

Fostering Student Well-being, Safety, and English Skills Through Martial Science Games

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This paper summarizes the author's contribution to the LLL SIG-sponsored Lifelong Language Learning Mini Conference "Fostering student well-being, safety, and English skills through martial science games" that was presented at the Okinawa JALT Summer Symposium 2023.

Introduction and Rationale

The objective of this workshop was to demonstrate the use of James Asher's Total Physical Response (TPR) (Jones, 2011) in the classroom, and how to apply TPR to a lesson promoting the safety and well-being of students based on martial science of Chapél (Jones, 2012).

Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response is an approach to acquiring language developed by James Asher in the 1960s and is based on previous language teaching methods, notably the Natural Method of Heness and Sauveur in the 1870s and the Palmer Method in the 1920s (Smith, 2004).

It uses an analogy of a split brain where the left brain is logical and processes language whilst the right brain observes, and pattern matches input to existing knowledge. The right brain acts as a gate keeper to allow or deny novel information to be stored in longer term memory. Many language teaching methods focus on the left brain to make sense of a new language. TPR makes use of the right brain to pattern match the novel L2 into existing L1 neural networks.

The basic idea is for the students to listen to commands often

supported by gestures and demonstrate their understanding physically. For example, the teacher would say, “Stand up and walk to the blackboard.” The student demonstrates their understanding of the target language by standing up and walking towards the blackboard. These series of “language body conversations” show that comprehension of the L2 has taken place (Asher, 2009). The lesson starts with easily “TPRable” words (Gross, 2010) such as everyday objects, classroom objects and concrete verbs such as walk, point, touch, throw.

This is congruent with Krashen’s (1983) Natural Approach, notably providing Comprehensible Input in reducing the Affective Filter. As students gain comprehension of the second language before the students are expected to produce the second language by talking or writing, the stress of learning is reduced, so lowering Krashen’s Affective Filter.

The students gain more target language; then they are challenged to demonstrate physically their understanding of more complex commands. This can be done by adding new language items, combining commands together in a chain or varying the order of the chained commands. This is congruent with Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (Jones, 2009).

This comprehension before production experience is the same way that students learned their first language as children. The students gain comprehension from understanding small chunks of concrete language before moving onto more abstract language.

Vygotsky and TPR both warn not to repeatedly use the same commands after comprehension has been achieved. In doing so adaptation occurs (Asher, 2009); this is when the students can become bored of the lesson and their language ability starts to decline, boredom sets or it leads to teacher dependence.

Self-Defense

The goal of a self-defense training is to gain knowledge to become aware of how to avoid, deter, deescalate, survive potential assaults. The first knowledge is an awareness of different types of violence, i.e., asocial and social. Simply put social interpersonal violence is often about social interactions of people attempting to establish

territory and social hierarchies. It is the “What are you looking at?” confrontations that can lead to violence and is focused on individuals or the group.

Asocial violence is criminal use of violence where the attacker is more concerned with getting something from the defendant, than who their defendant is. Rory Miller categorizes Resource Predators as those who want something from you, like your wallet; and Process Predators those who enjoy the experiences of taking something from you (Miller, 2008).

A vital part of self-defense is trusting your instincts. Your instincts are informed by your subconscious pattern-matching mind and they identify potentially dangerous situations. Unfortunately, your instincts do not always have a voice to explain why you are in danger. They can signal you with a feeling, e.g., the hairs standing up on the back of your neck. As De Becker explains in his seminal “Gift of Fear” book, honor these instincts (De Becker, 2000).

Martial Science

Martial Science as taught by Ron Chapél, is an umbrella term to describe the application of various disciplines applied to interactive body mechanics in a self-defense scenario, viewed through the lens of psychology of confrontation. The American Tactical Chuan Fa 100 Series (Chapél, 1991) is a series of self-defense problem scenarios examining the common attacks found in street assaults, namely combinations of punches, kicks and tackles. Martial Science teaches a measured moral, ethical and legally articulatable use of force in response to a series of attacks by attackers. It follows the scientific method of Research, Hypothesis, Experimentation, Results Analysis, Findings. The findings need to be teachable and learnable and repeatable (Jones, 2015).

Workshop Details

This one-hour workshop took place on 12 August 2023. It was attended by seven participants, five women and two men, and facilitated by the author. The workshop was divided into three sections. The first section introduced the theory of TPR for ten

minutes followed by an introduction to the theory of self-defense for ten minutes. The middle section of the workshop was used to apply TPR to the goal of student well-being and safety by examining common self-defense scenarios. This took thirty minutes. The final section was a question-and-answer session of ten minutes, used to explore the themes of the workshop.

TPR Games

TPR Warm Up Games

At first the instructor says a long series of commands in fluent L2 and the participants look at each other not understanding. Then the instructor tells them by the end of the hour lesson they will be able to understand and physically follow those instructions. This is generally met by a combination of disbelief, amazement, and excitement.

The participants were asked to listen to instructions and follow them. The instructor can check for comprehension by observing their actions. A video demonstrating similar games using the TPR approach can be accessed from the internet (TPR and Language Acquisition, 2009).

Heel Palm Pushing Door Game

The first game was to imagine pushing open a heavy door with one foot forward. Then the participants moved to find a spot on the wall to push the wall using their heel palm to make contact with the wall.

