The Star of the Week can be an amazing journey for a class. The teacher must be working from a place of trust, obviously, because personal things will be discussed. It is imperative that the teacher avoid overly personal questions, obviously, just like in the Circling with Balls activity, making sure as always to keep things lighthearted.

One option in this process is to ask the students to first come up with the questions that they'd like to be asked. From these, a new questionnaire can be created for the next round of Star of the Week. By asking the students what they want to be asked, you further open up the already wide pathway of interesting communication with the kids.

Another interview idea to use perhaps with level 2 high school students is to have students email to you baby or childhood pictures of themselves. Put them in a Power Point slide show and then display one at a time. Ask the students to guess who is whom. Ask questions like:

-Where were you born and where did you grow up?

-What did you watch on TV when you were little?

-What toys did you play with?

-What books did you read?

-Were you a brat/little angel...

-Did you have temper tantrums?

-What was your nickname? (best one)

In this work the CI:

- 1) is personalized, the students get to be a star for a day, they get to shine , and their peers get to know them at a deeper level.
- 2) builds community at a level that most teachers would not have thought possible. For example, as a result of a set of questions that included students' birthdays, the students quickly learn one another's zodiac signs.
- 3) provides tons of repetitions needed for acquisition.

It is entirely reasonable that an entire curriculum could be built around this activity for an entire year.

Here is the questionnaire Sabrina uses:

<b>Anglais</b>	<b>Question (2nd person)</b>	<b>Ta réponse personnelle (1st person)</b>	<b>Sa réponse ( il ou elle ) (3rd person)</b>
What do you fear the most?	De quoi as-tu le plus peur ?	J'ai le plus peur des ...	Il/elle a le plus peur de ...
What hobbies/pastimes do you have?	Quels sont tes passe-temps ?	Mes passe-temps sont ...	Ses passe-temps sont ...
What is your zodiac sign?*	Quel est ton signe du zodiac ?	Mon signe du zodiac est ...	Son signe du zodiac est ...
In this class, who do you trust the most? The least?	Dans ce cours, à qui fais-tu le plus confiance ?	Dans ce cours, je fais le plus confiance à ...	Dans ce cours, il fait le plus confiance à ...
Do you cheat when you play games?	Est-ce que tu triches ? Quand ?	Je triche quand je .../je ne triche jamais.	Il/elle triche quand il/elle ... Il/elle ne triche jamais.
If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go?	Si tu pouvais voyager n'importe où dans le monde, où irais-tu ?	Si je pouvais voyager n'importe où dans le monde, j'irais ...	S'il/si elle pouvait voyager n'importe où, il/elle irait ...
What famous person would you like to go out with?	Avec quelle personne célèbre tu voudrais sortir ?	Je voudrais sortir avec ...	Il/elle voudrait sortir avec ...
What would you do/buy if you won a million dollars?	Qu'est-ce que tu achèterais si tu avais 1 million de \$ ?	Si j'avais 1 million de \$, j'achèterais ...	S'il/si elle avait 1 million de \$ il/elle achèterait ...
If you could have one super-power, what would it be?***	Si tu avais un super pouvoir, qu'est-ce que ça serait ?	Si j'avais un super pouvoir, ça serait ...	S'il/si elle avait un super pouvoir, ça serait ...
With which famous person would you like to trade places?	De quelle personne célèbre tu voudrais être à la place ?	Je voudrais être à la place de ...	Il/elle voudrait être à la place de ...
If you could be an animal, what would you like to be?	Si tu étais un animal, quel animal serais-tu ?	Si j'étais un animal, je serais ...	S'il/si elle était un animal, elle serait ...
What is your favorite ice cream flavor?	Quel est ton parfum de glace préféré ?	Mon parfum de glace préféré est ...	Son parfum de glace préféré est ...
If you were the opposite sex, what name would you like?	Si tu étais du sexe opposé, quel prénom tu aimerais avoir ...	Si j'étais du sexe opposé, j'aimerais avoir le prénom ...	S'il/si elle était du sexe opposé, il aimerait avoir le prénom ...

## Q and A for Sabrina

**Q.** Is the questionnaire completed by all students when you pass it out?

**A.** Yes, all students fill it out as the first part of the process. This could take up to an entire class period.

**Q.** Do you use a different questionnaire each week?

**A.** I can only get to one or two of these in a semester. Technically, if you have 35 kids, that would be one Star a week for the entire year so only one set of questions. Of course there are no rules.

**Q.** Would the students write something for each student on the back of the sheet?

**A.** They only write their own answers down on the back of the questionnaire. While they do this the questions are on the screen so they don't have to keep flipping their papers over. They should try to write in the TL but if they can't it's fine – what you need is the information. You can just translate on the spot when you go over the questions with the kid in the chair. The notes about the other kids are put into their composition books, which are kept in the room with the questionnaires at all times. This is for schools where kids can't keep up with their notebooks/binders. If the kids are good with their binders and bring them to class, they would take notes on the information shared in their binders.

**Q.** When you interview the star, do you ask all ten questions?

**A.** The interview has as its goal to go through all ten questions by the end of the week. As long as the kid has been talked about using all ten questions by the end of the week it doesn't matter. One thing I know about these kids – they won't show it but if they all – even the shy ones – don't get their time they will not be happy. This thing is like personalization on steroids. It can't fail.

When Sabrina talks about the Star of the Week technique, she shakes her head and looks at the ground and says in a kind of amazement, here paraphrased: “I can't believe what these kids can do when I ask them these questions in this way! I have never seen anything like it and, in spite of the power and wonder we have with stories, I think I could build an entire year long curriculum on Star of the Week and be perfectly happy doing so, because it brings so much more output than the stories. I see the value of stories for constant input, but the Star of the Week brings the output!”

## Strategy #20 – Two Truths and a Lie:

Here Sabrina has provided another excellent variation on Jody’s Special Chair technique. Like the Star of the Week, it is based on Robert Harrell’s sentence frames.

Sabrina shares:

“I ask my students:

1. to write (in English for my beginners and French or English for my higher levels; please note I give them the choice) two truths and a lie about what they did during break.
2. I collect all the papers and one comes up to sit in the Star of the Week chair. (I no longer have desks in my class, just chairs.)
3. I read each of their three sentences out loud in French, modifying them as needed. If a word seems unfamiliar I use Point and Pause to clarify. Sometimes I write their entire sentence out to make sure we all agree on what is being said.
4. I ask the students to decide which one is the lie by showing me with their fingers. Is it sentence #1, #2 or #3?
5. I turn back to my Star and ask them: “Did you really go to Las Vegas during break? Did you really go bungee jumping?” etc.

“On the board I had prewritten vocabulary (including any high frequency verbs that I had predicted might come up). Prewritten vocabulary was mensonge (lie), *vérité* (truth), *est allé(e)* (went), *a fait* (did), *a vu* (saw), *a joué* (played), *a mangé* (ate), *a reçu* (received, got).

“Then if something came up on their papers that was interesting I just added it onto the board with translation. An example of that would be a student who wrote that he drove a ‘67 Dodge Challenger so I went and wrote ‘*a conduit*’ (drove). I also asked the kids on the chair details about what they got, or saw or did to get more reps.

“Most students get perfect scores on the quizzes. They stay engaged because the discussion is about them. They understand because they have all the support they need (visual, gestures and repetitions).”

Carol Hill shares how her students responded to this activity:

“Really, with very little direct grammar explanation my students were giving me French sentences using words I thought they did not know. A lot of these kids have gone from zero French in French 1 to a pretty amazing grasp

of the language. It's good to remember when I think I have not done enough with them. When I ask them which sentence sounds right, they always pick the right one."

Jeffery Brickler suggests a variation on Sabrina's idea that gives multiple reps on 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person forms while keeping the students attention where it should be – on the meaning and not on the form of what was being said:

"I collected the papers and, instead of putting someone in the interview chair, I told the students that we would first try to guess who it was and then what their lie is. This allowed me to get a ton more reps on 1<sup>st</sup> person and 3<sup>rd</sup> person forms.

"I read their statements aloud in the 1<sup>st</sup> person so that they could hear it. Then I asked, 'Who did x or y?' The kids guessed. I then turned to the person and used the 2<sup>nd</sup> person form. Sometimes, that student (who wasn't the right one) would say yes to the statement because he/she actually did that activity. Then I asked him/her the next thing until we figured out it was/wasn't him/her. This kept going until we found the student. It could have taken guessing 4-5 students with all those reps before we found the correct person. It was great and with every wrong answer the excitement built. I got tons of reps on lots of forms.

Then after we established who wrote the paper, I then asked the students which one was the lie. I read the statements again. They picked one and I asked the student if it was true, all the while repeating the statement with different verb endings. The student would then say yes/no and I would ask the students to guess again. This process would keep going until we finally determined what the lie was. The time flew by. The kids were really focused. I give this activity two thumbs up."

James Hosler adds succinctly:

"Jeffery's idea of asking whose paper it is (before asking what the lie is) is really, really good."

John Bracy reports on Two Truths and a Lie:

"I just used this activity with my 8th graders this morning (first two blocks of the day after Thanksgiving break). The kids really appreciated the activity and I was able to sneak in a ton of reps of some really high frequency verb forms. I forgot the step of having them guess with their fingers which answer was a lie, so I ended up inviting too much English into the activity. I have a second shot with my 7th graders today to include that aspect. Thank you so much for creating my new post vacation go-to activity!"

“The key is to not do it too often, as with any other CI activity, or it gets boring to them. I have mixed levels (1/2 combined and 3/4 combined). This is a great way to practice all kinds of verbs in past tense (mostly all high frequency verbs) and it is very compelling because the students supply the information.

“For my French 3/4, I spice it up a little. I ask and write on the board with translation first (although now they don’t need it anymore):

*‘What did you want to do that you did?’ (Qu’est-ce que tu voulais faire, que tu as fait?) and ‘What did you want to do that you didn’t do?’ (Qu’est-ce que tu voulais faire que tu n’as pas fait?). I still ask for two truths and a lie. By now, my French 3/4 totally hear, recognize and sometimes use correctly imperfect versus passé composé. They don’t know it of course but I do, and it makes me smile.”*

This last point by Sabrina is noteworthy. The result of comprehension-based instruction is that the students know what things mean in the target language, but they can’t necessarily label them. In traditional teaching, they can label them, but they don’t know what they mean when they hear them.

Why? Because when we teach to the unconscious mind as we do in CI instruction, we teach for meaning, but when traditional teachers teach to the conscious mind, they don’t teach for meaning, they teach for recognition/ learning of form, for tests.

## Strategy #21 – Animal Parade

### Part A: Description of the Process

Charlotte Dincher (Germany) has invented something for middle and elementary kids. It’s called a Wall Zoo. It is a blue chip idea that that we can use in many ways in our classrooms. The process requires some L1 use to get started – that is just fine.

Charlotte describes her idea:

“The Wall Zoo was actually a bail out move, as I had forgotten my other materials at home. I gave the kids white paper and asked them to fold it in half and draw an animal there. Then I asked each student in L1 which animal he or she wanted to draw. They threw out the names of various animals and I wrote them on the board and circled a little bit on some of the animals. Then I asked ‘Who will draw the fox?’ etc.

“Then it was on to drawing. I helped the students who felt they had serious trouble drawing by giving them some

tips on the blackboard. That worked very well for us. Also, one of our students is called the ‘Animal Explorer’ and he ALWAYS carries his favorite book, an animal encyclopedia, so we used that for reference, too. (This was great for him, as he is a poor and scrawny kid whose mom forbids him to read at night because of the energy costs. In our classroom, he is the go-to expert on animals. I’ve never seen more authority among students.)

“Then, as the students were finishing, they would write the name of the animal underneath their drawing in capital letters and cut it out with the name at the base. That also worked very well.

“Then I put the animals on the wall. My class is not too big (26 students) so we just huddle up in front of the zoo for PQA.

“Here’s a selection of questions/commands that I used:

- 1. Point to this animal: F-R-O-G (they’re beginners, so they usually need about three letters till they get it)*
- 2. Does a penguin eat fish or hamsters?*
- 3. What is next to the giraffe?*
- 4. How many big cats (lions, tigers, leopards, cheetahs, pumas – um, yes, we had them all) are there?*
- 5. Does a parrot have feathers/a tail?*
- 6. Does a giraffe live in Europe?*
- 7. Do cockroaches live in the sea or on the land?*
- 8. Does Sarah like cockroaches or rabbits?*
- 9. Does the polar bear live in Alaska or in Africa?*
- 10. Does the shark eat the penguin?*
- 11. Does the giraffe live with the fish?*
- 12. Do you like frogs?*

*etc.*

“Students’ favorite:

*How many legs do four penguins, three fish and one polar bear have?*

“This went on for days. The students never grew tired of talking about the zoo.

“Then I wrote up a short story script, but before sharing it with the kids I wanted to TPR these verbs, which we had done earlier in the year but I wanted them to know them for the story:

*finds*

*carries*

*says*

*puts*

*will eat*

*zoo*

“Here’s the story script I wrote:

Friedrich finds a penguin in the park. He carries it to the zoo. Anna is at the zoo. Friedrich says to Anna: “Put the penguin with the lion!” Anna says: “No, the lion will eat the penguin!”

“In the end, Anna accepts the idea. You can’t believe how proud the kids were of their stories of R2-D2 finding a Wookiee for the zoo, or stereotypically, a girl who finds a unicorn and puts it with the pegasus. I just let them come up with whatever endings they wanted. Needless to say, we got lots of repetitions because we ended up doing the same story at least ten times in each class.

“Two students wanted to act out their story with stuffed toys. Needless to say, I’m proud of them, too. Also, I learned a lot myself. I had to look up the names of several rarer animals and I had no clue that hedgehogs eat mice. My students loved to teach me!”

Obviously, Charlotte’s choice to use ten year olds’ naturally high interest in animals as a base for CI is a great move and a great choice. This is compelling input to students! Since each student’s own animal is on the wall, each student is just waiting for you to get to their animal! They may not say it but it is true.

This really could be a curriculum for an entire year of CI instruction. We are all well aware that the word “compelling” is key to what Dr. Krashen has been talking about years. And this takes the kids directly there – into compelling input.

The possibilities for CI in this activity are endless. We can ask anything about the animals. As Charlotte did, we can make up any stories about them. We could write an endless series of cute little stories about how certain animals interact. We could ask the kids how they feel about their animals. We could work with our zoos all day long. We could have them draw their animals on really big paper so everyone could see them, or use technology for that purpose. This could be a great end of year project!

Catharina Greenberg has said this about the Wall Zoo strategy:

*...the whole journey from using children’s drawings, to asking questions, to incorporating facts about animals, and co-creating a fun story is so beautifully scaffolded to get extra reps. I love the detailed explanations....*

## **Part B: Application of the Idea**

*Diane Neubauer first suggested linking this Wall Zoo strategy to the Star of the Week.*

*I responded:*

Diane, the idea is wonderful. It really could be fun to teach. I want to try it right now but I don’t have a bunch of sixth graders.

We could work with the art teachers in our buildings on a year-long Art/Foreign Language project, a major curricular unit in both classes.

The project could be called:

The Animal Project

*Le Projet des Animaux*

*El Proyecto de los Animales*

etc.

The two parts of the project would be:

### First semester: The Art Part

The kids make their animals to eventually fit on the special chair in the foreign language classroom and *the animals* could be the star for the week. The children could make their animals from clay or papier maché, etc.

A set of guidelines could be established. For example:

1. The animal must be able to fold its legs and sit on the chair in the foreign language classroom (no restriction on the number of legs). It should be made to stay on the chair easily.
2. Animal must be no taller than six feet.
3. Animal must be treated properly and stored in a safe place.
4. No cages.
5. Food is optional.

etc.

### Second Semester: The Language Part

When it's time for their animal to be moved from the art room to the foreign language classroom, one per week, the kids could sit next to their creations and answer questions about them.

We could follow the Star of the Week format to create questions. Here are some examples:

*What is your name?*

*How old are you?*

*Why is your nose purple?*

*Do you like having paws?*

*Are you the only animal like this, or are there others?*

*What do you eat?*

*Where do you sleep?*

*Do you hibernate?*

*Can those wings fly?*

*Do you sing?*

*Where do you go to the bathroom?*

The problem of the kids' not having enough vocabulary to answer for their animals is easily answered by the teacher instantly modifying the response. This happens in regular Star of the Week sometimes as I observed it in Sabrina's classroom.

### **Part C: Assessment**

We could assess the year-long project in two ways: 1) the "Exhibition" and 2) the end of year "Animal Parade."

#### 1. Demonstration of Mastery/Exhibition

This project would allow us to assess what our students did summatively, which doesn't happen often in CI classrooms. That alone carries value to administrators, who like summative assessment.

I suggest that we choose as a model for the summative assessment Common Principle #6 of the Coalition of Essential Schools (Ted Sizer):

"The diploma shall be awarded upon a successful demonstration of mastery – an 'Exhibition' that may be jointly administered by the faculty and higher authorities."

Having taught in a Coalition School, I have seen how the Exhibition works. It is not unlike an oral defense for an advanced degree. The student would come with her animal to a committee consisting of the art and language teachers and any parents or anyone else who wanted to attend.

The teachers would lead the (cream puff) questioning in their respective languages. Besides the animal, the child could show an artifact - the book they made that resulted from the story the class created after doing the vPQA under

the guidance of the language teacher. The vPQA slide show that resulted from the project could be shown as well.

This Exhibition would be a sort of celebration really, where questions like the following are asked in both languages:

1. (Art teacher) Can you tell us why you chose to use those materials to make your animal?
2. (Art teacher) Did you run into any difficulties along the way? If so, could you describe how you met them and what the outcome was?
3. (Art teacher) What was your favorite part of this project?
4. (Language teacher in the TL) How old is your animal?
5. (Language teacher in the TL) What are the colors you have there on your animal?
6. (Language teacher in the TL) What was your favorite animal in the class?

These questions could be given to the child in advance of the Exhibition, of course, as part of a self-reflective activity at the end of the project before the Exhibition.

I would suggest that each child would get an A on their project just for doing it. It's that kind of project. The emphasis is not at all on the grade but rather on the students' demonstration that they can create something and then after a year talk about it in another language.

Note: CES aligns beautifully with what we do in CI instruction. If you study all of the ten Common Principles, among them you will see these elements:

1. personalization
2. teacher-as-coach
3. demonstration of mastery
4. tone of decency and trust
5. less is more

## 2. The Animal Parade

A bunch of parents could organize a parade for the kids at the end of the year. That could be a lot of animals on display - if only even one teacher did the project that would be a parade of about 100 animals. The parade could have a grand marshal (an older beloved member of the faculty) and prizes could be awarded for the most creative animal, etc. - all those float categories they have in the big parades - and it would be something to look forward to as an end of year big celebration.

### **Strategy #22 – Visual PQA (vPQA):**

*[Note: I consider the general concept of PQA to be a skill, as discussed in the Skills section above. But Visual PQA is a strategy and one that I feel to be one of the best of the strategies offered in this book. I could not imagine a CI teacher not using it in their teaching. It is that great.]*

One reason for the strong opposition over the years to TPRS has been the “stories” part. Not too many teachers feel comfortable with stories. This has always been the case. Yet those same teachers fully understand the value of and want to bring comprehensible input into their classrooms.

A good option for those teachers is Visual PQA. It involves asking all sorts of personalized questions about images pulled from the internet to support the PQA. Instead of doing stories, many teachers spend entire class periods with their students discussing Power Point slides chosen to target certain vocabulary. This kind of PQA can be used to set up stories as well.

In the TPRS Step 1 type of PQA, the teacher hangs out with the kids in the language. In Visual PQA, image-based scaffolded questions provide the basis for the conversation. Both types of PQA have their advantages and disadvantages.

In one vPQA classroom, that of Denver Public Schools’ middle school Spanish teacher Julie Soldner, I saw effortless PQA done with Power Point slides that made Julie’s classes seem to go by quickly with a high level of interest which generated, most interestingly, lots of *output* from the kids. Why?

The answer lies in the images. Pictures seem to get kids talking in CI classrooms, even from 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade students in just their first and second year of study of a language. What I saw happening in Julie’s classes with Power Point images taken from the internet presents a strong and viable alternative to stories, is extremely simple to do and extremely effective.

## Emergence of Speech from Visual PQA

Why all the output from these kids in this activity? It is because PQA based on images, to quote Suzy Livingston, “feeds the need of the students to speak and write.” The pictures work to generate output where the stories don’t because they are more concrete and easier to discuss. This leads to the students being able to more easily say and write what they have heard and read.

When this happens, a *need is fulfilled in the human brain* to express oneself in a kinesthetic outward way that is natural. The images somehow stimulate the unconscious mind with interesting and at times compelling language that then naturally wants to come out.

## Prerequisites to Visual PQA

It is crucial before thinking about doing Visual PQA with our students to have done Total Physical Response gesturing on many of the most common verbs. Since TPR can get boring quickly, I also recommend spending lots of time doing the Verb Slam Activity. These two activities set the stage, give enough prior knowledge, for Visual PQA to be effective.

## Julie’s Sixth Grade Level 1 Class

Power Point sequences of captioned slides determine the entire process of Julie’s classes. To start class, there is an across-the-board district mandated “Do Now” sequence. This first slide sets a tone of quietness to start class, which is of immense importance.

Here is what is on the first slide:

1. When the students walk in, they sit down and in their notebooks start writing full sentence responses that first address the date, weather, time etc. The question on the Do Now slide might be, on a certain day, in the TL, “What is today’s date?” On other days, the questions could be about the weather, etc.
2. Next, there are three questions or sentences to be translated – chosen randomly using vocabulary from input contained in previous classes – which the students also answer in complete sentences in the TL. The students are allowed seven minutes to respond to all four questions in this Do Now activity.

Then, for a few minutes, there is general discuss about the date and the weather in the TL. Short daily repetitions on the weather and calendar expressions are by far the best way to get enough reps in this important area of our instruction.

The second slide can actually have pictures of weather, time and calendar expressions on it so that the teacher can go back and forth from the first and second slide to get lots of reps on those things. The value of images in this work is immense. The teacher also can return to the first slide to discuss the three Do Now questions, with some PQA thrown in.

This entire activity to start class should normally be from ten to fifteen minutes long, unless it takes off. That would be seven (timed) minutes for the written responses and another five to seven minutes or so for the ensuing discussion.

### Value of Do Now Responses as Artifacts

One of the benefits of the Do Now activity is that each day the students enter written information into their notebooks. Although it is true that students need only minimal writing in their first few years of language study (input precedes output), we as teachers need, for job security, to produce something physical that students have done, and the Do Now daily written responses serve that purpose well.

### Moving from Do Now to Visual PQA

After the Do Now activity to start class, Julie then throws in a quick game of (always optional) Simon Says. Working the verbs whenever possible is the name of the game in CI instruction. Julie works from a prepared list of words. I usually just work off my word wall for Simon Says, creating commands and clarifying things with the laser pointer.

Playing a quick game of Simon Says with certain classes just after the Do Now gets the kids up out of their seats, which is always a good idea after a hard fifteen or twenty minutes in the TL. Of course, Simon Says is the best CI activity to teach body parts, and so we throw it into our classes quite often anyway.

Look what has happened in our students' worlds since the start of their Spanish class: they have written for five or ten minutes, then they talked about what they wrote, and finally they got to stand up and move around. They didn't sit in their desks staring at the teacher. They were doing something!

### New Vocabulary

After the Do Now and Simon Says game, a slide appears with the term in Spanish, "New Vocabulary." This second slide lists 5 or 6 structures in L1 and L2. The students know that those words will be the subject of their Spanish classes for the next few weeks.

Realistically, one new structure per day is a good amount, with a goal of getting up to 200 reps on it. That's still not enough, but it is better than classes in which the teacher tells the kids what it means once with no repetitions in context at all and then expects them to know it for a test a week later.

### The First Structure

After the list of new vocabulary, the next slide contains the first target structure. The word – *lleva*/takes or carries – is at the top of the page and below it is a picture of Waldo carrying a stack of books.

First, Julie asks for a gesture for takes/carries. The mood is light, gesturing is happening in an environment free of L1. “Show Me” cards are used when asking for a gesture.

### PQA the Structure after the Gesturing Phase

After the gesturing phase using the Show Me cards, the PQA of the structure can begin. The picture of Waldo carrying the books is highly effective in conveying the idea, and it allows the teacher, using the laser pointer, to effortlessly create PQA questions using the structure:

*Is Waldo carrying four hamburgers, class? (No!)*

*That's right, class, Waldo is not carrying four hamburgers! (Ohhh!)*

*Class, is Waldo carrying nine books? (Class counts them. Oui!)*

*Correct class, Waldo is carrying nine books! (Teacher counts them.)*

*Class, is Waldo or John Steinbeck carrying nine books? (Waldo!)*

*Correct, class, Waldo is carrying nine books! (Ohhh!)*

*Is John Steinbeck carrying nine books? (No!)*

*Correct, class! John Steinbeck is not carrying nine books. That's ridiculous! (Ohhh!)*

*Class, who is carrying nine books? (Waldo!)*

etc.

So the order of things with the slides is - put up the word, show a picture, say what it means, get a gesture, exaggerate and attach emotions to the gesture (some verbs don't lend themselves to that and that is fine), and do some PQA around it just see where it goes.

### The Second Structure

Once the third slide with the first structure (*lleva*) has been sufficiently circled around the Waldo image (usually a period of 2 to 3 minutes), Julie moves on to another slide, the fourth in the overall slide presentation. It still targets carries/takes, but this next slide is more complex than the previous slide in that it has a picture of some luggage and the caption, "It is good to carry luggage on a trip."

Why this image? It's just something Julie made up when looking for slides to put into the Power Point presentation she was preparing for her class on carries/takes. She chose it because her class already worked with the word "baggage" earlier in the year.

Julie speaks to her students by associating the sound of the target structure with the image in order to bypass conscious analysis of the word in favor of focus on meaning. By constantly seeing the word depicted on the slide, and by constantly hearing it in varied and interesting context relative to the image, they acquire it.

### Response Options

Then in the next slide we see a slide of some people carrying some luggage, with the sentence "It is good to carry luggage on a trip." This time words having to do with travel have been superimposed over the image in the bottom right portion of the slide, with L1 translation. These are *response options*. They are there to prime the pump for students, to invite them to produce output. The response options on this slide are:

*takes a trip*

*luggage*

*rides a train*

*travels*

This new information on this third slide is of vast importance to the success of Julie's Power Point presentation. By adding this vocabulary in the form of response options, Julie is signaling to the class that she wants to get some PQA happening with takes/carries using those words.

As in all CI instruction, Julie tries to use words that the students have already seen. This is clear, ordered teaching, with images and words directly serving the aural development of the growing language system in a way that draws obvious results.

Notice the progression of slides up to this point in the lesson:

1. Do Now
2. New Vocabulary
3. Presentation of the first structure with an image (Waldo carrying books).
4. Presentation of the first structure with an image (a boy carrying an elephant) with the sentence caption: “The boy is carrying an elephant on his shoulders.”
5. Presentation of the first structure with an image (a backpack) with the sentence caption: “What do you carry in your backpack?” with the following response options listed: books, notebooks, pens, pencils, food, erasers, money, candy, cell phone.

#### Value of TPR in this Plan

Julie explained to me that at the beginning of the year she had purposefully taught the words that now appear on this slide, along with a lot of other classroom objects. She said that she did so knowing that verbs need subjects and objects around them, and, thinking that she would be teaching hundreds of verbs that year, but doing so in a classroom, she would make sure that her students knew the names of those classroom objects since those objects were readily available.

The idea that handy and visible objects are necessary to teach verbs was a breakthrough for me. Since they are right there in the room, when doing TPR I could say things like “Run to the pencil sharpener!,” “Hide under the desks!” etc. So each year, definitely by the end of August, Julie makes sure her students know those words.

Two other less important reasons to teach classroom objects are:

1. We have to. Most districts are still testing those words.
2. The classroom objects vocabulary assists in every day classroom management, transitions, and in giving instructions. If the kids don’t know those words, we cannot stay in the TL in class when giving instructions. By teaching that vocabulary first, we can then stay in the target language all the time, creating much more of an L2 only environment, which is so critical to our success in our CI classrooms.

Verbs that would be necessary to teach classroom vocabulary early in the year are: stand, sit, turn on, turn off, open, close, listen, read, speak, write, take, take out, we're going to, stop, wait, move, draw, erase, work, be silly, put and take off, pick up, return/hand in. Among nouns to teach are: chair, desk, door, paper, pencil, lights, books, candy, pens, pencils, money, notebooks, erasers, food, cell phones, binder.

This third slide is the last that Julie has prepared for the target structure *lleva*. She was able to get a ton of reps on it during a very productive and energized PQA session in which her students understood everything clearly and in which no English at all was used. She is now ready to go through the same process with the next of the three verbs she is introducing in this class, the verb “*duerme/sleeps*.”

### Brain Break

Julie seizes on this natural pause in class to fit in another game of Simon Says. It is another well camouflaged and rapid fire brain break that gets the kids out of their seats and clears the desktop of the information about *lleva*, preparing a fresh desktop for the next structure *duerme*. She mainly uses *lleva* a lot in this second game of Simon Says, to get even more reps on it. Needless to say, with so many just-completed reps on *lleva*, the game rocked and it took a bit of time to get a winner.

### The Second Structure

On the first slide for the second structure there is, as usual, an image. This one is a picture of students sleeping in a class at school, along with the target “*duerme – sleeps*” written out.

After just a few seconds on that slide, Julie goes to the second *duerme* slide. It is another picture of students sleeping in school, this one with the sentence caption, “Are these students sleeping?”

The students in the class cannot help but be interested in this picture. Julie seizes on it to ask personalized questions about who in her classes sleeps in school. The students are more engaged in this type of PQA with a picture there than they would be without one. All that sound is suddenly less abstract because of the visuals, and so the kids are much less apprehensive in their classroom demeanor than they would be with no image to guide them along through the conversation.

When Julie decides to go on to the third slide in this series on *duerme*, her students this time see an image of just one child sleeping. On it, the L2 caption, “Doctors say that you need to sleep 7 to 9 hours. How many hours, more or less, do you sleep?”

Listed below the question are the response options “each night” and “I try to sleep...” This is designed to coax some of the students into producing some output *if they wish*, at any point in class. Many of the students clearly want to share with the class information about how many hours per night they sleep, since they know how to use time expressions from their work with the daily Do Now activity.

So far, meaning has been established for two structures, gestures decided upon, and now Julie is working to get reps on this second structure. She goes around the room and asks kids how many hours they sleep.

Now, asking kids how many hours they sleep is not the most imaginative question, but it doesn’t matter. Our job is to ask questions in the TL. It may not be the most imaginative discussion, but, unlike in regular PQA, the kids are easily reading and some are outputting more than they would in regular PQA, because of the visual anchoring information on the third slide that allows them to do that.

We can ask how many hours the kids sleep in general, or how many hours they slept last night. It’s pure PQA but, unlike regular PQA without slides, the teacher and the students are safe from confusion because of the captions and the image.

There is a fourth slide waiting on *duerme*. (There is no set number of slides per structure we must use in this work with vPQA because there are no rules in this work.)

#### Next Three Slides on *Duerme*

So as soon as the previous slide loses energy, the next *duerme* slide is shown. It has the caption, “People normally sleep in a bed” with a picture of a bed. Again, this fires up the comprehension of the students.

They see the bed, they hear the sentence, they understand it because Julie has said it slowly while they read it. Julie circles the sentence and makes sure that she is speaking clearly and with kindness to the kids. The PQA on this new image starts with Julie asking about where the kids sleep.

Note that this would be a good time to whisper to one of them, in the TL, to lie to you. As soon as a child tells you he sleeps in the gymnasium of the school, you are off and running with some interesting PQA. The next question is “With whom?” (The two questions, “Where?” and “With whom?” are real PQA starters if the students know how to play the PQA game and lie to you.)

It doesn’t matter if the question about where the kids sleep lacks energy – Julie has another slide and caption waiting for such an event: “Pets normally sleep in a special bed on the ground.” This sentence gets circled.

This work of circling has a fugal quality to it, with the introduction and re-introduction (theme and recapitulation) throughout the discussion of the slides of people or animals sleeping in a bed. The images and the target structures

they support prevent Julie from straying out of bounds.

Julie has trained herself to include “sleeps” in everything she says, and all the images she has selected for this presentation all have something to do with sleeping. The CI keeps flowing, going repeatedly into the deeper minds of the kids without their knowing it.

When the energy in this *duerme* slide fades, Julie further continues to develop the theme of sleeping in the next slide: “However, sometimes pets sleep in the bed with their family.” That caption and slide form the sixth in this series of repetitions on “sleeps.”

The subsequent slide from Julie keeps hammering away at the verb sleeps. The image is of a dog sleeping in a doggie bed, with the caption:

Where does your pet sleep?

