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English as a Second Language  
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Sabbatical Report

### **Abstract**

I became certified through TPRS University semester-length 201, 301, and 401 course offerings. I created training modules with lesson planning handouts and hundreds of engagement and acquisition techniques in a Canvas course offered to GC ESL faculty and embedded tutors. I studied Spanish through traditional-grammar and German and Russian through TPRS every week of my sabbatical. I continue acquiring Russian in a TPRS course. I became familiar with the professional research for and against. Our ESBS dean, embedded tutors, and new faculty have taken TPRS 101 and one faculty even attended the National TPRS Conference. Level 1 course offerings have grown dramatically in enrollment.

### **What Was Accomplished**

Realizing TPRS (Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling) practices in our program and in my own classroom has been my aspiration since I discovered TPRS through the written work of Dr. Bill VanPatten while reading his most recently published work, *While We Are On the Topic*, during a period of customary andragogic woodshedding following the Fall 2018 semester. I habitually return to the published work and the podcasts of Dr. VanPatten when I feel dissatisfied with my approach and require rejuvenation along with confirmation of what I am doing right. While I was unsuccessful in gaining the attention or support of the then-ESBS dean in supporting TPRS training for level 1 colleagues at the end of Spring 2019 as our department was transitioning to a post-AB 705 program, our department experienced one of our proudest moments in hosting the researcher with two of the most-cited research papers in our field and over 180 peer-reviewed publications and 40 books. Dr. VanPatten was our PD speaker for our Spring 2020 FLEX department workshop and delivered an all-campus lecture demystifying folkloric practices in language education in Griffin Gate attended by developmental English course leaders along with several campus stakeholders, the ESBS dean at that time, and the college president at that time. The meta-research expert on TPRS is Dr. Karen Lichtman, whom we invited to lead a workshop for our faculty in 2021. Three FT faculty who attended the 2019

national ACTFL joined workshops and presentations led by Dr. Lichtman and Dr. VanPatten in Washington, D.C., while two of us enjoyed several informal after-hours meetings with Dr. VanPatten to ask any question our hearts desired after the formal ACTFL sessions ended. Dr. Lichtman is a close colleague of Dr. VanPatten and someone who will be conducting and publishing applied linguistics research for many years to come. We continue to use her embedded reading materials technique as modeled live and recorded for PD posterity in our department across all levels to this day.

To gain a grip on the professional research undergirding TPRS, I read numerous dissertations and published research, eventually finding my way to the Baker 2017 meta-study, which neatly summarized much of what I had already read and nicely prevented me from pursuing dead-ends. (N.B. Several of the negative theses and dissertations I slogged through featured poorly designed research constructs that should not have been signed off by tenured postgraduate committees.) Most of the published research indicates this theme: faculty must receive on-going training and support in TPRS practices, ideally for five years or more, to sustain and grow. Without this on-going professional development in TPRS (and Comprehensible Input) applications, many teachers abandon their emerging practice and retreat to traditional-grammar practices that are unsupported by both professional research and ACTFL, and often implicitly or even overtly forced upon them by department chairs or programs. A second theme is the frequent overt or implicit obstruction fomented by traditional-grammar faculty in high schools and colleges. Some of them even walk out of TPRS 101 training after the first hour because its underlying applied linguistics approach upends the folkloric practices that shape their professional identity and pride. One “bio dissertation” in particular was interesting. The author had been teaching world languages for a period of over 40 years and had come to feel that TPRS was the pinnacle of her professional life. She narrated the boredom and discouragement that so many world languages students feel when they are seated in teacher-fronted

transmission classrooms where disembodied (and inaccurate) andragogical “grammar rules” are explicitly lectured, drilled, and inequitably tested after an all-too-short duration for high stakes grading points in a unilateral scheme that disempowers and discourages novice and intermediate learners. Who wants to have the declarative knowledge of (linguistically inaccurate) “rules” when they cannot (procedurally) communicate comfortably or accurately in the target language?

During this period of lit review, I also read a study contrasting outcomes between Dr. VanPatten’s lauded but little-used Processing Instruction with TPRS for written and spoken fluency and accuracy. I created a Canvas module detailing the method of PI, shared this with our chair and FT colleagues, and embedded this module in the larger CI TPRS Canvas course I offered to colleagues in 2024. This is an ongoing project with more to add, but for now there are many useful lesson planning handouts, techniques from 201, 301, and 401 shared, weekly online discussions, and the optimistic aim of developing a community of practice with non-evaluative cohort observations and weekly debriefings once paid professional development can be offered to all interested. We’ll have to seek a grant opportunity similar to the one that allowed the CoP for English and ESL in Spring 2019, but with a gathering perhaps of World Languages, ASL, and ESL faculty and tutors.

### **Implications for Individual**

During the sabbatical and after I repeatedly felt a need to let my full-time colleagues in our department know how humbling the experience of acquiring a new language as an adult with many household and extended family responsibilities can feel. I took a traditional-grammar Spanish course through SDCL, a TPRS German course with an intermediate TPRS teacher,

and a TPRS Russian course with a more advanced TPRS practitioner. Despite the slow pacing and numerous repetitions of the TPRS courses, I often felt the sense of inadequacy our own students who work part-time and raise children surely feel when they attend class tired or hungry or distracted by socioeconomic challenges. Additionally, the TPRS 201, 301, and 401 courses I completed often featured demos and interactive sessions in Chinese, Japanese, German, Spanish, and other languages that require several repetitions of meaningful language before a student can be expected to produce communicative output without anxiety in front of a class of several students and an instructor.

