

## CHAPTER SIX.

# SUGGESTOPEDIA

### INTRODUCTION

The originator of the method we will be exploring in this chapter, Georgi Lozanov, believes as does Silent Way's Caleb Gattegno that language learning can occur at a much faster rate than what ordinarily transpires. The reason for our inefficiency, Lozanov asserts, is that we set up psychological barriers to learning: We fear that we will be unable to perform, that we will be limited in our ability to learn, that we will fail. One result is that we do not use the full mental powers that we have. According to Lozanov and others, we may be using only five to ten percent of our mental capacity. In order to make better use of our mental reserves, the limitations we think we have need to be "desuggested." Suggestopedia, the application of the study of suggestion to pedagogy, has been developed to help students eliminate the feeling that they cannot be successful and, thus, to help them overcome the barriers to learning.

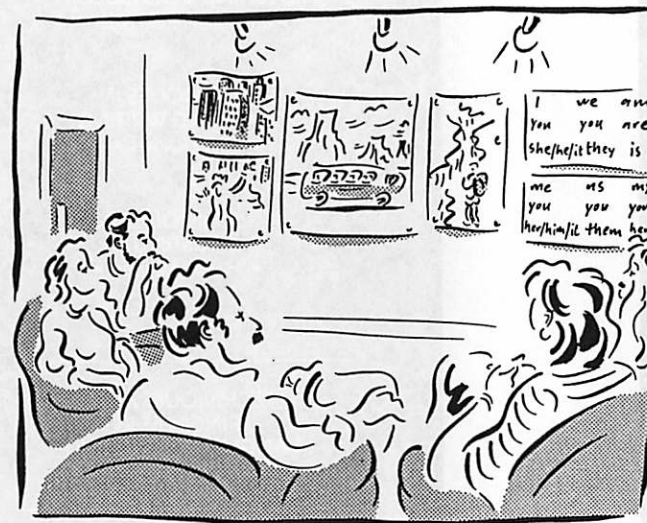
Let us now see for ourselves how the principles of Suggestopedia are applied to language teaching. We will visit a university class in Egypt being taught English by this method. There are sixteen students in the class. They are beginners. The class meets for two hours, three mornings a week.

### EXPERIENCE\*

The first thing we notice when we enter the classroom is how different this room is compared with all the other classrooms we've been in so far. The students are seated in cushioned armchairs that are arranged

\* The lesson described here is in part based on ones the author observed taught by Dan Dugas and Lynn Dhority, respectively.

in a semicircle facing the front of the room. The lighting is dim. There is soft music playing. There are several posters on the walls. Most of them are travel posters with scenes from America; a few, however, contain grammatical information. One has the conjugation of the verb "be" and the subject pronouns; another has the object and possessive pronouns.



The teacher greets the students in Arabic and tells them that they are about to begin a new and exciting experience in language learning. She says confidently, "You won't need to try to learn. It will just come naturally. Sit back and enjoy yourself."

The teacher puts on a record of *The Grand Canyon Suite* and invites the students to close their eyes and to become aware of their breathing. "In, out. In, out," she says almost in a whisper. She then invites the students to take an imaginary trip with her. She tells them that they are going to visit America. She will be their guide. She describes the airplane flight, what they will see when they first land

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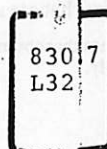
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and how they will feel in the airport. She tells them to listen to the English all around them and to feel themselves replying fluently in English to questions posed to them by the customs and immigration officials. "Now," she says, "slowly bring your awareness back to this room, its sounds and its smells. When you are ready, open your eyes. Welcome to English!"

One by one the students open their eyes. When they have all done so, the teacher tells them that they are all about to get new names—English ones. "It will be fun," she says. Besides, she tells them, they will need new identities (ones they can play with) to go along with this new experience. She shows the class a poster with different English names printed in color in the Roman alphabet. The students are familiar with the Roman alphabet from their earlier study of French. There are men's names in one column and women's names in another. She tells them that they are each to choose a name. She pronounces each name and has the students repeat the pronunciation. One by one the students say which name they have chosen.

Next, she tells them that during the course they will create an imaginary biography about the life of their new identity. But for now, she says, they should just choose a profession to go with the new name. Using pantomime to help the students understand, the teacher acts out various occupations, such as pilot, singer, carpenter, and artist. The students choose what they want to be.

The teacher greets each student using his new name and asks him a few questions in English about his new occupation. Through her actions the students understand the meaning and they reply "yes" or "no." She then teaches them a short English dialog in which two people greet each other and inquire what each other does for a living. After practicing the dialog with the group and with individual students, the teacher tells the class to pretend that they are each at a party where they don't know anyone. The students stand up and walk around the room, greeting one another.

