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FROM NOVICE LOW TO ADVANCED HIGH: FIVE DECADES OF  
PARADIGMATIC SHIFTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

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FROM NOVICE LOW TO ADVANCED HIGH: FIVE DECADES OF  
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This Doctoral Dissertation is dedicated to my daughter and best friend, Staci, without whom I would never have returned to Graduate School.

To my husband, Bob, whose understanding and patience carried me through.

And to my special friend, Janet, whose encouragement never let me be down.

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## **Abstract**

For me, the search for the optimal method to promote students' oral communication skills began more than fifty years ago. This autobiographical dissertation discusses the research base for various theories about teaching foreign language and elucidates my personal experiences with these theories as a student, high school teacher, mother, and university professor. The optimal method to teach communication combines the best of the Audio-Lingual Method, The Grammar-Translation, Individualized Instruction, the Direct and Natural Methods and Total Physical Response. Total Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling leads the methods in developing students' speaking ability. This dissertation seeks to elevate teaching beyond methods and techniques. The effective foreign language teacher develops a rapport and relationship with the student for true communication. The teacher infects her students with her passion and commitment to second language learning.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Autobiographical Dissertation – Evolution of Methods toward Communication**

#### **Present**

“He who dares to teach must never cease to learn.”

Anonymous

In 2010, I presented an academic paper at the Oklahoma Foreign Language Teachers Association (OFLTA) conference on using Total Physical Response Storytelling (TPRS) in beginning-college-level classes. I was surprised by the reception I received. I expected few educators to attend the presentation because I thought it would be of limited interest to most teachers, but the classroom where I spoke was filled to overflowing. After the presentation, several teachers came up to discuss my findings and to comment on their experience with TPRS, the newer Storytelling method I had presented. I was taken aback when a few younger teachers stayed around to comment on how impressed they were that an older/veteran teacher would still be interested and enthusiastic about teaching a new method. This startling comment made me think about the foreign language methods I had taught, my experiences as a teacher, and what had led me to this point in my educational career. My teaching goal for the last fifty years had been communication. Adding Total Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling, TPRS, to the best of the other methods I had previously taught, broadened my educational effectiveness to reach toward the optimal of method of teaching my students to communicate orally.



The previous semester, one of my education professors had suggested that I use the dissertation as a vehicle for capturing a lifetime of experiences as a teacher of foreign language. I had scoffed at her suggestion (privately of course) initially because I was not sure that my experiences had anything to offer. To be honest, capturing the essence of my experiences and attaching meaning to them seemed like a daunting task. After all, I was not completely sure what they meant, even to me. Could a message and a purpose for writing an autobiography be found from the frustrations and joys, disappointments and successes, naiveté and insights that constituted my many years of teaching foreign language?

The comments made after the presentation by younger teachers forced me to reevaluate. Maybe my memories of studying and teaching Spanish and French could help me put into perspective and better understand this educational journey I had taken. This re-experiencing project could be of value to new and future foreign language teachers who encounter obstacles and joys similar to those I worked through, sometimes successfully and sometimes not. I hope the transferability of my experience will resonate with new as well as experienced teachers through the concept of transferability. Veteran teachers could be encouraged to try new methods and expand their understanding of how young people learn in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Other teachers could learn from my mistakes and triumphs.

By writing this autobiographical dissertation, I hope that veteran teachers will be energized to try new teaching methods, to look with renewed interest at our diverse student population and to find ways to relate to their students. In my

experience, burnout occurs when teachers try to stay entrenched in outdated and unrealistic teaching methods that are no longer effective. They sit in the teachers' lounge complaining about how students are changing. Nothing stays the same except the grave, so instead of just putting in the time until retirement, teachers might consider making their teaching stimulating, creative and enriching. The students and the teacher will both profit from renewed enthusiasm and energy. That is what TPRS teaching did for me. It energized me. If an older, grey-haired teacher could adopt a new method, other experienced teachers may be inspired to launch a new rocket and take an exhilarating ride. As a teacher, I never want to stop learning. I delight in the evolving image in the mirror, older--but hopefully more knowledgeable and wiser--and it revitalizes me.

I present this autobiography as a dialogue that I want to have with new teachers and veteran teachers. Dimitriadis & Kamberelis (2006) explain their interpretation of Bakhtin's dialogism, "When someone speaks or writes, her words are not simply streaming forth from within herself as sole author and source. Rather, her discourse, like her identity, is essentially a coalescence of the many voices and languages that constitute her as a subject. Every subject is made up of multiple voices, past and present" (p. 51). I think the concept of multiple voices is especially true of foreign language teachers who speak and relate to each other and their students through multiple languages and cultures.

### **Background for Autobiographical Writing in Research**

I discovered a recent autobiographical dissertation written by Daniel Vincent (2006), from the University of Oklahoma, that reflects his career as a young science teacher; his work both supported and encouraged me to delve into this world of self-discovery and agency. It was difficult for me to conceive how autobiography would fit in the standard format for a research dissertation, but after perusing Vincent's story of only seven formative teaching years, I hoped, and fantasized, that an exploration of fifty years of learning and teaching and real life experiences could be a worthwhile pursuit. Vincent's abstract spoke to my own experience as a teacher and as an individual when he wrote, "By telling his story, the author/researcher was able to use his transformed notions of how people learn to construct personal meaning about his own education foundation and pedagogical perspectives, and in turn, give others a story within which they might find their own personal meaning" (p. v). I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of my past and present teacher experiences through telling my story, and I also hoped to enlighten other teachers as they search for effective teaching methods comparing the old to the new.

For example, Stuart (1949) describes his experiences as a teacher, principal and superintendent. His perspective on the value of the teaching profession did not change even after he left teaching for financial reasons. "I learned by experience that teaching is the greatest profession there is, and that the classroom can be made one of the most exciting places on earth for young, middle-aged, and older people to improve them-selves for more useful and richer living" (p. 5). Additionally, Conroy (1972) recounts his first year of teaching on an impoverished island off the South

Carolina coast and his ultimate dismissal. Conroy felt he had to describe his experiences autobiographically in order to make sense of his teaching, “I had to write this book to explain what happened and how it affected me... And eventually I gained a distance and could look back at the people and places of the past year, frozen in event and memory, calcified and motionless in a grand chronology that began and ended in the month of September” (p. 254).

Similarly, Ramsey (2004) chooses autobiography to make sense of her teaching experiences. She revisits her white privilege and her role as an educator during her journey toward multiculturalism, explaining: “My autobiography tells the story of the places I have been and describes the language, routines, habits, perception, thoughts, attitudes, and unconscious actions that have shaped and changed my understandings about multiculturalism,” (p. 46). Mali (2012) also relates many teaching experiences in autobiographical form. After writing his famous poem, “What Teachers Make,” Mali includes anecdotes, in his book of the same title, about his teaching and advice for present and future teachers. In the epilogue, Mali sums up his intentions for telling these previously lived teacher/student stories, “Whatever small contribution I might have made in the writing of the poem, “What Teachers Make,” whether through persuading bright college graduates to consider teaching or simply by reminding veteran teachers why they chose to walk this noble path in the first place, I am well aware that it’s only a drop in the bucket,” (p. 195). I hope this autobiographical dissertation adds another drop to the bucket.

For thousands of years, storytelling has been an important part of remembering and situating the past. The Epic Poems of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* gave way to depictions of wars, battles and the heroes who won them. Poems gave way to prose and oral histories to written descriptions, and exaggeration to facts. Historical writing became an important focus and biographers began to write the life stories of the great emperors of the time, like Alexander the Great of Macedonia. Historians linked wars, events and biographers to create a calendar and create a clear focus of Roman history (Breisach, 1994). The recording of life stories of important people situated a history for a developing pre Christian world. Boyatzis (1998) centers the collection of autobiographical data to the hunting and gathering tribes, “Telling stories about one’s past experiences and events was a method of communicating emotions, transmitting cultural values, and creating a history” (p. 67).

The concept of telling one’s life story has been around for a long time, with one of the earliest recognized examples being St. Augustine’s *Confessions*, c. A.D. 400, “and the term [autobiography] itself was not invented until the nineteenth century, but over the past four hundred years they have become highly popular forms of self-expression (McCullough, 2004, p. 119). Autobiographies have become popular as people today are curious about the lives of famous people, but also the lives of the common people. McCullough (2004) explains, “The attraction of the autobiography is that it offers an opportunity to look back over one’s life and the lessons that it holds...it is essentially an inside account of the progress made during a

lifetime, and the pitfalls encountered, mistakes made and opportunities taken and missed along the way” (p. 119).

### **In My Workspace**

In this dissertation, I explore my journey of learning and teaching Spanish through high school, college and my sabbatical from teaching years, twenty years out in the “real” world. After twenty years, I returned to teaching high school Spanish. After “retiring,” I revisited my college Alma Mater for a Master’s degree in Spanish Literature and to seek a Ph.D. in Foreign Language Education.

Now, writing this dissertation, I sit in my study surrounded by Hispanic novels, textbooks and souvenirs I have gathered from my travels to many Spanish-speaking countries. My bookshelves reflect the trend and focus of textbooks, reference books, loose-leaf notebooks of class notes and spiral lesson plan notebooks I have utilized and saved from over the last fifty-plus years of learning and teaching foreign language. I value, remember and laugh at my notes from my undergraduate Spanish and Education classes at the University. I reflect on my lesson plans from the late sixties and early seventies. I thumb through my texts and novels from my Masters’ Degree, beginning in 2007, on Spanish Literature, pondering the incredible amount of information and insight I’ve gained from my textbooks and novels. I peruse notebooks from doctoral studies begun in 2009 on educational issues, current perspectives and educational theorists. I rely on the historical and current literature about the study of foreign language through University library books, textbooks,

conference proceedings, and multiple foreign language journals. Most of all, I'm blown away by the tremendous amount of information and educational research available to students and educators in 2013, a far cry from the research available in 1960.

This rich and overwhelming collection makes my task of writing an autobiographical dissertation daunting as I attempt with some trepidation, to recollect the wealth of knowledge and experiences these materials have brought into my life. Sitting at the desk in my study, I reflect on my children's pictures that mirror their growing up. The Frida Kahlo skull statue and the silk calla lilies, from the outdoor market, remind me of the graduate conversation course I took in 2000 in Puebla, Mexico. The Don Quixote and Sancho Panza plaster figures from central Spain remind me of the conversation I had with the owner of a small shop who told me about her son's recent graduation when they played the theme song from "Man of La Mancha," which we both loved. The Indian design wall hanging makes me recall the remote rural village where I bought the woven textile, hanging on the façade of a small Catholic church in Ecuador. Ecuador holds a frightening meaning as well, because after buying the weaving, the next morning, my husband and I were awakened at 2:00am by an urgent phone call telling us to pack our bags and be ready to leave for the airport in thirty minutes. Our tour guide was afraid the airport would soon be closed because of a military coup that was planning to take over the government that morning.

Glancing above at my bookshelves, the two extensive tomes of Spanish literature remind me of extensive undergraduate hours spent painstakingly translating difficult passages with my worn English/Spanish dictionary. Next to the survey of Spanish literature books, The *Paso a Paso* textbook reminds me of the ubiquitous and ever present traditional-grammar textbook that tends to survive in the Spanish classroom, despite the changing demands of methodology. My favorite textbook, *Galeria de Arte y Vida*, an advanced textbook with a wealth of famous Spanish art and literature, still delights me with its timely appeal to students that presents Spanish language in a meaningful, realistic, contextual manner. Stacks of Spanish novels I have read by Garcia-Marquez, Fuentes, Lorca, Unamuno, Marti, Galdós, Cervantes, etc., try to seduce me to peruse them again. The converted closet holds my education texts and novels that I long to review, along with the graduate class education notebooks filled with enticing and provocative ideas for new and developing teacher strategies. There is never enough time to spend on reading. But the framed diplomas for Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts on my desk remind me that I'd better stop daydreaming and write this dissertation in hopes of securing the next level of diploma.

### **Dissertation Emphasis**

My research question is, “What have I learned about teaching Spanish over the course of my career? In this autobiographical dissertation, I discuss the teaching methods I used, the foreign language methods popular at the time, and reflect upon the effectiveness of these approaches. The purpose is to create a background



understanding of where foreign language was situated in the general curriculum in the last fifty years. I investigate the fluctuating goals of foreign language education and how they fit within an expanding and interconnected world. I compare the popular goals of educators and theorists of the period to my actual experience.

Furthermore, I discuss the influence of different methodologies for teaching foreign language, from the early Greek and Roman Grammar-Translation method until the present day focus on communication expressed by the *Standards of Foreign Language Learning* (1996, 1999, 2012), established by ACTFL (American Council of the Teachers of Foreign Language).

### **Disclaimers and Definitions**

This study is limited to the methods I have learned with the recognition that multiple methods for teaching foreign language have always been available.

The names and places in this dissertation have been changed or omitted to protect the anonymity of the students and schools where I have worked or studied. Conversations or “quotations” from colleagues and students are as I remember them, some occurred as many as fifty years ago.

### **Autobiography as Dissertation**

As with portraiture, the artist-writer brings a certain amount of personal bias to the work. Often the writer seeks to justify a decision made or path taken and will

slant the interpretation of events. After many years, selective memory can pose a problem of objectivity for the writer; autobiography must be taken with a grain of salt. McCulloch (2004) explains that autobiographies, "are usually written long after the developments they appraise... because the accounts they give are not impartial and also due to the effect of memory... the autobiography can serve to justify and rationalize the decisions taken during one's life" (p. 120). As I write this autobiography, I struggle against the effects of bias, filtering, and selective memory.

*The Autobiography of a Slave*, by Francisco Manzano, a Cuban slave, written at the insistence of a benefactor who wanted to denounce slavery to the rest of the world, is a famous work of Spanish Literature. Regarding bias and point of view in *The Autobiography of a Slave*, Schulman (1996) writes: "Manzano's fears, given that he was still a slave, undoubtedly caused him, on the one hand, to exaggerate, and, on the other, to delete the presentation of circumstances that might make him or his family vulnerable" (p. 11).

About autobiography, Yow (2005) explains, "People who write their accounts without an interviewer often make themselves heroes of the stories, justifying their actions to themselves, as they reflect on their experience. Motivation for describing oneself in the best light is always there, no matter what the form of expression." However she adds, "On the other hand... I have found that people tend with the passage of time to be more, rather than less, candid" (p. 19). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) contend that autobiographical writing tended to be reductionist,

stating, "... memory is selective, shaped and retold in the continuum of one's experiences" (p. 142).

Some of Manzano's autobiography was difficult to read because of its lack of organization and mixed up chronology. As I think about composing my autobiography, it's difficult to know where to begin, how to focus and how to organize the project. In writing an autobiography Boyatzis (1998) suggests to:

- 1) divide your life into chapters and reflect on the turning points,
- 2) report on peak experiences as a reductionist device,
- 3) include a nadir experience and be specific,
- 4) refer to significant people in your life who have impacted your development. (pp. 68- 69)

Likewise, McCullough (2004) encourages the writer to have a "discernible storyline, impose a pattern and have a general purpose" (p. 120) and to include rich detail, keen observations and imagination.

Rosenthal (2004) explains, "The present perspective conditions the selection of memories, the temporal and thematic linkage of memories, and the type of representation of the remembered experiences... So narratives of experienced events refer both to the current life and to the past experience" (p. 50). Obviously, views of the past must be reflected through the perspectives of the present. The autobiographer changes over time, just as the reader who reads a novel for the

second or third time has a different experience from the initial reading. The image in the mirror of the past self is shaded by a superimposed image in the present.

For this autobiographical study I use the method of *currere*. Schubert (2008) explains *currere* as developed through the work of Pinar and Grumet (1976), “The first step in the method of *currere* is regressive, free associative remembrance of the past. We work to excavate the present by focusing on the past, work to get underneath my everyday interpretation of what I experience and enter experience more deeply” (p. 3). They continue, “I work to get a handle on what I’ve been and what I imagine myself to be, so I can wield this information rather than it wielding me... I choose what of it to honor, what of it to let go. I choose again who it is I aspire to be, how I wish my life history to read” (p. 4). Writing this autobiography has involved a soul-searching recollection of events that suddenly occur to me in certain contexts and then elicit other memories. I recently asked my sister, who is almost five years older, about her early childhood memories of our summers in Colorado. She smiled as she told me about her adventures with horse backing riding, then suddenly stopped and asked me, “So what did you do?” She had no idea or recollection. Selective memories of important events reflect what each person perceives as important and worth remembering.

When my mother turned eighty, I became fascinated by the changes that had occurred during her lifetime that began in 1909. Reflecting on her long life, she listed many of the events that she had experienced: the Flu Epidemic in 1912, two World Wars, the invention and development of the radio, telephone, car and airplane.

She marveled and took in stride, the launching of satellites, computers and cell phones, racial integration and women's rights.

I was born right after the end of World War II. The Korean War occurred while Baby Boomers were still in grade school, but the Vietnam Conflict caught my generation in high school and college when students became aware of the United States' increasing involvement and connection with the rest of the world.

In this dissertation, I relate my journey from Traditional-Grammar teacher to more communicative and contextualized methods of teaching, such as Storytelling. I reflect upon the influences of my students and teacher colleagues on my growth, and the evolution and functionality of foreign language learning. I relate what I remember, using a range of sources including my class notes, lesson plans, textbooks and conversations.

McCullough (2004) concludes that autobiographies, "... shed light not only on their life but also on their times. They reflect interconnections with other lives, within the same family and often far beyond and in different contexts over the course of the lifetime" (pp. 121,122). A worthwhile life reflects a teacher's continual desire to grow, create, explore and learn.

## Chapter 2

### Learning Spanish in High School: Audio-Lingual Method

1960-1968

Education is our first line of defense – Make it Strong

H.G. Rickover, 1958

*As a first year Spanish student, I sat in my language lab cubicle surrounded on three sides by punctured metal dividers for soundproofing. The two and a half foot high frames over my two-by-two desk surface insulated and isolated me. I dutifully reached for my headphones with attached microphone as my stern teacher, Senora VanPelt, instructed.*

*“Es la hora de escuchar la cinta y la primera conversación. Después de escuchar, repitan la conversación. Yo voy a escucharles de mi Control Central.” [It is time to listen to the tape and the first conversation. After listening, repeat the conversation. I’ll be listening to you from my Central Control Console].*

*I enjoyed listening to the tapes, at first. I wanted to repeat after the native speakers as carefully as I could. Listening and repeating were fun. I was actually speaking Spanish and I got to use state-of-the-art foreign language lab equipment. I memorized the dialogue and dutifully repeated it in the pauses after the speaker on the tape.*

*“Buenos días José. Buenos días, Raúl. ¿Cómo estás? Muy bien, gracias, y tú? Bien, gracias. ¿Adónde vas? Voy al correo. Voy al correo, también. ¿Vamos*

*juntos? Sí vamos juntos.” [Good morning, Joe. Good morning, Raul. How are you? I’m fine, and you? I’m fine. Where are you going? I’m going to the post office. I’m going to the post office, too. Shall we go together? Yes, let’s go together].*

*Senora VanPelt monitored our responses through her master controls and sometimes commented about our pronunciation.*

*After listening and repeating with the recorded tape, Senora called on students to come to the front of the class and repeat the dialogue we had just practiced from the tape. We were really speaking Spanish.*

*¿Cómo estás,” asked Susan cheerfully.*

*“Sí, voy al correo,” Jim answered. “Wait a minute, that’s not right,” responded Jim sheepishly.*

*“Siéntense, por favor,” [sit down, please] scolded Senora VanPelt. “Clase, repitan ustedes conmigo el diálogo, por favor.” [Class, repeat with me the dialogue, please].*

*As a chorus, students mechanically repeated both parts of dialogue as we mimicked the teacher, again. There was little opportunity for student interaction, except in pairs up at the front of the room, because we sat behind isolating cubicles.*

*“Let’s review your verb conjugations now,” Senora switched from dialogues to grammar. As she called on students individually to conjugate the assigned fifteen*

*verbs of homework, I wanted to be called upon, because I had completed my assignment and wanted to “speak Spanish” again. With twenty eight students in the class, my chances weren’t good of getting called upon.*

*As the year progressed, the canned short dialogues became monotonous. Students memorized the sequential dialogues, listened to the native speakers, repeated and took dictation because, “You learn through repetition,” Senora reminded us. When we presented a paired dialogue, students were both sunk if either said the dialogue statement out of order. I had trouble improvising and changing the dialogues because I didn’t know what to say in a different context. Most dialogues we learned were short and to the point but included little contextual reference. I felt frustrated because I couldn’t speak beyond the memorized dialogue. Memorized dialogues must have been the objective of ALM because students were never tested beyond the ability to repeat the dialogue.*

Looking back on the foreign language methods I learned and taught. my first exposure to Spanish featured a combined approach, the modern Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) paired with the well-tested Grammar-Translation method. In this chapter, I analyze the theory and practicality of ALM and the forces that promulgated this method. In subsequent chapters, I relate how ALM affected my teaching perspective and combined with other methods I researched and implemented.



In order to describe the Audio-Lingual Method, it's necessary to place the method in historical perspective. ALM was created after World War II during the Cold War. Reeling from the Russian launching of Sputnik in 1957, the United States began to question the educational system that allowed the Russians to surpass us intellectually with the expertise to launch the first orbiting satellite into space. A government commission was formed to improve instruction in math, sciences and foreign languages so the United States could again claim its intellectual superiority and increase its military tactical ability, but also increase its ability to communicate in an increasingly global economy (Schiro, 2008).

The President of the United States from 1953-1961 was Dwight Eisenhower, a former five star army general. Eisenhower's contemporary, Vice Admiral Rickover, became an advocate for improving American education, stating, "Only massive upgrading of the scholastic standards of our schools will guarantee the future prosperity and freedom of the Republic" (p. 15).

Along with science and math, foreign language instruction received intensive governmental scrutiny. Rickover (1959) explains, "In the third [after science and math] field of importance today--foreign languages-- the situation is even more serious. One consequence is that we have a diplomatic service where only 50 per cent now have command of a foreign language...clear evidence of the deterioration of foreign-language teaching in the last generation" (p. 109). Rivers (1981) corroborates Rickover's concerns: "In this wartime setting, understanding a native

speaker and speaking a language with near-native accent were first priorities” (p. 38). National security and communication were high priorities.

In order to address the concern of educating students to reliably communicate in a foreign language, the government looked to “proven” methods of instruction in the military based on a scientific approach. Hadley (2001) describes the Audio-Lingual Method that began in the 1940s, as a result of combining two schools of thought, psychology and linguistics. The army used the scientific approach, and funding from the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) provided training for teachers in this method in the 1950s and 60s. Textbooks were created that reflected a speaking emphasis, “Every ALM textbook chapter consisted of three basic parts: (1) the dialogue, (2) pattern drills, and (3) application activities. There were very few grammar explanations within the pages of the text: Some books had none at all” (Hadley, 2001, p. 111). Referring to a method used by the armed forces to train soldiers for a higher degree of aural skill, ALM, also called the Army method, was developed to promote oral and listening communication skills (Rivers, 1981; Hadley, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The post-Sputnik years pushed educators to raise America’s standards of education and to increase the rigor of education while adapting to emerging global economies and shifts around the world in politics and power. Crucial to America’s reaction to the Russian dominance of space was the realization that the teaching of foreign language should promote the student’s ability to communicate. In the 1940s and 50s, ALM emphasized the exclusive use of Second Language (L2) in the foreign

language classroom, through repetition and conversation drills. Students were also encouraged to practice all the skills of listening, speaking, writing, and reading while being exposed to the culture of the Spanish speaking country.

The Audio Lingual Method sought to develop listening and speaking skills first. According to Rivers (1981), five slogans guided teachers for implementing ALM:

1. Language is speech, not writing – based on the natural way children learn their language. Stress is placed on listening and learning to understand the language and then speaking. Reading and writing are introduced at a more advanced level.
2. A language is a set of habits – Influenced by the conditioning theories of B.F. Skinner with reinforcement. Structured by memorizing and imitation without attention paid to forms.
3. Teach the language and not about the language – students memorized common conversational phrases and dialogues where the language was spoken.
4. A language is what its native speakers say, not what someone thinks they ought to say – replacing grammar focused, stilted sentences, contemporary, common use dialogues were taught according to conversational usage in native country or area.
5. Languages are different – Linguists, who helped develop this method, dispute the notion of universal grammar. Instruction focused on the specific language difficulties with repetitive practice in problem areas. (pp. 41-43).

At the beginning level, ALM emphasized speaking and listening skills over reading and writing. Students listened, imitated and repeated the spoken form of the language in common situations. After a series of structured patterned drills, students progressed to the full dialogue. Either the teacher or a recording by native speakers offered a dialogue using everyday expressions of high frequency vocabulary and structures. Students listened to repetitions of the dialogue until they could repeat them fluently. The memorization of dialogues was accomplished in class choral responses, then in small groups, and finally individual interactions, when students mastered and successfully imitated the dialogue. Students were encouraged to pronounce words like native speakers and learn the dialogue thoroughly. The theory supporting ALM was that repeated exposure to the language would result in internalized dialogue and native-like pronunciation (Rivers, 1981; Rivers, 1983; Hadley, 2001; Shrum & Glisan, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). As far as learning grammar is concerned, Rivers (1981) explains, “The emphasis is on structuring the situation so that the student will not make mistakes, or at least will make very few” (p. 45).

The main objective of ALM was effective communication in the target language, so speaking and listening were emphasized initially, followed by reading and writing. Through practice, repetition, and dialogues, students were exposed to native pronunciation and common conversational exchanges in the target language (Rivers, 1981; Shrum & Glisan, 2011; Hadley, 2001). The goal was to increase

students' ability to speak like native speakers and discern different foreign words because of the intense listening and speaking practice.

The popularity of ALM was evidenced by the 20 plus articles and reviews between 1961-1973 in one journal, *Hispania*, a prestigious Spanish and Portuguese language journal, published quarterly, which focused on literary studies and pedagogy. Typical topics included problems with reading, writing and pronunciation; textbooks; necessity of language labs; and the appropriateness of ALM at the university level.

In one article, Sheppard (1961) asks potential ALM teachers to first identify their goals as "... comprehension and acceptable reproduction of the spoken language" (p. 296). According to Shepherd, the goal of the teacher was to prepare students to actually use the language, not just discuss the structure of the language.

Shepherd's (1961) article is interesting to compare to Hamilton's (1966), which appeared five years later. Hamilton criticized the lack of measurable "learning" that occurs in ALM as compared to the Grammar-Translation, G-T, method. Hamilton clarified that he was not, in essence, opposed to ALM at the university level, even though it should be modified for university students, but he was opposed to the Natural Method, a central component of ALM, which referred to the way young children learn their first language. Hamilton dismissed the Natural Method as childish, noting it paid little attention to grammar.

No matter how well financed, promoted and well intentioned, ALM exhibited essential flaws that inhibited the goal of communication. Rivers (1981) cautions foreign language teachers about including mechanical repetition without meaningful context, tedious drilling and memorization, and inattention to students' difficulty expressing their own thoughts (p. 47). Outside of the canned dialogues, students had little opportunity to speak or write in spontaneous settings. The teacher emphasis on correct habits (correct grammar) tended to stifle any expressions outside the taped dialogue, which was always correct. Students felt compelled to filter oral production through the lens of correct grammar before attempting to speak. Richards & Rodgers (2001) explain the teacher's perspective in ALM, writing, "It is important to prevent learners from making errors. Errors lead to the formation of bad habits. When errors do occur, they should be immediately corrected by the teacher" (p. 3).

Students' inability to communicate orally fell short of expectations and a shift in the attitude and theory toward foreign language learning led to the decline of ALM. Richards & Rodgers, 2001) explain, "Students were often found to be unable to transfer skills acquired through Audiolingualism to real communication outside the classroom, and many found the experience of studying through audiolingual procedures to be boring and unsatisfying" (p. 12). Skinner's theory of habit formation in learning a foreign language was replaced by Noam Chomsky's theory of how humans process experience through language. Educators began to question ALM's reliance on habit formation and criticized the method's lack of context and

explicit grammar (Rivers 1981; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Hadley, 2001; Shrum & Glisan, 2010; Hamilton 1966).

### **Learning via ALM**

From my own experiences learning beginning Spanish through ALM, Rivers (1981) hit the nail on the head with her comments about the “dangers” teachers face instructing with this method. Mechanical drilling to prepare students for the dialogue was fun at first because I was really speaking Spanish and my pronunciation mimicked that of a native speaker. However, the drill and repetition became boring because the teacher or the native speaker on the tape asked us to repeat the same phrase over and over until we had it memorized. While imitating the recorded dialogue I thought, “Enough already! I’ve got it now.” As Rivers (1981) reveals, the short dialogues of three or four conversational exchanges lacked any meaningful context.

My respected teacher, Senora VanPelt, dutifully adapted her teaching to the Audio-Lingual Method, but she was still a Grammar-Translation teacher at heart. We filled out extensive verb sheets and by the end of two years of Spanish, we could conjugate verbs *correctly* in twenty four tenses. Tests included fill-in-the-blank grammar and verb conjugation questions along with long lists of vocabulary word translations from English to Spanish. Correct grammar was emphasized in test preparation. During third and fourth year Spanish, we translated Spanish novels into English, answered questions orally and in writing. I had learned a moderate amount

of Spanish vocabulary and a great deal of grammar in four years of high school Spanish. I could still repeat several dialogues from first and second year Spanish tapes, but I was hesitant to speak.

The biggest problem with ALM was my inability to relate the dialogues to spontaneous conversation. Here I was learning to speak the language, using realistic common conversations from everyday life, but if the question was not precisely one for which I was prepared, I found myself struggling to respond. As I looked forward to personalizing my conversations and advancing to the next level of meaningful conversation, I felt stymied. I was reluctant to think out of the correct grammar box of the recorded dialogues for fear of making a mistake. I knew my teacher would be displeased and I would feel humiliated in front of the class if I made a mistake.

An essential component of ALM was the language lab (Rivers, 1981; Shrum & Glisan, 2011; Hadley, 2001; Richards & Rodgers 2001; Shepherd, 1961). My very modern, large high school installed a state-of-the-art language lab of 28 cubicles and an imposing master console with two tape players, impressive looking switches and dials and teacher controls that dominated the front of the classroom next to the teacher's desk. Large padded headsets complete with attached microphones, hung on cubicle dividers, and converted our previously normal classroom into a technological modern foreign language learning station for the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During my first and second year of Spanish instruction we spent a third of our classroom time listening and repeating in the language lab cubicle. The switch from teacher to language lab tape also offered variety to the curriculum and offered students the



opportunity to listen to native Spanish speakers from many different countries.

However, the language lab and technology created language learning and communication problems.

Communicating with other students when isolated in a cubicle was difficult. There was very little interaction between students who could not see or speak to each other. There was only room for two students at the front of the class to present a dialogue. Students were never able to gather in small groups for personal adaptations of the dialogues or for spontaneous conversations. Students could disappear into cubicles and zone out. The teacher would have to stand on a chair, which she never did, in order to see what students were actually doing in their cubicles, especially in the back of the room.

My four years of Spanish instruction were spent in the same language lab with the same teacher. In my third and fourth year, my teacher progressed to teaching literature and advanced grammar, with fewer references to ALM. Instruction concentrated more on reading novels, translation and themed writing. It became more evident through my four years of high school Spanish that Senora VanPelt preferred the predictable, tried and true, Grammar-Translation method.

Majoring in Foreign Language Education at the university, I encountered more ALM in my first foreign language classes. My pronunciation and conversation intermediate level classes at the university included extra listening and speaking practice in an ALM style language lab with recorded stories and questions. The rest of my upper level college classes focused on Spanish literature and Spanish/Latin

American history classes. I felt well prepared to pronounce Spanish with near-native competency and my papers on Spanish literature reflected a reasonable grasp of Spanish grammar. I understood relatively well my literature and history professors and classmates who only spoke Spanish in class, but I was still hesitant to speak the language.

### Chapter 3

#### Beginning Teaching: The Grammar -Translation Method

1968-1972

To read Latin and Greek authors in their original form is a sublime luxury. I thank on my knees him who directed my early education for having put into my possession this rich source of delight; and I would not exchange it for anything which I could then have acquired, and have not since acquired.

