

# The ABCs of The Total Physical Response<sup>\*</sup>

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## **Preface**

Through the years, as I successfully applied the content of James J Asher's now classic book *Learning Another Language Through Actions* with my high school and college students, I discovered innovations that accelerated student involvement and excitement. I am pleased to share my experience with you in the second edition of *Total Physical Response in First Year Spanish*. Your colleagues will enjoy my new books: *Total Physical Response in First Year French* and *Total Physical Response in First Year English*. For a solid understanding of the stress-free Total Physical Response approach to second language learning, I recommend that you start by reading *Learning Another Language Through Actions* by the originator of TPR, Dr James J Asher. Then follow-up with a fine book by Ramiro Garcia entitled *Instructor's Notebook: How To Apply TPR For Best Results*.

## **Introduction**

Use the lessons in my book as a dramatic script in which you are the director of the play and your students are the actors. The important difference between your production and a Broadway play is that you are the only one who has read the script.

You will be uttering directions in the target language and acting with the students for the first part of the lesson so that they instantly understand the meaning of what you are saying. I will guide you step by step in how to do this.

Later in Act 2 of the play, students will be ready to reverse roles with you and utter directions in the target language to produce actions from you and other students in the class. As you move from lesson to lesson, I will cue you when it is time for role reversal. You will be amazed with the ease that your students understand what you are saying in the target language. This is a heady experience for instructors and often

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<sup>\*</sup>Note from Dr James J Asher, originator of TPR: If you are new to TPR, I think you will especially enjoy this excerpt from Dr. Cabello's book

encourages an ambitious attempt to race ahead. Resist the temptation! Relax. Take your time. Enjoy the experience along with your students.

Remember Ramiro Garcia's advice: introduce only three lexical items at a time. Do not proceed with new items until your students are responding with confidence to the previous set of three.

### **About Exhibits**

In the first act of the play, students should not see any of the directions you are uttering in the target language. As you make a smooth transition from lesson to lesson, I will cue you when to show students the directions in print.

### **Props**

You will need a variety of props for certain lessons. I have listed at the beginning of each lesson the props you will need to have on hand that day.

### **Reviewing**

It is always a good idea to start every class with a review of the previous lesson as a warm up before introducing new material.

### **After listening comprehension, then what?**

As you move step by step through my book, you will be delighted that your students understand everything you are saying in the target language. You will be surprised that they are internalizing the target language rapidly *in chunks* rather than word-by-word.

As understanding of the spoken language expands and expands, your students will be able to read without being aware that they are reading. The magic of TPR is that when the target language is internalized through body movements, students not only comprehend what you are saying but they comprehend what they see in print. This positive transfer from listening comprehension to reading is a huge saving in instructional time. Throughout my book, I guide your students into a smooth transition from listening fluency to reading without awareness.

Yes, this transfer from understanding the spoken words to reading works for languages that have a good phonetic fit – that is, the language appears in print just like it sounds in speech such as, for example, Spanish or French. But, it also works for languages without a phonetic fit as when English speakers acquire Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Hebrew or Arabic. (For a complete discussion of this intriguing issue of

transfer, please see the *Most Often Asked Questions* chapter in Asher's *Learning Another Language Through Actions*.)

The secret of "reading without awareness" is not to mention that the students are reading. They glide into "reading" by seeing messages in print and understanding what it says. For example, I use another "trick" I learned from Ramiro Garcia's book: ask each student to reach into a hat, select a strip of paper on which I have written ten commands in the target language. My directions are: "Look at the paper and do what it says to do." I do not mention the word "reading." There is no such thing as "reading." They are only looking at symbols on paper and doing what it says to do.

### **How about speaking?**

After about ten to twenty hours of understanding the target language through physical movements, students spontaneously begin to speak in the new language. Speaking cannot be forced, but will appear naturally as a playful activity. And when speaking appears, it will not be perfect. There will be many errors. But if we are as tolerant of student errors as we are of infants acquiring their first language, gradually speech will shape itself in the direction of the native speaker.

Throughout my book, I will help your students shape their speaking skills with role reversals, scenarios in which students play different parts, and skits that students create, stage, and act out.

### **How about writing?**

As your students evolve from lesson to lesson, they will be writing without knowing that they are writing. In other words, we do not announce that, "Now you will be writing!" because this triggers resistance from the left brain which whispers sabotaging messages to the student such as, "Oh, oh, this is something new! This will probably be difficult. You don't know how to write in this strange language. You will have trouble with this!" (For a more sophisticated understanding of the right and left brain, read James J Asher's book, *Brainswitching: Learning on the Right Side of the Brain* and *The Super School: Teaching on the Right Side of the Brain*.)

### **Testing Listening Comprehension**

Here's how testing works so that the experience not only demonstrates comprehension, but is enjoyable for both the students and the instructor: I put several versions of each quiz on a strip of paper which I place in a hat. Then three or four students come into the room and each gets to reach in the hat for a slip of paper. Students enjoy having some control over the testing process.

Each student hands their strip of paper to me. I then read the commands and record the accuracy of each student's performance. I note on paper any mistakes that have been made and grade it with points decided in advance. This saves time because the quiz is graded immediately before the student leaves the room. Another powerful advantage of this procedure is that each student gets immediate feedback. You will be surprised how few mistakes are made.

### **Testing Reading Comprehension**

As you probably guessed, the testing procedure for reading is the same as I use for listening comprehension. That is, three or four students come into the room, select a strip of paper from the hat, look at what is written and follow each direction on the paper. I will be noting errors, if any, on the strip of paper.

### **Testing the entire class as a group**

Realizing that many teachers have limited time for testing, I provide in my book, exams designed for administration to the entire class as a single group.

### **Your students are on their way to fluency, now what?**

You have enjoyed a successful experience with your students using Total Physical Response in the First Year. How do you follow that act? I have discovered an exciting way that my students can continue to develop the three skills of speaking, reading, and writing which is Blaine Ray's student books, *Look, I Can Talk!* for high school, college and adults, and Todd McKay's *TPR Storytelling* for students in elementary and middle school.

As you work with classic TPR, you will discover that your students have instant understanding of everything you are saying in the target language. As a result, students of all ages experience remarkable self-confidence as revealed in comments such as: "I can do this! I was afraid that I would not understand, but I get it! I am actually enjoying this language class!"

Once your students have internalized a batch of vocabulary and grammar in the target language with TPR, those items can be used to tell them a very short story. Follow up by coaching them to try telling the story to a classmate. Gestures are used to prompt the student step by step. As one young instructor told me recently on the telephone, "I was an average teacher, but these techniques of TPR followed by storytelling made me an outstanding instructor because my students are achieving fluency – not just ten percent of the class who will achieve no matter what the instructional strategy is – but 95% percent. It is extraordinary."