Next the teacher announces to the class that they will be beginning a new adventure. She distributes a twenty-page handout. The handout contains a lengthy dialog entitled "To Want To Is To Be Able To," which the teacher translates into Arabic. She has the students turn the page. On the right page are two columns of print: In the left

one is the English dialog; in the right, the Arabic translation. On the left page are some comments in Arabic about certain of the English vocabulary items and grammatical structures the students will encounter in the dialog on the facing page.

Partly in Arabic, partly in English, and partly through pantomime, the teacher outlines the dialog's story. She also calls her students' attention to some of the comments regarding vocabulary and grammar on the left-hand pages. Then she tells them in Arabic that she is going to read the dialog to them in English and that they should follow along as she reads. She will give them sufficient time to look at both the English and the Arabic. "Just enjoy," she concludes.

The teacher puts on some music. It's Mozart's Violin Concerto no. 5. After a couple of minutes, in a quiet voice she begins to read the text. Her reading appears to be molded by the music as her intonation and volume rise and fall with the music. She speaks at a slow pace.

The teacher then explains that she will read the dialog again. This time she suggests that the students put down their scripts, close their eyes, and just listen. The second time she reads the dialog, she appears to be speaking at a normal rate. She has changed the music to Handel's *Water Music*. She makes no attempt this time to match her voice to the music. With the end of the second reading, the class is over. There is no homework assigned; however, the teacher suggests that if the students want to do something, they could read over the dialog once before they go to bed and once when they get up in the morning.

We decide to attend the next class to see how the teacher will work with the new material she has presented. After greeting the students and having them introduce themselves in their new identities once again, the teacher asks the students to take out their dialog scripts.

Next, the teacher pulls out a hat from a bag. She puts it on her head, points to herself, and names a character from the dialog. She indicates that she wants someone else to wear the hat. A girl volunteers to do so. Three more hats are taken out of the teacher's bag and, with a great deal of playfulness, they are distributed. The teacher turns to the four students wearing the hats and asks them to read a portion of the dialog, imagining that they are the character whose hat they wear. When they finish their portion of dialog, four different students get



to wear the hats and continue reading the script. This group is asked to read it in a sad way. The next group of four read it in an angry way, and the last group of four in an amorous way.

The teacher then asks for four new volunteers. She tells them to pretend they are auditioning for a role in a Broadway play. They want very much to win the role. In order to impress the director of the play, they must read their lines very dramatically. The first group reads several pages of the dialog in this manner, and following groups do this as well.

Next, the teacher asks questions in English about the dialog. She also asks students to give her the English translation of an Arabic sentence and vice versa. Sometimes she asks the students to repeat an English line after her; still other times, she addresses a question from the dialog to an individual student.

Next, she teaches the students a children's alphabet song containing English names and occupations, "A, my name is Alice; my husband's name is Alex. We live in America, and we sell apples. B, my name is Barbara; my husband's name is Bert. We live in Brazil, and we sell books." The students are laughing and clapping as they sing along.

After the song, the teacher has the students stand up and get in a circle. She takes out a medium-sized soft ball. She throws the ball to one student and, while she's throwing it, she asks him what his name is in English. He catches the ball as he says, "My name is Richard." She indicates that he is to throw the ball to another student while posing a question to him. Richard asks, "What you do?" (The teacher says nothing, but we notice later that when it is the teacher's turn again, her question is "What do you do?") The student replies, "I am a conductor." The game continues on in this manner with the students posing questions to one another as they throw the ball. The second class is now over. Again, there is no homework assigned, other than to read over the dialog if a student so wishes.

During the third class of the week, the students will continue to work with this dialog. They will move away from reading it, however, and move toward using the new language in a creative way. They will play some competitive games, do role-plays (see description in the techniques review) and skits. Next week, the class will be introduced to

a new dialog and the basic sequence of lessons we observed here will be repeated.

## THINKING ABOUT THE EXPERIENCE

Let us now investigate Suggestopedia in our usual fashion. First, we will list our observations. From these, we will attempt to uncover the principles of Suggestopedia.

### Observations

1. The classroom is unusual: The students are seated in cushioned armchairs, the lighting is dim, soft music is playing.

2. Among the posters hanging around the room are several containing grammatical information.

3. The teacher speaks reassuringly.

4. The teacher tells them that learning the target language will be easy and enjoyable.

5. The teacher invites the students to take a mental trip with her.

### Principles

Learning is facilitated in a relaxed, comfortable environment.

A student can learn from what is present in the environment, even if his attention is not directed to it ("Peripheral Learning").

