

## Teaching methodology: An overview of desuggestive learning and accelerated learning

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### Abstract

Second language teachers are faced with an array of teaching methods and approaches and often find a mix of methodologies insures a successful language learning experience for their students. One such methodology available is suggestopedia. Dr. Georgi Lozanov, the creator of suggestopedia and the science of suggestology, reported his initial research findings in 1966 as a method to accelerate the learning of foreign languages. Continued research by Lozanov led to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) announcing in 1978 that "Suggestopedia had the potential to rid the world of illiteracy and raise the standards of education around the world".

While there appears to be little support of suggestopedia within second language classrooms, the last 30 years and particularly the 1980's have seen an explosion in interest and development of learning methods loosely based on suggestopedia. Methods such as Accelerated Learning, Super-learning, Speed-learning and the Einstein Factor are examples. Variants of suggestopedia however have often misinterpreted Lozanov's work and have failed to take into account Lozanov's ongoing research. During the 1980's Lozanov was placed under house arrest and prevented from overseeing the directions his methodology was taking. Many presumed Lozanov had died (Lozanov, 1999).

This paper presents an overview of the teaching methodology proposed by Lozanov along with subsequent variants. It also considers how such methodology could benefit adult foreign language learners and highlights components that are already being used in the classroom.

Keywords: suggestopedia, desuggestology, language learning, language acquisition, learning theory

### 1. Introduction

It must be noted that I am far from being an expert in the field of suggestopedia and I do not use this methodology as such in any of my classrooms. I initially became aware of Lozanov and

Suggestopedia through a one day Accelerated Learning introductory workshop on the German Language. The program written by Colin Rose appears to be the closest variant to Lozanov's methodology. Since I began teaching English fourteen years ago I have often considered whether this approach would be of benefit to adult beginner students as a means to quickly improve ability and therefor confidence and motivation. In particularly at Sapporo Gakuin University this immersion method would be suitable as a four week summer or winter program. This paper provides me the opportunity to review Lozanov's work and related techniques and while I refer to the term suggestopedia Lozanov (2005), preferred the term "desuggestive learning" which more correctly implies the removal of 'learning barriers' as opposed to suggestion which, to some, implies hypnosis or some form of mind control.

The paper is divided into four parts with the introduction providing a brief biography on Lozanov and an overview of suggestopedia. This is followed with an outline of the structure of a suggestopedic lesson. The paper then considers the merits and future of suggestopedia as well as a look at some misconceptions of suggestopedia. This is followed by a conclusion noting the possible direction of suggestopedia in the future.

## **2. A Brief Biography**

Dr. Georgi Lozanov, July 22, 1926, Sofia, Bulgaria - May 6, 2012, was a Doctor of medicine, neuroscience and psychotherapy. In 1963 he created his theory of suggestopedia and the science of suggestology. This was published in 1966 followed by a publication in English in 1967. It was also in 1966 that the State of Bulgaria and Lozanov founded the State Research Institute of Suggestology.

Much of Lozanov's research centered on his trials of suggestopedia within 15 experimental schools and 15 control schools over a ten-year period. This involved 10,000 adult students learning a foreign language and 40,000 primary school students studying their normal curriculum. The programs for children and the programs for adults are quite different. The results (to be discussed in part five of the paper) were significant enough to attract the attention of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) who requested a detailed report on suggestopedia. This culminated into the December 1978 UNESCO Expert Working Group on suggestology and suggestopedia which basically endorsed suggestopedia as "a generally superior teaching method for many subjects and for many types

of students, compared with traditional methods” (UNESCO, 1978). UNESCO also proposed set teaching standards, teacher training certification, and that an International Association for Suggestology and Suggestopedia should be set up that is affiliated with UNESCO with the assistance and guidance of Dr. Lozanov for training, research, coordination and publication of results.

