TPR Moviemaking - Comprehensible and Compelling
By Mary Holmes

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Moviemaking in a Comprehensible Input (CI) classroom is a highly effective and fun application of TPRS/CI strategies that engages the entire class. It's fast paced, collaborative and provides a framework for the material that reaches all types of student styles and interests.

I love making movies with my classes almost as much as they do. It draws on the varied strengths and multiple talents available in every student. The process can be interactive and engaging for just about every single student in the class. Some classmates are natural performers (our superstars). Some students are techies with no interest in being *in front of* the camera, but shine from *behind* it! Even those whose "role" is as an audience member are vital to the moviemaking and language acquisition process.

Movies, at their heart, are stories told through dynamic dialog. The keys to successful moviemaking in a CI class are to make that dynamic dialog

comprehensible for the students while maintaining a process that keeps it compelling for everyone.

TPR Moviemaking follows closely the common steps found in any TPR Storytelling activity:

● Target the vocabulary/ structures (Establish the Meaning)
● Propose collaborative context by developing the script (Spoken Story)
● Refine, assimilate and apply target structures in rehearsal and performance (Reading – also speaking and listening)

However, where traditional TPRS "Spoken Story" is more a conduit to explore the target structures, TPR Moviemaking relies on creating a strong story with the students and then using that story to build and reinforce a comprehensive script.

TPR Moviemaking: The Steps

1. Establish the Story Arc (Storyboarding)
2. Establish the Characters
3. Write a group script
4. Rehearse
5. Perform
6. Record

There is a natural activity overlap to the steps, which lends itself to 3 days of work. Because of that overlap, it's important to think about the process *by step*, rather than *by day*. Different classes (or stories) may need more time or less time to complete one or another step in the process, so a typical schedule plan would look like this:

Day 1 – Determine Story (storyboard)
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　　　　　Establish Characters
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Day 2 -- Write Final Script
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　　　　　Rehearse
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Day 3 – Perform/ Record
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　　　　　Show Time

Start with a Story

Stories, whether for storytelling or moviemaking, generally follow the same step progression. In moviemaking, these steps are called "beats" and they make up the main plot points that bring a story to the end.

1. Introduce the characters.
2. Introduce the problem.
3. The problem gets worse – *uh oh…*
4. The problem gets even worse – *oh no!*
5. Solution – *whew!*

Establish the Story Arc

Goal: Develop a story that can be presented in the TL using comprehensible input.

Las Calles de Pamplona is a story idea that I used with my class. We had talked about the Running of the Bulls in Pamplona, Spain. The festival presented a great opportunity for a movie. Here is the story arc, created collaboratively between me and my students, with the beats.

1. Introduction of characters: two bored middle-school students are in a very boring class (not language class – another unnamed class). They fall asleep.
2. Introduction of problem: they wake up in a café in Spain. There is only a waiter in the restaurant. No other people. The students ask for a table outside and the waiter is shocked. The waiter explains about the festival that is happening right now. The students don't believe the waiter and want an outside table anyway.

The students step outside and they are in middle of the Running of the Bulls They run for their lives.
3. Uh-oh: they turn right to avoid the bulls. They are confronted by monsters. (I always take pictures of my students in their Halloween costumes so I have a stock of still monster pictures). The bulls keep coming.
4. Oh-no!: they throw everything they have that is red at the bulls. The bulls keep coming.
5. Whew!: back in school, the frustrated teacher throws books at the sleeping students' desks. The students wake up and decide they love school.

Establish the Characters

Goal: Use TL to establish motivations and dialog for story characters

Our Running of the Bulls movie has four main characters: two students, waiter and teacher, as well as "extras" of other runners in the street and "cameos" of monsters.

I form groups of two or three students. Each student group is assigned a character from the text. I keep groups small so in a large class multiple groups might have the same character. That is fine. Student groups answer the following TL questions about their character:

1. Who is your character?
2. Give a single adjective describing the character. Be creative. (If I am making a movie from something we read in class, the students have to justify their adjective with a line from the text.)
3. Write a single sentence describing your character's problem.
4. What kinds of phrases could the character say to express what he or she wants?

After individual groups have finished the character questions, we have a class discussion. We use the *Character Chart* below during the class discussion to guide the conversation. All students are expected to record their notes on the chart.

Character	Adjective	What are the character's problem or motivation?	What are some expressions the character might use to get what they want?
Students	*Lazy* *Afraid* *Grateful*	*1 – bored at school* *2 – afraid of the bulls* *3 – grateful to be back in school*	*–I hate school* *–Help!! Run!* *–Whew, I love school!*
Teacher	*frustrated*	*Students fall asleep*	*–Pay Attention!*
Waiter	*shocked*	*Two people want to eat outside during the Running of the Bulls*	*–Do you want a table?* *–Are you crazy?*

   Table 1. Character Chart

Now we all agree on who the characters are, what the characters need or want and some ideas about what they can say to get what they want. We are ready to start writing our script.

