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## **Vocabulary Acquisition and Self-Selected Reading: A Test of the Reading Hypothesis in Singapore**

Phyllis Ghim-Lian Chew

*Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature, National Institute of  
Education, Nanyang Technological University.*

Stephen Krashen

*Professor Emeritus, University of Southern California.*

### **Introduction**

There is growing evidence supporting the Reading Hypothesis, the hypothesis that we not only "learn to read by reading" but also that reading is the source of our reading ability, our "educated" vocabulary, our ability to handle complex grammatical constructions, our ability to write in an acceptable writing style, and much of our spelling ability.

The Reading Hypothesis is a special case of the more general Comprehension Hypothesis, the hypothesis that we acquire language, aural and written, by understanding messages, not through deliberate study, production, or correction (Krashen 2003). The kind of reading that has been shown to have an especially powerful influence on literacy development is self-selected, also known as free voluntary reading: Free voluntary reading is simply "reading because you want to," with little or no accountability.

Evidence for the Reading Hypothesis comes from several different research methodologies:

- (1) sustained silent reading: comparison of classes in which time is set aside for self-selected pleasure reading. The impact of self-selected reading is compared to traditional instruction (for reviews, see Krashen, 2001, 2004; 2007; Nakanishi, 2014)
- (2) case histories of those who have developed high levels of literacy and give the credit to their reading habit (e.g. Krashen and Mason, 2015)
- (3) correlational studies, which include multivariate studies (Gradman and Hanania, 1991; Stokes, Krashen, and Kartchner, 1998; Constantino, Lee, Cho, and Krashen, 1997; Sullivan and Brown, 2014).

Free voluntary reading (henceforth FVR) has emerged as the winner in studies using each of these methodologies for both first and second language development.

Despite the consistency and large number of supportive studies, more testing of the Reading Hypothesis is called for. The shift in pedagogy from nearly exclusive use of direct instruction in grammar, vocabulary, and text structure to including large amounts of pleasure reading is quite drastic and is still contrary to many teachers' and students' personal theories of how language is acquired.

The study reported here is a correlational study. Correlational studies are most valuable when they are multivariate and when they control for potential confounds. Multiple regression is especially useful in that it allows us to assume that predictor variables are independent of each other.

The value of FVR has been demonstrated in both first and second languages in many different countries. We attempt to expand the research by examining readers in Singapore, where English is the dominant language in schools and is the main language spoken at home in most cases.

## **Procedure**

### **Subjects**

Subjects were 106 students aged 16 from a neighborhood secondary school in Singapore preparing for the Cambridge O Level examinations. All were comfortable using English and had been in English-language schools their entire school career, as is normally the case in Singapore. Seventy-six percent reported that English was the main language spoken at home, 21% a Chinese language and 10% reported speaking "other" languages at home. These results are consistent with overall statistics for language use in Singapore; English is the main language used for general communication (<http://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/english-most-common-home-language-in-singapore-bilingualism-also-up-government-survey>).

### **Measure**

Our dependent variable was scores on a vocabulary test, developed locally but modeled after the Cambridge O Level English examination. The test also included grammar, vocabulary, and writing subcomponents, but we only report results for vocabulary, as the other the other subtests did not have acceptable levels of reliability. (Results for the other subtests were, however, similar to what is presented below for vocabulary.)

The vocabulary test had 130 items and included three kinds of questions: (1) Match a word with its definition. (2) Fill-in-the-blank in a sentence choosing an

appropriate word from a list. (3) Fill-in-the-blank choosing an appropriate word that may or may not be in the appropriate form.

Reliability of the test was .95, using the Kuder Richardson 21 formula.

### **Independent Variables (Predictors)**

We describe each predictor used in the analysis, and present means and standard deviations for each.

**1. Frequency of self-selected reading (FVR):** "How often did you read extracurricular (not given by the teachers) English material (materials you read on your own without being directed by teachers, tutors, or parents) during the last week?"

- 0 = none last week
- 1 = once last week
- 2 = 2-3 times last week
- 3 = 3-5 times last week
- 4 = every day last week

The mean response was 2.1 (about 2 to 3 times a week), with a standard deviation of 1.2: About 2/3 of the subjects said they read between once a week and 3 to 5 times per week: The subjects were clearly readers, and there were no floor or ceiling effects.

**2. Daily English Communication:** How often do you use English in conversation in everyday life?

- 0 = never
- 1 = less than 30% of the time
- 2 = 50% of the time
- 3 = 50%-80% of the time
- 4 = More than 90% of the time.
- 5 = 100% of the time.

The mean response was 2.99 (sd = 1.38), indicating that English was used quite a bit in daily general conversation.

**3. Movies/TV:** Do you prefer to watch English movies/TV serials or Mandarin movies/TV serials?

Rated from 1 to 7, where 1 = English, 7 = Mandarin.

The mean response = 2.76 (sd = 1.5), indicating a preference for English but not an exclusive preference.

4. **Like English.** "How much do you like/dislike studying English as a subject in school"?"

- 1 = strongly dislike
- 2 = dislike
- 3 = slightly dislike
- 4 = neutral
- 5 = slightly like
- 6 = like
- 7 = strongly like

The mean response was 6.31 (sd = .89) indicating that our subjects were very positive about English class.

As shown in Table 5, all other predictors had very low correlations with the amount of FVR reported. Watching movies and TV was negatively correlated with use of English in daily communication and liking English in school. Those who said they liked English class, however, used English more in daily communication.

	English in daily communication	Movies/TV	Like English class
FVR	.01	.104	.075
English in daily communication		-.29	.47
Movies/TV			-.36

Table 5: *Correlations with amount of FVR reported*

## Results

Predictor	Vocabulary
FVR	0.25
English in daily communication	0.23
Movies/TV	0.04
Like English class	0.27

Table 6: *Correlations of predictors with vocabulary test scores*

Our initial hypothesis was that free voluntary reading would be the strongest predictor of English competence. This was only partly confirmed (Table 6).

Free voluntary reading, English in daily communication, and liking English class all correlated significantly, but modestly, with vocabulary test scores. Because of the large sample size, p-values for correlations involving FVR, English in daily communication, and Like English class were significant far beyond the .01 level.

Multiple regression (Table 7), confirmed that FVR was a significant predictor of vocabulary test scores, as was liking English class. (Because of its near-zero correlation with vocabulary test scores, Movies/TV was not included in the analysis.)

All predictors combined accounted for 15.5% of the variability on the scores on the vocabulary test. Comparisons of betas in table 7 shows that FVR and liking English class were stronger predictors than using English in daily communication. The use of multiple regression allows us to conclude that the effect of FVR and liking English class are independent.

predictor	b	beta	T	p
FVR	5.08	0.26	2.86	0.0025
English in daily communication	2.01	0.12	1.19	0.119
Like English class	5.96	0.23	2.25	0.0013

Table 7: *Multiple regression. Predictors of vocabulary test scores*  
 $r^2 = .1556$  adjusted  $r^2 = .131$

## Discussion and conclusion

Our results are consistent the plethora of studies showing that self-selected reading is the primary cause of vocabulary knowledge (Krashen, 1989, 2004).

The weaker results for conversation agree with those of Gradman and Hannania (1991) who reported that conversations in English (extracurricular speaking) was not a significant predictor of TOEFL scores, but "extracurricular reading" was. This result is consistent with studies showing that the vocabulary used in conversation is nowhere near the complexity of vocabulary found in books and other forms of written language (Hayes and Ahrens, 1988).

How do we account for the finding that liking English class was also a predictor of total scores? Liking class did not correlate with how much reading was

reported. It was positively correlated with English conversation, which was a weak predictor of vocabulary scores.

Liking English class could mean liking formal study and conscious learning of vocabulary, but there are limits on the effectiveness of vocabulary study. There are far too many words to be learned one at a time, and definitions are typically incomplete in terms of meaning and grammatical properties. Studies comparing the effectiveness of vocabulary study and learning by reading consistently find that reading is the winner (e.g. Mason and Krashen, 2004).

We need to ask students what it is about English class that they like.

### **Limitations**

High poverty means less access to reading material, and thus less reading and less literacy development. Thus, the effects of reading reported here may have been attenuated because we were unable to fully control for poverty.

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## **A Student in Korea Discovers the Power of Reading.**

Kyung Sook Cho

*Busan National University of Education. Busan, Korea*

*kscho@bnue.ac.kr*

### ***Abstract***

*This paper presents a case study of a middle school student in Korea who developed a very high level of competence in English as a foreign language through self-selected pleasure reading, with no cram school and no time spent in English-speaking countries.*

**Keywords:** *self-selected reading, EFL, pleasure reading, long-term reader, access to books*

### **Introduction**

Studies done over the last few decades have led to the conclusion that highly interesting (or "compelling") self-selected reading is the primary cause of language and literacy development once we reach the stage where at least some texts are comprehensible (Krashen, 2004). This conclusion holds for both first and second language acquisition (Krashen & Mason, 2015; Krashen, 2004, 2011; Cho & Krashen, 1994).

A serious problem for those involved in foreign language acquisition is access to reading material. Younger students of English as a foreign language, for example, often have a difficult time finding interesting books in English.

This paper presents a case study of a reader who, thanks to a library, her mother, and her family, was able to gain access to books. The results were spectacular.

### **Finding Sodam**

In 2009, the Board of Education in the city of Busan set up an English library for city residents, especially intended for elementary and secondary level students. This investigator asked the director of the library if there were any cases of long-term English readers among the young people who used the library. The director introduced me to the mother of one young reader, a woman with a master's degree in Korean education for foreign students in Korea. She generously supplied me with information about her daughter's reading history, with the full cooperation of the young reader, Sodam (real name used with permission).