On this slide, along with the image and the caption, again, Julie has primed the pump for output by providing her students with a list of response options to her questions:

with me

on the floor

with my parents

outside

in a special bed

in the garage

in the toilet (for fish)

etc.

Without such a list, students may want to participate in the discussion but wouldn’t be able to because they haven’t yet acquired the needed vocabulary. This addition of a list of words onto the captioned image keeps the class moving along with strong student interest.

Priming the pump with a list of helpful words on the picture also elevates the level of personalization and humor possible in class. If the kids have been trained to provide cute answers, now is the time to riff on what they suggest. The students’ level of understanding is high because of the narrow and deep nature of the questioning and the visual stimulation provided by the picture. In a regular PQA class, fewer students stay involved and the humor and fun is not shared by all the students in the class.

## Chest of Drawers Visual PQA

This section addresses the taxonomy that Julie employs in her Power Point presentations. It is suggested that teachers who use Power Point slides would enjoy more success if they scaffolded their slides. The image of a chest of drawers serves to communicate this idea.

When Julie first introduces her first structure *lleva* to the students, the first slide contains just a target structure consisting of a word or a word chunk with its translation, accompanied by a simple image. This slide can be compared to the top drawer of a dresser that contains only those two things. To start the PQA session Julie opens that first drawer and reaches in and uses (circles, asks questions about, makes comparisons about) only the contents of that top drawer to start the Visual PQA session.

When she is satisfied with the amount of circling done on the contents of the first drawer, Julie shuts the top drawer and fully opens the second drawer/shows the second slide. This second slide is a new image expressing what the target structure means, but this time with only a simple sentence. The same process of working with the word for as long as is needed takes place.

The second drawer is closed and the third drawer/slide is opened. The third slide is a new picture connected to the target, but now with a longer sentence, with the additional feature that now in this slide Julie has *loaded into the image a list of words* that kids could use to talk about that third slide. These are the response options. This is when we start to hear output from the students, because there are words that they want to say right there on the slide.

This taxonomy of new images accompanied by ever-increasing sentence complexity and growing lists of new captioned response options (words that the students may have been exposed to earlier but haven't yet acquired) can go far. How far it goes depends on the level of the class, but in this inductive process, in this taxonomy leading to speech output, we can see how easy it would be to take one word at the beginning of a class using this Visual PQA Power Point technique and get an entire class out of just that one word.

Julie can open a dresser that contains ten drawers/slide, or just a few. It's up to her, and she makes those decisions when she plans her Power Point presentations and during class. Hard to acquire structures would obviously get more slides. There is a data bank of pre-made Power Point vPQA lessons in various languages on my online PLC.

Look how narrow and deep this class has been. By now it has gone on for at least a half an hour (with brain breaks of course being thrown in), and only two target structures, *takes/carries* and *sleeps*, have been circled since the introduction of the first slide. And yet, the students need this kind of narrow and deep circling if they are going to understand what we say. The way the slides are set up as they become more and more complex allows Julie to stay in bounds effortlessly.

The results of this kind of narrow and deep circling of only a few structures aided by the Power Point slides are clear - visibly engaged kids who are not self-conscious about their speech output. It may not always be as funny as a story, but our work with CI is not about funny, but rather comprehension.

## Teaching *Se Duerme*

The work with *duerme* is complete. Julie has a choice. She can go on to a third structure or she can ramp up the work with “sleeps” by choosing to teach *se duerme*/goes to sleep. It’s a perfect time to do that and Julie in fact has slides in the queue prepared to teach this difference. It’s her choice. She doesn’t have to. She is in charge of the curriculum; the textbook is not.

In a traditional language class, the teacher would use grammatical terms in English to explain the difference between *duerme* and *se duerme*. But explanations *about* the language don’t stick. Julie just treats *se duerme* like a new expression. She doesn’t use English. She doesn’t get on a soapbox to show how smart she is by giving a sleep-inducing lecture on reflexive verbs. She does it this way because she wants authentic gains by most of her students, not false gains by just a few of her students who are good at memorizing.

Julie shows two slides featuring *se duerme*. The first slide represents a few students yawning in a class. The caption on this first slide is “It’s not allowed to sleep in school, but sometimes the children go to sleep when the teacher is not looking.” First, Julie reads the sentence caption to the students in the target language. She uses only written translation to clarify meaning. Doing that saves time and keeps the class in the target language, preventing blurting. Julie knows that the most efficient way to prevent L1 blurting in her classroom is to not do it herself.

The second slide on *se duerme* represents a person watching a movie who is nodding off. The caption is “Sometimes I go to sleep when I am watching a film.” The question is put into the PQA washing machine for a few minutes to be taken through the cycle, or to use an image from earlier in this text, to be sent on another rotation around the circling vortex.

## The Third Structure

Julie arrives next at the third new vocabulary term, having gotten hundreds of repetitions in meaningful and interesting context on *lleva* and *duerme/se duerme*. These verbs have actually been chosen by Julie as a bundle, and the third expression chosen, *hace ruido*, is meant to work with the others.

Why did Julie bundle these verbs to “work together”? To give her the option later on, after the PQA, of doing a story. It’s easy to forget that point when watching Julie teach a vPQA class, because just the PQA itself seems like such a fine lesson just by itself.

In choosing these structures, Julie first referred to the DPS Scope and Sequence, which has two lists of target structures (100 words, 200 words). She chose three to form a potential story with the class. What Julie does depends on Julie and not on some teaching formula or textbook. Ironically, we find in DPS that, even though teachers seem to randomly select structures from the Scope and Sequence, articulating perhaps only by

departments within a school, when they are asked they all turn out by the end of the year to have taught the same structures as the other teachers in the district. Maybe Krashen is right.

If Julie chooses to do them all in that order, this PQA, the story and the eventual reading would most likely stretch out over a week or more. Gone are the days when in TPRS we used to do all three steps in one 50 minute class period. We are now going more narrowly, more deeply, over more time with more reps and more options in the process than ever before.

Julie works with *hace ruido*/makes noise in the same way as she has with the first two structures. The same sequence happens:

- a) A picture of a person, in this case making noise, is presented, along with the written target structure *hace ruido*.
- b) After being sufficiently circled, that slide is replaced by one with a new picture and caption: “This man is making noise. He is yelling.” or “The girls are screaming. They are making noise.”
- c) After that slide, Julie presents, as she did before, a slide with suggested response option vocabulary.
- d) She has the option of putting up a slide that asks personalized questions like “Do you make noise at football games?” She always offers a few possible response options on the slide like “I make noise...”
- e) She can even put up a slide, taken in advance of the class and scanned into the teacher’s computer by the Class Photographer, of a student in the class yelling, which lifts the level of interest in the class even higher.

What is happening? The kids are getting multiple circled repetitions on a group of bundled target structures via images and captions. It’s a different kind of PQA. A story is not necessary but may happen later. Right now it’s all about getting reps and delivering clear and interesting comprehensible input.

The affective filter during this process is lower than in stories. It’s because of the pictures, which prompt authentic discussion. When a student sees a picture of a dog sleeping in the family bed, as long as he has the language to do it, he wants to share where his own dog sleeps at night. It is natural for human beings to want to share like that with others.

Julie is wise to avoid any discussion of where people in the families of the kids in her class sleep since this could cause embarrassment to certain students with difficult family situations, with many kids sharing a single bedroom, etc. or worse.

What posters in the classroom support this questioning process? Of course the question words, but Julie frequently

laser points to posters of other grouped words as well, for example these three posted adverbs which make their way easily into a lot of her questions:

*siempre* - always

*nunca* - never

*a veces* - sometimes

### Julie's Seventh Grade Level 2 Class

The first of the Nuevo Vocabulario for Julie's next class, a group of 7<sup>th</sup> graders, is:

*esta de acuerdo con*/she agrees with

As usual, the first slide only gives the expression with the English, along with an image, in this case of two people shaking hands and smiling. Since the English translation is always up on the first slide, the kids don't mistakenly think that the structure means shakes hands, and Julie doesn't have to use English to explain the difference in possible interpretations of the image, saving time and keeping the class in L2.

The next slide has a picture of Julie's school. The caption at the top is in the form of a question:

Do you agree with our school's rules?

Also on the slide are four response option choices:

in classes

in sports

in the cafeteria

on the patio

After a lively ten minute PQA discussion with the 7<sup>th</sup> graders, in which each sentence contains the target of "agrees with," Julie has choices:

1. She can repeat the pattern of the previous class, doing Visual PQA on as many structures as she wants.
2. She can go to a mini-story using only *esta accent de acuerdo con*.
3. She can use structures from previous classes that week to start a debate.

She chooses to go with the debate.

### The Debate

The “*Reglas del Debate*/Rules of the Debate” are posted on a slide in L2. Here they are:

1. Go to the middle of the room and wait silently.
2. Listen to the sentence and decide if you agree or not.
3. Walk to the sides of the room where signs indicate “Yes, I agree!” or “No, I don’t agree!”
4. Prepare to defend or explain why you went to one side of the room or the other. There is no middle position; you must go to one side of the room or the other.

In the debate, the focus for each student is on communicating an idea. The advantages of putting the kids into a debate format with questions that genuinely appeal to them are incalculable.

The debate questions come from class notes on student comments made earlier during the vPQA and given to the teacher by a key student called the “Debate Captain.” The first debate question, written on the subsequent Power Point slide with a picture of a roll of film, is whether Tommy “believes that reading a book is better than seeing a film.” Apparently Tommy had earlier that week made that statement in class in working with the expression “better than” and the Debate Captain had duly noted it for the coming debate, and given it to the teacher in time for her to get the debate slides set up for this part of class.

The students get in their two respective groups for or against the statement. They meet for a few minutes and discuss (L1 is fine for beginners) their reasons. The students then function as teams to answer the questions asked by the teacher as the debate moves into full gear.

When the debate dulls a bit, or if it never gets off the ground, another debate question is always waiting on the next slide. The next question prepared by Julie, again from things the kids had said in class earlier in the week, is:

...Kathy believes that Paris is a prettier city than New York....

Side by side images of Paris and New York are presented. So by choosing to ask the kids the same statements they had used in class at some earlier point in the week, the structures like “better than” and “prettier than” are not new and the kids can understand them.

About ten minutes elapses from the time the moment the class first reads and hears the prompt and sees the pictures to the time they move to either side of the room to prepare to argue their team’s position on the debate topic.

One thing that stands out during one of these debate discussions is that the affective filter is even lower than normal. It’s no surprise - Julie has worked with the debate structures earlier in the week, written the caption, provided an image (the side by side pics of Paris and New York), and allowed the students time to discuss the topic in English in their “teams.” The result is that, when she asks the debate questions, the kids start answering from a position of strength.

The output that she gets from some but not all the students in the class is the result of CI instruction on just a few structures that is narrow and deep and repeated. Low affective filters don’t just happen. Lots of repeated input must precede even minimal amounts of output. As happens in some CI classes, output in this second year class seems to have become the culture of the class.

Cognates help the debate process, as in this prompt question:

...Jack thinks that Samsung’s products are better than those of Apple....

That sentence is also a good example of a question on which kids have strong opinions, as opposed to the teacher giving a grammar class on comparison of adjectives in English with worksheets.

The slides Julie presents address real things. One has the caption:

...Emmylou thinks that being in a wheelchair is worse than being blind....

This point by Emmylou is actually something that came up in class discussion earlier in the week. Julie was quick to stop class for a moment to make sure that the story writer wrote it down, knowing that it would make a good debate question for later.

Julie craftily uses this sentence to get reps on the difference between *estar* and *ser*. Julie correctly makes no comment about the difference between *ser* and *estar* – she just provides yet another example of their use in context. Why? Because Julie knows that subtle verb distinctions in language are late acquired and cannot be learned via memorizing some rule, but rather by their repeated use in interesting contextual situations, thus handing the acquisition process over to the part of the brain that actually learns languages.

So the debate process is not difficult. Julie asks students their opinions about a statement of interest to them that they themselves made earlier in the week. She tells them to stand on one side of the classroom or the other. She then asks them to express their opinions on it in the TL. Those who feel comfortable responding will talk, and many of them (in some classes most!) do.

We conclude from the students asking at the end of class, “When can we have another debate?” that they have enjoyed the class. They enjoyed it because they were asked their opinions on a variety of topics. Their conscious minds were almost entirely focused on reading and looking at pictures while their deeper minds were absorbing vast amounts of details which will later that evening be organized, but not consciously, during sleep.

However, if the conscious mind of the language learner has no such vast amounts of input to organize during sleep, no language acquisition can occur. Plants cannot grow without water. These Visual PQA classes provide constant camouflaged input in both listening (triggered by the pictures) and in reading (triggered by the captions).

If one reflects on the process, it is clear that the Visual PQA process and the Debate are actually powerful pre-AP strategies.

#### Four Student Jobs Are Associated with vPQA

James Hosler has suggested an excellent student job during this kind of PQA, the Slide Switcher. This is the student who presses “next slide” when prompted, always in the TL, during a vPQA Haiku Deck slide show. The other three jobs associated with vPQA, of course, are the vPQA writer and the Quiz Writer (both are the same superstar students used in stories), as well as the Debate Captain mentioned above.

#### Use of Binders in Visual PQA Classes

One might think that students in CI classes would not need binders, since so much of the instruction is about input. It is true that children, when learning their first language, do not have binders. But the administrators and parents for whom we work and many of the students themselves, from experiences in other classrooms, expect binders. They also expect homework.

Here is how Julie asks her students to organize their binders:

Section 1 – Vocabulary. This is taken from the Do Now slides at the start of each class. Each time new target structures are introduced in class, the students add the new word(s) to the growing list of new vocabulary in this first section of their notebooks before then answering the Do Now questions in the second section of their notebooks as per:

Section 2 – Do Now Responses. The students write out their responses to the date, weather, etc. questions in complete sentences and then respond - in the TL and in complete sentences - to the three other random questions.

Section 3 – Writing and Drawings. This section contains all in class writing – free writes, dictations, OWATS, etc. This section also includes any six panel drawings (storyboards) they did as well as any self-reflection work they did.

Section 4 – Reading Homework. I make handouts of all Step 3 readings from stories and they go into this section of their binders. Whenever they receive one, the students read these stories to their parents and their parents sign and date when that was done, and keep them in this section of their binders.

Section 5 – Writing Homework. In this section of the binder go *homework* free write papers that have been signed and dated by their parents.

#### Julie Comments on Her vPQA Classroom Process

**Q.** Do you ever do stories?

**A.** Every time I teach new vocabulary structures, there will always be some sort of story to follow.

**Q.** Do you have a script writer, quiz writer, and counters when doing this Visual PQA?

**A.** I do very often have a quiz writer or script writer and counters, but not always. The quiz writer and script writer are used when I am asking the story or circling. The counters are used in the PQA process.

**Q.** What is the overall class plan?

**A.** I introduce new structures and establish meaning and do the gesturing, etc. Depending on the structures and how my students react, what they give me, etc., I may spend anywhere from 15 minutes to 2 days on one single structure. My goal is natural conversation and high-interest and engaging contexts, so I try to frame the new structures within a context that I know students will be able to “go somewhere with,” all the while facilitating the conversation and question-asking to maximize the reps and for students to continue to get to know each other even better in the class. Compare/contrast is a really rich tool in this step of the process, because you can constantly be comparing and contrasting the information the students give you with each other and even yourself.

**Q.** How many slide shows do you create in a year?

**A.** The amount of slides I create must be enough to get to the end of class – at least three but possibly up to ten per structure. The more slides in the presentation, the more relaxed I am in class. The slides often show the structure in up to three forms: the first person present, third person present and third person past. That way we can speak about our selves and each other. Images are linked to the slide where students can see the word and have a visual to connect with. From there, I just think of high interest connections and situations to supplement the teaching of the structure while also affording a natural context for them to see it in.

**Q.** Can you give an example of that?

**A.** An example would be for the verbal structure “plays.” After establishing meaning and gesturing it, I would show a slide with kids playing sports and would teach the word “deportes” as well, put up on the slide as a caption. Then I would have a few slides with the question, “Which sport(s) do you play?” And I would have a list of the sports with small images. From there I would field their answers and compare and contrast them with each other and maybe even go so far as to compare them to famous athletes using “better” or “more.” Do you see? The goal is natural, engaging conversation that allows the students to almost forget that they are hearing the TL the whole time and just to be engaged, without ever feeling that they are “on the spot” in class!

**Q.** How many slides do you create per year?

**A.** I teach from three to six structures a week for each of my classes. Every time I introduce new structures, I create a slideshow in this manner to have them be prepared for the next step (the story). My slide presentations typically have between 20-30 slides. I know that’s a lot of prep time, but the beauty of it is that once I have created the slideshow, it’s done! From there, I am able to go back and adjust for future years and classes. I am also happy to share them with Ben’s PLC members. We are actually currently collecting lots of PowerPoint slide shows targeted at a whole variety of structures in a big data base on that site right now.

**Q.** So the story always follows the Visual PQA?

**A.** Yes. Once the PQA piece is saturated for reps, we move on to the story. I have a skeleton plot-line for the story (the bare bones of the story and problem). From there, I have student volunteers adding in and offering up ideas as we co-create the story. This usually takes a day to complete. I personally don’t actually write a script to work from. I just wing it with a general plan based on the targets I am working on.

**Q.** What about after the story? Do you do a reading following the typical TPRS Step 3 “Reading Option A” format?

**A.** We read the story together as a class, individually, in pairs, using story strips, etc. But I also have my students rewrite the story using pictures I took during its creation, or they may just retell the story with the pictures. The options are endless, as we know.

**Q.** And after the reading?

**A.** Then comes the novel or authentic text reading. Remember that the original list of target structures in Denver Public Schools originated in those chapter books. This is kind of a supplemental activity but nonetheless very powerful. Students are given yet another opportunity to engage with the language and the target structures. From there, I simply plan more comprehension activities to work with the text – Ben has provided us with a ton of them – or just go on to a new set of target structures and a new set of slides.

### Technology Supports Communication

Ruth Fleischman has said:

“Visual PQA supports our personal communication with the kids, face to face, looking them in the eyes, connecting, talking. This is how we want to use technology. It’s not really a ‘slide presentation’ that we have to do in the way that many Power Points are done, where the audience just stares at the slides. Rather, in this kind of PQA, the screen isn’t the main focus. It’s part of it but does not take over. Screens have a way of pulling us away from each other, but in Visual PQA the technology bells and whistles do not detract from what our work is really about – human communication.”

### Advantages of Visual PQA over Regular PQA

In Visual PQA:

1. There is unforced and uncorrected output of the kind we see in small children. Over time, that output is corrected naturally by the unconscious mind, after sufficient reps of the structure in context.
2. The children feel important because their opinions and ideas are being listened to by others. Even if it is just

a nod of the head, their opinion counts and the class is not being run by just a few bright students, which happens too often in traditional PQA to set up a story.

3. Visual PQA stays in bounds more strictly than regular PQA because the pictures all resemble each other. The sentences being circled are virtually the same, the targets are the same, and the images are varied enough to keep the interest up but not so varied as to take the discussion out of bounds. Thus, it is much easier for the teacher to add details and scaffold up to more complex sentences. This keeps  $i + 1$  happening throughout the classes. In the example currently under discussion, we have so far had the following captions:

How many hours do you sleep?

People sleep in a bed.

Pets sleep in special beds.

Pets sometimes sleep in the family bed.

One could guess that well over fifty questions, and easily more than one hundred, could be generated from these four captions, and every one includes some form of the verb sleeps.

4. Since according to some estimates 93% of the human experience is visual, the images with their captions form hooks for each of the teacher's questions, bringing them with greater speed into the growing language system in the unconscious mind. In regular PQA a vague image, even if it is strong in the mind of the teacher and some of the students, soon goes poof in the minds of less focused students, and usually when that happens, even though the student *looks* engaged, they aren't. This looking engaged but not really being engaged has been a problem with PQA since its inception. Susan Gross has often said, "They get a lot less than we think."
5. There is more output in Visual PQA than in regular PQA. This keeps the teacher much more aware of what each student is experiencing in class, making the use of the Interpersonal Skills Rubric much easier for the teacher.
6. The constant output by most of the students in the class gives non-involved students very little room to create little cells of non-participants. The level of action from everyone in the class requires that any stragglers step up to that level as well. As we all know, the best classroom management is when students are completely engaged in the class. Good CI brings everyone along.
7. The constant back and forth of ideas in the classroom provides a much more fertile field for the teacher to use not just 3rd person forms, which characterize regular PQA, but also 1st and 2nd person forms. Over years, this kind of PQA could be said to provide a much wider spectrum of practice for all six forms than regular PQA, just because of the pictures, which spur personalized discussion in more verbal forms.

8. Because only one expression is being circled - sleeps, for example - with simple add-ons like “bed,” the fact that the core verb is not being changed allows the teacher to go much deeper with the questions. A common occurrence in traditional PQA is that the questions cover too much ground, and so the circling is like a group of small shallow and wide whirlwinds moving around a wide range of land. In Visual PQA, the circling is always a big narrow and deep vortex. The result is more comprehended reps and therefore more gains.
9. Because Julie’s students are middle school students, they need more structure than high school students, and they are getting the structure they need in the Visual PQA format. The short bursts of pictures throughout the class with captions in the target language, all limited to a few basic expressions that are being circled very narrowly and very deeply, give the younger students the structure they need.
10. The sentence captions play a huge role in this type of PQA. They anchor the auditory input for the kids, who are able to look at the picture and then move their eyes quickly back to the caption to keep things clear. This is high powered reading instruction, to say the least. Why? Because the kids aren’t focused on the individual captions, but rather on their meaning as they relate to the picture. They learn to read as they learn to listen, unconsciously without being aware of doing it, because they are focused on meaning and not individual words.
11. In Julie’s classroom kitchen, she combines PQA, Look and Discuss, reading and unforced speech together in a heavy gravy of personalization mixed together in a big safe ceramic mixing bowl (the technology) that is so strong that the teacher clearly doesn’t look or feel vulnerable. This makes the kids totally confident about speaking. The dish is often so tasty that SLOW is not really necessary in the way it is in stories.
12. Students trained with vPQA speak more rapidly and more often than they do when just stories are used. Grammatical speech accuracy is not there from the kids, nor would it be from kids trained in any method, but the communication of ideas is there. Over time, since the kids hear Spanish over 98% of the time, the grammar rights itself, as occurs naturally in L1 speech acquisition.
13. Second year Spanish classes full of 13 year olds aren’t supposed to be able to speak rapidly in the TL. I thought the same thing. But I saw it with my own eyes. And it wasn’t just a few kids. It was a lot of them. This was a testimonial to Visual PQA, because in most middle and high school classrooms unforced speech output is rare.
14. Into the above mix Julie keeps adding heaping spoonfuls of four most important and tasty spices that are normally not easy to find at the comprehensible input store:
  1. Compelling input
  2. Meaningful input
  3. Personalized input

#### 4. Interesting input

Not focused on the words, the students in Visual PQA are focused on meaning, which describes comprehensible input perfectly.

15. Julie's students are not in poverty, but I fully believe that these kinds of results are possible in poverty schools. As long as we create input that is directed towards the interests of the child and the needs of the child to be included in a group, we can see these kinds of results. When children are heard and recognized for who they are and what they think, language can be acquired.
16. In one case a student in Julie's second year 7th grade class was reading from the screen a sentence with the word "*ciego*/blind" in it. I was close by and was able to follow his eyes as he looked at the screen, trying to formulate speech. He was offering in Spanish his unrehearsed opinion on whether he thought it would be better to be blind or in a wheelchair. At one point, this student looked directly at the word "*ciego*" and said at the same moment "*una persona ciega*." Nothing was ever said by Julie in English about adjective agreement (she has chosen to teach grammar by speaking properly) and in the space of a nanosecond this student looked at a masculine form on the screen and produced the correct feminine form (and location) without seemingly even being aware of it. So here was a student reading contextualized input and producing speech as he processed the language far away from any part of his conscious analytical mind. He clearly felt safe. He was just happy to add his opinion to the discussion in unforced Spanish while all along having his thoughts reinforced by the image on the screen under a sentence caption. This was indeed a pre-AP class in the fullest sense of that often misused term.
17. The class was clearly happening in the students' *deeper minds* as their focus on images supported their processing at a level that was not limited to conscious analytical thinking. This is the goal of all CI instruction.
18. By establishing a culture of early output in the classroom from the beginning of the first level, which is what I saw in Julie's level 1 6<sup>th</sup> grade class, one could predict that if these kids were to stay with Julie until the end of their high school careers – which would mean a Spanish career with her of seven years - it is highly possible that at the end of that time most students would be able to easily perform at ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines levels ranging from the mid-intermediate range all the way up to advanced low. The beautiful part of that is that this statement would not apply to just a few privileged white kids, but to very large numbers of students.
17. Visual PQA provides unending safety, unlike stories, because whenever we lose track of what is going on, we can always just move on to the next slide. We can't do that in stories.

None of this is to recommend that we supplant traditional PQA with Visual PQA. The former serves far too many useful purposes. It sets up stories, creates a personalized bond between teacher and students, and brings humor with great gains. There's just a new kid on the PQA block. Visual PQA is certainly a good option to traditional PQA. Both have their place in the CI classroom.

Other things I observed in Julie's classroom:

1. The classes moved quickly. The fast speech was not a hindrance or a problem in any way for the students. They got it. It is likely that the pictures working with the captions had the most to do with that.
2. The sixth graders wanted and got more slapstick, more noisemaking.
3. I did not see a quiz writer in action but there could have been one. The standard quiz writer process could have been applied in these classes to get a quiz grade before the kids left the room.
4. Julie obviously enjoys the kids. She reflected on funny things and it was clear that she appreciated their antics. That's a big deal in a teacher - appreciating the kids.
5. Julie chose slides that had some degree of humor to them.
6. The verb in all the statements and questions in all the slides throughout the classes was always highlighted in a different color from the rest of the words in the sentence.
7. This debate format was being tested for the first time the day I observed, in mid-January. That needs to be made clear. Without traditional PQA and months of slow circled comprehensible input, these classes would not have been able to perform even remotely as well as they did on the debate.
8. The debate models the three steps of TPRS perfectly. Julie moves in that case from PQA (Step 1) to the Debate (replaces the story in Step 2) to the reading (Step 3) of the debate on the next day (IF a story writer is used).
9. Visual PQA cannot precede regular PQA. In Julie's classroom, it replaces it and serves the same function (to set up a story) just in a different way.
10. There is an average of two minutes spent on each slide (as timed by an observing teacher), with, of course, longer and longer times spent on the more complex slides (the bottom drawers in the Visual PQA Chest of Drawers mentioned above).
11. In this kind of Visual PQA Julie spends most of the time just discussing slides with her kids. She seems to have made a conscious decision to react with interest to what she learns from her students. Her class isn't about some teacher asking for the right answer, perched above the students. Rather, Julie participates in the conversations, smiling and reacting as one would in a normal conversation among friends. This aspect of what Julie does goes beyond mere teaching to actually being a part of a wonderful conversation! Of course, I would guess that one result of behaving in this way with her kids would in fact be the huge amounts of early unforced output she gets from her kids. They speak so much because they feel that they can trust her, that she is asking them questions in order to find out what they think, not because she is a teacher in some strange game called School.

12. Related to the above point – in her 7<sup>th</sup> grade class Julie was talking about the movie *Sandlot*, about a bunch of twelve year old boys playing baseball together all summer. As the class went along in Spanish, I was so involved in the discussion, in looking at the slides and listening to the conversation about them, since I am a Spanish learner, that I forgot I was in a classroom. We were just talking about a short clip from the movie. It is this complete focusing on the message and not the language that is the key to comprehensible input. It was a shock when I realized I was in a classroom after about five minutes of discussing the movie. I feel, however, that if Julie had jumped out of L2 into some moderate use of L1, I wouldn't have gotten so deeply into the discussion and the slides.
13. In fact, Julie used English only three times later on in that *Sandlot* class, and not once during the MovieTalk discussion that was embedded in it. She only used L1 three times, to say, a) ...*do you remember?* b) ...*oh, did you already use it?* c) *oh, you just got excited and forgot....* Each of those L1 utterances took less than one second to say. Three seconds of English in a 50 minute class. It certainly didn't throw off my focus. If Julie had used English 50 times for 50 seconds of L1 during her class, then I think it would have affected my focus as a Spanish learner in her class in a negative way.

**Q.** Does Julie ever ask, “What did I just say?” or do quick translations for clarification?

**A.** I did not hear any. Julie is very disciplined in that way and she has to be. The less English she uses, the better.

I believe in limiting “What did I just say?” In my view, the difference between 99% and 95%-97% L2 use is a huge chasm. When kids know that they have no wiggle room to toss out stuff in L1, they find ways to say it in the TL, because they want to be heard. When Julie refuses to “help them out” with on the spot clarification of certain words using L1, the more focused they seem to be in class.

The more we mix L1 and L2 our classrooms, the more we send our students the message that it's ok for them to do the same. This is a disaster if we want good classroom management, because it is the frivolous use of L1 by *us* that most undermines the proper daily management of our classrooms.

Please note that I am not bashing the use of L1 in the classroom during those special times when we are just hanging out with our kids, getting to know them as people. As long as such conversations are limited, they are a fine and necessary part of any classroom process.

It is the *mixing* of L1 and L2 during instruction that destroys the effectiveness of CI. It is not too strong a statement to make that, left unchecked, this *mixing of languages in class on a routine basis* has led to teachers quitting the profession.

If the students want to be heard, they will find a way. That is why I consider Visual PQA in an L2 only classroom to be a breakthrough in CI instruction.

## Natural Desire to Express Oneself in a Language

I think it's time after all these years in TPRS circles that we move to embracing the idea that our students have a desire, a need, a want to express themselves. If they are not encouraged to do that in L2, then they will do it in the L1. If the assumption that people naturally want to express themselves in a group is an accurate one, then extreme limits on L1 use will catapult the amount of L2 output we hear from our kids.

To restate and clarify, we will get much more verbal L2 output from our kids than we ever thought possible as long as we do three things:

1. Put extreme limits on how much if any L1 they can use. (I allow L1 use in my classroom only in response to the questions “What did I just say?” and “What does \_\_\_\_\_ mean?” and I limit the amount of times I can use *them* to just a few times per class period.)
2. Use Power Point images with captions (stories can't do this) so that the students can have something to hang their output on to make it easier to produce in class.
3. Show genuine/human and not fake teacher/robot interest in what the kids are thinking and saying.

In my view, this need is something that we in the TPRS community can no longer ignore. People have a deeply rooted need to express themselves in a language and try their best to output it. The TPRS mantra “If they want to speak we don't stop them” is no longer enough. By doing the three things listed above, we open up an entirely new vista in this work, in my view. Output is a personal need and not an option in learning a language. [credit: Suzy Livingston]

To conclude this section on Visual PQA, we summarize the sequence as follows:

1. Choose 3 structures from a district Scope and Sequence word list, or from a novel or authentic reading.
2. Create the PowerPoint vPQA presentation.
3. Do the Power Point vPQA in class, including the Debate as an option.
4. Ask a story based on the structures.
5. Give a quiz and read the story.
6. Read the novel or authentic reading that was generated from the original three structures chosen.

Visual PQA is no minor addition to our battery of strategies. It is major because it results in really clear classes and more output than we usually see from most CI/TPRS strategies.

## Sample Posted Classroom Objectives for vPQA

Here is a sample of some of Julie's posted daily objectives, for those who may benefit from seeing what Visual PQA objectives might look like. Note that the long list of words for Spanish 1 are the targets for up to a week or even two weeks of comprehensible input instruction, and will not be worked with all at once, but in groups of three:

Spanish 1: SWBAT demonstrate understanding of content vocabulary: *tiene, vergüenza, sabe, sonríe, está enamorado de, no puede respirar, ya, así que* by engaging in reading comprehension activities and MovieTalk.

Spanish 2: SWBAT demonstrate understanding of content vocabulary: *cruza, nada, sigue, sin embargo* by reading a slide presentation about Diana Nyad and engaging in a class debate.

### Strategy #23 – The Class Poem

Before I heard about CI/TPRS, some of my students would memorize a poem and love it. I would record it and then after school coach them along using some standard declamation guidelines. It was really fun to hear them and see what they could do with a poem.

Many entered and won in poetry declamation contests at local universities. The level of involvement by some of the kids was off the chart, which is the best reason to do it. Poetry declamation as part of my curriculum was always received well by high achieving kids and their parents.

Unfortunately, when I started stories I stopped the poetry. It may have been that there was just too much else to do, or perhaps I stopped the poems because, as output, I knew that students in their first few years of a language weren't ready to do it.

I have reconsidered that position. I think we should try to work some poetry into our comprehensible input programs. Students I taught twenty years ago tell me how important the poem was to them. It is a wonderful thing to recite a poem in another language, as long as it's not a course requirement and remains optional.

