

Suggestopedia and Desuggestopedia

MOJGAN RASHTCHI

Framing the Issue

As a method of teaching, suggestopedia (or suggestopaedia), as the name implies, is the application of suggestion to pedagogy. This method was founded by Georgi Lozanov (July 22, 1962–May 6, 2012), a Bulgarian doctor and psychotherapist. In *Suggestopedia*, Lozanov (2005) intends to apply or put to practice the characteristics of the theory of suggestology, the scientific study of suggestion. Suggestology, as Lozanov (1978) defines it, is the “science of tapping man’s [*sic*] reserve capacities in the sphere of both mind and body”; therefore it is the science of humans and their “manifold talents” (p. 8). By reserve capacities Lozanov understands the “genetically predetermined capacities” that are not apparent but operate mainly in paraconsciousness; they are inborn but suppressed by social suggestive norms and are ruled by laws that differ from ordinary psychophysiological laws (Lozanov, 2005, p. 14). To put it differently, suggestopedia or desuggestive learning releases the reserve of unused capacities in the brain, which are responsible for learning but are suppressed by social suggestive norms or through inhibiting influences. Desuggestive learning enables the learner to absorb loads of data available in the teaching process because, when one’s inhibitions are lowered, the opportunity to learn increases. One of the most important aims of suggestology is precisely to liberate students from the social suggestive norms (in other words to “desuggest” them), which is achieved through the “suggestopedic liberating–stimulating educational system and by concrete methods of freeing and making use” of human “locked up resources.” Suggestopedic, according to Lozanov, “stimulates not only memory but the whole personality—interests, perceptions, intellectual activity, motivation, creativity and moral development” (Lozanov, 1978, p. 22).

Suggestion (or suggestibility), as Lozanov sustains, describes an “unfavorable position,” which plays a role in every moment of our life (p. 9). It is a “communicative factor”; it communicates, namely, that the personality should choose from among a range of stimuli that come from the external environment or arise within itself (i.e., within the individual), both in consciousness and at various levels of paraconsciousness. Lozanov argues that the use of conscious–paraconscious

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stimuli can show “the personality’s universal reserve capacities and stimulate its creativity” (p. 10). Among the many examples of the reserve capacities tapped with the help of this method is hypermnesia (supermemory or enhanced memory), a phenomenon observed in long-term memory. Supermemory goes beyond the possibilities of ordinary memory and is revealed either after a “latent period and without any conscious effort, or suddenly and spontaneously” (Lozanov, 2005, p. 13).

For Lozanov, suggestopedia is a nonmanipulative and nonhypnotic method of learning, which offers deeper knowledge and enhances learners’ motivation to learn. By increasing their psychophysiological health, suggestopedia, as Lozanov argues, makes learning enjoyable, and thus increases its speed; for example, a foreign language could be acquired three to five times faster with suggestopedia than through nonsuggestopedic learning.

The means of suggestion are intrinsic communicative factors that may be unconscious yet are always present and can be divided into two nonspecific groups. The first group includes dual (or double) plane as well as intonation and rhythm of speech (Lozanov, 2005). “Dual plane”—which consists of the conscious verbal level (primary plane) and the paraconscious nonverbal level (secondary plane)—refers to the behavior of the students and teacher while communicating. Lozanov (1978, p. 193) defines dual planeness as the “enormous signaling stream of diverse stimuli that unconsciously or semi consciously are emitted from or perceived by the personality.” The decor of the classroom environment, the light, and the color can also contribute to the communication act in the classroom. The second group of factors that affect communication consists of credibility (prestige and reliability) of the source of information (i.e., the teacher), infantilization, and pseudo-passivity. According to Lozanov (2005), from different types of prestige, suggestopedia focuses on the authority of the teacher: as source of information, the teacher should be authoritative because when the information comes from an authoritative source, receptivity increases. This feature of authority helps learners be positive toward their teacher’s ability. Real prestige (credibility and reliability) plays a very important role in the desuggestive process, as it creates an atmosphere of confidence and encourages learning (Lozanov, 1978). Infantilization is the “natural and spontaneous reaction” in receiving reliable and credible information. It is the result of the learners’ trust and helps them enhance their receptivity. Pseudo-passivity refers to a “calm and relaxed, undisturbed and controlled activity” and promotes concentration; in other words, the learner concentrates better when he or she is experiencing self-relaxation (Lozanov, 2005, p. 53).

