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EDDN 673
Mini-Lesson
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Total Physical Response (TPR) in ML instruction: Method Analysis and Reflective Practice

LINK TO VIDEO:  TPR Mini-Lesson.mov

A. Method Analysis

Method Background

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language teaching method developed by psychologist James Asher in the 1960s. This method is grounded in the idea that language acquisition can be facilitated through the connection to physical movement. This notion is similar to the way in which children learn their first language. Through this approach, Asher emphasized the importance of students first developing listening comprehension followed by productive skills such as reading and writing.

TPR is based on several key principles. First, it highlights the significance of allowing learners to build understanding without the anxiety associated with immediate verbal output. Second, it connects to kinesthetic learning which helps make language more memorable. As noted by Colorín Colorado, “when students use a hand or body gesture to symbolize a key term, they often learn the terms more quickly and retain them for longer” (Colorín Colorado, 2023). Third, it prioritizes a low-anxiety learning environment, where students feel comfortable taking risks. This notion closely aligns with Krashen’s Input Hypothesis, particularly the concept of comprehensible input and the “affective filter,” which includes factors such as motivation, anxiety, and stress. When this filter is lowered, students are better able to absorb and engage with new language.

Critical Evaluation: Strengths and Weaknesses

TPR offers several strengths, particularly for multilingual learners (MLs). One of its greatest advantages is its accessibility. By connecting language with physical actions, students can begin to understand meaning even if they do not entirely understand spoken words. Additionally, TPR increases student participation through movement. Students who typically have anxiety participating in verbal discussions may appreciate the use of TPR as it reduces affective barriers. Students are not immediately required to speak, as this strategy helps them build confidence gradually.

Although there are several benefits of implementing TPR, there are some limitations. For instance, TPR is effective for teaching concrete vocabulary and commands, however, it becomes more difficult to implement for more complex language structures. In addition to this, overreliance on TPR may limit opportunities for extended language production if it is not paired with other content based and instructional strategies. As a fourth-grade general education/ENL teacher, it is important to ensure that activities remain meaningful while also maintaining rigorous, age-appropriate expectations for language development.

Practical Application

Despite its limitations, TPR remains highly useful in ENL contexts, particularly as a foundational or supplementary strategy. It is most effective in early stages of language acquisition, especially during vocabulary introduction and when teaching phonemic patterns. This is seen especially in phonics lessons where students physically act out words to reinforce sound-symbol connections. For older grades, TPR can also be integrated into literacy instruction to support comprehension.

TPR can be considered well-suited for diverse learning populations because it supports multiple learning modalities. This is primarily because there are visual, auditory, and kinesthetic components when implementing this strategy. It also provides equitable access to content by allowing students to demonstrate understanding through actions rather than relying solely on spoken word. For students with varying levels of English proficiency, TPR offers a shared entry point into the lesson, making it an inclusive and culturally responsive approach.

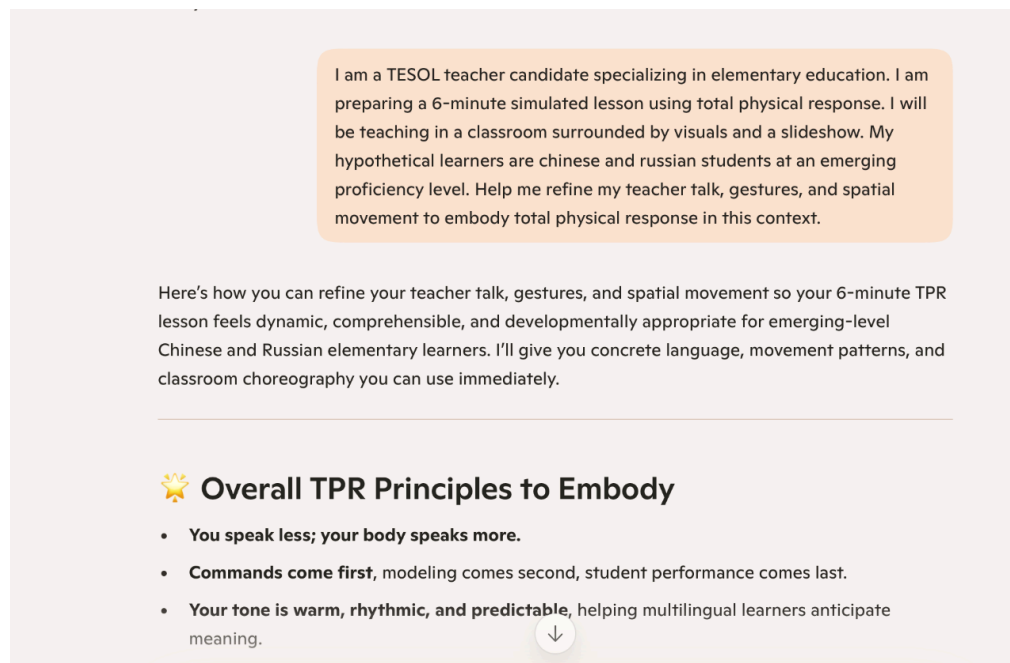
The mini-lesson on the digraph /ch/ demonstrates how TPR can be effectively applied in a fourth-grade classroom. In my fourth grade classroom, I teach Orton-Gillingham phonic instruction in a small group with my entering/emerging MLs. The lesson begins with a “Simon Says” activity, where students respond to commands such as “chop,” “cheer,” and “chase.” This introduction allows students to hear and physically engage with the target sound in a meaningful context. The use of movement helps reinforce phonemic awareness while maintaining high levels of engagement.