In 1979 Lozanov was invited by President of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria to travel the country and present his method to the people of Bulgaria. Then in 1980 as Lozanov was preparing to visit the United States he was placed under house arrest and deprived of lectures, publications, correspondence, telephone calls abroad, travelling, and eventually a salary having been dismissed from the Institute he co-founded. The house arrest lasted for ten years until the fall of communism in 1989 and during this time Lozanov along with his colleague, Dr. Gateva, continued their teaching and research which lead to the secret publication in 1988 of ‘The Foreign Language Teacher’s Suggestopedic Manual’.

It is during this time that many variations of suggestopedia were promoted, often misrepresenting Lozanov’s results, benefits and procedures and at the same time using his name and theory without his consent or knowledge. Lozanov had been critical of this fact and at how people have misunderstood suggestopedia with much development of his theory heading in the wrong direction (Lozanov, 1999, 2005). Lozanov (1999) also pointed out “that suggestology / desuggestology is a science, not a technique”.

Yet his main concern was the fulfillment of UNESCO’s recommendations. On his homepage was written “Will you let Suggestopedia disappear together with me? I am an old man - when you decide to fulfil the recommendations of the UNESCO experts, I will not be alive”. Sadly he passed away on the 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2012. Fortunately his granddaughter, Dr. Ina Lozanova, along with other teachers who have trained under Dr. Lozanov, are continuing to practice and research this methodology.

### **3. What is Suggestopedia?**

Lozanov (2005) wrote that Suggestopedia is a science for developing different non-manipulative and non-hypnotic methods for the teaching and learning of foreign languages and other subjects by tapping into the brain’s unused potential. According to Lozanov this means easier and deeper learning with inner freedom, a greater motivation to learn, greater enjoyment and

an increased psycho-physiological well-being which together contributes to a learning speed three to five times faster than that of conventional methods. Cassone (1991) points out that the speed is due to efficiency. Time and space in the class is used in a very efficient way and the teacher's plan is incredibly detailed, so that when the plan is carried out, the students "get it". According to Cassone students seem to absorb material much faster and remember it longer.

Suggestopedia is based upon on how the human brain works and how individuals learn most effectively. The physical surroundings and the classroom atmosphere are most important (Harmer, 2001) and must be rich in sensory learning with art, colour, and music, provide a positive expectation of success and include dramatized texts, music and active participation in songs and games.

A unique goal of suggestopedia is to ensure the students are comfortable, confident and relaxed (Harmer, 2001) and in doing so release the students' minds from the existing framework of the "social-suggestive norms" (Lozanov, 1978). Second language students, particularly adult beginners usually have a pre-conceived idea as to their abilities. These are based on "the guidelines of the suggestive norms which are often considered common sense in a given society" (Hagiwara, 1999). For example, students may say, 'I'm too old to learn another language', or 'It's too difficult and I don't have time' or 'How can I remember all those words'. Suggestopedia believes in replacing existing negative suggestions, which inhibit students' potential, with positive suggestions that can help free ones natural potential. Lozanov (1978) calls this the "de-suggestive-suggestive process".

Not only does relaxing the students lower the affective filter, it is important in creating the optimal state of mind which Lozanov (1978) calls 'concentrative psychorelaxation'. Lozanov describes this as the optimal state of brain activity for learning in which the level of relaxation is neither too deep nor too shallow. This may in fact involve a number of techniques best suited to a particular class or individuals. Harmer (2001) notes that removing barriers or lowering the affective filter is generally accepted as an important part of all teaching methods. Another feature of suggestopedia is the active and passive concert sessions, which helps students take in large amounts of information. During the concert sessions, the learners are in a 'pseudopassive state' (Lozanov, 1978) another words they are physically relaxed and mentally activated. Hagiwara (1999) writes that by listening to the teacher's voice in a 'pseudopassive state' and following the text and translation, students' "absorb both the linguistic rhythm and

meaning of vocabulary at once to create an accumulation of information in their minds". The textbook is read solemnly and dramatically with appropriately selected background classical music. The list of selected classical music is featured in Lozanov and Gateva's "The foreign language teacher's suggestopedic manual". (Appendix I)

The role of the teacher is very important because a large part of a lesson depends on the suggestive effect of the teacher's behaviour, verbally and non-verbally. Hagiwara (1999), who trained under Lozanov in 1998, reports that a teacher "not only radiates effective suggestive stimuli, but also coordinates environmental suggestive stimuli in a positive way for students to learn". The teacher is in effect a director and a facilitator.