I find time during each class period – block classes are best for this – to share whatever poem we are working on as a class.

Here is one suggested process to use when working with the Class Poem:

1. Make sure that the poem is below the level of your students' ability.
2. Take one line and PQA it for as long as you can.

3. PQA just that one line, or maybe two, in each class period.
4. Then do another line the next day, and so on.

I reserve about five minutes for this process in each class period. After a number of repetitions, the structures of the poem will have worked their way into the students' deeper minds so that after a few weeks of doing this for a few minutes each day they would know the line practically by heart. We would therefore do only a handful of poems per semester or even over the course of the entire year.

Of course, we would read the entire poem each time after doing this line by line activity. Working with poetry provides another good example of how we go narrow and deep instead of shallow and wide with lots of in-bounds repetitions in our fluency programs. Less is more in poetry.

A guide to how to coach kids in declamation can be found easily on the internet. We work with the kids on things like physical presence, voice and articulation, dramatic tone, accuracy, accent, etc. I sometimes even take a few minutes of class time working with individuals so that the other students can be a part of and see what it means to truly gain ownership over a poem, instead of, say, a video game.

Students who want to take it further and memorize it for a grade are encouraged to do so. I record my own voice reciting the poem for them to work with at home.

This activity might best be used as a final project, if you are in a school where you must do projects. There comes a point in the year, as we all know, when stories, reading, and just about everything we have been doing all year somehow lose their spark. Late spring is project time and this is a good project to do.

Nathaniel Hardt does this same thing with proverbs in his school. He shares:

"I use Spanish or French proverbs for declamations. There tends to be rhythm and often rhyme. I usually have three lines:

1. First is the proverb, for example "*Es pan comido.*"
2. Next we establish meaning. This can be literal - "*Este refrán quiere decir 'It is eaten bread.'*" (This proverb means...), or its equivalent in English, "*En inglés se dice, 'It's a piece of cake.'*"
3. Finally, we can offer an L2 explanation: "*Este refrán quiere decir 'Es muy fácil.'*" (This proverb means "It is very easy.")

Nathaniel elaborates:

“I do about five or six of these each year. After establishing the proverb’s meaning, I ask target language questions: How many words are in the first line? What is the first word? What is the first letter? How many letters are in the first word? How is the word spelled? What is the second word? What does “*pan*” mean? etc. Afterwards we enter it in the Proverbs section of their binders.

“Even though I don’t want to lose time to pure CI, I do this because 1) it is a department expectation 2) it is culture 3) it gives me something to use for our school-wide culture rubric 4) it is a change of pace for them and me 5) the kids feels as if they are learning 6) it gives the kids a way to show off to people twenty or thirty years later and 7) it truly makes a connection between what we are trying to do and what is possible in connecting our students with the language and culture of the country being studied.”

Of course, besides working with poems or proverbs, we can also work with simple songs. I avoid them, however, because songs just aren’t simple enough for classroom work, in most cases. Besides, many students go and find their own French songs on their phones. There is a whole lot of homework being done with music on the internet that we often don’t even know about.

The best poems (in French) that I have asked my kids to memorize over the years can be found on the TPRS Resources posters page of [benslavic.com](http://benslavic.com). I apologize that I don’t have them in other languages. The ones I have in French took me over two decades to locate in terms of quality and simplicity, which is the key ingredient in this activity because, as mentioned above, if the poem or song is too complex the whole thing doesn’t work. So try to choose simple poems and songs, yet ones with high octane content. They’re out there, and waiting and ready to be shared with 21<sup>st</sup> century kids.

## **Strategy #24 – Running/Drawing Dictation:**

Running Dictation is a good way to get the students out of their seats and moving around, especially if things are dragging. It’s not a brain break, however. We use running dictation when we have completed a regular story or anytime we want to get students reading and writing after some auditory CI.

Here’s the process:

Take five sentences from the completed story and cut them into strips, putting each sentence up around the room in random places on the walls. The font should be fairly large to make them easy to read.

Next, pair up the students. One student writes and one runs. The runner finds a sentence on the wall and runs back to tell the writer what the sentence is, who then writes it.

Once the students have found and recorded all the sentences, they try to arrange them in the proper order. The first team to do that wins the game.

Drawing Dictation is similar. A copy of a *simple* drawing is handed out to each student. An artist goes to the whiteboard. The students as a class describe the drawing to the artist. When done, the students and artist compare notes. This is a good activity to teach prepositions. Since this drawing activity, and running dictation as well, require some degree of output, it is best to avoid using them too much in first year classes.

Don Read comments on this activity: “I had my students do a couple of Running Dictation exercises this past week – an excellent May activity in my opinion. I used six sentences from a passage we had just read in ‘Pirates’ for French 1, and then 6 sentences from ‘Problèmes au Paradis’ for French 2. The exercise took about 15 minutes. What a great strategy for getting the students out of their seats!”

There are examples of Running Dictation and Drawing Dictation on YouTube.

## **Strategy #25 – Tric A Quiz:**

Tric a Quiz is a regular quiz but the kids suddenly, without announcement, start questioning the teacher about the details in whatever questions the teacher asks on the quiz. If the teacher asks “Were there fourteen clowns in the car?” one of the students says, in disbelief: “Fourteen? Fourteen clowns? No! There were ten clowns!” This is the dropping of the glove, the indication to the teacher that a game of Tric a Quiz is on.

As the game continues, the game is immediately stopped with the first words of English from the class. But most classes stay in the TL because they take pride in disagreeing with the teacher on every question on the quiz. It’s what teenagers do. The game is for points.

Basically, Tric a Quiz is a shouting match between the teacher and any one student or combination of students during the time that is supposed to be given to the quiz. The teacher asks a question and, instead of the room remaining quiet as in a regular quiz, a student openly and loudly disagrees with the teacher on whatever questions they wish, stating that something other than what the teacher said is true.

Thus:

Question 1 by the teacher: “True or false, class, there were 21 monkeys on the roof.” (The real answer to this question could be true or false – it doesn’t matter.)

Tric a Quiz response from some student (with a bit of vehemence and even disrespect in their tone as they throw down the gauntlet): “Yes, there were 21 monkeys, but they were on the ground floor!”

Response by teacher in defense of her original position: “No, they were on the roof!”

Response of first student or any others who want to join in: “No, they were on the ground!”

Teacher: “On the roof!”

Students: “On the ground!”

Teacher: “On the roof!”

Students: “On the ground!”

What is this insanity? It is nothing more than a good circling session in which the kids are being tricked into outputting the language. They think that they are trying to win an argument and trick the teacher into backing down so that they can get a free perfect score on the quiz for everyone in the class but really it’s a camouflaged mega circling section on each question.

Each time, the teacher either backs down to the students’ claim or not. After each back and forth volley on any one question, the teacher may give up and shake her head as if defeated, or keep yelling until the kids back down. Each point is fought to that point of one side giving up their position. The longer the argument, the better.

A student (the Tric a Quiz scorer) would go to the board when the argument starts and then keep a running score during the quiz of who has how many points. Of course, by that time the actual quiz would be entirely forgotten amidst the heat of arguing each point.

If the students get more points, the students all earn perfect scores on the quiz. If the teacher gets more points, the students get nothing and the teacher then starts the regular quiz over and the kids are scored as if the argument never took place.

This kind of argument requires that trust and a sense of fun exist between teacher and students and normally takes place only with upper level classes. It’s also a good way to let off steam.

Corinne Bourne’s students have ramped this whole idea of Tric a Quiz to another level. Corinne does Tric a Quiz slightly differently in that she fights for points with her kids. She reports:

“My students like the name! The game lifted our second semester spirits. Along with [textivate.com](http://textivate.com) and [intranslator.com](http://intranslator.com), it has given us so many more opportunities to reread because we generally write up what we create during TQ. It worked with both my French and Russian classes, even those who are not doing well usually in interpersonal communication skills.

“Once I knew the game was on, I didn’t just ask the questions I was given by the Quiz Writer - I looked at parts of each sentence that could be variables and then at my question word poster for inspiration and variety. I sometimes

told them that I knew extra information about the story, and told them the new detail. Other times I read an existing detail and said it could not have happened like that, then told them the alternative ‘truth.’ Then I asked them: do you accept that or do you dispute it? An agreed upon dispute won them a point.

“I set up the scoreboard, the class against me. In one class a student wanted to ‘give me a point,’ but everyone else squealed ‘Non!’ when I walked to the board to reward my idea.

“Many times there was more than one student suggestion, so I insisted that they come to a consensus which argument they would put forward for the point – hah! More interaction in L2! More opportunity to circle the sentence with the two suggestions to see which they thought was more plausible.

“Of course there were some who were not so directly involved, but I counted involvement as looking like they cared what would happen, reacting to the back and forth of the game and giving any appropriate ideas in context even if partly in English.

“If I can, when deciding to do this again, I shall prepare some ideas in advance, but that’s almost cheating. I think this had such power because the classes saw me having to think on my feet too. It was a genuine competition, not an educational activity masquerading as a game.

“I should have filmed it all!”

## **Strategy #26 – Three Locations:**

Story scripts written in the classic way with three locations expand both the reps we get on the target structures and the time we need for the story. The three locations have always been one of the anchoring features of TPRS stories.

Over time, however, we have forgotten their value. So many things have been invented that some of us have stopped sending our stories into a second and a third location.

That is fine. There is no rule that says we have to do all three locations. Each story will speak to us in its own way. But we must keep in mind that extending the stories to three locations is a total winner for the kids. We get more reps on the target structures, but in a different context in each new location with new details. This tricks the brain into thinking that the information is new, when only the variables are new and the target structures, unnoticed by the conscious mind, keep getting repeated over and over and over. That is the value of doing stories with variables in them through three locations.

Erin Bas shares another benefit of using all three locations:

“One thing I’ve done for squirrely classes that aren’t quite feeling it (because dragging them through inventing a 3-part story can be hard) is to have them draw a picture (Pictado) of the 2nd location. So we spend time deciding what will happen for the first location, then they get out a paper and draw as I dictate a second part, using the same major events with different details. It’s like a palate-cleanser to get them ready to invent the 3rd location.”

What Erin suggests here gets to the heart of all our work with storytelling. We make things up as we go along to keep the interest high, but we never leave the overall framework of the Three Steps.

Susan Gross has addressed this topic:

“No there is NO requirement for a story to have three locations. I started doing TPRS workshops in the 1990’s. In those days, beginning teachers said that they could not speak the language consistently for 40 + minutes and yet keep it comprehensible. They said that they could not think of questions to ask. They said that they could not come up with stories.

“To address these concerns and in order to give teachers the tools to enable them to see that they in fact COULD do those things, we came up with little formulae/tools that would give the teachers the power to stay in the language. Those tools were PQA (use the target phrase in a question that included something of interest to the student), circling questions and repeating the answers (kept the questions comprehensible and made the structures so familiar that the structures sounded right), and three locations in a story.

“The point of three locations was that even if you can’t think of a story, the main character can go somewhere and you use the three structures in a failed attempt to do something. Then the character goes somewhere else and you can use the three structures while the character again fails in whatever the quest is, and then goes to a third location and either fails again or succeeds, but the teacher has now told a story that is as engaging as the teacher can make it... and had a HUGE number of repetitions of the target structures.”

## **Skill #27 – Teaching Greetings:**

There is a danger in teaching greetings without visual reference. There are too many of them. Moreover,

the expressions in French:

*How are you?*

*What is your name?*

can sound very much alike:

*Comment allez-vous?*

*Comment vas-tu?*

*Comment vous appelez-vous?*

*Comment t'appelles-tu?*

Not only that, there are many different ways to ask how a person is:

*Ça va?*

*Comment ça va?*

*Vous allez bien?*

*Comment vous portez-vous?*

etc.

Now, the brain has to handle each of these arrangements differently, because each sound pattern is different. It is bewildering for kids who have never formerly studied a language before.

Yet, since we are usually under district pressure to “teach greetings” in the first few weeks of school (the district and the book publishers think that asking how one is or what one’s name is or what time it is or what the weather is are easy tasks), we drown our kids in these complex sound patterns and undermine the trust that we are otherwise so carefully trying to build with our students.

Usually what happens is that the teacher walks around the room with a fake smile and fake interest (do they really care how the kid is?) saying the “How are you” question over and over, and very soon the kids’ eyes start to glaze over and with good reason. How would you like to be sitting in a room where someone keeps asking people how they are for five or ten minutes?

Some teachers even sneak in things like “What is your name” (which sounds a lot like “How are you” in French) and then, when the kid innocently answers that they feel good today, the teacher says in English, “Ha ha! I tricked you! I asked you your name, not how you are!” which begins a tirade of using L1.5 to explain the difference and the kids just scrunch down in their seats in an effort to get away from this over-explainer who asks boring questions.

So we need to till the greetings soil with absolute simplicity, so that our students really get it. We can teach greetings slowly over the course of the entire year, a little bit at a time. Delivering easy to understand and interesting and meaningful comprehensible input from the beginning, clearly enforcing rules, going slowly, talking only about the kids, these things will have the kids leaning forward in their seats trying to understand what is going on. But how can we do this with greetings?

There is only one way to teach greetings that I have seen that works: We make their answer visible. Then it works. We write out a list of possible responses to the “How are you?” question of how the students are that day. A good place to put them is on a large poster on a tripod or in a Power Point presentation and we start class with this strategy two or three times a week at least!

Here are the expressions I use:

<i>Ça va/ Ça ne va pas</i> – Good/Not good	<i>heureux</i> – happy	<i>fâché</i> – angry
<i>comme ça</i> – so-so	<i>excité</i> – excited	<i>inquiet</i> – worried
<i>Je vais bien</i> – I’m well	<i>amoureux</i> – in love	<i>frustré</i> – frustrated
<i>J’ai confiance en moi</i> – I’m confident about myself	<i>en forme</i> – in shape, feeling good	<i>nerveux</i> – nervous
<i>J’ai soif</i> – I’m thirsty	<i>fier/fière</i> – proud	<i>déçu</i> – disappointed
<i>J’ai faim</i> – I’m hungry	<i>soulagé</i> – relieved	<i>vaseux</i> – out of it
<i>J’ai sommeil</i> – I’m sleepy	<i>grincheux</i> – grumpy	<i>malade</i> – ill, sick
<i>J’ai mal</i> – I am sore, I hurt	<i>irrité</i> – upset	<i>confus</i> – confused
<i>Je me sens/Je suis...</i> – I feel/I am...	<i>stressé</i> – stressed	<i>épuisé</i> – exhausted
<i>content</i> – happy	<i>triste</i> – sad	

We go around the room getting reps on these structures. We do not allow students to repeat answers. It’s fun to go around the room at the start of a class and ask how each kid is actually feeling that day. The students, since they are not stupid, will be able to tell if we really want to know and that will prompt them to choose honest answers from the list above.

As long as we don’t pry into their personal lives, we can stretch out the conversation by asking why a student is happy or grumpy. This is true even in a first year class. For example, if a kid says she is grumpy we can ask why and she can just say one word, like “*un professeur*” or a boy could say he is happy because of “*une fille*.” It’s just a fun way to start the class.

I leave words like “depressed” out of the list of choices I offer my students.

If a child uses an answer that another child has already used during this time spent working on greetings, we use the following expression to swat away their repeated answer:

*Déjà pris!* – Already taken!

(credit: Sabrina Janczak)

## Review of the Strategies:

Before presenting some classroom management tools in the next section of this book that will really put some teeth into the strategies described above, let's take a moment to briefly review each of those strategies, in order to keep everything clear:

**Strategy #1: TPR** reminds us how physical languages are. We get to play with words in a fun and physical way by putting the words into our bodies via gestures, sounds or images. This enables us to understand the word when we hear it in class later, instantly and without thinking. We play with the words and make weird sounds and gesture them and just enjoy ourselves. We do TPR whenever we can for a few minutes at a time all year.

**Strategy #2:** Starting on the first day of classes, **Circling with Balls** establishes in our classrooms a web of connectedness and personalization that removes the emotional walls between student and teacher and between the students themselves. The most important quality to be found in any classroom has thus been introduced – that of building trust and community via acknowledgement of each person in the classroom.

**Strategy #3: One Word Images** show our students how to focus on meaning by focusing on an image and not on individual words, thus training their unconscious minds to turn sounds into meaning without the involvement of the conscious mind.

**Strategy #4:** The **Word Chunk Team Game** fosters class chemistry and team building. It teaches kids how to think in word chunks. The time in play goes by quickly, and there is a high level of auditory focus on L2, setting the stage for successful stories later.

**Strategy #5: Dictée** bridges the gap between sound and writing, melding the two, moving information back and forth across the hemispheres, allowing the students' deeper minds to make all sorts of connections as they lay the ground for original and authentic writing later.

**Strategy #6: Look and Discuss** is a proven winner in the comprehension based classroom because the picture is right there in front of the students, which heightens comprehension and makes it easy for them to easily respond to the instructor's circled questions in a positive way. Look and Discuss is a great strategy to use when the teacher needs to take a break, because it is an effortless way to get a discussion going in the TL. Just grab a picture and start talking.

**Strategy #7:** The **Verb Slam Activity**, a TPR based activity, brings into the students' deeper minds instant or nearly instant identification of many high frequency verbs found in the target language.

**Strategy #8:** The **Mini Stories** set up regular stories by providing simplified practice in the Three Steps of TPRS, setting the stage for regular stories.

**Strategy #9: Textivate** allows us to plug into its software any written texts that we have created from the comprehensible input created in our classrooms by cutting and pasting texts into the program.

**Strategy #10: The Writing Strategies** make deep connections to acquisition in that they access any comprehensible input that the students have heard in class before and transfer it from input to output in the form of writing. They bring what is unconscious into the conscious mind. Communication is the only goal.

**Strategy #11: Sentence Frames** are great after a vacation. They allow free form discussion after a break, while developing the writing and reading skills. The Star of the Week activity is based on Sentence Frames.

**Strategy #12: Interactive Whiteboard Apps** allow the class artist to visually recreate stories on an iPad/tablet if one is available. If not, the artist can just draw a picture on a piece of paper that can then be projected through a document camera. Interactive whiteboards are one of the best things that we have going for us in our comprehension based classrooms.

**Strategy #13: Three Ring Circus** is a great way to get kids up and moving and responding to prompts in the target language. It is a tried and true strategy that has been used in CI/TPRS classrooms for decades to teach verbs.

**Strategy #14:** Many teachers who use comprehensible input could not do it without the energy-changing **Jobs for Kids**. When kids are involved in making the classroom work, ownership of the class, without which learning falls flat, goes to the students and is not thrust fully onto the shoulders of the teacher.

**Strategy #15:** The many **Reading Strategies** in this book, like the writing strategies, are the ones that have risen to the top of the heap over the years. In particular, Reading Option A for processing readings from stories and Read and Discuss for processing novels are unmatched in making CI reading classes work.

**Strategy #16: Listen and Draw** is a CI activity that the students don't get tired of. We create a story that the kids draw as we go. These can be graded or used to generate writing.

**Strategy #17:** In **MovieTalk**, the teacher describes the content of short video clips. The audio track of the video is not used. Instead, the teacher provides the audio track in the form of in-bounds comprehensible input, narrating the action and describing things.

**Strategy #18:** The **Special Chair/La Silla Especial** is perhaps best used with younger kids. The instructor asks students questions when they are seated in front of the class during the creation of a story.

**Strategy #19:** Like the Special Chair, the **Star of the Week** builds face-to-face communication in the TL that leads to trust between teacher and student, and also gets the students to know each other in real ways in class.

**Strategy #20: Two Truths and a Lie** is one of those strategies that gets right to the heart of what we desire to do in this work – make face to face contact with our students and share ideas in the TL. It’s a winner after vacations, weekends, or any sort of break.

**Strategy #21: Animal Parade** offers us a wonderful diversion into the world of animals with our students. They create their animals, bring them to class, and we get to talk about them. What’s better than that?

**Strategy #22: Visual PQA** may be the most useful strategy we have, along with stories. We work from Power Point slide presentations, scaffolding from one slide to the next in what is a powerful taxonomy. Visual PQA keeps kids interested and is an easy and pleasant way to spend a class in the target language with the students.

**Strategy #23: The Class Poem or Song**, when used for a short period of time in each class, leads to eventual memorized mastery of certain poems.

**Strategy #24: Running Dictation and Drawing Dictation** change the energy in the classroom when it is dragging. These dictation activities take the teacher temporarily out of the spotlight and give the kids time communicating with each other in the target language.

**Strategy #25: Tric A Quiz** is a fun way to goad output from students, who know that if they can just trick the teacher on the quiz questions, they get free points.

**Strategy #26: Three Locations** – This tried and true way of getting repetitions on structures is certainly not a requirement in stories, since it can take up to an entire class period to get through even one location. However, taking a story through three locations is a highly effective tool in doing what CI is all about – getting lots of reps while the students aren’t even aware of it.

**Strategy #27: Teaching Greetings** – Because there are so many possible forms of questions and answers in simple greetings in another language, repetitions on greetings are needed every day. One way to do this is to provide the students with a big list of possible answers using a poster/tripod.

(Note: The strategies listed above, and any time frame for their application, are suggestions only and are in no way prescriptive. We state again that there are absolutely no hard and fast rules about any of our work using comprehensible input. The teacher is free and encouraged to craft her own program from the general ideas contained in this text. All we ever need to do in this work is speak in the target language to our students in ways that are interesting and comprehensible to them, and then have them read what we talked about. So don’t fret if you can’t get to all the strategies presented in this book. Pick the ones that work for you and go have fun!)

# **SECTION THREE:**

## **Eight Classroom Management Tools**

### **Classroom Management Tool #1 – The Classroom Rules**

The classroom rules that I have used for years and years are the result of trying out over 100 such rules, most of which failed. These are the survivors, the ones that work:

#### **Classroom Rules**

1. Listen with the intent to understand.
2. One person speaks and the others listen.
3. Suggest cute answers.
4. Tell the teacher when they are not being clear.
5. Sit up...Squared shoulders...Clear eyes.
6. Do your 50%.
7. Actors - synchronize your actions with my words.
8. Nothing on desks unless told otherwise.

We cannot expect children to know how to behave. We must show them what we want, often to the point of sitting down from time to time and modeling the behavior for them. This is especially true with ninth and tenth graders, whose view of acceptable behaviors may have been skewed in their middle school classrooms, where they learned to act in ways that cannot be accepted in comprehension based classrooms.

If, in the first few weeks or so, we use these rules constantly, at every turn, in response to every single infraction that we notice as we teach, we rarely if ever have to use them again after that.

## Starting the Year with the Rules/Confronting Bullies

Don't go over the rules on the first day of class. The kids are bombarded with rules on that day. Just start in teaching. (Most teachers use the Circling with Balls strategy on the first day of their classes.) Then, whenever you see an infraction of the rule, each time, just do the following:

1. Stop teaching.
2. Look at the student and smile.
3. Turn to the poster and laser point to the rule he just broke.
4. Read the rule out.
5. Explain in English what the rule means *to the class in general*, not directly to the student.
6. Look back at the student and smile.

Note that when you smile as per the above steps in the *positive confrontation process* that you just initiated, you keep the good will flowing. And yet, I have to admit to a certain bitchy edge hidden somewhere in my warm smile, that the kids can't see but can feel. It is a kind of invisible self-protective move, part of my provisional teaching personality, and the kids know it is there.

I have found over all my years of secondary school teaching that that edge is a necessary constant for me – it means that I am not friends with my students. That slight edge, veiled under an expansive and positive teaching personality, is a kind of promise to myself that I will crush any little bit of misbehavior by stopping teaching by going through the steps above whenever it is necessary.

Again, *we act* each single time a rule is broken. There is no option here, no skipping over a single offensive behavior. You will know that you are doing it successfully when you find yourself stopping class and explaining the rules *constantly* in the first weeks of classes with all of your classes.

If the rules are not the main subject of the first weeks of class, you may as well do a silly walk on out of your classroom and stay gone, because nothing significant, except lots of headache and heartache, will happen in that classroom that year.

If one were to reflect on it, enforcing these rules is really a question of personal power. Is the teacher going to exhibit enough personal power to stop, from the very beginning of the year, each little side conversation or ill-timed comment they hear during class? Such side conversations and comments can grow like brush fires. The students are watching. Is the teacher going to grab the fire extinguisher (the appropriate rule) in the instant that it happens, or not?

Such little sparks are nothing more than students testing the level of personal power of the teacher in the first weeks of the year. That's what kids do when they are that age. Don't take it personally. Just respond to each spark with a bigger spark of your own in the form of the laser pointer at the rules poster, and do it every time.

Do NOT respond with a spark of your own in the form of anger. That is just stupid, as anyone who has been in teaching for more than five days knows.

If a kid is not o.k. with the rules and cannot change their attitude, they can change their schedules. With certain kids, you *must* change their schedule. Failure to do that – *get a schedule changed* – has been the cause of deep emotional classroom problems later in the year not just for the teacher but also for the other students in the classroom, including the offending student. Students don't want or need that kind of classroom drama, and we are the only people in the room who can protect them from it.

When you don't confront these bullies – that's what students who make rude comments in your classes are – you are sending a very clear message to your other students that they aren't important enough for you to assure their right to learn in a quiet and focused setting. That's the wrong message to send them.

Use the Classroom Rules and the interpersonal skills rubric (discussed below) to help you *find your personal power* and use it in your own classroom. Never back down to any counselors, parents or administrators in getting the schedule changed. They will tell you that it is your responsibility to teach the offending student. *It is not.*

Intimidation of teachers by other adults in the school when they are making professional decisions that are in the best interests of their individual classes is rampant right now in our nation's schools. Teachers back down from ignorant counselors, whose own hands are tied, and chaos ensues. Do not back down with certain students!

Such irresponsible counselors and administrators must be taught to make the right decision for the overall mental health of the building and you are the only one who can educate them on this point. Find someone in the building who can help you and make the phone calls home. Document everything. If there is no adult capable of helping you, consider leaving the school. It's a question of your own mental health.

When must you do all this? When must you *raise a ruckus* with parents and administrators to get those really rough kids out of your classroom? If you don't do it in the first few weeks of school, it is too late.

Here is a commentary on each of the Classroom Rules:

1. **Listen with the intent to understand.** Such an obvious behavior is *rarely done* by students in schools. They listen with the intent to get a grade. Tests rule in their minds. If your students do not cultivate this first and most important of the rules, if they think that school is a game built around testing, then they must be constantly reminded to listen with the intent to understand. Point the laser at it, smile, and *enforce it*. If the kid can't do it, tell them to fake the behavior until they can do it or leave the class.

2. **One person speaks and the others listen.** It only takes some students a few weeks before they have nearly complete passive aggressive control over a classroom. If you see a child getting into a side conversation, explain that you are going to be doing the talking this year because you are the only one in the classroom who speaks the language. If they are not o.k. with that, then invite them to change their schedule. Do not waste your time talking to the kid if you do not see an immediate positive response to this rule. Go to adults as described above. This bears repeating – much damage has been done because teachers have trusted a student, after a brief talk in the hallway or after class, to change, when the child has, over the years, made a profession out of lying to adults about changing their behavior in class. Go to the adults.
3. **Suggest cute answers.** Blaine Ray has said this about personalizing the class:

*...I believe people who are the most effective at TPRS don't tell stories. They ask questions, pause, and listen for cute answers from the students. The magic is in the interaction between the student and teacher....*

This is such a fine thing to say and such a necessary part of what we do. However, this searching for cute answers from our students is also a potential land mine in terms of causing discipline problems. I once experimented for three years with allowing students to suggest cute answers using only two words in English, thinking that it would lead to funnier stories. All it did was lead to more discipline issues as the kids tried to stretch the two words into entire sentences or paragraphs. Require that your students respond in the TL or not at all. English words will sneak in, of course, from time to time, but keep it to a bare minimum. The best thing to do if a word of English sneaks in is to ignore it, even if you accept it into the story. Just skate over the fact that it was given to you in English.

A point of immense importance in this discussion is to not allow students to ask the “How does one say?” question. That question is a Trojan Horse in your classroom. Often, it’s just a ploy to draw attention away from you and what you are trying to teach and shift the attention to the student. They do that because they have been allowed to distract their teachers in other classes. Do not allow the students to ask that question.

4. **Tell the teacher when she is not being clear.** This is where you tell the students to make a physical sign, a gesture, one previously agreed upon by the class, when the teacher is failing to be clear. It’s called a stop sign. This is a great idea in theory but is hard to put into practice, because the kids, taught to memorize, have trouble recognizing when they don’t understand. So you have to teach them that skill. Model the behavior physically. Sit down in a desk and model it if you have to, so that they can see clearly what behavior you want from them. When you do that, you are helping your students learn to self-advocate. Make it clear that it’s not their fault if they don’t understand. Admitting that you don’t understand something in a public setting can be really hard to do, especially if you think you’re “supposed” to understand. Telling a teacher that “they are being unclear” feels so much safer.

Which signal? There are many. I have settled on one that in my view is best for my students. It is the hand over the head from front to back to indicate “this is over my head.” It has the advantage of being easily seen by you so that a student cannot say that they clarified all the time but were blocked from your vision by the back of the person in front of them. Notice also that when a student uses the stop sign, in that moment, the entire section of the class that is sitting near the originally signing student ideally should be encouraged to also make the sign. This draws the attention of the teacher to the need expressed by the child who started the motion, without calling attention to the child.

5. **Sit up...Squared shoulders...Clear eyes.** This is the most effective rule I have ever used. It seems so obvious to ask a student to sit in a way that conveys respect, but when students have been allowed in their other classes to slouch and even sleep, it isn't so obvious at all. When we see slouching and sleeping, sometimes unbelievably with hoodies up, it is a scathing indictment of the teacher's lack of personal power in their place of work. Any behavior that conveys disrespect to teachers and other students cannot be allowed. Point the laser pointer at the rule each time it happens and, of course, use the smile and get immediate compliance without letting it get into a confrontation. If the student refuses to comply, they must be sent out of the classroom to the Sergeant at Arms of another classroom, as per the Jobs for Kids list on my website.
6. **Do your 50%.** The 50% rule means that we have to listen to our kids and they have to listen to us – each has to do their half. It's a two way street in which we both do equal work which then adds up to 100% effort. I constantly refer to this rule when I see a student not paying attention. The 50% rule may be a completely new concept to many kids, who have been taught to think for years that writing things in a notebook and doing homework is the way people learn. The rigor posters explain to the students what language learning in my classroom should feel like, and it feels very much like *we each do half of the work*.

I sometimes go over and point to the rigor posters ([benslavic.com/posters](http://benslavic.com/posters) page), to explain things more deeply, especially when being observed. Making administrators understand rigor is an important part of what we do. Rigor is completely different in a WL classroom because our students can't speak the language yet. Instead, they do the silent but very hard work of holding up half of a conversation for the entire class period without knowing the language. That silent work might be more rigorous than any form of rigor found in other classrooms, in fact. The reason for that is that language acquisition truly requires the full involvement of the whole brain, not to mention the body and the heart qualities. So educate your administrator to this fact. If they find fault with you in an observation because your students are quiet, educate them. Tell them how rigor in your classroom doesn't look like rigor in other classrooms. Maybe the administrator will understand.

7. **Actors - synchronize your actions with my words.** Anyone who has tried to create a story with their students knows that actors can be major distractors if not reined in. (That is one reason I don't use props, or rarely. Since most of human communication - about 93% according to some studies - is visual, an antsy actor with a prop can completely draw the attention of the students away from the language and onto the actor with the prop.)

Be very careful in choosing actors. Have them sit on stools and listen in class. Quiet focused kids of good will who are kind make the best actors. You feel their strength and positive listening energy next to you as you teach. Kids who lack self-control are very hard to teach next to. Actors absolutely must be corrected or told to sit down if during a story they make a single move or do anything that you have not said – that is why we have this rule. Not only is it confusing to the class, which is focused on the story, it is often part of a power game on the part of the actor. So, whenever you notice an actor going to the bus stop when in the story they are still back in the restaurant because you said nothing to send them to the bus stop, stop the actor and laser point to this rule. With a smile, of course.

8. **Nothing on desks unless told otherwise.** It is a lot easier, when a class enters the room, to remind a class about a rule than to say in a threatening way to one student, “Take that backpack off your desk!” which can immediately become confrontational. Say to them with a smile, instead, “Don’t forget Rule #8!” Just don’t allow anything on desks. Students will say that they need to take notes at the beginning of the year. Let them, because they will stop once they realize that they can’t keep up with the discussion and take notes at the same time. Notes are bogus in comprehension-based classrooms. This nothing on the desk rule includes coins, pencils, etc. Less than five percent of the time in a CI class, writing is involved, so kids need to see the “unless told otherwise” part of this rule. *This rule is a big one* in terms of classroom management because backpacks on desks are code for I’m-going-to-be-on-my-cell-phone-in-class-today. Only allow the PQA Counters, story writers, the quiz writers, the artists and timers to have anything at all on their desks. Enforce this major rule before class even begins, as they sit down in their desks to start class, every day.