Write the Group Script

Goal: Write a complete script in TL

I sit down in front of the class with my laptop projecting my screen so the class can see what I write. The students are required to write by hand what I type. I will be collecting their script as part of their assessment for this project. We, my students and I, write the script together. I try to keep each beat short; three or four lines. Students give me ideas of what each characters, and I accept, reject, or change their suggestions.

I print out copies of my script for the students to use the next day. That way, even though they have all written the script, the students have a correct, complete script to work with for rehearsals and performance.

Rehearse

Goal: Read, speak and listen to TL scripts

Everyone rehearses, even non-actors. We break into small groups with only the group members watching. This promotes a safe space for the students who may be less comfortable performing in front of the class. The rehearsal process is critical to student script comprehension. By the time we record our movie every student in the class has read, spoken and heard the lines of the script multiple times. That means when we watch our film, every student will understand the entire dialog of the movie.

All groups are rehearsing independently while I supervise.

Rehearsal One – Table Read

Student Groups assign individual character roles from the script to the members of the group. Students sit and read their assigned roles out loud.

Rehearsal Two – Stand and Speak

Students switch character roles. (Student #1 becomes The Waiter, etc.) Students stand and read their assigned roles out loud.

Rehearsal Three - ACT

Students switch roles again. Students should move and ACT as they read their lines. Acting means adding emotion, movement, and a little drama.

All groups are rehearsing simultaneously. By changing character roles and progressively intensifying each reading repetition (rehearsal) the students stay interested and on task.

Students have been instructed that if they finish their reading of the script before I change the instructions, they need to start reading again.

Performance & Recording

Goal: Produce short film in TL requiring coordinated engagement of the TL material.

Students choose whether they want to be an actor, extra, tech support or audience. Everyone has to be something.

Actors – Actors are volunteers. I have never had a class where no one wants to perform. The rehearsal process has made students comfortable speaking the script and many students seem to be ready to take the acting challenge.

Extras – Extras are students who want to perform, but not speak. I videotape extras reacting to the story.
Example - A fork drops in a restaurant. I video shocked looks on the faces of the extras. Overacting is encouraged.

Tech support – Tech support jobs help involve more students in the movie who don't want to perform. How much you use tech support is your choice.

Possible Tech support jobs:

- *Executive Producer/ Director:* Usually me.
- *Videographer:* A very reliable person to videotape. I choose who videotapes.
- *Teleprompter:* I project the typed script onto the wall opposite the performers. One tech student scrolls the script on the computer as the actors perform so the character lines are always showing.
- *Assistant Director.* Sits next to the videographer and watches the video screen. Counts down the actors to action (in TL - 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and action!) and then makes sure that everyone is in the shot. The actors watch the counter closely. If the counter makes a motion for them to move right or left, they move.
- *Lighting Tech:* Turns lights off and on.
- *Set Decorators:* Draw the background of the movie on the board.
- *Sound Effects:* Makes sound effects during the scenes.
- *Titles and Credits:* Creates credit signs to show at the end of the movie.

Audience – I push the classroom desks away from where the actors are performing to create audience seating. I tell the audience they have to be quiet

because the microphone will record anything they say. The key to keeping the audience engaged is to keep the actors moving. I tell them where to stand and then we record. Remember, these students have already rehearsed many times. There is novelty to the entire recording process that keeps the audience interested.

Editing – I use a free app called Adobe Premiere Clip. It works on Apple products (Mac, iPad, iPhone) and Android (tablets and phones). I have found this app to be the easiest editing system out there. Sometimes I edit and sometimes a student will. It just depends on how much more time I want to give to the project. Total editing time for "En las Calles de Pamplona" took about 10 minutes per class production to edit. You can find Adobe Premiere Clip here: http://www.adobe.com/products/premiere-clip.html

Show Time – Watching the Movie

Goal – watching compelling, comprehensible TL input.

Making a movie is fun. Watching a movie you made with your classmates is great. Watching other classes' movies when you know the performers, and understand the scripts is even better. Together, my classes and I have produced a short film (3–4 minutes) in the target language that is grammatically accurate, school appropriate, and with vocabulary that is comprehensible *and* compelling to its audience.

Grades and Assessments

This is a CLASS project. As long as the student has completed every required part, he or she will earn full credit.

The student requirements are to:

- Participate in the initial group script development
- Answer initial character questions (group discussion).
- Complete a character chart (on paper).
- Write the complete script.
- Rehearse in groups.
- Be an actor, extra, tech support or audience member during production.

TPR Moviemaking is a full class activity that promotes a positive, cooperative learning environment. It is a project you and your students can accomplish and truly enjoy together.

Have fun.