Thomas Jefferson

*“Bienvenidos, welcome to Spanish I class. I’m your teacher, Senorita Taylor. Is everyone in the right class?” I ask cheerfully my first day of teaching high school Spanish. “Listen for your names as I locate you in the seating chart.” My twenty students dutifully take their seats as we proceed to get to know each other.*

*“I graduated last year from the university with a major in Foreign Language Education and this is my first year teaching. For many of you, this is your first year in high school, or in this high school,” I inform my beginning-level mostly white with several black students in this newly integrated high school. “In my free time I like to play table tennis, travel and read books. Now that you know a little bit about me, I’d like to learn more about you all. Please fill out these lined index cards by answering questions about yourselves,” I add, passing out the cards to students now sitting in straight rows facing the front of the room, my teacher’s desk, supply table,*

*chalkboards, bulletin board, intercom box, and United States flag. I over-plan for my first day of class in my Grammar-Translation method, teacher-centered classroom.*

*“Do we have to answer the questions in Spanish or English,” John asks as he raises his hand.*

*“I don’t know any Spanish, yet,” adds Abigail with a concerned look.*

*“No, it’s fine. Just answer in English. We’ll learn to answer in Spanish in the next two weeks of class,” I reassure them. After students turn in their cards to me, we begin speaking. “Let’s choose some Spanish names so we can get in to the Spanish mood.” Handing them a list of Spanish names, which frequently correspond to English names, I give them a few minutes to decide on their class Spanish name, saying: “Once someone has chosen a name for himself, no one else can choose that name so you should have an alternate name in reserve.”*

*Hands fly up in the air, “I want Pedro, my name is Peter.”*

*“I want María for Mary.”*

*“How about Nacho? I know it’s not on the list, but it sounds cool.”*

*“Now that we all have Spanish names, let’s start a conversation. “Hola, Me llamo Señorita Sastre (Tailor). ¿Cómo te llamas? Repite conmigo, por favor,” [Hello, My name is Miss Taylor. What is your name? Please repeat with me]. I begin the first lesson on greeting people and students getting to know each other. After several repetitions of the question and answer, I add, “¿Cómo estás? Yo estoy muy*

*bien, gracias, y tú? [How are you? I am very well, thank you, and you?] Or you can answer, no muy bien, Así, así, fantástico. Repite conmigo, por favor.” [Not very well, so, so, fantastic]. Now let’s form groups of four and you can take turns asking each other questions and answering in Spanish,” I encourage, as students move their desks to form small circles. I enjoy the mild roar in the classroom as I circulate among the groups of desks, listening and prompting students’ short conversations. Later I add to the beginning conversation, ¿De dónde eres? ¿Qué estudias en el colegio? ¿Qué te gusta hacer en tu tiempo libre? ¿Cuál es tu número de teléfono? [Where are you from? What do you study in high school? What do you like to do in your free time? What is your telephone number?]*

*After two weeks of class, I say: “Now that you’ve learned to greet each other and ask questions in Spanish, it’s time to hand out textbooks,” I notified students, as if it were a privilege to finally receive their textbook. “Let’s discuss the difference now between Ser and Estar. They both mean, “To be” in English. Turn to page 25 in your textbook and let’s discuss the explanation in the book.” After analyzing the rules for using Estar and Ser for 10 minutes, I assign them homework, “Fill in the blanks on exercises 4, 5 and 6 and conjugate Ser and Estar. You have the last ten minutes of class time to get started. I’ll be glad to help you begin your homework in case you have any questions about the assignment before you take it home.” I notice a drop in enthusiasm as students get out paper and pencil to start their Grammar-Translation method assignment.*

*After two weeks of progressively more in-depth and increasingly more complex Spanish student conversations, I realize I am referring to the Audio-Lingual Method as I encourage my students to speak and understand each other before I even hand out the traditional textbooks. Looking back, toward the end of this first school year, I noticed that students were more enthusiastic and engaged when they were speaking to each other and conversing about subjects that interested them than when they were assigned grammar exercises or general knowledge, reading assignments.*

This chapter analyzes the history and purposes of the Grammar-Translation (G-T) method. Being the first recognized method of American foreign language instruction in the mid 1800s, this method has a long and varied history and still appears to be alive and well in foreign language instruction today. The G-T method influenced the formation of the first foreign language textbooks. Since modern language education developed from the classical instruction of Greek and Latin, the G-T method, considered the standard for foreign language education, is still prevalent in most of today's textbooks. Even as American foreign language curriculum transitioned from Foreign Languages to Modern Languages and World Languages, the influence of the ancient Greek and Latin teaching methods dominated newer methods as the standard and accepted ideal platform for teaching languages. The influence and intellectual attitude fostered by Grammar-Translation is still demonstrated in high school and beginning college courses today (Hadley, 2001; Rivers, 1981; Shrum & Glisan, 2010; Clifford, 1995; Rivers, 1999).

During the Middle Ages in Western Europe, Latin was used as a universal, educated, and elite form of both written and spoken language. It was the official language of the Catholic Church and most European universities. As the Roman Empire declined, Western European countries began to develop their own, “corrupted” Latin versions of regional languages. Languages spoken by the people began to be identified as French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Romanian. Spanish teachers recall the influence of Alfonso X during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, who mandated that the laws of the kingdom, the Bible and the history of Spain be written and translated into Castilian, instead of Latin (Lapesa 2008).

The Grammar-Translation method has its roots in Europe from the formal teaching of Latin and Greek by Catholic and university intellectuals. Rivers (1981) describes a major shift from Latin instruction as education became less elitist, “When Latin was no longer being learned as a language for communication among scholars, its primacy as a matter for study could not be justified on utilitarian grounds” (p. 28). However, utilitarian reasons for learning modern languages took second place to the ivory tower of intellectual discipline inspired by the learning of Latin and Greek. The mind was trained through the translation and grammar of Latin and Greek texts as, “... the key to thought and literature of a great and ancient civilization” (Rivers, 1981, p. 28).

Hadley (2001), Shrum & Glisan (2011), and Jensen & Sandrock (2007) echo Rivers’ description of the G-T method. This method not only fosters an appreciation of great literature but also intensive grammar analysis which aids students in

understanding their native language grammar. The major characteristics of G-T include, in the order in which they are usually taught:

1. Students learn rules of grammar deductively along with exceptions and extensive bilingual vocabulary lists.
2. Students learn prescriptions for translating.
3. Students are tested on how well they translate passages.
4. Students compare and convert first to second languages with optional dictionary use.
5. Students focus on reading and translation with little opportunity for listening or speaking the target language. (Hadley, 2001)

Memorizing grammar rules and extensive vocabulary lists was considered mental exercise. The phrase and idea of “discipline the intellect” appears in the discussion of G-T by Rivers (1981), Hadley (2001), Clifford (1995), Shrum & Glisan (2011), and Jensen & Sandrock (2007). Even Hamilton (1966) prefers Grammar-Translation to the Audio-Lingual Method at the beginning college level of foreign language instruction alluding to the discipline of the intellect. Rivers (1983) encapsulates the attitude toward G-T as she explains, “When the method was first developed and swept Europe like wildfire, modern languages were trying to establish themselves as a respectable study for intelligent students, as a study that made a real contribution to mental training and intellectual development” (p. 2). In order to gain academic acceptance, Modern Languages tried to conform to the established and respected mold of teaching Latin and Greek in the Grammar-Translation method.



Exercising the mind by memorizing grammar rules and practicing them improved the intellect because students demonstrated the ability to apply rules to difficult passages for translation. Memorizing extensive lists of vocabulary words and their native language translation trained the mind to remember. An excellent recollection of vocabulary words was recognized and rewarded via translation skills. Translating literary and philosophical works by the great Latin and Greek writers improved students' intellectual expertise and ability to debate the advancement of civilization by those students who gained elite scholar status. Jefferson's comment cited at the beginning of this chapter supports the intellectual necessity of exercising the mind by learning the sublime via Latin and Greek.

With the standard for foreign language instruction already established by the intellectual discipline of Grammar-Translation, modern languages struggled to prove themselves worthy of inclusion in the world of academia as equally able to train the brain. Rivers (1981) carries the beginning instruction of modern languages to a logical conclusion, "It was inevitable, then, that modern-language teaching methods should be modeled at this stage on the methods already employed for the teaching of an ancient language which was no longer in use for communication and of which even the original pronunciation was in doubt" (p. 28). It is no wonder that G-T concentrates on reading and writing the target language. Clifford (1995), Shrum & Glisan (2011), and Hadley (2010) corroborate Rivers' explanation of G-T as a model method for teaching modern languages that trained the brain for grammatical excellence but left little instructional time for speaking and listening. Ironically, the Grammar-Translation

method established itself firmly in the language teachers' attitude toward foreign language instruction. "Since the broadly accepted goal of second language study was not to build one's communication skills but to train the mind, the language teaching profession complied with this model. The more difficult the language learning was made to appear, the more credibility the process was granted by the educational system and the general public" (Clifford, 1995, p. 155).

A typical Grammar-Translation class instruction consisted of students sitting in rows, with their textbooks open to the beginning of a new chapter. The chapter began with a short reading section and long lists of vocabulary words alongside native language translations. As homework, students were assigned these vocabulary words to memorize for the following class. The following day, the teacher gave a quick vocabulary-matching quiz, native language to target language, to see if students actually did their homework. Students crammed the night before to quickly "memorize" as many words as possible. The teacher was often dissatisfied with the results of the vocabulary quiz and vocabulary retention when students began the next chapter. Students often relied on their first language background and knowledge to try to discern words in the foreign language. Their spoken language was influenced by first language interference.

Moving to the reading section of the textbook, the teacher called on students to read in the target language. Students clumsily and painfully attempted reading the target words relying on their native language background and accent. This method did not focus on target language pronunciation. How could one pronounce Latin, a dead

language? Exasperated by poor, almost unintelligible pronunciation, the teacher often took over the reading of the selection until she grew tired of speaking. Denied the opportunity to practice speaking, albeit poorly, students were directed to read the rest of the Spanish selection silently to themselves.

Next the teacher turned to translation. She called on students to translate the sentences of the selection into the native language. Listening to a logical translation, the teacher indicated to the students that they were progressing. Referring to the just translated reading passage, the teacher pulled out the grammar lesson for the day, the past tense, which had been placed in the reading selection. Often relishing the task, the teacher showed off her grammar expertise by detailing the basic rules and examples for using the past tense. Her students had already practiced conjugating multiple verbs in the past tense, so the teacher gained momentum as she next launched into the many exceptions to the rules and irregular verb forms. Students dutifully copied these rules and exceptions into their notebooks, next to the pages of conjugated verbs. Satisfied the students were advancing nicely, the teacher assigned homework of native language sentences to be translated into target language sentences in the past tense. She included fill-in-the blank verb conjugation exercises from the textbook and workbook. The following class, the teacher quickly and resolutely corrected student grammar errors. These constructed sentences bore little similarity to sentences students would actually use communicating with native speakers of the target language (Rivers, 1981).

When teaching and learning via the Grammar-Translation Method, students and teachers are tied to the textbook. My foreign language teacher handbook from the

State Foreign Languages Curriculum Committee, 1972, in reference to textbooks, advised student teachers to:

- Select a basic text and give the basis for its selection. (oral)
- Make five sequential lesson plans based on the selected text.
- Construct a first semester, first level test based on the selected text. (p. 77)

The textbook has historically had a central role in determining foreign language curriculum and teaching methods. The Grammar-Translation textbook is identified with reading selections, extensive vocabulary lists and detailed grammar explanations and exercises. Hadley (2001) identifies G-T with a bottom-up textbook approach, "... as the framework for organizing instruction and the primary source of exercises and activities" (p. 63). Rivers (1981) notes, "The importance of the textbook cannot be overestimated... In its preparation, decisions have already been made about what the students will learn, how they will learn it, and what sections of the work will receive most emphasis" (p. 475). The direction and focus of the textbook defined the teacher's lesson plans.

Foreign language teachers using the G-T method were encouraged to cover a certain number of chapters in the textbook, organized around grammar concepts for each beginning level course they taught. The teacher felt relieved/satisfied when a predetermined amount of material had been covered, whether students learned the material or not. The G-T method is not difficult to teach because the textbook does all the planning and structuring, even if it is prepared in a preconceived and often artificial manner. When the teacher follows the textbook, she only has to decide the amount of

material and which chapters to be covered in a certain amount of time. Many teachers who successfully learned foreign language with the G-T method feel comfortable and justified teaching the G-T (Rivers, 1981; Shrum & Glisan, 2011; Hadley, 2001; Clifford, 1995; Chastain, 1987). However, even though the G-T method continues to be taught and present day textbooks continue to present traditional grammar explanations and exercises, criticism is growing about the method as no longer appropriate (Rivers, 1981, 1999; Hadley, 2001; Chastain, 1987; Shrum & Glisan, 2011; Clifford, 1995).

The G-T method was designed as a form of mental discipline and its proponents used the method to translate the great works of Roman and Greek writers.

Grammar was considered essential to ensure credibility of the translations and to provide a model for subsequent student writings. Hadley (2001) sums up the drawback to G-T, stating: “The meticulous detail of the grammar explanation, the long written exercises, the lengthy vocabulary lists and the academic forms of language presented in the readings render language learning both strenuous and boring” (p. 106).

By the very definition of the method, G-T leaves little classroom time for communicative activities. Since the majority of class time is spent on grammar explanations and exercises, Chastain (1987) questions the value to the student of what is learned via the Grammar-Translation methods and notes five characteristics of basic communication violated by most G-T instruction:

1. Language is stimulated by some feeling, thought or bodily need.
2. Language is a communicable representation of knowledge.

3. The focus is normally on the meaning being transmitted rather than on grammatical components of language.
4. The communication is directed to someone.
5. Language has a purpose.

Rivers (1981), like Chastain, expresses concerns about the Grammar-Translation method and its adaptability toward more communicative skills. The G-T method does not stress pronunciation accuracy and does not seem to value student expression. Artificial and antiquated verb forms used in the exercises and readings are placed to dictate grammar structures and are of little practical use for the student who is already bogged down with extensive vocabulary lists and laborious grammatical exercises. Rivers concludes that students have little opportunity to express themselves personally and their role in learning is a passive one.

### **My Experiences with the Grammar-Translation Method**

When I first began teaching Spanish in high school and junior high, the traditional textbook comforted me, as it was similar to the one I had used in my own high school almost eight years before. Since my college Spanish language and literature classes were upper level classes, I had to refer to my high school beginning Spanish classes and model my teaching for Spanish I and Spanish II after my high school teacher. Even though my teacher, Senora VanPelt, introduced her students to the Audio-Lingual Method, complete with language lab and language tapes, Senora also practiced the Grammar-Translation method. Since my high school students had

limited access to a language lab and the previously adopted textbook presented a G-T approach, I followed the textbook method and channeled Senora into my teaching persona. However, I did notice that my present 1968 textbook had some added sections that reflected some conversational activities and more student-centered vocabulary, which also reminded me of ALM conversations.

Being comforted by the familiar G-T textbook, I wrote my lesson plans and arranged my classroom with row of desks that faced the front of the room in a very traditional way. All students' eyes were directed to the front chalk boards: pull down maps, colorfully decorated bulletin boards, teacher's desk, table for materials, the intercom speaker/monitor suspended on the wall next to the "panic button" for emergencies and the American flag which were all part of my teacher-centered classroom. With seating chart in place, and students in their assigned seats, the class was ready to begin with the Pledge of Allegiance and the taking of roll, made easy by the seating chart.

One of the first assignments suggested in the traditional first level Spanish textbook was the appropriation of Spanish names for students. Many names were listed in the first chapter to correspond to "American" names, which made the students' choices easier, *Enrique* for Henry, *Miguel* for Michael, *Isabel* for Elizabeth, *Elena* for Helen, as well as traditional Spanish names like Concepción and Mercedes. Fad names, like *Queso*, and movie star or rock star names were also popular and had to be rationed by the teacher. I never really cared if students chose a Spanish name or not in this textbook attempt to introduce Spanish culture. I noted that some students

thought it was a fun activity to assume a Spanish “identity” and some just preferred to stay who they were. I believe the advantage to English-speaking students’ taking a Spanish name opened up the students’ minds to relating to another culture, but I also wanted to be sensitive to not forcing them to assume another cultural identity.

The predictable and omnipresent “Getting to Know You” first chapter informed the students about greetings, asking questions, making plans and talking about their likes and dislikes. This conversational approach was meant to engage the students with a fun activity that related to them in their adolescent environment. “Cuál es tu número de teléfono?” [What is your telephone number?], was always a popular question that also served a practical teenage interest in getting to know their classmates. If students could converse with a person whose native language is different than theirs, they were opening up to understanding another culture. I was pleasantly surprised that this first chapter promoted student discussion and interaction. It reminded me of an updated version of the Audio-Lingual Method, only my students had very limited access to a language lab, and they were able to construct their own meanings and personal answers to these elementary questions. Also, reflecting the ALM approach, my students “got to know each other’ orally, without the textbook, during the first two weeks of class.

I decided to present this first chapter information orally to my students and withheld their textbooks for the first two weeks of class in order to get them used to listening and speaking the language without interference from their native language. I noticed that my students were engaged and enjoyed speaking to each other in Spanish



as they memorized a variety of questions and answers they imaginatively created. Just speaking and understanding Spanish in class opened my eyes to another way of learning a foreign language, a form without reading or writing, a form that related better to students who were academically challenged.

Besides teaching I was also taking a graduate introduction to educational research class at nearby university. I decided to research my Spanish I students and compared how well they were performing in my Spanish class to their scores on Academic Achievement tests. As I compared the students' grades in my class to their test scores, I was shocked to discover that two students who were making a "B" in my Spanish I class had 00-00 composite scores on their achievement tests. I later discovered that these students could not read, but they were making a B in my Spanish class because the learning was all speaking and listening.

During the third week of the fall semester, I passed out the textbooks and my students and I entered a Grammar-Translation world of grammar exercises and extensive vocabulary list. My lesson plan book for the first and second semesters indicated that I typically assigned my students a story to read and translate, verbs to conjugate, and grammar concepts to memorize. My lessons came to be identified with the grammar concept of each chapter, with *Ser/Estar* in chapter 2, with the AR verb conjugation in chapter 3, etc. My lesson plan book revealed English sentences to be translated into Spanish and new irregular verbs to be translated into different tenses. Comparing my experiences to Rivers' criteria for G-T:

1. I taught students grammar rules deductively and verb conjugations along with lengthy bilingual vocabulary lists of 40-60 new words in each chapter.
2. My students learned how to translate reading selections in each chapter because of the vocabulary they had memorized and the verb conjugations they learned.
3. My students were tested on translating English sentences into Spanish and vice versa.
4. My students used the English/Spanish dictionaries in the back of the textbook to translate passages and writing exercises.
5. My students focused on grammar and translation, but unlike G-T, my students also practiced listening and speaking exercises.

In my teaching, the G-T method was giving way to more communication opportunities. Even the textbook provided direction for students to actually engage in a “Getting to Know You” skit. My students enjoyed acting out a Mexican market scene during which they created stores and bought and sold merchandise using only Spanish. My students participated in a restaurant scene, speaking and acting out the roles of customers and waiters. However, because of the textbook’s primary emphasis on structure, I still felt compelled to deductively and extensively teach grammar. A typical 1969 textbook entitled *Conversemos*, explains, “Structure is a most important part of any lesson. It is through the pattern drills in this section that students will come to learn how the language functions” (Schmidt, 1981, p. 9).

As a beginning teacher, I dutifully followed page by page, grammar point by grammar point, and chapter by chapter through the textbook because I thought the textbook authors had much more expertise teaching Spanish than I. However, my second semester of teaching, I began to sort through the chapters for more relevant and interesting activities and exercises for my students. If I was getting bored with the lesson, I knew my students would be bored, too. I began to wonder about a more optimal approach to teach my students to communicate meaningfully in the second language.

After extensive research into the Grammar-Translation method, I am more aware of the goals of this method and its ramifications for modern language education. G-T was designed to address the needs of academicians and historians who sought to translate and preserve the great written works of the Greek and Roman writers and philosophers. This purpose included grammar as assurance that the translation was interpreted correctly, along with extensive lists of vocabulary words in both the native language and in Greek and Latin to facilitate translation. Translation and grammar were considered mental exercises that strengthened the intellect and weeded out the weaker minded.

The most powerful insight I received from the literature involved the acceptance of modern languages into the academic community. Rivers (1981) explains that since Grammar-Translation was the accepted and revered method of language instruction, it served as a model for modern language instruction as well. Even though the goals of modern language instruction were to teach communication

through speaking and listening, the G-T method continued to emphasize translation and grammar to the exclusion of oral communication. Obviously, with contrasting goals of instruction, there was bound to be criticism of G-T because it did not address the needs of students who sought to speak and understand living language.

While the Grammar-Translation method featured defined goals, its narrowly defined objectives do not represent a complete picture of foreign language instruction that is needed in a global and diverse society. This out-of-date method, which I taught in the sixties and seventies, continues to pervade present day foreign language education and textbooks. The hierarchical preference for extensive grammatical instruction in the foreign language classroom, at the expense of communicative activities remains popular at the university level. Foreign language coordinators, at a nearby research university, still clung to the perception that the G-T approach is superior to all others because it trains the mind. These educators continued to believe in the intellectual advantages of studying grammar as the fundamental and essential way to learn languages, though the Grammar-Translation Method allows no space for time development of communication or unrehearsed interactions.

## Chapter 4

### Private Prep School: Individualized Instruction Method

1972-1975

Although Aristotle criticized his master for giving Being to the genus or universal separate from particulars, he never doubted that the species was a real entity, a metaphysical or existential whole including and characterizing all particulars.

John Dewey

*The two Assistant Headmasters, John and Charles--both fluent in Spanish--approached me after classes while I was finishing my second year of teaching. John said, "We want you to construct a new curriculum for Spanish I and Spanish II students at the Upper School. There is a new method of foreign language instruction that we'd like to try at this school. It's called Individualized Instruction. Are you interested in creating an individualized approach for our beginning Spanish students?"*

*"A new teaching approach sounds intriguing, but I don't know anything about Individualized Instruction. I'm familiar with the Audio-Lingual Method and the Grammar-Translation Method which I'm teaching now at this school, but Individualized Instruction is new to me," I answered trying not to sound too uninformed.*

*The administrators smiled, and John began to enlighten me, "Individualized Instruction focuses on a curriculum that allows for individual student differences. Instead of all the students in your class working on the same page, vocabulary and*

*grammatical concepts at the same time, this approach allows students some flexibility. They can advance at their own pace,” he said.*

*Charles added, “When some parts of the lessons are easy for them, students can move faster and cover more material accordingly. When students have projects, big exams coming up in their science or math classes, or sporting events, they can spend less time on Spanish assignments in order to concentrate on their projects. Then, students can catch up later with their Spanish assignments without any penalty for ‘being late’ turning in their Spanish work.”*

*“Sounds interesting, but a little complicated,” I added, curious but also wary. “Why do you want to change the method we’re now using? Grammar-Translation is very popular and the method has been around for a long time, so it is a proven approach.”*

*The thirty-something young administrators showed their enthusiasm for the newer, more modern Individualized Instruction. “We recently received our Master’s Degrees in Education Administration and we talked about this more modern approach for student instruction in our graduate classes,” said John. Charles put in, “We’ve also researched several articles about the method that is gaining popularity. Individualized Instruction seems to fit our prep school environment better than the older Grammar-Translation Method. At the Upper School we require students to study at least 3 years of the same language to graduate. Our students are highly motivated, apply to prestigious universities upon graduation and should be able to influence how they study foreign language.”*

*“It certainly makes sense to allow students to progress at their own rate through a course of study. It appears our students would appreciate the opportunity to pace themselves and take charge of their progress. I assume the students would still be required to cover the same chapters for Spanish I and II that we currently cover for each level,” I added making sure I understood what the administrators were thinking. “Can you clarify for me what you have in mind?”*

*Charles and John went on to explain that they wanted me to convert the Spanish I and Spanish II textbooks into self-paced student packets. I was to divide each course into manageable units with progressively more complex levels of study, making sure to include assignments for each level and a test to ensure that students are sufficiently competent to pass that level. I would include dates for the assignments so students could keep track of their progress as they advance through the required chapters and levels of competency to ensure credit for Spanish I and II. After the explanation of duties, John said, “We’ll pay you a stipend this summer to develop the packets so they’ll be ready for students in the fall semester. You should do some research about Individualized Instruction to familiarize yourself with the method. As I stood before them processing the task, I heard Charles announce “Good luck” as they considered the subject addressed, delivered, and checked off their agenda.*

*With a little research on Individualized Instruction, which mostly centered on self-pacing, I set about constructing the student packets. I felt energized by creating something new and modern that promised such encouraging results. Individualized*

*Instruction offered flexibility to our students that they had not experienced before in studying Spanish. "This ought to be fun and invigorating," I naively thought and hoped.*

My experience teaching the Individualized Instruction method was part of a larger popular trend, which still related to the G-T method. Theorists and educators focused on the individual needs of learners. In the 1970s, foreign language education saw a change from the Grammar-Translation and Audio-Lingual methods to a more student-centered focus, as educators began to relate to students as individuals with specific abilities and modes of learning (Chastain, 1975; Long, 1999; Rivers, 1981, 1983; Shrum & Glisan, 2011). Chastain (1975) relates the basic appeal of individualized instruction as a reaction to an industrialized and impersonal society in the 1970s, "Being a part of the general culture, the educational system is also attempting to emphasize individuality rather than conformity (p. 334).

An integral part of individualized instruction involved self-pacing. Chastain (1988) notes how individualized instruction reflected societal trends and education in general, "The shift was toward the individualization of instruction as the focus was placed on self-pacing of learning and on emphasizing student responsibility for learning" (p. 11). Moving toward relevance, foreign language educators shifted from an elitist image of study toward a more broadly appealing approach that reflected student's lives and interests. Chastain (1988) explains: "Some teachers used learning activity packages and permitted students to proceed at their own pace to individualized learning" (p. 11). However, individualized foreign language



instruction involved more than preparing a list of sequential steps toward proficiency and student self-pacing (Rivers, 1981, 1983; Chastain, 1975, 1988; Long, 1999; Shrum & Glisan, 2011; Hadley, 2001).

Rivers (1981) clarifies that Individualized Instruction is different from independent study using programmed materials, in that individual differences background, intelligence, goals and personality needed to be identified for each individual. Chastain (1975) encourages teachers to consider fundamental differences among students and how they learn. His student learning characteristics include:

1. Intelligence – adaptation to the environment, cognitive abilities, capacity for abstract symbols, language use and I.Q.
2. Achievement – wide disparity in past learning experiences which influences future learning potential.
3. Cognitive Style- variability in the way students approach learning; analytical and non-analytical, the categorization of information, inference and attention to details.
4. Learning Skills – involved prerequisite skills such as language and reading skills.
5. Set for Learning – background of different ways to approach learning, concrete or abstract, visual or auditory, rapid learning or slow learning, etc.

6. Personality –related to intelligence and cognitive style, influences learners goals, persistence, delay of gratification, anxiety, dependency, assertiveness, self-esteem.
7. Motivation - emotional needs, the child must be accepted, related to introverts and extroverts.
8. Social Development – student does not learn in isolation, acceptance by teacher and other students.
9. Values – students’ goals and perception of the value of education for their future, intellectual or vocational goals. (Chastain 1975)

Despite the appeal, the task facing the teacher who attempted to devise a curriculum to appeal to differing student needs, sensory modalities, social preferences, learning styles and processing, was overwhelming. Strasheim (1972), Shrum & Glisan (2011) and Jensen & Sandrock (2007) recommend an array of specific strategies to help teachers address individualized foreign language instruction for teaching students with physical disabilities and special learning needs and disabilities as well as at-risk and gifted students. Papalia & Zampogna (1974) and Reeves (1974) express concern for teachers who attempt to truly individualize instruction for each student because teaching each student individually is time consuming and difficult, especially in a class of twenty-plus students.

Rivers (1981) elaborates on the problems facing both teachers and students with Individualized Instruction and warns against students being left alone to work

with programmed materials. The teacher needs to make sure the student has plenty of opportunities to interact with other students. Student isolation and depersonalization are feelings the teacher must guard against.

Brecht & Walton (1995) caution teachers about self-managed, learner-centered pedagogy that requires discrete knowledge for success. To be successful with Individualized Instruction, IT, students must understand how to acquire and become proficient in a foreign language according to their own learning style, and must demonstrate the skill sets that promote knowledge management through the computer, accessing on-line information sources and teacher/experts.

Strasheim (1972), Rivers (1981) and Chastain (1975) underscore the need for the teacher to include social interaction in the individualized, self-paced method. An individual learning packet must allow for students to communicate with each other, as the teacher incorporates small group and class social interactions which also prevent programmed lesson boredom and student stagnation. Students do not learn well in isolation, so they must remain an integral part of communication process and continually stimulate student interaction.

### **My Teaching Experience with Individualized Instruction**

The two young, bilingual prep school administrators were anxious to introduce a more student-centered, modern method through which students could navigate the first two years of Spanish at their own pace. This prep school required graduates to complete at least three years of study in the same foreign language. I

was glad to be employed for the summer and given the opportunity to work on a creative, innovative, and modern educational program--Individualized Instruction--for our self-motivated and college bound students.

I worked for about three weeks developing a self-paced curriculum that I coordinated with the first year and second year Spanish textbooks. I felt comfortable using the already defined and differentiated goals and methodology of the textbooks to organize my curriculum. I included additional worksheets, grammatical explanations, and stories for reading with questions. I divided student work into manageable segments with a grading system that reflected the Social Efficiency philosophy and Ralph Tyler's strategy for mastering progressively higher levels of skill. With clear objectives defined for each level of proficiency and exams to meet those objectives and goals, I separated the lessons (Madaus & Shufflebeam, 1989).

Tasks and proficiency tests were matched to the school calendar and students were expected to attain certain skills and proficiency levels by performing at a passable level of competency at or above the expected proficiency level on the staged exams. Grades were awarded according to how many levels the students had passed in a certain time period. For example, the whole year was divided into twelve levels for Spanish I. I expected students to finish six levels by the end of the first semester by passing six proficiency exams for a correspondent "A" that I could express on the school grading scale. Five exams passed awarded the student a "B," four exams a "C," and so on. Students were allowed to "catch up" by working harder to complete the levels faster later in the semester or school year. The student

programmed packets I created, remind me now of Rivers' (1983) discussion on Individualized Instruction. She clarified my assumption that my individualized packets appeared more like independent study packets. There was very little individualization except for self-pacing. All students read the same material and performed the same exercises in sequence toward the competency of the stated common goal.

One of the purposes of Individualized, Self-Paced Instruction is to give students the opportunity to work their way through sequential packets of information at their own rate. As students pass through the various stages of learning, they accomplish sequential proficiency tests and receive credit according to the levels of competency achieved through completion of the learning packets. Reflecting now on Rivers' discussion about individual differences and opportunities for student-to-student and student-to-teacher interaction, I understand the importance of promoting student and teacher interplay in the classroom.

When I completed the packets of materials for Spanish I and Spanish II, I was pleased with the product and anxious to give my students more flexibility to move at their own pace, getting ahead when they had less homework from other classes and putting off Spanish for a while when a chemistry or math project was due. What a modern, student-centered method, for self-motivated, college-bound students in an academic environment that required graduating students to complete three years of study in the same language. What an educationally advanced project-- that ended in disaster!

There were many reasons for the failure of this project. However, in the process, I learned a great deal about teaching, educational fads, student motivation, parent communication and what I loved about teaching. First of all, both Spanish speaking, educationally-forward-thinking Assistant Administrators who instigated the Individualized Instruction curriculum project left the school before the fall semester began. The new Head Master was not foreign language friendly. When visiting my Spanish I class, at the beginning of the semester, the one and only time he visited, he stepped in the classroom and announced, in a matter-of-fact manner, “I never liked foreign language.” Then he turned around and left the room.

Second, students were ill equipped experientially to self-pace. I painstakingly explained the new curriculum to my students, who seemed to accept it, at first. Each student was given a packet with dates, assignments, and instructions to follow. At the beginning of the semester, the students and I plunged ahead to the first chapter of study, pretty much staying together, until several students realized there was little punctual accountability. Time to complete assignments was flexible, which is a mature concept for adolescents to master. Flexibility translated, in their minds, to put off until tomorrow, or next week or next month! Their concept of timeliness had not been well developed because every other teacher and class in the school had more immediate deadlines and immediate consequences for not meeting them. I understand now Brecht’s & Walton’s (1995) explanation that students have to learn a new mindset for working with an Individualized method. Students have to accept

responsibility for their own learning and accomplishing tasks on the date indicated in the study packet.