Following this, students participate in blending activities, where they decode words such as *chat*, *chop*, *much*, and *rich*. These activities build on the initial TPR experience by connecting sound to print. While doing so we tap parts of our arms to blend. Finally, students engage in a partner charades activity, where they act out and identify /ch/ words, then categorize them based on whether they contain the target sound. This progression, from movement to decoding to application, reflects a thoughtful integration of TPR within a broader literacy framework.

The materials used in this lesson, including index cards, visuals, sentence frames, and slideshow, were intentionally selected to support MLs. These tools provide scaffolding that enables students to participate actively while developing both language and literacy skills.

B. Copilot Co-Creation Reflection

The process of using Copilot to refine my teaching script was helpful and reflective. Initially, I began with the given prompt regarding ideas for refining teacher talk, gestures, and spatial movement in relation to the TPR approach. After looking through the ideas the co-pilot generated, I decided to launch my lesson by doing a TPR-based “Simon Says” activity focused on the /ch/ sound. Through multiple exchanges with Copilot, I expanded this idea into a more structured and purposeful lesson. Copilot suggested a variety of action-based commands and helped organize them into a sequence that aligned with TPR principles. This iterative process allowed me to move from a general activity to a clearly defined instructional routine.



I am a TESOL teacher candidate specializing in elementary education. I am preparing a 6-minute simulated lesson using total physical response. I will be teaching in a classroom surrounded by visuals and a slideshow. My hypothetical learners are chinese and russian students at an emerging proficiency level. Help me refine my teacher talk, gestures, and spatial movement to embody total physical response in this context.

Here's how you can refine your teacher talk, gestures, and spatial movement so your 6-minute TPR lesson feels dynamic, comprehensible, and developmentally appropriate for emerging-level Chinese and Russian elementary learners. I'll give you concrete language, movement patterns, and classroom choreography you can use immediately.

🌟 **Overall TPR Principles to Embody**

- **You speak less; your body speaks more.**
- **Commands come first**, modeling comes second, student performance comes last.
- **Your tone is warm, rhythmic, and predictable**, helping multilingual learners anticipate meaning.

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One key insight I gained from this experience is the importance of intentional teacher language. As I refined my script, I became more aware of how my wording supports comprehension for MLs. Given the native languages of my MLs, co-pilot was able to provide me with tailored tips to ensure my phrasing, repetition, and language was clear. For instance, my Chinese speaking students largely benefit from clear syllable segmentation while my Russian native speakers would benefit from clear modeling of the articles. This is something I will continue to apply in my professional teaching practice, particularly when working with students at varying levels of language proficiency and of different native languages.

Tips for Chinese & Russian Emerging Learners

Chinese learners

- Benefit from clear syllable segmentation.
- Respond well to rhythmic repetition.
- Visuals help bridge tonal differences.

Russian learners

- Benefit from strong stress patterns in English.
- Appreciate clear modeling of articles (“a,” “the”), even if they don’t produce them yet.
- Need extra support with English word order—TPR helps by pairing order with movement.

For both groups

- Keep commands concrete.
- Avoid idioms.
- Use consistent gestures.
- Provide lots of wait time.

At the same time, I exercised professional judgment in adapting Copilot’s suggestions. For instance, some initial ideas were either too simplistic or not developmentally appropriate for fourth-grade students. For instance, the co-pilot suggested I solely stick to short two to three word sentences. I modified these suggestions to ensure they were engaging while still maintaining academic rigor. Additionally, I prioritized activities that connected to literacy goals, such as blending and word sorting, rather than focusing solely on movement. In some cases, I rejected suggestions that did not align with my instructional goals or the needs of my students. For example, I avoided overloading the lesson with too many unfamiliar vocabulary words, as this could overwhelm MLs. Instead, I selected a smaller set of high-utility words that students could meaningfully practice and apply.

Teacher Talk: Clear, Rhythmic, and Repetitive

Below is a model of how your teacher talk can sound—simple, slow, and paired with gestures.

1. Use short, imperative sentences

- “Stand up.”
- “Sit down.”
- “Jump.”
- “Turn around.”
- “Touch your head.”

2. Add supportive cues

- Say the command.
- Pause.
- Show the action.
- Repeat the command while doing it.

3. Use consistent intonation

- Slightly rising tone for the command.
- Slow pacing.

Overall, the co-creation process with Copilot was valuable in helping me refine my instructional approach. It encouraged me to think critically about lesson structure, teacher language, and student engagement. More importantly, it reinforced the importance of balancing technology-generated ideas with professional experience. As an educator, I see Copilot as a tool that can support planning and reflection, but not replace the professional expertise required to meet the unique needs of my students.

References:

Colorín Colorado. (n.d.). *Total physical response*. [Total Physical Response](#)

Microsoft Copilot. (2025). TPR Approach For Lesson [AI-generated instructional material]. Generated for [Evangelia Diakoumakos], [3/20/26].