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Desuggestopedia

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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 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 reserve capacity, the limitations we think we have need to be 'desuggested.' Desuggestopedia,¹ the application of the study of suggestion to pedagogy, has been developed to help students eliminate the feeling that they cannot be successful and/or the negative association they may have toward studying and thus to help them overcome the barriers to learning. One of the ways the students' mental reserves are stimulated is through integration of the fine arts, an important contribution to the method made by Lozanov's colleague Evelina Gateva. Let us now see for ourselves how the principles of Desuggestopedia are applied to language teaching. We will visit a university class in Egypt being taught English by this method. The students are beginners. The class meets for two hours, three mornings a week

Principles

Thinking about the Experience Let us now investigate Desuggestopedia in our usual fashion. First, we will list our observations. From these, we will attempt to uncover the principles of Desuggestopedia. Observations Principles 1 The classroom is bright and colorful. Learning is facilitated in a cheerful environment. 2 Among the posters hanging around the

room are several containing grammatical information. A student can learn from what is present in the environment, even if his attention is not directed to it (peripheral learning). 3 The teacher speaks confidently. If the students trust and respect the teacher's authority, they will accept and retain information better. 4 The teacher gives the students the impression that learning the target language will be easy and enjoyable. The teacher should recognize that learners bring certain psychological barriers with them to the learning situation. She should attempt to 'desuggest' these. 5 The students choose new names and identities. 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. 6 The students introduce themselves to the teacher. The dialogue that the students learn contains language they can use immediately. 7 They play rhythmic instruments as they sing a song. Songs are useful for 'freeing the speech muscles' and evoking positive emotions. 8 The teacher distributes a lengthy handout to the class. The title of the dialogue is 'To want to is to be able to.' The teacher should integrate indirect positive suggestions ('there is no limit to what you can do') into the learning situation. 9 The teacher briefly mentions a few The teacher should present and explain points about English grammar and vocabulary. These are in bold print in the dialogue. the grammar and vocabulary, but not dwell on them. The bold print allows the students' focus to shift from the whole text to the details before they return to the whole text again. The dynamic interplay between the whole and the parts is important. 10 There are reproductions of classical paintings throughout the text. Fine art provides positive suggestions for students. 11 In the left column is the dialogue in the target language. In the right column is the native language translation. One way that meaning is made clear is through native language translation. 12 The teacher reads the dialogue with a musical accompaniment. She matches her voice to the rhythm and intonation of the music. Communication takes place on 'two planes': on one the

Reviewing the Principles

Let us now follow our usual procedure of reviewing the principles of a method by answering our 10 questions. 1 What are the goals of teachers who use Desuggestopedia? Teachers hope to accelerate the process by which students learn to use another 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 feel more secure. If they feel secure, they can be more spontaneous and less inhibited. 3 What are some characteristics of the teaching/learning process? The course is conducted in a classroom that is bright and cheerful. 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 dialogues (as many as 800 words) in the target language. Next to the dialogue is a translation in the students' native language. There are also some notes on vocabulary and grammar which correspond to boldfaced items in the dialogue. The teacher presents the dialogue during two 'concerts.' These represent the first major phase (the receptive phase). In the first concert the teacher reads the dialogue, 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 become activated. The students follow the target language

dialogue as the teacher reads it out loud. They also check the translation. During the second concert, the students listen calmly while the teacher reads the dialogue at normal speed. For homework, the students read over the dialogue just before they go to sleep, and again when they get up the next morning. What follows is the second major phase (the active 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. 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. 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 important in Desuggestopedia classes.

Reviewing the Techniques

If you find Desuggestopedia's principles meaningful, you may want to try some of the following techniques, or to alter your classroom environment. Even if not all of them 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 that is bright and cheerful. This was accomplished in the classroom we visited where the walls were 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 positive an environment as possible. •

Peripheral Learning This technique is based upon the idea that we perceive much more in our environment than we consciously notice. 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 choice of a

dialogue entitled, 'To want to is to be able to.' •

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.