An important element that must be taken into consideration is the role of placebo in suggestopedia; this element refers to “non-specific impact factors in any communication” (p. 49). Placebo is assumed to give stimulus to learners and must be present from the first to the last moment of the course. Lozanov believes that a placebo gives signals that are “incorporated unconsciously through the peripheral perceptions and the paraconsciousness but their elimination is impossible” (p. 49). Signals work as a placebo and are not as useful as the procedures of the method; however, they exist and have the potential to impact the learning process. As

Lozanov states, they are “transitory, unstable, requiring constant support, and sometimes could produce *unexpected negative effects*.” Lozanov adds: “That is why any attempts at explaining our suggestopaedic system of *training by means of the placebo effect*, the Hawthorne effects, and the Pygmalion effect are far from the truth” (p. 50).

Making the Case

The early suggestopedia courses for teaching a foreign language, as mentioned in Lozanov (1978, p. 45), included the pre-session phase, the session phase, and the postsession phase. The pre-session phase took 15 to 20 minutes during which students familiarized themselves with the new material and memorized a great part of it. In the session phase, which took about 45 minutes, pleasant emotions were aroused. The teacher explained the new material and deciphered the dialogue. The teacher’s behavior suggested to the learners that learning the material is easy. This stage, as Lozanov (1978) put forward, included three substages of fixation, reproduction, and new creative production. The postsession phase was the phase of various elaborations designed to help learners assimilate the material. The elaborations consisted of imitation of the text, questions and answers, reading, and conversation on given themes. The learners could voluntarily engage in small role play, which was not difficult for them because they had been given new names taken from the language they were learning and associated with the characters in the text. Role play helped learners use the phrases they had heard in the session phase without too much effort. As Lozanov (1978) clarified, the last day of the course was devoted to the performance of a little show in which all learners were given a role. The show covered most of the themes practiced during the course.

In his later work, however, Lozanov referred to these three phases as deciphering, active memorization *séance*, and passive memorization *séance* (Lozanov, 2005). During the deciphering stage the teacher explained the content of the lesson, the grammar, and the new vocabulary. In the active memorization *séance* the teacher read the “huge bulk of the text” at normal speed, without any music, while the students *actively* followed the textbook. Each word was read three times, to enable the students to memorize it (in the later versions of the method repetition was removed). Then the teacher went through vertical reading without repetition of words and phrases. In the passive *séance*, which had some music in the background, the students sat calmly on their chairs and only listened to the teacher who read the text but did not provide any explanation. The necessary explanations were given the following day and practiced through songs and games.

After hundreds of experiments and thousands of students (Lozanov, 2005), the method took its final version. The deciphering stage was replaced by an artistic introduction during which the teacher and the students engaged in a game and the material was taught through role play. The second stage, the active *séance*, was performed against the background of classical music by famous composers such as Mozart, Beethoven, Haydn, and Tchaikovsky. The teacher read the text

with an intonation appropriate to the music. The passive séance was performed against the background of preclassical works by composers such as Bach, Vivaldi, and Corelli. The subsequent day, the students sang the classical songs and played games in a happy and friendly environment. In the new version of the method there was a fourth stage: one of production, during which the students told interesting stories and carried out conversations in the foreign language. It is worth mentioning that introducing classical music to the method was suggested by Lozanov's colleague, Evelyn Gateva, as a result of her experiments with the method. Classical music, as Lozanov (2005, p. 12) asserts, enabled the method to "reach the hidden reserves of mind" and "now is an integral part of suggestopedia—desuggestive teaching."

In 1980 Lozanov was placed under house arrest for about ten years, during which many variations of the method were developed. Lozanov claims that his method has been misunderstood and led in a wrong direction, since he could not publish much before the political and social changes in 1989. He states that his "theory about love and the freedom of personality needed to activate the reserves of mind was in dangerous contradiction with the official ideology of communist regime" (2005, p. 131). Lozanov clearly rejects the use of certain features that are occasionally attributed to suggestopedia and desuggestopedia. Hypnosis, neurolinguistic programming, breathing exercises, using alpha waves of the brain, slow baroque music, super-learning, reclining chairs, and special diets, as Lozanov straightforwardly asserts, are among the factors that are erroneously attributed to the method (p. 127). However, he emphasizes the use of classical art, placebo, paraconsciousness, relaxation (calmness), peripheral perceptions, credibility of the source of information, dual plane, intonation and rhythm, infantilization, prestige, multiple personality, fluctuating methodology, new biographies, songs, laughter, directed nonmanipulative communication, and soft communicative suggestion in the method (p. 127).

