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Total Physical Response in the Foreign Language Classroom

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Abstract

The following research addresses a critical question in the field of foreign language education; specifically, the research was conducted at a high school in the Spanish 2 classroom. First, the question was decided upon after careful observation of many 95 Spanish students in Spanish2. Many students struggle with communicating with one another; communication is a key component in learning a foreign language. The students struggled because they did not know vocabulary words to communicate. Therefore, this research studies the effect of Total Physical Response in the foreign language classroom. TPR (total physical response) is a method which requires students to physically respond to words. TPR also assumes that by producing words, students then understand the words. The research question is as follows: Will total physical response increase vocabulary retention in second year Spanish students?

To collect this data, there were three different methods used: observation, student interviews, and data collection. The data collection shows the average scores between two different classes. One, the control class, learned the vocabulary as normal. There was no difference in the methodology and no use of TPR. The other class learned the vocabulary through use of TPR. The data shows that the class who used TPR scored an average of 2.64 points higher. Additionally, initial observation showed that students were more engaged when using TPR.

Research Question/Hypothesis

Question: Will Total Physical Response (TPR) increase vocabulary retention in second-year Spanish students?

Hypothesis: I hypothesize that TPR will increase vocabulary retention in second-year Spanish students because it requires that all students are engaged in recognizing the new vocabulary; furthermore, previous literature highlights the benefits of using TPR in classrooms.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to collect data, I will observe a maroon-day Spanish 2 class on the day that vocabulary is introduced in order to see the specific differences between total physical response teaching and more traditional teaching. Through observation, I will be able to recognize the differences in teaching styles and how the vocabulary is presented to the students and if this could possibly have an effect on their retention. Next, once students take their first vocabulary quiz, I will compare the scores of that quiz to those of the previous unit and see if their scores increased, decreased, or stayed the same. Concrete numbers such as test scores will help me to see exactly if total physical response increased vocabulary retention, decreased vocabulary retention, or had no effect. Finally, I will interview groups of students to see how total physical response affected their learning. Did the motions help them to remember words? What was helpful about total physical response and what was not helpful? How was this different than the normal introduction of vocabulary? What method did you prefer when learning vocabulary—traditional or total physical response? What observations did you make about your own personal vocabulary retention from total physical response? In this data, I will look for a few things: first, in observations, I will look to isolate the differences in the introduction of vocabulary. How is total physical response differing from the traditional method and how does total physical response help to include many aspects of the human mind and body to facilitate learning? This will also be from my own perspective. In the quiz scores, I will simply look at the concrete numbers—did scores improve? Lastly, I will look at the interview responses from students to see their perspective—what was their reaction to total physical response? How did they view total physical response in relation to their vocabulary retention?

Research Instrument

The research instruments I will be using include: student interviews, observation, and data collection (quiz scores).

RESULTS

STUDENT OBSERVATIONS

WITHOUT USE OF TPR:

- The teacher says the words aloud and the students repeat them.
- The words are on a PowerPoint slide so that students can also see pictures of the words.
- As the teacher continues through the words, many students begin to “glaze over”.
- Students do not appear interested and are not paying attention.
- There is no context for the words, they are simply stated and repeated.
- Many students no longer follow the words in their book.
- About 3 or 4 students appear to be paying attention by the end of the words and are following the words with the PowerPoint in their books.

STUDENT INTERVIEWS

- The majority of students enjoyed learning the vocabulary using TPR for the following reasons:
 - They were able to move around which made it more interesting.
 - They were able to remember the clothing article by pointing at the part of the body that it corresponds to .
 - They had to be able to act the word instead of just say it so it was easier to memorize.
 - They could see the words physically acted out instead of just repeating them.
- A few students said that they did not enjoy using TPR for the following reasons:
 - Feeling embarrassed and childish doing the motions.
 - Distracted easily and it was harder to focus standing up.
 - Some of the motions were not realistic.
 - The classic method of seeing the word and repeating it is comfortable so they prefer learning that way.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

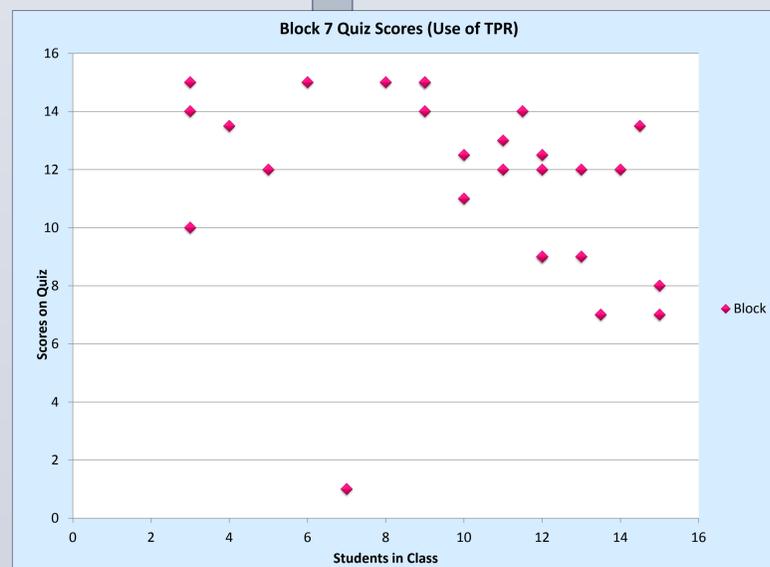
In conclusion, this research seems to show that TPR helps with vocabulary retention in Spanish 2 students. Overall, students who used TPR scored slightly higher on vocabulary quizzes and they personally felt as if they benefitted from the use of Total Physical Response. However, there is not a drastic change, meaning TPR helps to a degree; however, more research needs to be done to see what other methods may lead to a greater increase in vocabulary retention for second year Spanish students.

For a classroom, I would recommend using Total Physical Response to begin introducing vocabulary because it will initially help students to retain slightly more information; however, students will need more than TPR to further increase vocabulary retention.

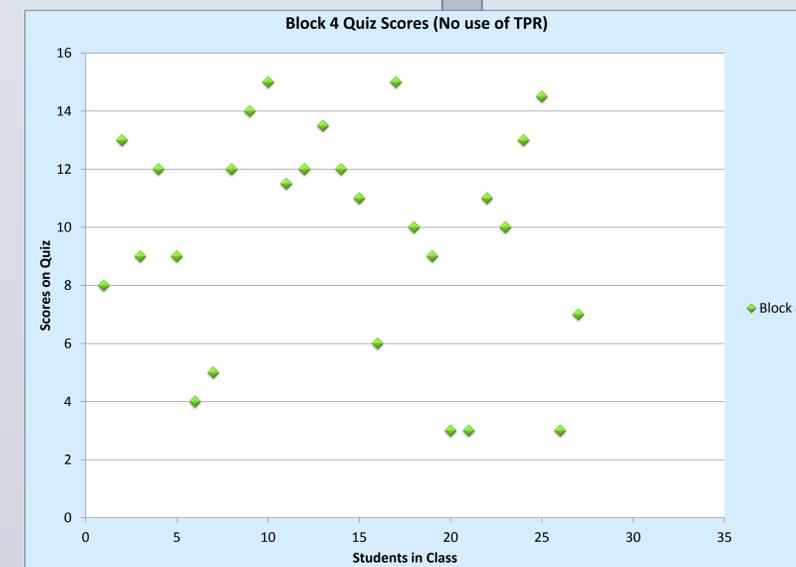
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Quiz Scores: No use of TPR vs. TPR



Average Score:
9.155



Average Score:
11.79