Third, I didn't communicate the Individualized Method concept for foreign language education well with parents who followed their teenagers' explanation of flexible time and deadlines. Suddenly, when the nine weeks grades came due and their child had a "C" in my class and had passed the tests with "A's", for "Acceptable", parents became alarmed along with the students. Even other teachers at the school sympathized with the students for being graded "unfairly". This self-guided, self-paced curriculum did not register with my students or parents. I learned that my highly motivated, Ivy League college bound students were too tempted by other activities, friends, trips, family obligations or just laziness, and put off completing their assignments. Flexible completion of assignments wasn't the only major problem.

Fourth, I found myself turned into a monitor, or proctor, while checking on student performance. Throughout the semester, students became scattered out through the twelve lessons and I was trying to help individual students at all different levels and dividing my time for each one student, in isolation. The circle of conversation I used with my small classes in the Grammar-Translation Method was gone. Students often couldn't work with each other on the same assignment. Spontaneous discussions, explanations and the fun of student interaction were gone as each student plugged along, alone, through the levels. I had created a monster. Most students lacked the motivation and maturity to follow the schedule printed in

the packet because of delayed accountability. There were no administrators to buffer me from parents, to explain the modern educational purpose behind this curriculum to parents and to other teachers and to help me adapt the curriculum to classroom and student reality. I felt isolated, too. I missed teaching and interacting with my students in the conversation circle where we were all working toward the same goal within the same time frame. I also noticed that students were not speaking as much Spanish as before when I was teaching the Grammar-translation method.

I learned to research new methodology more on my own and not take such a simplistic approach with the curriculum. I learned it is a good idea to observe other successful teachers using a new method before adopting it for myself. I now understand how to proceed more slowly, by degrees when implementing a new teaching method. The valuable lessons I learned from this experience helped me during the rest of my teaching career.

Preparing Spanish I and II lesson packets for Individualized Instruction complemented and contributed to my bag of language teaching tricks. Although I was becoming a more proficient teacher, I still wanted to investigate newer, more communicative second language teaching methods. So, I kept looking for the optimal method for teaching my students.



## Chapter 5

### A Sabbatical from Teaching- New Perspectives on Foreign Language Teaching

1975-1990

Spanish was so hard for me to learn to speak when I was in high school. I am just amazed when I see these little Mexican kids running around speaking Spanish so easily.

Personnel Director for public school district during a job interview

*“Welcome to our town and public school system,” the personnel director greeted me warmly. “How long have you been in town?”*

*“My husband and I just moved here and I’d like to start teaching again in the fall,” I answered optimistically, reflecting the amiable attitude of the director.*

*“Please tell me about your experience. I see from your resume you’ve taught in a high school, a junior high and most recently a prep school. Which levels of foreign language did you teach?” the director asked smiling as he flipped pages.*

*“I’ve taught Introductory Spanish and Spanish I, II and III and French I to a wide variety of students. My students in junior high were from twelve to fifteen years old and came from very diverse ethnic, racial and economic backgrounds. My high school students were also diverse, but my prep school students were mostly upper middle or upper class privileged adolescents who were college bound. I’m familiar with the Audio-Lingual Method, The Grammar-Translation Method and most*

*recently, Individualized Instruction,” I added trying to sound experienced, knowledgeable and highly qualified for a teaching position in this district.*

*“This all looks impressive, but our district has no foreign language positions available for the fall,” the director announced in a matter of fact manner. “We’ll keep your resume and CV on file, should something come up. By the way, you should call my wife and go out for lunch sometime. She’ll help you learn more about our town and help you get acquainted. I’ve gotta tell you, Spanish was always hard for me to learn to speak in school. I am just amazed when I see these little Mexican kids running around speaking Spanish,” the director explained in a confidential tone.*

*Somewhat stunned by the director’s remarks, I didn’t know how to respond or what to say. His comments have haunted me for a long time as I compose, in my head, how I should have reacted to his unbelievable and ignorant statement. I wondered, after the interview, if he reflected the attitude and understanding of this school district about learning a foreign language. Even in a town of 35,000 this school district received students from not only a rural background but also a diverse population of students from around the world due to it being the headquarters of a very large international oil company.*

When my husband and I moved to a new city, I applied to teach Spanish or French for the local school district, but there were no positions available. This “opportunity” gave me a chance to explore the world outside of education as I started a twenty year sabbatical. Many life experiences added to my teaching perspective

and expanded the world I bring to my students today. Learning and growing through traveling, becoming a parent, coping with caregiving and the death of my parents and my sister, volunteering and joining the business world all contributed to the background experiences which shaped the teacher I bring to the classroom. Reflecting on these life changing events has brought me to new revelations about teaching foreign language.

In 1975, some school administrators lacked an understanding of the implications of increasing diversity among their student population. Banks (2008) points out, “One problem that continues to haunt the multicultural education movement--from both within and without--is the tendency by the public, teachers, administrators, and policy makers to oversimplify the concept. Multicultural education is complex and multidimensional...” (p. 30). Reading through Banks’ (2008) book, I was disappointed to only find references to teachers, not administrators, making changes and adapting to school diversity. Banks encourages teachers to choose textbooks that represent different racial and ethnic perspectives, to develop lessons that are sensitive to a diverse group of students, to serve on curriculum design committees, etc. but he neglects to address school administrators who hold the decision making power.

I used to joke with other language teachers about school administrators’ performing teacher observations and evaluations when they could not understand the language being spoken. We language teachers simply spoke the foreign language to our classes when the principal was observing, in order to impress or confuse him. I

witnessed a greater awareness of the advantages of foreign language education among school administrators when I returned to teaching in 1995. During a faculty meeting, my high school principal complimented the teachers on the advantages foreign language students gained from taking AP classes and receiving college credit.

During the mid 1980s, I discussed student diversity with my oldest sister, Kay, who was an assistant principal at an elementary school in northern California. She informed me how difficult her situation was, “Seventy five percent of the children in my school don’t speak English as their first language.” Trying to encourage her, I responded, “Then all the Spanish you studied in high school should come in handy.” She shocked me with her reply, “Most of my students speak Vietnamese and other Asian languages!” This was a reality in America in 1985 that my sister, a school vice principal, had to deal with on a daily basis.

In my experience, some school administrators are naïve and uninformed about the study of foreign languages and student diversity and would benefit from a foreign language immersion experience in a different culture. School principals would be more sympathetic to non-English speaking students if they experienced firsthand the difficulty of learning a second language. Administrators with limited knowledge and understanding of different languages, cultures, ethnic and racial groups were and many still are severely hampered in their educational effectiveness in today’s public schools.

## **A Teacher Became a Parent: 1981**

It's not only children who grow, Parents do too. As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching us to see what we do with ours. I can't tell my children to reach for the sun. All I can do is reach for it, myself. --Joyce Maynard

While working at my husband's office, the phone rang, "Hello, Mrs. Oliver, this is Rhema Nessbaum, from the Adoption Agency. "Oh my gosh," I almost whispered in the telephone receiver. "I can't believe you're calling me here at my husband's office. We've waited so long to hear from you," I said breathlessly, motioning wildly for my husband to come and listen to the conversation.

"Congratulations! You have a beautiful baby boy waiting for you to pick up. He is almost three weeks old and weighs about nine and a half pounds. He was voted the most beautiful baby in the nursery when he was born," Rhema added enthusiastically. "What do you think you will name him?"

"Tttttaylor," I responded, starting to shake.

"Tyler," she asked, not understanding me.

"No, Taylor," I answered gaining some composure. "Taylor is my maiden name and since my dad did not have any male children, my husband and I decided to keep my dad's name for his grandson, Taylor Dan Oliver." I noticed my husband's eyes growing wide as his jaw dropped. I quickly thought, *oh, my gosh! We're going*

*to be parents. Instant parenthood!* We were going to pick up our son in just two days.

It seems obvious that becoming a parent enriches the teacher. However, researching the many books I have cited for classroom methods, I found little research specifically about teaching and being a parent. However, in a recent article, Flannery (2013) explains the teacher/parent identity by quoting another teacher, “Being a parent has definitely made me a better teacher. I am much more empathetic to parents, and more patient and understanding with kids,” said Lisa Turner a social studies teacher at the Aspen Creek School in Colorado and a parent who is actually teaching her own son this year” (p. 1). Flannery touches on the ticklish situations of teaching in the same school your children attend. She discusses the boundaries of a teacher/parent inquiring about her child with teacher colleagues. She wonders how her child acts in a classroom away from the parent.

Reflecting on that comment, I remembered a high school teacher colleague who stood up and announced at the pre-school faculty meeting, “I apologize, in advance, for my son if he happens to be a student in your class.” Watson (2009) sent out a questionnaire to her readers asking, “Did you have any new insights or revelations about teaching once you had kids of your own” (p. 4). She categorized her responses to reflect most teacher/parent’s views on the returned forms:

1. Teacher/parents felt more empathy toward parents and students.  
They understood how important this child was to parents.

2. Teacher/parents were less frustrated when students did not complete homework or did not turn in completed homework.
3. Teacher/parents more deeply respected the individuality of the student and parents. Even the best parents could produce a “unique” child.
4. Teacher/parents gained a truer sense of what was truly important and the ultimate mission for teachers. (p. 4)

Watson includes other typical comments by teacher/parents. Many parent/teachers felt that being a teacher had made them a better parent. One teacher felt more relaxed and less critical of parents and students because of the humility she had learned as a parent.

Carduso (2010) comments on the importance of teacher empathy. Clarifying the concept of what constitutes empathy, the author points out that the teacher does not have to agree with the student, but, “Instead, she is able to step aside from where she stands and enter in the world of the learner, for a moment in this relationship she neglects her experiences, values, opinions, and puts herself in the other’s shoes” (p. 2). The teacher is better able to express this empathy after having practice with her own children. Brooks (1999) comments on the importance of empathy for successful teachers and parents. He states, “. . . if we want others to appreciate what we are communicating, if we want others to respond to and work cooperatively with us, then we must consider their perspective and how they perceive us” (n.p.). I recall a

statement I have heard several times about student motivation, “I cannot learn from you until I realize that you respect me as a person.”

Claesson & Brice (1989) report on the dual roles of teacher/mothers. After conducting many interviews, the authors conclude that each role complements the other and teacher/mothers gain insights and learn strategies as a parent which benefitted their teaching. For example, I relied on *Parenting with Love and Logic* 1993 by Cline Foster, M.D. Many of the tactics suggested by Dr. Foster focused on giving students choices which the parent could live with, and thus agency and responsibility for their own conduct. The concepts and ideas presented reminded me of the Individualized Instruction Method which mandated student participation and responsibility. Papalia & Zampogna (1974) discuss the individual goals of students, “Because the emphases on the goals of foreign language instruction may vary from student to student, from parent to parent, and from teacher to teacher, foreign language programs must provide opportunities for all students to pursue goals of personal value” (p. 302).

Becoming a parent during my sabbatical from teaching taught me a great deal about myself, my priorities, and the uniqueness of children, such as how they learn and how they prefer to learn. When each of my children turned three years old, I decided to enroll them in preschool. My son, who was very young for the class age criteria, was accepted regardless of his birth month. Four years later, my daughter, who was also quite young for the class, was denied admittance to a different preschool because of her age. The age “problem” continued to affect my children’s



acceptance in primary school because the elementary school culture felt younger children would enter school at a disadvantage because they were not as experienced, or “mature” as older students in the same grade.

Parents in our school district were encouraged to hold their children back if they had a summer birthday. These elementary schools routinely tested most young children at the end of kindergarten, and then placed most of the younger ones in Developmental First grade, D1, in order to give them an extra year to develop first grade skills and maturity. As a result of holding back so many children in elementary schools, the other kids in my children’s grades were sometimes a year and a half older than my children. I believe the advanced age of students in a particular grade affected the teacher’s student performance expectations. As a parent/teacher, I advocated for placing my children in their age appropriate grades, instead of holding them back a year, as long as they were reasonably prepared. Each child’s readiness for schools needs to be considered on an individual basis, not on just a birthday. There are many individual factors that influence a child’s learning ability and readiness.

Being a parent, I learned how standardized school rules do not always fit the individual child. There is no standard child. For example, young children who don’t always speak their first language clearly may have difficulty learning to speak a second language. My son started speaking when he was less than a year old. He matched pitches with me as I sang him a lullaby when he was a year old. However, my daughter’s speech was still difficult to understand when she turned three years

old. I was so concerned about not being able to understand her speech that I had her hearing tested. Her basic hearing ability was fine, but she did not carefully repeat sounds she heard. My son, four years older, thought her speech was unacceptable and proceeded to correct it, by modeling the correct sound and pointing out the differences in how she pronounced words. She responded well to his “tutoring” and careful listening and within a short time, she was speaking more clearly.

Implementation of the Audio-Lingual Method, with its emphasis on pronunciation, would later help my daughter distinguish sounds when she learned to speak a foreign language.

Through this experience, I learned that some children are not acute listeners or speakers. Differences in sounds can be explicitly taught for better pronunciation in a first and second language. Some students who are learning a second language need extra time and attention to be taught to listen and pronounce carefully.

As Palmer (2007), Rivers (1981), Gaab (2006) and Ray (2009) point out, an effective teacher relates to her students and includes the child’s world in the lesson, in order to make learning more relevant. Helping as a parent volunteer in my children’s classrooms, I noticed disparate student reading abilities, visual acuity and motor skills along with their varied readiness levels. I came to understand the need for the teacher to interact with students as they learn and manipulate a new language to suit their interests and goals. Children are distinctive individuals, exhibiting special talents, interests and personalities.

When I returned to teaching after twenty years, I returned no longer as a potential peer, a twenty- something recent college graduate, I returned as a parent, who understood children better because I was raising my own children. I had witnessed and coped with childhood tantrums and challenges. I felt the butterflies in my stomach as my children competed in table tennis tournaments and performed ballet on stage. I reveled in their accomplishments and was amazed as they progressed through more complex levels of development. I sat in the closet with my daughter who was consumed by tears as she lamented that her first grade composition was not perfect. I learned a valuable lesson from my son's Physics teacher who counseled me to let my teenage son own his failures and take responsibility for his homework assignments. Time stood still during gymnastics and ballet classes, but flew by looking back over the years. Progressive class photos illuminate growth and maturity changes.

Maturing with my children helped me handle a fight between two boys when I later returned to teaching. After the first punch, the teenage boys separated, giving me the opportunity to guide one boy down the hall while another teacher took the second boy to her empty classroom. Walking down the corridor toward the Vice-Principal's office, I spoke slowly and softly to the boy, "It looks like you're really upset. I'd really like to know your side of the problem." The feeling of tension eased as he tilted his head toward mine and began his story. He motioned to the growing group of students following us, that he was Ok. He told me his side, as I

sympathetically listened, as a mother who was not shocked by his behavior as I might have been before becoming a parent.

I experienced the world of a child through my children's lived experiences, and my perspective was broadened. I yearned to bring a piece of the outside world—the cultures and languages that had helped my own children blossom—into the classroom for my students. When I returned to teaching, it was with a new awareness of the inner workings of the minds of individual children. I had witnessed firsthand how two children, even when raised in the same household, preferred different learning strategies. However, while I was learning these lessons, other teachers were evolving in their teaching strategies. As I toyed with the idea of reentering the classroom, I wondered how approaches to foreign language learning had changed in the last twenty years. With some trepidation, I planned to adapt as I investigated newer methods for teaching students to communicate in a foreign language.

## Chapter 6

### A Sabbatical from Teaching – New Perspectives on Foreign Language Teaching

#### Travel - 1990-1995

Perhaps travel cannot prevent bigotry, but by demonstrating that all peoples cry, laugh, eat, worry, and die, it can introduce the idea that if we try to understand each other we may even become friends.

Maya Angelou

*“Come on guys let’s find the ice cream,” my 11-year-old American son living in the Southwest United States shouted to his same-age new buddies on the cruise ship. “Then we can check out the video games in the Kids Quarters!”*

*José, a Venezuelan boy who was traveling with his grandmother from Florida, shouted, “I know a short cut to the Kids Quarters. Follow me, rápido.”*

*Ahmad, an Iranian boy, living with his extended family in England, added excitedly, “I have to tell my family where we’re going. Come with me to our cabin for a minute. At the cabin, Ahmad introduced his mother and little sister to his new friends hurriedly and informed his mother, “We’re going to Deck 12 for some ice cream and to the Kids Quarters. I’ll be back before dinner, Chao.”*

*Chin Ho, “Charlie,” a South Korean boy, living with his family in California, bowed to Ahmad’s mom and sister then repeated, “I’m hungry and if we don’t hurry all the old people will eat all the ice cream before we get there. I’m gonna mix all the*

*flavors for a triple dip cone! Do they have a table tennis table in the Kids Quarters?"*

*"I'm gonna beat you," they shouted to each other, each pushing and shoving the other playfully as they raced up the five staircases to the upper decks.*

*With English as their common language, each boy communicated in "Boy Talk" with the others, learning a few terms on the way in Spanish, Korean, Arabic and American.*

*Later my son brought his friends to the pool, "Hey Mom, listen to Ahmad. We taught him how to say "water" in American," my son enthusiastically pointed to his friend.*

*"How do you say 'water' in British English, Ahmad," I asked trying to follow the groups' excitement.*

*"Wuah tehr," Ahmad dutifully obliged.*

*"Now in American," my son urged proudly because Ahmad now sounded like an Okie.*

*"Waterrr," Ahmad answered with a Texas accent and a Redneck smirk.*

*"Oh boy," I thought. My son has corrupted the child's beautiful English accent.*

*When we stopped in different ports in the Caribbean, the boys were surrounded by Spanish signs on storefronts and streets. Hawkers regularly tried Spanglish on the boys, because they were not too sure which language each boy spoke. The boys laughed and adapted to the language they understood in the group.*

These boys created a community culture that allowed them to have fun together regardless of the race, nationality or native language. They shared the same common boy goals when traveling and made friends with each other. Becoming friends came very naturally to them. The teacher side of me realized that students learning a foreign language and another culture break down barriers to communication and understanding. Therefore, methods that teach students to communicate and respect each other are optimal, just as travel and immersion are valuable.

Rivers (1981) discusses the importance of travelling and living in a foreign country in order to develop second language fluency: “The ideal way for them [students] to develop the speaking skill to the fullest is to live for a period among the people who speak the language. They are then forced to use what they know to supply their physical and emotional needs, that is, in genuine communication” (p. 221). Students surrounded by signs, listening to words in a country where another language is spoken are confronted with another language in context, which leads to greater understanding.

Traveling, in greater depth and for a longer period, is now referred to as a language immersion experience, “Study Abroad,” for language students. Foreign language students living in a foreign country with a family who speak a foreign language is considered one of the most effective methods for acquiring a foreign language (Rivers, 1981; Hadley, 2001; Shrum & Glisan, 2010; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Study Abroad programs are offered at many universities across the United States. For example, the University of Oklahoma provides over two hundred opportunities for Study Abroad to students. Courses offered through various colleges, Business, Education, Arts & Sciences, etc., encourage students to broaden their education by experiencing life in another culture by living in a foreign country for the summer, a semester or an academic year. Students can enroll in the Autonomous Popular University of the State of Puebla, Mexico to gain further credits in Spanish language fluency. Chastain (1988) praises the advantages of travel/study abroad opportunities for students, “The most valuable type of experience is direct exposure to the customs and habits of the second culture. Students can learn more in less time than is ever possible in class” (p. 315). However, study abroad programs must be carefully prepared and researched for them to be worthwhile. Rivers (1981) and Bourque (1974) caution students to take full advantage of the opportunity to live with a family, speak the language and participate in the community. A drawback to the program occurs when students stay isolated with their friends and speak their native language in the foreign country. However,



because of financial and other school concerns, most students are taught foreign language in a classroom setting.

Travelling during my sabbatical encouraged me to later take several groups of students for short visits to Mexico. Students not only picked up the language quickly in context, but they appreciated the reality of the language and the culture. There was something about actually taking a bus, taxi or the subway, in Mexico City to a local museum, a pyramid, a sporting event or concert that confronted the true existence of the culture and language. Immersion in the culture and country gave my students an opportunity to eat real Mexican food in a Mexican restaurant. They experienced the excitement of a bullfight in an actual Corrida de Toros. They bought food and souvenirs in a rustic Mexican market and had to bargain with the sellers for their souvenirs. They practiced dancing traditional dances in Mexico while listening to instructions in Spanish. They walked the narrow streets in the Colonial parts of the old city to experience life and architecture constructed in 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Mexico. Perhaps these students imagined themselves as long ago colonial citizens as they absorbed the culture on cobblestone streets.

My students also experienced the reality of living in a Spanish speaking country through a Practice Teacher I mentored in the early seventies. Four years earlier, she had fled from Cuba to the United States. Her honest, firsthand revelations about her life in Cuba made the experiences real for my students. She told our students about her life as a high school student and how, when Castro's regime took control of the government, she had lost her home, money and father to the dictator's

economic and political realignment of Cuba. She confided to students that the rum drink, Cuba Libre, was used as an undercover protest of the Castro takeover – The “C” in Cuba was pronounced caustically to sound like their hatred of the “C” in Castro.

Before and after this sabbatical, I related my experiences to my students about travelling to countries in the Caribbean, Central America, Spain and South America. Showing a National Geographic article and pictures of Machu Pichu, “The Lost City of the Incas,” to my students, I included my own Polaroid pictures from my trip to Peru and Ecuador. Showing another photo, I explained how a band of eight Inca Indian descendants, dressed in traditional costumes, welcomed us to Cuzco, the former capital of the Incan Empire, by playing music on their flutes, singing and dancing. The Incas entertained tourists as we entered the large central courtyard of the mansion that had once belonged to Pizarro, the Spanish conquistador of the Incas in mid 1500s. I explained how, upon arriving to the approximately 10,000 foot high former capital of the Incan Empire, we were served Coca Tea, a derivative of the coca plant, which helps travelers adjust to the extreme change in altitude. Since I had actually travelled and stayed in Cuzco and Machu Pichu, these places seemed more real to my students. I concluded the exposure to a foreign culture by telling my students about the Peruvian college student who was our waiter at the hotel restaurant and how we conversed in Spanish. On our second day at the hotel, this student brought me a poster of Machu Pichu as a gift. Very

politely he gave me his address and phone number as he indicated how much he wanted to come and live with my family in the United States.

Through my travel experiences with my students and my own children, I saw firsthand how students more clearly grasp the reality of other languages and cultures by living in a foreign country. Teaching methods that emphasize the reality of the language and the culture motivate students through their authenticity. This realization profoundly impacted my teaching, making me relate by travel experiences to my students as we imagined the world outside the classroom. The world the student brings to the classroom can later bind to global experiences.

## Chapter 7

### 1995-2006: Communicative Approaches

In Paris, they simply opened their eyes and stared when we spoke to them in French!

We never did succeed in making those idiots understand their own language.

Mark Twain

*After studying a story for a few days in Spanish II class, my ninth grade son surprised me in the car when I was taking him home from school. “Mom, I learned this cool story in Spanish this week and I want to tell it to you,” he started eagerly as I was pulling out of the pick- up lane.*

*The story went something like this, “Hay una muchacha bonita. Se llama Coquí. Ella tiene un gato grande. Hay un muchacho malo. Se llama Pedro. El es un muchacho malo. El corre hacia la muchacha bonita. El agarra el gato grande. El tira el gato al suelo. El gato grande escapa. La muchacha, Coquí, está triste. Ahora, no tiene su gato. No está contenta. Ella llora y llora y llora, pero Pedro se ríe. Hay otra muchacha bonita. Se llama Mónica. Mónica lleva un gato pequeño. Mónica ve que Coquí está llorando. Coquí está llorando porque ella ya no tiene su gato grande. Mónica va hacia Coquí y le da su gato pequeño. Ahora Coquí no está triste. Está muy contenta. (Story adapted from Ray, 1995, p. 4). [There is a pretty girl. Her name is Coqui. She has a big cat. There is a bad boy. His name is Pedro. He is a bad boy. He runs toward the pretty girl. He grabs the big cat. He throws the cat to the ground. The big cat escapes. Now she does not have her cat. The girl,*

*Coqui, is sad. She is not happy. She cries and cries and cries, but Pedro laughs. There is another pretty girl. Her name is Monica. Monica carries a small cat. Monica sees that Coqui is crying. Coqui is crying because she no longer has her big cat. Monica goes toward Coqui and gives her small cat to her. Now Coqui is not sad. She is happy] (My translation).*

*“Son, I am so proud of you. What you just did is amazing. You just told me an entire story in Spanish and I understood everything you said. Congratulations,” I replied enthusiastically and rather shocked.*

*My son was delighted and proud of himself. I was amazed that he could tell me a story, totally in Spanish, in sequential order, with a good accent and grammatically correct. I decided I needed to investigate how this happened.*

This chapter examines new teaching methods that arose from the renovated Direct Method, Krashen’s theories and the Natural Approach. When I returned to teaching after twenty years, I returned to teaching the Traditional-Grammar Method, a newer form of Grammar-Translation. Several other teachers in the school system were experimenting with Total Physical Response (TPR) and TPR Storytelling (TPRS), which developed from insight gleaned from the Direct Method, the Natural Approach and Krashen’s theories. These new teaching methods were included under the broad interpretation of the Communicative Approach.

This chapter examines how the Grammar-Translation Method was still practiced, although with an updated title of Traditional-Grammar and with more

communicative activities included in textbooks. The Natural Approach was beginning to infiltrate the traditional teaching methods because of the growing influence and respect for Krashen and Terrell. I detail these new methods because of their profound effect on teacher attitudes, perspectives and communicative goals. Foreign language teachers looking for newer, more communicative approaches investigated the creation of TPR by Asher and TPR Story telling by Blaine Ray.

### **Communicative Approach**

The Communicative Approach appeared in the 1970s and was promoted by many experts in the field of foreign language education (Shrum & Glisan, 2011; Long, 1999; Hadley, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Rivers, 1981, 1987; Chastain, 1988). Shrum & Glisan (2011) explain, “In the 1970s, greater attention was given to developing a more communicative approach to teaching language, focusing on the needs of learners and on the nature of communication in realistic settings outside the classroom” (p. 48). Communicative activities that allow students to express and negotiate meaning are preferred over rehearsing grammatical patterns and memorizing grammatical rules. This approach refers more to an aim for second language learning than a method. A variety of authors express common understanding of basic tenets of the communicative approach whose aim is communicative competence.

The Communicative Approach emphasizes meaning through context, interaction with others from the beginning of instruction, maintaining student

interest, judicious use of translation, learning activities and strategies which reflect learner preferences and needs and communicative competence (Hadley, 2001, pp. 116-117). Rivers (1981) and Long (1999) refer to communicative language that incorporates realistic context that is of interest to learners and motivates them to express themselves through functional language use. Analysis of Krashen's theories and hypotheses leads to the Communicative Approach, which then points the way to the Natural Approach and a renovated Direct Method.

The Direct Method reemerged in the 1970s in a modern version that emphasizes real communication (Rivers, 1981; Shrum & Glisan, 2011; Hadley, 2001). Shrum & Glisan (2011) explain the link between the newer version of the Direct Method and the Natural Approach:

The Natural Approach, a modern day version of the Direct Method was Terrell's (1982) attempt to operationalize Krashen's theories in the classroom. Anchored in the philosophy that L2 [second language] learning occurs in the same way as L1 [first language] acquisition, the Natural Approach stresses the importance of authentic language input in real-world contexts, comprehension before production, and self-expression early on, and de-emphasizes the need for grammatical perfection in the beginning stages of language learning. (p. 49)

Since Terrell (1982) bases his Natural Approach theory on Krashen's research, a discussion of Krashen thorough theories and hypotheses are appropriate here.

## **Krashen's Theories**

Even though Krashen espouses his theories beginning in 1977, I refer to his 1982 book, *Principles and Practices*. This later publication provides the author an opportunity for more detailed explanation of his theory after questions and criticism arose after the 1977 book, *The Monitor Model for Adult Second Language Performance*. Krashen (1982) describes his first three important hypotheses, the Acquisition learning hypotheses, Natural Order hypotheses and the Monitor hypotheses. Later in the chapter, Krashen details his most celebrated hypotheses, “The fourth hypotheses, the Input hypotheses, may be the single most important concept in second language acquisition theory today” (p. 9). He concludes the chapter on Second Language Acquisition Theory with the concept of the affective filter. All these hypotheses and concepts, which contributed to the Natural Method expressed by Terrell, deserve further explanation.

Krashen (1982) contends that adults have two distinct and independent ways of developing competences in a second language.

1. **Acquisition** – Similar to how children develop their first language as a subconscious experience. Learners are not aware of the rules of language, but have a “feel for correctness”.
2. **Learning** – Conscious knowledge of grammar rules. Students know *about* the target language through explicit instruction.



Krashen elaborates on acquisition, “This does not mean that adults will always be able to achieve native-like levels in a second language. It does mean that adults can access the same natural language acquisition device that children use” (p. 10).

Krashen contends that an adult’s ability to acquire language does not stop at puberty. Learning and acquisition coexist. The author proposes that acquisition takes place before learning for the beginning foreign language student regardless of age. Later, learning combines with acquisition as the student becomes more proficient and knowledgeable about the language. Krashen envisions the usefulness of combining acquisition and learning for the advanced foreign language competence of the student.

Krashen (1982) explores the Natural Order Hypothesis. When learning is later introduced, he asserts, “... the acquisition of grammatical structures proceeds in a predictable order” (p. 12) and that certain structures are naturally acquired earlier while others are acquired later. Adult learners reportedly follow a natural order similar to children when learning a second language.

In order to clarify his hypothesis of Natural Order, Krashen does not recommend grammatical order sequencing syllabi for foreign language classes when the goal of instruction is language acquisition. He first encourages students to acquire language and later, as students begin to gain control and confidence, advocates adding more structure. Along with acquiring a second language, Krashen (1982) refers to transitional forms, developmental errors the student progresses through toward foreign language competency. He contends that the similarities the

student has encountered in acquiring and learning his first and second languages support the theory of natural language acquisition. Adults tend to learn a second language by passing through similar stages as they did learning their first language.

Krashen's Monitor theory explains the coexistence of learning and acquisition and the function of each for the second language student, "Normally acquisition 'initiates' our utterances in a second language and is responsible for our fluency. Learning had only one function and that was as a Monitor or editor" (Krashen, 1982, p. 15). As students listen to themselves speak and read what they write, they make changes that clarify their meaning. With the teacher's guidance, students learn to communicate more effectively. Student self-corrections and conscious learning, guide the student toward increased fluency and competency.

Krashen (1982) emphasizes the effects of structure on fluency when he explains that time, focus on form correctness, and internalizing the rules, influence how well students communicate. Because of structural monitoring, the student demonstrates a hesitant way of talking and writing because he is conscious of filtering his part of the conversation and his writing, trying first to remember and implement the grammatical rule. However, Krashen clarifies that the learning of grammatical rules and concepts are beneficial when he states, "Use of the conscious Monitor thus has the effect of allowing performers to supply items that are not yet acquired" (p. 17). He encourages the teaching of simple rules of grammar first, so as not to overwhelm students with structure. He summarizes the Monitor Theory as students progressed through the hierarchy of simple to more complicated

grammatical concepts, "... the rise in rank of items that are, 'late acquired' in the natural order, items the performer has learned, but has not yet acquired" (p. 18).

Krashen recognizes the difference in time needed for a student to acquire all facets of a language compared to the great deal of time a child has naturally growing up, as he acquires his first language. Explicit, conscious grammar learning speeds up the total knowledge learning a student needs to become proficient.