U-Shape Camera Game

The participants followed instructions to form a U-Shape hand posture. The U-Shape is formed by spreading your fingers out, palms facing away, with the thumbs touching. Extend your arms halfway out with the thumbs horizontal at chin height. Imagine the U-Shape is a camera lens; turn around the room finding interesting things to photograph.

Push-Pull Hand Game

The next game was a game to stand facing one's partner with arms halfway extended in the U-Shape, having your U-Shape palms touching your partner's U-Shape palms. The instructions were for one person to slowly push out their Heel Palms towards their partner's shoulder. Their partner would yield by slowly bringing their palm back, then pause and push out so both partners have their hands back in the start position. This was then repeated by the partners taking turns, pushing either their left or right hands out.

Ship's Anchor Tracing Game

Trace a picture of an old-fashioned ship's anchor on your face. The horizontal cross piece goes one inch above your eyebrows from side to side. The vertical shank goes from the top of your forehead to the tip of your chin. The semi-circular points start below one ear and trace to the base of the other ear.

Flicking Water Game

Imagine you have just washed your hands and your hands are still wet. Flick one hand out straight, making sure your thumb and fingers are splayed out as wide as possible. Now repeat on the other side. Now flick both hands out together. We will call this the Chinese Exploding Hand Game.

Hair "Kame" Touch Game

After the Chinese Exploding Hand run both of your palms to smooth back your hair from front to back and continue to the U-Shape Camera position.

Upside Down Heart Apology Game

After the Chinese Exploding Hands continue with both of your hands to trace an upside-down heart pattern in front of you ending with a clap of your hands at heart height and continue to the U-

Shape Camera position.

Martial Science Games

At first the instructor gave a long series of commands in fluent L1 based on a martial science problem scenario. For example, “You are walking down the street when suddenly you are grabbed from behind. You escape from the grab and the attacker starts punching you. After stopping the punches, the attacker attempts to bear hug you. You stop the bear hug stunning the attacker; which allows you to strike the attacker’s Anchor Points and run to safety”.

The participants will probably look at each other not understanding. Then the instructor tells them by the end of the workshop they will be able to understand and physically follow those instructions to physically defend themselves. This is generally met again by a combination of disbelief, amazement, and excitement.

Punches to the Head

The first participant is told to make the U-Shape Posture facing the attacker with either foot forward in a bladed stance and then to stomp their lead foot into the floor. This is the same hand posture they made before in the TPR game.

The instructor shows that the attacker will see that their intended victim’s hands are close to the center line and so straight punches will be difficult to throw. So they elect to use elliptical punches to the head.

The Defender has a binary task to do next. If the attacker left-hand punches their same/right side, they shove their heel palm into the attacker’s shoulder, combined with a lead leg stomp to the floor. This stops the punch. If it was a right elliptical punch then the defender shoves their same/left side hand into the attacker’s shoulder to stop the punch. Repeat to get the feel of it. These are the same movements as learnt before in the Push Pull Game

The attacker, not expecting their punch to be stopped pauses for a second, giving the defender a chance to extend their heel palm to strike an Anchor Point on the Attacker’s head, combined

with a lead leg stomp to the floor. This anchor point is one of the lines they traced in the TPR game before. When the attacker is stunned, run to safety.

Bear Hugs

The next self-defense scenario is when an attacker attempts to bear hug either around the upper body or lower, towards the waist. First turn to face the attacker. Then repeat the U-Shape non-threatening hand posture with the bladed stance and lead foot stomp.

When the attacker's arms move apart to encircle you, extend both of your arms forward to heel palm each shoulder. If the attacker is aiming for the waist, then your heel palms fit nicely to the top of their shoulders, either side of the attacker's head. This stops the attacker in place, probably stunned and taking a step back; giving you time to strike them in an Anchor Point and then to run to safety.

Wrist Grabs

The next self-defense scenario is when an attacker approaches you from behind or from the flank and grabs one of your wrists to control you. Turn to orientate to the attacker and execute a Chinese Exploding Hand. Then there are two options.

If the attacker's thumb of the grabbing hand is up, do your Hair Touch movements. This will break the grab. If the attacker's thumb is down, then do your Reverse Heart to Clap movements to release the grab. After the grab is released, flow into the U-Shape non-threatening posture and read and react to the situation from there.

The participants had fun practicing these movements. The instructor then repeated the self-defense scenario from the beginning of the lesson. This time the participants knew how to survive the initial assault and secondary assaults of an attacker and ran to safety. They demonstrated their understanding by physically performing the scenario.

Question and Answer Session

The last ten minutes of the workshop were used for a question-and-answer session. The participants shared stories of how they used their intuition to avoid potentially dangerous situations. They can use the U-Shape non-threatening posture to create a barrier between themselves and a potential threat.

Finally, the workshop facilitator encouraged the students to stay safe and enjoy teaching. If they wished more information, then Mr. Jones is going to present on Total Physical Response Story Telling at the 2023 JALT International conference. For more information about safety, the MacYoung website www.nnsd.com is an excellent source of self-defense information.

Conclusions and Summary

The participants enjoyed learning about the teaching methodology of Total Physical Response and learning how to defend themselves in common self-defense situations in order to keep themselves and their students safer, as well as reducing their anxiety of being victimized.

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