## Classroom Management Tool #2 – The Ten Minute Deal

So far in this book I have made the statement that my goal is to use very limited L1 in my classes, with virtually no L1 allowed from my students, except to answer “What did I just say?” or “What does this mean?” That is my goal.

What if I can’t meet it? What if I have one class or what if all my classes that cannot step up to the plate? What if the culture of the school I am in is just too rough around the edges to be able to help me meet my goal? What if I can’t find within myself the personal power I need to meet my goal?

That is when I use the Ten Minute Deal. If I can’t make it the entire period in L1, I might be able to make it for ten or fifteen or twenty or more minutes. It’s better than mixing L1 and L2, which is a serious waste of time in a language classroom because of the way the brain learns languages.

The Ten Minute Deal involves the use of a student job – the Classroom Timer. This is a responsible and focused student – a tough student. His or her job is to use an iPhone or iPad timer to time the class, including the instructor, on how long both the class and the teacher stay in L2 before an L1 fail.

When your tough kid is in control and timing things, glaring at kids who aren't helping make the process work, not surprisingly, the students take the work seriously.

When the class begins to experience some really strong ten minute L2 sessions before a brain break, we begin to see each lesson get stronger. The class pulls together for a common goal. The teacher may choose to write down their streak of continuous CI minutes on the board, for other classes to see. Ten minute periods of staying in the TL grow into fifteen minute periods or longer.

When we use the Ten Minute Deal, things get better in our CI classrooms. The class begins to feel as if it *can do this work* of staying in the target language. I would much rather get three really high quality ten minute sessions in a fifty minute period than do what I used to do, always lying to myself about how much I was staying in the TL, droning on in a bad mix of English and French.

If we don't make it to the end of the ten minutes in the Ten Minute Deal, we simply restart. This really brings the focus. When we achieve the ten minutes, we let the air out of the balloon with a brain break for a few moments before starting another ten minute period, as discussed, with a brain break. With each continued success, the teacher can sometimes signal the timer to keep the time going, sometimes well past ten minutes.

A benefit of the Ten Minute Deal is that the teacher-student bond I have with my timer student is off the chart. The tough kid chosen for this job should be one who commands a lot of respect in the class, but is not necessarily a superstar. It might be an athlete who may want extra credit points for doing this job. It definitely needs to be a person from whom a hard glance during the ten minutes would prevent any blurting, etc.

In fact, very often, the timer is a low achieving student with a good heart whose intelligence is largely missed in his other classes. Low achieving students often find themselves having great success in CI classrooms. Concern has been raised that the timer kid may zone out and end up paying more attention to the clock than the lesson. That timer would need to be fired, and somebody who can do both things – time and focus on the lesson – hired.

Once I had a class taken over by a bunch of kids with tattoos and leather jackets who had started the year off in the back of the room but who, after experiencing personalized comprehensible input for a while, showed that they had more heart for the work than did a group of four memorizers who sat in front and tried to dominate the classroom process.

That group of misfits led the transition in that class to full on use of the target language. They trickled up to the front of the room with my enthusiastic permission, displacing the superstars towards the back of the room. The memorizers were keeping me from reaching all my kids just by where they were sitting and they were pressuring me to teach them in the way they thought best.

Left unchecked, the memorizing grade conscious kind of students can take over a CI class and pollute it with English. Seating charts are brilliant tools to divide and conquer such cliques. I never did divide the chain

gang – they didn’t need it – they stayed in the TL and rather enjoyed controlling the actions and blurting of the memorizers.

One of the memorizers never did understand what real rigor looks like in my classroom and had to be put on her own textbook-based program. She thought that was rigorous. This suited her and her parents because she thought that she could learn French by staring at pages in a textbook.

Used to controlling her classes in middle school, this memorizing child was completely outclassed in that particular group by fun-loving kids who didn’t particularly care about their grades and whose intelligence and creativity at times that year was astounding, off the chart.

Tim Bennett says:

*...some of my students actually mentioned the 10-minute period of all Spanish on my teacher evaluations as something they liked about my class. My students love to be timers. This technique has really helped me a lot....*

### Training the Timer

Here is what David Sceggel does in his classes with the Timer:

“I put a stopwatch up on the smart board (search “full-screen-stopwatch”).

“I find the toughest kid in the class and train her/him.

“At every infraction, if the timer doesn’t restart the clock, I will calmly ask him to restart the clock, while giving a nice look to the offenders.

“I will sometimes make it a competition with other sections. Which class was able to get through the ten minutes fastest? Bonus points, extra credit grades, etc. are the reward.

“As soon as the timer hears a side conversation or an English blurt, they immediately start the clock over. (This includes me. I tell kids I love to speak in English, but it won’t help them if I speak in English.)

“And if they don’t do a good job, they’re fired.

“Whenever there is an infraction the timer usually just starts the clock over. It’s up on the smart board for anyone to see. I remind the timer if they miss an infraction. On the rare homerun days, no one notices the time, the timer,

the Spanish, or any of the jobs. They just want to see if the boy goes to the bathroom on Santa's lap or not.

"I used to give the little lectures in English about how it is through listening that we learn, the more time we hear Spanish the more we learn, respect for the process, etc. – but generally those are no longer necessary because of the power brought to the classroom process with this particular job.

"I don't do 10 minutes. I'll go until I'm ready to quit or it's time for a quiz, etc. If kids want to pause the timer for a grammar question or a funny story, I gladly pause it for them.

"The timer sits at my desk and controls the clock. For that reason alone, it's one of the more desired classroom jobs. I tell them that they will determine how well the class learns, that if they are a strict timer, everyone will acquire more Spanish."

### **Classroom Management Tool #3 – Starting Class on Time:**

Of course, we associate good classroom discipline with starting class on time. But is it possible to keep one's personal balance and still start class on time?

A class of thirty five students cannot leave the classroom only to be replaced by another class a few minutes later, five or more times through the day, with the teacher only getting rushed and nervous planning periods and lunch breaks. And of course there are the duties and meetings and unexpected conversations that require so much of our time during the day as well.

How must it likewise be for the students who must rush to another class, take out their materials and start taking notes or, in our CI classes, sit down to an extended period of listening to a language they don't know? Of course, school officials are always on the watch, which keeps us always on edge to "be good teachers" by starting class on time. Can't we just sit down and relax and visit with our students before getting to work? No - somebody might see and turn us in! One of our students might do that.

So the question becomes, "How can I start class on time and yet get enough of a break to be fresh and energized for my next class?" We have to do *something* to break the flow of non-stop activity. One way, perhaps the best way to do this, is to start the class with silent reading for a ten minute period. How to do it? It really is very simple. The students read while listening to music.

Let's address the reading part first:

## Using Reading to Start Class on Time

When my students enter my classroom, they pick up and start reading a common shared classroom text, usually a chapter book. In my view, the reading should not be free and voluntary (FVR) but required silent sustained reading (SSR) on a common text and a common chapter.

Requiring the reading of a common text gets the class started on time in a peaceful and restful way, responding to the need expressed above, so that we can all keep our sanity in what are arguably some of the most insane places on the planet – school classrooms.

## Assessment of Daily SSR Sessions

A final weekly quiz on what was read during SSR during the week, containing up to twenty questions, gives the students the incentive to take the daily ten minute SSR sessions seriously.

It is possible to briefly assess the kids during each class as well. The quiz writers from time to time during SSR write very simple true/false five to ten question quick quizzes while reading. The class and the teacher decide that the quiz that day will cover certain pages in the chapter. The slower readers pour over those pages while the faster readers go ahead.

An option to quizzes is to simply give the students a translation test on a *random* section of the text that was read during the reading each week. This is also a great way to hold students accountable.

To review this way of doing SSR to start class on time:

1. Everyone reads in the same chapter.
2. The quiz writer prepares a quiz during the reading sessions.
3. The teacher and students decide on what pages the quiz will be on.
4. Slower students stay on those pages; faster readers move ahead.
5. Reading silently in pairs doesn't work.

The point is that the class reads with intent to understand during the session. Slower students know that they will not be left behind. Only one chapter is done each week. Boring chapters are skipped over; the instructor merely

tells them in English what happened in the skipped chapter and the next *interesting* chapter in the book is read the next week.

Of course, what better time is there than doing a nice crisp discussion session just after the reading session? The kids know that they are minutes away from a quiz. I often ask for the quiz at the end of the session and hold it in my hand and ask the same questions in the discussion that are on the quiz. Total class buy-in is the result.

Two things describe this way of doing SSR using a shared common text:

- a. The students know that the reading is required. (That is the reality in how most students approach learning in schools.)
- b. The students know that the text is a common one that will at one point be discussed in a full class period of Read and Discuss – in my own classroom that happens on Fridays - and will therefore be the subject of at least one grade, and up to five per week, four daily quiz grades and the big chapter quiz on Friday.

### Controlling Tardies Using SSR

Besides the quick quizzes on SSR, it is possible to make the 10 minute SSR period into another kind of grade. In this approach, the students all receive 10 points if they are silently reading for 10 full minutes. I have found this useful in schools where tardies are part of the school culture.

As soon as the bell rings, the student timer starts a 10 minute timer. If a student comes in one minute tardy, a point is removed from the 10 points. If the student is 2 minutes late, their reading score for that day is 8. If a student is 5 minutes late, the grade is a 5. If a student daydreams or talks to somebody, they lose points. Tying the start of class to a grade is a good way to send a message to certain kids who have a problem with arriving in class on time.

In this approach, calling roll, counting and grading tardies and maybe pretending to read the book with the students are the only things that the teacher needs to be doing during this period of SSR. Teachers get to rest during this time and gather their thoughts.

Another classroom management option with tardy students is to not even let them into the classroom during the silent reading period. If they are tardy, they are locked out and simply receive no points for the ten minutes of reading. When tardy students are made to wait behind a locked door in the hallway until the ten minutes of SSR is done, they avoid disturbing those who arrive in class on time and who are quietly reading.

When you do this, your students tend to start coming to class on time, because even a few zeroes earned in this way can negatively affect a grade. Many teens don't see the value of reading, or of even faking it, but when

reading is worth ten points, they don't argue or complain.

So we can say that doing 10 minutes of SSR is a good way to start class. Instead of the teacher stressing out and having to start a class when it seems as if just a few moments before they were collecting quizzes, the students read.

### Using Calming Music to Start Class on Time

We can combine calming music with reading when we start our classes with SSR. How does the calming music work?

1. Many students these days get insufficient rest, have jobs, and endure untold pressures at home. Their balance, and a healthy heart rate of 60 to 72 beats per minute, is often not there.
2. So we choose music that is written at 60 beats per minute. It is found fairly commonly in the second (slow) movements of certain Baroque concertos. Listening to this slower music has the effect of slowing down the pulse into the range of about 60 beats per minute.
3. When the heart rate slows after a few minutes of quiet reading in the target language while listening to this calming music, this slows the students' brain waves from around 22-24 (active waking state) to a bit less than that, around 18 cycles per second. The brain waves don't go all the way down to the alpha state (14 cycles per second, the gateway to sleep), but it slows their brain waves down enough so that they are more open and more receptive to what is presented to them. They calm down.

There is some music available in downloadable form on the "TPRS Resources" hard link at [benslavic.com](http://benslavic.com). The playlist offered there provides a quick and efficient way to access music directly into your computer for the silent reading periods in your classroom.

The students enjoy this period of restful reading accompanied by music. However, there are actually teachers who don't want to lose time from their instruction. They think that teaching is all about them, and they mistakenly think that if they just use every available instructional minute for auditory comprehensible input, they will see greater gains.

But the truth is that we can only provide a small percentage of the hours, even in a four year program, to get our students very far down the path to fluency anyway. And is not reading a form of comprehensible input?

In first year, first semester classes, the ten minute SSR periods would not be introduced into the classroom process until the second semester, when students have had enough auditory input to be capable of reading simple texts. If the teacher really wants to use SSR in the first semester of beginning classes, however, it is easily done by presenting (TPRS Step 3) readings of stories done earlier that month during the SSR reading period.

To repeat the most crucial point about the music you choose for the silent reading period – if you want the brain wave changes to occur with the deep calming of the students’ minds that results from it, the music you choose must be music written at 60 beats per minute. There is science to this, and just playing “relaxing” music will not be nearly as effective as choosing music written at 60 “calming” beats per minute.

### Combining SSR and Read and Discuss: the 10/5 Plan

After the ten minutes of SSR some teachers devote five minutes to a discussion of the text just read using Read and Discuss. When you do that, you use slow and tight circling to review the main points of the reading.

I recommend this 10/5 plan for your daily SSR. And if it extends beyond the fifteen minutes, so what? My only goal in my comprehension-based classroom is to provide my students with as much meaningful comprehensible input as I can.

### Dealing with Sleepers and Side Talkers

The teacher is especially cautioned to not allow any students to even think about putting their heads down during the reading period. What a colossal mistake that is! If a student must sleep (bless their hearts – this does happen), they are not in a position to learn and must be sent to the nurse, or to the classroom of a colleague as discussed elsewhere in this text. For some odd reason, most students would rather stay and pay attention in my class than go to sleep in someone else’s.

After sending sleepers to the nurse or to a colleague, don’t then forget – in every instance – to contact the parents about your concern for their child’s well-being, and don’t forget as well to enter a note into the behavior atom of your gradebook for use during parent meetings, if your gradebook has one.

It also goes without saying that there should be no side talking during SSR, and yet some teachers, unbelievably in my opinion, allow it at the cost of their role as the authority in the classroom.

The issue of side talking during SSR can be solved easily but only if the teacher jumps on it the first time it happens with a strong admonition not to do it. It is that allowing of the first attempt by students to strike up a side conversation during the reading period, or during class for that matter, that often spells doom for the entire silent reading period.

And, of course, dealing with the sleeping students and the talkers must be done in a positive and upbeat way with a smile on our faces. Don’t we love our jobs?

So consider doing SSR to start your classes along with calming music. Your students will make strong gains, you and your students will get a much needed short rest during the day, something that you will all look forward to, and any CI that follows the silent reading will start in a much more peaceful way.

Those teachers who use the Visual PQA strategy usually alternate one week of SSR as described above with one week of the Do Now activity used to start class in those Visual PQA classes. It breaks things up very nicely.

## **Classroom Management Tool #4 – Addressing Student Apathy:**

Students' empty stares when you are teaching them using comprehensible input are really warning signs, red flags that you are not reaching them. Because they have not been taught to advocate for themselves in classrooms, students constantly fail to use the clarification gesture (the stop sign) discussed elsewhere in this text when they are confused.

This can lead to the failure of our entire comprehension based approach. What are we even doing with this entire approach unless we teach in a way that our students understand us?

The onus of responsibility for our students paying attention is therefore completely on us. We must make sure that our instruction is actually reaching our students. We stop the class each time we sense that even one student is not with us. We allow no heads on desks. We use the laser pointer to enforce the Classroom Rules. We look for auditory focus, a term which is defined later in this text.

Yes, there are those children who are not with us for various psychological reasons, but even they are required to fake it in our classrooms, since when they don't do that it sends a clear message to the rest of the class that paying attention in our class is optional.

In teaching using comprehensible input, we learn to *reach into those stares* and change the interaction between us and our students into one of dynamic and reciprocal/participatory interchange, and that is done through the eyes and through positive interactions in class and in the hallways.

We may not move our students up to a state of auditory focus, but we must at least get them to shake their heads up and down with eyes that relay to us their intent to comprehend, or respond with yes/no answers, throughout class.

Not a few TPRS teachers will go on through a class, talking away, when it is clear that many of their students don't understand. Such teachers require no responses from their students. That is a death blow to the CI process.

*We demand some sort of visible response* from our kids to everything we say to them. As long as we go slowly enough, stay in bounds, circle to get enough reps, and insist on a choral response from the entire class to each of our questions, our class will work just fine, no matter what activity we are doing.

Above all, we must endeavor to always make ourselves understood. *Failure to understand what the teacher says is the real reason for student “apathy” in all comprehension-based instruction.* They don’t participate because they don’t understand.

It is not the responsibility of the students to make the class function properly; it is we who must make ourselves understood so that our students can respond in happy and authentically human ways that result in real gains.

The list of things that contribute to student apathy is controllable by us. Student apathy happens when we:

1. Circle in too predictable a manner, or not enough.
2. Speak too fast.
3. Go out of bounds and thus fail to use only words that our students already know.
4. Fail to check for understanding.
5. Fail to hold our students responsible in our gradebooks with the Interpersonal Skills rubric (jGR) and with quick quizzes.

Let’s turn a focused eye to the statement that students are apathetic because they don’t understand.

We often are afraid to confront a group of largely surly kids who are used to being allowed to not show up for class in an authentic way, often showing up merely physically, rarely answering us loudly and with enthusiasm.

One day I had just had it with the weak responses. I was in one of those moods in which I just didn’t want to allow my students to get away with being cardboard cutouts of students anymore. That day my rigor posters ([benslavic.com/TPRS Resources/posters](http://benslavic.com/TPRS/Resources/posters)) were all on one of those triangular rolling whiteboards, like an easel, right next to the kids. So I started to refer to them at almost every turn in class that day, in English.

The best of the rigor posters is the one that talks about what learning a language should *feel like* inside and outside. I really focused on the outside piece, the piece describing *what it looks like to me* when they are learning. I sat down in a desk and modeled what I wanted to see from them.

I told them that unless I see the desired observable non-verbal behaviors from them in class *all the time*, then we are not really acquiring the language and it will affect their individual grades. I told them that **observable non-verbal behaviors** [credit: Barbara Vallejos] are what I must see them doing if we are to be successful, to see in their eyes if they understand or not.

I told them again about the Interpersonal Skills Rubric and how what they do in class in terms of observable

nonverbal behaviors and in terms of negotiating meaning with me would determine 65% of their grades. In short, I gave them “the lecture.”

At the end of pointing to and explaining and re-explaining the posters, I told them that if they exhibited what the posters described they would probably get an A, because 65% of my assessment is based on those posters and the Classroom Rules and the Interpersonal Skills Rubric and *what they brought to the class*. I told them that I was now going to return to the story and again start the process of asking them a bunch of easy questions that required only easy yes/no/one word answers. I told them that I expected to hear and see them respond to me in the way I wanted.

It worked. They did it. I was so happy. They are children and they must be told. They not only require lots of reps to learn the language, they also require lots of reps on how to behave in my class. I am happy to oblige them.

### Cute Answers

**Q.** *I can't get them to come up with cute answers and it is frustrating just standing there in front of them not knowing what to do asking questions.*

**A.** Well, first, are you staying in bounds and making yourself comprehensible? Are you going slowly enough so that they all fully understand? Are you repeating the target in each and every sentence/question you say?

In addition, have you been clear in explaining to your class that giving you cute answers is a rule? Have you explained to them what rigor looks like to you in your classroom and what it feels like to them? Most importantly, have you explained to them how the game is played, and how you expect cute answers from them in response to every question you ask?

### Wait Them Out

So you just have to wait them out for those cute answers because that's what they are doing to you – waiting you out to see if you crack. Kids can be so mean to their teachers, really. Turning kids around who haven't been taught how to behave in a classroom is tough work. So wait them out. Ask a question and wait. Look around. Get the answers.

Once, when being observed by an AP, they weren't playing and so I went over to the desk and put my feet up and just waited with my hands behind my head for at least two minutes, but it seemed like an hour. Finally, the AP offered to the first person to suggest an answer a free Lincoln High School tee-shirt.

Somehow I got out of that situation, as the AP had observed me lots of times before and always enjoyed his visits because he liked learning French, but I was ready to put my observation on the line that day to support my own position on how to deal with these kids. So when kids aren't *showing up for class*, I suggest that you wait them out.

When you do this, your socks may start rolling up and down with teacher fear, but wear long pants and wait them out anyway, in spite of the fear. Most of the time – 99% of the time, honestly – someone will eventually suggest something – they know the deal. But you have to wait them out. It's all about power.

Students who suggest cute answers give us something to work with are worth their weight in gold and definitely get praise and breaks on quizzes. Reward students who feed you good stuff.

Student apathy means that the kids just forgot how to play. Only accept answers and details that are cute and funny; reject the boring and obvious answers that are not funny.

Waiting is really code for the idea of *staying in the moment of fear and uncertainty* as you stand there in front of your students. You stand right there and feel the burn, feeling your vulnerability as you take the risk. At least you know now that 99% of the time someone will suggest something, if my opinion is to be believed, so it's just a question of doing it. Be stronger than they are. Win the battle.

Most importantly, if the details of the story are not provided by the students, they will not be interested in it. The instructor must create spaces via artful questioning that allow for those spaces to be filled by students' answers that are interesting to them. So learn to stay in the moment, waiting there, waiting for the right cute answer, avoiding the desire to push forward.

What about those classes when the class just can't get it's cute on? It's a dull group. It happens. We could wait until the cows come home and get nothing from such a group. What to do then?

We could: (a) go to the teacher's lounge and complain about that class to our colleagues. Lots of language teachers do that, even though it is *highly* unprofessional, (b) let our feelings about the class seep into our teaching, which I also see as highly unprofessional, or (c) give up on the cute answers thing with that particular class.

I vote for choice (c). Are the kids hearing the language? Are we speaking the target language to them in the class, and are the kids reporting in on comprehension checks at 80% or above? If so, then we are doing our jobs. Then, echoing comedian Al Franken (as Stuart Smalley), we can say with confidence, "I am good enough, I am smart enough, and gosh darn it, my students are learning!"

So staying in the moment and waiting for cute answers may produce wonderful suggestions that give sparkle to a story, but if the story does not glitter with gold, that is just fine. We need to expect less from comprehension based teaching than all glitter and gold. Personalized comprehensible input while we stay in the target language is just fine. It doesn't always have to be cute and funny. Wonderful moments in this work are the exception rather than the rule.

## When Students Turn

Sometimes the humanizing of the classroom can cause students to turn on a teacher. The students don't feel comfortable adapting to an approach that is based on good will and real human interaction. A teacher once shared with me her thoughts on a truly tough topic – what to do when a class turns on a teacher. Her questions and my responses are below. The teacher is a self-described “recovering TPRS geek.”

**Geek:** There was a student from last year who kept me from figuring out my difficult class. It was a girl who is super smart, and one that another teacher told me later could really set the tone in a class. She was one of the best students in the class. Things were so easy for her. One day, she decided to play dumb. She refused to answer some simple question that she almost certainly knew the answer to. The class sensed it, too, because, as I went around the room, the next six or seven people just gave me a sullen ‘I don't know’ or just refused to answer.

Then it spread. There was another girl who would say biting things. I remember one time I was doing the “Class, there's a problem!” thing. She blurted out, “What's your problem now?”

*Me: This is brutal, but you will survive such exchanges with these undeveloped human beings – that's what teenagers are – and you will outpace their closed hearts with your own open heart. How unfortunate it is that teachers who always play it safe in their classrooms may never know the thrill of patiently overcoming an event like this. We who have gone through these fires are truly lucky people!*

**Geek:** Then there was the boy who should never have been in my class... a bored and angry native speaker who refused to do work, follow instructions or show up for detentions. And he had something of a following. “Why should he have to do the work when he already knows Spanish?” It spread a bitter tone throughout the class.

*Me: Yes, big error on administration's part there. Huge. No excuses for their error. Do they put people who have a PhD in Chemistry into beginning Science classes? There are, of course, things that we can do to include that kid's expertise into our classroom process. Plus, you can always differentiate such kids into the grammar/writing thing. I have met few native speaking teens who have complete written control over their own language. Such kids should therefore be either a) helping with the WTC game or generally helping us ask questions (maybe someday they will teach their language based on what they learned in your classroom!), or b) doing individual work to learn how to write the language that they only speak well now.*

**Geek:** That student didn't come to the front of the dissonance until November. It just kept spreading until it became a nightmare. I actually had to leave school one day, and I think it was partly a reaction to the stress. Something really strange was happening to me, and the students could tell and were making fun of me.

*Me: This is real. A teacher having to leave school in the middle of the day because of stress is real. It deserves more attention than it gets because you didn't leave that building that day because you are weak but because you were in a situation that was mentally very dangerous to be in. Your story is so big, so primal. You did the right*

*thing in leaving. You should have been shown unequivocal support by your colleagues and administrators in your building that day.*

**Geek:** Someone gave me the Fred Jones book. I'm grateful. I can see this helping me turn around. Any other suggestions? How would you have handled that first girl? That was on the subtle side for me, since there's no tangible way to prove she actually knew the answer. It's just that everyone in the room knew it and played on it.

***Me:** Fred Jones works for some CI teachers, and not for others. I am on the "not" side. I have to have more genuine buy-in from my students. This question travels to the very marrow of a teacher's sense of who they are. Are you someone who will let a group of teenagers walk on you? Then perhaps you should do something about that, since you work with teenagers professionally. I don't want to be too blunt here, but I don't know how else to say it. Somehow, a few students wrestled control of the classroom from you. What you describe was a big problem for me for the first twenty-four years of my teaching career. So I know the hurt. I know the getting dizzy feeling and having to walk out of a classroom. Once in South Carolina I had to walk down to the beach at lunch in a kind of depression that I can't even describe. On another occasion in that same year I had a weird psychic kind of mental battle with a student who was out of control and should never have been in my class. There was one minute of pure teaching hell with her, so long ago, when in the midst of extreme disrespect from her I put my left arm up in the air for some reason and it was jerked down hard immediately by some invisible really dark force. This is not an exaggeration. I know nothing about the occult, and don't want to, but that moment convinced me that there is such a thing. The worst part was that the students saw it. So yeah, I get it and my heart goes out to both of us for what we have had to deal with in those situations. But that was long ago. Now, I have learned so much. I am able to use my Classroom Rules and Interpersonal Skills Rubric to steady the ship and demand good human responses from all my students. It is because I have gotten in touch, through the suffering that teaching can be and that only teachers can know, with my own personal power. For me it was a survival move. And yes, I have had kids turn on me as well when I announced that there was a problem, and in exactly the same way and even at the same time of year around November, just like you. I didn't let it continue. Now, besides playing my wonderful Classroom Rules and Interpersonal Skills Rubric cards, I have learned to act immediately in such situations. Now I would say something like this to this person, and I would say it in front of the entire class the minute I realized that she had turned on me:*

*"Jennifer, I know that you are not happy right now in my class. I am sorry. I am working hard at being a good teacher for you and reaching you with this language so that you can be really good at it. Our class is not always going to be perfect, and there will be times when you want to do and say things like you just did, and maybe influence other students to do the same thing, because you are obviously a strong person with lots going for you. But, please understand that what you have said this week and the general mutiny that is going on this class these days is not good for any of us and I am going to see that it stops right now. I am now asking you to not pull away from my instruction in the future with sarcastic comments, and that we look upon my little speech here as my effort to clear the air. I will not wait to bring your parents into this, of course; I will call them after school today or tonight to set up a meeting so that we can all know what just happened and come to an understanding of what I expect from my students in this classroom. What you are doing is not going to work in here after today."*

*Then, I would certainly go to the phone after school or that evening and make sure I had a talk with the parents, explaining my situation in a calm and clear and professional way, asking them to talk to Jennifer, etc. I would have some informational material in front of me that explains comprehension based instruction and I would refer to it in a calm way as I explain my professional approach to teaching languages. If the parents turn out to be in that general classification of parents who allow back talk from their children and support them against teachers without knowing what the position of the teacher is, which they almost certainly are because look at the daughter, I would schedule them in for a conference with an administrator and member of the teacher's union in attendance.*

*That is what I would do. When Jennifer tells those others that a phone call was made the night before, and she will, that phone call will be the beginning of the end of that problem in that class. No phone call means no resolution of the problem - count on that. To repeat the key thought here: no phone call or meeting, no resolution. When you do this, you may "lose" the kid mentally for the rest of the year, but you won't lose the class. The fact is that Jennifer tested you like that in order to get some control over the class, which we can never allow.*

*As time goes by, you will get so smooth in your instruction using comprehensible input that things like that won't happen ever again. Complete use of L2 in your classroom will contribute greatly to solving this problem, of course. Using uniquely L2 is also about your personal power. You will get to deeper and deeper levels of finding out where your core strength and personal power lie and you will use them in your classroom, never getting too close to kids to the point where they think you are their friend. There is a difference between having lots of fun with a class using a comprehension based approach and being friends with a class. Anyway, that is what has happened to me. I wanted my students to like me and so I allowed too much with them. My own struggles with getting in touch with my own personal power have defined my career. Sometimes I think that I was lead into this profession just to learn those lessons. Finding one's personal power and exercising it in a classroom full of teenagers is not an easy thing to do! But no teacher who is going to make their career into a lifelong commitment, and who will in that way unwrap and enjoy all the benefits that lie in the treasure chest that teaching really is, is going to get away without having to fight battles like the one you describe above.*

**Geek:** Thank you for that. It makes sense. I have thought about this so much. I had one kind of odd insight. I have to admit that everything I just described happened while I was struggling to figure out how to fit comprehensible input instruction into the textbook. That was like mixing oil and water for me, and I was circling a little (the boring beginner way...) and getting stuck mostly with the book. We started TPRS in November. These experiences with students are part of the reason I was so determined to start off with full comprehensible input this year - it's the only way I know to get everyone engaged and involved.

**Me:** *This is a supremely important point to share. I wondered about that above, because, usually, the kids are so grateful to not be in the book and so happy to be just talking about themselves in the target language. But I get it now! Now you have explained the secret - the book is so dead that it slapped down your circling and swallowed up and dampened and neutralized all the good things that you were trying to inject into the book. The book blasted away any chances of personalization. The book crushed the human element that always emerges in a TPRS class. The book was functioning in the exact opposite way it was intended to work - it was destroying any*

*chances of moving the class up to the kind of high quality and light-hearted acquisition that we get in CI classes that are not tied into a book. Your student, without knowing it, may have been trying to call your attention to that fact with her insolent behavior!*

### Student Apathy and Parents

Student apathy doesn't always just happen. Too often, it is learned at the dinner table from parents who have their own ideas about how languages should be taught. This is especially true of parents who are influential in the community and remember that when in high school they were star students in their foreign language class, just like in everything else they did. Since the parents earned an A by memorizing, then they want to know why their child can't do the same.