Lastly, Krashen explains the importance of the Input Hypothesis in both theoretical and practical terms which is crucial to understanding how second language, L2, is acquired. He represents his theory with an equation,  $i$  (*current competence*) +  $i + 1$  (*the next level*), an equation exemplifying how a student progresses from his present level of ability to the next higher level. Krashen defines his Input theory, "We acquire, in other words, only when we understand language that contains structure that is a 'little beyond' where we are now" (p. 21). How do students cross the threshold of "going beyond?" Krashen (1982) elucidates his point, "The answer to this apparent paradox is that we use more than our linguistic competence to help us understand. We also use context, our knowledge of the world, our extra-linguistic information to help us understand language directed to us" (p. 21). In order to accomplish the goal of understanding the meaning of the message and not the form of the message, students rely on links to their first language and linguistic background, the context of the message with visual and auditory clues, and gestures. Emphasizing Krashen's Input Theory, it is essential that students

completely understand the L2 input and that there is enough input and interesting repetition for students to acquire the language.

Krashen concludes, “The final part of the input hypothesis states that speaking fluency cannot be taught directly. Rather it ‘emerges’ over time, on its own” (p. 22). Krashen explains how comprehensible input leads to acquiring speaking. He, like Terrell and later Asher, advocates that the teacher patiently wait for the student’s readiness to speak. The teacher should not force the student to speak before he is ready. Instead, Krashen prefers a ‘caretaker’ approach used to encourage young children to speak their first language. A simpler, slower rate of caretaker speech is meant to aid comprehension, relates an accepting relationship with the child, whose beginning attempts to speak, progress toward more grammatically correct communication. Expanding the similarity to caretaker’s speech, Krashen refers to recycling information the child has already acquired for reinforcement, not unlike the “binding” process Terrell (1986) discusses later.

Caretaker speech concentrates on the present, the child’s immediate environment and his interests. Krashen (1982) explains caretaker input to the child, “First, it is, or aims to be, comprehensible. The ‘here and now’ feature provides extra-linguistic support (context) that helps the child understand the utterances containing  $i+1$ ” (p. 23). Real speech relayed by the caretaker to the child, albeit simple and slow, relates to the way the teacher communicates to the student, giving clues to the student to encourage him to guess and experiment with language, hence “ $i+1$ ”. Krashen sums up the caretaker perspective by noticing that the caretaker does

not worry about consciously introducing grammar to the language the young child is acquiring. Next, Krashen relates his input hypothesis to the child, or adult, learning a second language. He compares a second language learner to a child acquiring his native language who can receive modified input similar to that given by caretakers of small children. Krashen (1982) also reiterates his natural order of acquisition of a second language to help a child learn naturally.

### **The Natural Approach**

The Natural Approach was developed by Terrell (1977), who was influenced by Krashen's perspective of language learning and his theories. Chastain (1988) points out, "It is an inner-directed, reduced-stress, mentalistic approach," (p. 99). Terrell (1977) explains communicative competence, "My premise is that it is possible for students in a classroom situation to learn to communicate in a second language" (p. 325). Even though this premise seems obvious as a foreign language teacher's main objective, he asserts that due to a prevalent constrictive classroom atmosphere, the reality of the final product does not support communication. Structure/grammar instruction occupies the majority of class time with little time left over for students to practice speaking and listening in the target language.

Terrell carefully defines communicative competence in his argument, "I use this term to mean that a student can understand the essential points of what a native speaker says to him in a real communicative situation and can respond in such a way that the native speaker interprets the response with little or no effort and without

errors that are so distracting that they interfere drastically with communication” (p. 526). In order to accomplish increased communicative competence, grammar expectations for student performance must be lowered. In other words, the majority of classroom time needs to be devoted to communicative activities instead of grammar explanations with practice exercises and drills.

Beginning foreign language students acquire a second language easier when words are presented in meaningful context, as opposed to in isolated grammatical sentences to support a grammatical rule. Terrell contends that knowledge of grammar is not essential for successful communication with a native speaker. He extends his point that grammar correctness in early language learning is a “... felt need of language teachers and is not an expectation of either language learners or most native speakers of L2” (p. 326). Terrell agrees with Krashen that acquiring a language comes first, and then grammar learning serves as a monitor for later, increased language competency. The student must first be able to communicate and then the teacher can direct the student toward adult grammar editing. Terrell concurs with Krashen about acquiring a language he described as “... the unconscious absorption of general principles of grammar through real experiences of communication using L2” (p. 327). Acquisition of a language involves “picking up a language.” Learning, on the other hand, is the conscious study and memorization of the rules and concepts of grammar.

Terrell (1977) elaborates on Krashen’s hypothesis that adults learn a second language in a similar manner to children learning their first language. Terrell points

out the fact that many immigrants learn L2 away from an academic setting. They acquire L2 naturally, albeit often imperfectly. Many citizens in “conquered countries” have found themselves obliged to acquire the language of the conqueror as soon as possible to increase their chances of survival (Tourist Guide, 2009, Estonia). Terrell supports the idea that most people, regardless of age, can learn to speak a second language. He upholds Krashen’s 1973 study, which indicates contrary findings to the theory of a critical age period for language acquisition.

Krashen contends that because cortical lateralization has been completed by age five, the critical period for language acquisition, which supposedly ended at puberty, is therefore not a factor in language acquisition (Terrell, 1977, p. 328). Terrell concludes, “The evidence at this point indicates then that the primary factors which influence L2 acquisition are affective not cognitive, therefore, the overriding consideration in all of the components of any natural approach must be to make the student feel at ease during activities in the classroom” (p. 329). Adults or adolescents are not limited in their ability to acquire L2 because they have passed the age of brain readiness. Acquiring a second language, at any age, is more likely a result of motivation not his brain readiness.

Terrell (1977) summarizes the Natural Approach:

1. Goal of beginning language instruction – acquiring communicative competence not grammatical perfection.
2. Grammar instruction – modify and improve student’s grammar

3. Students given opportunity to acquire – not forced to learn
4. Primary forces of acquisition – affective not cognitive. (p. 329)

When applying the Natural Approach in the classroom, Terrell proposes that teachers devote the entire class period to communicative activities and save the grammar explanation and practice for homework, outside of class time. Teachers should act as guides and motivators with the primary responsibility for improvement resting with the student. Error correction, which is more appropriate for writing activities, should almost never occur during the acquisition of speech. Instead, the listener of the beginning speaker should focus his attention on the message or context/content of the speech and not on the structure. Does the native speaker understand the intent and the message of the beginner? If so, then the student is acquiring the second language as he communicates.

Students, whose beginning attempts at speaking are constantly corrected, become hesitant to express themselves and respond in the target language. “Consequently, most students avoid trying to communicate anything which goes beyond simple direct answers. Communication in the real world with native speakers bears little resemblance to this sort of classroom exchange” (Terrell, 1977, p. 331). The teacher must use creativity and imagination to encourage students to risk expressing themselves in an accepting, respectful classroom environment free from embarrassment.



In order to prevent the new learner from becoming overwhelmed when acquiring a second language, Terrell recommends that the student listen to a great deal of second language input before joining into the conversation. Like Krashen, Terrell advocates giving the beginning language learner time to feel comfortable understanding the language before he speaks. After many hours of listening, the student begins to contribute to the conversation with short answers as he gains experience and confidence with the new language. Terrell even suggests that the use of the student's native language, L1, or a combination of L1 and his second language, L2, is appropriate and does not retard the student's acquisition of L2. Terrell points to the key to second language comprehension as a "... matter of learning to comprehend what is being heard (or read) without knowing all of the structure or all of the lexical items of the sentence" (p. 332). Students' attempts at speaking L2 should be appreciated by the teacher and classmates in a risk free atmosphere that encourages fluency.

Cautioning teachers not to be too easy on students, Terrell encourages teachers to stretch students' imagination and to listen to, or to look for, various cues to catch the gist of utterances. This suggestion is reminiscent of Krashen's theory of  $i + 1$ . Start where the students' knowledge begins and then extend understanding in small steps, by using context, gestures, visuals, explanations, and stories, so students progress to the next level.

"It cannot be stressed enough that building a tolerance for listening to a second language, which one is only partially understanding, is not especially easy,

however, the satisfaction the student derives from comprehension usually ameliorates the tension caused by hearing of unfamiliar lexical items and structure” (Terrell, 1977, p. 332). Vocabulary memorization, not grammatical structure learning, is the key to second language speaking and understanding L2. Students begin to speak the L2 when they have enough confidence to overcome anxiety and the fear that they will be ridiculed by their peers or their teacher. Terrell’s attitude is flexible as he permits students to communicate with short or long answers in both native and second languages. In order not to hinder communication, Terrell includes more structure and refinement as students’ fluency increases. He adds that if communication is the goal of the beginning second language student, then the student should be tested orally and not for grammatical accuracy.

Terrell concludes, “I have argued that the goal of most students studying a second language in an academic situation is to acquire the ability to communicate effectively in that language” (p. 335). His three guidelines for beginning second language acquisition include permitting students to use L1 or L2 or a combination, not correcting student grammar errors, and allocating all class time on communicative activities while spending out- of -class time on structure learning and drill exercises. Terrell advises teachers to realign their goals to those of their students who want to learn to communicate in the second language.

Terrell (1986) elaborates on three important stages of language acquisition, “... Comprehension (preproduction), early speech (one-word responses), and speech emergence (sentence production)” (p. 214). Terrell introduces a new term, *binding*,

that he defines as, "... the cognitive and affective mental process of linking a meaning to a form" (p. 214). Binding helped build listening comprehension. Students link a new foreign word to some first language word they already know, such as a cognate, *titulo* for title, or use a process to connect/interpret the new word to an already known concept, *ojo*, for eye with a dot in each "o".

Terrell refers to Krashen's Natural Order hypothesis with the binding of grammatical morphemes. "L2 theory predicts accurately that, for natural acquirers, grammatical morphemes will be acquired as expected (in natural order) provided that enough comprehensible input is available (Terrell, 1986, p. 217). Finding some problems with Krashen's L2 theory, Terrell prefers to classify learning and acquisition as a binding/access framework for acquisition. Even though Terrell agrees with the essence of Krashen's theory, he interprets acquisition and learning from his own perspective, "Within this framework [binding/access] acquisition as a process is seen as a mixture of conscious and subconscious attempts at binding form and meaning and then accessing those forms for communicative purpose" (p. 225). Binding form to meaning adds another dimension to Krashen's construct of acquisition and learning. Students acquire language easier when it relates to something they already know or can connect to, which then links to Krashen's theory of  $i+1$ . Terrell emphasizes the mixture of the conscious and unconscious when acquiring or binding the language. Close similarities exist between Terrell's ideas and Krashen's acquiring (unconscious) and learning (conscious) when both

conscious and unconscious styles are combined as students progress toward communicative competence.

In a comparison some fifteen years after the introduction of these methods, Hadley (2001) criticizes Krashen's and Terrell's approaches to the ACTFL proficiency goals. She contends, "One aspect of Natural Approach methodology that may not be congruent with proficiency goals is the lack of form-focused instruction or corrective feedback in classroom instruction" (p. 123). The emphasis on grammar instruction over communicative instruction has become an intense foreign language teacher debate. Hadley comments on the growing controversy between educators who do not correct grammar during oral activities and those educators who do correct.

The schism that exists between "pro-grammar" and "anti-grammar" beginning level L2 teachers reflected a lack of thorough understanding of Terrell's Natural Approach and Krashen's theories. Both authors proposed including grammar instruction as the student progresses through the acquiring process, or binding/access process. Terrell (1986) suggests that explicit grammar instruction is worthwhile for the student in the interest of time as an advance organizer. Krashen (1982) also adds a later inclusion of grammar instruction as the student's level of competency increased. Hadley wrote, "This acknowledgement of a potentially positive role for explicit grammar instruction makes an important modification in the Natural Approach, as described by Terrell in his earlier work" (p. 123).

Rivers (1983) acknowledges the fascination people have had with ‘natural language learning’ as far back as 19<sup>th</sup> century and refers to the natural language learning of children as enjoyable and successful. The logical assumption is that classroom language acquisition should also follow this natural, childlike method. Rivers (1983) describes second language learners, “They are individuals who have already learned one language by a natural process. They retain a certain capacity... for acquiring language naturally through communication and interaction in the language, as well as for learning it in a more structured fashion” (pp. 5-6). Adults bring their own background/native language to the classroom while young children learn their first language with a clean slate and with no first language interference. Krashen supports the theory that all learners of L2 are beginning learners, but they do not all present themselves the same in a natural and classroom setting. Terrell’s concepts of binding connected with both children and adult learners; however, adult learners have more language knowledge for increased binding and access.

The young child has a great deal of concentrated time to learn the first language as opposed to the limited time available for classroom learning. Because of limited classroom time, Rivers (1981) refers to the Natural Approach time division: class time entirely devoted to communicative activities and homework time devoted to structured learning and practice. Rivers discusses the lack of classroom time available to students with the Direct Method which closely resembles the Natural Approach, “It is unrealistic to believe that the conditions of native-language learning can be recreated in the classroom with adolescent students. Unlike the infant learner,

adolescent or adult students already possess well-established native-language speech habits” (p. 34). Rivers continues, “These will inevitably influence the forms in which they express themselves in their early attempts at spontaneous communication, unless they have been given some systematic practice in the structures they need to express these ideas” (p.34).

Chastain (1988), Rivers (1981), Rivers (1983), Shrum & Glisan (2011), Hadley (2001), Rivers (1987), Richards & Rodgers (2001), and Long (1999) all discuss the Natural Approach, inevitably citing Krashen’s theories and Terrell’s adaptations. Interestingly, few authors, other than Rivers and Hadley, offer criticisms of the Natural Approach. Perhaps this lack of criticism propelled the popularity of the method among language teachers. Markee (1997) reveals some reasons for the Natural Approaches’ proliferation. The method was simple to understand, it was already accepted knowledge of second language acquisition and Krashen demonstrated the method to many teacher groups and explained the flexibility of the plan that could work with current teaching practices.

### **Total Physical Response Method**

Asher (1969) prefaces his strategy of Total Physical Response (TPR) by pointing out the difficulties a teacher faces when teaching a foreign language in a classroom setting: student to teacher ratio, student motivation, student aptitude and most importantly, classroom time. Explaining that high school language programs might be overly ambitious, Asher proposes a focus on listening and speaking skills

for the beginning language student because of classroom time constraints. Citing several studies, Asher concludes that "...listening skills seem to have a large positive transfer to reading and writing depending upon the fit phonology and orthography of a specific language" (p. 4). In order to solve the problem of addressing student listening competency, Asher observes how young children listened and responded physically to commands before they learned to speak.

Following this line of thinking, reminiscent of Terrell's Natural Approach and Krashen's observation of children, Asher (1969) explains TPR, "The strategy of the total physical response is to have the students listen to a command in a foreign language and immediately obey with a physical action" (p. 4). Typically the teacher began instruction with a one or two word command, saying and demonstrating, "Stand Up," which the students imitated physically by standing up. One word commands transitioned to a string of commands which eventually led to more complex multiple word commands that the students imitated. The teacher then gradually withdrew her demonstrations as students responded only to the verbal cues and commands.

Citing twenty-one experiments, Asher (1969) concludes that students can achieve listening comprehension when he states, "One approach which produces rapid, non-stressful learning to understand a second language is the Total Physical Response Technique" (p. 16). Asher details the TPR method making the following points:

1. Students must physically perform motor acts for retention
2. Intact patterns of the motor act are necessary to listening fluency
3. Motor acts facilitate learning as complexity increased
4. Motor acts facilitated learning through varying time intervals
5. Translation method impeded comprehension
6. Comprehension was decreased when students learned to listen and speak together
7. Adults scored superior to children in listening comprehension when both groups were taught with the Total Physical Response Technique (p. 17)

Asher's first experiments with TPR were conducted with adult learners.

Asher, who advocates extensive listening exposure for students, influenced foreign language teaching and became quite popular among teachers with this new energetic and stress-free method. Rivers (1981) explains the priority of listening over speaking in TPR, "Asher found that students who learned in this way [TPR] achieved a higher level of listening comprehension than those who were expected to speak early in the program. He also claimed that his subjects retained what they had learned over surprisingly long periods" (p. 177). However, Rivers (1981) notes the controversy that developed concerning TPR, stating: "The basic question which these experiments leave unanswered is whether intensive listening for a considerable period at the beginning of the course will result at a later stage in more rapid development of speaking ability—a hope implicit in all of these reports" (p. 178).



Rivers questions the desirability of postponing the time when students express themselves orally and the communicative usefulness of command phrases students are physically imitating; go to the chair, write on the chalkboard, open the window, etc. She also questions the emphasis on only one sensory modality, listening, when learning a foreign language. She notes that it was possible that students were influenced to respond to the command with other visual and contextual clues.

Warriner (2002), like Rivers, questions Asher's postponement of speaking by advocating for both speaking and listening during class time. As opposed to Asher, Warriner prioritizes speaking by declaring, "In other words, the ability to speak is a reasonably dependable measure of performance in all of the skills" (p. 83).

Chastain (1988) focuses on the stress students experience when learning a foreign language and notes that stress, which is alleviated by the TPR method because students are not required to speak the new language perfectly. Chastain compares TPR to a comprehension approach because students in both approaches are encouraged to make meaning and are not required to speak before they are ready. Chastain concludes that Asher's approach eliminates stress and uses commands to establish meaning, saying, "Finally, students 'acquiring' second languages by acting out commands may engage the right hemisphere of the brain, while they tend to use the left hemisphere in traditional approaches" (p. 97). An advantage to TPR is that it encourages the use of both sides of the brain.

Richards & Rodgers (2001), like Chastain (1988), explore the role of student stress in Asher's approach and the importance of emotional factors in language learning: "A method that is undemanding in terms of linguistic production and that involves game-like movements reduces learner stress, he [Asher] believes, and creates a positive mood in the learner, which facilitates learning" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 73). These authors discuss Asher's use of the imperative form of the verb with physical activity as a stimulus-response way of learning which increases successful learners recall. In order to emphasize their point, Richards & Rodgers refer to right brain learning, "Drawing on work by Jean Piaget, Asher holds that the child language learner acquires language through motor movement – a right-hemisphere activity. Right-hemisphere activities must occur before the left hemisphere can process language for production" (p. 75). Reflecting Rivers' (1981) concern of only concentrating on one sensory modality, listening, Richards & Rodgers (2005) suggest that TPR teachers combine the approach with other methods, "... TPR represents a useful set of techniques and is compatible with other approaches to teaching. TPR practices therefore may be effective for reasons other than those proposed by Asher and do not necessarily demand commitment to the learning theories used to justify them" (p. 79). Teachers could simply employ TPR as another teaching tool instead of relying solely on that method.

Hadley (2001), along with Rivers (1981), Chastain (1988) and Richards & Rodgers (2005), recognizes the affective appeal and stress-free environment created in the TPR classroom. She states, "The atmosphere in the class is warm and

accepting, allowing students to try out their skills in creative ways. The focus on listening skills in the early phases of instruction, allows students to experience the new language in a low-anxiety environment...” (Hadley, 2001, p. 119). Hadley also refers to the enhancement of learning that physical responses by students demonstrate when listening to the foreign language. But, echoing Richards and Rodgers, Hadley explains the limitations of this approach, “TPR is not really designed to be a comprehensive “method” in and of itself, but represents instead a useful set of teaching ideas and techniques that can be integrated into other methodologies for certain instructional purposes” (p. 119). Like Rivers (1981), Hadley discusses the limitations of using TPR exclusively as a single sensory approach. Hadley refers to limits that do not contribute to acquiring other skills listed in the ACTFL Guidelines such as speaking, reading and writing. Hadley (2001) also questions the lack of emphasis on accuracy [grammar correctness] when teaching Asher’s TPR approach.

Shrum & Glisan (2010) refer to the binding technique first discussed by Terrell (1986) that is prevalent in TPR, an outgrowth of the Natural Method. Shrum & Glisan explain that binding occurs in TPR, “... to actively engage students in connecting the vocabulary they hear to actions they perform or objects they manipulate,” (p. 129). After multiple repetitions of command and demonstration, students listened and bound the spoken command to the action they later performed. Binding was accomplished by ensuring that the input was totally comprehensible and that the teacher periodically returned to reinforce commands that were previously

learned. Shrum & Glisan also point out the importance of positive peer interaction and collaboration, which helped students acquire the language more effectively. The authors conclude, “In sum, vocabulary acquisition can be facilitated if learners encounter new vocabulary in meaningful contexts and if they work collaboratively with peers to use the vocabulary for meaningful purposes” (p. 130).

Krashen (1998) joins Richards & Rodgers (2001) in pointing out that TPR is a grammar-based approach: “Some earlier versions of TPR focused on TPR activity on a particular point of grammar” (Krashen, 1998, p. 2). Krashen cites a TPR activity to practice definite and indefinite articles in English. Richards & Rodgers (2001) describe TPR as a “... grammar-based view of language... He [Asher] views the verb and particularly the verb in the imperative, as the central linguistic motif around which language use and learning are organized” (p. 73). Action verbs make it easier for students to demonstrate their understanding of the second language, but the command verb form is limiting to students who want to engage in conversations.

Rivers (1981) complicates the notion of grammar implicit in TPR by explaining, “Yet research into the listening process indicates that we store the gist of what we hear, the core of meaning, and that surface structure features are not stored. When we ask listeners to restate a message they have received, they give it back “in their own words,” not verbatim” (pp. 179-180). Understanding meaning while listening is complicated when students try to also concentrate on grammar. Students appear overwhelmed when faced with interpreting meaning while analyzing structure. Retention of learned material is hampered and retards the connection of

future input. Rivers refutes the idea of students learning structure while listening. Her argument is logical, because students learn to hear and then correct because, “it sounds right.”

Echoing Warriner’s emphasis on early speaking, Rivers (1981) explores Asher’s assumption that speaking should be delayed and only introduced after extensive listening experience. She explains that listening and speaking operate differently, “The implication of this for the language learner is that knowledge of lexicon may have greater importance for the listener than detailed knowledge of syntax, which is, however, essential for precise expression of a speaker’s intention. Yet the listening material in the experiments discussed is syntactically oriented” (p. 179). From this discussion of listening through TPR, we see that there are clearly positive benefits for the skill of speaking as well; this relationship needs to be explored further.

Krashen, Rivers and Hadley describe the positive aspects of students understanding the spoken language and their ability to express their understanding through physical actions. Students demonstrate enthusiasm for acting out knowledge of the language in a relatively stress-free classroom. However, as these authors also note, TPR has certain limitations. Krashen (1998) comments, “Because these activities are constrained by the perceived need to focus on the ‘grammar rule of the day,’ it is very hard to make them interesting” (p. 2). Several authors point out that TPR is not a complete method (Rivers, 1981; Krashen, 1998; Hadley 2001). Krashen supports the idea of supplying comprehensive input through the use of, “...

background knowledge and pictures, as in story telling” (p. 3). In order to overcome some of the limitations of TPR conveyed by Krashen, Hadley, and Rivers, the method naturally evolved to include storytelling.

Blaine Ray and Contee Seeley’s first edition of *Fluency through TPR Storytelling* was published in 1997, and, as the title suggests, added Storytelling to the TPR technique. In the early stages of Storytelling, Ray, with Asher, developed stories in which the new vocabulary for the story was introduced with TPR. Using TPR, students had already acquired much of the new vocabulary in the story before the story telling began, thus making total comprehension easier. Vocabulary was reinforced with TPR gestures, students acting out scenes and repetitive questioning as the storyline progressed. Seeley explains a collaboration between TPR and Storytelling, “Where TPR Storytelling differs from the Natural Approach, broadly speaking, is in the use of techniques that foster efficient acquisition... in the deep ingraining of vocabulary aurally through Total Physical Response (TPR)... and in the use of stories as a means of both instilling comprehensible input and eliciting expression in the acquisition level of the student” (p. xxix). Stories offered an intuitive extension of TPR and the Natural Approach, which already included conversations.

Seeley (2009), who had been a language teacher for over thirty six years when she coauthored the 1997 book with Ray, explains student motivation in a foreign language class, “The number one interest of almost every student of language is to be able to speak and understand... We have seen generations of students who

are, in general sour on or, at the very least, disillusioned with language classes” (p. xxix). Warriner, Rivers, and Shrum & Glisan support students’ motivation to speak the language. Ray & Seeley’s quotation at the beginning of their book, “We have ways of making you talk,” epitomizes their foreign language teaching strategy (Anonymous, based on a line in the film *Lives of a Bengal Lancer*.)

Ray and Seeley (2009) discuss TPR Storytelling (TPRS) in detail, while giving practical advice to teachers wanting to implement the method in their classrooms. The “Three pillars of TPRS are comprehension, interest and repetition” (p. 13). TPRS includes three essential steps:

1. **Establish meaning:** Beginning vocabulary words are written with their translations in English within view of students during the story. Props, gestures, TPR, and pictures are employed for complete student understanding and faster processing.
2. **Ask a story:** A statement is given that begins the story. Then several questions are asked about the story that demands student response. Details are added to the statement with more questions. The story progresses through three locations that present the problem, an unsuccessful attempt to solve the problem and finally a successful solution to the problem, with more questions. Stories are personalized to the students’ interests and unexpected events are added to stimulate participation. With a great deal of repetition, students remember the plot and the details of the story.

3. **Read and discuss:** Students read and translate the story, discuss the facts, add details and create a personalized story.
4. **Write an adaptation of the story:** Students compose a similar story or create a new one using the vocabulary and structure obtained from the spoken and read stories. (Adapted from Ray & Seeley, 2009, Chapter 2-3)

Ray and Seeley (2009) advocate teaching grammar through “pop-ups” that occur naturally in the story or the reading. “Pop-ups’ are questions about meaning, very often the meaning of grammatical elements” (p. 43). The authors focus on these quick and short explanations on topics such as the difference in verb endings, or masculine and feminine endings of adjectives. These often thirty-second explanations are meant to simply and quickly identify the students’ questions, but not bore them with lengthy grammatical descriptions.

Ray and Seeley’s ‘Keys to Fluency’ are imbedded in TPRS. As teachers perfect their technique using this method, these elements are ubiquitous in their lesson plans:

1. Comprehensible – All students understand everything
2. Sufficient aural input of structures and vocabulary – Students acquire the language
3. Input is interesting to students
4. Fluent oral expression
5. Conduct class in target language



6. Relatively stress free class atmosphere
7. High teacher expectations. ( Chapter 1)

Ray and Seeley carefully detail and give examples of TPRS strategies and proven methods for student fluency. Vocabulary is limited in each story, translation is used when necessary, and stories are interesting and humorous and often contain unexpected and outrageous elements to pique the students' interest. Students are encouraged to interact with each other using material that reflects students' backgrounds and interests. Students dramatize the plots of stories and create their own interpretations. Stories are structured to include three places which help students remember and retain the action and dialogue occurring at each locale. Ray's emphasis on three story locations relates to Foer's (2011) explanation of memory retention.

Ray and Seeley (2009) explain that their goals for proficiency/fluency are attainable, stating, "A realistic goal is for students to be able to produce the language confidently with some errors" (p. 10). Students become fluent by taking risks and making errors that can be corrected later as the students' experience, understanding and vocabulary increase, which corresponds to Krashen's and Terrell's theories. According to Ray and Seeley, fluency is promoted through the TPRS method because students are encouraged from the beginning to speak the second language with the confidence that they can make themselves understood, which also corresponds to Warriner's advice. Essentially, Ray & Seeley (2009) believe that by utilizing "... repetitive, interesting, comprehensive input," students become fluent (p.

11). TPRS affects not only speaking and listening skills, but also contributes to the students' ability to read and write.

Several educators and theorists previously demonstrated interest in many of the key strategies and philosophies of TPRS. Rivers (1987) expresses the importance of student interaction and student interest for acquiring a second language. Richards & Rodgers (2001) compare Communicative Language Teaching and the Natural Approach, which relates to the later evolution of TPRS. These authors express the originality of communicative techniques as a method, "... that emphasizes comprehensible and meaningful practice activities, rather than production of grammatically perfect utterances and sentences" (p. 190). Chastain (1988) discusses the importance of interpersonal teaching skills in the classroom where students are interested, occupied and happy. This author cites leaders in foreign language education who "emphasize that the goal of second-language teaching should be communicative competence, which implies that students would be able to produce sentences in the language and know how to use them appropriately in social situations" (p. 131).

Not all theorists were ready to accept the many methods that developed from the Communicative Approach. Brown (1995), who appeared to dismiss new methods as superficial, defines TPR and the Natural Way as packaged pedagogies, "... the central focus of each pedagogy is on ways of presenting language material to students in order to maximize learning. Though wrapped up in elaborate rationales, and though sometimes backed up by research, the central argument in all cases is that

presenting language ‘in such and such a way’ will help the students to learn more effectively, easily or enjoyably” (p. 17). Chastain, like Rivers (1981) emphasizes the importance of teachers and curriculum planners, defining their goals for language learners, in order to direct learning techniques toward stated goals. Brown’s general discussion of packaged pedagogies reflects a more theoretical perspective of language instruction which did not offer practical advice to teachers who were searching for more communicative methods to employ in the classroom.

Hadley (2001) emphasizes the necessity of teaching foreign language in context. She moved closer to the concept of TPR and TPRS by focusing her discussion on student comprehension, student interaction, and student background, along with linguistics and rhetorical features found in textbooks. “Students need to learn language in logical contexts... that simulate authentic input using sentences that follow in logical sequence. Their reading and listening input, as well as productive practice activities, needs to extend beyond the borders of the single sentence to encompass the widest possible contexts in which language is used for communicative purposes (Hadley, 2001, p. 161). Listening and responding to story questions in TPRS provides the learner with context. Personalizing the stories encourages students to internalize and express their own meanings, interacting/communicating with other students.

Krashen (1982) reiterates Hadley’s concern for language presentation in context by urging the use of concrete examples in the classroom. Krashen encourages the use of objects and events that are sensory, seen, felt or heard, in order

to enhance learning. He states, “Communication about the ‘here-and-now’ ensures that the learner understands most of what is being said in the new language, and thereby becomes a critical aid to progress in acquiring new structures and vocabulary” (p. 42). Stories with illustrations, unexpected events and emotional experiences pique students’ interests and encourage vocabulary retention.

Shrum & Glisan (2010) devote an entire chapter to “Using a Story-Based Approach to Teach Grammar.” This grammar oriented tangent of storytelling reflected the disappointment and frustration foreign language teachers express when they are accustomed to teaching a grammar-based approach but are dismayed because their students are unable to communicate/interact in the second language. Teachers, who support teaching for communication, can become confused and frustrated when adding grammar instruction to contextualized, storytelling lessons. Shrum & Glisan explain, “From this perspective, [grammar instruction] focus on form can emerge spontaneously as learners need to understand language to express themselves and deepen their comprehension of texts... teachers can also draw students’ attention to form when the form is particularly relevant to the context of the lesson” (p. 217). These relevant mini-lessons are reminiscent of Ray & Seeley’s (2009) pop-ups. However, emphasizing personal interaction with stories is their main focus over explicit grammar instruction.

Shrum & Glisan (2010) relate to a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) created with storytelling because of responsive assistance provided from the questioning of the story and individual student questioning for personal answers.

They state: “As a result, from the very beginning of the lesson, the teacher and learners are engaged in authentic use of language through joint problem-solving activities and interactions to render the story comprehensible. By using simplified language, pictures and gestures, the teacher scaffolds... and guides learners to comprehend the story” (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, pp. 221-222). Instead of Blaine Ray’s creation of TPRS, Shrum & Glisan explore the Presentation Attention Co-Construct Extension (PACE) model of storytelling by Donato & Adair-Hauck (1994). Although I refer to Ray and Seeley’s TPRS as the authorities on the storytelling approach, the PACE and TPRS approaches appear to be similar.

Just as Shrum & Glisan (2010) describe storytelling, several more recent researchers and educators express their evaluations of TPRS and its adaptations and evolutions over the last twenty years. Serving as a transition from TPR to TPRS, Krashen (1998) explains the need for expansion, “TPR is not a complete method. It cannot do the entire job of language teaching, nor was it designed to do so” (p. 3). Asher and Blaine Ray began to corroborate on creating stories that featured TPR gestures, *Look, I Can Talk!* By Blaine Ray, Edited by James J. Asher, 1990, 1995. I continue my discussion of the evolution of TPRS in the next chapter.

### **My Experiences**

In the fall of 1995, I was nervous and somewhat apprehensive about jumping back into teaching after twenty years away. I wondered how students had changed and how teaching methodology had evolved. I felt somewhat confident that I could

cope and adjust to new methods and curriculum. I was welcomed back to teaching by the Head Spanish Teacher at the Mid-High School, for ninth and tenth graders. This experienced and respected teacher gave me teacher copies of the textbooks for Spanish I and II. It was reassuring that her classroom was right across the hall from mine. She, the only other Spanish teacher, and the French teacher, offered to show me around, gave me supplies and suggestions for decorating my room and showed me the supply room for foreign languages materials, videos, movies and CDs.