### **Sodam's Awards**

Sodam was 13 years old, in her second year in Middle School when this study was done. She had won nearly every possible major prize for mastery of English awarded to young people in Korea. She won the grand prize for middle school students in the Nationwide English contest, based on her performance in writing and public speaking.

Sodam also has an impressive record of doing well in local English contests: In 2012, she placed first and third in two speaking contests, and first in a reading contest held by an internet publisher. In 2013, she won another local English speaking contest and a reading award from the superintendent of schools in Busan. In 2014 she won a special award for reading from the Busan English library, and in 2015 she won first prize in a book report contest.

### **An English Teacher's Reaction**

One of her English teachers, a native speaker, had this to say about Sodam: "She is very well-spoken and her reading comprehension skills are second to none among her classmates .... When I talk to her I almost feel as if I'm speaking to another native English speaker."

### **What Sodam Didn't Do, and What She Did Do**

Sodam had no special advantages. She did not go to cram school, and had the same exposure to English in EFL classes that other Korean children have. She had never lived in an English-speaking country. The difference was that Sodam was a reader.

### **Sodam's English Before Starting to Read in English**

Sodam's reading and writing competence in English were very low compared to friends who were attending cram schools. Her mother said that Sodam was not even able to read and write simple words like "fox," and the English books that her friends had from cram school were much too hard for her.

### **How it Began**

During the fall semester of 2012, when Sodam was in fourth grade, the school introduced a new reading program. In reaction to the new program, Sodam's mother began to look for English books for her daughter.

Soon, the entire family became members of the English library, in order to make sure Sodam could take out all the books she wanted to. Sodam's mother even asked a family friend to become a member of the English library so Sodam could use her library card and take out even more books. And in reaction to this abundant access to books, Sodam, already a reader in Korean, became an enthusiastic reader in English.

### **Access to Books**

Sodam's school provided lists for recommended reading, and at first, Sodam's reading selections were taken from these lists. But soon after, she started selecting her own reading from the public library collection.

Her mother's dedication continued: she searched other libraries in the city to find even more English books, and when she noticed that her daughter developed a special liking for a particular book, she bought a copy for Sodam's personal book collection.

### **A Thousand Books and More**

From the time Sodam was in fourth grade in September 2012 to March, 2016, Sodam and her family checked out an astonishing 1,124 books from the library. In addition, Sodam and her family checked out many books from a commercial site which the school provided for free reading. Sodam's mother estimates that Sodam may have read nearly 4,000 books in total.

Of course this could be an overestimate because we do not know if Sodam actually read each book.

### **What She Read**

Sodam's reading interests included series books (e.g. the Oxford Bookworms series). Her taste for series books is consistent with previous studies of dedicated readers (Cho & Krashen, 1994, 1995a, 1995b, Lamme, 1976), but she also reported reading a variety of genres, especially history and classical novels.

Sodam has read books designed for English learners, but did not rigidly read all the books on every level, as many were not interesting to her.

### **Other Sources of English Input**

## **Movies**

In addition to reading and attending EFL classes, Sodam is an avid movie-goer in both English and Korean. She mentioned that when she liked a movie, she would then read the book in English. Also, she would often read a book in English and then see the movie in English, a strategy demonstrated to make movies in a second language more comprehensible (Cho, 2006, 2007, 2011; Cho & Kim, 1999).

## **Peer Input**

The only peer input in English that Sodam had was when a child her age (12 at that time) visited from India and stayed at Sodam's house for one week. They occasionally communicate using e-mail.

## **More Reactions**

### **Sodam's Mother's Reaction**

Sodam's mother said that English seemed to be easy for Sodam, and she attributed this to Sodam's pleasure reading habit:

"Sodam seems to express, read, write and listen comfortably in English. She acquires English from reading. The pleasure she gets from reading has helped her improve her English..." (translated from Korean)

Sodam's mother also noticed that Sodam's reading habit actually gave Sodam more time and less pressure from school:

"Sodam has more free time than her friends who go to cram school to improve their English ... I am so happy that Sodam is free from the terrible pressure and that she has time to do what she wants to do."

### **Reaction of Other Parents**

Other parents in school noticed Sodam's remarkable competence in English without attending cram schools, and asked Sodam's mother for the secret of Sodam's success.

Sodam's mother told them about Sodam's pleasure reading habit, but most of the parents were not convinced, and were skeptical that such progress could take place without extra studying at cram schools after regular school.

## Conclusions

Novelist Lisa See (2004) proclaimed, "Read a thousand books and your words will flow like a river." Reading more than 1,000 books certainly worked for Sodam.

Sodam's case supports the hypothesis (Krashen, 2004) that highly interesting reading results in improvement in literacy and language development, a conclusion that also supports the more general hypothesis that we acquire language when we receive comprehensible input.

Of great interest is that Sodam's case is quite similar to descriptions of other long-term EFL acquirers who improved through self-selected reading: All had plenty of access to books, were able to read what they wanted to read, were not tested on what they read, and did not do supplementary workbook exercises (Cho & Krashen, 2016, 2015; Krashen, 2004).

This case thus confirms that EFL students can become autonomous language acquirers, that is, they can improve on their own, without extra instruction, through reading.

**Acknowledgment:** This paper was supported by the Busan National University of Education in Korea (2017).

**Editor's note:** There is 5 book check-out limit per person at the English library in Busan. The loan period is two weeks. For this reason, Sodam's family members and friends obtained cards so that she could check out more books per week.

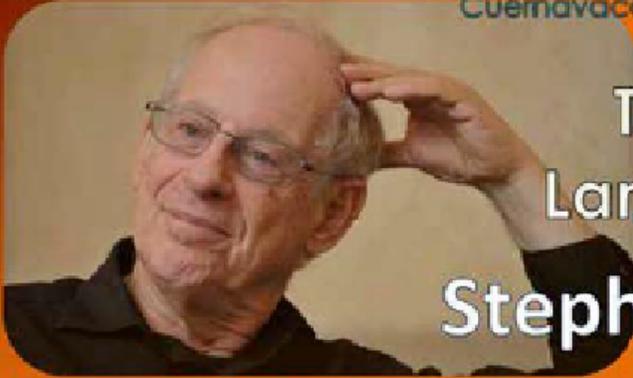
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## Reading Science Books for Pleasure Will Help You in Science Class: Chen, Chang, & Yang (2017)

**Jeff McQuillan**

*Originally published: 22 Aug 2017 [The Backseat Linguist](#). Re-printed with permission of the author.*

Study discussed:

[Chen, S.Y., Chang, H.Y, and Yang, S. \(2017\). Content-Based Recreational Book Reading and Taiwanese Adolescents' Academic Achievement. Journal of Education and Learning, 6\(1\). \(Open Access\)](#)

One of the current fixations of the reading field is teaching “academic language,” especially academic vocabulary, via direct instruction. Most of these efforts have produced very meager results, as I have pointed out [here](#) and [here](#).

Krashen (2012) suggested that the way to improve struggling readers’ academic language proficiency is (a) encourage them to become pleasure readers, and then (b) allow them to read on academic topics that interest them. Chen, Chang, and Yang (2017) provide some interesting evidence that this is indeed an effective path.

The researchers analyzed the impact of self-selected “content-based” reading on tests of academic achievement for a large group of students (N = 4,730) at an all-girls Taiwanese senior high school (data from four cohorts were collected). The school had a “Reading for Pleasure” program that included an online tracking system for some of the students’ out-of-school reading. Students were invited to look at a website that contained lists of recommended books in a variety of genres, both fiction and nonfiction. After reading a book from the lists, students had the option of taking a “certification” test on the book. Prizes were available for “avid readers” each semester.\*

The researchers grouped the recommended texts read by the girls into three categories: literature, social sciences, and science (p. 209). They then compared the number and genres of the books read to the students’ performance on the Chinese literature, science, and social sciences subtests of the Taiwanese college entrance exam (GSAT), taken in January of the students’ senior year.

Wang et al. were careful to control for achievement in these subjects before the students entered senior high by entering their subject matter scores from a previous exam (a senior high entrance exam) first into their regression analysis.

This allowed them to see how much the scores on the content area tests of the GSAT might be associated with the content-area pleasure reading.

Scores were analyzed by the student's chosen specialization in high school, either Humanities/Social Sciences or Science. Here are the genre of texts that were significant predictors of content area test scores for the Humanities students:

- Literature/Social Sciences books → Literature scores
- Social Sciences/Science books → Social Science scores
- Literature/Social Sciences/Science books → Science scores

Humanities students who read more social sciences and literature books did better on the social sciences test than those who read fewer such books, controlling for the achievement in that subject matter prior to senior high. The same was true for the science scores: the more books about science students read, along with both social sciences and literature books, the higher their science test scores.

The results for the Science students were slightly different:

- Social Science books → Literature scores
- Social Sciences, Science books → Social Sciences scores
- Science books → Science scores

Again, more content area reading was associated with higher scores for both the social sciences and science test, but not for literature, where only the reading of social science books was significantly related to subject matter scores.

As the researchers themselves noted (p. 209-210), the Reading for Pleasure data almost certainly underestimated the total amount of out-of-school reading students engaged in. It did not include any books not on the "certification" list, and of course did not count magazines or Internet reading of any kind. The average student read only 6.5 books as part of the "certification" testing program over a three-year period. Wang et al. suggested that the data from the program acted as a proxy for the total volume and type of pleasure reading students engaged in outside of school.

Unfortunately, the researchers did not present a single analysis that included the impact of all three genres combined on test scores. A more comprehensive measure of reading or "print exposure" would probably have found an even stronger impact. Still, the fact that even a rough measure of content-area pleasure reading had an impact on content achievement scores is impressive. It suggests

JEFF MCQUILLAN: READING SCIENCE BOOKS FOR PLEASURE WILL HELP YOU IN SCIENCE CLASS: CHEN, CHANG, & YANG (2017)

that the road to academic language is the same as that for all types of literacy development: free voluntary reading.

