Part One

The Methodologies Behind the Sonrisas Spanish Curriculum

Using Total Physical Response, the Natural Approach, and the Waldorf World Language Approach

At Sonrisas Spanish, we incorporate many teaching techniques to which we have been exposed throughout our careers. Many of the teaching methodologies that we have observed and researched have influenced the development of our own teaching style. In this curriculum, we have drawn upon the strengths and the most effective techniques of our different influences.

In the following pages we'll describe each of the methodologies, ideologies, and techniques that have influenced and informed the Sonrisas Spanish curriculum.

Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response (TPR) is an ESL methodology developed by Dr. James J. Asher in the late 1960s. The TPR approach to world language acquisition models the way children learn their first language. Parents begin having conversations with their infants right after birth. A baby smiles and an adult says, "What a beautiful smile you have." An adult shakes a rattle, hands a baby the rattle, and says, "Now you shake it." Dr. Asher calls these interactions "language-body conversations." Although not yet talking, the child is imprinting a linguistic map of how language works, silently internalizing the patterns and sounds of language. When the child has decoded enough of the language, she begins to speak. Gradually, her words begin to approximate the language of her parents.[2]

Gestures are a critical facet of the TPR approach. In the classroom, TPR is played out by saying an action word and demonstrating that word simultaneously. The teacher says, "I touch my head," as she touches her head. Then she says, "Now you [pointing at student] touch your head [pointing at the student's head]." In this way, students are asked, through gesture, to respond physically to commands such as "sit down," "stand up," "hop," "march," "clap," etc.[3] Further, students are not required to speak until they feel comfortable doing so. This is because, like infants, they begin learning language with a "silent period," during which they internally decode language until they feel comfortable speaking it.

The beauty of using TPR in world language acquisition is that comprehension happens without the use of translation. Translation is a process that takes language out of the natural linguistic experience and transforms it into intellectual study, a process inappropriate for children. Comprehension can be, and should be, expressed through gestures—children can respond with gestures long before they are ready to use the language orally.

Another important benefit of TPR is that it engages children kinesthetically, bringing the language into their young bodies. This experience is fun and essential to students' success in acquiring language.

The Natural Approach

The Natural Approach (NA) was developed by a pair of applied linguists, Dr. Stephen Krashen and Spanish teacher Tracy Terrell. NA is based on the premise that the study of world languages can be taught and learned in two distinct ways: through acquisition or through learning. *Acquisition* requires a focus on meaning; *learning*, on the other hand, requires a focus on form, i.e., on grammar. According to NA, children learn language only through acquisition.[4]

Dr. Krashen regards communication as a function of language; that is, communication takes place only when messages are comprehended. Further, Krashen believes, comprehension of language precedes its production: Speaking will emerge naturally and inevitably after a silent period of active listening. A comprehension-based approach, NA focuses on "comprehensible input." When students are exposed to this input in low-anxiety contexts, acquisition is inevitable. In order to control anxiety levels in the learner, one does not demand a premature production of language, and one does not correct any errors in speech except when they compromise meaning. In the NA classroom, the teacher's role is to allow students multiple opportunities to understand language through the use of multiple strategies.[5] These include visual aids, actions, gestures, photographs, and illustrations.

NA and TPR are obvious complements to each other in the classroom; in fact, TPR is one of the strategies used in an NA classroom. Both methodologies are predicated on the belief that learners can acquire a second language most effectively using methods similar to the way they acquired their first language.

At Sonrisas Spanish, we help students acquire language by providing comprehensible input in Spanish using gestures, illustration, everyday objects, and artwork. We avoid translation and we teach grammar only in the context of oral communication—never through isolated academic exercises. We believe that students thrive in the Sonrisas classroom because the environment is fun and free of anxiety—students don't feel any pressure to speak Spanish before they are ready.