In trainings, we emphasize to new level 1 and 2 faculty the importance of slowing down to achieve universal describe the situation status in our classrooms. Every student who is processing must be able to describe the situation before we move on. Nothing ingrained this more in my working consciousness than experiencing Russian as a total novice. We also emphasize teaching to the students and their eyes rather than “covering” a one-size-fits-few curriculum designed without specific students in mind. My Russian teacher tailored lessons to my interests, sent me weekly Textivate practice quizzes, and recorded Vocaroo lessons for my leisure time. Her outreach, in turn, helped me take up these supportive practices for my own students. In fact, just this past Thursday, I recorded a reading of our latest story live in front of my students and emailed it right away to them so they can listen while in waiting rooms or on their air pods walking around campus.

My research led me to the work of Dr. John Medina in neuroscience and to the Storytelling Teaching of Dr. Kiernan Egan, among many others theretofore unknown figures in pedagogy. I now include brain breaks and more sensory integration in classes structured in ten-minute segments as often as possible.

In short, in TPRS German and traditional-grammar Spanish I experienced the feelings of inadequacy that rushed, pressured students feel when we do not ensure mastery before moving another rung up the ladder. While dropping these courses due to overwhelming frustration would hold little of consequence for me, I gathered a deeper awareness of what a recent Afghan refugee driving nights for Door Dash and raising seven kids might well feel when pressured to produce before ready or to move on in a language classroom in total unfamiliar educational ecology that insists upon accredited course completion for social recognition.

I am a member of the 2024 TPRS 2.0 Book Club led by founders Blaine Ray and Von Ray. I am also a member of the Textivate cohort led by Craig Sheehy, Director of Training for TPRS.

I have written and piloted numerous original lessons through ten modalities, often featuring East County landmarks, with level 1 students to our collective satisfaction.

I continue to study Russian through an online community of TPRS practitioners every Thursday night. While Farsi/Dari was my initial goal, I was offered the opportunity to take Russian and German at no cost through the TPRS 201/301 community in Fall 2023 and, with my promised ESBS and department funding support considerably delayed (until December 2023, it turned out) and its amount considerably altered from the original pledge, I decided to accelerate my TPRS certifications into two semesters rather than three and take the opportunity of the free courses. GC English faculty joined me in one TPRS Russian class to experience first-hand the method. Farsi/Dari would have cost \$22+ per hour out of pocket and was a challenge to find. Russian is an equally formidable language with few ambient opportunities for communicatively embedded input in San Diego County.

## Contribution to Educational Goals of the District

Our department has seen its largest enrollment growth by far in our level 1 offerings. This is mostly due to the efforts of Aly Gorokhova from Fall 2019 until now. During the first year of her tenure track, Aly took “The Green Bible” (by the TPRS founder, Blaine Ray) from me as a suggestion for a pathway of interest, read it over the weekend, and then began to research CI and TPRS prosocial communities throughout the world. Due to her leadership, level 1 course enrollment expanded dramatically over a short period of time. We now have seventeen cohorts of students attending 078/078R courses on campus and with non-credit students throughout East County. Cuyamaca College ESL more or less wholesale adopted our level 1 objectives for their own ESL 045 courses after observing our level 1 courses and conferring.

For Spring 2024, I led a FLEX TPRS workshop for department members teaching level 1 courses and for our embedded tutors supporting their students. One of these instructors then ended up attending National TPRS Conference this summer and returned full of enthusiasm to lead her own FLEX presentation for our department at the outset of Fall 2024.

Our ESL Lead Tutor attended formal TPRS 101 training and was certified in January 2024. She led a session in TPRS Arabic that saw rave reviews from long-time certified Master TPRS trainers. She in turn was able to model techniques and train our new L1 Dari/Pashto embedded tutor who is serving two cohorts this Fall 2024.

Dr. Stephen Fomeche, interim ESBS Dean, attended TPRS 101 training at no-cost thanks to my arrangement with Craig Sheehy, Director of TPRS Training, in January 2024.

Three other new level 1 faculty have attended TPRS 101 training and are leading level 1 cohorts on campus this semester.

I've been able to share ten different ways to teach one lesson through the many modalities of dramatic narrative co-construction I learned and practiced in 401. I've also shared databases of MovieTalk lessons and graded e-book libraries with faculty for their students' free use.

I will now continue with my role supporting our level 1 leader and fellow faculty by offering earned perspectives, access to training materials and e-books, and supportive clarification.

While our hope is always that new level 1 students of the refugee and emigrant communities coming from Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria, Haiti, Kurdistan, Iraq, Mexico, and other conflict areas is always that each student realize their highest personal and prosocial goals by transferring to university and completing a degree, we readily acknowledge that family and work burdens often require students to interrupt their educational pathways prematurely. We feel that by acquiring the most frequent communicative structures in English through hundreds of stress-free and fun repetitions in a connected, meaningful narrative during each Ask A Story with supplemental readings, our level 1 students will at least temporarily depart their academic pathway with the confidence to communicate effectively in their residential community, with their colleagues and clients at work, and with the K-12 teachers serving their striving children.