In this communication between Robert Harrell and a parent, we have a template from Robert that we could modify to use to answer parent inquiries like this one he once received:

*Good afternoon Mr. Harrell,*

*My wife and I have been after our son for the last few days and his grades and participation at school. Do not get me wrong we have been on him for a while now not just the last few days, but over the last few days let's just say the hammer has been dropped on our son. One of the biggest items that I have noticed is that our son has not been correctly informing his mother or me on his assignments for German. Nor has he been using his daily schedule planner to write down what his assignments are or when a test is coming up. We have both informed our son that this is to change, we want to see what his assignments are, when there is something due and when test/quizzes are going to be for German written down in his planner. I was going to ask you to also send my wife and I an email with what his assignments are, when they are due and when test/quizzes are but to save you time with that, my wife and I would like for you to initial our son's planner before he leaves class every day. This way we can see that he is communicating with you and that he has it written in correctly in his book.*

*If there is anything else that we should know about, please email us with that information. Both my wife and I know that our son can complete his work and there is no doubt in my mind that he should be getting an A in this class.*

*Again if there is anything else that you can give us to help in this matter it would be greatly appreciated.*

*Thank you very much for your time and cooperation!!*

*[concerned father]*

Robert's reply:

*Thank you for your e-mail. I appreciate having parents who are concerned about how their children are doing in school. However, I believe I need to clarify some matters for you, your wife and your son.*

*Perhaps the first thing to clarify is what grades look like in German. I use what is known as Standards Based Grading in my class. This is very different from traditional grading in that students do not collect “points” toward a grade. Instead, I assess them against the World Language Standards as outlined in the California State Standards for World Languages and the ACTFL Performance Guidelines. (ACTFL is the American Council on Teaching Foreign Language and the parent organization for teaching world languages in the United States.) Instead of a traditional scale from 0 to 100, I use a five-point scale for assessment. It is very similar to what you see with the California Standards Tests administered each spring:*

*5 = Advanced; the student goes beyond the standard*

*4 = Proficient; the student meets the standard*

*3 = Basic; the student approaches the standard*

*2 = Below Basic; the student fails to meet the standard*

*1 = Far Below Basic; the student significantly fails to meet the standard*

*The problem lies in converting this to our current gradebook program, which is based on traditional scoring. As a result, I have to adapt the percentages. The A range is from 81-100%; Your son has an A for first semester in German. One of the other high schools in the district has been piloting Standards-Based Grading for a couple of years, and my percentages reflect their findings as well as my own. Using the “normal” percentages would not reflect students’ actual ability and knowledge.*

*As far as homework is concerned, if your son has been telling you that he doesn’t have homework assignments in German, he is correct. The California State Standards, ACTFL and the College Board (Advanced Placement) all emphasize the Three Modes of Communication in foreign language instruction.*

*These three modes are Interpersonal, Interpretive and Presentational, and they are what the grades in German class reflect: ability in communication. At the beginning level of language acquisition, the most important modes are interpersonal and interpretive; presentational communication will come later.*

*Furthermore, all of the Second Language Acquisition research shows us that the single most important element in acquiring a language (whether first, second, third, or later) is what is known as Comprehensible Input. That means that students need to hear and read German that they understand, not do endless worksheets of discrete-item grammar. The primary source for that language is the classroom.*

*If students actively participate in constructing meaning, signaling their understanding or lack thereof, and comprehending the content of the German they encounter, then they will acquire the language.*

*Consequently, I do not assign specific homework very often. There are, however, ways to assist the process of acquisition at home, and I give these as optional activities. If you would like to help your son in his acquisition of German, you could have him:*

- 1. switch the controls and interface on all of his electronic devices to German*
- 2. switch all of his video games to German.*
- 3. read some children's books in German to read.*
- 4. watch in German a movie that he knows extremely well in English; if he can rattle off the dialogue of a movie in English, then hearing it in German will be understandable and aid his acquisition*
- 5. watch a movie in German with English subtitles (Note: repetition is a key factor in acquisition, so it would be good for him to watch repeatedly.)*
- 6. watch a TV program or sports event in German (similar to the movie but without the same opportunity for repetition)*
- 7. go on YouTube and look for music and other videos in German; this will be especially helpful for anything that he already knows. For example, the Beatles recorded some of their early music in German; he can easily find both "She Loves You" and "Love, love me do" in German; many students listen to German bands like Rammstein. There are also excellent German instructional videos on YouTube. Better than a grammar explanation would be a video that teaches him to do something like dance. If you look for "Schuhplattler," for example, there are German-language videos that teach how to do this Austrian/Southern German dance. (But pick something that your son finds interesting.)*
- 8. Locate and try to have a simple conversation with a German native speaker; do you have friends or relatives who speak German, does your son participate in any kind of international forum or chat online, does he have contact with Americans who are traveling or living overseas?*

*Also, with Standards Based Grading, especially in foreign languages, we are testing what students have acquired, not what they can cram into their brains for short-term memorization. So, I do not generally announce tests and quizzes in advance. Today's quiz was on higher numbers in a random setting (cumulative scores for the German Soccer League), and your son was obviously able to deal easily with them, scoring 5 or Advanced on the quiz.*

*Thank you again for your e-mail. If anything remains unclear or I have raised further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me again.*

*Sincerely,  
Robert Harrell*

[Needless to say, Robert did not hear back from this parent. He had blocked the real goal of the email: the easy A for the man's son.]

## **Classroom Management Tool #5: Brain Breaks**

Brain Breaks are quick 1 to 2 minute physical activities for the students in your classroom. They require little preparation and no extra materials. Students of all ages love them for a very simple reason: they are fun and make them laugh.

Brain breaks also challenge students' brains by allowing them to cross the mid-line of their bodies, which helps both sides of their brains to engage. This causes new information from the desktop of the brain to drop down into the hard drive/deeper mind by crossing the hemispheres. When this happens, there is heightened brain activity.

A brain break is not something physical done in the target language. Its purpose is to give the mind a complete break from all work of processing the language. If English is used during a brain break, it is not a problem. The students may need a time to just rest.

### **Why Brain Breaks?**

Short bursts of physical activity in a classroom lead to the release of endorphins (mood regulators), dopamine (similar to adrenaline - controls movement and emotional responses), norepinephrine (relays messages). This reduces stress, helps with impulse control, combats depression, focuses attention, increases self-esteem, increases motivation, and helps regulate mood and anxiety.

Alisa Shapiro once heard a doctor say, "Sitting is the new smoking." Sitting is unhealthy and according to mercola.com regular workouts do not offset the negative consequences of extended sitting, but frequent movement does. It is recommended that every ten minutes we stand up, whether we are students in schools or not.

### **Silent Ball**

One brain break that I have used countless times in my middle school classes, a real winner, is called Silent Ball:

The students form a circle around the perimeter of the room. A soft squishy ball, or just a tennis ball but nothing harder, gets tossed around the group from one kid to another. The kid who just caught the ball gets to decide to whom to throw it.

It progresses in an attempt to build a complete web of connectedness with all kids catching the ball no more than once. Silence must be observed. If it is not observed cancel the brain break.

Be wary of children who may have a handicap that prevents them from catching the ball. Don't use this brain break strategy in that case. And beware of children who want to "chuck" the ball hard at someone. That requires an immediate stoppage of the game as well. If someone chucks it in my classroom, the game is gone for a month.

### Using Brain Breaks to Teach L2 Vocabulary

In my opinion, the best brain breaks require no thinking whatsoever and thus I recommend that when choosing them the CI teacher find the ones on YouTube that don't make the kids think about language in any way. Try to find the ones in which arms and legs cross in some way.

However, brain breaks can be used *on occasion* to teach vocabulary in the target language. Angie Dodd shares three such strategies where L2 vocabulary would replace the L1 terms below:

**Star/Pencil:** Have the kids do jumping jacks but with this difference: when your body is straight with arms above head, that position is called "pencil" and when you are legs apart and arms apart that position is called "star." So one person calls out "star, pencil, star, pencil, star, pencil" and the students jump in time with the commands. In between each one, the students count. So it goes like this:

Caller: Star, pencil!

Students: One!

Caller: Star, pencil!

Students: Two! etc....

**Rainbow:** Start with your hands together and make a big swoop overhead, first one hand with the other following to the other side. As you do that you say "Rainnnbowww," and the students answer "one!," two, etc..

After these, say "a big hug!" and students give themselves (and sometimes each other) a big hug, which crosses the hemispheres of the brain.

**High Fives:** These include up high, down low, fists, and then there are lots of others that the students know like "turkey," "snail" and "jellyfish." These "high fives" can be googled to see how to do them.

**Disco:** There are various YouTube disco clips that provide excellent brain breaks. You can find an excellent one in French by googling or looking on YouTube for the words: 5-a-day Fitness: *Disco en français*. In Spanish they are called 5-a-day Fitness: *Hula en español*. Any YouTube videos that get kids moving are great.

Brain breaks definitely impact the effectiveness of our instruction in a dramatic way. They are not optional – we load up too much information on the desktop when we speak to our students in the TL and that information *must be dropped* into the hard drive. Frequent short brain breaks get that done.

If you need one in a hurry, just search “Classroom: Brain Breaks.”

## **Classroom Management Tool #6 – Personalization via Naming**

Building identities via special names for our students raises the level of fun and interest, and therefore the learning, in comprehension based classrooms. The right names are names that uplift. Naming students is an important classroom management tool because when a child gets personal attention and respect in a classroom they are much less likely to act out. Being recognized as a human being with unique qualities by others in a classroom overpowers their desire to break the rules. In fact, not being so recognized is one big reason they break the rules.

In the comprehensible input process, things always emerge. That is to say, unexpected things happen, unexpected information is learned, and we are quick to apply that information to a student in a lighthearted and honoring way. We never know what will happen or what name will occur when – our job is to be open to the possibilities and learn to react to what happens in the classroom instead of always, miserably, trying to control everything.

Jason is a highly rated boxer in Denver and has competed nationally. Who knows this in his other classes? No one, because no one cares. But in French class, Jason is called “Champ” by his teacher. Jason likes French class and pays more attention than in his other classes. Why? Because he is recognized for things he does outside of class and he has a cool nickname. He counts for something as a human being.

Thinking that teachers have to control everything in education is no longer a valid pedagogical idea. We can’t control how people learn. We can no longer be the star of the show. We know that now, but judging from all the books and computer programs out there these days, the point has not been applied.

When you allow names to emerge organically in your fluency program, that is to say, from basic and authentic human interaction as it occurs over time in stories and PQA with your students in a natural way, you can then dance into an identity with a child.

Names aren’t silly if they are forced or announced by the teacher. The best silly names don’t even come from the

questionnaires, they come from class discussion and emerge unexpectedly. Students may act amused if you tell them that they are Pablo, but they resent it on some level. You labeled them without getting to know them! Why do that, when the creation of funny, organically emerging names that reflect the real kid is so crucial to your success.

You may perhaps learn a little fact in class while circling with sports balls or in some other identity building activity. Or the fact may emerge in the hallway. It may look so small. But you keep it in your mind, like a treasure, and when the right moment arrives in class, you play the name and, because it has been cultivated like a plant, it stays alive, with roots in the activity of the class, and so it usually lasts all year or, in the minds of the students, ten years.

It is a fine thing to learn the art of waiting for a name to emerge. You are a watcher of the process, a contributor, to be sure, but you don't have to be clever and put the naming game all on yourself. Students don't want you to. They want in on the process that creates their names.

So go ahead, get to know the kids over time. Wait, wait, and the right name - the one most honoring to them - will emerge. Some names happen in the first interchange of the first class because of something the kid did that was unique and funny and worthy of a cool name right away. Others arrive as late as April or even May in the school year.

As you stand by your door on hall duty between classes, you may notice that a kid who never says anything in class just said to a friend in the hallway (walking by your door) that he was able to drive a Chevrolet Corvette for five minutes this summer.

This is major information. So you yell down the hallway how impressed you are that he drove a Corvette and the next day you ask him what it was like and if you can use that in class and he mumbles something but you see in his eye a look of recognition. From that little look emerges not just the name but him as your student with a class identity and now, only now, can you set yourself to the task of teaching CC because you are reaching CC. You run the name by him softly, and leave space for him to counter with another name.

To conclude this section on naming, we can say that naming kids is a kind of delicate art form that can do wonders for our classroom management. We wait, and then a little thought will appear in class, or some little event will happen, and we will know what that student's name is supposed to be, and our relationship with the student will change, because trust and respect will be there. With that trust and respect will come a far more focused classroom.

## **Classroom Management Tool #7 – What's Your Name?**

This is an odd management tool, but I love it and use it all the time with students. It contains hidden power.

Sometimes in the midst of class some unconscious student will ask some really stupid and unrelated question in

English. Let's not fool ourselves, that is a power play and everybody knows it. The question, like "Can I go to the bathroom?" in English or some other totally unrelated question, puts a damper on whatever it is we are trying to do in the target language in class.

It puts you on the spot. Here you are trying to work your magic in the target language, things are rolling along really well because you have worked so hard to learn how to teach this way, and then out of nowhere some kid challenges you with a completely unrelated question that, on the surface, sounds reasonable.

We have discussed blurting elsewhere in this text, but here is another option. I respond directly and instantly to the kid in L2 with the question, "What's your name?" (Stay with me here.) This responding to a question with another, unrelated question with an instant question of my own has the effect of immediately making the class forget the first question, because it is such an odd thing for a teacher to ask. The non-sequitur momentarily stuns the student and the rest of the class and brings me back into power.

After that little moment when the kid and the class are stunned by the first question, I pile it on. I ask another L2 question: "Did you sign up downstairs on the sign-up sheet to ask that question in French class today?" This stuns them even more and the original question, originally designed to draw attention to the student, has by now been all but completely forgotten.

In the midst of this, a few kids start to laugh. They find the entire conversation funny, and it is. But, under the weight of my second question, is my firm resolve to shine a light on the child's rudeness and get my class back. It's working.

At that point I continue piling on statements that put the kid on his heels: I pile on a third question. I say, "You know the rule (of course there is no rule): 'You have to sign up downstairs on your way into the building to be able to ask questions in English in my French classroom.' Did you do that?"

Since these long questions from me are in the target language, I often have to write them down and circle them. This is good. I am getting reps on comprehensible input, which is all I have to do in class.

By now, and this happens at least once a week, most of the class is laughing at the stunned kid, who wants to crawl into a hole by now. I want this. One of the ways I deal with passive aggressive rudeness in my classroom is to meet force with force housed in humor.

A few teachers reading this may be thinking that maybe the kid just wanted to go to the bathroom. Perhaps, but we know the difference. Nothing should interrupt our instruction, because once there is a crack in the dam, the dam breaks. We know this. An announced brain break is one thing, but a thinly camouflaged interruption by a student is another.

The strategy by this time has worked. The original question is remote history, the student is being laughed at by the class, and he is laughing at himself if he has any sense of humor at all, I am laughing, and we are all getting a needed break. Then I go back to my teaching. It all happens fast, in less than thirty seconds.

With this technique I am able to avoid an outright confrontation with the student over interrupting my class. I thus avoid the bad feeling that only teachers know when some controlling student has tried yet again to hijack the classroom process. Also avoided has been a mini-lecture by me about the Classroom

Rules. Most importantly, I am able to get back to my instruction within thirty seconds, amidst a bit of laughter.

I use this technique about once a week. Once the kids see that I am again playing the “What’s Your Name” card on some rude student, they often start laughing immediately. Classroom discipline served up in a bed of laughter – it works for me!

## **Classroom Management Tool #8 – The In-Class Phone Call:**

As with all classroom management efforts, the hard work of making things clear to students and of contacting parents must be done early in the fall or not at all. Many a classroom has failed because of inaction by the teacher early on in the year. The teacher who fails to act decisively with non-communicative or oppositional students in the fall will pay the price later.

The ability of some students to respond to the demands of a comprehension-based classroom is, unfortunately, not something that we can assume they have. If they have gotten away with oppositional behavior in previous years, it falls to us to educate the child about our expectations. Where previous teachers and parents have failed their child, we must teach the child how to succeed.

In certain buildings, there are students who actually come into class in the few first days of the school year with the intention of breaking the teacher. This, in their young and unformed minds, is a way to gain the respect of their peers. The teacher must act.

Why not make a phone call home during class? It works! Use the following tool sparingly, but if you need to break out the big guns, use it and use it early.

*“Hello... Mrs. James? Yes, it’s Braden’s French teacher, Mr. Slavic. Listen, I’m calling from my French class and Braden is here with the other students and he is having some difficulty with his behavior... What? ... Oh yes, right now in class! I don’t like to put things off and your son is really having a hard time understanding the expectations in French class this year. We really need to talk. Just one request for tonight – please ask Braden to explain those expectations to you. I will give him a sheet right now explaining them and the two of you can go over them so we don’t let this thing get out of hand. (ed. note: the sheet is a printout of the Classroom Rules poster found at benslavic.com on the TPRS Resources page.) I can’t teach French if Brandon is busy trying to distract everybody by speaking English, right? Thank you! I’ll talk to Braden tomorrow to see how it went tonight in your conversation. And thank you for your interest in supporting the World Language Department at Lincoln High School!”*

So all you will need for this classroom management strategy is a phone and a copy of the Classroom Rules ready to hand to the offending student(s) when needed. There is no reason not to make the call home during class. Such calls are game changers and can save you untold hours of work later.

Many teachers might choose not to do this. It is because they are afraid of confronting students in class. But the student with their behavior is confronting the teacher! The students, sensing that fear, will *simply not respond* to idle comments or vague threats made by the teacher during class. This is a slippery slope that will cost the teacher dearly all year. If the child does not follow the rules when asked, make the call home.

### Summary of Classroom Management Strategies

How can the kids *not* behave when the following classroom management plan described in the section above is in place?

1. The Classroom Rules are posted and being referred to.
2. The students know that their grade is connected to their arriving in class ready to follow a set routine from the beginning of class. Silent Reading to start class as an option brings a sense of calm and focus, setting a relaxed tone in the classroom and providing a needed break from all the activity of the school day.
3. The Ten Minute Deal helps immensely in keeping the class in the TL. When students are not allowed to speak English, classroom management is a lot easier.
4. By connecting the start of class to a grade, the sense of classroom order and who is in charge of the classroom is maintained.
5. By responding to students who are out of line with a smile and the same correction routine each time, using the Classroom Rules, the teacher sends strong consistent messages about what is acceptable in the classroom.
6. Student apathy is aggressively dealt with. There is no hoping it will go away. We act.
7. Brain breaks lower the tendency of kids to act out in class.
8. By unexpectedly asking any student question who is out of line what their name is, the entire question gets neutralized and the momentary loss of power by the teacher is instantly restored.
9. The possibility that the teacher may instantly call home if a child is unable to control him/herself provides another assurance that the class will remain untarnished by student misbehavior.

## SECTION 4:

# Three Assessment Tools

### **Assessment Tool #1 – Formative Assessment in the form of Quick Quizzes:**

Quick Quizzes are short daily quizzes given in the last few minutes of each class. They provide an excellent assessment tool because formative assessment is a perfect match for comprehension based instruction. In addition, when students know that a quiz is likely at the end of class, or sooner, they pay attention.

When you quiz daily, or even twice a day, it changes the culture of the class. The child, now deprived of grades for copying someone's homework or cramming everything in the night before the big test because that's not how we do it in comprehension based teaching, finds that engaging in class is a prerequisite for passing it.

A prime motivating factor in the success of quick quizzes in my classroom is that the quizzes are easy. Usually, kids act out in part because the class is often too challenging for them, because the culture of most classes is greatly skewed in favor of the "smart" students.

However, in a comprehension-based classroom, everyone is smart. The teacher who can deliver the instruction by successfully implementing the various skills we use can reach every single child in the room, and so has a vast advantage over the teacher down the hallway who has to deal with academically and emotionally and demographically split classes all year.

Does that mean that discipline problems simply disappear when quick quizzes are used? Of course not. Comprehension based instruction, because it is a genuinely rigorous and not falsely rigorous process, requires hard work from every student in the classroom.

This is even true of the kids who have punched their meal tickets for a grade of A by memorizing (learned in middle school) and by dominating the classroom process. When such students become aware of the fact that they must comport themselves as human beings in our classrooms, many of them run right to their parents, who often launch an investigation. This type of perceived disturbance to what language teaching is requires a tremendous adjustment on the part of the student and her parents. The teacher who has fought this battle knows that it is one of the hardest of all battles to fight on behalf of our decision to teach using comprehensible input.

I constantly remind my kids what they are getting in return for their rigorous listening and reading on a daily basis in my classroom: good grades that respect that they have lives outside of school. I ask for most of the work to be done in class, with limited homework, no big tests, projects, extra credit or any other of that lame stuff that currently defines success in most language classrooms.

Quick Quizzes as written by the quiz writer actually test what the students have learned. All a student has to do to be successful on quick quizzes is show up for class and be present intellectually and socially. What an odd thing to ask a child in this world!

Do not use questions that require complex answers when you give quick quizzes. We are rewarding effort in listening and reading here. And languages are just too complex for us to expect our students to always “get it right.” The obvious corollary of that statement is that we should use much more formative than summative testing in our comprehension-based classes, which is what quick quizzes do.

*Not* using quick quizzes can have deleterious consequences in that we can emerge after a few weeks with a seriously skewed idea of what some of the less communicative students actually know, which is unfair to the child, can lead to arguments over grades and bring in helicopter parents.

A few things that I try to keep in mind when assessing using quick quizzes are:

First, as stated, I want the quiz to be easy. If a kid knows that forty minutes after they walk into my classroom they will be assessed on something that they can succeed at if they pay attention during that time, they will then in fact pay attention, and the classroom discipline will be there.

Traditional classes are skewed in favor of certain kids so that there is a natural imbalance created, and when there are imbalances in classrooms, there are discipline problems. Why not keep ALL of the kids in the classroom in the fold by guaranteeing them success? Why not take the word “punitive” out of our classrooms? It is as easy as giving quick quizzes!

Another thing about quick quizzes is the need for speed. Anyone who has had success with stories knows that stopping a class that is rolling along in the target language in order to assess is a difficult thing indeed. But it is easy to give a quick quiz in just a few minutes at the end of a fifty minute class.

Once I stopped a story and gave and collected a quiz in 2 minutes and 37 seconds, but that class was highly trained. The quiz writer, those kids who pass out and collect pencils and the quiz sheets, the timer, everybody did their jobs perfectly that day.

So far, in summary:

Possible purposes for quick T/F quizzes:

1. Attention/Classroom management
2. Accountability

3. Data collection (formative assessment)

4. Provide additional reps

5. Build student confidence

Who can argue with the points in that list?

### The Quick Quiz Process

Here is a step by step explanation of the quick quiz process:

1. First, the kid who is the **Distributor/Collector of Quizzes** jumps up and distributes either scantron sheets or pre-prepared squares of paper (8.5 x 11 in four squares) or if the teacher is using GradeCam (described below) does neither of those things.
2. Pencils are distributed to anybody who needs one. Everybody moves apart with their hands functioning as cover sheets.
3. When I say, “Question #1!” the class knows it has only about twenty or thirty seconds to get ready to write, so you can move from processing a story to being in a quick quiz in that amount of time.
4. If a kid tries to look on someone else’s paper, I keep the kid after class and call the parent in between classes, treating it as a serious issue, the result of which is that they don’t compromise their integrity as much. I always have a list of kids’ phone numbers in class, as we all do. Failure to call parents about matters of integrity is not an option.
5. Next, the superstar kid who wrote the quiz – the Quiz Writer – hands it to me. As described above, this student writes twelve questions, so that I can instantly throw out a few if they don’t work.
6. Some teachers prefer to get more complete answers and forego the yes/no format. It is their prerogative. I prefer to forego the extra work. Moreover, yes or no questions do a greater job of guaranteeing the success of the students while at the same time guaranteeing a faster quiz.
7. Yes and no/true and false in L2 have to be spelled correctly or the answer is wrong.

So much time is lost in our schools to testing! This way of assessing recoups some of that time, and the kids get

to learn more. Everybody is happy, parents and administrators because they can go into the grade portal and see lots of good grades, although I did practically no work to get them, and students are happy because they know that simply listening brings their success on the quiz. This makes them want to listen the next day, which greatly improves individual morale, which in its turn greatly improves classroom discipline. The result is that quick quizzes become one of our greatest classroom management tools.

I believe that the students who most appreciate these quick and easy quizzes are those who are in school to actually learn. They don't feel that they are being put into memorization mode, which is good because, with internet search engines, people don't need to memorize anything anymore – they can just look things up. In fact, the student when taking a quick quiz is merely recalling recent interesting information that they just heard in a relaxed way because they were interpersonally involved in the class, exactly as per the Interpersonal Skill/jGR of ACTFL's Three Modes of Communication, which is the only other grading tool that I suggest we use in our comprehension based classrooms.

By choosing test questions that are reasonable and straightforward, I send the message to the student that it is not my purpose to trick them on tests, but instead to grade them fairly. Fairness is sorely lacking in the testing culture that our kids constantly endure these day. So quick quizzes become in my classroom a motivating tool and not just a classroom management tool.

Grading punitively has been a dark game that has been played too long in education. It ultimately detracts from a teacher's program and keeps it from growing. Teachers who grade kids with a mean streak are rewarded each year with lower and lower enrollments, so that only a fraction of the students who originally enrolled in the program remain at the upper levels. What student wants to go on to another year of testing with a punitive teacher?

I generally weigh the quick quizzes at 35% of a student's grade. The other 65% comes from a single assessment source, a magnificent one, mentioned above, a rubric that is in my view a true breakthrough in foreign language education and an even more powerful classroom management tool than quick quizzes. It is discussed in the next segment on classroom management.

### GradeCam

Michael Nagelkerke has found a way to keep grading to a minimum by using GradeCam. The quizzes are scanned with a webcam and students can see their grade immediately after taking the quiz. They just drop the quiz under the webcam or document camera and it tells them their score on the computer screen.

If you give 10 point quick quizzes, you can use GradeCam for free. If you want to do anything more than 10 point quizzes, you'll have to buy the subscription.

Here is the site:

<http://www.gradecam.com>

Michael reports:

*...this program saves me a lot of time, and the kids like it too. They all race to get in line to scan immediately following a quiz. It's also helpful because there are a bunch of data functions that help get boxes checked on evaluations (my district has a data-driven initiative)...*

A hotkey (normally F8) can be used to input grades into an electronic gradebook. Just click the spot to enter the first student's grade and then press F8. It will enter in all of the grades for you.

## **Assessment Tool #2 – Assessment Using jGR/ISR:**

The assessment tool named jen's Great Rubric (jGR, also known as the Interpersonal Skills Rubric - ISR) is a skills rubric based on the Three Modes of Communication of ACTFL. It is a true heavy hitter in that it forces students to show that they are interpersonally involved with you and with the learning process in the classroom, as per statements made by ACTFL about skills that are required for language acquisition to occur.

jGR is the happy outcome of a two year long online collaboration between me, Robert Harrell in Los Angeles, jen Schongalla in New Hampshire and Annick Chen, my colleague at Abraham Lincoln High School in Denver. We named the rubric after jen, who first identified in rubric form the skills that we wanted to see in our students in class.

Our reasoning in using this rubric is that if our students can exhibit the interpersonal skills that have been defined by our national parent organization ACTFL as necessary in learning a language, then they will learn the language. We want to hold our students accountable for those skills above all others. Holding them accountable means tying those desired skills to the grading process.

Below is one version of the rubric. Simply put, this rubric is used to measure the quality of the interaction in a comprehension-based classroom. What is the observable non-verbal quality between students and teachers? It is our claim that in CI classes a high quality of interaction is everything we want and need to be successful in our jobs:

## INTERPERSONAL SKILLS RUBRIC (used in daily assessment: 65% of grade)

5 ALL SKILLS IN 4, PLUS NON-FORCED EMERGING OUTPUT. The student who earns a 5 on the quality of their interpersonal interaction with their teacher is a rare student who throws out some good unforced French every once in a while. If I am in the middle of piling up repetitions on “She went camping at Wal-Mart,” this student is the one who says in the target language, “So there is a girl who goes camping at Wal-Mart, right?” and I go, “Yes, that’s it!,” and we go on with no use of English. That kid is a 5 kid. These are really strong co-creators of stories. I would say to this student: “You are giving A+ effort. You play the game perfectly.”

4 (A/B) THE STUDENT CONSISTENTLY AND IN A CLEARLY OBSERVABLE WAY NEGOTIATES MEANING WITH THE TEACHER NONVERBALLY. This is the student who is really involved but not spontaneously outputting speech yet. They are respectfully involved, always visually locked on, they consistently use the stop sign when they do not understand, they are always there with cute answers, and are just a blessing to each class and I tell them so. These are strong co-creators of stories.

3 (B/C) THE STUDENT SOMETIMES NEGOTIATES MEANING WITH THE TEACHER NONVERBALLY IN AN OBSERVABLE WAY, BUT THE NEGOTIATION OF MEANING IS INCONSISTENT. THERE IS ALSO INCONSISTENT USE OF THE “STOP” SIGNAL. This student is also involved but more passively. They show that they are not always on top of all the CI because they let the stop sign slide a bit. This is the student who used to get an A in my class just for getting 8 or above on quizzes. No more. These are limited co-creators of stories. They do not blurt out words in English or talk to their neighbor in English. They can be counted on not to blurt.

2 (C/D) ATTENTIVE BUT DOESN’T RESPOND; DOESN’T USE THE “STOP” SIGNAL. THERE IS NO OBSERVABLE NEGOTIATION OF MEANING WITH THE INSTRUCTOR. This is the student who may or may not get a good grade on a quiz but makes me work way too hard. They just aren’t involved. They don’t get how to play the game yet. They occasionally blurt out words in English or talk to their neighbor in English, both of which destroy the goal of the class, to stay in the target language as per the 90% Use Position Statement of the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), which is the national parent organization for foreign language teachers in the United States. But usually they just stare at me in spite of my being practically on my knees begging them for a more creative and energetic response to all the hard work I am doing. These are not co-creators of stories.

1 (D/F) NOT ATTENTIVE: NO EYE CONTACT OR EFFORT\*. These students are not creators of anything. THERE IS A COMPLETE ABSENCE OF OBSERVABLE NEGOTIATION OR MEANING AT ALL GOING ON BETWEEN THEM AND THE INSTRUCTOR. They suck air out of the room. They do poorly on tests. They give nothing to the story. Their chances of failing the course are high. They often blurt out words in English or talk to their neighbor in English, both of which destroy the goal of the class. I would say to this student: “You really don’t add anything to the class; in fact, you might put your head down, come in late, try to do work for your other classes, disrupt others, blurt out in English, talk to your neighbor during class, organize your purse or bag, put on make-up, check the time every other minute, try to text, etc.”

\*One might object that that is just the way some kids are, and are that way through no fault of their own. This may be true, but my job, as described in the main clause of my school's mission statement, includes the phrase "build productive citizens" who are ready for work in the 21st century workplace. I take that seriously. So if I let those same kids' stone faced behavior or blurting go, thus not aligning my assessment with the national standards or with my school's mission statement, then I am not properly doing my job for my employer and I should be fired.

Note in this rubric that demonstration of interpersonal skills at level 4 does not depend on the student's ability to speak or write, but on their demonstrated use of skills to negotiate meaning in the target language. Negotiation of meaning is everything in the process of language acquisition.

It is therefore important to note that students can earn a grade of "A" on interpersonal skills *no matter what their level of proficiency/readiness* to output. The reason for this is that consistent use of these input skills in the process of language acquisition ensures the highest possible level of comprehension and thus, much later, of output in the form of correct speech and writing.

Here is how jen defines the word "attentive" in the rubric:

ATTENTIVE = NOTHING ON DESK OR LAP; SITS UP; MAINTAINS EYE CONTACT WITH SPEAKER; LISTENS WITH INTENT TO UNDERSTAND; RESPONDS TO STATEMENTS/QUESTIONS WITH SHORT ANSWERS OR VISUALLY; DOESN'T BLURT.

Of course, the close reader can recognize in that definition the Classroom Rules.

There is another more simplified downloadable version of this rubric in color that is easier for students to relate to. It was designed by Annick Chen and can be found on the posters page of [benslavic.com](http://benslavic.com) along with the Classroom Rules.

Robots can sit attentively but the difference is that they give nothing to the group. That's why jGR is about interpersonal skills and not inter-robotic skills, which are needed when students memorize things for a grade. So the new definition of a successful student in a language class, in my view, is one who tries to do the rigorous work of interacting with me in class, not just by listening, but also by responding actively with one word answers or to whatever degree they can in the TL. Those students should be rewarded.

As inferred above, teaching a language is not about getting measurable gains on tests, for three identifiable reasons:

1. Kids process things at different speeds. It doesn't mean that they can't learn the language.
2. Working hard to try to understand is the real work.
3. We are dealing with a language. *It's an unconscious process.* It's a soup that takes years and years to be ready to serve. Does a gourmet chef dare to pass judgment on the taste of a soup after only fifteen minutes into its preparation when the recipe calls for eight hours of slow cooking before it is ready to taste?

Let's be clear. Some students don't have bubbly personalities. That is not the point. When we talk about showing a strong interpersonal skill, the quietest kid in the room might be one of the strongest and most expressive.

We all have had those quiet kids. Sometimes in their silence they are more expressive than the louder kids, much more so in fact. So the claim cannot be made that a child who is a quiet superstar would, in jGR, run the risk of getting a lower grade. They could easily be rated at 4. Re-read below the description of a 4 on the jGR scale to confirm that statement:

4 (A/B) THE STUDENT CONSISTENTLY AND IN A CLEARLY OBSERVABLE WAY NEGOTIATES MEANING WITH THE TEACHER NONVERBALLY. This is the student who is really involved but not spontaneously outputting speech yet. They are respectfully involved, always visually locked on, they consistently use the stop sign when they do not understand, they are always there with cute answers, and are just a blessing to each class and I tell them so. These are strong co-creators of stories.

Such kids would not be rated at a 5. That is a good thing. We are here to educate the whole child. Ours may be the only class that this kind of "Buddha" student experiences in high school that might push her outside the limits of her comfort zone if they really want the 5 on jGR, which requires that they speak in an *unforced* way on occasion.

Forcing a highly intelligent but quiet student out of their comfort zone into occasional *unforced* speech would be a true service by us to the child, and align with most schools' expressed mission statements to address the needs of the whole child. Language education is much more than an academic exercise. The children in our schools must be trained to be much more than uninvolved observers.

Beyond that, jen also uses the term "uses the stop sign" as a key indicator in determining a score above 2. To get a 3 or above, the child doesn't have to be a fast processor, nor have great talent at writing or speaking, but be able to demonstrate the skill of negotiating meaning in the target language. People who attempt to negotiate meaning in the target language, quietly or not, learn the language. It cannot be said that jGR punishes students for having introverted personalities.

A student who interacts with me in class nonverbally but in observable fashion and who uses the stop sign and shows up for class in the real way is exhibiting a human and not a robotic response and I will reward that kid with a grade at least above 2. I will not reward a kid who doesn't use the stop sign or who chooses to give me nothing back in class. Such a student will be rated at a 2 at most. Then passing the class becomes the student's problem and not mine, which is the way it should be but which is not the way it is now in most school settings.