With their encouragement, I settled into my new room, a new routine, a new school, and new students. For technology, teachers at this school depended on cassette tape players, videos, and radio and television programs. There was no language lab. Textbooks determined the curriculum and the teaching methods.

The teacher I had replaced at the Mid-High left organized file cabinets full of quizzes, exams and practice sheets from the textbooks, which helped me ease into teaching again by supplying me with current textbooks for levels 1,2,3; *Voces y Vistas (1992)* [Voices and Views], *Pasos y Puentes (1992)* [Steps and Bridges], and *Arcos y Alamedas (1992)* [Arches and Walkways]. Textbooks for Spanish I, II and III, reminded me of the traditional-grammar texts I had taught with before. The photos and drawings were updated, but the grammar, vocabulary and sequential series of chapters were essentially the same. I followed the textbooks' chapters in order and instructed my students in a sequential method of simple to more complex grammatical concepts and beginning vocabulary which also needed to be retained throughout the text and Spanish I and II. I did not perceive that textbooks had

changed much from Grammar-Translation, which was now termed as “Traditional-grammar”. However, perceptible changes were evident if I had only researched the teacher introduction in the textbooks more thoroughly. Looking for comfortable familiarity, I essentially followed the textbook in lock-step fashion. The text was intended to drive the methodology.

### **A Typical Textbook**

I explain, in detail, a chapter in this textbook to demonstrate the emphasis that still existed on the Traditional-Grammar method, but also to convey the inclusion of newer, more communicative activities: Chapter Eight in *Voces y Vistas* represents a typical chapter in all beginning Spanish texts about foods and the market place. This chapter begins with a “Prólogo Cultural, Comida Americana” [Cultural Prologue, American Food], which was written all in English. When the authors cite “American” they do not mean food from the United States of America, but from Central and South America. The accompanying colorful photograph of a typical food market shows the wide variety of fruits, vegetables and spices available from Latin American countries. I was disappointed to discover that the five paragraph market description is written entirely in English. I knew this was a first year textbook, but a combination of Spanish and English would have been understood by beginning students and would seem preferable for Spanish exposure.

The next section of the text continues with *Palabras Nuevas I*, (New Words I), which presents sketches of a family eating at a restaurant with Spanish labels next

to the pictures of the napkin, plate, glass, tablecloth and various breakfast foods. Drawings, instead of translated English words, are supposed to encourage the students to think in Spanish when they connected the written Spanish word to the pictured items. This was an updated method to simply listing Spanish vocabulary next to the English translation resembling the G-T method. *The Contexto Comunicativo* (Communicative Context) on the facing page features very short and disconnected conversations with additional vocabulary about food and eating. I was disappointed in these somewhat random, two to four sentence conversations whose only connections were food. These disjointed “conversations” were reminiscent of ALM. Next a new page showing a verb conjugation was provided followed by student exercises. For exercise, students were to conjugate the new verbs in sentences which also reviewed the new table-setting vocabulary. These exercises were repetitive, and while repetition is necessary, just like practice is necessary to play a sport successfully, the exercises left little to the imagination or creativity of the students. Students simply plugged in the correct ending of the verb listed in the chart.

I describe in detail these textbook features because change in teaching methodology often happens slowly. In this chapter the authors, besides the Traditional-Grammar exercises, include elements of newer methods, and the including the theories of Krashen and Terrell. My favorite activity in the chapters was called, *Hablemos de ti*, (Let’s talk about you), because the questions were open-ended, personal and the students could be creative. Next, in the chapter sequence,



students are asked to apply what they had learned in *Aplicaciones*, (Applications). A dialogue was presented between an American boy and his new “brother” from the Spanish family he was staying with in Spain for an immersion experience. Student-to-student dialogues are encouraged in this textbook, but, in my opinion, students had too little input to improvise their own dialogue, a common problem that was also present in the ALM. As the teacher, I had to frame the statements in the dialogue and offer alternative choices from previously presented statements. After the dialogue in the chapter, students are directed to answer questions corresponding to what they read. The last two questions ask for personal responses. I liked the chance for the students to respond personally, because it would be more fun and interesting for them. It was also a benefit for the teacher, because students would be more animated and motivated to communicate in Spanish.

Next in the chapter comes *Palabras Nuevas II* (New Words II), which again features Spanish words next to drawings of foods in a Spanish market. Short, disjointed dialogues follow to introduce more vocabulary and verb conjugations. Then larger numbers are listed so students could count the vegetables from the market and pay for their purchases. The following activity, *Hablemos de ti*, brightened the classroom atmosphere before the grammar section started. *Explicaciones I* (Explanations I), features the conjugation of common but irregular verbs. These random verbs, because they don’t relate to food or the market, and are out of context, are presented with four pages of conjugations and exercises for extensive and repetitive practice, again. Relief comes with another *Hablemos de ti*

and a short explanation of how chocolate was “discovered” by Hernán Cortés when he conquered the Aztecs in Mexico.

Sometimes I think textbook authors must throw darts at a board with grammar concepts spread over the target, because the placement they choose in the text for new structures seems random. Krashen’s more natural order of learning grammar concepts seems more appropriate for students acquiring a second language. The authors’ random inclusion of the next grammar explanation in *Explicaciones II* features direct object pronouns. Direct and indirect object pronouns and their placement in Spanish sentences has always been a difficult concept to teach American students because many of the students did not remember the term *direct object* in English, let alone a *pronoun*. Following the Traditional-Grammar approach in the textbook, teachers had to first remind students of the grammatical concept of direct and indirect objects in English, so they could adapt it to Spanish explanation in the textbook which was based on English grammar.

I was disappointed in the artificial manner grammar in which concepts were presented to students using isolated sentences, out of context. As a teacher, I dutifully followed the textbook exercises, hoping students, through repetition, could internalize grammar points and add to their speaking ability. Looking back now, it seems like a waste of classroom time that would have been better spent in communicative activities. I realized this Traditional-grammar approach was more comfortable for me to teach because I was still somewhat reluctant to speak the second language to my students during class time. After introducing the direct

objects pronouns, students were directed to replace nouns with the appropriate direct object pronouns in practice exercises that lasted for six pages. The Student Workbook offered additional exercises. Students did not really need to understand and internalize the grammatical concept, but could just mechanically fill in the blank on the exercise using the table of pronouns on the preceding page.

Chapter Eight concludes with the *Repaso*, (Review) which utilizes sentences to translate from English to Spanish following certain grammatical and vocabulary clues. The writing section of the review features picture cartoons for students to describe or student prompts for composing a dialogue or paragraph about students' own food buying and eating habits. The Practice Test includes exercises for student to write descriptions of a picture, fill in the blank verb conjugations, and substitutions for nouns by direct object pronouns. A lengthy list of ninety five chapter vocabulary words, expressions and verbs conclude the chapter that hopefully, prepared students to successfully complete the textbook prepared chapter exam. I followed the Achievement Test from the previous teacher through the lens of my Traditional-Grammar method of instruction I had taught before. Unfortunately, I did not take the time to read carefully, the "Program Philosophy" included in the Teacher's Edition of the textbooks.

Reading the textbook philosophy for these three sequential books now is enlightening, but instructive because I bring more background and experience to the reading. In the student's edition of *Voces y Vistas* (1992) the authors state their goal as, "To communicate effectively in Spanish" (p. 3) and advise students to, "use

Spanish to talk about yourself and your experiences and to express your own needs, desires, and opinions” (p. 3). In bold letters the authors continue, “**EXPRESS** yourself in practical, real-life situations” (p. 4). I expected the authors to announce “learning of structure” as their prioritized goal. As a “first” year teacher again, after twenty years, I didn’t take the time to study and carefully digest the textbook and its philosophy. Now, I try to rationalize my laziness by remembering the difficulty of returning to teaching and trying to integrate the extensive variety of components this program presented to teachers besides the textbook: the Workbook and Tape Manuel, the Teacher’s Edition: Workbook and Tape Manuel, Practice Sheet Workbook. Communicative Activities Blackline Masters, Quizzes, Achievement Tests, Proficiency Tests, Teacher’s Resource File, Cassette Tapes, Overhead Transparencies, Reader, Computer software and Video Package (Reynolds, Rodriguez & Schonfeld, 1992, (Teachers’ Edition, p. T8-9).

Textbooks had changed from twenty years ago when I stopped teaching. Back then, teachers had to supply and create their own quizzes, exams, and ancillary materials, and *realia* [authentic material] from Spanish speaking countries. Teachers and students used to listen to tapes on tape recorders. Now we listened to vastly extended cassette tapes and CDs that echoed textbook dialogues and stories, provided listening exercises, student responses and the listening section for textbook exams. Even though our school did not provide a language lab, our classrooms were equipped with extra speakers around the room for easier listening through amplification. The textbook authors presented two alternatives tests, “achievement,”

which I was using, and “proficiency,” which represented a more communicative approach that I neglected to research. Lack of time to research new methods and implement them may be a contributing factor for foreign language teachers not adopting recently created teaching methods. Most foreign language teachers are faced with large classes and multiple preparations because of difficulty in finding teachers for vacancies and too few foreign language teachers in the department. My colleague, Carolina, taught French I, French II, Spanish I and Spanish II classes during one academic year.

Even though the authors of *Voces y Vistas* (1992) discuss the best method for “developing communicative proficiency,” they defer to the best method as being, “...whatever gets students using the language to socialize and exchange information, and whatever allows you [teacher] to express your personal style as a teacher” (Reynolds, Rodriguez and Schonfeld, 1992, Teachers’ Edition, p. T6). This textbook philosophy approximates the modern language conundrum at the time, communicative fluency or grammar rule focus. Many teachers were debating the optimal method or methods for teaching foreign language. The textbook alludes to the importance of making instruction relevant without focusing on one particular method: “Research has shown that language is best learned and remembered in contexts that relate to students’ own lives, because the context activates and brings into play all the students’ existing background information. This enables learners to attach new language skills to real-life experiences and information... express their own feeling, experiences and creativity” (Reynolds, Rodriguez & Schonfeld 1992 p.

T6). The introduction continues by explaining Total Physical Response (TPR), The Natural Approach, and Comprehensible Input, which were promoted by James Asher (1988) and Stephen Krashen (1983). Even though the textbook was grammar oriented, there was evidence of newer, communicative methods. At this time in my teaching career, I would not have recognized these innovative methods or the names of modern leaders in foreign language education.

The other Spanish/French teacher at the Mid-High, and the French teacher at the High School researched and took some classes on teaching TPR and later TPRS. My son took Spanish II in Carolina's class when she taught her students a story. These TPR and TPRS teachers encouraged the rest of us in the department to try these new methods during workshops given during our monthly foreign language department meeting. As a group, we also attended some introduction to TPRS sessions given by Blaine Ray (1995).

There was such excitement in the air during the sessions as we learned a story in French at Ray's workshop. This very energetic approach, given by an enthusiastic Ray, looked like fun and his questioning and repetition helped us retain the story in a language we did not teach, French. Like me, the TPRS teachers in our department were also in their fifties and enthusiastic to try something new that was gaining an increasingly good reputation for getting students to communicate orally. The TPRS method reminded me of some adult friends who expressed their dissatisfaction remembering their two years of high school Spanish. "I don't remember anything I learned in Spanish" they moaned. In the next breath they added earnestly, "I sure

wish I could speak some Spanish now.” The Storytelling approach can address many foreign language teachers’ and students’ frustrations and lead to students’ desire and ability to actually communicate in a second language. I investigated TPRS as an optimal method to teach students foreign language. In order to teach TPRS well I wanted to improve Spanish speaking ability.

After three years of teaching Spanish again, I felt the need to improve my speaking ability and confidence. Several of the teachers in the Modern Language Department in our district had obtained Masters Degrees. I felt I wanted to improve my oral proficiency and my conversation experience. Watching my colleagues demonstrate TPRS contributed to my wanting to increase my oral and listening expertise. I enrolled in a two week immersion conversation graduate class that was available for college credit and taught in Puebla, Mexico. Even though I felt insecure about taking another college class when I was in my fifties, I pursued my goal. During this period in my teaching career, three experiences led me to explore the importance of storytelling with other teaching methods: a graduate conversation class in Mexico, developing an elementary Spanish program for our school district and teaching Advanced Placement Spanish.

This advanced conversation class required teachers to only speak Spanish for the entire two weeks of the class. Class work included excursions to different locations around Puebla, scavenger hunts for specific *realia*, recorded conversations of our interactions with locals, tours and conversations with local guides of the important sites in Puebla, cooking demonstrations and participations, as well as

classes about the Mexican family, Mexican university classes and student activities, Mexico's newly elected President in 2000 and his proposed governmental reforms. I was captivated by the unit on Mexican legends and stories taught by our professor. She loved the legends she enthusiastically taught and I readily saw their applicability to teaching my students. There was a universal appeal to stories and I could relate these Latin American stories to American stories my students already knew. Could stories contribute to my teaching bag of tricks and encourage my students to speak Spanish? My Spanish Conversation class motivated me to stimulate my students to speak through the medium of stories.

When the elementary Spanish teachers in our district were not rehired, there was still a limited budget available for an elementary Spanish curriculum. I volunteered to research possible options for continuing the instruction of Spanish in the elementary schools. My research and attendance at an ACTFL Conference led me to the conclusion that a video-based program, which was "friendly" to non-Spanish speaking elementary teachers, was the best use of limited funds.

As a result the Spanish department adopted a video program for young children called "Salsa" (Day, 1998). This delightful program featured video programs of puppets that told and acted out familiar fairy tales to elementary students. A complete list of activities and supplemental story translations by teachers in our department made the lessons easy for non-Spanish speaking elementary teachers to implement. Middle School and high school teachers offered support and encouragement to elementary teachers. Some middle school and high school Spanish



students visited elementary classrooms for added motivation and interest. This program provided a scaffolding of lessons for increasing difficulty and older elementary students. By developing the Salsa curriculum, I found myself drawn to the desirability of using stories to teach students to speak and communicate in Spanish.

From 2004-2006, I taught Advanced Placement Spanish at the high school. This grammar- intensive exam for college credit featured not only grammar exercises and verb conjugations, but also extensive vocabulary lists for reading and writing assessments. Since my students had already been exposed to traditional-grammar instruction for their first three years of Spanish, I decided to focus in AP Spanish 4 and 5 on the listening and speaking components of the exam. Since students had not been required to speak spontaneously or converse much with each other, breaking down barriers, (Ray and Seeley called them filters), became an emphasis for this section of the exam.

Taking advantage of practice AP Exams and study guides, my students concentrated on sequential frames of figures and backgrounds (cartoons) to begin telling stories. Working in groups, students used their imaginations to develop a story that fit the pictures. Then the class compared their story creations with examples of students who scored from 1 to 5 on the previous exams. Students learned vocabulary to identify characters and describe them. They described the action taking place and the location. I encouraged them to situate the story in time and present a solution to a problem presented by the characters. These pictures and

their made- up stories were very similar to stories presented with TPRS. I would not have had to spend so much time preparing students to talk during the AP exam if they had been previously exposed to the Storytelling method. Story clue sequential pictures are an excellent way to stimulate speaking. I wondered: Is TPRS the optimal method to teach students for not only beginning classes, but also advanced foreign language classes?

Still looking for the optimal method for teaching foreign language and one that would fit my teaching personality, I bought several of Ray's and Seeley's books, but I was still reluctant to try this method with my students. I needed some kind of catalyst to push me into trying something new. I, like so many other teachers my age, have been moderately successful with the Traditional-Grammar method, so why did I have to change? I also knew I was not satisfied with my current method when I saw the results the other TPRS teachers were achieving. Was TPRS an improved method for teaching my students to communicate? Change was on the horizon and this was a good time to investigate and research the methods I had learned and taught and also observed.

As a language teacher approaching the end of the millennium, I needed to examine the validity of retaining the old methods and exploring the necessity of teaching new methods that focused on more communicative second language proficiency. I felt restless with the status quo and the methods I was teaching. I needed to discover a wider world of foreign language instruction. My AP students did well on their Exams in 2006 and, at the age of sixty, I decided I was not content

to stay at the same level on the Tower of Babel. Borrowing Rivers' analogy of a language teacher climbing a language tower to find the best teaching methods, I left high school teaching to pursue, full-time, a Master's degree in Foreign Language Education/Bilingual Education at the university.

## Chapter 8

### 2007-2010: Total Physical Response (TPR) and Total Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS)

“Tell me a fact and I’ll learn. Tell me a truth and I’ll believe. Tell me a story and it  
will live in my heart forever.

#### Indian Proverb

*I announced at the end of the second week of my third level Spanish class,  
“Quiero que ustedes escriban una composición corta sobre lo que les gusta hacer en  
su tiempo libre. Favor de escribir diez frases. [Today I’d like you to write a  
composition about what you like to do in your free time. Please write ten sentences].  
There was a pause and silence in the classroom, as students thought about what they  
wanted to write. Two or three students started to write, but most of the class sat  
there with pencils poised on paper, unable to enervate a thought. Students appeared  
frozen in time. These third level students had already passed two five hour courses  
of beginning Spanish and I presented this writing exercise as a review.*

*Jennifer raised her hand and timidly asked, “Can you give us some verbs to  
write about?”*

*Robert chimed in, “Can you write some verbs on the board for us? When we  
took our exams last semester, the teacher always gave us a word bank to use for  
compositions. I guess I don’t remember verbs off the top of my head.”*

*Shocked by these questions, because I expected third level students to have retained some vocabulary from their prior ten hours in Spanish I and II. I swallowed hard, "Let's start with some common verbs. If you were writing in English, what would you say? You remember "Ser" and "Estar." What about some action verbs?" I knew it had been a long summer without speaking or reading Spanish, but this was ridiculous. "OK. Let's brainstorm as we write some verbs on the board. I'll be your dictionary," I added trying to stay positive.*

*Students suggested many verbs in English, "Ride a bike, go shopping, play my guitar, cook dinner with my friends, listen to music, go to the movies, play basketball, etc."*

*"Now let's start your composition with five interesting sentences. You have five minutes," I added modifying the requirements for the assignment with the hope a spark might be ignited. Students still paused and appeared to agonize over each thought as it was painstakingly written in Spanish. Five minutes turned to fifteen for a planned activity which far exceed its limits. This intended short writing activity took twenty minutes of class time.*

*"What if we make mistakes on the verb endings? What tense do you want us to use? I can't remember the irregular form of the past participle for "Hacer." Do you count off for spelling and accent marks? I don't remember much from last semester Spanish," my students responded as I collected their papers. I realized I would have to include a great deal of review to advance my students up to level*

*three, but how could I spend class time on review, when the curriculum for third level was so extensive? Where was the time?*

*“Can you tell me how I’m doing in this class,” asked a transfer senior several weeks later, at the end of the level three class period. “My last Spanish class wasn’t this hard. This class is very difficult for me.”*

*“Well, you weren’t able to answer the questions I asked you in class today and you failed the last exam. You have your work cut out for you. Why don’t you spend some time with me before your next class so I can help you with your homework,” I added trying to be optimistic.*

*She followed me out the door and up the stairs to the graduate teaching assistants’ office. With tears welling up in her eyes, she pleaded, “I have to pass this course to graduate. Please, what can I do? I’m trying really hard!”*

*She was frustrated and so was I. I knew I had to look for a better method to prepare my students to pass their required third level classes. A couple of students told me they just wanted to pass the class and a “D” was OK with them. I had to discover a better way to prepare my beginning students for the third level. What was the optimal method to teach my students to communicate in Spanish, retain what they had learned in previous classes, and feel positive about the experience of learning a second language?*

Many educators have researched the TPRS method, adapted it to their own goals and created their own expertise. I explore the influence that Krashen, Asher, Terrell, Ray & Seeley, and Gaab have had and continue to exert on many new educators, as well as experienced ones like me, who use TPRS and other communicative methods. The Traditional-grammar approach is still taught, although it contains vestiges of newer methods. The current focus for second language acquisition at national conferences is teaching methods that will best afford students the opportunity to progress through novice and superior levels of the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines. The current emphasis on second language acquisition is effective communication.

The Preface to the Fifth Edition of *Fluency through TPR Storytelling*, 2009, reveals Ray's and Seeley's journey through the last twenty plus years and the evolution of TPRS. The authors have copyrighted their method which "continues to evolve and improve" (p. xi). This method is now practiced around the world, thanks to the many workshops Blaine Ray and other TPR storytellers/specialists have conducted and word-of-mouth testimonials from successful practitioners. There is now a TPRS list serve and an international TPRS Conference. Because of TPRS' longevity, students who originally learned their foreign language via TPRS are now teachers, teaching the method to a second generation.

Ray and Seeley (2009) include an excerpt from a Master's thesis by Mark A. Webster, April 2003, which deals with attrition and retention in the upper levels of foreign language education. Webster states, "The majority of students satisfy college

foreign language requirements with two years of foreign language in high school. Many students decide not to study additional language levels due to the intensive grammar study and because it just isn't fun anymore" (p. 328). Webster's study found that with the implementation of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and TPRS, teachers experienced many positive results. Webster concludes that student enrollment increased in Spanish III and IV. The district introduced Spanish in Middle School and has added AP Spanish to its curriculum. A similar enrollment increase was evident in French.

Davidheiser (2002), a German professor, relates to Webster's findings with his own TPRS teaching which he feels invigorated the German program. He reports that after implementing TPRS in his beginning level classes, more students enrolled in upper level German classes at the university because they enjoyed learning German and felt more confident and competent conversing in the language. Beginning with TPR, Davidheiser moved to short stories and includes picture frames for students to describe and act out. Students were then encouraged to become creative with the stories with their own interpretations and unexpected events. The author prefers to add grammar study and verb conjugation sheets to supplement his teaching and for homework activities. Davidheiser agrees with Krashen about the suitability of adding explicit grammar explanations to promote faster learning.

Davidheiser outlines what makes TPRS successful:

1. Learning is active – college students are more likely to benefit from physically active learning.



2. Students take ownership of their learning – retention is improved when students experience learning personally and teach it to others.
3. Students get more comprehensible input – teachers speak at an accessible level to students.
4. Students feel included and validated in an accepting classroom atmosphere of mutual respect and help builds confidence.
5. TPRS is fun- students’ affective filter is lowered. (p. 32)

Davidheiser concludes his discussion by advocating for the strengthening of the German curricula through TPRS.

In the summary of a doctoral study, “Effects of Two Foreign Language Methodologies, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Teaching Proficiency through Storytelling (TPRS), on Beginning- Level Students’ Achievement, Fluency and Anxiety,” Spangler (2009) compares CLT and TPRS in student achievement, fluency and anxiety levels. The author utilizes two types of data, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Survey (FLCAS) instrument and the Standards-based Measurement of Proficiency (STAMP) test. Her research results indicate that when CLT and TPRS students’ achievement assessments were compared, there was no appreciable difference in students’ scores in reading, writing or anxiety. In speaking fluency, however, the TPRS students outperformed the CLT students. Reading and writing skills seem to benefit from a variety of teaching methods, but the most difficult skill, speaking, excels with TPRS.

Watson (2009), like Spangler, examines various teaching methods. In “A Comparison of TPRS and Traditional Foreign Language Instruction at the High School Level” she compares test scores of students in a modified TPRS/natural approach to the scores of students in a Traditional-Grammar class. Every week both groups read short novels by Blaine Ray. The classes were audio-taped for verification of teaching methods. Participants included a total of 73 high school students enrolled in first year Spanish. Twenty-three students were enrolled in a traditionally taught class and 50 students were enrolled in two sections of TPRS classes. Students’ comparative ability was measured by a final exam and an oral exam. The final exam tested listening, vocabulary and grammar, and reading. Watson concludes that, “... the TPRS students outperformed the comparison students, scoring about one standard deviation higher... The results showed that TPRS students outperformed the traditional students on both the final and oral examinations” (p. 23). It is also worth noting that many more students, 50, were enrolled in two TPRS classes and only 23 were enrolled in the one traditional class.

Varguez (2009), like Watson, compares two common teaching methods. She presents her research findings in “Traditional and TPR Storytelling Instruction in the Beginning High School Spanish Classroom.” She explains, in this experimental study, that traditional instruction and TPRS are fundamentally different methods. She, like Rivers (1981), describes the traditional method which teaches about the language, but doesn’t actually teach the language to students. She compares these two methods and their impact on real language competency. In her study, teacher

participants were selected from around the country according to their answers to a questionnaire to determine their teaching preference and style, Traditional-Grammar or TPRS. Two teachers were selected in each method along with four schools. The University of the State of New York's standardized Second Language Proficiency Examination in Spanish was chosen for this study to test reading, listening and comprehension skills for beginning Spanish students. A total of 83 students participated in the study with combined, two school, comparison groups of 48 students, traditional, and 35 students in the two experimental, TPRS, groups. From her research, Varguez concludes, "When demographic factors were similar, TPR Storytelling students easily outperformed comparisons in traditional foreign language classes. This provides clear support for the efficacy of TPRS and the validity of the underlying theory" (p. 5). Varquez' research findings are similar to those of Spangler and Watson.

Like Varquez, Spangler and Watson, Asher (2000) compares TPRS to another method. Asher furnished the statistical analysis from a previous study, (McKay, 2000), of middle school students who were taught in an ALM class against students taught in a TPR Storytelling class. The study concludes that TPRS students outperformed ALM students.

Carol Gaab (2006) explains the evolution of TPRS. Clarifying the original acronym of TPRS as Total Physical Response Storytelling, Gaab expresses the new meaning as Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling. She explains, "... they [modifications to the name] are based on proven results after 10+

years of planning, collective research, classroom experimentation and collaboration from countless educators around the globe. They are based on proven results from **real** teachers, **real** classrooms and **real** situations” (n.p.). She advocates for a newer hybrid TPRS as opposed to the original TPRS created by Blaine Ray. She describes the meticulous process that produced the second wave of TPRS, “... throughout the last decade, TPRS collaborators have tested established strategies and techniques, combining them in different ways, prioritizing them and organizing them in order to streamline effective L2 instruction” (n.p.). Hybrid TPRS advocates that teachers follow three basic steps:

1. Show – Use visuals and verbal explanation for thorough understanding.
2. Tell – Comprehensible input in context through personalized questions and answers, personalized mini-situations, target language structures.
3. Read – age and level appropriate stories that reflect target structures and vocabulary.

Acquiring language via TPRS, students use language for meaning and understanding in a contextual and interesting manner that requires active participation, cooperation, student interaction and creativity.

Gaab (2006) declares that acquiring a second language via TPRS is brain-friendly. Multiple senses are stimulated to increase learning. Kinesthetic learners use

gestures (TPR) and acting. Visual learners respond to illustrations, props, actors, backgrounds. She adds, "... the tremendous amount of contextualized, comprehensible input appeals to visual and auditory learners. Students develop a real "ear for the language," learning to listen and respond to what sounds right" (n.p.).

She refers to Krashen's Natural Order Hypothesis, " Students and language acquirers in general will first acquire that which has the most meaning/structures to which they have been repeatedly and consistently exposed" (n.p.). Neither Krashen nor Gaab support a foreign language curriculum based on grammatical concepts following the natural order of acquisition. Gaab understands that students naturally acquire structure in order, as they acquire the language. Grammar and natural order should not be artificially structured into the curriculum. Susan Gross (2003) agrees with Gaab and Krashen on the natural order of acquisition. In her advice to teachers, she advocates, "Just speak the language comprehensively and naturally. Shelter vocabulary, DO NOT shelter grammar" (n.p.). Gaab, again referring to Krashen's studies on reading, concludes that reading is an important and culminating element of acquiring language through TPRS.

TPRS has been proven effective for teaching students to speak a second language. As the American Council of Teaching Foreign Languages sets the standards for student performance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, how do TPRS and the other teaching methods fit with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for 2012? Shrum & Glisan (2010) explain the ACTFL Provisional Proficiency Guidelines from 1982, which set the stage for the current guidelines.

These guidelines define what language users should be able to do with the language in speaking, listening, reading, and writing, at various levels of performance. These guidelines, which marked a shift from a focus on methodology to a focus on outcomes and assessment, continue to have a great impact on language instruction. Although neither a curricular outline nor a prescribed syllabus or sequence of instruction in and of themselves, the guidelines have implications for instructional strategies, the setting of performance expectations, and performance-based assessment. (p. 50)

The most recent edition of ACTFL Guidelines (2012) is included in the Appendix of this dissertation. Proficiency guidelines are illustrated in an inverted pyramid design for each of the four skill areas, speaking, listening, reading and writing. The current pyramid design represents a spiraling up of second language ability, not a straight linear design. Students are ranked in ability from Novice to Distinguished, according to how they fit the criteria for each level and sub level of low, mid and high.

ACTFL discusses its Standards of Foreign Language Education as Five C's interlocking because of the interconnections:

1. Communication – Communicate in Languages Other Than English
2. Cultures – Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures
3. Connections – Connect with Other Disciplines and Acquire Information
4. Comparisons – Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture

5. Communities – Participate in Multilingual Communities at Home and Around the World. (Shrum & Glisan, 2010, p. 53)

These five C's emphases are being incorporated into new textbooks as curriculum writers and teachers seek to align their teaching to these standards for instruction and guidelines for proficiency.

Phillips & Terry (1999) contend that the formation of ACTFL Standards provides foreign language teachers with a strong national consensus of criteria ranking for a standardization of different levels of proficiency. They conclude, "The major shift inherent in the standards requires teachers to focus more on what students are learning than on what they are teaching-- making output what counts rather than input . . . It is imperative that as teachers, we move from using the standards to verify present practice to using them to improve student performance" (p. 3). Elaborating on improving student performance to meet the Standards, Phillips & Terry advocate listening as an interpretive and interpersonal task and the intermingling of reading and speaking. Without mentioning any particular methodology for successfully meeting the Standards, the authors focus on teacher-student interactions, and students learning content in a meaningful way, which is reminiscent of TPRS. Children learn their native language according to content and meaning.

Hall (1999), like Krashen and Terrill, refers to the way children learn their first language as a way for second language learners to develop oral proficiency. She contends, "Children develop the knowledge and skills needed for competent

communication through participation in communicative activities with more expert communicators” (p. 23). The author provides evidence that students’ communicative competence improves according to the amount of opportunities they experience communicating and interacting with the teacher and other students. She promotes the implementation of instructional conversations and, “... discourse that engages students in productive interaction helps them to develop complex knowledge and behaviors at the same time that it helps them assume responsibility for their own learning” (p. 29). Exchanging ideas encourages students to connect their own experiences to the conversation for deeper understanding. Hunt concludes by advocating that teacher preparation programs expect future teachers to understand the concepts of community and communication development in order to effectively instruct their students.

Even though Hall (1999) and Jensen & Sandrock (2007) do not mention specific instruction methods to instruct students for the ACTFL proficiency exams, they allude to the philosophy behind TPRS. Jensen & Sandrock explain, “Standards-driven instruction focuses on meaningful communication and genuine interaction among students through classroom activities that are embedded in authentic, real-life contexts” (p. 5). Echoing Gaab’s emphasis on age and skill appropriate stories, Jensen & Sandrock continue, “In standards-driven world language classrooms, students should expect to engage in relevant, age-appropriate communicative tasks that emerge from nonacademic areas of interest and importance as well as from academic content in other curricular areas” (p. 5).



Hadley (2001) does not include a discussion on Storytelling in her handbook for teachers. She, like Shrum & Glisan, insists, "... there are no methodological prescriptions in the *Standards* and no implications that one particular methodology is best for all learners" (p. 88). With a disclaimer that teachers should rely on their own experience, and be flexible about newer methods, Hadley offers some hypotheses:

1. Opportunities for students to practice in a variety of contexts – students express own meaning, interact with other students, manipulate language.
2. Opportunities for practice of functions to deal with others in target culture.
3. The development of language accuracy.
4. Instruction responds to affective and cognitive needs of students – learning styles, personalities and preferences.
5. Promotion of cultural understanding and sensitivity. (pp. 90-91)

These hypotheses are reminiscent of the perspectives of Krashen, Terrell, Asher, Ray & Seeley, Gaab and Gross on communicative language learning in context. The hypotheses also reflect some, not all, effective strategies for successful attainment of ACTFL proficiency levels.