If the student trusts and respects the teacher's authority, he will accept and retain information better.

The teacher should recognize that learners bring certain psychological barriers with them to the learning situation. She should attempt to "desuggest" these.

Activating the learners' imagination will aid learning.

**Observations**

6. The teacher suggests that the students feel themselves replying fluently in English to the questions posed to them.

7. The students choose new names and identities.

8. The students greet each other and inquire about each other's occupations.

9. The students use the new English sentences as if they were at a party.

10. The teacher distributes a lengthy handout to the class. The title of the dialog is "To Want To Is To Be Able To."

11. The teacher briefly mentions a few points about English grammar and vocabulary.

12. In the left column is the dialog in the target language. In the right column is the mother tongue translation.

**Principles**

The teacher attempts to increase her students' confidence that they will be successful learners. The more confident the students feel, the better they will learn.

Assuming a new identity enhances students' feeling of security and allows them to be more open. They feel less inhibited since their performance is really that of a different person.

The dialog that the students learn contains language they can use immediately.

When their attention is off the form of the language, and on the process of communicating, students will learn best.

The teacher should integrate indirect positive suggestions ("there is no limit to what you can do") into the learning situation.

The teacher should present and explain the grammar and vocabulary, but not dwell on them.

One way that meaning is made clear is through mother tongue translation.

**Observations**

13. The teacher reads the dialog with a musical accompaniment. She matches her voice to the volume and intonation of the music.

14. The teacher reads the script a second time as the students close their eyes and listen. This is done to different music.

15. For homework, the students are to read the dialog at night and in the morning.

16. The teacher gives the students hats to wear for the different characters in the dialog. The students take turns reading portions of the dialog.

17. The teacher instructs the students to pretend they are auditioning for a play.

**Principles**

Communication takes place on "two planes": on one the linguistic message is encoded; and on the other are factors which influence the linguistic message. On the conscious plane, the learner attends to the language; on the subconscious plane, the music suggests that learning is easy and pleasant. When there is a unity between conscious and subconscious, learning is enhanced.

A pseudo-passive state, such as the state one experiences when listening to a concert, is ideal for overcoming psychological barriers and for taking advantage of learning potential.

At these times, the distinction between the conscious and the subconscious is most blurred and, therefore, optimal learning can occur.

Dramatization is a particularly valuable way of playfully activating the material. Fantasy reduces barriers to learning.

The fine arts (music, art, and drama) enable suggestions to reach the subconscious. The arts should, therefore, be integrated as much as possible into the teaching process.

### Observations

18. The teacher leads the class in various activities involving the dialog, for example, question-and-answer, repetition, and translation.

19. She teaches the students a children's song.

20. The teacher and students play a question-and-answer game with a ball.

21. The student makes an error by saying, "How you do?" The teacher ignores the error at the time, but later uses the correct question structure herself.

### Principles

The teacher should help the students "activate" the material to which they have been exposed. The means of doing this should be varied so as to avoid repetition as much as possible. Novelty aids acquisition.

Music and movement reinforce the linguistic material. It is desirable that students achieve a state of "infantilization"—having a childlike attitude—so that they will be more open to learning. If they trust the teacher, they will reach this state more easily.

In an atmosphere of play, the conscious attention of the learner does not focus on linguistic forms, but rather on using the language. Learning can be fun.

Errors are to be tolerated, the emphasis being on content, not form. The teacher should use the form a little later so the students will hear it used correctly.

## REVIEWING THE PRINCIPLES

Let us now follow our usual procedure of reviewing the principles of a method by answering our ten questions.

1. What are the goals of teachers who use Suggestopedia?

Teachers hope to accelerate the process by which students learn to use a foreign language for everyday communication. In order to do this, more of the students' mental powers must be tapped. This is accomplished by desuggesting the psychological barriers learners bring with them to the learning situation.

2. What is the role of the teacher? What is the role of the students?

The teacher is the authority in the classroom. In order for the method to be successful, the students must trust and respect her. The students will retain information better from someone in whom they have confidence since they will be more responsive to her "desuggesting" their limitations and suggesting how easy it will be for them to succeed.

Once the students trust the teacher, they can undergo infantilization—adopting a childlike role. If they feel secure, they can be more spontaneous and less inhibited.

3. What are some characteristics of the teaching/learning process?

A Suggestopedic course is conducted in a classroom in which students are as comfortable as possible. Ideally, easy chairs, soft lighting, and music are all available to contribute to a relaxing environment. Posters displaying grammatical information about the target language are hung around the room in order to take advantage of students' peripheral learning. The posters are changed every few weeks.