#### **4. The structure of a suggestopedic lesson.**

The lesson is divided into four phases being:

- 1, introduction
- 2, concert session (active and passive)
- 3, elaboration
- 4, production

##### **Introduction**

On the first day of a language course the teacher introduces the students into their new language quickly by simply speaking the new language to the students as if they already know it. The teacher introduces him or herself in a manner that students will realize as a greeting and then the teacher will encourage the students to do so as well. After introductions the teacher introduces realia and discusses each item again in the students' new language and in a manner that provokes interest and understanding. The teacher is always smiling and happy and the students are like a group of friends. When a student understands a new word that is introduced and uses it the teacher not only praises that student but the whole class. Words of encouragement are often used in the new language. During this phase the written form of the new language is also introduced along with its pronunciation.

Finally students choose a new name and occupation from large cards or posters that show a name and an occupation both in their new language and their first language. This feature of suggestopedia is described by Harmer (2001) as infantilisation where the teacher and student

exist in a parent - child like relationship.

From the second day of the course the introduction reviews the end of the previous day. If the students were telling stories then they would begin the next day with these stories. If the previous day ended with a song then the class would begin with the same song.

### **Concert session (active and passive)**

Dryden and Vos (1999) comment that Lozanov found baroque music harmonizes the body and brain. Modern research into the brain found that emotion is not the only province of the brain's limbic system but that many of the limbic structures play a critical role in memory storage (Eliot, 1999). Eliot further explains that because of this close anatomical link we are more likely to store memories about events that had a strong emotional impact. Therefore the concert sessions created by Lozanov provide the emotional stimuli that enable increased memory storage and, according to Dryden and Vos, a super memory and the link between the conscious and subconscious brain. Dryden and Vos (1999:320) note that "according to Lozanov a well executed concert can do 60% of the teaching in 5% of the time".

### **The active session**

After a short break the students return to the seats and after the exciting introduction phase the teacher returns calm and relaxed. The students require their textbooks, which is in fact a play in a number of acts. The teacher tells the students that he or she will read the first act twice with classical music playing in the background. In the first act students are able to follow in both the new language and the translation. If the language being learnt is English for example the students are also able to follow the English text with Japanese written below.

The teacher stands and the students listen to the opening of the classical piece of music before the teacher begins reading. The first reading is slow but dynamic following the music as opposed to natural intonation. Lozanov (2003) also suggests that to avoid any possible feeling of passivity and manipulation students can stand up twice and read one or two pages with the teacher

### **The passive session.**

With the second reading it is suggested to the students that they can close their textbooks and follow the reading, the music or both. The music reflects the passive session and students can close their eyes and think about the story if they wish. After listening to the music's opening

the second reading is at normal speed with correct intonation.

### **The Elaboration phase.**

The elaboration phase covers a variety of teaching techniques and activities, used in an integrated fashion that helps maintain and review what had been learned during previous activities. Often reminders are placed somewhere around the classroom and may include the students' own drawings or other work, realia used in role-plays, vocabulary etc. The names and occupations chosen by the students are also used by way of role plays or actual events. For example if a student has a toothache and one of the occupations chosen is that of a dentist then the student can ask for help or advice. A further part of the elaboration includes having the students read the play together with the teacher. The students will hopefully volunteer for the various roles and are encouraged to read dramatically. Each role in the text had its own props that visually distinguish one character from another. All students are given an opportunity to read part of the play. Corrections are made in a soft whisper and students choose whether to correct themselves or not. The reading from the textbook can be developed further with costumes and more elaborate props.

Lozanov believes that the teacher is more of a consultant during this phase.

