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The Relationship between TRP (Total Physical Response) with Memory of Chinese Characters

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The Relationship between Total Physical Response and Recognition of Simplified Chinese Characters

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Introduction

In the U.S., the traditional teaching method requires students to spend one or two years to learn pinyin, an American alphabet system that represents phonetic pronunciation, before learning characters. This leads us to conclude that many Chinese learners highly depend on pinyin to read. In reality, Chinese native speakers need to read Chinese characters in order to understand and almost never use pinyin. Taking those factors into consideration, a combination of the strategy of Total Physical Response and Chinese character recognition was proposed.

Research Question:

How does TPR impact students to memorize Chinese characters?

Materials and Methods

An experiment was given in a Level I Chinese class which included 9 students at Washington Township High School. Two lessons were taught with more traditional method while another 2 lesson were taught with the newer method. Lessons were taught within four weeks and started on April 2 and continued until to April 27. Two surveys and two quizzes were taken to compare the results.

Step 1 Paper Survey

To find out the students preconceived knowledge of learning Chinese, one survey was completed before the experiment began. The Survey was to determine what each student opinion on learning Chinese characters the best way. Each student was asked to fill out the survey which had four unique choices. Students were required to choose 2 options with the first one being their preferred choice. The result is presented in Figure 1.

The questions on the survey were as follows:
❑ Through the actions that are connected to the meaning of characters.
❑ Through the actions that are connected to the structure of characters.
❑ Through the practice of calligraphy.
❑ Through the images that are connected to the meaning of characters.

### Step 2 Four Lessons and Two Quizzes

After taking the first survey, two lessons were taught with an older teaching method within two weeks. This included two vocabulary quizzes at the end of each lesson. The 2 lessons that followed were conducted in the same manner of the first two. The same amount of time and quizzes were given. Only the method was changed. In the quizzes, students were asked to look at flash cards with only Chinese characters on them, and write down the English translation by order. The result is presented in Figure 2.

Step 3 Oral Survey

After four weeks were completed, students were given another survey by orally answering the question "After these two weeks of character learning with TPR strategy, how many of you think this method helps you memorize the character?" The result is presented in Figure 4.
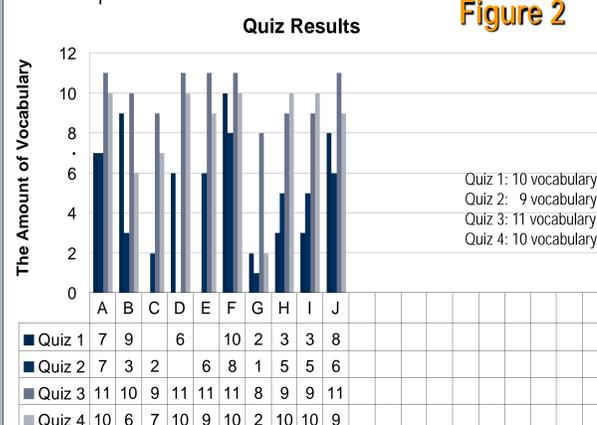
Result

Figure 1
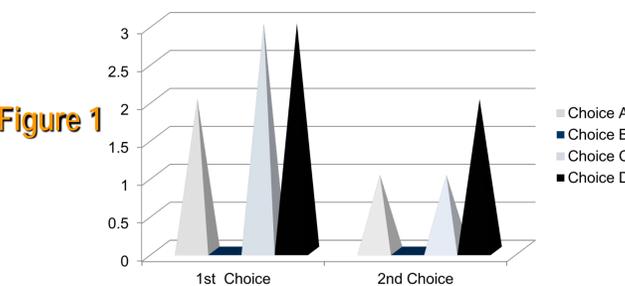
Choice A: Action and meaning of characters
Choice B: Action and structure of characters
Choice C: Calligraphy
Choice D: Images and meaning of characters

From the data in Figure 1, we can see that no student selected Choice B as neither their 1st choice nor 2nd. Choice C and D were chosen the most . Choice D was chosen at most as second choice. To conclude my findings, Choice B was selected by none, Choice A was the way students thought least helpful for learning characters, and Choice C and D were found to be most helpful. I find that most students were not interested in learning characters that required action.

Figure 2

Quiz Results

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Quiz 1	7	9		6		10	2	3	3	8
Quiz 2	7	3	2		8	1	5	5	6	
Quiz 3	11	10	9	11	11	11	8	9	9	11
Quiz 4	10	6	7	10	9	10	2	10	10	9

Quiz 1: 10 vocabulary
Quiz 2: 9 vocabulary
Quiz 3: 11 vocabulary
Quiz 4: 10 vocabulary

In the Figure 2, almost all the students made a huge improvement in Quiz 3 and 4 when compared to the first two quizzes. Even though three students missed one class each, the latest scores exceeded greatly from previous quizzes. Furthermore, there was only 1 student to get a perfect score in Quiz 1 and none did in Quiz 2. However, in Quiz 3 and 4, 5 students got full credits in each quiz. This grouping of data proves the strength applying the TPR in character memorization.

Figure 3

Selection of TRP Strategy

Action / Non-Action

11%

89%
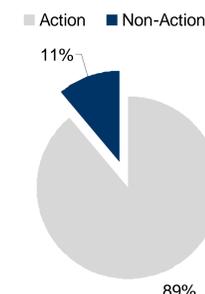
In the second survey after the whole study, 8 out of 9 students agreed that TPR strategy helped them with the memorization of characters. Only one student did not think TPR helped and he preferred visual learning which refers to the text book. Overall, 89% of the class believed that TPR helped students remember and recognize Chinese characters.

Discussion

According to the above three groups of data, it shows that a positive response can be given to the research question for this study. I conclude that the TPR strategy is helpful for Chinese learners to recognize Chinese characters.
In the first survey, students seemed not very interested in learning vocabulary by using TPR strategy which basically requires student interactions. Since high school students are not as active as middle school students are, it was not surprising to see their indifference over TPR strategy from the first survey. However, although students were not interested in doing action to learn vocabulary before the action research, students had to admit that they made a big improvement on recognizing Chinese characters by using the TPR strategy. After the whole study was finished, all students did not hesitate to tell me the helpfulness of TPR strategy, except the student who preferred visual learning.

Besides the improvement students made on quizzes, the interest of students to learn Chinese characters was peaked as well. For instance, students C and G who were relatively weak in this class, not only made a great advancements in the quizzes at but also showed more excitement during the learning process.

Implications

As a teacher candidate, I am very excited about the result of this first action research in my teaching career. TPR strategy gives power to Chinese character learning. It not only improves a student's grade but also improves a student's interest for learning characters. The more students can recognize characters, the more they will feel proud of learning this hard language and then more interest will be caught. I believe, interest is the best tool for teaching.
Due to the positive result of this action research, I highly recommend P-12 Chinese teachers to use TPR strategy to teach reading Chinese characters. It will make both teaching and learning easy and interesting!
According to other studies, TPR is a strategy that is suitable for teaching all foreign languages, from students to children to adults. It is a good resource to apply for further research in the whole education field. More studies on Chinese learning with TPR might be worthy to do such as, the relationship between TPR and Chinese writing.

Ideas for Continuing or Expanding Data

Even though the result of this action research went positively, there were some limitations. First, due to limited time, the amount of hours which should be 14 hours learning with TPR strategy was cut into only 3 to 4 learning hours for one lesson. Secondly, since there was only one class available for this study, the data from 9 students might not be enough. To firmly conclude my findings, more teaching hours in more classes should be added into any future research.

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