Students select target language names and choose new occupations. During the course they create whole biographies to go along with their new identities.

The texts students work from are handouts containing lengthy dialogs in the target language. Next to the dialog is a translation in the students' native language. There are also some notes on the vocabulary and grammar in the dialog.

The teacher presents the dialog during two concerts. These represent the first major phase (the receptive phase). In the first concert the teacher reads the dialog, matching her voice to the rhythm and pitch of the music. In this way, the "whole brain" (both the left and the right hemispheres) of the students becomes activated. The students follow the target language dialog as the teacher reads it out loud. They also check the translation. During the second concert, the students



simply relax while the teacher reads the dialog at a normal rate of speed. For homework the students read over the dialog just before they go to sleep, and again when they get up the next morning.

What follows is the second major phase (the activation phase), in which students engage in various activities designed to help them gain facility with the new material. The activities include dramatizations, games, songs, and question-and-answer exercises.

4. What is the nature of student-teacher interaction? What is the nature of student-student interaction?

The teacher initiates interactions with the whole group of students and with individuals right from the beginning of a language course. Initially, the students can only respond nonverbally or with a few target language words they have practiced. Later the students have more control of the target language and can respond more appropriately and even initiate interaction themselves. Students interact with each other from the beginning in various activities directed by the teacher.

5. How are the feelings of the students dealt with?

A great deal of attention is given to students' feelings in this method. One of the fundamental principles of the method is that if students are relaxed and confident, they will not need to try hard to learn the language. It will just come naturally and easily.

It is considered important in this method that the psychological barriers that students bring with them be desuggested. Direct and indirect positive suggestions are made to enhance students' self-confidence and to convince them that success is obtainable.

Students also choose target language names on the assumption that a new identity makes students feel more secure and thus more open to learning.

6. How is language viewed? How is culture viewed?

Language is the first of two planes in the two-plane process of communication. In the second plane are the factors which influence the linguistic message. For example, the way one dresses or the nonverbal behavior one uses affects how one's linguistic message is interpreted.

The culture which students learn concerns the everyday life of people who speak the language. The use of the fine arts is also common in Suggestopedic classes.

7. What areas of language are emphasized? What language skills are emphasized?

Vocabulary is emphasized. Claims about the success of the method often focus on the large number of words that can be acquired. Grammar is dealt with explicitly but minimally. In fact, it is believed that students will learn best if their conscious attention is focused, not on the language forms, but on using the language.

Speaking communicatively is emphasized. Students also read the target language (for example, dialogs) and write (for example, imaginative compositions).

8. What is 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 mother tongue in class when necessary. As the course proceeds, the teacher uses the native language less and less.

9. How is evaluation accomplished?

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

10. How does the teacher respond to student errors?

At least at beginning levels, errors are not corrected immediately since the emphasis is on students communicating their intended meaning. When errors of form do occur, the teacher uses the form correctly later on during class.

## REVIEWING THE TECHNIQUES AND THE CLASSROOM SET-UP

If you find Suggestopedia's principles meaningful, you may want to try some of the following techniques or to alter your classroom environment. Even if they don't all appeal to you, there may be some elements you could usefully adapt to your own teaching style.

### **Classroom Set-up**

The challenge for the teacher is to create a classroom environment which does not look or feel like a normal classroom. This was accomplished in the classroom we visited by the use of dim lights, soft music, cushioned armchairs, and walls decorated with scenes from a country where the target language is spoken. These conditions are not always possible. However, the teacher should try to provide as relaxed and comfortable an environment as possible.

### **Peripheral Learning**

This technique is based upon the idea that we perceive much more in our environment than that to which we consciously attend. It is claimed that, by putting posters containing grammatical information about the target language on the classroom walls, students will absorb the necessary facts effortlessly. The teacher may or may not call attention to the posters. They are changed from time to time to provide grammatical information that is appropriate to what the students are studying.

### **Positive Suggestion**

It is the teacher's responsibility to orchestrate the suggestive factors in a learning situation, thereby helping students break down the barriers to learning that they bring with them. Teachers can do this through direct and indirect means. Direct suggestion appeals to the students' consciousness: A teacher tells students they are going to be successful. But indirect suggestion, which appeals to the students' subconscious, is actually the more powerful of the two. For example, indirect suggestion was accomplished in the class we visited through the use of music and a comfortable physical environment. It helped the students relax and feel that the learning experience was going to be a pleasant one.

### **Visualization**

Visualization can be a vehicle for positive suggestion or it can be used simply to relax one's students. Students are asked to close their eyes and to concentrate on their breathing. After a minute or so, the teacher, speaking in a quiet voice, describes a scene or event. The description is detailed so students feel they are really there. When the description

is complete, the teacher asks the students to slowly open their eyes and to return to the present.