There are students in many classes who exhibit considerable skill in being able to get a grade by merely knowing the material. But, in a comprehension-based class, they cannot get away with that. Language, as described on the ACTFL web pages, requires that reciprocal back and forth communication occur between the teacher and the student. If a student in my classes chooses to do well on the quizzes (35% of the grade) but not participate in the real way in class as described in the jGR rubric (65% of the grade), then they can earn a 2 on jGR and hope for a

C in my class. If they want a grade above C then they actually have to show up for class.

Grading using jGR keeps the teacher and students in line with the ACTFL Interpersonal Mode. Indeed, the only thing that keeps teachers thinking in terms of testing and not in terms of this kind of interpersonal communication in language classes is a failure to professionally identify what really defines language acquisition – interaction with others to communicate ideas – which is something that we cannot quantify.

No blame on the attentive robots – they probably literally have never had a class in which their grade was determined by a mode of communication.

And yet, not only do the national standards imply that we should assess in that way, but also many parents are now increasingly asking that their child have, in at least one class, the opportunity to interact in a human way with their teacher instead of with a machine or with a teacher who teaches like a machine.

Such parents get it. Not everyone is voting for robots and books in schools. There are parents who want their kids to learn interview skills and job marketplace skills and skills that focus on working positively within a group. There are parents who don't want cyborgs for children.

### Use of jGR with Difficult Students

Grant Boulanger uses the jGR rubric with difficult students effectively. Once after a parent conference the parents asked Grant for daily reports for the rest of the grading period. Suddenly Grant had more work added to his day but the child did not. Parents do this a lot with their failing students; they put the work on the teacher. When the teacher agrees, the parents have succeeded in placing a responsibility where it should not have been placed.

In this case, Grant responded brilliantly. He countered with “How about we put the onus of responsibility on [Troy] to come to me at the end of class each day and together we will fill out the Interpersonal Skills Rubric, and then Troy can take that home to you to discuss the numbers we agreed on after class. I will give you a copy of the rubric today and you both can refer to it when you meet each evening.”

Responding in this way to parents in the way Grant did represents a power move in buildings where much of the system is based on reducing the power of teachers against misbehaving students. When we proactively deal with a problem every day like this instead of at the end of a grading term, we are really going to solve it. The child will have to change or fail the class. The onus of responsibility (lit. the ability to respond) is squarely where it should be, on the child and the parents.

## Keeping Students Responsible with jGR

Many teachers require students to grade themselves using the rubric. It's a good idea. When students self-reflect on their performance in terms of the clearly stated expectations of the rubric, they learn that they are not just passive observers of the classroom experience, that they must "show up" for class.

Chris Stolz does the following:

"I started using a modified jGR this year. I printed it off and hand it out every 2 weeks, the kids self-evaluate, and I tell them that their grade will be a mix of their score and mine. I tell them that if they are more than 2 points off my score, I ditch their score. They are usually bang-on."

Chris also often has the kids draw a box right on their Quick Quiz paper and put their evaluation of their work in terms of the rubric in that box for that day. When they hand in their quizzes, he has two grades instead of one to enter into the grade book, and he doesn't hesitate to override their opinions of their work that day with his own.

Other teachers, instead of a box on the quiz for the jGR grade, use the form on the next page. It provides a sample daily rubric to be filled out by the student at the end of class to be submitted to the teacher or even brought home for a parent signature. It is part of the daily routine in my classroom – the students must fill it out as they leave class each day. Feel free to use it in your classroom.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

## Interpersonal Communication Self-Evaluation Form

**Please write a number in the box that best describes your work in class today and return this sheet to the teacher.**

[illegible]

When talking to parents about this form, point out also that the descriptors above and the term Interpersonal Skills Rubric/jGR in particular are not random terms you made up, but in fact describe a national standard, Communication, as expressed in the second of the ACTFL Three Modes of Communication, along with the Interpretive and Presentational Skills of the Communication standard, which they should know you also address in your classes.

I recommend learning some hand motions when you explain the Communication standard to them so that you can make sure that they and their child know how the term is defined:

1. Interpretive – put your hands out in front of you and draw them in to yourself to indicate that the child can understand/comprehend/interpret what they hear/read in your class.
2. Interpersonal – this is the big one in a comprehension based classroom. Put your hands to your sides near your shoulders and cross them back and forth in front of you. This describes that the standard requires back and forth sharing of ideas, since the language can only be learned if the speaker and the listener are negotiating shared meaning.
3. Presentational – put your hands close to your chest and move them outward, in the opposite motion of the Interpretive mode. Explain that this describes output in the form of speaking and writing and that it is not assessed in your classroom in any serious way until doing that is reasonable, in higher levels of language study.

Explaining these things in this way puts what you expect into a focus for the parents that, without the hand motions, might otherwise not be clear. Once the parent knows what is expected of the child, the responsibility for classroom performance is finally placed right where it should be, on the parents and the child.

### Letter Home

When setting up this daily jGR check-in plan with the parents, you may also need a letter home – some students just won't respond if their parents are involved. Here is one suggested template written by Grant Boulanger:

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Jones:

I'd like to check in regarding Troy's performance in Spanish class. It is clear that Troy is very capable. However, currently he is among the poorest performing students in his Spanish class. There really is no need for that.

Troy is expected to be an active participant in class. I expect him to dedicate his energy to understanding the Spanish he's hearing or reading. I expect that he focus his attention in class on our conversation or on what we are reading. I expect him to respond to my questions and statements. I expect him to observe my facial expressions,

gestures and laser pointer when I'm delivering spoken messages so he can benefit from the many ways I'm conveying meaning to him and the class.

This type of communication – interpersonal communication – is part of a national standard and accounts for 65% of Troy's grade, which is currently a D. (The other 35% comes from daily quizzes which are easy if the student pays attention and attends class regularly.)

I give frequent, daily reminders about my expectations and about the skills necessary for successful interpersonal communication. While I avoid calling him out by name in class, I can only assume that he is intentionally ignoring these expectations.

Troy's long-term achievement is intimately tied to how well he engages in class on a daily basis. Just like a band member can't pass band without playing his instrument, Troy won't be able to pass Spanish without interacting with me during our various Spanish activities in a back and forth and participatory way.

It's important to me that I have your support in helping Troy know and understand expectations. If he doesn't understand why they are what they are, I would be happy to sit down with you both and help him understand. That is my responsibility as Troy's teacher. Troy's is to do the things described above. Honestly, there really is no reason why he shouldn't be performing well, at least that I can tell.

I look forward to working with you to help Troy achieve all that he can achieve this year. Thank you for your support and I look forward to hearing back from you. Please call this number anytime for further clarification:

\_\_\_\_\_.

Sincerely, etc.

#### Another Example of Parent Contact and jGR

Nathaniel Hardt once received this letter from a parent. It is typical of the kind of letter teachers sometimes receive from parents who expect our comprehensible input based classes to resemble other classes, with lots of memorization and homework, which they decidedly do not for the simple reason that in our work we have to actually teach to a *different part of the brain* than in other subjects.

*Good morning, Mr. Hardt,*

*My son Gordon is in your Spanish I class. Yesterday, he came home and informed us that he had a pop quiz in class and didn't think he did well. When we inquired further as to what he's been working on in class, he didn't have much to show. We found that he only had a half page of notes. We've seen no homework to date and although he's mentioned a*

*couple of previous quizzes (that he's said he's done well on) we haven't seen them. I also don't understand why there is no textbook available for this class. I'm concerned that Gordon may be missing something as I would have thought we should have seen more content, given that school has been in session now for over a month.*

*Please let us know your thoughts.*

*Thank you.*

*Mr. Smith*

Any comprehensible input teacher who has received a note like this one knows the feeling of being wrong, of being found out. Some parents, in their understandable ignorance about how people actually learn languages, have broken new CI teachers and caused them to actually quit the profession. So how we respond to such a charge from a parent is most important.

Needless to say, this is where having even one administrator in the building who understands and supports what we are doing with comprehensible input is of great value.

The response letter below is Nathaniel's. It is a bit lengthy, but I include all of it here as a possible template from which the teacher can draft her own similar response if needed:

*Dear Mr. Smith:*

*I commend your efforts to take an active role in your son's education. My own background is one of 25 years of teaching Spanish. My training is at the Middlebury College Spanish School. My BA and BS degrees are in Spanish from the University of Connecticut, and I studied for a summer in Salamanca, Spain. Since then I earned my MA in Spanish through California State University, Sacramento by living with families and studying Spanish for three consecutive summers in Mexico, Peru, and Spain (Burgos).*

*In that process, I used a lot of textbooks and did a lot of grammar study and vocabulary lists, but I found that fluency did not arise out of those resources. It came rather through communicative interaction with speakers of Spanish. That is how I teach, via direct communication in Spanish with my students in the classroom on a daily basis, with lots of reading as well, since we now know that textbooks and the memorization of grammar rules and worksheets are ineffective, to say the least, in teaching languages, and the best gains are made via direct eye to eye interaction and reading.*

*This is the observation of Berty Segal Cook, a teacher and trainer of language teachers: "Language is acoustical; it is not intellectual."*

*Before I understood that current research debunks homework and that the textbook does not produce language*

*gains. Even at the end of four years many students have learned little.*

*Gordon must grasp that language acquisition is different from any other kind of learning. As Segal Cook mentioned, it is acoustical and must be taught acoustically. The brain treats language differently from normal human cognition. Most of Gordon's classes are taught with students taking notes and using a textbook (and that is as it should be, but none of that applies to Spanish).*

*Spanish should not be studied cognitively via memorization of lists and a textbook. Instead, language is acquired communicatively, by focusing on meaning and not individual words. Gordon and I must interact in Spanish if he is to learn the language. Since I speak it but he doesn't, it is only naturally that he would be the one to do the hard work of listening and trying to understand what he hears in class.*

*That is the amazing thing about language: when we focus on understanding and producing messages we pick up the language in the process. But we have to be present in class, and this is where Gordon can improve. Dr. Stephen Krashen, a world authority on how we acquire language, says there is only one way to acquire language: by understanding the messages we hear (and read).*

*It should thus come as no surprise that the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages recommends that the language classroom be conducted 90%+ in the target language. This is something I am therefore required to do in my class, and I suspect that this, my use of the language, is at the core of the problem we are seeing here with Gordon. He is certainly not to be blamed. It is a new and different way of paying attention in class, and all students who are new to my class must necessarily go through an adjustment process before they can explain to others how the class works.*

*So I very much welcome the opportunity to meet with you as soon as possible at your convenience to get Gordon back on track with my class, since the grade is largely about being present in class when I speak in Spanish to my students, which is so different from being able, in other classes, to simply read a textbook, take notes and memorize a bunch of information for a test. I would like to give Gordon a clean slate on his grade, which is currently a D, so that we can turn this thing around immediately.*

*I hope this has been helpful.*

*Nathaniel Hardt*

### **Assessment Tool #3 – Comprehension Checks:**

Many experienced CI teachers report that the best way to assess comprehension is simply to ask the class to put up hands with ten fingers indicating 100% comprehension, five fingers indicating 50% comprehension, etc. It is

recommended to do this skill once every ten minutes or so during CI. It only takes a few seconds.

Another, faster way to do a comprehension check is to simply ask the students to give thumbs up, sideways, or down as an indication of the level of comfort they are having in their understanding. We can also use the thumbs up or down technique to check on their comfort level about the speed of the input you are providing.

We also have a unique way of doing assessment with smaller children. This is from Catharina Greenberg:

*...in early elementary kids sometimes evaluate themselves with 0 to 5 fingers as an exit ticket. We do it on a count of three in the style of rock-paper-scissor and see how well we match. It's a gimmick more than anything else. A gentle way to boost their confidence if they are too judgmental on themselves (or the reverse). My groups are small, 14 kids at most, so it works....*

With these comprehension checks, there is always the desire by many students to hide an authentic response, to put up more fingers so that the class doesn't see that they may not be getting it. If the teacher suspects a less than honest hand signal from the student, a private conversation after class can clear things up.

It is most important at this time to avoid any semblance of criticism. In fact, if the child is trying to understand us, but does not, the problem lies in point of fact with our own failure to identify the child as a barometer student, and to make the appropriate adjustments in the speed with which we are presenting the material. Doing this is one of the most crucial moves we can make; not just in identifying the barometer, but acting together with the barometer to make the necessary changes.

Teaching to the eyes, the barometer student, SLOW, and comprehension checks are all part of the same mental framework reflecting the fundamental role of the teacher to connect with and engage the students.

It must be stated that comprehension checks have drawbacks: 1) the students often lie, and 2) they are sometimes hard to remember to do. However, they have real value when we are being observed, because checking for understanding is a pretty standard box that administrators have to check in assessing us. I have almost gotten to where, when being observed, I do hand comprehension checks just to make sure that I get that box checked during the observation.

# SECTION FIVE:

## The Bail Out Moves

Sometimes we don't know what to do. What we are doing isn't working, for whatever reason, and we need to change. It's not an option when there are thirty-five kids in the room. So we stop doing what isn't working, and we do so in the moment that we know it isn't working.

There is no shame in this. Teaching using comprehensible input is very much like riding a bike, and sometimes we fall off. Writing is generally what we do with our classes when we fall off the bike. Writing gets the kids quiet and busy with a pencil in their hands.

To students trained in schools, when they are writing, they think that they are learning, so you will see that four of the six bail out moves described below involve writing:

### **Bail Out Move #1 – Dictée:**

The mechanical steps of dictée have been described earlier in Strategy #5. It is mentioned here again only to alert the reader of its double use as a great bail out move. In fact, as long as it is not done too much, it is unmatched as a bail out move. Just be sure to enforce the NO ONE SPEAKS DURING DICTEE EXCEPT THE TEACHER rule. Without the strict enforcement of that rule, dictée doesn't work, so be forewarned.

### **Bail Out Move #2 – Math Brakes:**

Here is a way that you can “brake” the flow of your class when you simply don't feel comfortable with what is going on by doing a math “brake.” It's not as if our students don't need the repetitions on numbers. At the same time, when we do this bail out move we are teaching across content areas, which administrators love for some reason.

This sequence of steps is suggested when doing math brakes:

1. Working at the board, teach them all the math addition, subtraction, etc. terms in the target language.
2. Make them do math problems on a blank piece of paper by giving them practice questions.

3. If you feel like it, give them a ten point quick quiz using simple math problems.
4. They have to show their work.

Math brakes should be short, under five minutes, but do them often, since numbers are among the most challenging sounds in a new language. Note that math brakes are an integral and valued part of the Two Week Schedule (Appendix K) that I use to great advantage in my own planning.

### Numbers/Colors Poster

Teacher's Discovery makes a poster of the numbers 1-100. On it, each horizontal row of ten numbers is in a colored square. I use it frequently to teach numbers and reinforce colors at the same time, not necessarily in a story. The numbers one through ten are all in red squares, eleven through twenty in orange, etc.

Another good bail out move involving numbers is to go to the poster and call out (as in Bingo):

*27 Yellow!*

If 27 is in a yellow square they put thumbs up:

*Correct, class, 27 is in the yellow!*

If 27 is in a colored square other than yellow on the numbers/colors poster, the students put thumbs down. This is a chance to get some good circling in:

*Correct, class, 27 is not in the yellow - it is in the red! Class, 27, it is in the yellow or the red?*

*Correct, class, it is in the red! Class, 27, it is in the green? No class, that is absurd!*

*27 is not in the green! 27 is in the red!*

Used in a focused way for five or even ten minutes, this activity is very effective. I was amazed at the gains in comprehension of numbers the first year I started using this particular poster in this way with circling.

## Greater Than/Less Than

A third good numbers game, which is really a guessing game using circling, involves simply drawing a horizontal line across the board or screen and asking the students to yell out numbers between one and one hundred, or for advanced classes, higher numbers.

If the number you have in mind is 70, and a student guesses 50, write 50 below the line, which indicates to the class that their number is below your number. If 90 is guessed, write it above the line.

If a student repeats a number that has already been guessed, just point to the number already written and state either “no it is more than...” or “no it is less than.....” Saying those particular expressions out loud repeatedly in class helps teach the students a grammar oddity involving prepositions (in French anyway) without ever mentioning the rule.

Nothing replaces seeing and hearing the numbers at the same time. Of course, I never even have a number in mind in this game until eight or ten guesses have been tallied, thus stretching this activity out for extra input.

Numbers are not easy to learn. Do frequent math brakes.

### **Bail Out Move #3 – Walk-ins:**

This next bail out move is aimed specifically at responding to those electric moments when observers walk into our classrooms unannounced and the class is not focused and needs to be brought into immediate focus without the observer even noticing the shift to “performance mode.”

I don’t think that these people mean to knock us off our rhythm, and I’m sure that there are teachers who handle such intrusions (that’s really what they are) with aplomb. I, however, am not one of them.

There have been times in my career when an unannounced observation by a supervisor would send me into an internal panic and I would lose my focus. But when Dr. Krashen came into my classroom with Diana Noonan and an entourage from the district, to observe two classes in 2012, I had no such reaction.

Why the difference? Why was I experiencing a fear-based reaction when being observed by someone who likely doesn’t even understand how languages are acquired, but none when being observed by one of the pre-eminent scholars in the world on language acquisition? I think it is because I knew and sensed that Dr. Krashen wasn’t there to find fault with me - he simply wanted to see some of his ideas in action in the field.

Hmmm. Does it matter if the observing presence is in the room to check off boxes and judge, or to just hang out

in a spirit of shared interest about best practices? It does to me.

Over time, over the decades, I have come to realize how deeply ignorant most observers are about what I am doing in my classroom, how little they care, how overworked they are (most would rather be doing anything else than having to come in and observe a language class for an entire class period), and how truly underqualified they are in SLA to be in a position to observe me in the first place.

I am happy to report that I no longer react in fear to formal observations by administrators. I look upon observations now as ways to educate these people, so that they don't use 20<sup>th</sup> century ideas to evaluate 21<sup>st</sup> century teachers. That shift in thinking has made for much better observations.

So this final bail out move is for those situations when you get observed unexpectedly and must raise the quality of the class but don't have time to shift the class into a writing or reading or math or drawing activity, because they take too much time to set up.

The observer doesn't want to see a two or three minute shift in the class when they walk in - they want to see the flow of instruction and the lesson continue without interruption. (They think that they can observe without changing the energy in the room, but that is another topic.) So you need an instant transition into something good. So what to do?

My answer is simple. Since TPR is instantly engaging, we should use it as a bail out move in these situations. *We want to fool the observer into thinking that the TPR was what we were doing before they came in.* You will find that good TPR, when properly extended out a bit, is a great way to meet the pressure of an unannounced observation and to get all the right boxes checked in a short amount of time.

We can shift to TPR that fast if we need to, before the observer even gets through the door, and thus win the mental battle. Just tell the kids early in the year that when you get observed, there are certain things you need to do for the observation and that you may switch things up on them very quickly if someone walks in. Kids always get it and they always go with it when it happens. They love a challenge.

### Checklist for Unexpected Observations

Do the following:

- 1. Quickly locate a verb that has energy in the list of verbs on the Verb Wall.**
- 2. Before the person gets in the door, have the laser pointer on the verb and say these things in this order to the class:**

*Class, this verb means “runs.” What does this verb mean? (runs)*

*Class, how do you say “runs” in French (court). Good, class, “court” means “runs.”*

*Class, show me “runs.”* (They show me various gestures. I accept one and praise its author. If you have a good Master of Gestures, this is a good time to nod to him or her, which is their cue to jump up and “work” the gesture in animated fashion with the class while you make TPR sentences up. That gets the student engagement box checked and the observer is not even seated in a chair yet.)

3. **Then inform the class using the PSA technique** (Personalized Statements and Answers) **that one of them runs:**

*Class, Jorge runs! (ohhh!)*

I don’t ask them if Jorge runs, I tell them. The reason for that is that teachers are not the only ones who are iced by administrators, it happens to kids, too. They also feel judged by the new controlling presence in the classroom which just feels wrong somehow. So we are going to use that one sentence, circled slowly over and over with plenty of comprehension checks in the form of strong choral responses and hand comprehension checks, so that we get command of the observation and convey a sense of instructional ease to the person in the back of the room.

4. During this time, while teaching, **walk over to the observer and hand him or her the Administrator’s Checklist** for Observing a CI classroom. Don’t interrupt your instruction, just hand it to the person and keep teaching. Why do this? Because this checklist (Appendix Q below), is better and more accurate than the checklist the administrator has, because the latter usually has to do with the work we are doing. Moreover, physically handing it to the observer puts us on the offensive with the administrator, and not the other way around.
5. **Next, circle the original statement.** The kids get what I am saying but the administrator doesn’t. Score a point for me. In the rare instance when the observer knows what they are doing, they come in expecting to see engaged kids hearing the target language in the class, and that is what they are now seeing.
6. **Once the circling on the original statement that Jorge runs begins to lose energy, play the big card - ask “where.”** If the class has been properly trained in supplying cute answers, they will make it a weird place. Heap praise on the student who suggested the answer that you accepted, that Jorge runs to the bathroom. Ask for applause for that student. Let her bask in the applause. Check in with the observer and see the big smile on their face to see such involved students, which is all they are looking for. Circle the fact that Jorge runs to the bathroom a lot. (Obviously, you only accepted that answer because Jorge is one of those cool students who can laugh at themselves with the class.)
7. **Then play the “with whom” card.** Making that person a celebrity or someone in the school building always works best. Or if an observer is in the room, **make it the observer.** When you find out that Jorge

runs to the bathroom with the man observing the class, get another round of applause for the genius who suggested that cute answer. Keep circling until it loses energy. Do at least one **hand comprehension check** to get that box checked.

8. **Keep building the image** with other question words to make sure the observer can get all the boxes. Sadly, I have learned how to plan my instruction when being observed with the sole purpose of getting boxes checked.
9. Play the **“How is that Spelled”** (Bail Out Move #4) card. See below for details.
10. As soon as a preposition is used, play the **TPR the Prepositions** card (Skill #14)
11. Do a short **dictée**.
12. Knowing that the observer needs to check the assessment box as well, **I quickly get a quick quiz from the Quiz Writer**, who has been told to monitor and adjust when an observer walks in by writing at least a five point quiz on only the content that happens after the observer comes into the room.
13. **When the observer is gone**, I either go back to the lesson or stay with the verbs or go to another bail out move. We often chat in English about the observation, pointing out funny things that happened, like the look on the observer’s face when Lakisha pointed out that Jorge ran to the bathroom with him. The kids seem to enjoy being able to show off skills that assistant principals can’t do. If the observation went well, I end class by announcing that everyone will receive a 10 for class that day and that I won’t count the quiz I just gave. I tell them as they leave the classroom how fantastic they are and I thank them for stepping up for me that day. They know I mean it.

Of course, if the class is flowing well we would not bail out by doing TPR with a verb from the verb wall. But it’s nice to know that this bail out move is there if needed.

## **Bail Out Move #4 – How is That Spelled?**

This short bail out move is from *TPRS in a Year!* I include it here because it is so effective:

Teaching the alphabet does nothing for acquisition of the language. And yet district benchmarks often include teaching the alphabet, so it must be taught. Here is a way to teach the alphabet while at the same time allowing you to temporarily bail out of some auditory instruction that may not be working.

Whenever you write a new word or structure on the board, if you wish and if you remember, you can simply ask

in the target language, “How is that spelled?” The kids call out the letters of the word, and you write each one down in large letters on the board as the kids associate the right sound with the letters they see you writing. It’s better than the lame repetition of the alphabet that makes you wish you had never become a teacher, or singing some song with the kids for the millionth time in your career.

The alphabet gets plenty of practice throughout the year in this way. Not only does it give you a moment to regroup your thoughts and the direction of your instruction, it also gives the students a nice neurological break from the hard work of decoding the story, and they clearly enjoy it. For some reason, I prefer spelling names out more than other types of information. When we use this technique, we are teaching writing.

A shorter variation on this skill requires only a few seconds. Quickly ask, about a certain word that has been written on the board, “This word begins with what letter?” or “What letter does this word end with?” or “What is the third letter in this word?”

Doing this bail out activity usually requires less than one minute. It’s a winner, but like so much about this work is often hard to remember to do. Practice makes perfect!

## Afterword

Let's not mince words. Kids of today have few reasons to believe in themselves. The scene in most schools is still all about competition and testing and dominating and winning and excluding others.

But if we learn to teach using comprehensible input we can change that culture of competition into one of cooperation and mutual understanding and the building of community. We can bring success in languages to many more than just the few dominant winner students.

We really can. Let's give the kids something to believe in – themselves. By setting up classrooms in which we speak to the kids in ways that they can understand, in ways that make them want to understand, we give them hope enough to believe that they can do something, that they can be very successful in at least one of their classes.

Let's learn how to teach in such a way that our kids experience hope. Let's stop teaching in ways that crush hope. That is what the old system did – it crushed hope in kids. We just weren't aware of it. But the sad looks on our students' faces when they were in our classes before we made this change should have tipped us off that something was wrong.

All that is done now - it's over. There is no blame. The time has finally arrived for us to change how we teach so that we can change the looks on our students' faces. That is reason enough to get up in the morning and go into our schools, even if we don't feel like it.

We can do it. We can help kids believe in themselves. We can help kids believe that they can be good at something: a language. We can help kids believe in life. It's not really about teaching a language at all, is it? It's not. It never was. We do so much more than teach languages.

# Appendices

## Appendix A – TCI/TPRS Fact Sheet

The first two appendices offered here are taken from the “Primers” section of my online PLC. They were written by Robert Harrell, and are published here with his permission. They illustrate and defend the ideas presented in this book in precise language and are offered here for anyone who may wish to use them as ammunition in any skirmishes they get into with anyone about foreign language pedagogy.

**Q.** *What do TCI, TPRS, TPR, etc. stand for?*

**A.** TCI stands for Teaching with Comprehensible Input and means just that: the teacher uses messages in the target language that are understandable to students to help them acquire the language unconsciously. TPRS® stands for Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling. It is one excellent way of providing comprehensible input. TPR® is Total Physical Response and is another way of providing comprehensible input. Don’t confuse TPR and TPRS. The rest of the alphabet soup is best learned in context.

**Q.** *Isn’t TCI just another name for TPRS?*

**A.** No. While TPRS is a prime example of TCI, Teaching with Comprehensible Input is more than that and includes anything the teacher uses to make certain that the messages in the target language are both compelling and understandable to students. (The “comprehensible” part of the name means comprehensible to the students, not just to the teacher.)

**Q.** *Speaking of “compelling,” isn’t this all about flying blue elephants?*

**A.** While many classes enjoy the creative freedom that TCI offers and do come up with bizarre stories, “compelling” simply means that students get so involved in the content of the message that they forget they are speaking a foreign language. This may result in flying blue elephants, but it can equally easily result in a discussion of bullying in school, the upcoming football game or school dance; in other words, “compelling” means it’s something the students truly want to talk about.

*Q. So what is Teaching with Comprehensible Input?*

**A.** To help answer that, let's see what it is not: it is not a grammar-driven curriculum; it is not a textbook-driven curriculum; it is not long lists of vocabulary words; it is not the teacher talking at students; it is not learning about a language; it is not immersion.

Teaching with Comprehensible Input is speaking with students in a way that every student understands what the teacher is saying all the time; it incorporates relevance by exploring topics to which students have a connection and that are connected to real life; it is student driven and student centered because students give input and direction to the flow of conversation; it is going “deep and narrow” with the language rather than “shallow and broad”; it is relational; it is aimed at acquisition of the language rather than learning about the language; it is contextualized.

*Q. But what about rigor? I hear many students and teachers say that TCI or TPRS is “easy.”*

**A.** Teaching with Comprehensible Input, including TPRS, definitely seems easy to students and is certainly different from most of their classes. But we need to distinguish between rigorous and onerous or burdensome. Doing more work does not mean more rigor, it just means more work. Are 40 math problems that practice the same concept twice as rigorous as 20, or just more work?

According to the US Department of State, rigor includes a sustained focus, depth and integrity of inquiry, suspension of premature conclusions, and continual testing of hypotheses. Students in a TCI classroom are exposed to this kind of rigor. The Interpersonal Mode of Communication requires them to sustain focus for the full class period with no zoning out, side conversations, etc. The student-driven nature of the course means that they can explore deeply and fully in the target language the topics that truly interest them. As students are exposed to the language in a contextualized, meaningful fashion, they suspend conclusions about how the language functions rather than having those conclusions forced upon them at the outset. The unconscious brain continuously tests the students' hypotheses about what sounds correct in the language.

So why does all this seem easy? Imagine you have a travel trailer that you want to take on vacation. Since all you have is a small four-cylinder car, you hitch the trailer to it and take off. Your car will strain to pull it and probably break down as a result. Your neighbor comes along with his large V-8 pickup truck; you hitch the travel trailer to the pickup and take off. No strain; the pickup handles the load with ease. What's the difference? Did you travel trailer suddenly become lighter? Is the work any easier? No. You simply got the right equipment for the job. That's the difference between learning a language and acquiring a language. Learning accesses the conscious mind, which is not designed for languages. TCI accesses the unconscious mind, which is powerfully designed to acquire languages. Learning or acquiring a language (whichever one you want to call it) is hard work, always has been, and always will be. It just seems easy when you use the right equipment.

*Q. Okay, but what was this about the “Interpersonal Mode of Communication”? What about the skills of reading, writing, listening, speaking, grammar, and culture?*

**A.** The newest state World Language standards, the National Standards, ACTFL (American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages) and the College Board (AP courses and exams) all revolve around the Three Modes of Communication: Interpersonal, Interpretive and Presentational. Since the purpose of language is to communicate, this is rightly the emphasis. Presentational communication is when the “author” speaks or writes without the opportunity to interact with the audience and so must think in advance about how to present compellingly and understandably. Interpretive communication is when the recipient reads, hears, or sees a “text” without the author being present. The text must be understood without direct help from the author. Interpersonal communication is when two or more people exchange information and language with each other and have the opportunity to clarify, negotiate meaning, express lack of understanding, etc. This is really the core of both language acquisition and Teaching with Comprehensible Input. Interestingly enough, real-life communication incorporates all six of those skills in a holistic and organic way, rather than as a laboratory sample to be dissected.

*Q. That all sounds interesting, but can you back it up?*

**A.** Good question. We should always be able to give a reason for what we do. Second Language Acquisition researchers disagree on many points, but the one thing that they all agree on is this: The single most important element in language acquisition is comprehensible input. As Wynne Wong from Ohio State University puts it: “A flood of input must precede a trickle of output.” TCI and TPRS are built around this one indisputable principle.

In addition, brain-based research indicates that the brain requires certain things; among these are meaning, repetition and novelty. We can see these at work in all sorts of ways. The need for meaning is why we see shapes in clouds, the face of a person on a tortilla, etc. Children exhibit the need for repetition when they watch the same film or read the same book over and over. The novelty aspect comes out when we remember that unusual event on our routine drive to work. How many times do you get there without remembering how you did it? But see a plane land on the freeway, and you will remember it because it was novel. There is a lot more at work here, including chunking and automaticity, but that is for another discussion.

*Q. What does a TCI classroom look like, then?*

**A.** As with any method, strategy or approach, TCI will look a little different for each teacher. Some common things to look for, though, include: the teacher speaks and encourages the students to speak the target language at least 90% of the time or more; the teacher and students engage in a conversation or dialogue in the target

language; the teacher checks for comprehension regularly and often; the teacher encourages but does not force students to express themselves in the target language at all times; the teacher shelters vocabulary but not grammar; grammar is contextualized and embedded in the language; the teacher explores those topics and items that interest students as shown by their responses, reactions, and requests; the teacher incorporates rigor in the classroom by requiring sustained focus from students for the class period; the teacher and students develop a relationship with one another.

What you won't see are lots of worksheets, lots of homework, and lots of mind-numbing drills.

## **Appendix B – A Philosophy of Language**

### **Instruction in High School**

*This statement of philosophy was also written by Robert Harrell:*

In developing and articulating a philosophy of language instruction, or instruction of any kind for that matter, a good place to start is at the end. What is the goal of our instruction? What should students be able to do: recall a set of fact? Apply those facts to a given situation? Analyze a text, whether written, oral, visual, or audiovisual using critical thinking skills? Synthesize the learned material and create something entirely new?

Foreign language instruction has – or should have – the latter as its goal: giving students the tools they need to create something entirely new, the expression of their own thoughts, questions, and desires in another language. This is thinking of the highest order because it is not simply the recitation of learned phrases but the manipulation and synthesis of acquired elements into something new and uniquely suited to accomplishing the task of eliciting or expressing information about knowledge, will, hopes, desires, etc. In other words, the goal of Foreign Language instruction is communication.

For the high school setting, further refinement of the goal is necessary. What sort of communication do we want to see? In English Language Arts, Science, Math, and History courses, the emphasis is on the acquisition of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), that is, not only the vocabulary specific to the discipline but also the standard grammar, syntax, and vocabulary of academic discourse.