The Waldorf World Language Approach

The third methodology that has informed the Sonrisas Spanish Curriculum has perhaps made the strongest impact on us as teachers and on our students who are acquiring language. The Waldorf School world language classroom is a carefully designed approach to world language instruction and acquisition.

Rudolf Steiner started the first Waldorf School in Germany in the 1920s. Among other things, Steiner offered very specific guidelines for teaching world languages, guidelines that are to this day implemented in Waldorf schools throughout the world.

Like NA, the Waldorf approach is based on the idea that the primary purpose of world language acquisition is to develop the ability to communicate. World language study also raises one's social conscience and cultivates an interest in and respect for others. In fact, the Waldorf School sees the study of world languages as a window into the soul of another culture. Because the manner in which we think is expressed through the languages we speak, we nurture a cultural understanding of other peoples through acquiring their languages.[6]

This concept struck a chord with us when we thought about our own experiences learning Spanish. The very nature of the way the Spanish language is constructed and expresses the world is very different from that of the English language. In the Spanish language, we reflected, words seem to flow together with no verbal punctuation between them. There is even a tense—the subjunctive—that infuses verbs with emotion. Taking these ideas to the next level, when children are exposed to another language, they are building much more than linguistic agility. Their minds are opening to a very different way of thinking about, seeing, and expressing the world. Being continually mindful of this

openness is important, we believe, when choosing what we teach and how we present it in our classroom.

Central to the Waldorf approach to world language acquisition is the recognition that in the first grade, the imitative and memory capacities of children are still strong and spontaneous. Because children at this age are ripe for acquiring languages, Steiner advocated that two world languages, from two separate origins, be introduced in the first grade.[7] Further, during the first three years of world language instruction, all learning should occur within an oral context through verse, song, activities involving rhythm, dramatizations, and situational dialogues. Through these activities, students learn vocabulary and language concepts. The thematic content of the curriculum is grounded in children's everyday experience, i.e., through nature, colors, the body, clothing, food, the home and family, numbers, etc.[8]

The structure and flow of the Waldorf classroom can perhaps best be described as a well-orchestrated concert. The teacher leads students through a wide range of activities in a relatively short period of time. In each lesson, students are given adequate room and opportunity to move their bodies, alternating sitting with physical activity of some kind. After an initial greeting, the class enters an oral segment that emphasizes a lively, rhythmic pace. This portion of the class may include song, recitation, counting, Q&A, and dancing; it brings the class together and puts students in a receptive mode for the next activity, in which new material is introduced. In the Waldorf classroom, teachers introduce this new material using a basket or "special box" with objects that represent the new content. Following this "lesson," students actively engage in a project or activity that they can complete without help from the teacher. The lesson closes much like it began, through singing, recitation of verses, etc.[9]

During the first three years of world language instruction, there is a gradual shift in emphasis from receptive to productive use of the language, ensuring that students have plenty of time to absorb the language before they are asked to produce it. In the Waldorf classroom, repetition is imperative to successful absorption of the language.[10]

Though much of the Waldorf world language approach complements TPR and NA techniques, there is one quality that differs significantly. While NA focuses on comprehensible input, through which students acquire language as they understand its meaning, in the Waldorf classroom, students learn extensive poems and verses by heart before they completely understand the content of these poems. This is not to say that in each lesson students do not also learn through comprehensible input. The idea of introducing substantial and often complex verse and poetry, however, is based on the belief that until the age of six or seven, children relate less to meaning and more to sound. To put this another way, children relate to emotional content long before they relate to intellectual content. Although children may not fully grasp the meaning of the poem, they can become familiar with the language on an emotional level through the sound of the poem.[11] This experience is not unlike learning nursery rhymes and songs in our own language. "Sing a song of sixpence, a pocket full of rye," for example, makes little cognitive sense to a five- or six-year-old (or a person of any age today for that matter). By learning these old verses, however, children connect to the rich verbal traditions and the history of the English language. The verses of Mother Goose are incredibly engaging and easily memorized in spite of the sometimes odd, antiquated language that they contain. Traditional verses in Spanish are no different. Children have the same ability to engage with and subsequently memorize verses in Spanish. Rhythm, beauty, culture, history, and emotion supersede meaning. The flexibility of the young child's mind allows them to take in a verse in Spanish where the "comprehensible input" is more emotional or artistically comprehensible than literally comprehensible.