\* Neither reading incentives (McQuillan, 1997) nor frequent testing (Krashen, 2003) has been found to increase students' reading motivation or proficiency, but regular readers of this blog probably knew that already.

Dr. McQuillan runs <https://www.eslpod.com/>, a podcast for English language learners.



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3. Paragraphs: The first line of paragraphs should NOT be indented. The main text of all paragraphs should be justified. Separate paragraphs with one blank line.
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instances where items are not literally translated into English. The idiomatic gloss should be on the following line, in single quotes, and examples should be separated from the text and from other examples by one blank line. If there are multiple examples per example number, the lettered sub-examples should be one tab stop away from the example number. So, if the example is tabbed at 0.25, the sub-example(s) should be tabbed at 0.5. If the language variety needs to be made clear, it can be enclosed in parentheses and right aligned on the line directly above the example. For standard morpheme labels and glossing rules, please refer to the Leipzig Glossing Rules at <http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php>

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Appendix 2: (Audio, .wav format) <http://hdl.handle.net/XXX/XXX> Appendix 3: "Title of Appendix 3" (Additional data, .xls format) <http://hdl.handle.net/XXX/XXX> If you have appendices, the editor will assign you permanent URLs.

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What do you do better than most other teachers? What do you do differently than other teachers? What do you do that other teachers would be able to adapt for themselves? Sharing those ideas is the purpose of the IJFLT Teacher to Teacher section. In general, submissions:

- Should be a teaching idea that is applicable in the classroom by other teachers
- Should be short.
- Should not assume that readers are familiar with terminology like TPRS or CI or the 5Cs.
- Should write for an international audience, showing that the technique could be applied to any language.
- Avoid using idiomatic expressions in English.
- Avoid using informal language. (It was so cool! Can you believe it?)
- Speak of your own experience and your own strategies and provide step-by-step instructions for teachers who might not be familiar with the background information. While this section is somewhat less formal than the Research section, please follow the guidelines above regarding font, page size, margins, tabs, spacing, and footnotes. Be sure to check the veracity and accuracy of that information carefully and then cite your source.

For an ongoing discussion among Comprehension-Based Teachers, join the [Facebook professional learning community](#)

# TEACHER TO TEACHER

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## TEACHER TO TEACHER

### **Adapting and Creating Reading Materials for the Elementary World Language Classroom**

**Suzanne Pesa**

*Skokie Middle School Spanish Teacher [supesa@winnetka36.org](mailto:supesa@winnetka36.org)*

**Alisa Shapiro-Rosenberg**

*Greeley Elementary School Spanish Teacher [alisashapiro@winnetka36.org](mailto:alisashapiro@winnetka36.org)*

**Carla Tarini**

*Skokie Middle School French Teacher [carlatarini@winnetka36.org](mailto:carlatarini@winnetka36.org)  
Winnetka Public Schools, Winnetka, IL*



Note: This article is based on “Expanding Your World Language Class Library in Grades 1-6,” our 2015 and 2016 presentation at IFLT and NTPRS ([www.ntprs.info](http://www.ntprs.info)) summer conferences. Our slide presentation and ancillary resources website can be accessed here: Adapting and Creating Reading Materials for the Elementary World Language Classroom (<https://drive.google.com/drive/search?q=Adapting%20and%20creating%20reading%20materials%202017>)

#### **Introduction**

Reflecting the research on the power of reading to provide essential comprehensible input, reinforce language, expand vocabulary, and bolster

retention, this article focuses on choosing and adapting existing elementary reading material, as well as authoring original texts based on student interest and/or class-spun stories.

Considerations in adapting and creating reading materials for the young learners' classroom include: story types and elements; book appeal and format; length & complexity; and linguistic considerations, such as high-frequency language, grammatical concerns, and proficiency level.

We will also discuss guided and independent self-selected reading, often referred to as Free Voluntary Reading (FVR). Extensive independent reading additionally benefits students by offering literary choices to young readers, as well as boosting confidence through successful reading experiences.

It is our hope that readers of this article will learn to:

- Evaluate existing literature, and adapt it as necessary to the level(s) they teach;
- Author or collaborate with students to create developmentally appropriate comprehensible and compelling stories;
- Utilize the Embedded Reading model to level and differentiate reading.

### **Choosing Existing Texts**

Native speakers are the intended audience for the vast majority of commercially published texts written in the target language (L2). This, of course, poses a problem of comprehensibility for the young novice language learner. Even the simplest and most inviting picture books are usually too complex for the beginner to understand. Some specific obstacles that young readers encounter with age appropriate native texts are:

- Low frequency or theme-specific vocabulary
- Advanced / poetic 'out of bounds' language
- Inadequate repetitions of foundational language
- Wordy passages and dense pages
- Rhyme and meter is lost in translation (for books written in verse)

Some exceptions to these onerous L2 book options are illustrated *wordless* books, which the comprehensible input-based teacher can "book walk" with her students, and then script herself, as well as high-frequency word books for emergent readers. Occasionally, teachers find "just right" L2 illustrated trade books, though they are rare.

### **Adapting and Writing Texts for Grades K-3**

While the trade books mentioned directly above might meet the literacy needs of our early elementary language learners, this youngest group does present particular L2 reading challenges:

- Some students are still pre-literate
- Classes may present a wide range of decoding ability
- Entry level readers can seem babyish and un compelling

To address the dearth of linguistically appropriate L2 resources for this age group, we recommend exploiting entry level readers by adapting their text for more interest and comprehensibility.

This is easily accomplished by adding sticky notes to extend, change, or streamline text. An added speech bubble, for example, provides character dialogue, so a narrative story now more easily lends itself to dramatization.

It should be noted that while our youngest learners may not have the literacy skills to participate in self-selected Free Voluntary Reading, a thorough CI treatment of such a book (circling, PQA, dramatizing, choral reading, etc.) will render it comprehensible, so that it can eventually be moved to the FVR (independent reading) library shelves.

Often the early elementary homeroom is abustle in thematic studies, such as The Moon, Immigration, or the Chick's Life Cycle. These are opportunities for the World Language teacher to capitalize on student excitement, to connect and incorporate the content in language class, ensuring of course, that the language is brought in bounds and the text is comprehensible. Redacting tape and/or sticky notes, shaped like speech and thought bubbles, etc. can ease the task of adapting text for our young novice learners while preserving an appealing format.

### **Writing Collaborative Texts for Grades K-3**

Story-asking is a key feature of such CI-based strategies as TPR Storytelling®, in which teachers elicit character/s, locations and plot from student-generated ideas and interests. We can do this with our youngest learners, however some adjustments make the written language more accessible.

### **A. Line-At-A-Time (LAT) Stories**

Fashioned from the Language Experience Approach (see resource page link at the end of this article), LATs control the pace of exposure and complexity of written text for our young readers. We do this by eliciting simple story details from our students and writing them on the board/screen, one line or sentence at a time, as they are established. Once the teacher circles the sentences, students then ‘practice’ chorally reading the accruing text from the beginning, building familiarity and reading proficiency within the context of their customized story. In this strategy, pre-literate students and readers alike are exposed to L2 text and map meaning/sound to the written word.

### **B. Detail-Swapping to Create New LAT Stories**

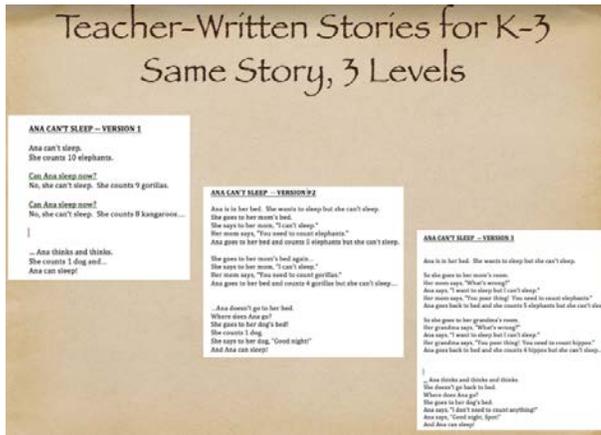
By changing a few story details, such as characters and locations, but keeping the high-frequency verbal structures constant, resulting ‘new’ stories feel fresh and novel to young learners. The process is easily accomplished electronically through the Find & Replace functions on your word processor. In this way, more stories are created for instruction and FVR, and more children get to share the excitement and satisfaction of seeing their story contributions in print.

### **Teacher-Written Stories for Grades K-3**

Authoring original stories that employ acquired language from your classroom is a great way to fill your FVR shelves, and encourage extensive comprehensible reading. The process for teachers is simple, keeping in mind the following guidelines:

- Start with a simple, compelling idea;
- Limit the number of verb-containing structures;
- Check for high frequency word usage, true cognates, and repetitions.

Optional/recommended: Write two more versions (scaled up or pared down) for other class levels. Elementary teachers often teach several grade levels per day, so minimize the workload by modifying your basic story for older or younger learners.



Harder versions are longer and contain more complex clauses and sentences. Do this by adding more characters, rejoinders, transition words, etc. to the plotline, while insuring that the number of verbal structures does not go out of bounds. This is the process of Embedded Reading, however our purpose is different: The scaled stories are intended to differentiate reading for *different audiences* at different reading and grade levels.

### Adapting and Writing Texts for Grades 3-6

With older elementary audiences, the same issues apply. These students require high-interest / low-language texts, rendering emergent-level trade books inappropriate. In order to exploit commercially produced books, yet meet the developmental needs of this group, we can further modify existing text passages for greater interest and complexity by:

- Adding character dialogue;
- Adding parallel character/s (i.e., with craft sticks, such that characters ‘walk onto’ the story);
- Changing the point of view;
- Switching/adding tenses.