On the other hand, Shrum & Glisan explore the advantages of Storytelling, albeit in a different form, called PACE and developed by Donato and Adair-Hauck (1995). Referring again to Hadley's hypotheses, Shrum & Glisan discuss the relationship between Storytelling and instructional goals for student success with the

ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. The authors describe the storytelling strategy: "... from the very beginning of the lesson, the teacher and learners are engaged in authentic use of language through joint problem solving activities and interactions to render the story comprehensible" (pp. 221-222). Shrum & Glisan advocate several teacher strategies.

First, teachers should develop a thorough understanding of the ACTFL proficiency Guidelines. Second, teachers' interactions with students must reflect typical conversations. Teachers must modify their tendency to interrupt and correct student grammar mistakes and focus on the content of students' messages. Third, students should receive significant comprehensible input, interact with others and negotiate meaning in a low anxiety environment. This explanation resonates with Terrell's Natural Approach, Asher's TPR, Krashen's acquisition of language and Ray's TPRS method.

Even though ACTFL Guidelines do not suggest any particular methodology for attaining proficiency, looking at the criteria for levels of proficiency from the top down offers the foreign language teacher some indications of which methods produce the best result for scaling the proficiency pyramid. What is the optimal method for teaching students to successfully climb the proficiency pyramid for higher levels of competency? Practicing teachers look for specific tools and methods to utilize in the real world classroom.

Rivers (1981) writes:

Teachers faced with the daily task of helping students to learn a new language cannot afford the luxury of complete dedication to each new method or approach that comes into vogue. They need techniques that work in their particular situation with the specific objectives that are meaningful for the kinds of students they have in their classes. On the other hand, teachers need the stimulation of a new approach from time to time to encourage them in reading, discussions, with colleagues, and classroom experimentation. Trying out new ideas in class is exciting and challenging. It is for these reasons that many experienced teachers are eclectic in their teaching, they like to retain what they know from experience to be effective, while experimenting with novel techniques and activities which hold promise for even more successful teaching. (p. 54)

Rivers presents the dilemma foreign language teachers face, especially ones who have taught “successfully” for many years. Chastain (1988) discusses the eclectic approach but cautions teachers not to become too comfortable with older, outdated methods and not to accept a newer approach just to be flexible. Chastain proposes, “All teachers should screen each activity to determine its effectiveness in promoting course goals” (p. 110). Long (1999) also raises the question of which method is best because of the introduction and recycling of many approaches to language teaching in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From a wealth of instructional methods, Long concludes, “Because there is no single ‘best way’ to teach, teachers at last have the freedom to adopt the instructional approaches that best fit their own teaching style and the

learning styles of their students” (p. 393). Following Rivers’ and Chastain’s thinking, the optimal approach to teaching foreign language may well be the melding of the best of established methods with an infusion of newer more communicative methods.

### **My Experiences Teaching with TPRS**

In 2007, I returned to the university and began a Master’s Degree in Spanish Literature. As a graduate student, I was offered beginning level Spanish classes to teach. At the orientation session for graduate teaching assistants (GTA’s), the Head of Modern Languages pointed out that the purpose of this department and the professors’ main focus were literary research. Since I was a graduate student in Spanish Literature, I thought that made sense, but I was uneasy about how a literature focus aligned with the goals of beginning level foreign language students. I was surprised by the traditional/grammar textbook and the curriculum emphasis on structure for the first three levels of Spanish that represented the required foreign language courses for most students at the university. Reviewing the textbook, I felt like I had travelled back to my undergraduate days in the sixties, back to the future. The Traditional-Grammar textbook resembled the ones I had studied as a student, in high school, but they also featured advanced technology resources and auxiliary materials for teachers.

After all the changes I had witnessed teaching at the high school level with new theories about communication and comprehensibility, with new methods of TPR and TPR Storytelling, I felt like methodological strategies had slid backward at the

university. As a recent high school Spanish teacher, I wondered how articulation between high school and college classes was affected and how the beginning and upper level Spanish courses were perceived. Swaffar & Arens (2005) discuss a common college articulation situation, “Language faculty members as a whole have not had much exposure to perspectives that have emerged in research on language learning and the teaching of foreign languages, particularly with regard to more advanced learners or considerations of their program as a holistic enterprise from start to finish” (p. xi). Our Spanish department’s focus on literature left little attention for newer methods in the curriculum for beginning level classes.

Two native speakers, raised in Latin America, were hired as coordinators, to manage the GTA’s and organize the curriculum for the first four levels of beginning Spanish. I was surprised by the coordinators’ choice of textbook for the first three levels, which emphasized a Grammar-Translation approach. An included on-line workbook brought a more modern perspective and opportunities for students to listen to a variety of native speakers and record their Spanish responses. Beginning level Spanish students could complete workbook assignments in the language lab or their own laptop using a special registered code and an audio program.

Blanco and Donley, editors of *Vistas* (2008) explain, “Completely coordinated with the VISTAS student textbook, the Lab Manual for VISTAS provides you with additional practice of the vocabulary, grammar, and language functions presented in each of the textbook’s eighteen lessons. The Lab Manual will also help you to continue building your listening and speaking skills in Spanish” (p.

v). The activities for listening and speaking offered valuable outside second language exposure to students. However, most GTA's and Instructors chose fill-in-the-blank grammar exercises for their students' homework assignments because these activities were scored electronically.

My students became frustrated with the electronic workbook, because the program was limited to one correct answer, but could be interpreted several ways. The listening and speaking exercises were helpful and exposed students to much needed, out of class, additional experience, except when the native speakers spoke too fast or ran words together. My students had difficulty understanding some the accent of some native speakers. Blanco & Donley (2008) continue, "You will hear statements, questions, mini-dialogues, conversation, monologues, commercial... all recorded by native Spanish speakers. You will encounter a wide range of activities, such as listening-and-repeating exercises, listening-and-speaking practice, listening-and-writing activities, illustration-based work, and dictations" (p. v). Practicality also figured into assigning workbook activities, because most teachers felt that activities were too time-consuming for students, so teachers chose exercises that were grammar centered. The the standardized department exams for the first two levels contained mostly grammar questions anyway. Because of this underlying assumption of "teaching to the test", speaking and listening activities were often omitted in the assignments for students.

The syllabus, that was identical for both first and second level, stated the first goal of the courses, "To learn the fundamental structures of Spanish." This focus

on grammar was exemplified by the grading system that was difficult for the teacher to manage and even more difficult for students to calculate their grade. Eight grading components were listed in the syllabus and “Oral Presentations” only accounted for 5% of students’ final grade. According to this syllabus, the last goal states, “To acquire a proficiency of Novice High level according to the ACTFL guidelines.” As a GTA, I was unsure what the guidelines were and I knew my students were unaware. I was shocked that the objective for the class, Novice High Level of proficiency, was not addressed. After all, speaking represented only 5% of the student’s grade.

I later discovered that future teachers in our state must pass a proficiency exam at the Novice High level to become certified. The university’s requirement, relating to Novice High for education majors, was to successfully pass the first two levels of beginning foreign language. This requirement is problematic because students in the first two levels of Spanish are only required to speak according to the 5% percent criteria. Students with this limited exposure to speaking are not prepared to pass the proficiency test at the Novice High level. Swaffar & Arens (2005) discuss a student’s confusion when beginning to study foreign language, “In the absence of a coherent pedagogy about how to teach students to learn and apply theories and with expanding demands for students to become literate about historical, sociological, psychological, and anthropological content, the burden placed on learners can lead to confusion about standards of competence. Often, students in a FL department remain unclear about their aims as learners” (pp. 191-192). I recall a

frustrated student shouting at his GTA in our office, “I thought I was supposed to learn Spanish when I took this class. Now I know I just have to memorize grammar!”

The Traditional-Grammar Final Exam for the first two beginning levels contained mostly fill in the blank grammar sentences, a reading section and a writing section with prompts and some vocabulary provided. The exam had no listening or speaking components. It was easy to judge from this grading system and the Final Exam that a student learning to *speak* Spanish was not a priority to the Spanish department or the language coordinators. Students and teachers prioritize study time and class preparation according to the most valuable components of the grading scale. Swaffer & Arens (2005) propose “... that a number of established, well-researched assumptions about what is teachable and learnable now exist and that these assumptions have relevance to teaching practices at all levels...” (p. xii).

The Spanish coordinators provided students and teachers with a class schedule, with assigned dates for material to be covered in the textbook, for exams and for compositions. There was little flexibility for individualized instruction or for emphasizing speaking and communication during the fifty minute class that met five times a week. The textbook determined the curriculum. This Traditional-grammar method resembled what I remembered from 1968. I taught to the test following the vocabulary and grammar concepts presented in order, in the textbook. I was surprised and disappointed that university classes, which I expected to be cutting



edge and up-to-date on teaching methods still employed antiquated approaches to L2 learning.

The Traditional-Grammar method taught in our department did not complement or mesh well with newer more communicative methods taught in high school. I observed a GTA in our office ridiculing one of her students. (The student was not present). With exaggerated gestures and arms flailing, the GTA mimicked Spanish words her student said with gestures as she complained, “These TPR students don’t know any grammar!” The Traditional-Grammar method used by this department also did not reflect the most recent AP Exam from 2007. The new focus had shifted away from isolated grammar and fill-in-the-blank exercises.

After the 2007 version of the AP Spanish Language Exam, an AP teacher told me about her student, who as a junior in high school, took the AP Exam and scored a “5,” the top score possible. Before his score was known, he wanted to take a Spanish college class using concurrent enrollment. He was placed in a mid-level Traditional-Grammar oriented class at the university. He left the class after three days, citing his boredom and the class’ irrelevance. The Spanish Department proposes to recruit high level performing students to continue in their literature program, but this instructional approach does not attract talented students. Pratt (2010) discusses her findings regarding the motivations of high school students to continue studying Spanish in college, “The strongest influences on the students’ decision whether or not to study Spanish in college are immediate and utilitarian factors... They have indicated that it is important to them to be able to use Spanish in

their everyday life, which underscores the importance of instructional practices. Teachers should utilize more the aspects of the class that the students enjoy most and believe are most beneficial to them” (p. 682). The Traditional-Grammar approach is teacher, not student, centered.

The Language Lab at the university represented some of the latest technology available to foreign language education. Students were already able to use the computers with the online, interactive workbook, but I wanted a way to record their oral responses to speaking prompts that I could record and evaluate at my convenience. I worked with the Director of the Language Lab as we attempted to implement the recording portion of the Vistas (2008) textbook ancillaries. Preparing my students for what to expect, we spent two class periods trying to record student responses to prompts I had previously recorded in the Language Lab. The Director was startled when my students started to speak, in strong voices, the previous story they had learned in class or adapted to their personal story. He was not accustomed to hearing students speak in the language lab.

I followed the format from the 2006 AP Exam on preparing students to speak. I gave them a prompt for discussing, two minutes to think about what they would say and write notes and then two minutes to speak and record their answers to the prompt. It was worth a try, but the technology did not record all my students’ responses and some students were confused about the process. Even though it is time consuming to evaluate students’ speaking fluency, I thought it worth the effort. I eventually turned to arranging time for students to speak to me in pairs, in person.

This type of evaluation encourages students and teacher to work together for a common goal and there is no room for cheating. I have had little experience with On-line language classes, but my first impression is that it is difficult to teach language via the computer because learning a language requires a great deal of student and teacher interaction. I think the spontaneous and creative relationship established in the classroom are invaluable for fostering communicative proficiency.

After teaching for several semesters, I became frustrated with the lack of proficiency and retention I encountered in students in my third level college Spanish class. Three consecutive semesters of beginning Spanish were graduation requirements for most students and the students were having difficulty retaining vocabulary and grammar concepts as they progressed through the three levels. Perhaps more importantly, they were reluctant to speak the language. Looking for a more communicative approach to teaching Spanish than the Traditional-Grammar oriented approach, I explored several more recent methods. TPRS appeared to be the most popular and promising approach, but there was little research on using this approach at the college level. After further research and attending several demonstrations, I decided to integrate a modified TPRS approach into my first level college classes the following semester. I was hopeful I could employ TPRS appropriately for students in higher education. I centered my research on *Fluency through TPR Storytelling* (2009) by Blaine Ray and Contee Seeley from the Command Performance Language Institute.

Armed with background information about TPRS, I presented the Spanish language coordinator with my teaching method intentions. She indicated I could teach whatever method I wanted as long as the students followed the textbook vocabulary and grammar, took the prescribed exams and took the departmental final exam. She cautioned me to make sure that my students were as well prepared as the traditional students, to be successful in the subsequent required Spanish classes.

With these restrictions in mind, I set upon the task of incorporating the Storytelling and TPR approaches into a Traditional-Grammar emphasized setting of beginning Spanish at my university. At first, being keenly aware of my older, college level student audience, I wanted to present stories for their particular level of maturity and experience and minimize the anxiety that is often present in second language learning. I also felt the necessity of creating new stories that would reflect the collegiate life of my students and thus involve and motivate them with relevant stories. Following Blaine Ray's advice, I also needed to include unusual and unexpected elements in the stories to keep the students engaged and interested. With little previous experience, I painstakingly created the first story to accommodate the first textbook chapter's vocabulary and grammar concepts.

In order to acquaint my students with the Storytelling approach at the beginning of the semester, I first showed my classes a video of Blaine Ray's Storytelling techniques with the questions he asked. I wanted my students to know what to expect in my non-traditional classroom and that their active participation was essential. Telling my story took a lot of concentration and practice because I had to

ask many questions to get and keep the students involved. Starting with a few TPR gestures for common verbs, which students imitated, I repeated the stories and questions. My Storytelling ability improved with practice and the students' active participation was encouraging. Using choral responses in which the whole class responded at once together, and then individual responses, the students were all speaking Spanish more than my previous students had spoken when I taught with the Traditional- Grammar method. I was encouraged with this modified TPRS because the atmosphere was fun and supportive and during choral responses these students did not appear shy or hesitant to speak. I included "modified" in my TPRS description because, to a lesser degree, I also included Traditional-Grammar and other method techniques in my teaching.

The first story was lengthened and embellished with repetition of the core vocabulary and grammar concepts from the textbook. Students personalized the story orally and read a longer story version to extend their vocabulary and understanding, re: Krashen's  $i + 1$  theory. Finally, students were asked to write the story as it was presented, modify it or to create their own adaptation. Their writing ability improved because they carried their speaking ability over to their compositions by writing in phrases with mostly grammatically correct expressions. Students were writing in Spanish the way the stories and questions were presented to them.

I asked students to do "timed writings" of three to five minutes with as many vocabulary words and expressions as they could remember. Their composition grade reflected the number of words they produced in the context given. The students

wrote like crazy in the time allowed—first, because they had phrases they remembered in the story, and second, because they weren't pausing to filter for grammatical correctness. What's ironic is they wrote much more than my traditional students in my previous classes and the grammar they had internalized, through the stories, reflected correct expressions. Grammar seemed to come naturally to them in context. Student compositions alerted me to consistent grammar mistakes so I could address more thoroughly particular grammar points. My students felt more confident in their language ability and corrected errors in compositions because they could see the re correction in context.

Reflecting and comparing TPRS students with previous traditional students, I noticed a marked improvement in composition writing. Traditional students had struggled to combine nouns, verbs and adjectives because they had to create the whole process without context. Students hesitated, when writing or speaking, to try to conjugate the verb for agreement with the subject. Traditional students were focusing more on correct grammar than content. Speaking and reading in context, in stories, TPRS students combined words in phrases for rapid recall. The TPRS approach improved on the older, Audio Lingual Method, of simply memorizing dialogues that students couldn't adapt to spontaneous conversations. With TPRS, students are constantly being asked questions about the stories and personalizing them so they can adapt, combine and compose language on their own with few grammatical errors.

The stories, and later, novels made grammar instruction more relevant because it was presented in context: Elmo quiere bailar con Puerquita [Elmo wants to dance with Miss Piggy]. (I used non -threatening childhood characters to lower the level of anxiety among students and make the stories fun. I then placed the characters in situations college students could relate to.). ¿Tú quieres bailar con Puerquita, también? No, yo no quiero bailar con ella. Quiero bailar con Beyonce. [Do you want to dance with Miss Piggy, too? No, I don't want to dance with her. I want to dance with Beyonce]. With short explanations, grammar pop-ups, students focused on verb endings and subject pronouns that were in context. Next, I encouraged students to use different subjects and verb endings in small group sessions. Later, for homework, students completed exercises in the textbook and workbook for repetition while matching different verb endings to the subject.

The most surprising and encouraging grammar acquisition came from the three novels students read for class. (Remember these students are in the first level of Spanish instruction). One of the most difficult Spanish grammar concepts for beginning students to learn is the direct and indirect object pronouns and their placement in the sentence, which is different in Spanish than it is in English. Utilizing the novel dialogues, students were exposed to indirect and direct object pronouns in context with repetition: “He said to them, she said to me, they gave it to us, the thief robbed it from her, we heard it.” While reading the novels, I pointed out these indirect and direct object pronouns as students translated the text. Then students began to consciously use the objects in their answers to questions and

explanations of the storyline. When the last textbook chapter for my beginning Spanish class introduced direct object pronouns, my students were already familiar with them, placed them correctly in relation to the verb and some students even incorporated them naturally in their third exam compositions.

The results of the final exam supported TPRS students' ability to learn, retain, produce Spanish vocabulary and write grammatically correctly even on a Traditional-Grammar based exam. The same final exam, given to all beginning-level Spanish I students, was created by the Spanish coordinator who only tested reading, grammar and writing. Listening and speaking were not tested. The TPRS students demonstrated their ability to recall vocabulary, integrate grammatical concepts with fill-in-the-blank questions, analyze reading sections and answer correctly the reading section questions. Most importantly, these students expressed themselves with proficiency, respective to their beginning level, in the composition component of the final exam, the most difficult section of the final exam.

I conducted a quantitative study comparing the final exam scores of my two modified TPRS first level classes with the final exam scores of four Traditional Grammar, first-level classes taught by three different teachers. These teachers identified themselves with the Traditional-Grammar method. The TPRS students outperformed Traditional-Grammar students, 85% to 81.75%. TPRS students practiced speaking more and their compositions contained more vocabulary, better grammar and more expanded writing than my traditional students from the previous semester. Between the Traditional-Grammar taught students and the TPRS taught



students, the difference was statistically significant,  $t=2.08$ ,  $df=113$ ,  $p=.02$ , one tail, and the effect size was  $d=.49$ , a modest but clear difference.

In my study, I concluded that TPRS students outperformed Traditional-Grammar students on an exam which was purposefully biased towards grammar and vocabulary. TPRS students not only did not suffer, but excelled on a Traditional-Grammar final exam. Of course, TPRS students' scores would have been even higher if they had been tested on speaking and listening skills that are emphasized through TPRS. Students in the TPRS classroom obtained high scores on the traditional grammar exam, with the added benefit, in my observation, of more confidence in speaking and understanding the target language. Despite its explicit non-grammar focus, TPRS did not take away from students' knowledge of grammar. Furthermore, class evaluations revealed attitudes toward Spanish were quite positive (Oliver, 2012).

In the Storytelling approach, students answer the choral questions and then ask each other similar questions in small groups. Students have a context, a story to work within. There is a plot, three locations and an obstacle to overcome. Most students were animated, creative and engaged with Storytelling. Their having fun made it fun for me and discipline was hardly ever an issue. However, I could not sustain this modified TPRS for an entire fifty-minute class period. When I shifted class instruction to Traditional- Grammar, I was disappointed to see the energy level of my classes drop and eyes droop as they lost interest in textbook exercises and grammar explanations.

Overall, students seemed encouraged and more confident about their Spanish ability when they realized they could communicate in the language and they were able to read and understand three short novels entirely in Spanish. I was proud of my students and they were proud of themselves. Several students indicated they wanted to study the next level class with me, using this method. I enjoyed teaching in a new way and was energized as well. Not only did students demonstrate confidence in their reading, writing, and grammar ability as evidenced by the final exam, but they also appeared more comfortable speaking and understanding Spanish than my previous traditional students at the same level.

## Chapter 9

### Teaching at Small Private University – Methods Reflecting ACTFL Guidelines

#### 2012 – Present

The limits of my language are the limits of my world.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

*“Notice that your book list from the bookstore does not include a textbook,” I informed my Spanish Conversation class. This class is all about speaking, so we’ll tell and ask some stories. You’ll also read two novels and then a third novel that reflects a video mystery filmed on location in Mexico. You’ll prepare a Spanish notebook with the vocabulary, grammar and stories we tell and read. Now, tell me about your experience with learning Spanish,” I added trying to size up the exposure my students already had in Spanish.*

*“I took Spanish I and Spanish II at this university,” John volunteered. “But we didn’t speak Spanish very much and we only studied the present tense.”*

*“I’m concurrently enrolled in Spanish II at the high school in town,” Austin chimed in.*

*“I had three years in high school and I only had two,” announced Erika and Courtney, raising their hands.*

*“I lived in Costa Rica for two years when my parents were missionaries. I studied Spanish while I was there, too” informed Christy.*

*“My mother is from Mexico and she speaks Spanish at home, but I usually speak English at home,” added María enthusiastically.*

*“I coach soccer at this university while I finish my senior year. Many soccer players speak Spanish and I’ve learned some Spanish from them,” stated Mark softly.*

*“Well, I’m glad to learn you all have some background in Spanish, so we’ll review introductory vocabulary and grammar quickly,” I responded as I considered the wide range of Spanish language exposure my students presented. “Since this is a Spanish Conversation class, almost all of your class time will be spent speaking. We’re going to follow a Storytelling method. This method really helps improve speaking ability and confidence. I think it will work well for you, also.”*

*Most student faces appeared eager to start, but a few were apprehensive. “Is our final all in Spanish?” Courtney asked with a troubled look.*

*“Is our final only going to be speaking Spanish,” Austin asked.*

*“I don’t think I know enough Spanish to just speak it. That sounds really hard,” someone muttered.*

*“Well, this is a conversation class so the main goal of taking this class is to be able to converse in Spanish and make yourself understood,” I answered trying to encourage, but also trying to be realistic with my new students. “Since most of you are education majors, this class will help you prepare to pass the Novice High Level*

*oral exam similar to the ACTFL Proficiency Test. In order to become certified to teach in our state, you have to pass a speaking/conversation exam. The final exam for this class uses the same criteria for the Novice High level for this Proficiency Test, so if you pass it, you'll also get a good grade in this class and I'll sign off on your proficiency level, according to the university's criteria. Let's begin with some basic Spanish questions and answers so we can get to know each other."*

*Three weeks into the semester John asked, "Is there a textbook I could use? The other two Spanish classes I took used a textbook and we didn't speak much," John reminisced about a teaching method he was more familiar with. "I'm exhausted. Speaking Spanish for a whole class period is mentally taxing. It's hard to be immersed in a Spanish speaking environment for eighty minutes at a time. My brain aches," John complained after telling the first story in Spanish.*

*"Va a ser más fácil. Ya sabes contar un cuento en español. Te entiendo muy bien. Vas a conversar muy bien en español. Felicitaciones," [It's going to get easier. You already know how to tell a story in Spanish. I understand you well. You're going to converse very well in Spanish. Congratulations],*" I responded to a grinning, but tired student who understood my Spanish answer. *"You learn to speak Spanish by speaking it. That's the goal in this class," I answered positively.*

Having already taught TPRS at the college level, I decided to continue teaching this method at a small, private university. I took the opportunity to conduct more research into the latest developments of TPR and TPRS and discover what

recent practitioners of the method had developed. Because of the proficiency requirement for Education majors in my Spanish Conversation class, I researched the applicability of TPRS to help students successfully pass a proficiency exam similar to the ACTFL Guidelines 2012 Novice High Proficiency Exam for speaking.

First, looking for a background on the formation of the ACTFL Standards, I referred to Phillips (1999), “During the standards development process, much effort had been aimed at achieving a strong national consensus. That challenge was successfully met as individuals from education, government, and business embraced the standards and over fifty professional and state organizations endorsed them officially” (p. 2). Phillips discusses how the ACTFL Standards influenced a change of focus from what teachers are teaching, to what students are learning. Standards and guidelines allow teachers to come to an agreement on what constitutes student proficiency in the four areas of language competency: speaking, listening, reading and writing. The authority and integrity of ACTFL is responsible for creating a knowledgeable and reputable consensus, focusing on input from language educators, of what constitutes proficiency. The General Preface to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 states, “For the past 25 years, the ACTFL Guidelines have had an increasingly profound impact on language teaching and learning in the United States.” (p. 3). This discussion focuses on the standards and guidelines for student oral proficiency.

Although some educators might disagree, most teachers are relieved and heartened to prepare students to achieve demonstrative, logical guidelines for

assessing students' level of proficiency created by ACTFL. The 2012 ACTFL Standards and Guidelines suggest that college foreign language departments determine their goals for learner outcomes for students fulfilling university requirements and future teachers. Swaffer & Arens (2005) explain the two different kinds of instruction prevalent in foreign language college classes in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In the first case, teachers hold an authoritarian role in which the student is evaluated according to correctness. The authors elaborate, "Instructors teach language in a normative fashion, as a corpus of data to be learned "correctly"... That assumed standard for communication relies on tasks such as reading texts for information alone, memorizing individual words in lists and writing sentences outside a particular communicative contest" (p. 17). This traditional grammar oriented method does not prepare students adequately for the speaking section of the ACTFL proficiency exam because class time is too focused on grammar and vocabulary memorization instead of speaking opportunities (Rivers, 1981; Chastain, 1988; Hadley, 2001). In the second case, Swaffer & Arens (2005) contrast the traditional method with an individuated approach.

The individuated method aligns more closely with the ACTFL Guidelines for student proficiency as the authors point out, "... an individuated user-oriented curriculum that sets broad, flexible goals for learning will define students' ability to function effectively in real-world contexts, within particular social and occupational settings" (p. 19). Swaffer & Arens continue, "Effective presentation of messages and significance of content become as important as language form. Similarly, when

speech performance is evaluated, formal correctness weighs in terms of situational appropriateness and so does the learner's increasing ability to edit and self-correct language-based performance" (p. 19). The Individuated Method sounds like it belongs within Communicative Approaches, especially in relation to speech performance. The student's ability to make himself understood in L2 becomes the major focus for language proficiency and evaluation as echoed by the ACTFL description for speaking proficiency. ACTFL Guidelines provide criteria for evaluating students through a progressively more advanced level of proficiency: Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior and Distinguished with sublevels for each category. Beginning level college education students are expected to approximate a Novice High Level as described by the ACTFL Guidelines 2012:

Speakers at the Novice High sublevel are able to handle a variety of tasks pertaining to the Intermediate level, but are unable to sustain performance at that level. They are able to manage successfully a number of uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward social situations. Conversation is restricted to a few of the predictable topics necessary for survival in the target language culture, such as basic personal information, basic objects, and a limited number of activities, preferences, and immediate needs. Novice High speakers respond to simple, direct questions or requests for information.

They are also able to ask a few formulaic questions. (p. 9)

The Traditional method, which emphasizes form, does not focus as much time speaking the language as individuated/communicative methods do. The teacher must



carefully evaluate the goals of her instruction. As the ACTFL goals and guidelines become more accepted as the standard for student proficiency evaluation, more teachers seek appropriate teaching methods to prepare their students to climb the proficiency scale.

Shrum (2010) discusses foreign language teacher unification in relation to the ACTFL Guidelines, “Standards can help us identify and agree upon desired outcomes, especially if they are shaped in the context of a national assessment that has been developed and valued by members of our profession” (p. 1). Now that professional guidelines and proficiency levels have been delineated, the essential question becomes, which is the best instructional method, or methods, teachers should employ to help students attain a beginning and subsequently higher levels of proficiency? Unfortunately, the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 are for evaluation purposes and valorize teaching methods that lead to the attainment these goals:

The Guidelines are not based on any particular theory, pedagogical method, or educational curriculum. They neither describe how an individual learns a language nor prescribe how an individual should learn a language, and they should not be used for such purposes. They are an instrument for the evaluation of functional language ability. (p. 3)

Referring to the four areas of proficiency in the ACTFL Guidelines (speaking, listening, reading and writing), the most difficult skill to master is

speaking, which is most students' main goal in learning a second language (Rivers, 1981). Even though students are motivated to speak L2, Rivers elaborates on the difficulty of learning and teaching speaking, "The teaching of the speaking skill is more demanding on the teacher than the teaching of any other language skill" (p. 188). Students learn to speak by speaking. Rivers emphasizes this obvious point by including a heading in the speaking skill chapter, "We Learn to Speak by Speaking" (p.188). She points out some teachers' belief that if they speak L2 in class, students will automatically start speaking themselves. Teachers should provide students multiple opportunities to express their own meaning, in a natural way, from the very first lesson.

Young and Buxton (2013) call for usable language to replace the Traditional-Grammar method, "In programs using outdated pedagogies focused on grammar and translation and coupled with low expectations, students take foreign languages with goals that seemingly include everything except actually learning to speak the language" (p. 1). Foreign language educators often hear, "I took two years of language in high school and I can't speak it. Now I wish I knew how to speak it." Young and Buxton advocate for students learning real-life language and survival travel skills predicated upon the ability to speak and understand the language. This recommendation relates to the Novice High Level criteria for speaking proficiency which includes survival and social proficiency.

The Grammar-Translation, Traditional-Grammar methods have proven to be effective for reading and writing, but speaking and listening skills are more readily

developed using ALM, the Direct Method, the Natural Method, Individualized Instruction, TPR and TPRS. Communicative methods are key to developing students' speaking ability. It's surprising to note that Phillips and Terry (1999) classify the Direct Method, Audio-Lingual Method, Individualized Instruction and Total Physical Response as "Rational-Scientific-Technical" in contrast to "Communicative Methods" (p. 102). The authors make the distinction that communicative methods must include the teaching of culture along with the language. The Berlitz method, which is often classified with the Direct Method, has been criticized because it is difficult to incorporate into a classroom setting (Rivers, 1981; Hadley 2001). Meaningful language is not learned in isolation, but with people. In learning to converse in a foreign language, students expand their understanding of the culture.

### **Researching the Strengths of Various Methods**

Reflecting on the criteria for Novice High Level of speaking proficiency, it is appropriate to begin research on the best methods by focusing a backward design. ACFLT Guidelines indicate that students need to speak and be understood in uncomplicated conversations in social and survival situations. Students must utilize sufficient vocabulary and structures to understand and ask questions as they express personal meaning and understanding in a conversational interview. Interviewers/testers for the ACTFL oral exams who are sympathetic to non- native speakers can understand the spoken message students are trying to communicate without focusing on correct grammar. With the goal of students making their oral

messages understood, teachers investigate which method is most effective to prepare students to be understandable and proficient speakers.

Even though the Audio-Lingual method emphasizes speaking and listening to L2, formulaic dialogues and canned listening activities may restrict the ability to improvise and carry on a spontaneous and personal conversation which is expected at the Novice High level (Hadley, 2001; Rivers, 1981). ALM seems adamant about centrality of careful pronunciation. Chastain (1988) explains, “Incorrect production of these features [stress, intonation, juncture phenomena, liaisons, elisions, internal juncture, release of final consonants] is a source of miscomprehension even when students have mastered the structures required for the basic functions and pronounce individual sounds acceptably” (p. 198). Listening to native speakers and imitating their speech patterns using the Audio-Lingual Method, L2 students make themselves easier to understand during oral examinations. Explicit instruction in foreign language sounds and conscious imitation of native pronunciation help students develop comprehensible speaking ability with less native language interference.

The first application of the Direct Method also encourages correct pronunciation. Students learn the language while listening to it in large quantities without interference from their native language. Students actively participate in role playing, following instructions or describing pictures. However, grammar is taught inductively and with little structured feedback. Inaccuracy causes students to speak a pidgin form of the language that inhibits understanding by native speakers (Hadley,

2001). According to the Direct Method, without grammar instruction, students develop a created language reinforcing mistakes that are later difficult to overcome.