Should this also be the goal of Foreign Language instruction? Before answering the question, we need to remember that students, for the most part, are learning the academic register of a language they already know. The course of instruction is designed for students who already speak the language of instruction fluently. Modifications and accommodations must take place for those who are not already fluent so that they can take part in the course.

In the typical high school curriculum, learners of a foreign language are beginning from a base of zero knowledge.

They are conversant with neither the course content nor the language of instruction. (See the ACTFL position statement on 90%+ use of the target language both inside and outside the classroom). This is radically different from all other courses except English Language Development (ELD). If a district had a fully articulated program of foreign language instruction from kindergarten through grade twelve (vid. World Language Standards for California Public Schools), the situation would be similar to that of other disciplines, but most districts do not, and the situation is not.

Many administrators and teachers fail to recognize that tens to hundreds of thousands of hours of language acquisition through Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) precede the introduction of Academic Language in school. As a result, they think erroneously that the same content and standards that apply in other subjects ought to apply in foreign language instruction. This thinking is, however, fallacious because it does not acknowledge the necessity of developing BICS before addressing CALP.

Another factor that ought to influence curriculum design (also known as Scope and Sequence), but often does not, is the goal or goals of the learner(s). Other disciplines in high school rightly place an emphasis on CALP in preparation of pursuing study of the subjects at university. Most students have further study as one of their goals.

Once again the situation is different for foreign language. Students will most likely use the target language, if they use it at all, for traveling, meeting tourists, speaking to clients or tradesmen, conversing with acquaintances. They will need some specialized vocabulary, depending upon the task at hand, but not academic language. Only a small percentage will continue with language study as an academic pursuit.

Some very good reasons, then, to concentrate on helping students acquire Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills are the following:

1. BICS is foundational, and we need to lay a solid foundation before we attempt to build a superstructure, no matter how attractive. Otherwise we are building on sand, and the edifice will collapse when faced with real-life communication.
2. BICS is not only foundational but pervasive. Even when communicating in the rarified atmosphere of academia, the ability to maintain Interpersonal Communication is essential.
3. It is impossible to address all of the contexts and situation in which our students will or may employ the target language. Therefore we must equip them with basic skills that allow them to communicate interpersonally, thereby providing them with the means to acquire the specialized vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of their chosen domain when they need it.
4. Since the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few or the one, our instruction should address primarily the goals and uses of the overwhelming majority (dare I say 96%?) of our students\*. This will be essential basic human interpersonal communication: introductions, simple requests and replies, giving

and getting personal information, expressing opinions on familiar topics, etc. All of this falls naturally under the rubric of BICS.

For these reasons and more, I unashamedly and unabashedly choose to expend my resources and spend my time and energy on Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills rather than Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency.

\*We do not ignore the needs and interests of the minority but neither do we emphasize them. There is room in instruction to address the needs of the few and the one without sacrificing the needs of the many. Instead of leaving large numbers of students behind each year, we bring the majority along to greater fluency while providing the few with the means and opportunities to go beyond and above. Legacy programs have tended to cater to an “elite” few while sacrificing the many.

## **Appendix C – On Mixing TPRS/CI with the Textbook**

*Should we mix TPRS/CI instruction with textbook instruction? Nathaniel Hardt discusses why it is unwise to do so:*

1. Kid-centered TPRS/CI is of interest to kids. Textbooks are not. When required by my school to use a textbook, I decided that I would try to use readings from the textbook. Then I read it. It was boring. I was bored so I knew the kids would be bored. I closed the book.
2. The textbook has a de-energizing effect on teens. There is an inverse relationship between eyelids and textbooks. The wider we open our textbooks, the more the eyelids of the students begin to droop. Moreover, when we as teachers open up the textbook, we close our eyes to other things that might otherwise happen in our classrooms, be they connections, communication, life, sharing, and just things that make taking or teaching a language class worthwhile.
3. There is a new phone app called World Lens which is a point and translate app. This makes obsolete just about anything except face to face interaction.
4. The textbook chops up language parts; TPRS/CI treats language as a whole. TPRS/CI is like leading students up a staircase to fluency; the textbook is like carrying the kids up a few steps and then giving a test. Since you can’t go anywhere from there, you go back down and go up another “staircase.”
5. Using textbook listening exercises does nothing for student listening skills because the textbook writers take a whole class of listening time and expect the kids to be able to understand based on memorizing vocabulary and grammar. There is no sense of the enormous amount of time/work necessary to sensitize the student’s brain and ear to spoken language.

6. Focusing on textbook grammar leads to a lot of English in the class. Using a lot of English in the FL class is like talking baseball in the history class; it is off task.
7. Focusing on grammar divides students into cans and cannots. This requires homogeneous grouping. Language and TPRS/CI unite the class. Grammar has a way of marginalizing the majority.
8. A lot of work goes into modifying textbooks for any approach. Why pay all of that money if it is not going to reduce your workload? And why pay all that money in the first place?
9. We used to say that at least the textbook is a good resource. With the internet resources online a textbook is at best an obsolete, overpriced resource.
10. Presenting material in thematic units or in pacing guides destroys the confidence of students and is boring. They can't remember all the words in the lists. Rather, we would do much better to introduce expressions of time, etc. in very small doses, sprinkling them lightly into our instruction throughout the year, rather than confining them to one chapter in a book, to be forgotten after the test.

## Appendix D – Responding to Colleagues

**Q.** *How does one react to a colleague who does not wish to implement a non-textbook approach, especially when you both are responsible for students who are grouped together in the same year?*

**A.** Your question about what to do when you and this colleague have grouped students at the same level is a serious one. The crux of the problem lies in the area of summative assessment. The larger answer to it is that ultimately the students and parents will decide.

This kind of thing can't be ignored in the larger community of a school. The only leg that your colleague has to stand on, the only things keeping her sinking ship still afloat, are the skewed memorization based results her students are getting on summative assessments.

Since we are allowing our kids to be tested in the henhouse guarded by the foxes, the traditional teachers will keep thinking that their kids are stacking up o.k. against ours. But the truth is otherwise.

Unfortunately, there is no way to come to terms with what your colleague is doing, so don't try. It is your colleague who now must change. Even in recent years, such colleagues could intimidate us into doing what they wanted. But they can't do that anymore. What they do has been found to be very weak in terms of student gains and student engagement. Their well is dry.

Languages are not acquired via memorization, and what our students know, planted under the ground but not yet in bloom yet, or even a sprig, cannot be measured. But at least a seed is there under the ground. In traditional grammar classes, because the students don't hear the language enough, there is no seed even there.

So is there any kind of common ground or common assessment possible, where the two of you would agree on some sort of compromise? I don't think so. The person who needs to change is not you, because you are teaching for fluency and they are not.

Wait for them, help them, encourage them, find school money for them to get to conferences, but don't try to change their thinking. In my view it is best to react to their closed minds with open heart. Your colleague is the one who must now change.

## **Appendix E – Sample Content Objectives**

We have to post objectives on the board. Below are a few sample content objectives that any teacher doing comprehensible input based instruction could post as their objective for the day.

*If the class is doing PQA to set up a story, the objective for that day could easily be:*

Students will understand spoken French.

*If the class is doing a story, the objective could be:*

Students will co-create a story in French with the instructor.

*If the class is looking at a picture (doing Look and Discuss, for example), the objective could be:*

Students will view an image and understand the French words used to describe it.

*If the class is reading (either the story generated the day before or in a chapter book,) the objective could be:*

Students will read and understand written French words.

Each of the above objectives could be accompanied by a second sentence (the teacher would choose from the seven choices to end the sentences):

Students will demonstrate comprehension by:

1. Translating
2. Hand Comprehension Checks
3. Gesturing
4. Yes/No Answers
5. Acting
6. Suggesting Answers
7. Scoring 8 of 10 points correct on the end of the class quiz.

These two sentence posted objectives are short, clear and easy to interpret by anyone observing.

Instead of writing the objective for each day on the board, I have the four objectives above already written out on four big sheets of butcher block paper. When she comes in, the student who is my **Objectives Person** asks what we are doing that day and puts up the proper objective for the day, placing it on the wall near the door so that it is visible to any administrator who may come in to observe.

If we are doing a story, for example, the Objectives Person puts up the objective that goes with creating a story.

With the Objectives Person doing her job each day, I don't have to worry about being "caught" by the administrator without having my daily objective posted. I can therefore tend to the other tasks I have to do at the beginning of my classes.

Administrators often have difficulty in grasping the simplicity of our approach to teaching a language, so the posted objectives help them understand. Of course, the sheets of paper would not be necessary if the administrator could just understand that as long as we are speaking to our students in the target language in ways that they can understand, or they are reading, we would be doing our jobs and so wouldn't have to post the objectives. Maybe someday it will be like that.

## Appendix F – Rigor

Below is a poster that some TPRS/CI teachers refer to throughout the year in their classrooms so that their students know what they should be experiencing in class. I consider it a requirement to invite this kind of self-reflection by students, because what we ask students to do in our CI classrooms is so different (occurs in an entirely different part of the brain) than what they are asked to do in their other classes:

## WHAT DOES HARD WORK LOOK LIKE IN THIS CLASS?

HARD WORK (RIGOR) is when you are actively engaged with the language, because language acquisition only happens when written and spoken messages are actually being understood.

In this class “hard work” means that ON THE INSIDE you will:

- Stay focused on the message being delivered.
- Observe what is happening.
- Listen with the intent to comprehend.
- Read with the intent to comprehend.

ON THE OUTSIDE you will:

- Respond with body language.
- Show the teacher when you do not understand.
- Respond with short answers.
- Read and show that you understand.
- Correctly answer most or all of the quiz questions given at the end of class.

When you are doing rigorous work you will FEEL:

- Confident.
- Aware of the stream of the conversation.
- Like you understand, but you may not feel as if you are learning (but you will be).
- You don't feel lost, confused, defeated or frustrated.

You will KNOW you are learning when:

- You understand what the teacher says or what you are reading.
- The language starts to fall out of your mouth in class without you having to think about it too much.
- The language comes out naturally and makes sense (even with errors).
- You notice you can write more in the language than you could before.
- You are not translating from English to the language when you speak or write.

This is the fourth most utilized poster in my classroom, behind the Classroom Rules, the Word Association Charts, and the jGR poster. It is downloadable at [benslavic.com](http://benslavic.com) (TPRS Resources) in the same color scheme as the Rules and the jGR poster.

#### Robert Harrell - Advice to an Embattled Teacher/Clarification of Rigor

I'm sorry to hear you are getting grief from your administrator about rigor. It sounds to me like he attended a meeting and received a one-size-fits-all worksheet. I think you need to educate him (nicely, of course) about what rigor is and what it looks like in a language acquisition classroom.

As I continue to talk to people – including my students – about rigor, I have expanded a bit on my definition, though the base and core remain the statements provided by the US Department of State. This week I concluded that my students needed a reminder of what the class is about, so I had some discussion with them. When I got to the section on rigor, I began by asking them to define “Academic Rigor” or tell me how they decide if a class is rigorous. Then I gave them my own definition: Academic Rigor means that an educational experience is designed to help students 1) understand knowledge and concepts that are complex or ambiguous and 2) acquire skills that can be applied in a variety of educational, career, and civic contexts throughout their lives.

Next I shared with them the four elements of rigor that the Department of State gives and one that I have added:

1. Sustained focus
2. Depth and integrity of inquiry – paying attention to what is going on until I understand it, can reproduce it, and can explain it in my own words. I clarify if I don't understand, and I contribute appropriately to the conversation or discussion.

3. Suspension of premature conclusions – I do not listen to only a few words and then think that I know what is being said. I listen to complete statements and questions and think before trying to formulate a reply.
4. Constant testing of hypotheses – I try out the language and then listen for feedback. If I used the language correctly, I will get confirmation; if I said something wrong, I should get a re-statement with correct language or other help.
5. Person Challenge – I do not take the easy way out but am always trying to improve both my understanding and my performance. I do not allow a failure to understand make me give up or be frustrated but strive to clarify and understand.

I also addressed the issue of mindset, although I didn't use the term. There are two ways of thinking:

If I think my ability or intelligence is fixed, then I will do everything I can to protect myself.

If I think I can increase my ability and intelligence through challenging myself, I will not see walls but bridges to success.

Perhaps you can have a meeting with your administrator to discuss the concept of rigor. Ask him what his definition of rigor is. If you do a search and look through various websites that discuss rigor, most are careful to distinguish rigor from simply more or harder work. The Department of State website even cites Alfie Kohn. "Academic rigor does not imply harshness or severity. In one interview, Alfie Kohn (in O'Neill & Tell, 1999) states, 'A lot of horrible practices are justified in the name of "rigor" or "challenge." People talk about "rigorous" but often what they mean is "onerous," with schools turned into fact factories. This doesn't help kids become critical, creative thinkers or lifelong learners (p. 20).'" <http://www.state.gov/m/a/os/44875.htm>

## Appendix G – Scope and Sequence Thoughts

*In various writings, including the one above, Robert Harrell has illustrated and defended the use of comprehensible input in foreign language classrooms. The CI tidal wave, however, has yet to find its defense in most district level Scope and Sequence documents, which are still largely written from textbooks. In this appendix, Robert makes a unique and refreshing argument in favor of an entirely new kind of Scope and Sequence, one based on teaching using comprehensible input:*

Many schools are placing increasing emphasis on tools such as Curricular Mapping and asking all teachers to submit lesson plans in a particular format. In many cases, teachers merely copy the Scope and Sequence contained in the textbook they currently use. The problem with simply continuing to use the Scope and Sequence provided

by textbook publishers is that these are most often simply lists of vocabulary topics and successions of grammar explanations. This sort of Scope and Sequence needs to be replaced by something that reflects theory and practice of comprehension-based instruction through comprehensible input. The following is an attempt to articulate a possible Scope and Sequence that takes into account the research and findings from such diverse sources as ACTFL, SLA, Brain-based research, Krashen, and others. At the very least, I hope it will begin a discussion of what a “program of study” ought to look like in World Languages.

First of all, the theoretical underpinnings (in no particular order):

1. If, as much research indicates, there is a natural order of acquisition, setting up an artificial grammatical sequence of presentation such as most textbooks use does not aid either acquisition or fluency. In fact, the order of presentation in a textbook often runs contrary to the order of acquisition. Examples of this are the presentation of *por/para* and *ser/estar* and their distinctions. Grammar-driven textbooks present these in early first year, yet native speakers often argue about the correct use of them in a particular situation, indicating that they are late acquired. (I’ve observed these discussions personally.)
2. Furthermore, late-acquired items seem to simply require more exposure than early-acquired items. A corollary, therefore, is that delaying exposure to any feature of the language simply delays acquisition of that feature. For example, not exposing students to past tense or direct and indirect object pronouns until year 2 or 3 simply delays acquisition of those forms. Listening to parents and caretakers who speak to children in their first language reveals that they do not shelter the grammar but use all facets of the language’s grammar and syntax long before the child is ready to produce them. What they shelter is vocabulary. Textbooks generally get this backwards as well, giving long lists of vocabulary terms to be memorized out of context while parceling out the grammatical and syntactical structures bit by bit. The conclusion is that teachers must use the whole language the whole time. This in no way even suggests that students must or should be held accountable for all aspects of grammar from the very beginning; they simply must be exposed to it.
3. Researchers (e.g. Asher, Krashen, Van Patten, Omaggio, Wong, Pink) agree that the single most important element that leads to acquisition is Comprehensible Input. Of course, that means input that is comprehensible to the student not just to the teacher. Terms such as the “Silent Period” remind us that this comprehensible and comprehended input must precede output. As Wynne Wong (Ohio State University) puts it, “a flood of Input is necessary to get a trickle of Output.” Bertie Segal observes that “Language is first of all acoustic.” (How many times do people tell us that something “just sounds right”?)
4. In addition, receptive skills precede and outpace productive skills. My observation - and it seems supported by casual research and listening to others - is that the skills develop in a natural order: listening, speaking, reading, writing. Asking students to speak and write before they have had sufficient time listening and reading is counterproductive. In addition, reading and writing are very different skills from listening and speaking and develop later, at least in first-language learners.

5. ACTFL Performance Guidelines, the California State Standards, and Second Language Acquisition Research inform us that students will spend considerable time (often multiple years) in one stage of language acquisition, acquisition does not progress linearly, each person acquires at his own pace, and an individual will not be at the same stage or level of acquisition in all areas at the same time.
6. Studies published in various professional journals such as “The Foreign Language Annals” (ACTFL), “Die Unterrichtspraxis” (AATG) and “The Language Educator” indicate that manipulation of the language before any sort of explicit grammar instruction leads to greater gains in fluency and retention of the explicit instruction. This mirrors first-language practice. Students have (hundreds of) thousands of hours hearing, seeing, and speaking (and even writing) their own language before they receive any explicit grammar instruction, yet they are able to manipulate the language correctly, efficiently and effectively.
7. Brain-based research shows that the brain craves and requires two very different experiences. On the one hand, because active memory is limited to +/- 7 items, it is necessary to automate many functions and processes as well as “chunk” them together. That requires repetition - lots of it. Think of the difference between a new driver learning to drive a manual transmission and an experienced driver who has automated the use of the clutch, gas pedal, brake and gearshift. Now attention can be spared for observing traffic, pedestrians, etc. On the other hand, meaningless repetition is soon disregarded by the brain; what sticks out is novelty. Using the analogy of vehicles again, think of how many times we get from one place to another without consciously being aware of what happened, but when something unusual occurs, we remember it.
8. Brain-based research also shows that the brain craves and requires meaning and significance. This is why people see figures in clouds or the face of Jesus on a tortilla. Language that is not meaningful (and meaning requires comprehensibility) and significant will not be acquired, though it may be put in short-term memory for a test or quiz. The brain also works from greater meaning to lesser meaning. A student will, for example, get the basic idea of (Spiel-/Jug-/Jou- = Play) much faster than “-e/-o/-e = I” because the former carries greater (and more significant) meaning.
9. Acquiring a language is different from learning in nearly all other areas (Van Patten) because it is, especially in the early stages, essentially an unconscious process (Chomsky, Krashen). While one learns history by reading about history in the native language or learns mathematics by working mathematics problems in the native language, this approach does not work for learning a language. Instead, one attends to other things (content) in the language, and the brain unconsciously (or subconsciously) maps the language. We see this in young children: they do not learn the rules of their language first; they have a message to communicate and simply speak because they have been bathed in the language. In the world language classroom, as soon as we begin to speak in English about the target language, we have ceased targeting acquisition and are now studying linguistics. Does this mean that there is no place in the foreign language classroom for explicit grammar instruction? *μή γένοιτο!* (*me genoito!* May it never be!) This explicit grammar instruction follows acquisition and is used to polish the language and help students understand the system, but only after they have sufficient experience and acquisition to see that there is a system. Perhaps an analogy with art or sports

will help with understanding this. We do not take the budding artist and teach him color theory, elements of composition, and principles of line, shape and form. Instead, we encourage him to draw, show him great artwork, and make suggestions for small changes: “Why don’t you try this?” Only later do we discuss the “system,” the theory behind the work, in order to polish the product. Even then, there are many artists who cannot articulate art theory yet produce excellent works, especially when doing so for their own enjoyment. We do not subject the promising young athlete to drill upon drill and in-depth discussions of principles of ball handling, offensive and defensive strategy, or even the complexities of the game. Let her kick the soccer ball around and get a “feel” for it. Once she is mentally and emotionally ready to play at a competitive level (club or school), then she can get the instruction that polishes the game. But if she plays simply for her own enjoyment, the technical and regulatory side of the game will remain largely meaningless for her; yet she may have excellent skills and an intuitive understanding of how to play. Learning a language is more like this than it is like memorizing dates and facts for math or history.

Now some related observations:

- A. Whether one accepts the distinction between learning and acquisition proposed by Krashen or thinks more along the lines of short-term vs long-term memory (Van Patten), the fact remains that varied repetition is necessary for retention.
- B. While most language teachers are familiar with the concept of  $i+1$  as a “formula” for language acquisition, the reality in the classroom is that what constitutes  $i+1$  is different for every student. Teachers cannot be so narrow in their focus that they fail to provide  $i+1$  for everyone. Perhaps counter-intuitively (but reflecting real life first language experience), the teacher must cast a net or web of language that is comprehensible so that students are able to catch what is right for them. That is also part of the reason why the teacher cannot shelter grammar but must use the whole language. As Hart Crane puts it, “One must be drenched in words, literally soaked in them, to have the right ones form themselves into the proper pattern at the right moment.”
- C. The time necessary for true mastery far exceeds the time available in the school setting. Malcolm Gladwell in his book “Outliers” postulates that a minimum of 10,000 hours are needed for true mastery of any given subject or activity. He shows how Bill Gates and others had access to those hours before their breakthrough moments. The Foreign Service Institute has published their beliefs about the number of hours needed for “General Professional Proficiency” in various languages. The “easiest” languages (Spanish and French) require 600 class hours at the Defense Language Institute. Exposure to the language outside the classroom (3-4 hours per day) is required at the institute but is not included in the 600 class hours. This additional time takes the exposure hours to well over 1,000 for these “easier” languages. Other important parameters to consider include: language study is all the participants do each day (they don’t have other classes); they are mature (about 40); they have shown an aptitude for learning foreign languages (have already learned at least one foreign language); they are motivated (or they don’t stay in the program); they have classes of no more than six students. Does this sound like any high school situation you know?

- D.** We need to decide what ought to be accomplished in a high school program and how much can be accomplished. Both ACTFL and the College Board indicate that the AP program is designed for students who have been exposed to the language for longer than 3.75 years; it is for students who have begun as true beginners (not heritage or native speakers) in seventh grade or earlier. (Remember that California's Standards are for Kindergarten through Grade Twelve.) But is our goal to cater only to an academic use of the language? How many of our students will make academic use of the language? Shouldn't the real goal be to give students the language they need to interact with relatives, friends, travelers, business contacts and other non-academic people? Most students want to use the language in "real life," not in a college or university classroom. Nor should we be teaching a course in linguistics (that is, teaching about the language).

### Suggested Scope and Sequence

So now that I have prefaced my submission to you with all of that, if I were free to design a Scope and Sequence based on ACTFL, Krashen, SLA, Brain-Based Research, etc., I would have something like the following:

1. **In the first year** students are introduced to oral language through interpersonal communication in the target language on topics directly related to them and their immediate environment (e.g. personal description, family, friends, and interests) with the emphasis on hearing and understanding spoken language. (90%+ target language in the classroom and out.) As their ability increases, students are given ample opportunity to produce language spontaneously and without coercion. Cultural literacy and competence are developed through embedded culture, just as grammatical and syntactical competence is developed through embedded grammar and syntax. Additionally, students "learn how to learn," i.e. the conditions and procedures that support maximum acquisition of a language. Students are exposed to written language through reading short texts based on class discussion and storytelling.
2. **In the second year** students continue with oral language development through interpersonal and interpretive communication on topics related to the students, their community (including school) and their environment with emphasis on hearing, understanding and responding to spoken language. At this level students' exposure to written language increases through reading graded readers and short, simple authentic texts. [N.B.: I think this would put most "level 1" readers at the correct level for maximum benefit.] Students are supported by techniques such as Scaffolded Literacy, Embedded Reading, Essential Sentences, and Embedded Culture, Grammar and Syntax.
3. **In the third year** students continue developing oral language through interpersonal and interpretive communication on topics related to them and their larger environment with emphasis on hearing, understanding and responding to spoken language. They begin oral presentational communication. Students continue developing literacy and improve their textual interpretive communication skills through reading increasingly complex texts (both graded readers and authentic texts). Toward the end of the year students begin to develop their written presentational skills, aided by such devices as Sentence Frames.

4. **In the fourth year** students expand their ability to communicate in all three modes of communication (Interpersonal, Interpretive, Presentational) through listening, speaking, reading and writing about themselves, their environment and the world at large in formal and informal settings. They continue developing cultural literacy and competence as well as their ability to manipulate the language through strategic use of multiple time frames and perspectives. Students also learn how to continue language acquisition in formal and informal settings both inside and outside the classroom.

Rigor and Relevance are addressed at all levels by empowering students to discuss things that relate to them, connect to real life, and are novel, engaging and involving (Relevance), and then pursue those things in depth with integrity and sustained focus (Rigor).

Responses:

Some may suggest that the above Scope and Sequence is not “challenging” enough, that the “Silent Period” is relatively short for a young teenager, and that high school students can begin responding fairly quickly to formulaic, practiced language, thus calling for the introduction of things like sentence frames at an earlier point in the sequence.

I would certainly not deny that some teens are what we know as “quick processors.” Consequently there is provision, even in year 1, for spontaneous, unforced output. For the school setting, there are multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate what they have acquired in a variety of ways. The distinction is in what is graded. In a first-year classroom, students might well perform a scene from a story they are reading. However, the purpose for the performance is as an aid to understanding rather than a grade for mastery of a standard. I simply believe that Presentational Communication - preparing a product for an audience that is unable to provide immediate feedback, negotiate meaning and ask for clarification and therefore taking into account the audience’s prior knowledge, cultural competence and linguistic ability - is not appropriately a significant component of assessment until after massive amounts of comprehensible input. Part of the divergence of opinion may lie in the definition of “presentational communication.” It isn’t a check of “can you negotiate meaning in the target language so that another person understands you?” That’s Interpersonal Communication. It is, rather, “can you construct and present a text or utterance that is fully understandable to your audience without their being able to ask for clarification or negotiate meaning with you, taking into account cultural as well verbal and non-verbal communication issues?”

As far as writing is concerned, delaying Written Presentational Communication as an emphasis does mean that students do no presentational writing. Writing is a part of both Interpersonal and Interpretive Communication, though. As practiced by many deliverers of instructional services, however, students are asked to “present” in writing before they have acquired the tools to do so. According to ACTFL, Novice writing is primarily copying, so - for example - my students begin writing dictations fairly early in the year and then correct them by copying the text and comparing the two versions.

In addition, I disagree with what seems to be the assumption behind the statement, “The Silent Period needs to be relatively short for a 14 year old.” The phrase “needs to be relatively short” implies that the teacher determines

how long the silent period lasts. Second Language Acquisition research and theory maintain, however, that the silent period is unique to each person and “needs” to last as long as necessary for that person; that’s why year one contains the opportunity for “spontaneous, uncoerced output.” If we are to believe Chomsky, Van Patten and Krashen, acquisition is accomplished unconsciously as we attend to comprehensible content in the target language. While focusing on meaning the brain subconsciously maps the language being used. It is a non-linear internal process that does not lend itself to checking off boxes but requires a much deeper relationship between “informant” (teacher in our case) and “learner” (student) for assessment. This is not to say that there is no place for “grammar instruction,” but it should certainly be toppled from its throne as the crowning glory and driving force of instruction. In addition, true “grammar instruction” is simply the use of correct language in communication. It is grammar in context rather than in isolation. One might almost say that it is grammar in 3-D as opposed to the two-dimensional grammar explanations found in most textbooks. A comparison with first-language acquisition indicates that one does not need to know grammar terms in order to speak the language correctly. Think of the many indigenous people groups whose languages have not been reduced to a writing and grammar system. (BTW, I like that term “reduced”; that’s what we are doing with a language when we systematize it according to a set of rules, we’re reducing it from the living, organic thing that it is to an inert set of learned words, morphemes and syntactical units.) The speakers of those languages have managed to learn them just fine without any sort of grammar explanation whatsoever.

Of course, some may object that many students arrive at school unable to “speak correct English” (or the “correct” version of their native language) and have to be taught the rules of grammar in order to “get it right.” We need to take a good look at what that statement truly means. Students arrive at school unable to speak the particular variety of the language that we call “Standard American English” – and that has many regional variants. It is a construct, often artificial, that certain speakers (and writers) of the language have set up as their preferred version of the language. There are certainly other standard variants of the English language, including Standard British English, Standard Australian English, Standard New Zealand English, Standard Canadian English. Would someone who speaks one of these varieties of English also be labeled as “unable to speak correct English” upon arrival at an American school? While I am not an advocate of an anything-goes position in schools, we should understand that we are teaching native speakers a particular version of their Language. It should also be noted that we teach them these rules only after they have manipulated the language – their mother tongue – for years. (See numbers 5 and 6 above.) The advantage in the foreign language classroom is that we can teach true beginners the Standard Version of the language from the beginning. The disadvantage is that there is often more than one Standard Version of the language. Do I teach Bundesrepublik German, Swiss German or Austrian German? Do I teach Castellano Spanish, Argentinian Spanish, Costa Rican Spanish, or another Standard Variant? Do I teach French as spoken in France, Quebec, or Belgium? Spanish teachers in particular often face the situation of having heritage speakers “correct” them because the variant they are teaching in class is different from the language the student hears at home. All languages are pluri-centric, and we acquire a particular variant of a language through exposure to comprehensible input, not through learning rules about the language.

Another objection may be: “sometimes some kids won’t say anything because they’re lazy. Some kids need to be pushed sometimes.”

Certainly some kids need some “nudging” to use the language. However, the truly lazy student is, in my experience, a rarity. Once you get through the veneer of uncaring that is in fact a defense mechanism, the real reasons - at least as I have observed students - generally boil down to some combination of the following:

1. The rewards offered by the school system do not motivate this student\*
2. The student does not feel safe sharing\*\*
3. The student is a slow processor of language and is intimidated by the fast processors - which then ties into #2 – or is simply prevented from speaking because of the impatience of the teacher.\*\*\*

\*As I analyze the situation, there are many facets to this issue. Experts in psychology often point to the diminishing returns of external rewards in motivation, yet the entire school system builds on external rewards in the form of grades. Some students simply do not care about grades (for whatever reason), which is a different issue from laziness, and have not developed internal motivation as it relates to school and classes. I know that I would not be motivated by any reward system that relied on coffee as an incentive. We as teachers may have a hard time understanding why a student doesn’t find grades motivating, but there are plenty of those students out there. Part of our challenge is to find what does motivate them and then help them to find sufficient pleasure in our classes that they want to stay and participate. Furthermore, these allegedly “lazy” students may be facing challenges in their lives that take precedence over our classes. If we truly believe in the reality of Maslow’s hierarchy of need, we cannot expect students to expend their energy on acquiring or learning a second language when they are dealing with where they will sleep that night, whether there will be food to eat when they get home, how they can get away from school without being bullied, or any number of other more basic issues.

\*\*The reason the student does not feel safe may have little or nothing to do with the teacher or class per se. For example, I have worked for several years with multiple students who have generalized anxiety disorders and one with significant stuttering. In dealing with both issues, it has helped for the students to come in privately and speak to me one-on-one. My stutterer regularly came in after school and sat down in his seat while I continued my paperwork; eventually he would just start talking without necessarily looking at me. It was clear, understandable, correct German; had I pushed him to speak in class, he would have been completely tongue tied and embarrassed. Speaking in front of others was not “safe” for him, so he would not do it. That had nothing to do with my class, except that it was large, which created more anxiety.

\*\*\*Setting aside the issue of “safety,” the question of impatience on the part of the teacher is significant, in my opinion. As speakers of the target language (often native speakers), teachers process the language quickly. Often we forget how long it can take a learner to do the same thing. First, the brain must separate the flow of sound into recognizable bits. Then it must decode those bits. Then it must make sure the overall message has been understood. Then it must check to see if there is an appropriate response to the message. Then it must formulate that response. Then it must produce the response, which will often involve using muscles of the throat, tongue, and face (e.g. jaw and lips) in ways that are not “natural.” Concern for correctness will delay the response even more as the brain checks the formulated response against known “rules” of the language and the position of all elements of the vocal

mechanism for correct placement. All of this takes far longer than we realize, and teachers often move on while the student is still decoding the message or searching for a response. Thus, the watchword for teachers must be SLOW. A study I read noted that the average adult speaks his or her native language at the rate of about 180 words a minute. The average child of 10 understands his or her native language at the rate of about 120 words a minute. The rate of understanding decreases the younger you go. So, a native speaker who is a child misses at least one third of what adults say. How much slower and repetitive must the language be for a learner?

I certainly don't believe I have all the answers or have definitively answered anything at all. I do hope that this helps promote conversation that will ultimately benefit our students.

## Appendix H – Teaching Culture

The “Five C’s” – the national standards – of ACTFL are:

1. Communications
2. Cultures
3. Connections
4. Comparisons
5. Communities

It is suggested to WL teachers in the United States by ACTFL that we address all five of these. This is ridiculous. We can't even remember what they are. We focus primarily on teaching to the communication standard because, now that we are beginning to fully understand what teaching a foreign language even means, we realize how much time and how many repetitions are needed to make communication happen in the real way in our classrooms. How can we address the other C's when we don't even have enough time to address the first and most important one properly?