Upper-elementary-level text can be further extended by:

- Describing or captioning page illustrations within the story;
- Inserting rhetorical questions and rejoinders (e.g. transcribing circling and PQA sequences);
- Adding sound effects and onomatopoeia;



- Personalizing versions of the same trade book with each class group (resulting in several versions of the exact same book/story).

### **Prompt-Based Collaborative Stories**

While teachers often drive early elementary stories with leading questions and circling, older learners often delight in developing the plotline themselves. A simple storyboard can invite diverse responses from group to group, resulting in multiple versions of stories. Students can even re-order the frames. Teachers write up class and swapped-detail versions, and story collections can be bound and later moved to FVR shelves. Sharing peer stories with groups is not only fun but gets massed repetitions on high-frequency targets. The same story-spinning process can also be applied to any interesting image, generating countless original classroom texts.

### **Teacher-Written Stories for Grades 3-6**

While the same basic guidelines apply (as those for early elementary stories), older students have a stronger linguistic foundation upon which to build stories (if they've had more instructional hours in the target language). Older kids often enjoy stories with famous figures, a cultural or humorous setting, and/or a cultural tidbit. One teacher-written story told of a sweaty and frustrated Serena Williams at the Café de Flore, who, after repeatedly requesting an ice-cold lemonade, learned that ice isn't served in Paris restaurants!

### **Injecting Novelty**

As teachers, we search for ways to repeat the same words and verbal chunks without our students sensing the repetition. By devising a reason for repetition within the plot (i.e., the character is hard of hearing; the music is loud and the listener can't decipher the message; the message has been garbled or misinterpreted and needs clarification; etc.), we create opportunity to repeat our targets in a humorous context. Similarly, difficult-to-pronounce vocabulary can simply become a character name, in order to transliterate for easy pronunciation and repetition. For example: The bird in the French story is named, '*Wa-Zoh*, l'oiseau' (Wa-Zoh, the bird).

### **Insuring Comprehensibility**

Since teacher-generated stories at the 3rd through 6th grade level can include broader language, it's critical that we check and revise for comprehensibility.

Guidelines include:

- Comb through and eliminate words that are new, low-frequency, or have fewer repetitions;
- Aim for true cognates;
- Focus on high-frequency, practical structures;
- Recycle previous structures;
- Insert plenty of Q & A for more repetition.

### **‘Publishing’ Class and Teacher-Generated Stories**

Reading on screen or from a photocopied handout are basic ways to ensure that our elementary students read comprehensible and compelling material. However, by illustrating and binding our stories, we boost their appeal and durability for other classes and for years to come. In this section, we offer practical ideas for how to prepare and present teacher and class-created work.

#### **Student Hand-illustrated Stories**

Simply type up the class story with an illustration box, assign a volunteer student (or group of artists) to illustrate, at home or in class, and staple or bind the pages.



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### **'Publishing' Electronic Books**



Web-based (i.e., Storybird), computer-based (iBooks Author; Book Creator) and device-based publishing software (i.e., Creative Book Builder, Scribble Press, Story Creator or any other device-based apps that might also be free) are great options for creating and sharing collaborative or teacher-authored stories. Completed projects can be exported as a PDF and printed/bound, or enjoyed on screen. On-screen versions often include exciting interactive elements, such as media (images, audio/video files, maps), review questions or quizzes, or simple practice activities. Files created this way can be shared with or without the interactive elements, in PDF form (electronically) or in paper format, bound as books. When shared electronically, students may conveniently access from anywhere on their devices. You can also put the "pages" from your newly created books into a slide-sharing application (such as Keynote or Powerpoint), record the text with your voice, and export as a movie. Students enjoy listening to their teacher read them these stories as the pages turn.

### **Displaying Reading Materials and FVR**

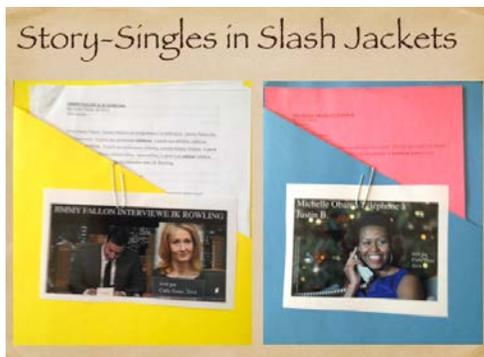
In our experience, independent reading in the World Language classroom is not recommended before 3rd grade. Since most early elementary programs allot limited instructional minutes, precious time is better spent on auditory input and guided reading until students enjoy solid decoding and reading skills.

As previously mentioned, commercial and class-produced texts can migrate to the FVR shelves once teachers have ensured that they are comprehensible. Books can be leveled and rotated on or off display, depending on class language in use.

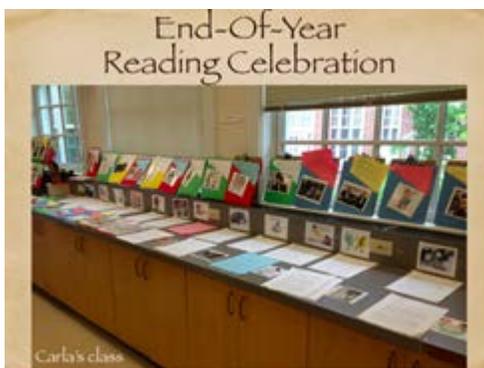
### **Story Singles**

As an alternative to trade books and student-illustrated stories, the teacher may choose to author a collection of short, compelling and comprehensible texts (e.g.,

“Story Singles”). By attaching a Google image to the folder containing multiple copies of each reading, she can advertise and build interest in that story. Story collections can rotate after all students have read the entire collection.



In lieu of book summaries, reports or lists, students can simply recommend a reading to classmates by choosing whether or not to affix a star sticker on its folder.



Here, parents and school administration were invited to an end-of-year World Language reading celebration!

### Summary and Conclusion

In this article, we have explored adapting and creating texts for the elementary grades 1-6 World Language classroom.

Options for adapting existing texts might include, but are not limited to:

- Teacher-scripted wordless picture books;
- Adapted picture books;
- Adapted emergent readers;
- Adapted content-related books;
- Class-specific rewrites (multiple versions).

Options for creating original texts might include, but are not limited to:

- Line-At-A-Time stories (LAT);
- LAT with swapped details;
- Multilevel teacher-written stories;
- Illustrated collaborative stories;
- E-books (on-screen or printed);
- Story Singles.

We invite IJFLT readers to explore our original slide presentation for additional photos and images, as well as our resource website:

<https://sites.google.com/a/winnetka36.org/expanding-elementary-fvr/resources>  
and contact us with any questions or concerns.

While the ever-changing educational technology landscape allows for countless possibilities in how we ask, tell, embellish, ‘publish’ and share our stories, it is the bottomless well of student imagination and inventiveness that will keep new stories flowing and our classroom communities of all ages enjoying them, group after group, year after year.

## NEW SPANISH BOOK!



**Don Quijote, el último caballero** is a novel for intermediate and advanced beginners in the Fluency Fast series of readers. It uses a vocabulary of fewer than 200 different Spanish words to tell a 1,400 word story in the present tense and the same story also in the past tense. It is repetitive and simple and uses many cognates to make the story comprehensible to adults and children. The stories are intentionally written to be acted out in class, but also to serve as independent reading in either the present or past tense.

**Don Quijote, el último caballero** is an amusing, ironic and - at the same time - tragic story. Don Quijote is an ordinary Spaniard with an extraordinary imagination who believes the he must achieve great feats to honor a lady. He falls in love with a waitress that he considers to be the ideal lady. He and his companion Sancho Panza have adventures in which Don Quijote is always mistaken about what he finds along the way while Sancho sees what is really there. The story is based on Miguel de Cervantes' *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*, published in the 17th Century. Many consider it to be the best book of fiction ever written.

**\$6 ORDER NOW**

## Who Invented Comprehensible Input?

**Stephen Krashen** (the author of this paper, not the answer to the question)

On page 49 of his new book, *While We're on the Topic*, Bill VanPatten writes: "The role of input is often credited to Stephen Krashen. Although Krashen popularized the notion of comprehensible input ... the idea of communicative input has been around longer, and began with first language acquisition. What Krashen distilled for many people ... is this: acquisition happens through understanding messages. In short, acquisition is a byproduct of comprehension..."

VanPatten is correct. In fact, I wasn't even the first person to talk about comprehensible input in second language acquisition.

First language acquisition researchers have indeed talked about communication, but have not explicitly acknowledged the centrality of comprehensible input. Several first language literacy researchers, however, have been very clear about the role of comprehensible input: We learn to read by reading (making sense of what is on the page), and develop other aspects of literacy (vocabulary, writing style, complex grammar, spelling) through reading (e.g. Frank Smith, Kenneth Goodman, Richard Anderson, Richard Allington, Warwick Elley and others), all independent of my work.

Several second language researchers arrived at versions of the Comprehension Hypothesis before I did, including Leonard Newmark, Harris Winitz, and James Asher. In addition, both S.P. Corder and Larry Selinker made distinctions similar to the acquisition-learning distinction and hypothesized that acquisition is available to the adult. (1)

I have acknowledged these scholars in several publications, including Krashen (2013).

My thanks to Bill VanPatten for making this point, and for reminding us to honor our lineage and learn from the pioneers in our field.

Note

(1) Those doing research in animal language (animals acquiring their own languages and acquiring human languages) have been vague, even though some of their conclusions appear similar to what is stated in the Comprehension Hypothesis. To my knowledge, only Pepperberg has explicitly related animal language findings to comprehensible input. In Krashen (2013), I review animal language studies from the point of the view of the Comprehension Hypothesis.