Lozanov investigated the effect of suggestopedia in various experimental and control schools for 10 years with 10,000 foreign language learners and 40,000 primary school students learning other subjects. He asserts that "it is wrong to consider suggestopaedia a methodology of foreign language teaching only" (p. 12). The children who participated in Lozanov's experiment were taught the Bulgarian alphabet suggestopedically and were able to read 40 words without any effort. Subjects such as mathematics, geography, and history were also learned easily. The results of Lozanov's study were reported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Suggestopedia was supported by UNESCO in 1978 as "a generally superior teaching method for many subjects and for many types of students, compared with traditional methods" (UNESCO, 1978; as cited in Lozanov, 2005, p. 124). Experts from the Working Group on Suggestology as a Learning Methodology, after scrutinizing different sources and evaluating the classes in which suggestopedia was practiced, stated that the information obtained was "incomplete and must be augmented by knowledge of the research data and knowledgeable opinions from informed experts" (pp. 124–5).

The classroom procedures of suggestopedia, as Lozanov's works (1978, 2005) reflect, have undergone several changes due to his ongoing research in the field. Additionally, variations in the method incorporated by different scholars signify misinterpretations or deviations from what Lozanov has actually intended. For example, Bancroft (1978, pp. 170–1) explains that, during the *séance*, "students relax the vital areas of the body and sit in their reclining chairs in the alternate Savasana posture." Also, she states that the learners practice "correct yoga breathing," which "accords with the teacher's reading of the language material ... during the passive or 'concert' part of the *séance*, both with the reading of the language materials and with the ... baroque music in the background." It can be presumed that attitudes toward communism during the 1960s and 1970s gave rise to a negative perception of suggestopedia. Also, Lozanov's restrictions in communicating with the world outside Bulgaria for 10 years had a substantially negative impact on his work. The fact that he could not defend his theory or prevent its development in different directions may have affected the credibility of suggestopedia.

Research findings regarding the practice of suggestopedia are controversial. For example, Wagner and Tilney (1983), who attempted to teach 300 German words to native English speakers in a five-week period, found that "those taught by a traditional classroom method learned significantly more vocabulary than those taught by superlearning techniques" and stated that, "although scrupulous care to preserve 'Superlearning' methodology was taken in this investigation, accelerated learning could not be substantiated" (p. 5). Scovel (1979, p. 265) believes that suggestopedia is far from being a scientific approach to learning and that the teaching profession has very little to gain from the "pseudo-science of suggestology." However, Scovel stresses that there are techniques and procedures in suggestopeddy that may prove useful in a foreign language classroom."

Pedagogical Implications

The fundamental goal of suggestopedia is to help learners free themselves from the social barriers that impede learning. The role of affective factors in the method categorizes it among the humanistic approaches (e.g., community language learning, total physical approach) to language teaching. The respect that suggestopedia has for students' feelings and emotions can set a good example for EFL/ESL teachers. Teachers' love for their students and for human beings in general could be considered a key component in successful teaching. The games, the role play, the adoption of new biographies, the use of costumes, and the different types of *realia*, which can all be enlisted in teaching different language skills and subskills, can also contribute to lowering the affective filter. In fact such activities give free rein to teachers' innovative spirit and resourcefulness and boost both teachers' and students' originality. Engagement in role play stimulates creative thinking among learners and contributes to teachers' reflection on their students' learning. Also, it can help teachers diagnose their students' language problems and thus bridge the gap between teaching and classroom assessment.

The joyful atmosphere of the classroom is another lesson of suggestopedia to pedagogy. Friendly relationship among learners is good for cooperative learning. Colors, posters, and pictures can add to the pleasant atmosphere of the classes. Teacher characteristics such as credibility, intonation, and prestige can give an advantage to teachers, particularly those who are new in the profession.

Another lesson from suggestopedia to ELT could be about the use of music. As Harmer (2001) believes, music can stimulate learners' desire to engage in learning, since it addresses emotions and meanwhile allows the brain to analyze its effect. A piece of music can change the classroom atmosphere and initiate a new activity, while establishing a connection between relaxation and learning (Harmer, 2001). A new identity, conceived of as a "cute device on the cognitive level" (Stevick, 1983, p. 118), can help learners see themselves in the foreign culture and detach themselves from the "norms and limitations" (p. 116) the society has imposed on them. It can bring "positive and pleasant associations" and help learners take roles not with their "real Self" but with their "surrogate Self" (p. 118). The idea of a new identity also receives theoretical support from Kaplan's (1966) cultural thinking, which suggested that people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds organize discourse differently, as a reflection of their native language and culture. A target identity can affect the learners' ways of thinking—and, consequently, their use of the target language. A new identity can help learners think differently; it can also stimulate ideas and encourage students to learn the cultural values and rhetorical conventions specific to the English language (Rashtchi & Karami, 2015).

SEE ALSO: Role Play

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Suggested Reading

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