

## **SUGGESTOPEDIA: HOW DOES IT ACCELERATE LANGUAGE LEARNING**

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**Abstract:** *Suggestopedia is a method of teaching a foreign language in which students learn quickly by being made to feel relaxed, interested and positive. The method is developed because of the argument that students naturally face psychological barriers to learning. The psychological barriers here refer to a variety of internal distractions (worry, anxiety, fatigue, boredom, fear, etc.). Suggestopedia uses four main stages as follows: presentation, active concert, passive concert, and practice. The design of suggestopedic instruction has positive cognitive, motivational, emotional, and social effects on the learners.*

**Keywords:** *Suggestopedia, suggestopedic instruction, active concert, passive concert, psychological barriers.*

Suggestopedia is a method of foreign language teaching developed by Lozanov. It makes use of dialogs, situations, and translation to present and practice language, and in particular, makes use of music, visual images, and relaxation exercises to make learning more comfortable and effective (Richards, *et.al.*,1990). It is a method of teaching a foreign language in which students learn quickly by being made to feel relaxed, interested and positive (Hornby, 2005). From these two definitions, it is clear that Suggestopedia uses techniques to make the students feel relaxed, comfortable, interested in order to learn more quickly.

In the late 70s, a Bulgarian psychologist by the name of Georgi Lozanov proposed an argument that students naturally face psychological barriers to learning. The psychological barriers here refer to a variety of internal distractions (worry, fatigue, boredom, fear, etc.). There are “negative belief systems”, such as a conviction that learning is hard or that school is a bore, etc. These barriers will make them unable to perform their best and will reduce their ability to learn. These systems must be changed into “positive belief systems”, such as “learning is interesting and fun” and “I can accomplish much more than I ever thought I could,” in turn permit the activation of unconscious mental processes that result in unexpectedly powerful effects. The procedure of suggestopedic instruction is as follows: presentation, active concert, passive concert, practice.

Lozanov believes that learners may have been using only 5 to 10 percent of their mental capacity, and that the brain could process and retain much more material if given optimal conditions for learning. Based on psychological research, Lozanov began to develop a language learning method focusing on

"desuggestion" of the limitations learners think they have, and providing the sort of relaxed state of mind that would facilitate the retention of material to its maximum potential. This method became known as Suggestopedia - the name reflecting the application of the power of "(de)suggestion" to the field of pedagogy. Lozanov believes that unconscious mental activity can be brought into play. Physical and mental relaxation exercises enable students to regulate the contents of their consciousness in order to receive lesson material in a manner uninterrupted by any of a variety of internal distractions (worry, fatigue, boredom, etc.) ([http://www.englishraven.com/method\\_suggest.](http://www.englishraven.com/method_suggest.), August 28<sup>th</sup> 2010)

One of the most unique characteristics of the method was the use of soft classical music during the learning process. Lozanov believes it creates a level of relaxed concentration that facilitates the intake and retention of huge quantities of material. Another aspect that differs from other methods is the use of soft comfortable chairs and dim lighting in the classroom (other factors believed to create a more relaxed state of mind). Using this method, Lozanov's foreign language classes have demonstrated rates of learning three times faster than those achieved in the best intensive programs in the United States. A number of authors have investigated various aspects of suggestopedia as applied to university-level foreign language learning. Bordon and Schuster have applied the principles of suggestion to Spanish instruction over one academic quarter and report that students learned up to three times faster than students taught by the conventional audiolingual method. Kurkov describes a preliminary experiment with a suggestopedic Russian class that learned twice as much as the control class in one semester. (<http://www.delphin-international.com/ResourceCenter/Suggesto>, August 29<sup>th</sup> 2010)

This article will discuss how Suggestopedia accelerates language learning. The discussion will be subdivided into:

1. Principles of Suggestopedia
2. The procedure of suggestopedic instruction
3. Effects of suggestopedic instruction

## **THE PRINCIPLES OF SUGGESTOPEDIA**

According to Larsen, *et.al.* (2001: 81-83), the principles of Suggestopedia method are as follows:

### *1. The goal*

The term 'Suggestopedia', derived from suggestion and pedagogy, is often used loosely to refer to similar accelerated learning. The goal is to accelerate the process of language learning. In order to achieve this goal, the students' psychological barriers must be minimized. And the students' mental power must be maximized. Learners have commonly set a limit on their abilities. For instance, students may say, "Oh, it's too late for me, I am too old," or "How can I remember that amount? Nobody can!" Lozanov says that by using this method

one can teach/ learn languages approximately three to five times as quickly as conventional methods. (<http://www.delphin-international.com/ResourceCenter/suggesto>, August 30<sup>th</sup> 2010)

### *2. The role of the teacher and the students*

The relationship between the teacher and the students is like parents and children. The teacher is the authority in the classroom. He is sources having great authority. The students will retain information better from someone in whom they have confidence. Once, the students trust the teacher, they can feel more secure, they can be more spontaneous and less inhibited.