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## Six Keys to Magical Moments in Elementary

### Annabelle Allen



*Annabelle Allen is a Middle School Spanish Teacher in Metairie, Louisiana. She has taught students ranging from 2 years old to 88 in public, private, and independent schools in Colorado, China, and Louisiana. Annabelle Allen is better known as La Maestra Loca (the crazy teacher) and presents, coaches, and mentors at in-services, workshops, and language conferences throughout the United States. She is passionate about Comprehensible Input and loves to share that passion with teachers and students alike.*

“The younger the better!” We have all heard it. Everyone I know, whether they teach a language or not, says that the best time to introduce a new language is when students are young. So that must mean that elementary language teachers have the easiest job of anyone, right? No, it doesn’t mean that, but it CAN mean that they have the most fun! You do have the opportunity to create a magical environment in your classroom where language exploration is treasured, valued, and sought after by each and every child that crosses the threshold. I recently wrote a blog about the steps I take for setting up an elementary language classroom during the first week of school. I want to expand upon that here, and explain some very important techniques that, when used together, create a powerful, successful learning environment for your students. These six tools will help you to establish a safe, fun, routine-based, classroom community where little language learners will acquire language and thrive!

### 1. Body Language

Your body language communicates SO much. From the minute students walk in your door you should be on their level. Making eye contact with them as they come in the door and smiling at each one of them and greeting them with a simple “hello” in the target language (TL). As you begin class, your body language

should exude confidence, excitement, and control. Students want to see you as the expert and “leader” of the classroom. Praise them with your body language. When they are following your expectations and rules, give them lots of high fives! I am known for jumping around and squealing when students are doing what I want them to. I had a student today tell me that he counted I gave out 42 high fives in the 45-minute period. I don’t doubt it. This praise and excitement creates buy-in. Students WANT to do well. Body language is more important in a foreign language classroom than any other! TPR is an essential part of establishing meaning and creating a kinesthetic connection for children to the language you are sharing with them. Your language should be very simple and sheltered, with lots of TPR (most especially in the first few classes). As you tell them to stand up, YOU should stand up and signal their movements with your arms. As you tell them to touch their heads YOU should touch your head. Your body language and TPR will help make meaning, and help to ensure children feel successful and safe in your classroom.

## **2. Tone**

For many little ones, the first day of a language class is terrifying. The thought of going into a classroom and not understanding anything is incredibly daunting. As a comprehensible input teacher, I know I am not going to be speaking to my kids in English all the time, in fact quite the opposite! I want to be spending 90-95% of my class time in my target language. Presenting your language classroom and methodology in a non-threatening way on the first days of school has a lot to do with tone. As you greet your students at the door with a “hello” in the TL it should be in a happy, cheerful tone. Smile as you are at eye-level with them. Let them hear the excitement in your voice. We convey so much through our tone; that is why children as toddlers understand much of what is going on even before they fully understand language. As you start speaking in the TL (with simple TPR gestures), do so with a happy voice, full of excitement and praise. Tone is two-sided. While I strongly encourage keeping a happy tone, I also reserve sad, stern, and serious tones for when students are not following the expectations I am setting for them. Tone of voice and praise for students with high fives and body language should work for buy-in and convincing your class to play along. If you notice they need more encouragement, try switching the tone of your voice first, to sound disappointed when some students aren’t doing what they are supposed to. I combine that tone with my point management system which works like gold with young students.

## **3. Slow, Slow, Slow**

You can NEVER go slowly enough. Pause. Don’t be afraid to then pause again. Go even slower. If you feel bored, really bored, you are probably speaking at the

right speed. Don't feel like you have to jump into lots of language fast! You can be excited, and be slow. They need you to be slow. Slower than slow. They want to understand you and going slowly ensures that they feel like they CAN understand you if they really listen with their eyes and their ears. Justin Slocum-Bailey wrote a wonderful blog on the power of slow comprehensible input. Did I say "slow" enough in this paragraph?

#### **4. Clear, Simple, High Expectations**

Students of all ages crave routines and structure. If students know exactly what is expected of them and if they know there are simple rules and routines to follow, they are less stressed or nervous about you speaking in the TL. Establishing rituals and routines in the first few weeks is essential, and yes, it does take time up front. It is crucial that you take the time to make sure the expectations are understood AND met before moving forward. Decide on clear classroom rules. The simpler the better! Mine are: 1. Respect, 2. Target Language, 3. Listen with your eyes and ears. Simple but all-encompassing rules. I take time to really explain these in English and ask students what they think each rule means; I also tell them my expectation. Establish a strong transition protocol with your students. I shout something out (¡Hola hola!) and they shout back something else (¡Coca Cola!). The expectation after this happens is that EVERY student is sitting quietly with their eyes on me and they are silent. We practice this about 20 times the first class. I praise them each time it is successful and if they DON'T do it successfully, we keep trying until they do. If you move on before everyone has it, that is setting the expectation that you don't need everyone to participate, and you never want to send that message. So, be very enthusiastic when you do get 100% participation. Praise them! Use your body language (high fives) and tone to let them know how happy you are. If you don't want to use your voice to shout, then use a bell or a noisemaker for your transition sound.

#### **5. Movement**

While I have already touched on TPR and body language for YOU, I haven't talked about how vitally important movement is for your students. Elementary students should be moving all the time. Have them do lots of TPR (don't forget to do it with them). When you are telling stories, you should stand students up and use them as actors. Blair Richards is amazing at engaging her students through movement and acting! The easiest way to incorporate movement is to remember how rigorous it is to listen to someone speak in another language for even 5 minutes. Give your students Brain Breaks and give them frequently. Brain Breaks do not have to be 5-minute-long games. They should be SHORT breaks in rigor. There are hundreds of ideas out there and the possibilities are endless. I have written about some in blogs, or you can see students in action on my YouTube

channel. You can also use 1-5 second Brain Breaks which I call Brain Bursts. For example, just stand students up and tell them to jump three times, then sit them back down. Remember, use your transition to make sure everyone is silent before you continue with the TL. Movement is a powerful tool to ensure active listening!

## **6. Smile! Share your passion!**

There is a reason you became a teacher. Remember that reason. Hold onto your passion. Share that with your students! SMILE and show them that you love your job and you love your target language. Your passion will inspire them. After all, isn't that our goal? We want to spark an interest in students so they want to be life-long language learners. We want them to be as passionate about the language and culture we teach as we are. We hope that they achieve fluency in the language and then move on to acquire other languages, too. We want to spark in them a curiosity for other people, with customs, foods, traditions, and cultures different from their own. All of that stems from our own passion and love for what we do!

So there you have it! Six simple strategies that together will create an incredibly powerful language classroom! To sign off, I wish you the best of school years! Until next time, HAPPY TEACHING! Love, La Maestra Loca

### **Links to blog posts:**

1. Annabelle Allen - First week of school  
<https://lamaestralocablog.wordpress.com/2017/08/03/the-first-week-of-school-pre-k-to-high-school/>
2. Annabelle Allen - Point system  
<https://lamaestralocablog.wordpress.com/2016/08/05/classroom-management-part-1/>
3. Justin Slocum Bailey - slowness and silence:  
<http://indwellinglanguage.com/slowness-and-silence/>
4. Blair Richards - movement and acting  
<https://madamemadamemadame.wordpress.com/2017/04/19/best-day-ever/>
5. Annabelle Allen - Brain breaks  
<https://lamaestralocablog.wordpress.com/?s=brain+breaks>  
[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJQxKIyg5Ko8cGt1PTSWwwQ?view\\_as=subscriber](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJQxKIyg5Ko8cGt1PTSWwwQ?view_as=subscriber)
6. Annabelle Allen - Brain bursts  
<https://lamaestralocablog.wordpress.com/2017/01/05/brain-breaks-part-5-brain-bursts/>

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## Building a Cultural Treasure Trove with the Culture in the Room

Rachelle Adams and Anna Gilcher



Some say that the shortest distance between two hearts is a story. As Comprehensible Input (CI)/TPR Storytelling®-oriented teachers, one way that we make connections to the hearts of our students is in the telling and co-creating of stories. World language teachers also work diligently to share stories from the target cultures represented by the languages we teach— but how often do we miss golden opportunities to share cultural stories that are right in front of us? We don't have to look to distant lands, books, or films to share cultural stories. There is a vast amount of culture ready for the sharing in each of our classrooms. When we start to use the culture in the room, the person right in front of us becomes the most important, and there is a cultural treasure trove waiting to be discovered.

In our work this summer, we have had the opportunity to do just that with our colleagues: hear the cultural experiences of a diverse group of people as they told their own stories. We worked with dozens of teachers all over the country, and asked each of them, “What is something from your culture that you would want taught?” One thing we learned along the way is that we first need to understand what “culture” is in order to meaningfully answer this question.

There are some great resources out there to help. One place to start is Zaretta Hammond's book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* (2014). In it, Hammond offers a wonderful graphic representing the different elements of culture in the form of a tree, with leaves representing surface culture, the trunk as shallow culture, and roots as deep culture. What becomes evident quite quickly is that when thinking about culture we must go beyond food, heroes, holidays, and clothing. While all of these can be worthwhile as a way in, culture is much deeper and wider than just these four things.

Another way of looking at culture is that there are *seen* and *unseen elements* of culture. The *seen elements* of a culture are things that are physical, which can be seen and understood by everyone. For example, we can see the physical features of a country and can understand how these have affected/created part of the culture. The *unseen elements* of a culture are things that are based on ideas and communication. For example, we can't see or touch a person's beliefs or religion, but we can learn about these things through communication and thinking. (*See Culture Wheel*)

Once we have established a deeper, more multifaceted understanding of culture, the next step is to examine the impact of personal and group identity on our understanding of and relationship to culture. Use your Comprehensible Input (CI) skills to help students explore their own identities; in so doing, you create the conditions for them to understand their own culture. Help students to notice their own cultural traits. (Often, this noticing happens when students are exposed to difference.) With this as the foundation for making cultural comparisons, we empower our students to gain a deeper and more connected understanding of their own lives, thus giving them one of the tools necessary for cross-cultural exchange. Additionally, it opens up a vast array of options for answering the question "What is something from your culture that you would want taught?"