The modernized version of the Direct Method reflects a more Communicative Approach and became identified with the Natural Approach of Terrell and the theories of Krashen. The Natural Approach concentrates on real life communication and survival skills for beginning language students who are not inhibited by extensive structure and error correction. Students receive a great deal of comprehensible, repetitive input. Acquisition of vocabulary is prioritized over knowledge of structure. L2 is taught in context in a relaxed classroom atmosphere that focuses on students' interests, opinions and emotions. However, Hadley (2001) criticizes the Natural Approach's "... lack of form-focused instruction or corrective feedback in classroom instruction," (p. 123). The Direct Method and Natural Approach prepare and encourage students to speak the language, but the conspicuous absence of structure limits students' actual ability to communicate comprehensibly, especially as they progress into speaking sentences with more abstract meaning. The Direct Method and the Natural Approach cannot completely prepare students for the ACTFL proficiency guidelines. However, many of the strategies and tools the Natural Approach utilizes, pictures, role playing descriptions can contribute to a student's oral proficiency.

The Total Physical Response Method is not a complete method meant for oral proficiency. Krashen points out that TPR is limited because it focuses on students' physical responses to verbal commands in L2. Asher's insistence on

listening skills before speaking or writing skills is both beneficial and detrimental. Students' listening ability and thus understanding may become heightened, but the focus on listening does not necessarily lead to improved speaking, reading or writing abilities (Rivers, 1981). The TPR spoken command approach does not contribute to students' ability to converse socially at the Novice High level. TPR can help prepare students to pass the Novice Low and Novice Mid levels of speaking proficiency because it teaches students vocabulary as they identify objects and respond to active verbs. TPR produces a heightened listening ability which prepares a student to perfect his pronunciation during conversational interaction.

The Individualized Instruction Method can offer a viable opportunity to climb the ACTFL proficiency scale for a student with talent and self-discipline. Phillips & Terry (1999) express the importance of focusing on the individual student's needs and goals, "In any approach to the development of communicative ability, the focus must be on the individual learner's need to become a competent user of the language because each arrives at the process of language and culture learning with a unique background and experiences. As a result, instruction adapts to individual learners to meet mutually agreed-upon outcomes," (p. 103).

Since the creation of ACTFL proficiency guidelines, outcomes have become more identifiable. Under the umbrella of communicative competency, theorists and educators tend to stop short of prioritizing any particular communicative method. Richards & Rodgers (2001) reference the Communicative Approach in relation to a method, "A method, on the other hand, refers to a specific instructional design or

system based on a particular theory of language and of language learning. It contains detailed specifications of content, roles of teachers, and learners, and teaching procedures and techniques. It is relatively fixed in time and there is generally little scope for individual interpretation” (p. 245). Richards & Rogers’ obvious bias against specific methods leaves the teacher with the theory and philosophy of the Communicative Approach, but with little actual/practical strategies to obtain it. The authors contend that beginning teachers should simply follow procedures and strategies practiced by more experienced teachers. Then, as teachers gain experience, they can focus on the methods or approaches that best suit their personalities and their learners’ goals.

The broad platitudes register what teachers need to “do” in the classroom rarely guide practice. Cutshall (2012) discusses the development of the standards over the last decade and asserts that the Standards are having an impact on practice in K-16.

Gaab (2006) charts the evolution of TPRS from 1997 and 2006 based on actual teacher experiences in real classrooms. Contending that TPRS has become part of the mainstream, the author explains, “What makes TPRS so successful is its common sense, pedagogically sound and scientifically supported approach to teaching and learning languages” (n .p.). “An extensive international Internet chat group supports TPRS’ popularity. Gaab introduces a hybrid TPRS based on the explosion of TPRS practitioners and adaptations to the method. Citing brain-friendly advantages, Gaab contends that TPRS uses a multisensory approach that appeals to

various learning types through visual images, gestures, kinesthetic movement and listening. Students learn what sounds right. TPRS focuses on input as students begin by mimicking phrases with high frequency vocabulary and structures. Tsui (2012) discusses how the brain works with speaking and memory, moving words from short-term memory to long-term memory. She points out the importance of social interaction and meaningful context.

Gaab (2006) and Gross (2003) claim that students will naturally acquire structures in the order that is most meaningful to them. As students' level of proficiency progresses, students edit structures that help them communicate more effectively. Students looking to pass the Novice High level of speaking proficiency communicate for meaning at their level and interviewers/testers identify the message students are trying to convey, not grammar correctness unless it interferes with meaning. Gaab encapsulates her hybrid TPRS stand on eliminating the Traditional – Grammar Method emphasis on structure, “Rather, from day one, grammar is taught in meaningful context via natural conversation and engaging stories. The focus is first and foremost on the message, with realistic expectations for (level –appropriate) grammatical accuracy” (n.p.). Gaab’s explanation for TPRS echoes criteria for the ACTFL guidelines at the Novice Level speaking proficiency.

### **My Experience Teaching TPRS and an Eclectic Approach**

While continuing to work on my dissertation, I was offered the opportunity to teach Spanish I, II and Spanish Conversation classes at a small, private university.



Because I was the only teacher in the department, I was given authority to choose textbooks and methodology and to design curriculum. Education majors at this university were required to take Spanish Conversation so they could fulfill their teacher certification requirements by passing an oral exam similar to the ACTFL Novice High level of proficiency. I set about the task of selecting books and materials. Having such an opportunity to create a curriculum placed an extra burden on me to devise lesson plans which reflected the method that I considered most effective. I deepened my research on the latest versions of TPRS and other contemporary methods. Which methods could I utilize to prepare my students to pass what I considered to be a Novice High Level version of the ACTFL proficiency exam?

I emphasize here that I am not a certified Oral Proficiency Interview examiner and I do not claim to be. The Dean of Arts and Sciences and the Dean of the Education Departments accepted my qualifications to administer a proficiency test for novice level students, as an experienced Spanish teacher with a Master's Degree in Spanish Literature and a forthcoming PhD in Foreign Language Education. The state department of education gave universities in the state the opportunity to set their own qualifications for what constituted a Novice High Level of proficiency (Dawson, 2012). I decided to teach my Spanish I class focusing on TPR and TPRS. To a lesser extent, I incorporated aspects of ALM, the Direct Method, Individualized Instruction, Krashen's theories, the Natural Method and the

Grammar-Translation/Traditional Methods, or, at least, my interpretation of these methods.

The freedom of methodology and textbook choice was energizing, but also risky. I decided not to incorporate a formal textbook for any of the classes. Instead, I required students in both classes to purchase a Spanish notebook complete with Spanish/English dictionary, verb conjugation wheel, and laminated sheets of basic Spanish grammar. I provided introductory themed vocabulary lists along with lists of the most commonly used words and verbs. Students conjugated verbs in the present tense for their notebook and compiled vocabulary lists from the novels and stories they read with the purpose of creating their own, personalized reference notebook/textbook.

At the beginning of the semester, students practiced Spanish pronunciation, a remnant of ALM I still consider valuable to gain confidence pronouncing Spanish words so a native speaker could understand them. Since Spanish is a phonetic language, students could also easily learn to spell the words they pronounced correctly. I discovered that students who learn to pronounce words well are also better readers and have more confidence writing short essays because they can sound out words as they write them. Incidentally, students taught phonetically add accent marks where needed because they have internalized simple rules of pronunciation. My pronunciation experience helps students with reading difficulty pronounce and spell words better in Spanish and later English because students spell what they hear and then see what they spell/hear.

Of course, I used a vast collection of fun and interesting stories. However, I had learned from my prior experience teaching TPRS to college students to create stories based on current students' interests. I wanted to provide on level vocabulary in a low anxiety classroom atmosphere. I personalized stories loosely based on characters from Sesame Street a non-threatening reference to students' childhood, to appeal to my university student's interests: Elmo, Miss Piggy and Oscar lived in the college dormitories, took classes, bought school supplies, went to parties, played sports, travelled abroad and attended concerts. I told and asked the stories, gave students an expanded version of the stories, asked them to tell the stories in their own words. Finally students wrote timed writings of the stories with an emphasis on the number of words written, not grammar.

Students read three beginning level short novels in Spanish and produced a project for *Día de los muertos* [Day of the Dead] by constructing an *ofrenda* (memorial display) and describing how they remembered a relative who had died. My goal was to get students talking. As an outside class activity, students conducted *Entrevistas* [Interviews] with native Spanish speakers they encountered at the university or around town. The Spanish Conversation class focused almost exclusively on conversations in to prepare for the Novice High speaking final exam.

Along with the general units of survival Spanish, Conversation students read a short novel, *Esperanza*, and worked through ancillary novel sources. The second novel, *Rebeldes de Tejas*, we ran out of time. Indeed, my biggest problem was time; a three hour class that only met two times a week for eighty minutes for sixteen

weeks. I needed to slow down and follow Ray's and Gaab's advice to teach for total comprehension. The third novel for the conversation class was accompanied by a video mystery featuring college students searching for clues, on location in Mexico. Although reading the novel was too difficult, students enthusiastically watched the video and actively participated in plot discussions, which led to personal adaptations.

For the final exam Conversation students had to discuss five areas of concentration: a description of themselves, a description of their family, their favorite activities and pastimes, their university life and a personalized last category in which they discussed their favorite movie, book, music, sport, trip, or restaurant. Since some students were anxious about a speaking exam, I encouraged them to prepare a picture sheet for each category. Students personalized the picture sheets with pencil drawings, hieroglyphics, and clip art. These picture "crutches" seemed to give students more confidence as students spoke and conversed for twenty minutes. If they faltered, I encouraged them to continue by asking questions about areas they were discussing. Most students tested very well and I think they surprised themselves about how much they could say in Spanish.

## **Conclusion**

My background and teaching experiences influence my choice of teaching strategies for individualizing the approach with each class. Even though I am now emphasizing TPRS, I know I'll use Grammar-Translation when students compose Valentine poems and translate them into English. My experience with the Audio-Lingual Method influences how my students engage in dialogues. The Direct/Natural

Method influences role play and picture presentations. Conversations are individualized toward student's interests. When ideas from my teaching background pop into my head, I use an Eclectic Approach according to the advantages each method offers at a particular moment. My students are usually enthusiastic and I work to keep changing the stimulus.

I begin to discuss the fifty-year search for the optimal method, one that addresses all my language teaching goals. Reflecting on Rivers' (1981) comment about eclectic teachers, I realize that all the methods I have learned and taught, have something to offer as I pull from my bottomless Mary Poppins style bag of strategies, techniques and tools. I believe I pull from my experience with ALM for student dialogues, listening to native speakers and pronunciation skills. I pull from my Grammar-Translation experience, the ability to encapsulate grammar concepts for "pop-up" explanations and student composition grammar corrections. I understand the wider grammar picture from a non-native speaker point of view. From the Direct and Natural Methods, I emphasize speaking and listening activities. From Krashen and Terrell, I understand how students acquire language naturally, the mechanisms of how and when students learn a second language and how to spur them onto the next level. I understand that students can communicate the content of their message without being grammatically correct. From TPR, I understand that students retain more language when they are kinesthetically involved. I understand that other sensory input facilitates language retention and understanding.

With the wide variety of methods I have experienced and taught, it is logical that as a seasoned teacher, I practice and retain the best of these methods and adapt them to students in my current classes. A teacher is a multifaceted guide who pulls tricks out of her teaching bag to fit the occasion and the individual student. As Baines (2003) enlightens "...In truth the most valuable assets for a teacher are a sense of humor, charisma, determination, compassion, common sense, and an unbridled enthusiasm for the language..." (p. 83). I have fun and a good sense of humor teaching TPRS. I hope my enthusiasm for foreign languages is contagious to my students and that I remain flexible and open to new ideas and methods of teaching.

Rivers reminds me to not only retain the best of the tried- and- true methods but to stay flexible and explore new methods. In some strange way, I feel that Wilga Rivers is mentoring me, even though we have never met. Ordering and then receiving her book, *Speaking in Many Tongues*, 1983," used but in good condition", her words spoke to me personally as I opened the cover and read the inscription,

"To Jean, With much affection, Wilga M. Rivers, Harvard University Sept 24, 1983."

Even though Rivers does not discuss TPRS, her logical, knowledgeable, and compassionate writing inspires me. I think she would approve of Storytelling. TPRS was the new method I was finally flexible and desperate enough to implement. Being a reluctant speaker myself, this method has opened a whole new world of

communicative strategies to me. It has energized and innovated my teaching, but it is not the only tool in my teacher backpack. I have figuratively climbed the Tower of Babel, collecting method/strategy tools along the way and like a video game Mario, I employ the tools that win me points, and make me an eclectic teacher. However, the climb is not finished. With my tool filled backpack securely fastened, I keep climbing, searching for the optimal method or combination of methods to effectively and better teach students. I recommend this quest, through my humble story, to other teachers because it can energize and refresh teachers and because it can benefit students.

## Chapter 10

“The more things change, the more they rhyme.”

Mark Twain

*“You’ll have a quiz on this book in class tomorrow,” I quickly added at the end of the Spanish Conversation class. “It’s about elementary students in a Spanish speaking school and is an excellent resource for you as you look to teaching your own classes. You will probably have some Spanish speaking students.”*

*“I like the vocabulary about school objects and what students do in the classroom,” Stephanie added while underlining useful words.*

*“I’m glad I can tell my Spanish speaking students what I want them to do: Go to the board, add the numbers, write a composition, listen to the teacher, line up for lunch and wash your hands,” Rachel added enthusiastically because she could actually speak these phrases in Spanish.*

*“OK. Let’s get serious. How do I tell my non-English speaking students: Be quiet and don’t hit the kid next to you? This should be fun.” John added as a wisecrack.*

*I asked the three more advanced students to write the negative commands on the white board as students added these to their notebooks. “Along with these affirmative and negative commands, be sure you memorize the Spanish vocabulary for classroom objects, school supplies and school subjects like math, science,*



*English, composition, reading. I want you to feel confident saying these words to your students. There is an added benefit to speaking Spanish to your students; native English speakers will learn school vocabulary in Spanish, too,” I added, trying to broaden these future teachers’ perspectives. Realistically, I noted that my students needed more practice and repetition to really internalize these commands so they would use them confidently in their classrooms.*

*“Can we take this quiz orally instead of written?” Kristen asked waving her hand.*

*“Yes, let’s take it orally so we can practice saying the commands,” two more students joined in.*

*“OK. If you’d prefer, you can take the test orally. Just make sure you memorize the commands with school vocabulary so you don’t just say baby sentences,” I agreed somewhat stunned that the students actually preferred a speaking quiz over a written one. I puzzled over their motivation and rationalized that I marked more grammatical errors when they wrote a quiz.*

The original story of the Tower of Babel describes the building of a manmade tower, which was proposed to reach into Heaven. The people, who all spoke one language, intended to approach God via the tower. God, displeased with the tower, confused the people’s language so they could not understand each other and could not complete the tower. God scattered the people all over the earth where they spoke many different languages (Genesis 11:1-9). As a reversal of the Babel story, I liken

the story to people learning to again communicate with one another by learning various languages and the optimal methods to teach language communication. As I pause to reflect on my climb up the imagined Tower of Babel, where the peak is fluent communication in the target language, I look down toward the ground, where I started learning Spanish and French over fifty years ago. As I imagine the naïve student I was in high school when I first started to study Spanish, some events are recalled easily and some are foggy or lost. Writing this dissertation about foreign language instructional methods has focused some memories as I relate the significance and meaning of my teaching career. As I struggle to recall the view looking up at the tower as I began my climb, my perspective is colored by the experiences and professional influences I now carry in my head, making up the backpack of teaching tools and strategies I've won on my ascent. Some of my most treasured items are the notes I have received from former students thanking me for my help on their own roads to communicative proficiency.

As an adolescent high school student, I was impressed by the modern Audio-Lingual Method, which was touted as the ultimate method for teaching foreign languages to American students. Many educational theorists and government officials promoted this scientifically proven, behaviorist, and military tested method as the “answer” to the oral language communication problem (Rivers, 1981; Chastain, 1988; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The latest technology in the sixties, the language lab, allowed foreign language education to enter the modern global emphasis on increased exposure and practice in second language learning. However,

my experienced high school Spanish teacher still included the Grammar-Translation method in her teaching, just to be sure students learned the basics.

As a beginning teacher in 1968, when I began my climb, the view of the tower was clearly focused. I followed the textbook, utilizing the Grammar-Translation Method I was taught in high school instead of the Audio-Lingual Method. The ALM had fallen out of favor because it didn't keep its promise; students were still not able to orally communicate. Next I researched and taught Individualized Instruction with mixed results. I gained an increased understanding of methods and how to effectively implement them. My sabbatical from teaching taught me more about children's differences, increasing student diversity in the classroom, and how learning to communicate using foreign languages and understanding cultures are essential in this ever shrinking world. Returning to teaching twenty years later, I experienced a renewed emphasis on student oral communication proficiency. New methods reflecting the Natural Approach and Krashen's theories resulted in the development of Communicative Approaches like TPR and TPRS. Getting students to speak in the classroom during the majority of class time became the major objective of these methods. The ACTFL Standards and Guidelines now focus attention on speaking proficiency levels, but leave the question of method to achieve these goals up to the individual educator. Effective oral communication is the same goal I remembered from five decades ago.

Now, continuing my climb up the side of the tower to communication proficiency, my naïve view is transformed. Remembering Don Quixote's fight with

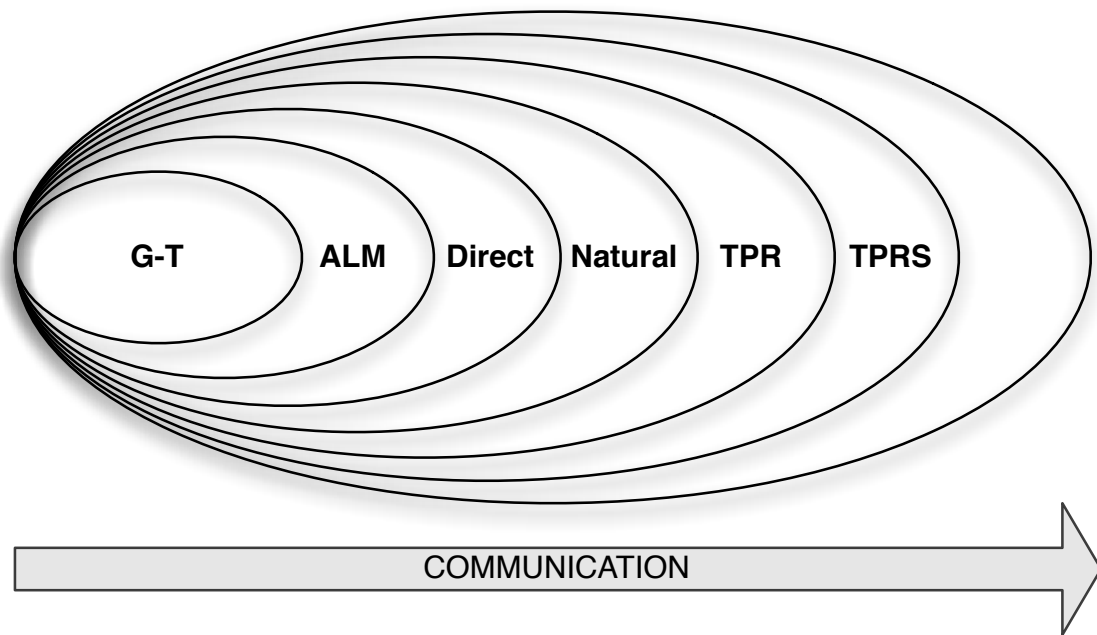
the windmill, which he imagined to be a monster he felt compelled to defeat, I think back as a new teacher, when the battle to reach the top seemed so clearly and deceptively defined. My view of the climb is now more realistic. Making meaning of my experiences on the way up has transformed me not only as a teacher, but also as a student returning to the university for a Master's and Ph.D. Writing this dissertation through autobiography allows me to relate my teaching journey to new teachers and experienced teachers who may be looking for a refreshing view from the tower as I make sense of my teaching career, as far as it goes. I borrow the notion of *currere* with a twist--instead of running a race; I equate my journey with climbing a tower to the optimum method for teaching foreign language oral communication.

In order to acquaint me more closely with autobiography, my advisor handed me a well worn copy of a teacher's story, *The Water Is Wide*, by Pat Conroy. This autobiography inspired me because my first year teaching experience related so closely to the experiences of the author. Perhaps his story, so eloquently and personally told, means other teachers could learn something from my, more humble, story. Conroy (1972), on the page before chapter 1, quotes the lyrics, "The river is deep and the river is wide, Milk and honey on the other side" from Michael Roll Your Boat Ashore. This popular and thought -provoking sixties song has special meaning for me as I interpret the difficulty of learning to teach effectively and the reward on the other side when students start speaking a second language and the "light bulb" turns on. Conroy's tale of teaching black students, isolated on an

impoverished island of the North Carolina coast, reminded me of my first year of teaching. I started teaching when the schools in my large district first racially integrated. His teaching improvisations reminded me of mine teaching to diverse group of students. His frustrations echoed mine when administrators failed to anticipate innovative teaching strategies for effectively teaching racially and ethnically integrated classes. As beginning teachers we naively, but optimistically, faced many social, racial, economic and global changes in our perceptions of the world. I came to realize how teachers must adapt to instruct effectively.

Mark Twain's quote struck me as the focus of my climb: For fifty years I have attempted to learn and teach effective oral communication in Spanish. Rickover (1959) promoted the approach, ALM, I studied for oral communication in the sixties and taught it in the seventies. When I returned to teaching in the nineties, educators were still trying to promote oral communication with new and improved methods. The ACTFL Guidelines standardized the criteria for levels of foreign language proficiency, ranging from novice-low to distinguished. I try to implement TPRS and other methods for oral communication as I continue to teach in the teens. I think Mark Twain explains my exploration of methods and the circling of change with a twist. I envision my journey as a line of growth which still includes the best of the earlier methods, but then takes off in a new direction, circling but exploring on an ever expanding trajectory – changing but rhyming – not the same but similar and newer. As methods are taught, explored, personalized, learned, discarded, experienced and passed on to future teachers, the method changes and adapts. The

figure below demonstrates how I conceive the process toward increased communicative ability in students.



This diagram elucidates an ever increasing understanding and encompassing of all the methods I have taught and experienced. As I search for the optimal method for teaching increasing communication, I include the benefits of G-T, ALM, the Direct and Natural Methods, and TPR as a emphasize TPRS. I realize no single method is optimal, but a combination of methods, along with an empty arc for a future method, continue to lead toward communication competency.

True communicative teaching involves more than methods and techniques, it involves forming a relationship with the student. It is my intention that this reflection of memory pictures, communicate and resonate with other and future

foreign language educators. I realize now I can't see the top of the tower; I only know I'm getting closer as I continue to circle my way upwards toward the optimal method for oral communication. Join me on my climb to the top. The view is great and the climb invigorating. Ven Conmigo!

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## APPENDIX

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## *General Preface* to the **ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012**

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines are descriptions of what individuals can do with language in terms of speaking, writing, listening, and reading in real-world situations in a spontaneous and non-rehearsed context. For each skill, these guidelines identify five major levels of proficiency: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are subdivided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels. The levels of the ACTFL Guidelines describe the continuum of proficiency from that of the highly articulate, well-educated language user to a level of little or no functional ability.

These Guidelines present the levels of proficiency as ranges, and describe what an individual can and cannot do with language at each level, regardless of where, when, or how the language was acquired. Together these levels form a hierarchy in which each level subsumes all lower levels. The Guidelines are not based on any particular theory, pedagogical method, or educational curriculum. They neither describe how an individual learns a language nor prescribe how an individual should learn a language, and they should not be used for such purposes. They are an instrument for the evaluation of functional language ability.

The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines were first published in 1986 as an adaptation for the academic community of the U.S. Government's Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Skill Level Descriptions. This third edition of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines includes the first revisions of Listening and Reading since their original publication in 1986, and a second revision of the ACTFL Speaking and Writing Guidelines, which were revised to reflect real-world assessment needs in 1999 and 2001 respectively. New for the 2012 edition are the addition of the major level of Distinguished to the Speaking and Writing Guidelines, the division of the Advanced level into the three sublevels of High, Mid, and Low for the Listening and Reading Guidelines, and the addition of a general level description at the Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice levels for all skills.

Another new feature of the 2012 Guidelines is their publication online, supported with glossed terminology and annotated, multimedia samples of performance at each level for Speaking and Writing, and examples of oral and written texts and tasks associated with each level for Reading and Listening.

The direct application of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines is for the evaluation of functional language ability. The Guidelines are intended to be used for global assessment in academic and workplace settings. However, the Guidelines do have instructional implications. The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines underlie the development of the ACTFL Performance Guidelines for K-12 Learners (1998) and are used in conjunction with the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1996, 1998, 2006) to describe how well students meet content standards. For the past 25 years, the ACTFL Guidelines have had an increasingly profound impact on language teaching and learning in the United States.

ACTFL  
PROFICIENCY  
GUIDELINES  
2012  
— SPEAKING

*Preface*

**The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 – Speaking** describe five major levels of proficiency: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The description of each major level is representative of a specific range of abilities. Together these levels form a hierarchy in which each level subsumes all lower levels. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are divided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels.

The Guidelines describe the tasks that speakers can handle at each level, as well as the content, context, accuracy, and discourse types associated with tasks at each level. They also present the limits that

speakers encounter when attempting to function at the next higher major level.

These Guidelines can be used to evaluate speech that is either Interpersonal (interactive, two-way communication) or Presentational (one-way, non-interactive).

The written descriptions of speaking proficiency are accompanied online by speech samples illustrating the features of each major level.

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**DISTINGUISHED**

Speakers at the Distinguished level are able to use language skillfully, and with accuracy, efficiency, and effectiveness. They are educated and articulate users of the language. They can reflect on a wide range of global issues and highly abstract concepts in a culturally appropriate manner. Distinguished-level speakers can use persuasive and hypothetical discourse for representational purposes, allowing them to advocate a point of view that is not necessarily their own. They can tailor language to a variety of audiences by adapting their speech and register in ways that are culturally authentic.

Speakers at the Distinguished level produce highly sophisticated and tightly organized extended discourse. At the same time, they can speak succinctly, often using cultural and historical references to allow them to say less and mean more. At this level, oral discourse typically resembles written discourse.

A non-native accent, a lack of a native-like economy of expression, a limited control of deeply embedded cultural references, and/or an occasional isolated language error may still be present at this level.



### SUPERIOR

Speakers at the Superior level are able to communicate with accuracy and fluency in order to participate fully and effectively in conversations on a variety of topics in formal and informal settings from both concrete and abstract perspectives. They discuss their interests and special fields of competence, explain complex matters in detail, and provide lengthy and coherent narrations, all with ease, fluency, and accuracy. They present their opinions on a number of issues of interest to them, such as social and political issues, and provide structured arguments to support these opinions. They are able to construct and develop hypotheses to explore alternative possibilities.

When appropriate, these speakers use extended discourse without unnaturally lengthy hesitation to make their point, even when engaged in abstract elaborations. Such discourse, while coherent, may still be influenced by language patterns other than those of the target language. Superior-level speakers employ a variety of interactive and discourse strategies, such as turn-taking and separating main ideas from supporting information through the use of syntactic, lexical, and phonetic devices.

Speakers at the Superior level demonstrate no pattern of error in the use of basic structures, although they may make sporadic errors, particularly in low-frequency structures and in complex high-frequency structures. Such errors, if they do occur, do not distract the native interlocutor or interfere with communication.

### ADVANCED

Speakers at the Advanced level engage in conversation in a clearly participatory manner in order to communicate information on autobiographical topics, as well as topics of community, national, or international interest. The topics are handled concretely by means of narration and description in the major time frames of past, present, and future. These speakers can also deal with a social situation with an unexpected complication. The language of Advanced-level speakers is abundant, the oral paragraph being the measure of Advanced-level length and discourse. Advanced-level speakers have sufficient control of basic structures and generic vocabulary to be understood by native speakers of the language, including those unaccustomed to non-native speech.

#### Advanced High

Speakers at the Advanced High sublevel perform all Advanced-level tasks with linguistic ease, confidence, and competence. They are consistently able to explain in detail and narrate fully and accurately in all time frames. In addition, Advanced High speakers handle the tasks pertaining to the Superior level but cannot sustain performance at that level across a variety of topics. They may provide a structured argument to support their opinions, and they may construct hypotheses, but patterns of error appear. They can discuss some topics abstractly, especially those relating to their particular interests and special fields of expertise, but in general, they are more comfortable discussing a variety of topics concretely.

Advanced High speakers may demonstrate a well-developed ability to compensate for an imperfect grasp of some forms or for limitations in vocabulary by the confident use of communicative strategies, such as paraphrasing, circumlocution, and illustration. They use precise vocabulary and intonation to express meaning and often show great fluency and ease of speech. However, when called on to perform the complex tasks associated with the Superior level over a variety of topics, their language will at times break down or prove inadequate, or they may avoid the task altogether, for example, by resorting to simplification through the use of description or narration in place of argument or hypothesis.

### **Advanced Mid**

Speakers at the Advanced Mid sublevel are able to handle with ease and confidence a large number of communicative tasks. They participate actively in most informal and some formal exchanges on a variety of concrete topics relating to work, school, home, and leisure activities, as well as topics relating to events of current, public, and personal interest or individual relevance.

Advanced Mid speakers demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in the major time frames of past, present, and future by providing a full account, with good control of aspect. Narration and description tend to be combined and interwoven to relate relevant and supporting facts in connected, paragraph-length discourse.

Advanced Mid speakers can handle successfully and with relative ease the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar. Communicative strategies such as circumlocution or rephrasing are often employed for this purpose. The speech of Advanced Mid speakers performing Advanced-level tasks is marked by substantial flow. Their vocabulary is fairly extensive although primarily generic in nature, except in the case of a particular area of specialization or interest. Their discourse may still reflect the oral paragraph structure of their own language rather than that of the target language.

Advanced Mid speakers contribute to conversations on a variety of familiar topics, dealt with concretely, with much accuracy, clarity and precision, and they convey their intended message without misrepresentation or confusion. They are readily understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives. When called on to perform functions or handle topics associated with the Superior level, the quality and/or quantity of their speech will generally decline.

### **Advanced Low**

Speakers at the Advanced Low sublevel are able to handle a variety of communicative tasks. They are able to participate in most informal and some formal conversations on topics related to school, home, and leisure activities. They can also speak about some topics related to employment, current events, and matters of public and community interest.

Advanced Low speakers demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in the major time frames of past, present, and future in paragraph-length discourse with some control of aspect. In these narrations and descriptions, Advanced Low speakers combine and link sentences into connected discourse of paragraph length, although these narrations and descriptions tend to be handled separately rather than interwoven. They can handle appropriately the essential linguistic challenges presented by a complication or an unexpected turn of events.

Responses produced by Advanced Low speakers are typically not longer than a single paragraph. The speaker's dominant language may be evident in the use of false cognates, literal translations, or the oral paragraph structure of that language. At times their discourse may be minimal for the level, marked by an irregular flow, and containing noticeable self-correction. More generally, the performance of Advanced Low speakers tends to be uneven.

Advanced Low speech is typically marked by a certain grammatical roughness (e.g., inconsistent control of verb endings), but the overall performance of the Advanced-level tasks is sustained, albeit minimally. The vocabulary of Advanced Low speakers often lacks specificity. Nevertheless, Advanced Low speakers are able to use communicative strategies such as rephrasing and circumlocution.

Advanced Low speakers contribute to the conversation with sufficient accuracy, clarity, and precision to convey their intended message without misrepresentation or confusion. Their speech can be understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, even though this may require some repetition or restatement. When attempting to perform functions or handle topics associated with the Superior level, the linguistic quality and quantity of their speech will deteriorate significantly.

## **INTERMEDIATE**

Speakers at the Intermediate level are distinguished primarily by their ability to create with the language when talking about familiar topics related to their daily life. They are able to recombine learned material in order to express personal meaning. Intermediate-level speakers can ask simple questions and can handle a straightforward survival situation. They produce sentence-level language, ranging from discrete sentences to strings of sentences, typically in present time. Intermediate-level speakers are understood by interlocutors who are accustomed to dealing with non-native learners of the language.

### **Intermediate High**

Intermediate High speakers are able to converse with ease and confidence when dealing with the routine tasks and social situations of the Intermediate level. They are able to handle successfully uncomplicated tasks and social situations requiring an exchange of basic information related to their work, school, recreation, particular interests, and areas of competence.