In our classrooms, we see this emotional reception to the language demonstrated over and over again. Our students learn beautiful poems that come to life for them through the beauty of the sound and through accompanying gestures. Teachers need not worry about choosing poetry that is thematically simple so that students understand each word they're reciting. It's more important that the poetry reflect the richness and beauty of the language. Young children possess flexible tongues and strong

imitative skills. One can see these strengths at work in any young child who loves to listen to verse and nursery rhymes. Although he may have little idea of what the individual words mean, he has a clear understanding of the emotional content of the words, evident through his intonation and gestures.

The Sonrisas classroom resembles the Waldorf classroom in many respects. As in the Waldorf classroom, songs, poems, games, and drama are central to our lessons, as is the focus on rhythm. Also like Waldorf lessons, Sonrisas lessons begin with a lively oral segment that involves singing, dancing, and playing, followed by the introduction of new material. However, while Waldorf lessons use a visual aid such as a basket, Sonrisas lessons rely on lesson activities and well-illustrated books to introduce new material. In both approaches, the third segment of each lesson consists of a hands-on independent project that involves the new material that's just been introduced.

Reading Children's Spanish Literature

Reading children's Spanish literature is a critical aspect of the Sonrisas approach because it is such an effective teaching tool. We have taken a lot of time to find quality children's books in Spanish to read in the Sonrisas lessons. One of our mantras at Sonrisas Spanish is "If we can find a great book, then we can teach a great lesson."

A prerequisite for an effective Spanish lesson is the opportunity for students to connect with the content of the lesson. If they can't connect with the content, there is no way for them to engage. And without engagement, they simply won't learn. Children love books, and a great book creates an immediate connection for them. Many great children's books are distinguished by the quality of their illustrations. Children are drawn into the story, theme, and mood of the book through pictures. And when the text is in Spanish, children have the opportunity to engage in an authentic Spanish experience (see Story Time, page 39).

In the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Integrated Performance Assessment guide, an "authentic" text is defined as a text prepared by and for native speakers of the target language.[12] According to this definition, children's Spanish literature is an ideal authentic text for teaching Spanish to children. Even children's books that have been translated into Spanish can be authentic texts. The themes in quality children's books are universal, and children of all cultures can appreciate them. As long as the translation is true to the story and well-written (which usually means that it has been translated by a native speaker), the book can engage children and transcend cultural barriers.

We embrace the definition of literature as all writing considered to have permanent value, excellence of form, and great emotional effect. We scrutinize each book used in the Sonrisas lessons to ensure they stand up to these standards. Reading high-quality literature to your students offers them the opportunity to connect to the content of the lesson and offers several other benefits to the Spanish language classroom:

With each book, students are exposed to a distinct voice, style, and vocabulary. Each author's vocabulary, dialect, and style provide a very different linguistic experience. By reading diverse books to Spanish language learners, you can expose your students to a diversity of Spanish expressions to which your students would not likely otherwise have access. For example, a teacher from Mexico can read literature written by Cuban and Spanish authors and expose her students to a voice, style, and vocabulary that the teacher couldn't express otherwise. Spanish in particular is spoken by so many people from so many distinct cultures, that without using diverse literature in the classroom, you may limit your students' overall language-learning experience with your own dialect, vocabulary, and voice. In her article, "Teaching in the Target Language," Helena Curtain writes about the teacher as the "culture bearer," that is, the representative of culture in the classroom.[13] Every time you read a book written in a distinct voice, you represent another Spanish voice, style, and vocabulary to your students.