So, what are the steps to make this happen in the world language classroom?

### **Step one: Elements of culture and identity**

Take one or two class sessions to explore and talk about elements of culture and identity, using the resources above.

### **Step two: Introducing the process of *Cultural Jewels* through students' L1**

The next step is to task your students, as well as yourself, with writing a "*Cultural Jewel*" story in their first language (whatever that language is).

### **The Cultural Jewel Process**

- Make available to students the graphic information on what makes up culture (*i.e. culture wheel, the culture tree, etc.*) that you used in your session exploring elements of culture and identity.

● **Give the following instructions to students:**

- a. Choose something from your culture that you would want taught to someone learning your language and about your culture
- b. Break it down to its essence in 5 – 10 sentences (*give students options to write a longer narrative first and then pare down the writing to its essence; use a graphic organizer to catch thoughts that would then form their story; or dictate their first draft*).  
NOTE: We have found that it's important for the narratives to come from a perspective of "I" or "we".
- c. Share what you created, in groups of 3 – 4.  
When sharing - only share what you have written.  
When listening - just listen deeply and then simply say "thank you".  
(*It is extremely important for the "jewels" to stand on their own without discussion.*)
- d. Stand up when you are done (*or whatever else works for you to have the group signal completion of sharing*).
- e. Each group shares one "cultural essence jewel" with the whole class.

**Step three:**

When students are linguistically ready, have them write a cultural jewel in L2 using this same process. Depending on the level, this could be early or late in the year.

Using this process at the beginning of the year in the students' native language is a powerful way to establish trust and to create community. Students can then more skillfully analyze and engage with culture throughout the rest of the year as well. We have been amazed by the depth of learning, community, and connection that occurs as people participate in this process.

Ideally, you will collect these stories created by students. Perhaps ask your colleagues, family members, students' families, and friends to also write these stories to share within the classroom. As we work within our own classroom community and then expand outward, we can create quite the treasure trove of first-person stories that can be shared.

World language teachers are poised to be leaders in creating multicultural—not just multilingual—classrooms and schools. Our learning how to do this as teachers matters deeply for our students and their futures. When we write and share cultural stories in our work toward multiculturalism, we start creating the space for true cross-cultural dialogue to happen. Dialogue and reciprocal cultural exchange are fundamental to understanding, cooperation, and peace.

Rachelle Adams (<http://www.elevateeducationconsulting.com/>) and Anna Gilcher (<https://annagilcherphd.wordpress.com>) presented at the National TPR Storytelling Conference. Handouts are available here:

[http://scho.schd.ws/hosted\\_files/ntprs2017/c6/Creating%20a%20Cultural%20Treasure%20Trove%20%28NTPRS%202017%29.pdf](http://scho.schd.ws/hosted_files/ntprs2017/c6/Creating%20a%20Cultural%20Treasure%20Trove%20%28NTPRS%202017%29.pdf)

They are available for trainings and inservices throughout the U.S. Adams also provided an on-line webinar for Fluency Fast Faculty in 2017. Rewriting the Story: Upending Bias Through Language Learning with Rachelle Adams.

(<https://newstore.fluencyfast.com/webinarrewriting-the-story-upending-bias-through-language-learning-with-rachelle>)



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 ~ Katie Hein ELA coordinator, Denver Public Schools

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Jason Fritze



Karen Rowan

## How to Organize an International Conference

### Judith Logsdon-Dubois



*In college, I majored in French and also studied German, Spanish, Greek, and Latin. I joined the Peace Corps to teach English in Cameroon. I moved with my family to France in 1984 and began teaching English in afternoon and evening classes for adults. I acquired a DEA in English literature and taught translation for a branch of the University of Bordeaux until 2005. I first heard of TPRS Storytelling® in 2005 and, like Stephen Krashen, I'm convinced it's the most effective method to teach languages in use today. I organized the first TPRS workshop in France which was held in Agen in August, 2013. Participants came from seven different countries. Last year participants came from 23 different countries. I am now organizing the sixth Agen Workshop, which will open on July 23rd, 2018 and last five days. <http://tprs-witch.com>*

The Agen Workshop was a bit of an accident. Christopher Columbus thought he was on his way to India, and I thought I was organizing a conference for English teachers in France.

### Dreaming Out Loud

I was extremely fortunate in having met Teri Wiechart at NTPRS in Minneapolis and that she remembered me. We connected on the moretpers listserv and began dreaming out loud. Teri accepted my invitation to come to Agen in 2013 and since then has helped me tremendously with her experience and knowledge of coaching and of who is who in the TPRS world. I had also met Lynnette St. George and Alike Last, and invited them as well. Perhaps the first ingredients of a successful conference are experienced users of the method who can model a typical class.

## Presenters



*Sabrina Sebban-Janczak, teaching the French Language Lab, Agen, 2016*

In later years, as we grew, we needed more presenters and I began looking at some of the better-known presenters. I discovered that people I knew only as “big names” were incredibly generous. They were usually willing to travel to France as long as their travel expenses were covered. I have not yet met anyone who is in this

for the money. Everyone I have dealt with believes that helping teachers learn to use Comprehensible Input methods is something worthwhile and important and that we are helping to make the world a better place.



*Blaine Ray, Agen 2017*

## Location

I then needed a place to hold the conference. My first thoughts were Bordeaux or Toulouse, two large neighboring cities that would have all the facilities and could accommodate visitors without any problem. But my budget was too modest to envision renting rooms in a big hotel, so I began looking closer to home. And I soon discovered that the Centre Culturel of Agen could rent rooms at a very reasonable rate, even for my limited means. And since Agen is not considered a big tourist attraction, hotel and restaurant prices were off-season and affordable. Only later did I realize how ideal Agen was for my purposes. International travelers can take the TGV (high speed train) from either Bordeaux, Toulouse, or Paris. The train station is downtown, within walking distance of our site, the main restaurants, and hotels. That means that our participants do not need a car for



transportation and are not shut up in a gigantic hotel miles and miles from the heart of the city, which sometimes happens.

### **Budget and “profit”**



*With Dr. Stephen Krashen, Agen 2017*

I had a site and I had presenters. Next I needed a budget. My first year, I estimated my costs and divided by a minimum number of participants. Later an English friend who is a retired accountant helped me set up something more detailed, and last year Lisa Hinkley Reyes gave me some good pointers. Of course, I learned that there are always unexpected, or unplanned costs. That means you need a “cushion” to absorb them. This is not

my strong point, so I try to find people who are better at bookkeeping than me to help out. My best advice, if you want to organize an international conference, is to forget the word “profit.” In my experience, profit is in hiding somewhere with the tooth fairy and the Easter rabbit. I work pretty hard all year round putting the conference together, but I’m very happy if we cover costs and have a little left over to prime the pump for next year. What I get out of it can’t be counted in euros or dollars and doesn’t go into the books.

### **Marketing**

With a budget, a site and presenters ready to go, I needed participants; I had to advertize the conference. I began by asking my daughter Kellie, who is a graphic artist, to design a flyer for me. I wanted it as professional as possible. When Kellie had too much work to continue with my flyers, she passed me on to a friend of hers, Julie Brault, who is very talented and has the time and patience to keep changing things until we get it right. Now she also prepares the Workshop Handbook which started out as the program and has now become a proper book. I have the flyer ready in November, so I can pass it out at the TESOL conference in Paris. Some years I have been able to have copies made in the States to be handed out to teachers there, but not on a large scale. I do have an ad in IJFLT each year.

### ***“A prophet in his own country”***

As for advertising the conference, in my case, the old adage about “a prophet in his own country” has held true. Only one of my former colleagues from the lycée has attended a workshop, and the articles that have appeared in the local newspapers have not been very convincing. One of the problems I encounter is

that the journalists fail to understand the purpose of the conference. They think of it as just one more language school with “an innovative method”. In general, the best articles were written by interns. They seemed to make the effort to try to understand and wrote more detailed articles. I suspect the “old hands” were a bit bored with my story, wanting something more earth-shaking or scandalous. Rather than spend a lot of time begging for articles, I now send them as much documentation as possible in French, including previous articles by other journalists. I have a description of TPRS in French on my web site and they quote from it.

There are other reasons why I don’t have many French teachers at the conference. Those who work for the Ministry of Education in France expect their professional development to be paid for by the ministry and to get time off from teaching their classes. Also, the French ministry’s official policy is currently in favor of problem-based learning, and I have not been able to convince their representatives that there is no fatal contradiction with Comprehensible Input strategies. I haven’t given up and I do have the support of some people who work in the universities and are interested in what is going on in Agen.

Almost all the teachers living in France who come to the conference first heard of me through TESOL International Association, an organization for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. In France, TESOL members usually work for private schools or independently. They have a large conference in Paris every year, the last weekend of November. They invite members to put in proposals for presentations every year and every time I have made a proposal I have been accepted as a speaker.

In 2012, I demonstrated TPRS in Croatian. I don’t speak Croatian and had planned on doing the demonstration in Ukrainian, having asked a woman I had met the day before to play along with me. (My original plan had been to work with my son Daniel, who teaches Breton, but he wasn’t able to come.) Unfortunately, the woman from the Ukraine wasn’t able to get to my presentation on time. Just before the beginning of my hour-long talk I saw a woman with a badge saying she was from Croatia and asked her to step in. To my amazement, it actually went quite well. We learned how to say, “has a car” in Croatian and I went around the room asking who had a car and what kind of car and of course the man from Saudi Arabia had a big silver Mercedes and the woman from Strasbourg had a little blue Renault and the man from the Netherlands had half a car. We laughed and had a good time. Although there were only twenty some people present, three of them decided to come to the conference to learn more about TPRS. They keep coming back and they keep bringing friends.