### **The production phrase.**

In the production phase, every student speaks without being interrupted for corrections with the aim being spontaneous speech in the new language. The students are invited to create their own stories around a theme or a prop. Students should be able to ask questions to the speaker in the language they are studying.

## **5. Suggestopedia in practice**

Dryden and Vos's record selling book 'The Learning Revolution' looks at the power of accelerated learning and its impact on teaching methods and business practices around the world. Two key aspects of suggestopedia appear prominent in most forms of accelerated learning. Firstly the ability to create a relaxing learning environment filled with art and colour and designed to replace negative barriers with positive suggestion. Secondly the importance of music which closely follows the concert sessions recommended by Lozanov 40 years ago.

Dryden and Vos do suggestopedia justice by reporting on an experiment by Professor

Lynn Dhority. Dr. Dhority was a highly accomplished German teacher before he studied suggestopedia with Lozanov. Following his study Dr. Dhority had the opportunity to test the method with the U.S. Army and comparing the results with his control group of eleven soldiers and a second group of thirty-four soldiers. All materials for the course with the control group were prepared thoroughly in advance according to Lozanov's guidelines with peripherals, including posters, music, games, songs, activities and scripts. In addition Dr. Dhority was able to ensure that the results would be documented.

Dr. Dhority's control group then studied basic German following a suggestopedic lesson plan for 108 hours over three and a half weeks. The results were then compared with the second group of thirty-four soldiers who studied basic German through regular "audio drill" methods for 360 hours spread over a twelve week period. Dr. Dhority did not teach this group.

The results revealed that only 29 percent of the students using the regular method reached the required "level one" of basic German in the 360 hours. Of the control group using suggestopedia, 73 percent achieved the required level of "listening understanding" and 64 percent the required level of reading ability in the 108 hours. (see appendix II)

Lozanov's own study reports students were able to learn up to 1200 new words a day and that as the number of students in a class fell the ability to remember more words increased. Below are the results of 896 students studying language through suggestopedic lessons:

Number of of words given in session	Number of students in session	% of words memorized per session
Up to 100	324	92.3%
100 - 200	398	96.8%
201 - 400	93	93.1%
401 - 600	53	90.4%
1000 - 1200	28	96.1%

Dryden and Vos (1999) note that outside of Bulgaria results have not been recorded anywhere near the level reported by Lozanov. However, they do report an interview they had with a US professor, Schmid, who decided to experiment with the so-called 'new teaching methods'.



Schmid would give his students 400 words of French on day one and found that by the end of the third day they were able to repeat the words in forms of conversation. Usually Schmid would be lucky if his students retained ten words of the twenty five words he gave his students the previous day.

In 1993 Bridley Moor High School in England conducted an experiment using an accelerated learning program provided by Colin Rose. This is actually the same program that the workshop I attended was based on. The study involved two German language classes of the same level. One class however used the Accelerated Learning program for a period of 10 weeks. At the end of the course examination marks of the two groups were compared.

65% of students using the accelerated learning program obtained a pass of 80% or higher and of them 38% obtained a pass mark of 90% or more. From the second group who were taught using conventional methods 11% obtained a pass mark of 80% or higher of which 3% obtained a mark of 90% or higher.

As mentioned this program does follow Lozanov's methods more closely and also highlights the fact that his method seems to cater for a wider range of learners.

## **6. Misunderstandings of Suggestopedia**

Hagiwara (1999) states that it is important to realize that suggestopedia does not use hypnosis and opposes any form of neuro-linguistic programming. In addition there is no use of breathing, visualization or alpha wave enhancement exercises. Lozanov (1999, 2005) has never used these techniques and opposes any control over an individual's freedom yet it is these very techniques that have been associated with Lozanov during the 1980's that have created a number of unfounded criticisms.