If we did a survey, we would probably find out that *not a single teacher* in the country addresses all five C's, so what's the point? The two big cop outs by traditional teachers in their misinterpretation of ACTFL's messages are connected to the areas of writing and culture:

1. Traditional teachers don't grasp that writing can't happen successfully until huge amounts of auditory and reading input have occurred first, at the very least hundreds (really many thousands) of hours. They cleverly choose to teach grammar via writing by claiming that it addresses the writing skill. But grammar

is not about writing; it is about speaking properly. Grammar is first and foremost properly spoken language, not properly written language.

Teachers stay with grammar on paper (worksheets, etc.) to avoid having to reach inside themselves and change everything they ever knew about teaching a language. They were rewarded for their grammar skills in high school and college but are only effective in reaching those same kinds of students in their own classrooms. This means that they only really reach a very small percentage, about two students, in each of their classrooms (which is why we call those students and their teachers four percenters).

2. Teachers who only focus on teaching to the culture standard turn their classes into social studies classes conducted in English. Who has the time to teach both communication and culture in a standard program? It can't be done. Besides, the door to a country's culture is the language. The need to address culture expressed by ACTFL, however, gives these teachers a dodge. They can turn their language classes into part or even full time social studies classes. Students who make little flags of foreign countries and do other output oriented projects are not doing much to address the critical need in the world right now that people have to communicate in the target language. ACTFL has done everyone in the profession a disservice by presenting the five C's in the way they have. It reflects lobbying by book companies and it allows teachers to get away with doing whatever they choose in their classrooms, since the broadly stated five Cs allow them to do that. It is worth noting that some states have modified the five Cs to reflect the importance of communication, notably Minnesota.

So what do we do about teaching culture in our comprehension-based classrooms? Is there a place for it?

Absolutely there is. In our comprehension-based classrooms we can teach plenty of culture with songs, artwork, etc. that the students can relate to, but in the target language. In that way we address the first two C's together at one time. This means that we place the focus of our instruction on our students' understanding of the chunks of sound in the song, or of the terms necessary to be able to have a conversation in the target language about a painting, or work with a recipe (upper levels) or any other aspect of the culture being studied.

In the case of a song, the song should be extremely simple and we should not even play the song until we have first circled the word chunks in it extensively and done significant preparatory discussion around the song's key structures. So that is one way to teach culture. In the case of artwork, we can just use Look and Discuss.

It is accurate to say that in teaching culture, however, there is too much to circle. That is why I limit my own teaching of culture in my comprehension-based classroom to simple poetry and songs as well as paintings. Songs, of course, are the most riveting with students and always will be. *As long as we make sure that they can understand the song* before listening to it, the song becomes just another vehicle for addressing language in our comprehension-based classroom. How to do this in detail is described in *PQA in a Wink!*

## **Appendix I – ADMINISTRATOR CHECKLIST FOR OBSERVING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM**

### **TARGET LANGUAGE USE**

The teacher speaks in the target language (TL):

- ☐ Less than 50% of the time
- ☐ 50%-75% of the time
- ☐ 75%-90% of the time
- ☐ 90%+ of the time Students cannot acquire spoken language if they do not hear it.

(Over 90% target language use is recommended in the 2011 ACTFL position statement. Not using the TL in a language class is like a math teacher chatting about sports most of the time.)

The teacher checks for comprehension frequently:

- ☐ by asking individual students
- ☐ by carefully observing all students in class
- ☐ by listening for responses from the whole class
- ☐ by asking for translation occasionally Students cannot acquire language if they do not understand what the teacher is saying.

(The teacher must speak in the TL and it must be comprehensible to the students.)

The teacher offers opportunities for sophisticated language use:

- ☐ by embellishing the basic statements that students make

- ☐ by asking a variety of questions in a variety of formats and levels
- ☐ by inviting students to create with the language rather than simply a) repeating b) responding mainly with formulas c) memorizing dialogues Students should be expected to think and perform at high levels—even in beginning courses

(Memorization is the LOWEST level of thinking in Bloom's Taxonomy. We need to encourage students to analyze, evaluate and design at all course levels.)

## **FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS**

The teacher raises the level of student attention:

- ☐ by involving students in the narration
- ☐ by allowing student input to direct portions of the lesson
- ☐ by talking to individual students
- ☐ by talking about specific students
- ☐ the students are actively engaged in the lesson
- ☐ by gesturing
- ☐ by acting
- ☐ by responding to questions

The students are held accountable for the lesson:

- ☐ by speaking the target language when asked
- ☐ by helping each other
- ☐ by retelling material in their own words
- ☐ by translation, when asked
- ☐ by unannounced quizzes

The teacher promotes grammatical accuracy:

- ☐ by briefly explaining the meaning of unfamiliar or new items
- ☐ by using the unfamiliar or new items multiple times & in different contexts
- ☐ by asking students to predict correct grammatical usage
- ☐ by requiring increased accuracy as students progress

The teacher demonstrates appropriate correction techniques:

- ☐ by modeling accuracy: Rewarding the student's attempts while acknowledging the content of the student's statement

The teacher promotes higher-level thinking skills:

- ☐ by asking students to synthesize the language in a story retell
- ☐ by asking students to create imaginative situations

The teacher tailors the tasks to individual student ability:

- ☐ by asking many types and levels of questions
- ☐ by requiring simple one word answers to questions from beginning students
- ☐ by requiring longer, more detailed, and more accurate narration from the most able students

## **CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES**

There seems to be a routine to begin the class:

- ☐ teacher greets students as they arrive
- ☐ students arrive on time
- ☐ students are on task
- ☐ students are prepared
- ☐ students are working when class starts

The teacher models proactive classroom management:

- ☐ by showing genuine interest in the students
- ☐ by remaining calm and in control
- ☐ by taking the time to listen to student suggestions
- ☐ by using body language to control student behavior non-verbally
- ☐ by using facial expressions that are appropriate to the situation (smiling, not angry, etc.)

Adapted by Ben Slavic from Bryce Hedstrom. Original by Susan Gross. Used by permission.

## Final Notes

Many of the ideas and strategies in this book are of my own invention; some were invented by others. But lots of the powerful strategies that will grace language classrooms of this new century have yet to be invented. There are as many and more potential strategies as there are teachers. Do not think that the CI is limited to the strategies in this book. It is the nature of this work to be free and new each day.

The skills mentioned are, of course, the key. The skills like Circling and Staying in Bounds are highly refined and powerful tools that allow us to communicate at an effective level with our students. The same is true for the Classroom Management tools and the Bail Out Moves and the Assessment Tools.

The core intent of everything in this book is always the same - to help us get better at communicating in the TL with students, but how that is done cannot and should not become rigid. Keep the core there but invent new forms for it. That's what makes it fun and keeps it connected to our own personalities!

Break through the mental barricade. Do not allow the strategies in this book to limit your own invention of new ones. There are so many ways to communicate with children in another language, as long as our hearts are open. One teacher frequently uses props, another rarely if at all. One loves to use technology and should use it as long as the CI is there, but it is the nature of this work that a teacher who never uses technology can be just as effective as one who does.

Everything in this book was born of a great need to find a way to teach that made me and my students happy. Teaching a language using comprehensible input can do that. It can bring everyone in a classroom closer to their hearts, blending mind and heart into a state of professional balance that cannot be found when one studies the language merely on the intellectual one dimensional robotic level of mind.

It is not easy to rebalance oneself. It takes a long time. But I'm glad I did it. Happiness in one's job is not always easy to gain. One must work hard. In my case it took twenty-four agonizing one dimensional years to finally be pushed into this more balanced approach, and then thirteen more years and counting to refine it. It is my prayer that younger teachers who have just begun their work in teaching don't need twenty-four years to begin the change! Why? Because the change is here now. People who teach in the old way aren't getting jobs, and who wants to teach that way anyway?

Now that you have worked with all of the strategies above, you are ready to do full stories if you haven't started them already. The sample story below provides a template that describes how a story can unfold. The reader is also invited to go to YouTube and search Ben Slavic for lengthy sample stories in video form. It is hoped that the story below and the YouTube videos will help you follow your way through the story construction process and give you confidence.

## Sample Story

In this story, a TPRS session lasting over two hours emerged from a single expression in a class of motivated adult beginners in French at Arapahoe Community College in Denver.

The story was based on Blaine Ray's *Mini-stories and Extended Readings for Look, I Can Talk More!* However, any scripted story will do. Most story scripts provide three locations (no need to finish all three!) with a problem needing to be solved in the first, a failed attempt to solve it in the second, and a resolution of the problem in the third.

In this class I was working from Chapter Two, *La Fille Sociable*, Lesson 1 mini-story on page 35 of the *Mini-stories and Extended Readings* text. With this solid framework in front of me, all I had to do was read the story quickly before class and then change it depending on what the class came up with in response to my questions.

The scripted story was like the canvas on which my students and I painted our own story, with informational and factual changes only. Note that this is not necessarily the “right” way to do a story, as there are as many ways of telling a story as there are teachers. Some stories generate a wave of their own and are quickly unrecognizable. They become highly personalized and bizarre, and are often truly outstanding.

It is suggested, however, that for the novice it is best to stay close to a scripted story. This permits maximum practice with the skills in a secure and steady text which is within arm's reach of the instructor throughout the creation of the story.

A few minutes before class, I chose to read only the first of the three paragraphs of the story to myself. There was no need to memorize the story as I was planning on referring to it throughout the class anyway. Here is what I read:

There is a girl who lives in Kahalui, Maui. She smiles a lot. She smiles every day. She smiles

at a Chinese cat, but the cat does not smile at her. The cat throws a rat at the girl. The girl cries for 20 days and 38 seconds.

I determined that my students already knew “there is” and “lives in” but not “smiles.” So on the board I wrote the word “smiled” in French, since I wanted to ask this story in the past tense. Thus, I established meaning:

*a souri* – smiled

I had no intention of teaching any other structures at that time. This one word was enough for me at that point. If I needed more structures, I knew where to find them. Besides, by the end of the class I will have added a lot of new words, but all within the context of the story and *all fully comprehensible* to the student.

I explained that *a* means “has” and that *souri* means “smiled.” Then I explained that the present tense version of that structure, which we would need later when doing the readings, is *sourit*. I also explained how the word came from the French word *sous*, which means “under,” and *rire*, which means “to laugh,” so that a smile is really an “under-laugh.”

In less than two minutes I had established the meaning of *a souri*. I did not overexplain the structure. Most of my students have no desire to become French teachers, and they didn’t want to hear any more explanations. They wanted to hear some French. So I moved on to PQA.

I always do the PQA part of class in the present tense, because PQA usually involves real time. When things move into the past tense later, the similarity in sound between *a souri* and *sourit* causes no problems in comprehension.

When I begin PQA with my students, they know that I am going to be talking about them for a while now, and I use *sourit* – smiles – in a variety of ways *with them as the center of the discussion*. I have no preconceived ideas here:

Elizabeth is smiling, class! (Ohh!) Yes, she is smiling. Is she smiling? Yes, she is smiling. Is Elizabeth smiling or is Simon smiling? Elizabeth is smiling. Is Simon smiling? No, Simon is not smiling. (Simon frowns as he gets into the act) Is Robert smiling? No, class, Robert is not smiling. Elizabeth is smiling. Class, who is smiling? That’s right class, Elizabeth is smiling.

All I did to start PQA was to say “Elizabeth is smiling” and circle it. When I said that Simon was not smiling, since the idea of “not” was new to this particular class, I wrote it on the board and pointed to it. Since this was PQA and not a story, I wrote in the present tense:

*ne sourit pas* – does not smile

and I explained that *ne* and *pas* around the verb mean “not.”

I then continued with PQA by making statements *and circling them* about everyone in the room. I decided to have all the women in the class smile and all the males not smile.

Then I decided it was time to extend the PQA. I did so by simply pointing to an imaginary dog in front of the class, writing the “dog” on the board because it was new:

*chien* – dog

and I asked if the dog was smiling. I pulled a plastic chicken out of my backpack and asked if it was smiling. I circled that. I found a rubber duck in my backpack. I pulled that out and asked if it was smiling. It was not. Then I asked if the imaginary dog in front of the room was smiling. Each new word – dog, chicken, duck, and cat – was written on the board at the time it occurred, with its translation. Those students who felt the need to write things

down were able to do so. Normally I would not add in new words as described earlier in this text, but in this case I allowed it.

The entire PQA and extended PQA process in this case lasted about 45 minutes, and I could have just continued on extending the PQA as long as it was working because my students were learning French and enjoying themselves.

I decided, however, to extend the PQA on into a story. I just felt like it. One of the great strengths of TPRS is that it gives the teacher the ability to respond to intuition. The teacher learns to monitor and choose a flow of the class that is best for everyone. No one class resembles another. There is no prescribed schedule of learning to bore the class. This natural flow is, in fact, exactly how people learn languages.

So far in the process I have just really enjoyed interacting with my students in a lighthearted way. We have determined that all the women and a dog and a cat in the room are smiling and that all the men plus a chicken and a duck are not smiling. The students have heard the word *sourit* many times in the present tense.

The person who was counting the structure with the baseball pitch counter told me at the end of the PQA that I had at that point 245 repetitions of some form of the word “smiled.” I thanked my PQA counter and told her she didn’t need to keep counting, since the PQA counters don’t count reps during the actual story to follow the PQA.

I was glad that I didn’t have a second expression to teach, which would have taken a lot more PQA time. In this class I had two hours and was half way through the class at the end of the PQA. In another situation I may have wanted three or four hours on PQA – it all depends on the situation. For me, it was now time to start the story. In fact, because of the banter around the word “smiles” the PQA was extended seamlessly into the image of the smiling dog and then on into the story as described below.

I glanced at the scripted story on page 35. I read that the girl in Kahalui, Maui smiles a lot and that she smiles every day. This material morphed into my story in the following way:

Remembering to change verb tenses into the past for the story (PQA is usually in the present; the story is always in the past), I started to circle the first sentence while remaining alert and open to what the class started suggesting here:

Class, there was a girl. Was there a girl?

The class said “yes” except for Staci. I looked at Staci and she suggested that there was a dog instead. I went with that. Staci was very happy when I told her how intelligent she was and that I accepted her suggestion, asking for a round of applause for Staci’s idea.

Class, there was a dog. Was there a dog?

Simon suggested that this was not true, that there was a chicken. But since this was my story, and I had accepted Staci's suggestion, I said to Simon that this was my story, and we all had a laugh and I went on circling:

Class, there was a dog. Was there a dog? Yes, class, there was a dog. Was there a dog or a girl?

That's correct, class, there was a dog. Was there a girl? No, class, that is absurd. There was not a girl. There was a dog.

Class, was there a cat? No, class, there was not a cat, there was a girl.

Class, what was there? That's right, there was a dog.

The possibilities here are endless in circling, and the teacher must be careful to circle the right amount of information. This is dictated by the individual story as it develops.

Once the statement was circled to a reasonable extent, I referred back to Blaine's text. The next information was:

*qui vit à Kahalui, à Maui* – who lives in Kahalui, Maui

so I asked the class where the dog lived. *Notice how already our story was taking on facts generated by our own class but staying within the framework of the original scripted story.* Thus, the story was becoming personalized:

Class, where did the dog live? No, Simon, the dog did not live in Seattle. That is absurd! Where did the dog live? That's right, Robert! You are very intelligent! The dog lived in Rabbit Hatch, Kentucky! It is obvious! How intelligent you are, Robert! Class, applaud five times! Class, did the dog live in Seattle or in Rabbit Hatch, Kentucky? That's correct, the dog lived in Rabbit Hatch, Kentucky. Did the dog live in Seattle? No, the dog did not live in Seattle. The dog lived in Rabbit Hatch, Kentucky. Class, did the dog live in Taiwan? No, class, the dog did not live in Taiwan. The dog lived in Rabbit Hatch, Kentucky. Class, who lived in Rabbit Hatch, Kentucky? That's right, the dog lived in Rabbit Hatch, Kentucky. Class, did the dog or a cat live in Rabbit Hatch? Correct, the dog lived in Rabbit Hatch. Did a cat live in Rabbit Hatch? No, class, that is absurd. A cat didn't live in Rabbit Hatch. A dog lived in Rabbit Hatch.

Now, having circled that, I glanced at my original scripted story again to see the next sentence:

*Elle sourit beaucoup* – She smiles a lot

So I wrote on the board:

*beaucoup* – a lot

and I asked the class if the dog in front of the class smiled a lot. The answer was “yes.” So I circled that:

Class, did the dog smile a lot? Yes, he smiled a lot. Did he smile a lot or little?

Since “little” was a new word, I wrote it on the board with its translation:

*peu* – a little bit

When I explained that *peu* means “a little bit,” my mind went to how *peu* is easily confused with *petit* in French. I love to explain the differences between adverbs and adjectives in French. It’s what I did for 24 years, but I especially did *not* say: “*Peu* is an adverb. It differs from the word *petit* which is an adjective and means little in the sense of small or short.”

I congratulated myself for remembering that grammar should be taught based on spoken meaning, not on grammatical terms, and that I did not use any grammatical terms. I did not even bring up the fact that it might be confused with *petit*. It was difficult but I did it.

When teachers use such grammar terms they are being cavalier. Most kids don’t have a clue what they mean, nor do they even care to understand them. They fake all that.

The teachers often blame previous teachers in English for this bored response, or even the students themselves. It would be a healthy thing, however, if those grammar-oriented teachers asked themselves an honest question: “Is grammar really as easy to acquire as some teachers assume if the learner has never heard the language?” If students really want to learn it they can learn it later, after they learn the language.

Next I returned to circling that last sentence, since I didn’t want to stray too far from the story script, which would take me out of bounds:

That’s right, class, he smiled a lot. Did he smile little? No, class, he did not smile little,

he smiled a lot. Class, who smiled a lot? That’s right, the dog smiled a lot.

I did not ask where or when or why or any other question words at this point because I felt that the students understood the concept and it was time to move on. I was careful not to “over-circle” the story, and my barometer, Gene, was doing well with everything.

Now at that point in the story I had been pointing to an imaginary dog in front of the class. The students knew that the dog smiled a lot. That invisible dog had become my actor, and my friend. So I did not need an actor because I had one in the invisible world. It was clear to everyone that there was a dog in front of the class because I had been pointing to it for at least five minutes.

In most stories, I need a physical actor. I call up the actor, and the story continues with my moving the actor around to three locations, etc. But in this case I felt comfortable with the imaginary dog and I went on. I could have easily brought up an actor to be the dog, of course. There are no rules in this work. But since I had a focus for the story in the minds of all the students and we were having fun with it, that was all that was necessary. I glanced at the next sentence in the scripted story and saw:

*Elle sourit tous les jours* – She smiles every day

I knew that *tous les jours* was a new expression so I wrote it on the board with its translation:

*tous les jours* – every day

So Blaine’s story continued to morph into my own:

Class, did the dog smile a lot every day?

Elizabeth excitedly said yes to that and, just for fun and because I knew that Elizabeth could stand the rejection and to keep the students focused and sharp, I said:

No, Elizabeth, that is absurd! The dog did not smile a lot every day!

At this point I began to circle all three parts of the sentence. But I did so only to the extent that the class needed it. Once I knew that the class was comfortable with the expression, there was no need to circle it “into the ground” as just stated, and I moved on.

It occurred to me at that point that the expression *tous les jours* was a good opportunity to reinforce the days of the week. So:

Class, did the dog smile a lot on Monday? No, Jacqueline, that is absurd! The dog did not smile a lot on Monday! How ridiculous! What, Robert? You are saying that the dog smiled a lot on Tuesday? How ridiculous! Class, it’s obvious!... (pause to let the tension build)....The dog smiled a lot on *Wednesday*! (Ohh!)

At this point I had circled the first three sentences of the scripted story in front of me. My students and I had established our own details for the story so far. Instead of a girl who lives in Kahalui, Maui who smiles a lot every day, we had created a story about a dog who lived in Rabbit Hatch, Kentucky who smiled a lot on Wednesday.

At this point it was time to recycle the story. It is amazing how a lot of circling can be compressed into less than a minute of recycling. The students showed me via hand comprehension checks while I looked at their eyes that the comprehensible input of the recycled story was near 100%. I knew then that I had recycled well and gone slowly enough.

Before continuing on with the story, I felt it was a good time to add some detail to the description of the dog using the Portrait Physique skill (described in *TPRS in a Year!*). This was important for many reasons. Details lend interest and humor to the story. My circling goal now was to create a freaky-looking creature with one *grossly exaggerated* physical characteristic.

So via the magic of the Portrait Physique, the dog in front of the classroom became not just any dog, but a red plastic dog with an extremely thin body whose large square head had in it two small round green eyes. Although it took a lot of circling and writing of new words on the board to establish such details, it was worth it because the class now had ownership in “their” dog and the image becomes increasingly comical with each new detail.

Now with that strange looking dog in the room distracting me, I had lost track of where I was, as has, perhaps, the reader of this text. All I had to do was glance at the next sentence of the original scripted story:

*Elle sourit à un chat chinois* – She smiles at a Chinese cat

Continuing on while resisting the temptation to create an even funnier-looking dog (no time), I asked myself if there was anything here that my students didn’t know. The answer was “Chinese” but I decided to forgo the teaching and circling of nationalities at that point in favor of moving the story forward and making it more personal. I did that because I knew that personalization would be one of the major keys to the success of my story. What I had so far was not personal enough.

I decided to personalize the story by having the weird-looking dog stare at Elizabeth. I wrote on the board:

*a dévisagé* – stared at

I explained the relationship between *dévisager* and *visage*, which we had just used in our description of the dog. I added that this expression was used in a French film called *Rue des Cases Nègres* (*Sugarcane Alley*) thus adding in some cultural information about Martinique in a kind of cultural pop-up. The phrase from the film was “*On ne dévisage pas les grandes personnes!*” and I wrote it on the board because I thought they could understand it.

Then I circled the subject:

Class, the dog was staring at Elizabeth! (Ohh!) Was the dog staring at Elizabeth or was *a cat* staring at Elizabeth? That’s right, class, *the dog* was staring at Elizabeth. Was *a cat* staring at Elizabeth? No, class, that is absurd, *a cat* was not staring at Elizabeth. *A dog* was staring at Elizabeth. Was *an elephant* staring at Elizabeth? No, class, *an elephant* was not staring at Elizabeth. *A dog* was staring at Elizabeth. Class, *who* was staring at Elizabeth? Yes, *the dog* was staring at Elizabeth.

Then it was time to circle the verb:

Class, was the dog *staring* at Elizabeth or was the dog *dancing* with Elizabeth? etc.

Then the object:

Was the dog staring at *Elizabeth* or was the dog staring at *Bill Clinton*? etc.

Now Elizabeth was personally involved in this story to a great degree. She was “into” the story. With each sentence, her name was mentioned.

Remember that this story was being built “brick by brick” or “idea by idea” from page 35 of Blaine’s story. There was no need to be afraid of losing track of the story, as can occur without a scripted text in front of you. Nor was there a need to worry about creating a story that was not personalized enough – there was plenty of room to do so from the original.

This feeling of safety gave me a measure of confidence. The story flowed more easily, ironically, because of the structure the scripted story provided. The next words in the story were:

*mais le chat ne sourit pas* – but the cat does not smile

I asked Elizabeth if she smiled at the dog. She said no. So I circled that, focusing on how absurd it would be if Elizabeth actually were to smile at the dog.

By now the dog was not only staring, but also smiling at Elizabeth. What a combination! A large square-headed red plastic dog with a very thin body was in my classroom staring and smiling at Elizabeth through small round green eyes! How bizarre! I was able to really communicate to the class my belief in the truth of this image by histrionically focusing on its actual existence in the room.

Note also that at this point a student in the room had become *the* focus of the story. Realizing that personalizing the story is the key to success in building a story, I brought another student into the story. The next sentence of the scripted story was:

*Le chat lance un rat sur la fille* – The cat throws a rat at the girl.

I took the plastic chicken from my backpack and said:

Class, Simon took a chicken.

I waited for the obligatory reaction – *Ohhh!* Simon was quite excited that the story was now turning to him. But I didn’t give him the chicken yet. I had to reinforce the previously taught verb first. So I wrote on the board:

*prend* – takes

*a pris* – took

And then I asked the class, as a review:

Class, how did we remember that *prend* means “takes”?

The class reminded me that in an earlier class we had agreed that *prend* sounds like “prong” in English, so that when we heard the sound “prong” we imagined little “prongs” coming out from the ends of our fingers, “taking” something.

I continued personalizing. I handed the chicken to Simon, being careful to synchronize Simon’s action of taking the chicken from me with my saying of the word *prend*.

Next, I automatically went back to circling, starting with the subject:

Class, *Simon* took the chicken. Did *Simon* take the chicken or did *Elizabeth* take the chicken? Correct, *Simon* took the chicken. Did *Elizabeth* take the chicken? No, class, *Elizabeth* didn’t take the chicken. *Simon* took the chicken. Did *Gene* take the chicken? No, class, *Gene* did not take the chicken. *Simon* took the chicken. *Who* took the chicken? Yes, *Simon* took the chicken.

Notice the barometer check at the three-in-one point of the above circling. Had Gene not been on board with that sentence about him, I would have had to go back and reteach the material until he was on board.

Then, circling the verb:

Class, did Simon *take* the chicken or did Simon *eat* the chicken? That’s correct, class, Simon *took* the chicken. Did Simon *eat* the chicken? No, that is stupid, class, Simon didn’t *eat* the chicken; he *took* the chicken. Did Simon *hide* the chicken? I only used words that I knew the class already knew from previous classes.

At that point I was again in doubt about where I was in the story, so I just glanced back at Blaine’s story. The sentence currently being worked on was:

*Le chat lance un rat sur la fille* – The cat throws a rat at the girl.

I got back on track with:

Class, Simon threw the chicken at the dog!

At this point I saw a golden opportunity for dialogue. I played the role of the dog since it was a new class, but a student could easily have done it:

Dog (said with anger in French): What is *that*?

Simon: (with anger): *That* is a chicken!

Dog: *Plastic* or *rubber*?

Since rubber was a new word, I wrote it on the board and explained it:

Simon: *Plastic*!

I knew at this point that extending that particular dialogue would cause unnecessary confusion. Instead, with the energy from the class very high, I asked for the same conversation but had the dog (me) speak with fear, because the same sentence said using different emotions drives its meaning deeper.

Then I divided the class into two parts and we chanted the first two lines in mock anger. It was fun. The creation of spontaneous and humorous dialogues is easy as long as the instructor is open to the right moments for them. It's all to drive the meaning deeper into the students' minds.

I returned to:

Class, Simon threw the chicken at the dog!

And after that was sufficiently circled, the next glance at the scripted story showed me that:

The girl cries for 20 days and 38 seconds.

This circling:

Class, how long did the dog cry? Did the dog cry for one week? (I wrote *une semaine* – *one week* on the board because it was new) No, class, the dog did not cry for one week. The dog cried for seventeen weeks. Did the dog cry for one week or for seventeen weeks? The dog cried for seventeen weeks. Did the dog cry for one week? No, class, the dog did not cry for one week. He cried for seventeen weeks. Did the dog cry for ten weeks? No, class, the dog did not cry for ten weeks. He cried for seventeen weeks. Who cried for seventeen weeks? That's right, class, the dog cried for seventeen weeks. We ended up with:

The dog cried for 17 weeks, 5 days, 30 minutes, and 7 seconds.

After circling that last sentence, it was time to bring the new story to closure via a complete re-tell, which took less than a minute with some very fast French at well over 90% comprehension by everybody, except the barometer, who came in at 70%, just fine with me.

Looking at the two stories, here is what we ended up with:

*There is a girl who lives in Kahalui, Maui. She smiles a lot. She smiles every day. She smiles at a Chinese cat, but the cat does not smile at her. The cat throws a rat at the girl. The girl cries for 20 days and 38 seconds.*

*There was a girl who lived in Rabbit Hatch, Kentucky. She smiled a lot. She smiled a lot on Wednesday! A dog was staring and smiling at Elizabeth. Simon threw a chicken at the dog. The dog cried for 17 weeks, 5 days, 30 minutes, and 7 seconds.*

In this particular class, six sentences had provided a two-hour PQA/story session. There was no effort to leave the basic framework of the scripted story, thus guaranteeing the success of the reading class that was to follow this class.

Two of the three steps of TPRS were followed. The story began with establishing meaning for one single word and then moved into a highly repetitive period of personalized questions and answers about who was or was not smiling. Then the PQA was extended into a little imaginary scene involving a smiling dog. After that a lengthy and highly personalized story was created “brick by brick” from glances at the scripted story.

Many of the skills involved in creating a good story were used, yet I felt under no compulsion to use all of them or even think of them during class. Even if they hadn’t come up, the class still would have been a lot of fun because we were doing interesting and personalized comprehensible input.

I circled all the time, rarely using words that the students didn’t know into the conversation (except in the examples above), thus staying in-bounds. I constantly pointed to almost every word I used if it was in view on the walls. I was in constant eye contact with all students, especially the barometer student.

I went slowly with massive repetitions. Due to the fact that the dog was so real to me, it became real to them, which generated frequent emotional reactions from all of us. I avoided the trap of trying to tell the story and instead asked it. Thanks to so much circling, I got some great answers to my circled questions. Circling assures high levels of student input, because it guarantees that they understand.

Other, more freewheeling TPRS teachers may disagree, but I personally felt that I was able to *ask* the story instead of *telling* it largely due to the aforementioned sense of safety and security provided by the original scripted text. I knew that if I became confused all I had to do was glance at it – I would find my story somewhere in it and, in fact, this happened many times. By staying close to the scripted story, I could thus fly into fantasy, knowing I had a rock – the next sentence - to land on whenever I needed it.

Though this way of working with a story works for me, it may not work for others. TPRS contains such an ocean

of potentialities within it that new things are always coming to the attention of the teacher, and over the years an individual style develops.

Knowing that unexpected twists and details can really liven up a story, I was open to any information provided to me during the circling process. I knew that such twists and details occur primarily as a result of circling. All I had to do was listen for interesting information in response to my questions. For example, a basic twist occurred when I started to circle the first sentence:

Class, there was a girl. Was there a girl? (yes)

and everybody said yes except for Staci, who shyly suggested that there was a dog, I went with that. The class had a little trouble with it but I told them it was my story and off we went with our dog. I was open to what was suggested here in circling. My decision to use the dog was intuitive. It turned out to be a good choice.

In this story there were about five recyclings, which required all together a total of no more than three minutes. There were four or five grammar pop-ups and even a culture pop-up. When Simon wanted to throw the chicken at the dog I made him wait until I synchronized his actions with my words. We had a good chant and good dialogue in the chicken scene. When I had approved of Elizabeth's suggestion at the beginning of the story that there was a dog, and Simon wanted a chicken, I lovingly but authoritatively told him that this was my story.

In only their second French class, these adults were able to understand and enjoy two hours of French in a relaxed environment filled with humor and good will. When they experienced Blaine's extended readings in their next (third) class, it was easy for them to read the story. With very little effort and without a dictionary, they enjoyed continuing on with their study of French via the supremely important third step of the TPRS method, reading.

Did a story spin out of the reading? In this class, yes! Even though it was "only" a reading class, we did more than read – we chose to make up a story that ended up being very similar to the original, though much shorter. However, on another day, we might have just read the text without any discussion, only translation.

One year, I was so enamored of the process of telling stories that I did very little reading with my students. I wish now that I had done more readings from stories with them. It was like I sent them out of the classroom at the end of the year with only one glove on.

The goal for that class had been met. It is the same goal that we have in all of our CI classes - to do the same thing we do in all our TPRS classes - *have fun with stories and reading in the target language*. Our goal is not to cover materials. It was to have fun!



## About the Author

Ben Slavic is a teacher of French in Denver, CO. He has taught for over thirty-five years at the middle and high school levels, including Advanced Placement French Language and Literature, as well as at the university level. He has twice been recognized by the U.S. Department of State as a Fulbright Teacher Exchange ambassador in addition to being recognized as a South Carolina finalist for the prestigious Rockefeller Award. Ben's students consistently have won state and national awards in competitions testing listening and reading skills.

On one occasion, one of Ben's students, a ninth grader with no previous background in French except as an eighth grade TPRS student, passed the Advanced Placement Exam in French language with a score of 4, which according to the College Board means that the candidate is "highly qualified" in French. That score, according to Ben, is a "direct result of the vision, hard work, and leadership of Blaine Ray, Susan Gross, Diana Noonan, Carol Gaab, Jason Fritze and the other pioneers of TPRS who are radically changing the *concrete outcomes* for language learners everywhere. I have been waiting for something like TPRS to come along for most of my professional life. *Finally*, a new era in foreign language education has arrived!"

Ben lives in Littleton, Colorado with his wife Holly and their four children, Evan, Landen, Luca, and Jett and their Australian Shepherd, Elsie, who kept guard while Ben was writing this book.

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