I have also been to local events sponsored by TESOL, in Bordeaux, Toulouse, Lyon, and Strasbourg. Even if only one person decides to come to Agen, I

know that that person may bring more next time, so my traveling expenses are justified.

My other source of participants was the internet. People on the moretpers list and people on Ben Slavic's Professional Learning Community knew me from my posts and decided to come to Agen. For those living in Europe it was much cheaper than going to a conference in the States. For American teachers of French, it was a chance to visit France and practice their French while getting some professional training. Those who taught Spanish or German or Italian could fit us in with their summer plans. I set up a web site and a Facebook page and try to post articles that may interest language teachers as often as possible. On Facebook I try to keep my professional page, TPRS Witch, separate from my personal page. Occasionally I post a warning to teachers that if they don't like my politics or are not interested in my grandchildren, they can unfollow me.

I spend a lot of time on the internet, following discussions and keeping up with new ideas. I don't plug the Workshop all the time, only when it seems relevant. I realize that while people appreciate information, they are quick to suspect ulterior motives. The most effective advertising strategy is word of mouth. Past participants have gone home very happy about their week in Agen and over the years we have acquired a reputation that is precious to me. It's something I'm determined to protect and maintain.

### **Competition or Collaboration?**

*"...in the TPRS World there is no such thing as competition."*

Agen 2018 will be our sixth conference. I have made mistakes and learned some lessons that I would like to share. One thing I realized is that in the TPRS/CI world there is no such thing as competition. Although Comprehensible Input has much better press now than it did a few years ago, there is still plenty of room to grow. I was just a little put out last year when some friends in the Netherlands organized a weekend conference that they called ETPRS, European TPRS. David Maconaghie had given that name to Agen when he came in 2013 and Ben Slavic had used it to talk about our conference. I had thought it lacked modesty at the time. After all, there were only 15 people in Agen that first year. When my Dutch friends started saying they were the first European TPRS conference, I did protest, so they settled for being the first TPRS conference in northern Europe.

But their conference did not harm us in any way. It was actually a big boost for Agen. Many Dutch, Belgian, and German teachers heard of my workshop in Agen for the first time at ETPRS. All of a sudden I was getting applications from all over the Netherlands. Now people are planning conferences in other

countries, and I'm very happy about it. Perhaps TPRS/CI conferences are addictive. You can never get enough.

This year Annie Beach and Cathy Elliott, who teach Indonesian in Australia, asked me if I would mind talking to them about how I organized the Agen Workshop, because they hope to organize conferences in Australia. They seemed almost embarrassed, as if they were asking me to give them the secret formula for Coca-Cola. Perhaps they thought that I might consider them as competition. The first idea that came to my mind was that it was flattering that they actually thought I knew what I was doing. The second thought was the more, the merrier. The more teachers that learn about Comprehensible Input methods, the more there are that might be tempted to spend a week in a lovely little town in southwest France, eating some of the best food in the world in charming little restaurants with ridiculously cheap prices, spending time with some amazingly passionate teachers, and meeting face to face their virtual friends from the internet. Annie was our first participant from Australia. Cathy joined her this year. I hope that next year there will be half a dozen from "Down Under."

### **The Secret Weapon**

#### *"I still haven't revealed my Secret Weapon..."*

I still haven't revealed my secret weapon, the essential element to having a successful conference, wherever you are. The secret weapon is accepting help from other people with different strengths and talents. I was very fortunate, right from the beginning, in having friends that believed in my dream, friends that were better organized and more methodical than I was. I've mentioned Teri Wiechart, but that first year would never have happened if Aicha Belkadi and Françoise Soriano hadn't believed in me. Françoise made lists and furnished a first aid kit and made coffee and tea and bought fresh fruit and taxied people right and left throughout the conference. She also reminded me that we would need toilet paper. Her devotion, enthusiasm and energy were inspiring. Her practical mind was invaluable. Lillian Stirling came as a participant that first year and has been back every year since then to help me make my dream come true. I rely heavily on her level head, her good humor and her ability to count. Sometimes Lillian can just cock her head and ask, "Is that really what you want?" to make me stop and think instead of getting carried away. Christine Brechmier is an adult student who has become a very good friend and is now an essential part of the workshop. Last year we realized that we needed a different system for the coffee and tea breaks. Christine took it over and ran it single-handedly this year. She did a great job and I'm still trying to figure out how to thank her.

Then, of course, I have to mention Daniel Dubois. He was curious the first year, not sure his mother had anything to show him. Of course, he's a born story-teller and enjoys relating to people, so he was already half-way there, a



bit like Obélix who fell into the magic potion when he was a baby. Teri pronounced him a natural and knew how to coach him so that he developed his skills without ever feeling the prisoner of a “method”. He has grown into a model demonstrator and I feel very proud of what he has accomplished, giving those who are new to Comprehensible Input the invaluable experience of being a

student in Breton, a language that is fundamentally different from any they know.

So, in conclusion, how do you organize an international conference for language teachers? Well, you start by dreaming big and then you find a group of very competent



friends who share your dream. You tell them the truth about what you can and can't do, and you listen to them when they tell you the truth. After that, all you have to do is to remember to say thank you.

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## The Power of Home Run Reading

Debbie Harrison



“*The Power of Reading* by Stephen Krashen is my home run reading book,” I excitedly told my professor in class. “What did you just say?” she gasped, as my colleagues stared at us and listened intently. I think we all sensed that something significant had just happened. “Yes! *The Power of Reading* is my home run reading book,” I repeated a bit more loudly this time. “Unbelievable. Forgive me if I do backflips right here. Now, go write about it,” the professor responded excitedly.

In what follows is the story about how one fine day, I discovered and internalized Stephen Krashen’s ideas about literacy and the power of reading. I finally *got it*. That day I finally made a connection to the coursework I had been struggling with, but more importantly, I found my passion. It was a true and very powerful text-to-life experience.

The purpose of this article is to explore the idea of the home run book’s impact on reading. We will examine how free voluntary reading (FVR), or pleasure reading, can affect reluctant and avid readers as well as social media readers, and finally the impact of reading for me personally.

### The Impact of My Home Run Reading Book

The term *home run reading book* refers to that book that made us fall in love with reading. “[Jim] Trelease (2001) introduced the concept of a “home run” book, a reading experience that readers claim stimulated their initial interest in reading. The idea of a home run book comes from an observation made by Clifton Fadiman: “One’s first book, kiss, home run, is always the best”” (Ujiié & Krashen,

2002, pp. 36-37). *The Box Car Children* was my home run reading book when I began to read as a child, but *The Power of Reading* is my home run book in my professional world. I have always been a voracious reader. I can remember being in second or third grade and going to the school library in our small town in North Dakota to check out *The Box Car Children* books by Gertrude Chandler Warner. How I loved reading those books. I once asked my mom how I learned to read. She told me she had no idea since we used to read little dime store picture books over and over so many times that she was convinced I was a genius because I could “read” the stories by myself. She followed up by adding that we had read them so much that I probably had just memorized them. However, make no doubt: I was reading.

Early on in my first semester of the English as a New Language (ENL) program, I struggled with the fact that I did not have any ENL students in my school or in my small town in northeastern Wyoming, where I am a high school English teacher who works with juniors and seniors.

As my first semester went on, I seriously considered withdrawing from classes. I just was not understanding what the professors wanted from us. I had no idea what I was going to do for a final project. I felt overwhelmed by all of it.

“Try this,” the professor said as she handed me her copy of *The Power of Reading* (2004) by Stephen Krashen, and then she left me alone. As I read, I began to understand how important reading was to the success of language learners as well as students in any setting. I began to make sense of how reading affects language learning; I began to understand how getting kids reading could help them acquire language! Later in those classes, we continued to talk about home run reading and its impact on learning. Dr. Wink’s stories about Krashen’s ideas lead me to a more serious exploration of literacy for students that might help them enjoy reading more.

### **The Impact of Reading**

As a teacher, parent, student, and reader myself, I know the impact reading can have every day. We learn much of what goes on in the world by reading. I check my email first thing in the morning to see if I have any messages or texts waiting. I check the news every day on my computer. Before I go to bed at night I read whatever novel is on my bedside table. Being an avid reader, I struggle to understand why other people do not read. I struggle every day with ways to get my students to be readers. How do we help students find their home run reading book that will turn them into lifelong readers?

I think daily about the power of reading and its impact on learning. I talk about the impact of reading to family, students, and co-workers alike. We are not talking about assigned reading. We are talking about what Krashen describes as Free Voluntary Reading (FVR). No tests, no book reports, no evaluations, just reading for the love of reading.

The impact of reading goes far beyond a student's ability to read and understand the world better. Reading also increases a student's ability to communicate well. Reading helps students recognize proper sentence structure and grammar. Writing well, using diction appropriately helps students open their minds and experiment with their own creativity. As I have learned from reading Frank Smith and listening to Joan Wink, writing makes us smarter. Or, as Krashen tells us: "When we write, our mind automatically helps us solve problems, and in doing so, stimulates intellectual growth" (Krashen, 2005, p. 66). Reading fosters the ability to write well; it helps readers compose their thoughts and ideas to express them to others through writing.