Often his actual methods would be misinterpreted. For example Bowen (2002) writes that "During both types of reading, the learners would sit in comfortable seats, armchairs rather than classroom chairs..." where in fact this is not the case. As many have linked suggestopedia with comfortable armchairs and sofas, hypnosis has also been associated. Likewise the Trident School of Languages (1992) believes that Lozanov's methodology is attributed to "using yoga-like relaxation and concentration techniques".

It is probably fair to say that attitudes towards Communism during the 1960s and 1970s

created an air of suspicion towards suggestopedia followed by Lozanov's 10 years under house arrest, with no communication outside Bulgaria permitted, had a largely negative impact on Lozanov's work. Particularly as he was unable to defend his theory or prevent its development in many different directions some of which further damaged the credibility of suggestopedia.

## Conclusion

Suggestopedia has plenty to offer the second language classroom especially as a language immersion program. However as the use of the learners first language by the teacher is required problems will arise from either the teacher's inability to speak the learners' native language or simply due to the fact the class is of mixed nationality. Resources and, in particular, time may also prove a difficulty in offering this methodology.

The method and a number of its variants obviously work with supporting recorded experiments to back up its claims.

As a methodology in its own right it appears that, through no fault of its creator, the opportunity to impact significantly on teaching has disappeared and it will only survive through the dedication of a small group of teachers practicing this method. Other accelerated learning programs based in part on suggestopedia continue to thrive however.

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## **Appendix I.**

### **Examples of Lozanov' s music for the active and passive concerts.**

From The Foreign Language Teacher's Suggestopedic Manual, by Georgi Lozanov and Evalina Gateva, published by Gordon and Breach, New York, 1988.

### **Active**

Beethoven, Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 5 in B-flat major.

Mozart, Symphony in D major, "Haffner", and Symphony in D major, "Prague".

Haydn, Concerto No. 1 in C Major for Violin and Orchestra; Concerto No. 2 in G Major for Violin and Orchestra.

Haydn, Symphony in C Major No. 101, "L'Horioge;" and Symphony in G Major No. 94.

Mozart, Concerto for Violin & Orchestra in A Major No. 5; Symphony in A Major No. 29; Symphony in G Minor No. 40.

Brahms, Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in D. Major, Op. 77.

### **Passive**

Vivaldi, Five Concertos for Flute and Chamber Orchestra.

Handel, Concerto for Organ and Orchestra in B-flat Major, Op. 7, No. 6.

J. S. Bach, Prelude in G Major, "Dogmatic Chorales."

Corelli, Concerti Grossi, Op. 6, No. 4, 10, 11, 12.

J.S. Bach, Fantasia for Organ in G. Major; Fantasia in C Minor.

Couperin, Sonatas for Harpischord: "Le Parnasse" (Apotheosis of Corelli);

"L'Estree;" J.F. Rameau, Concert Pieces for Harpischord "Pieces declavecin" No.1 and No. 5

## Appendix II

From The Learning Revolution by Gordon Dryden and Dr. Jeannette Vos, 1999. Published By The Learning Web Ltd. Auckland, New Zealand.

### How to increase the learning rate 661% with these techniques

Former Boston Professor of Education  
Freeman Lynn Dhority specializes in teaching  
second languages by many of the creative  
learning techniques outlined in this book.

In one well-researched study:

- Three groups of American soldiers studied basic German for 12 weeks using standard educational methods (60 days, 360 hours).
- Another group studied the same subject, using "accelerated learning" techniques, for 18 days (108 hours).
- Only 29 percent of the "standard groups" reached the required level of understanding in 360 hours.
- But 64 percent of the "accelerated learning" group achieved the same ability to read German in 108 hours; and 73 percent reached the required level of understanding spoken German.
- Statistically, that is a 661 per cent better learning rate: more than twice the results in one-third the time.\*

\*These results are summarized from: *The 661% Solution: A statistical evaluation of the extraordinary effectiveness of Freeman Lynn Dhority's U.S. Army accelerated learning German class*, by Lyelle L. Palmer, Professor of Education and Special Education Chair, Winona State University, Minnesota, in a joint paper with Professor Dhority.