

Doing Research

Research involves asking a question or testing a hypothesis. This can be a very broad hypothesis, such as “TPRS is better than traditional instruction,” or a very specific hypothesis, such as “students’ comprehension and production of indirect object pronouns improves after acting out and reading a story that uses several indirect object pronouns.” An experiment will tell you whether or not your hypothesis was correct. Teachers ask questions and test hypotheses *all the time*. (“Will this lesson be effective?”) They just don’t publish the results of their tests (except on the moretpers listserver)!

Partnering with graduate students (or professors) is an excellent way to accomplish research. Teachers can supply the research question, access to their students (research subjects), and if the study includes a classroom intervention, the intervention itself. Graduate students can provide a review of the existing literature, details of materials and procedures for the study, statistical analysis, and ideas for where and how to publish the study. Different departments ask and answer different research questions. Try some of the following departments at your local university:

Education or Educational Psychology: which method is more effective; test design; individual differences; socioeconomic status and achievement; learning and retention; classroom interventions (comparing students who get a certain lesson to students who don’t)

Linguistics: acquisition of specific grammatical structures; whether second language learners are similar to or different from first language learners; whether learners’ language follows principles of universal grammar; different L1-L2 combinations; L2 phonology studies the acquisition of pronunciation; conversation analysis studies classroom interaction

TESL: questions about learning English as a second language

Second Language Acquisition: anything goes!

Cognitive Psychology or Psychology: questions about language processing, perception, attention, memory, language acquisition, speech production

Your Language: within each language department, typically some of the students specialize in literature, and others in linguistics or teacher education. You want the linguistics/teacher education ones.

Getting specific: What does it mean to say “TPRS is better?” If you mean “more fun,” you might develop a questionnaire measuring enjoyment of class and give it to TPRS teachers and traditional teachers, or to TPRS students and traditional students. If you mean “creates more proficient students,” you need a proficiency measure. Often you can adapt an existing standardized test, such as a state proficiency exam or college entrance exam.

Why bother? If you publish your research, hundreds of people will hear about it. In fact, everyone who does research on TPRS in the future will cite your study! You will add to the body of evidence that TPRS is effective.