### *3. Characteristics of the teaching/ learning process*

The teaching- learning process of suggestopedia instruction is "learner-centered". The learning climate is established that is free from anxiety and cooperation within the group is perceived as supportive. The consciously designed learning environment, consisting, for example, of a bright, cheerfully decorated room, flowers, and a seating order which allows eye-contact among learners as well as maximum freedom of mobility is designed to increase the joy of learning and to create a positive learning environment. The learner is able to practice the material in a playful manner in order to be able to apply it freely and creatively in new contexts. These exercises are designed to promote learning through life-like contexts.

### *4. The nature of student-teacher, student-student interaction*

The teacher initiates interactions with the whole group of students and with individuals from the beginning of the course. Later, the students initiate interaction themselves.

### *5. The feelings of the students*

Students are encouraged to be as "childlike" as possible, yielding all authority to the teacher. Students thus become "suggestible" (Brown, 2001: 27). A great deal attention is given to students' feelings. One of the fundamental principles of the method is enhancing the students' feelings of relax and confidence.

### *6. The language skills that are emphasized*

Speaking communicatively is emphasized. Lozanov states that the suggestopedic course directs the students to act communications (Richards, Jack C, 1992: 144).

### *7. The role of the students' native language*

Native-language translation is used to make the meaning of the dialog clear. The teacher also uses the native language in the classroom when necessary. As the course proceeds, the teacher uses the native language less and less.

*8. The way the evaluation is accomplished*

Evaluation is usually conducted on students' normal in-class performance and not through formal tests, which would threaten the relaxed atmosphere considered essential for accelerated learning

*9. The way the teacher responds to student errors.*

Errors are corrected gently, with the teacher using soft voice.

## **THE PROCEDURE OF SUGGESTOPEDIC INSTRUCTION**

Georgi Lozanov states that learning is a matter of attitude, not aptitude. Some of the key elements of Suggestopedia include a rich sensory learning environment (pictures, colour, music, etc.), a positive expectation of success and the use of a varied range of methods: dramatised texts, music, active participation in songs and games, etc. Suggestopedia uses four main stages as follows: ([http://www.jwelford.demon.co.uk/brainwaremap/t\\_suggest](http://www.jwelford.demon.co.uk/brainwaremap/t_suggest) , August 28<sup>th</sup> 2010)

### *1. Presentation*

It is a preparatory stage in which students are helped to relax and move into a positive frame of mind, with the feeling that the learning is going to be easy and fun. Physical exercises, mostly muscle tensing and relaxing, mind calming with music are done. Students are relaxed and immerse themselves in soft classical music while they visualize themselves first in a safe, calm place away from the classroom, then see themselves learning lesson material quickly and easily. After three or four minutes of this activity, the students return to their usual attentive state of awareness.

### *2. First Concert - "Active Concert"*

The instructional setting will be look like a living room, using a central round table and ordinary arm chairs surrounding the table. The classroom is bright and colorful. There are several posters on the wall. Some of them contain grammatical and vocabulary information. The teacher is lively, dynamic, confident, yet sensitive. All learners choose a new name and nationality, after which they are given a fictional autobiography. By means of song, imitation, and play, the learners are enabled to introduce themselves to each other and assume their new roles (Murcia, 1991: 42).

This involves the active presentation of the material to be learnt. The teacher introduced the new dialogue for the week, reading the material aloud in a dramatic manner, pausing to translate new vocabulary as necessary. He reads the text at a normal speed, sometimes intoning some words, and the students follow. Then, it is followed by various kinds of activities: group or choral reading of the parts of the script, role play, singing , playing games. It uses lively pieces of classical music. Suggestopedia uses the power of pieces of classical music because of its

artistically harmonized colorful melody, rhythm, and emotion that stimulates all levels of mind as it changes from time to time.