Intermediate High speakers can handle a substantial number of tasks associated with the Advanced level, but they are unable to sustain performance of all of these tasks all of the time. Intermediate High speakers can narrate and describe in all major time frames using connected discourse of paragraph length, but not all the time. Typically, when Intermediate High speakers attempt to perform Advanced-level tasks, their speech exhibits one or more features of breakdown, such as the failure to carry out fully the narration or description in the appropriate major time frame, an inability to maintain paragraph-length discourse, or a reduction in breadth and appropriateness of vocabulary.

Intermediate High speakers can generally be understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, although interference from another language may be evident (e.g., use of code-switching, false cognates, literal translations), and a pattern of gaps in communication may occur.

### **Intermediate Mid**

Speakers at the Intermediate Mid sublevel are able to handle successfully a variety of uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward social situations. Conversation is generally limited to those predictable and concrete exchanges necessary for survival in the target culture. These include personal information related to self, family, home, daily activities, interests and personal preferences, as well as physical and social needs, such as food, shopping, travel, and lodging.

Intermediate Mid speakers tend to function reactively, for example, by responding to direct questions or requests for information. However, they are capable of asking a variety of questions when necessary to obtain simple information to satisfy basic needs, such as directions, prices, and services. When called on to perform functions or handle topics at the Advanced level, they provide some information but have difficulty linking ideas, manipulating time and aspect, and using communicative strategies, such as circumlocution.

Intermediate Mid speakers are able to express personal meaning by creating with the language, in part by combining and recombining known elements and conversational input to produce responses typically consisting of sentences and strings of sentences. Their speech may contain pauses, reformulations, and self-corrections as they search for adequate vocabulary and appropriate language forms to express themselves. In spite of the limitations in their vocabulary and/or pronunciation and/or grammar and/or syntax, Intermediate Mid speakers are generally understood by sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to dealing with non-natives.

Overall, Intermediate Mid speakers are at ease when performing Intermediate-level tasks and do so with significant quantity and quality of Intermediate-level language.

**Intermediate Low**

Speakers at the Intermediate Low sublevel are able to handle successfully a limited number of uncomplicated communicative tasks by creating with the language in straightforward social situations. Conversation is restricted to some of the concrete exchanges and predictable topics necessary for survival in the target-language culture. These topics relate to basic personal information; for example, self and family, some daily activities and personal preferences, and some immediate needs, such as ordering food and making simple purchases. At the Intermediate Low sublevel, speakers are primarily reactive and struggle to answer direct questions or requests for information. They are also able to ask a few appropriate questions. Intermediate Low speakers manage to sustain the functions of the Intermediate level, although just barely.

Intermediate Low speakers express personal meaning by combining and recombining what they know and what they hear from their interlocutors into short statements and discrete sentences. Their responses are often filled with hesitancy and inaccuracies as they search for appropriate linguistic forms and vocabulary while attempting to give form to the message. Their speech is characterized by frequent pauses, ineffective reformulations and self-corrections. Their pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax are strongly influenced by their first language. In spite of frequent misunderstandings that may require repetition or rephrasing, Intermediate Low speakers can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors, particularly by those accustomed to dealing with non-natives.

## **NOVICE**

Novice-level speakers can communicate short messages on highly predictable, everyday topics that affect them directly. They do so primarily through the use of isolated words and phrases that have been encountered, memorized, and recalled. Novice-level speakers may be difficult to understand even by the most sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to non-native speech.

### **Novice High**

Speakers at the Novice High sublevel are able to handle a variety of tasks pertaining to the Intermediate level, but are unable to sustain performance at that level. They are able to manage successfully a number of uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward social situations. Conversation is restricted to a few of the predictable topics necessary for survival in the target language culture, such as basic personal information, basic objects, and a limited number of activities, preferences, and immediate needs. Novice High speakers respond to simple, direct questions or requests for information. They are also able to ask a few formulaic questions.

Novice High speakers are able to express personal meaning by relying heavily on learned phrases or recombinations of these and what they hear from their interlocutor. Their language consists primarily of short and sometimes incomplete sentences in the present, and may be hesitant or inaccurate. On the other hand, since their language often consists of expansions of learned material and stock phrases, they may sometimes sound surprisingly fluent and accurate. Pronunciation, vocabulary, and syntax may be strongly influenced by the first language. Frequent misunderstandings may arise but, with repetition or rephrasing, Novice High speakers can generally be understood by sympathetic interlocutors used to non-natives. When called on to handle a variety of topics and perform functions pertaining to the Intermediate level, a Novice High speaker can sometimes respond in intelligible sentences, but will not be able to sustain sentence-level discourse.

### **Novice Mid**

Speakers at the Novice Mid sublevel communicate minimally by using a number of isolated words and memorized phrases limited by the particular context in which the language has been learned. When responding to direct questions, they may say only two or three words at a time or give an occasional stock answer. They pause frequently as they search for simple vocabulary or attempt to recycle their own and their interlocutor's words. Novice Mid speakers may be understood with difficulty even by sympathetic interlocutors accustomed to dealing with non-natives. When called on to handle topics and perform functions associated with the Intermediate level, they frequently resort to repetition, words from their native language, or silence.

### **Novice Low**

Speakers at the Novice Low sublevel have no real functional ability and, because of their pronunciation, may be unintelligible. Given adequate time and familiar cues, they may be able to exchange greetings, give their identity, and name a number of familiar objects from their immediate environment. They are unable to perform functions or handle topics pertaining to the Intermediate level, and cannot therefore participate in a true conversational exchange.

ACTFL  
**PROFICIENCY  
GUIDELINES**  
2012  
— **WRITING**

*Preface*

**The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 – Writing** describe five major levels of proficiency: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The description of each major level is representative of a specific range of abilities. Together these levels form a hierarchy in which each level subsumes all lower levels. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are divided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels.

The Guidelines describe the tasks that writers can handle at each level as well as the content, context, accuracy, and discourse types associated with the writing tasks at each level. They also present the limits that writers encounter when attempting to function at the next higher major level.

These Guidelines can be used to describe written text that is either Presentational (essays, reports, letters) or Interpersonal (instant messaging, e-mail communication, texting). Moreover, they apply to writing that is spontaneous (immediate, unedited) or reflective (revised, edited). This is possible because the Guidelines describe the product rather than the process or purpose of the writing.

The written descriptions of writing proficiency are accompanied online by writing samples illustrating the features of each major level.

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## **DISTINGUISHED**

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Writers at the Distinguished level can carry out formal writing tasks such as official correspondence, position papers, and journal articles. They can write analytically on professional, academic and societal issues. In addition, Distinguished-level writers are able to address world issues in a highly conceptualized fashion.

These writers can use persuasive and hypothetical discourse as representational techniques, allowing them to advocate a position that is not necessarily their own. They are also able to communicate subtlety and nuance. Distinguished-level writing is sophisticated and is directed to sophisticated readers. Writers at this level write to their audience; they tailor their language to their readers.

Distinguished-level writing is dense and complex; yet, it is characterized by an economy of expression. The writing is skillfully crafted and is organized in a way that reflects target-culture thought patterns. At the Distinguished level, length is not a determining factor. Distinguished-level texts can be as short as a poem or as long as a treatise.

Writers at the Distinguished level demonstrate control of complex lexical, grammatical, syntactic, and stylistic features of the language. Discourse structure and punctuation are used strategically, not only to organize meaning but also to enhance it. Conventions are generally appropriate to the text modality and the target culture.

## **SUPERIOR**

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Writers at the Superior level are able to produce most kinds of formal and informal correspondence, in-depth summaries, reports, and research papers on a variety of social, academic, and professional topics. Their treatment of these issues moves beyond the concrete to the abstract.

Writers at the Superior level demonstrate the ability to explain complex matters, and to present and support opinions by developing cogent arguments and hypotheses. Their treatment of the topic is enhanced by the effective use of structure, lexicon, and writing protocols. They organize and prioritize ideas to convey to the reader what is significant. The relationship among ideas is consistently clear, due to organizational and developmental principles (e.g., cause and effect, comparison, chronology). These writers are capable of extended treatment of a topic which typically requires at least a series of paragraphs, but can extend to a number of pages.

Writers at the Superior level demonstrate a high degree of control of grammar and syntax, of both general and specialized/professional vocabulary, of spelling or symbol production, of cohesive devices, and of punctuation. Their vocabulary is precise and varied. Writers at this level direct their writing to their audiences; their writing fluency eases the reader's task.

Writers at the Superior level do not typically control target-language cultural, organizational, or stylistic patterns. At the Superior level, writers demonstrate no pattern of error; however, occasional errors may occur, particularly in low-frequency structures. When present, these errors do not interfere with comprehension, and they rarely distract the native reader.

### ADVANCED

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Writers at the Advanced level are characterized by the ability to write routine informal and some formal correspondence, as well as narratives, descriptions, and summaries of a factual nature. They can narrate and describe in the major time frames of past, present, and future, using paraphrasing and elaboration to provide clarity. Advanced-level writers produce connected discourse of paragraph length and structure. At this level, writers show good control of the most frequently used structures and generic vocabulary, allowing them to be understood by those unaccustomed to the writing of non-natives.

#### Advanced High

Writers at the Advanced High sublevel are able to write about a variety of topics with significant precision and detail. They can handle informal and formal correspondence according to appropriate conventions. They can write summaries and reports of a factual nature. They can also write extensively about topics relating to particular interests and special areas of competence, although their writing tends to emphasize the concrete aspects of such topics. Advanced High writers can narrate and describe in the major time frames, with solid control of aspect. In addition, they are able to demonstrate the ability to handle writing tasks associated with the Superior level, such as developing arguments and constructing hypotheses, but are not able to do this all of the time; they cannot produce Superior-level writing consistently across a variety of topics treated abstractly or generally. They have good control of a range of grammatical structures and a fairly wide general vocabulary. When writing at the Advanced level, they often show remarkable ease of expression, but under the demands of Superior-level writing tasks, patterns of error appear. The linguistic limitations of Advanced High writing may occasionally distract the native reader from the message.

#### Advanced Mid

Writers at the Advanced Mid sublevel are able to meet a range of work and/or academic writing needs. They demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe with detail in all major time frames with good control of aspect. They are able to write straightforward summaries on topics of general interest. Their writing exhibits a variety of cohesive devices in texts up to several paragraphs in length. There is good control of the most frequently used target-language syntactic structures and a range of general vocabulary. Most often, thoughts are expressed clearly and supported by some elaboration. This writing incorporates organizational features both of the target language and the writer's first language and may at times resemble oral discourse. Writing at the Advanced Mid sublevel is understood readily by natives not used to the writing of non-natives. When called on to perform functions or to treat issues at the Superior level, Advanced Mid writers will manifest a decline in the quality and/or quantity of their writing.

#### Advanced Low

Writers at the Advanced Low sublevel are able to meet basic work and/or academic writing needs. They demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in major time frames with some control of aspect. They are able to compose simple summaries on familiar topics. Advanced Low writers are able to combine and link sentences into texts of paragraph length and structure. Their writing, while adequate to satisfy the criteria of the Advanced level, may not be substantive. Writers at the Advanced Low sublevel demonstrate the ability to incorporate a limited number of cohesive devices, and may resort to some redundancy and awkward repetition. They rely on patterns of oral discourse and the writing style of their first language. These writers demonstrate minimal control of common structures and vocabulary associated with the Advanced level. Their writing is understood by natives not accustomed to the writing of non-natives, although some additional effort may be required in the reading of the text. When attempting to perform functions at the Superior level, their writing will deteriorate significantly.



## **INTERMEDIATE**

Writers at the Intermediate level are characterized by the ability to meet practical writing needs, such as simple messages and letters, requests for information, and notes. In addition, they can ask and respond to simple questions in writing. These writers can create with the language and communicate simple facts and ideas in a series of loosely connected sentences on topics of personal interest and social needs. They write primarily in present time. At this level, writers use basic vocabulary and structures to express meaning that is comprehensible to those accustomed to the writing of non-natives.

### **Intermediate High**

Writers at the Intermediate High sublevel are able to meet all practical writing needs of the Intermediate level. Additionally, they can write compositions and simple summaries related to work and/or school experiences. They can narrate and describe in different time frames when writing about everyday events and situations. These narrations and descriptions are often but not always of paragraph length, and they typically contain some evidence of breakdown in one or more features of the Advanced level. For example, these writers may be inconsistent in the use of appropriate major time markers, resulting in a loss of clarity. The vocabulary, grammar, and style of Intermediate High writers essentially correspond to those of the spoken language. Intermediate High writing, even with numerous and perhaps significant errors, is generally comprehensible to natives not used to the writing of non-natives, but there are likely to be gaps in comprehension.

### **Intermediate Mid**

Writers at the Intermediate Mid sublevel are able to meet a number of practical writing needs. They can write short, simple communications, compositions, and requests for information in loosely connected texts about personal preferences, daily routines, common events, and other personal topics. Their writing is framed in present time but may contain references to other time frames. The writing style closely resembles oral discourse. Writers at the Intermediate Mid sublevel show evidence of control of basic sentence structure and verb forms. This writing is best defined as a collection of discrete sentences and/or questions loosely strung together. There is little evidence of deliberate organization. Intermediate Mid writers can be understood readily by natives used to the writing of non-natives. When Intermediate Mid writers attempt Advanced-level writing tasks, the quality and/or quantity of their writing declines and the message may be unclear.

### **Intermediate Low**

Writers at the Intermediate Low sublevel are able to meet some limited practical writing needs. They can create statements and formulate questions based on familiar material. Most sentences are recombinations of learned vocabulary and structures. These are short and simple conversational-style sentences with basic word order. They are written almost exclusively in present time. Writing tends to consist of a few simple sentences, often with repetitive structure. Topics are tied to highly predictable content areas and personal information. Vocabulary is adequate to express elementary needs. There may be basic errors in grammar, word choice, punctuation, spelling, and in the formation and use of non-alphabetic symbols. Their writing is understood by natives used to the writing of non-natives, although additional effort may be required. When Intermediate Low writers attempt to perform writing tasks at the Advanced level, their writing will deteriorate significantly and their message may be left incomplete.

### NOVICE

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Writers at the Novice level are characterized by the ability to produce lists and notes, primarily by writing words and phrases. They can provide limited formulaic information on simple forms and documents. These writers can reproduce practiced material to convey the most simple messages. In addition, they can transcribe familiar words or phrases, copy letters of the alphabet or syllables of a syllabary, or reproduce basic characters with some accuracy.

#### Novice High

Writers at the Novice High sublevel are able to meet limited basic practical writing needs using lists, short messages, postcards, and simple notes. They are able to express themselves within the context in which the language was learned, relying mainly on practiced material. Their writing is focused on common elements of daily life. Novice High writers are able to recombine learned vocabulary and structures to create simple sentences on very familiar topics, but are not able to sustain sentence-level writing all the time. Due to inadequate vocabulary and/or grammar, writing at this level may only partially communicate the intentions of the writer. Novice High writing is often comprehensible to natives used to the writing of non-natives, but gaps in comprehension may occur.

#### Novice Mid

Writers at the Novice Mid sublevel can reproduce from memory a modest number of words and phrases in context. They can supply limited information on simple forms and documents, and other basic biographical information, such as names, numbers, and nationality. Novice Mid writers exhibit a high degree of accuracy when writing on well-practiced, familiar topics using limited formulaic language. With less familiar topics, there is a marked decrease in accuracy. Errors in spelling or in the representation of symbols may be frequent. There is little evidence of functional writing skills. At this level, the writing may be difficult to understand even by those accustomed to non-native writers.

#### Novice Low

Writers at the Novice Low sublevel are able to copy or transcribe familiar words or phrases, form letters in an alphabetic system, and copy and produce isolated, basic strokes in languages that use syllabaries or characters. Given adequate time and familiar cues, they can reproduce from memory a very limited number of isolated words or familiar phrases, but errors are to be expected.

ACTFL  
**PROFICIENCY  
GUIDELINES**  
2012  
— **LISTENING**

*Preface*

**The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 – Listening**

describe five major levels of proficiency: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The description of each major level is representative of a specific range of abilities. Together these levels form a hierarchy in which each level subsumes all lower levels. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are divided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels. The subdivision of the Advanced Level into High, Mid, and Low is new. This makes the Listening descriptions parallel to the other skill-level descriptions.

Listening is an interpretive skill. Listening comprehension is based largely on the amount of information listeners can retrieve from what they hear and the inferences and connections that they can make. By describing the tasks that listeners can perform with different types of oral texts and under different types of circumstances, the Listening Proficiency Guidelines describe how listeners understand oral discourse. The Guidelines do not describe how listening skills develop, how one learns to listen, nor the actual cognitive processes involved in the activity. Rather, they are intended to describe what listeners understand from what they hear.

These Guidelines apply to listening that is either Interpretive (non-participative, overheard) or Interpersonal (participative).

The written descriptions of listening proficiency are accompanied online by authentic speech samples and the functional listening tasks associated with each major level.

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## ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 – LISTENING

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### DISTINGUISHED

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At the Distinguished level, listeners can understand a wide variety of forms, styles, and registers of speech on highly specialized topics in language that is tailored to different audiences. Listeners at the Distinguished level can understand language such as that found in classical theater, art films, professional symposia, academic debates, public policy statements, literary readings, and most jokes and puns. They are able to comprehend implicit and inferred information, tone, and point of view, and can follow highly persuasive arguments. They are able to understand unpredictable turns of thought related to sophisticated topics. In addition, their listening ability is enhanced by a broad and deep understanding of cultural references and allusions. Listeners at the Distinguished level are able to appreciate the richness of the spoken language.

Distinguished-level listeners understand speech that can be highly abstract, highly technical, or both, as well as speech that contains very precise, often low-frequency vocabulary and complex rhetorical structures. At this level, listeners comprehend oral discourse that is lengthy and dense, structurally complex, rich in cultural reference, idiomatic and colloquial. In addition, listeners at this level can understand information that is subtle or highly specialized, as well as the full cultural significance of very short texts with little or no linguistic redundancy.

Distinguished-level listeners comprehend language from within the cultural framework and are able to understand a speaker's use of nuance and subtlety. However, they may still have difficulty fully understanding certain dialects and nonstandard varieties of the language.

### SUPERIOR

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At the Superior level, listeners are able to understand speech in a standard dialect on a wide range of familiar and less familiar topics. They can follow linguistically complex extended discourse such as that found in academic and professional settings, lectures, speeches and reports. Comprehension is no longer limited to the listener's familiarity with subject matter, but also comes from a command of the language that is supported by a broad vocabulary, an understanding of more complex structures and linguistic experience within the target culture. Superior listeners can understand not only what is said, but sometimes what is left unsaid; that is, they can make inferences.

Superior-level listeners understand speech that typically uses precise, specialized vocabulary and complex grammatical structures. This speech often deals abstractly with topics in a way that is appropriate for academic and professional audiences. It can be reasoned and can contain cultural references.

## ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 – LISTENING

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### ADVANCED

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At the Advanced level, listeners can understand the main ideas and most supporting details in connected discourse on a variety of general interest topics, such as news stories, explanations, instructions, anecdotes, or travelogue descriptions. Listeners are able to compensate for limitations in their lexical and structural control of the language by using real-world knowledge and contextual clues. Listeners may also derive some meaning from oral texts at higher levels if they possess significant familiarity with the topic or context.

Advanced-level listeners understand speech that is authentic and connected. This speech is lexically and structurally uncomplicated. The discourse is straightforward and is generally organized in a clear and predictable way.

Advanced-level listeners demonstrate the ability to comprehend language on a range of topics of general interest. They have sufficient knowledge of language structure to understand basic time-frame references. Nevertheless, their understanding is most often limited to concrete, conventional discourse.

#### Advanced High

At the Advanced High sublevel, listeners are able to understand, with ease and confidence, conventional narrative and descriptive texts of any length as well as complex factual material such as summaries or reports. They are typically able to follow some of the essential points of more complex or argumentative speech in areas of special interest or knowledge. In addition, they are able to derive some meaning from oral texts that deal with unfamiliar topics or situations. At the Advanced High sublevel, listeners are able to comprehend the facts presented in oral discourse and are often able to recognize speaker-intended inferences. Nevertheless, there are likely to be gaps in comprehension of complex texts dealing with issues treated abstractly that are typically understood by Superior-level listeners.

#### Advanced Mid

At the Advanced Mid sublevel, listeners are able to understand conventional narrative and descriptive texts, such as expanded descriptions of persons, places, and things, and narrations about past, present, and future events. The speech is predominantly in familiar target-language patterns. Listeners understand the main facts and many supporting details. Comprehension derives not only from situational and subject-matter knowledge, but also from an increasing overall facility with the language itself.

#### Advanced Low

At the Advanced Low sublevel, listeners are able to understand short conventional narrative and descriptive texts with a clear underlying structure though their comprehension may be uneven. The listener understands the main facts and some supporting details. Comprehension may often derive primarily from situational and subject-matter knowledge.

## INTERMEDIATE

At the Intermediate level, listeners can understand information conveyed in simple, sentence-length speech on familiar or everyday topics. They are generally able to comprehend one utterance at a time while engaged in face-to-face conversations or in routine listening tasks such as understanding highly contextualized messages, straightforward announcements, or simple instructions and directions. Listeners rely heavily on redundancy, restatement, paraphrasing, and contextual clues.

Intermediate-level listeners understand speech that conveys basic information. This speech is simple, minimally connected, and contains high-frequency vocabulary.

Intermediate-level listeners are most accurate in their comprehension when getting meaning from simple, straightforward speech. They are able to comprehend messages found in highly familiar everyday contexts. Intermediate listeners require a controlled listening environment where they hear what they may expect to hear.

### Intermediate High

At the Intermediate High sublevel, listeners are able to understand, with ease and confidence, simple sentence-length speech in basic personal and social contexts. They can derive substantial meaning from some connected texts typically understood by Advanced-level listeners although there often will be gaps in understanding due to a limited knowledge of the vocabulary and structures of the spoken language.

### Intermediate Mid

At the Intermediate Mid sublevel, listeners are able to understand simple, sentence-length speech, one utterance at a time, in a variety of basic personal and social contexts. Comprehension is most often accurate with highly familiar and predictable topics although a few misunderstandings may occur. Intermediate Mid listeners may get some meaning from oral texts typically understood by Advanced-level listeners.

### Intermediate Low

At the Intermediate Low sublevel, listeners are able to understand some information from sentence-length speech, one utterance at a time, in basic personal and social contexts, though comprehension is often uneven. At the Intermediate Low sublevel, listeners show little or no comprehension of oral texts typically understood by Advanced-level listeners.

## ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 – LISTENING

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### NOVICE

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At the Novice level, listeners can understand key words, true aural cognates, and formulaic expressions that are highly contextualized and highly predictable, such as those found in introductions and basic courtesies.

Novice-level listeners understand words and phrases from simple questions, statements, and high-frequency commands. They typically require repetition, rephrasing, and/or a slowed rate of speech for comprehension. They rely heavily on extralinguistic support to derive meaning.

Novice-level listeners are most accurate when they are able to recognize speech that they can anticipate. In this way, these listeners tend to recognize rather than truly comprehend. Their listening is largely dependent on factors other than the message itself.

#### Novice High

At the Novice High sublevel, listeners are often but not always able to understand information from sentence-length speech, one utterance at a time, in basic personal and social contexts where there is contextual or extralinguistic support, though comprehension may often be very uneven. They are able to understand speech dealing with areas of practical need such as highly standardized messages, phrases, or instructions, if the vocabulary has been learned.

#### Novice Mid

At the Novice Mid sublevel, listeners can recognize and begin to understand a number of high-frequency, highly contextualized words and phrases including aural cognates and borrowed words. Typically, they understand little more than one phrase at a time, and repetition may be required.

#### Novice Low

At the Novice Low sublevel, listeners are able occasionally to recognize isolated words or very high-frequency phrases when those are strongly supported by context. These listeners show virtually no comprehension of any kind of spoken message, not even within the most basic personal and social contexts.

ACTFL  
PROFICIENCY  
GUIDELINES  
2012  
— READING

*Preface*

**The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 – Reading**

describe five major levels of proficiency: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice. The description of each major level is representative of a specific range of abilities. Together these levels form a hierarchy in which each level subsumes all lower levels. The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are divided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels. The subdivision of the Advanced level is new. This makes the Reading descriptions parallel to the other skill level descriptions.

Reading is an interpretive skill. Reading comprehension is based largely on the amount of information readers can retrieve from a text, and the inferences and connections that they can make within and across texts. By describing the tasks that readers can perform with different types of texts and under different types of circumstances, the Reading Proficiency Guidelines describe how readers understand written texts. These Guidelines do not describe how reading skills develop, how one learns to read, nor the actual cognitive processes involved in the activity of reading. Rather, they are intended to describe what readers are able to understand from what they read.

These Guidelines apply to reading that is either Interpretive (books, essays, reports, etc.) or Interpersonal (instant messaging, texting, email communication, etc.).

The written descriptions of reading proficiency are accompanied online by authentic text samples and the functional reading tasks associated with each major level.

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## ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 – **READING**

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### **DISTINGUISHED**

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At the Distinguished level, readers can understand a wide variety of texts from many genres including professional, technical, academic, and literary. These texts are characterized by one or more of the following: a high level of abstraction, precision or uniqueness of vocabulary; density of information; cultural reference; or complexity of structure. Readers are able to comprehend implicit and inferred information, tone, and point of view and can follow highly persuasive arguments. They are able to understand unpredictable turns of thought related to sophisticated topics.

Readers at the Distinguished level are able to understand writing tailored to specific audiences as well as a number of historical, regional, and colloquial variations of the language. These readers are able to appreciate the richness of written language. Distinguished-level readers understand and appreciate texts that use highly precise, low-frequency vocabulary as well as complex rhetorical structures to convey subtle or highly specialized information. Such texts are typically essay length but may be excerpts from more lengthy texts.

Distinguished-level readers comprehend language from within the cultural framework and are able to understand a writer's use of nuance and subtlety. However, they may still have difficulty fully understanding certain nonstandard varieties of the written language.

### **SUPERIOR**

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At the Superior level, readers are able to understand texts from many genres dealing with a wide range of subjects, both familiar and unfamiliar. Comprehension is no longer limited to the reader's familiarity with subject matter, but also comes from a command of the language that is supported by a broad vocabulary, an understanding of complex structures and knowledge of the target culture. Readers at the Superior level can draw inferences from textual and extralinguistic clues.

Superior-level readers understand texts that use precise, often specialized vocabulary and complex grammatical structures. These texts feature argumentation, supported opinion, and hypothesis, and use abstract linguistic formulations as encountered in academic and professional reading. Such texts are typically reasoned and/or analytic and may frequently contain cultural references.

Superior-level readers are able to understand lengthy texts of a professional, academic, or literary nature. In addition, readers at the Superior level are generally aware of the aesthetic properties of language and of its literary styles, but may not fully understand texts in which cultural references and assumptions are deeply embedded.

## ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 – **READING**

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### **ADVANCED**

At the Advanced level, readers can understand the main idea and supporting details of authentic narrative and descriptive texts. Readers are able to compensate for limitations in their lexical and structural knowledge by using contextual clues. Comprehension is likewise supported by knowledge of the conventions of the language (e.g., noun/adjective agreement, verb placement, etc.). When familiar with the subject matter, Advanced-level readers are also able to derive some meaning from straightforward argumentative texts (e.g., recognizing the main argument).

Advanced-level readers are able to understand texts that have a clear and predictable structure. For the most part, the prose is uncomplicated and the subject matter pertains to real-world topics of general interest.

Advanced-level readers demonstrate an independence in their ability to read subject matter that is new to them. They have sufficient control of standard linguistic conventions to understand sequencing, time frames, and chronology. However, these readers are likely challenged by texts in which issues are treated abstractly.

#### **Advanced High**

At the Advanced High sublevel, readers are able to understand, fully and with ease, conventional narrative and descriptive texts of any length as well as more complex factual material. They are able to follow some of the essential points of argumentative texts in areas of special interest or knowledge. In addition, they are able to understand parts of texts that deal with unfamiliar topics or situations. These readers are able to go beyond comprehension of the facts in a text, and to begin to recognize author-intended inferences. An emerging awareness of the aesthetic properties of language and of its literary styles permits comprehension of a wide variety of texts. Misunderstandings may occur when reading texts that are structurally and/or conceptually more complex.

#### **Advanced Mid**

At the Advanced Mid sublevel, readers are able to understand conventional narrative and descriptive texts, such as expanded descriptions of persons, places, and things and narrations about past, present, and future events. These texts reflect the standard linguistic conventions of the written form of the language in such a way that readers can predict what they are going to read. Readers understand the main ideas, facts, and many supporting details. Comprehension derives not only from situational and subject-matter knowledge but also from knowledge of the language itself. Readers at this level may derive some meaning from texts that are structurally and/or conceptually more complex.

#### **Advanced Low**

At the Advanced Low sublevel, readers are able to understand conventional narrative and descriptive texts with a clear underlying structure though their comprehension may be uneven. These texts predominantly contain high-frequency vocabulary and structures. Readers understand the main ideas and some supporting details. Comprehension may often derive primarily from situational and subject-matter knowledge. Readers at this level will be challenged to comprehend more complex texts.

### **INTERMEDIATE**

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At the Intermediate level, readers can understand information conveyed in simple, predictable, loosely connected texts. Readers rely heavily on contextual clues. They can most easily understand information if the format of the text is familiar, such as in a weather report or a social announcement.

Intermediate-level readers are able to understand texts that convey basic information such as that found in announcements, notices, and online bulletin boards and forums. These texts are not complex and have a predictable pattern of presentation. The discourse is minimally connected and primarily organized in individual sentences and strings of sentences containing predominantly high-frequency vocabulary.

Intermediate-level readers are most accurate when getting meaning from simple, straightforward texts. They are able to understand messages found in highly familiar, everyday contexts. At this level, readers may not fully understand texts that are detailed or those texts in which knowledge of language structures is essential in order to understand sequencing, time frame, and chronology.

#### **Intermediate High**

At the Intermediate High sublevel, readers are able to understand fully and with ease short, non-complex texts that convey basic information and deal with personal and social topics to which the reader brings personal interest or knowledge.

These readers are also able to understand some connected texts featuring description and narration although there will be occasional gaps in understanding due to a limited knowledge of the vocabulary, structures, and writing conventions of the language.

#### **Intermediate Mid**

At the Intermediate Mid sublevel, readers are able to understand short, non-complex texts that convey basic information and deal with basic personal and social topics to which the reader brings personal interest or knowledge, although some misunderstandings may occur. Readers at this level may get some meaning from short connected texts featuring description and narration, dealing with familiar topics.

#### **Intermediate Low**

At the Intermediate Low sublevel, readers are able to understand some information from the simplest connected texts dealing with a limited number of personal and social needs, although there may be frequent misunderstandings. Readers at this level will be challenged to derive meaning from connected texts of any length.

## ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 – **READING**

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### **NOVICE**

At the Novice level, readers can understand key words and cognates, as well as formulaic phrases that are highly contextualized.

Novice-level readers are able to get a limited amount of information from highly predictable texts in which the topic or context is very familiar, such as a hotel bill, a credit card receipt, or a weather map. Readers at the Novice level may rely heavily on their own background knowledge and extralinguistic support (such as the imagery on the weather map or the format of a credit card bill) to derive meaning.

Readers at the Novice level are best able to understand a text when they are able to anticipate the information in the text. At the Novice level, recognition of key words, cognates, and formulaic phrases makes comprehension possible.

#### **Novice High**

At the Novice High sublevel, readers can understand, fully and with relative ease, key words and cognates, as well as formulaic phrases across a range of highly contextualized texts. Where vocabulary has been learned, they can understand predictable language and messages such as those found on train schedules, roadmaps, and street signs. Readers at the Novice High sublevel are typically able to derive meaning from short, non-complex texts that convey basic information for which there is contextual or extralinguistic support.

#### **Novice Mid**

At the Novice Mid sublevel, readers are able to recognize the letters or symbols of an alphabetic or syllabic writing system or a limited number of characters in a character-based language. They can identify a number of highly contextualized words and phrases including cognates and borrowed words but rarely understand material that exceeds a single phrase. Rereading is often required.

#### **Novice Low**

At the Novice Low sublevel, readers are able to recognize a limited number of letters, symbols or characters. They are occasionally able to identify high-frequency words and/or phrases when strongly supported by context.

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