Reading books provides the opportunity to review previously taught material. An authentic children's book usually has multilayered themes within it. For example, we recommend the book, *A comer*, about a family in Spain, for several of the Sonrisas lessons. The book covers the seven days of the week and family vocabulary, so through shared reading, you can review and reinforce that vocabulary each time you read the book (see page 40 for more about shared reading).

Reading books provides an opportunity for you to check for understanding. As you review previously taught material through reading, you are also checking for understanding. If students are not understanding review questions, you should consider incorporating a relevant review activity into your next lesson.

Many children's Spanish books provide opportunities for students to gain an understanding of the relationship between the practices, products, and perspectives of Spanish-speaking cultures. Not only can a book draw students into the target language experience, it also can expose students to the target culture. A book that is not only for Spanish speakers, but also about a Spanish-speaking culture, provides a perfect avenue to address the Cultures standards (see "Using the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages," page 17).

In short, when you read children's Spanish literature to your class, your lessons become effective, dynamic, and most importantly, engaging. Children love it when adults read good books to them. Reading children's Spanish literature is not just effective methodology—it's enjoyable.

Engaging the Imagination Through the Senses

Engaging the imagination through the senses is a methodology that can make teaching and learning almost effortless. We value the depth of human-to-human communication that a teacher provides in language learning, and we believe that this type of learning is much more effective than media-based programs. The "language-body conversations" in language acquisition, to which Dr. Asher refers, require two-way communication that cannot be replicated through screens or audio recordings. We believe that it's only through the human interaction of a teacher guiding students through a linguistic journey that all of the senses are used in order to engage the imagination.

The senses provide a window between ourselves and the world around us. We want our students to *experience* Spanish as opposed to just *learn* Spanish. We use the senses to create this experience. It may be helpful for you to think of yourself not as a Spanish teacher, but rather as a guide taking your students into a Spanish language experience. If you think of your time with your students as an adventure or a journey as opposed to a lesson, you are more likely to activate your students' senses. If each activity is designed with an eye toward sensory experiences, the journey comes to life in students' imaginations.

FEEL

You can give students the experience of feeling the language in so many ways. For example, during calendar activities, when asking the question, *"¿Qué hace el tiempo?,"* you can open the window so students can feel the weather. Saying *"Hace frío y hace viento"* gives context and meaning to the experience. You can also bring in relevant objects to the lesson that students can pass around and touch. When teaching clothing, for example, you can provide a bag of clothes for students to try on during the activity. When teaching *Limpio y sucio* in Sonrisas Level I, you can have students rub cloth in the mud to experience the feel of "dirty" in contrast to the feel of "clean." In each lesson, ask yourself, "How can I give my students the experience of "feeling" the language?"

HEAR

There are also many opportunities for you to activate strong audio-sensory experiences in the lessons. When teaching the lesson *Yo veo* in Sonrisas Level I, for example, you can display pictures of plants and animals that live in a Costa Rican rainforest throughout your classroom, then say to your students,

"¡Escuchen!" When everyone's quiet, you can make your best monkey sound and exclaim, *"¡El mono! ¡Vamos a encontrar el mono!"* You can then ask, *"¿Dónde está el mono?,"* and then hand each student a cardboard toilet paper tube telescope to help find the monkey. When a student finds the monkey's picture on the wall, you can then say, *"Juan ve el mono y yo veo el mono también.*" You can then say, *"¡Escuchen!"* again, followed by your best parrot squawk, and exclaim, *"¡El loro! ¡Vamos a encontrar el loro!"* The class then goes through the same routine with a jaguar and a frog, and finally, rain.

This is just an example of the kinds of experiences you can create in your classroom to engage multiple senses, including hearing. Musical instruments, rain sticks, and animal sounds can all be added to lessons to engage students' imaginations. Having students close their eyes, listen, and share what they hear can be effective and fun. Ask yourself, "How can my students use their sense of hearing in this language lesson to make it more imaginative?"