Some teachers have used such visualization exercises to activate student creativity just before their students do something in the target language—writing a composition, for example.

### **Choose a New Identity**

The students choose a target language name and a new occupation. As the course continues, the students have an opportunity to develop a whole biography about their fictional selves. For instance, later on they may be asked to talk or write about their fictional hometown, childhood, and family.

### **Role-play**

Students are asked to pretend temporarily that they are someone else and to perform in the target language as if they were that person. They are often asked to create their own lines relevant to the situation. In the lesson we observed, the students were asked to pretend they were at a party and were going around meeting other people there.

### **First Concert**

The two concerts are components of the receptive phase of the lesson. After the teacher has introduced the story as related in the dialog and has called his students' attention to some particular grammatical points that arise in it, he reads the dialog in the target language. The students have copies of the dialog in the target language and their mother tongue and refer to it as the teacher is reading.

Music is played. After a few minutes, the teacher begins a slow, dramatic reading, synchronized in intonation with the music. The music is classical; the early Romantic period is suggested. The teacher's voice is usually hushed, but rises and falls with the music.

### **Second Concert**

In the second phase, the students are asked to put their scripts aside. They simply close their eyes and listen as the teacher reads the dialog at a normal rate of speed. The teacher is seated and reads with musical accompaniment. This time the content governs the way the teacher



reads the script, not the music, which is pre-Classical or Baroque. At the end of this concert, the class ends for the day.

### Primary Activation

This technique and the one that follows are components of the active phase of the lesson. The students playfully reread the target language dialog out loud, as individuals or in groups. In the lesson we observed, three groups of students read parts of the dialog in a particular manner: the first group, sadly; the next, angrily; the last, amorously.

### Secondary Activation

The students engage in various activities designed to help them learn the new material and use it spontaneously. Activities particularly recommended for this phase include singing, dancing, dramatizations, and games. The important thing is that the activities are varied and don't allow the students to focus on the form of the linguistic message, just the communicative intent.

## CONCLUSION

What connection, if any, can you make between Suggestopedia and your approach to teaching? Does it make sense to you that when your students are relaxed and comfortable, their learning will be facilitated? Should the teacher's role be one of being a respected and trusted authority? Should direct and indirect suggestions be used? Should learning be made as enjoyable as possible? Which, if any, of the other principles of Suggestopedia do you accept?

Do you think students can learn peripherally? Would it be useful for your students to develop a new target language identity? Would you consider presenting new material with a musical accompaniment? Are any of the activities of the activation phase of use to you?

## • ACTIVITIES •

### A. Check your understanding of Suggestopedia.

1. What are some of the ways that direct positive suggestions were present in the lesson? Indirect positive suggestions?
2. How are the arts integrated into the lesson we observed?
3. How is the infantilization of the students encouraged?

### B. Apply what you have understood about Suggestopedia.

1. Most teachers do not have control of the kind of lighting that is present in their classrooms. They also do not have access to special, comfortable chairs for their students. This does not mean that they cannot provide an environment designed to reduce the barriers their students bring with them, however. Can you think of ways that you might do this?
2. Choose a theme, select some music, and plan a visualization exercise. The theme can be about any experience, not necessarily that of taking a trip.
3. Make a list of ten grammatical points about the target language that you would want to display on posters to encourage beginning students' peripheral learning.

## EXTRA READING

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## CHAPTER SEVEN.

# COMMUNITY LANGUAGE LEARNING

## INTRODUCTION\*

The method we will examine in this chapter advises teachers to consider their students as "whole persons." Whole-person learning means that teachers consider not only their students' feelings and intellect, but also have some understanding of the relationship among students' physical reactions, their instinctive protective reactions and their desire to learn. The Community Language Learning Method takes its principle from the more general Counseling-Learning approach developed by Charles A. Curran. Curran studied adult learning for many years. He discovered that adults often feel threatened by a new learning situation. They are threatened by the change inherent in learning and by the fear that they will appear foolish. Curran believed that a way to deal with the fears of students is for teachers to become "language counselors." A language counselor does not mean someone trained in psychology; it means someone who is a skillful understander of the struggle students face as they attempt to internalize another language. The teacher who can "understand" can indicate his acceptance of the student. By understanding students' fears and being sensitive to them, he can help students overcome their negative feelings and turn them into positive energy to further their learning.

Let us see how Curran's ideas are put into practice in the Com-

\* In this chapter, the author has benefited enormously from the careful reading and helpful comments of Jennybelle Rardin and Pat Tirone of the Counseling-Learning Institute.