### *3. Second Concert - "Passive Concert"*

In this step, a state of relax is created. The students put down the script, close their eyes. The students are now invited to relax and listen to some Baroque music, with the text being read by the teacher very quietly in the background. The music is specially selected to bring the students into the optimum mental state for the effortless acquisition of the material. Suggestopedia uses baroque music pieces in the second or "passive" concert session, it never uses a "slow baroque" or a music piece written as "adagio". It is simply because Suggestopedia does not want students to fall asleep in the concert session. Rather, it uses faster and livelier pieces to stimulate a whole brain. At the end of this passive concert, the students leave the classroom silently (Harmer, 2003: 90)

### *4. Practice*

In this stage, the students finish off what they have learned with dramas, songs, games, puzzles, etc. to review and consolidate the learning. The students sing classical songs and play games, etc. while "the teacher acts more like a consultant." The students spontaneously speak and interact in the target language without interruption or correction.

## **EFFECTS OF SUGGESTOPEDIC INSTRUCTION**

According to Gabriele Beitinger, the design of suggestopedic instruction has positive cognitive, motivational, emotional, and social effects. Individual differences between learners are taken into consideration as well, since the goal of suggestopedia is to give special help to those learners with somewhat more negative approach to learning, such as a high degree of anxiety.

(<http://www.delphininternational.com/ResourceCenter/suggesto>, August 30th 2010)

### *1. Cognitive effects: development of knowledge.*

As explained above, suggestopedic instruction provides learners with learning environments which are comfortable. This is to increase learning resistance, to stimulate learning readiness, to make the learners feel relaxed, to foster hope and trust in their own power, to help the learners overcome the barriers to learning, to facilitate the learners to change input into intake. The students are exposed to situational exercises as well as to the complex, authentic system of the target language. It can be expected that this exposure has an especially positive effect on the development of listening comprehension and the ability to communicate in a foreign language in everyday situations.

### *2. Motivational effects.*

According to the motivational approach, the experience of enjoyment (intrinsic motivation) and competence in learning is the decisive factor in the development

of *long-term* learning motivation. The playful design of many exercises in suggestopedic instruction is likely to produce such kind of experience, e.g. a joy of learning and curiosity. Therefore, we might expect an increase of intrinsic motivation during the course of suggestopedic instruction. As suggestopedic instruction offers frequent opportunities to select the activities according to personal interests or intent to apply the learning, learners should quite often experience the feeling of autonomy and self determination. The manner in which different forms of practice are embedded in rich situational contexts helps the learner understand rather complex remarks even with a limited vocabulary. Experiences of success such as those are likely to frequently let learners experience a feeling of competence. Thus, overall, suggestopedic instruction can be expected to have positive motivational effects.

### *3. Emotional effects: Anxiety.*

In regard to emotional effects, one important way to facilitate the learning process of the learners is to reduce their nervousness and anxious tension. Suggestopedic instruction responds to this emotional need through the frequent use of relaxation exercises as well as through reducing nervousness in movement-oriented exercises. We can therefore assume that suggestopedic instruction has a positive effect on the emotional dimension of the learning process.

### *4. Social effects.*

By motivating independent groups of learners to work on a certain subject matter even after a corresponding course has ended ("groups of practice"), self autonomous development of knowledge, especially on a long term basis, is promoted. A positive view of the shared process of learning is vital for the formation of such groups. Suggestopedic instruction frequently uses exercises which provide a high degree of social interaction and authentic communication. It is seen as very important that learners become acquainted with each other. Therefore, we can expect that students in a suggestopedic course will experience cooperation with other students as well as with the instructor in a positive way.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the above discussion, some conclusions can be drawn. The goal of Suggestopedia is to accelerate the process of language learning. The relationship between the teacher and the students in suggestopedic instruction is like parents and children. The teaching-learning process is "learner-centered". The teacher initiates interactions with the whole group of students and with individuals from the beginning of the course. Later, the students initiate interaction themselves. One of the fundamental principles of the method is enhancing the students' feelings of relax and confidence. The student errors are corrected gently, with the teacher using soft voice. Suggestopedia uses four main stages as follows: presentation, active concert, passive concert, and practice. Suggestopedic

instruction has positive cognitive, motivational, emotional, and social effects on the learners.

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