### **The Impact on a Reluctant Reader**

Years ago, the school district I worked for added a contemporary literature class to my teaching schedule. I had been asking to teach a class that students could join just for *the love of reading*. When the counselor started scheduling classes, one student, Lindsey, a straight-A student, came to see me about the literature class. She told me she didn't like to read, so was hoping my class would help her learn to appreciate reading. I was both excited and apprehensive about this new challenge.

The following fall when I started the class I decided that our first book would be Mitch Albom's *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* (2006). It was a great book to kick things off; it was easy to read with an interesting subject. A couple of days after we started I ran into Lindsey's mom at a school activity. The first thing she said to me was, "What did you do to my daughter?" I didn't even know how to respond, so she continued. "We were watching TV but Lindsey wasn't in the room. When I went to check on her, she was sitting in a chair in her room reading her book! I couldn't believe it."

The next day Lindsey came into class excited about what she had read, and she was eager to talk about it. The rest of that semester she continued to ask me for book recommendations, which she immediately read and came to discuss with me and the class. Nicholas Sparks turned out to be a favorite of hers. Lindsey had always been a good student, but she seemed to be even more involved and interactive once she realized that reading was something that could be done for pleasure.

### **The Impact of Reading for Pleasure**

Reading for pleasure is essential according to Krashen (2004). Students who read because they enjoy it gain essential grammar and usage skills by osmosis. Much like students acquiring a new language, if the stories they are reading are “interesting and compelling” as Krashen tells us, students will acquire what they need. That not only works for acquisition of a new language, but also for vocabulary, grammar, spelling, writing ability, and knowledge of the world.

My daughter Jamie recently attended conferences for her second-grade daughter. Aamira’s teacher told Jamie that Aamira was reading at a fourth-grade level so it was hard to find books for her that were at her level but still appropriate for her age. I asked Jamie if they read with her a lot, but Jamie told me that very often Aamira can be found sitting on her bed with a book. That love of reading seems to be something innate, something that she loves doing despite the fact that there is no big push to read from her parents. As a result, her vocabulary skills and her ideas about the world are much broader than what many expect from a 7-year-old. Not only is my granddaughter an avid reader, but so is my father. When I was growing up, I do not think I ever saw my dad pick up a book. We farmed and ranched in the Dakotas and there just did not seem to be enough time in the day to read for pleasure. Even after my dad returned to school and began working in farm credit, he did not read for pleasure, but since his retirement he has learned to take time for reading. He would come home from auction sales with boxes and boxes of old westerns. Last year I bought him a Kindle. It has become a full-time job for my mom to keep his Kindle loaded with books since he reads about a book a day. Recently I loaded a dictionary on his Kindle. He is amazed at the technology that allows him to place the cursor over a word only to have the definition pop up on the screen. Even at the age of 75, my dad is still learning new vocabulary, experiencing new adventures, and working hard to keep his mind sharp despite the effects of aging.

### **The Impact of Reading on Social Media**

Also relevant today, when it comes to student reading, is the massive amount of online reading students participate in. Krashen has spoken often about Free Voluntary Surfing (FVS) to accompany FVR. Students are reading and writing posts through text messages, Facebook, Snapchat and a host of other social media apps. Although this is not academic communication, students are reading and writing more than at any other time in history. Literacy is happening voluntarily through the exchange of messages.

### **The Impact of Reading Academically**

The problem with student reading is that more often than not, students who have not found their home run reading book have not discovered their own love of reading. As a result, students struggle to read academically because they have not acquired the reading skills developed through Free Voluntary Reading, which Krashen (2004) tells us is so important to academic success. Without these skills students are at risk of scoring lower on high stakes tests such as ACT and SATs. For ELL students, reading is a bridge to understanding more and more language in context. Reading books that they can comprehend but that challenge them just a little to stretch their understanding, goes a long way towards language acquisition.

### **The Impact of Reading and Stress**

I was recently talking to my nieces about the importance of reading for pleasure. My 13-year-old niece said she does not like to read because it isn't interesting. That is the issue I see with some of my students, as well. The exception to this rule seems to be with students who have difficult home lives or have suffered some kind of trauma. My 15-year-old niece who has been affected by several difficult events over the past year entered the conversation with her own ideas about reading. "When I am reading," she said, "I am hearing about other people's problems so I don't have to think about what has happened in my life. I can read for hours to escape the thoughts in my head."

Studies done on the effect of reading and stress back up this idea of relief from the worries and problems of life. Reading provides a type of escapism from traumatic events, according to cognitive neuropsychologist Dr. David Lewis: "... by losing yourself in a thoroughly engrossing book you can escape from the worries and stresses of the everyday world... This is more than merely a distraction but an active engaging of the imagination as the words on the printed page stimulate your creativity and cause you to enter what is essentially an altered state of consciousness" (*The Telegraph*, 2009).

Students who come to this country from areas of conflict can not only acquire language through voluntary reading, but can also escape from their own thoughts brought on by post-traumatic stress. Reading for pleasure provides benefits that range far beyond just learning something new.

### **The Impact of Reading on Me Personally**

Reading, especially the love of reading, has provided me with a world far beyond my physical boundaries. As an active duty Air Force member I have traveled to

Asia, living in the Philippines and visiting Korea and Japan; I was also stationed in Germany and traveled to several European countries. Since becoming an empty-nester, I have traveled often to Great Britain and Western Europe. Reading allows me to experience worlds beyond what is natural; science fiction and science fantasy are favorites. Because of my love of reading, I have also excelled academically, currently working towards my second master's degree. Even with all of this life experience I still love the experiences and adventures discovered through reading.

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## Language Acquisition for Language Teachers A new column on language acquisition

**Karen Rowan**



Most occupations require workers to continue professional development throughout their careers. Teachers receive ongoing training about many aspects of education. Among language teachers, non-native speakers of the language they teach often struggle to keep their language skills up; they need as much focus on professional development in language acquisition as in other areas of education. Those who do not live near native speakers need to find creative solutions.

We will continue an ongoing occasional column on ways to improve advanced language skills in many languages, although our primary focus is Spanish acquisition.

Comprehensible Input is what leads to language acquisition for our students. As teachers, perhaps self-conscious about our language ability or wanting to acquire a new language, we often forget to apply the same rules to ourselves. Comprehensible Input leads to language acquisition at all levels.

Here are some options:

1. **Take a class.** Not any class. A class that uses TPR Storytelling® and Comprehensible Input to teach. [Fluency Fast Classes](#) are one option. We primarily teach Spanish. Classes this year are in Denver, Colorado; Olympia, Washington; Norman, Oklahoma and Boston, Massachusetts. (This is my company.)

2. **Immersion.** Not just any immersion. Immersion with a home stay and sheltered subject matter classes are ideal, but classes with a particular CI/TPRS focus are the best. Avoid classes that focus on teaching grammar. One travel option is the [International Forum of Language Teaching](#) taking place over a 3 week period in Cuernavaca, Mexico. This is specifically for Spanish teachers wanting to improve their Spanish. Dr. Stephen Krashen will also present on language acquisition theory. Information is also on their [Facebook page](#).
3. **Read.** Not just any book. Look for books that are designed for language learners. If you are learning a new language, look for low word counts with glossaries in the back. If you are trying to improve a language you are already proficient in, go for quantity. Instead of choosing books that are time-consuming and difficult to read, choose many easy books with few new words and plots that are compelling. (You will find advertisements in this journal for [Command Performance Language Institute](#). Mike Peto also maintains a [blog](#) with a list of new and independently published readers. He is also the author of easy readers available on that page. Two other publishers of easy readers for language learners are TPRSBooks (Formerly Blaine Ray Workshops) and Fluency Matters (Formerly TPRS Publishing). In all cases, we recommend ordering books directly from the authors or publishers rather than distributors whenever possible.
4. **Take an on-line class or video.** Alina Filipescu, a Spanish teacher in California, is a polyglot, determined to add more languages to her repertoire and to improve each language she knows. She teaches Spanish, although her first language is Romanian. She is now acquiring French and recommends the videos of [Alice Ayel](#). She contributed [a blog](#) on her French journey to TPRS for Chinese.  
Fluency Fast also has pre-recorded on-line videos of previous classes in Spanish, French, Russian, Arabic and German. The French class is new, recorded this summer, with [Donna Tatum-Johns](#).
5. **Netflix.** Television. Movies. TV shows. Binge-watching. I personally am trying to improve my own Spanish. While I am reading and taking TPRS classes to learn beginning French, all French television is too advanced for me. For Spanish, though, it is my number one resource for improving my advanced Spanish. I started with El Internado. I have also watched El tiempo entre costuras, Velvet, El Barco, El ministerio de tiempo, La embajada, Las chicas del cable and Gran Hotel. Other recommendations have been Ingobernable, La Niña and Juana Inés and Bala Loca. Some of these are not available in the U.S. I downloaded them onto my iPad while I was traveling in either Mexico or Spain. When I returned, I did not reconnect to the internet in the U.S. until I had finished watching as many episodes as I had downloaded. This will work

when leaving the U.S., also. (Once Netflix re-connects to U.S. internet, programs downloaded in other countries will no longer play.) For all episodes, I use the subtitles in Spanish and listen and read simultaneously.

6. **Make a friend.** Whether in person by going to meet-ups or local events with native speakers or on-line in a conversation exchange, keeping up and improving your own language ability in the language you teach Alina Filapescu also has a Skype friend with whom she practices English for 30 minutes and Spanish for 30 minutes weekly. I took up Salsa and Bachata dancing and slowly changed by social group to primarily Spanish speakers.

These are not light recommendations. As non-native speakers of the languages we teach, continuing to improve our language skills is critical. All of us need to continue to spend time exposed to comprehensible input in the language we wish to learn. As teachers, this is a job requirement and we don't all live in places where we have easy access to native speakers.

In future articles we will address more in-depth language acquisition at the advanced and beginning levels. Links are included in this article. If you know of more, please forward them to us.

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