SEE

To engage the visual imaginations of your students, you can use books, photographs, puppets, maps, globes, and artwork. When teaching the seasons, for example, you can bring in pieces of colorful construction paper, hold one up, and say, *"Yo veo el color anaranjado. ¿Cuál es la estación?"* Again, before each lesson, ask yourself, "What visual input can I give my students to support this lesson? How can I incorporate an experience of color into this lesson?"

SMELL AND TASTE

We can all relate to the experience of an olfactory memory. The scent of your grandmother's perfume on a stranger propels you into her living room; the fragrance of a gardenia takes you back to a tropical vacation you once took; the smell of apples transports you to a fall apple-picking harvest. The smells trigger the memories. If you can give your students the opportunity to smell and taste, the experience is etched into their memories. When teaching *¿Qué sucede en la primavera?* in Sonrisas Level II, for example, you can bring in flowers for students to smell. When teaching *¿Qué te gusta*? in Sonrisas Level I, you can bring in different foods for students to taste. When teaching *El Día de los Muertos* in Sonrisas Level I, you can burn incense, bring in marigolds, and share *pan de muertos*. Each of these experiences of smelling and tasting in the context of learning the language will engage students' imaginations through their senses.

Circling

Another methodology that we use in some of the activities in the Sonrisas lessons is called "circling." Circling is a part of the TPRS method of teaching languages. TPRS, or Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling, was developed by Blaine Ray, a Spanish teacher in California, and can be explained as a way of teaching language holistically without having to teach grammar rules. With circling, students are able to get lots of repetition with comprehensible vocabulary and phrases. We have found circling to be effective in achieving proficiency with short phrases in daily activities while remaining 100 percent in the target language.

Circling consists of establishing a statement by asking a question and then repeating the statement, then asking a "yes" question about the statement and repeating the answer, then asking an "either/or" question and repeating the answer, and finally, asking a "no" question and repeating the answer. For example:

Teacher: *"Juan, ¿Cuántos niños hay en la clase?"*	(establishing a statement with a question)
Student: *"Hay nueve niños en la clase."*	(statement)
Teacher: "*Muy bien. Hay nueve niños en la clase."*	(repeating the statement)
Teacher: *"Emilia, ¿hay nueve niños en la clase?"*	("yes" question)

Student: *"Sí, hay nueve niños en la clase."*

Teacher: *"Muy bien. Hay nueve niños en la clase."* (repeating the answer)

Teacher: *"Ricardo, ¿hay cinco niños en la clase o hay nueve niños en la clase?"* ("either/or" question)

Student: *"Hay nueve niños en la clase."*

Teacher: *"Muy bien. Hay nueve niños en la clase."* (repeating the answer)

Teacher: *"Ana, ¿hay veinte niños en la clase?"* ("no" question)

Student: *"No, no hay veinte niños en la clase, hay nueve niños en la clase."*

Teacher: *"Muy bien. No hay veinte niños en la clase, hay nueve niños en la clase."*

To make circling effective, you will have to model for your students how you want them to answer each question. You can do this by simply answering the questions for the students and then having them repeat. Once the routine is established, circling can be used with almost any phrase from an activity or lesson. Circling also takes some practice to get the sequence and rhythm down. Practice with a colleague or a friend before you circle with your students.

Of course, because circling is not how one would normally converse, you'll want to use it in moderation. As mentioned, circling can be effective for students in achieving proficiency and building confidence with short phrases and vocabulary. In the Sonrisas lessons, we use circling mainly in the calendar activities and lesson activities. You want to make sure that you employ circling appropriately in class. For example, you wouldn't want to interrupt the flow of a story with circling, nor would you want to do circling with every little phrase that comes up in the lesson. We suggest that you do maybe one circling activity per lesson. You can repeat the same circling activity for several lessons until students are proficient with the language and then move on to something else.