

Desuggestopedia

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.

Experience²

The first thing we notice when we enter the classroom is how different this room is compared with all the other classrooms we have been in so far.

¹ Suggestopedia is now called Desuggestopedia to reflect the importance placed on desuggesting limitations on learning (Lozanov and Miller, personal communication).

² The lesson described here is in part based on ones the authors observed taught by Dan Dugas and Lynn Dhority, respectively. It has been somewhat modified in light of comments by Alison Miller and Georgi Lozanov.

Everything is bright and colorful. There are several posters on the walls. Most of them are travel posters with scenes from the United Kingdom; 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. There is also a table with some rhythm instruments on it. Next to them are some hats, masks, and other props.

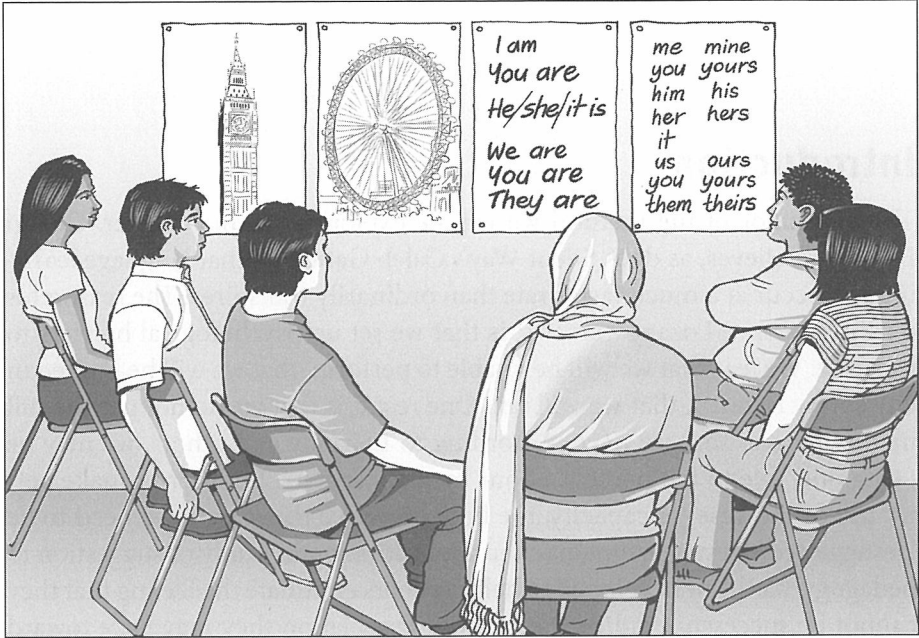


Figure 6.1 Students looking at posters on the wall

The teacher greets the students in Arabic and explains 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.’

‘First, you will all get to pick 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 the students, using their new names and asks them a few *yes/no* questions in English about their new occupation. Through her actions the students understand the meaning, and they reply 'yes' or 'no'. She then teaches them a short English dialogue in which two people greet each other and inquire what each other does for a living. After practicing the dialogue with the group, they introduce themselves to the teacher. Then they play the rhythm instruments as they sing a name song.

Next the teacher announces to the class that they will be beginning a new adventure. She distributes a 20-page handout. The handout contains a lengthy dialogue 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 dialogue; 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 dialogue on the facing page. These items have been boldfaced in the dialogue. Throughout the 20 pages are reproductions of classical paintings.

Partly in Arabic, partly in English, and partly through pantomime, the teacher outlines the story in the dialogue. 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 dialogue 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—Mozart's Violin Concerto in A. 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 she varies her intonation and keeps rhythm with the music. The students follow along with the voice of the teacher, who allows them enough time to read the translation of the dialogue in their native language silently. They are encouraged to highlight and take notes during the session. The teacher pauses from time to time to allow the students to listen to the music, and for two or three minutes at a time, the whole group stands and repeats after the teacher, joining their voices to the music.

Following this musical session, the students take a break. When they return from the break, they see that the teacher has hung a painting of a calming scene in nature at the front of the room. The teacher then explains that she will read the dialogue again. This time she suggests that the students put down their scripts and just listen. The second time she reads the dialogue,

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 dialogue 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 dialogue 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 dialogue. 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 dialogue, imagining that they are the character whose hat they wear. When they finish their portion of dialogue, 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 a cheerful way.

The teacher then asks for four new volunteers. She tells them that 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 dialogue in this manner, and following groups do this as well.

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

Then 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 Australia, 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 is 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 corrects in a very soft voice saying '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 dialogue if a student so wishes.

During the third class of the week, the students will continue to work with this dialogue. 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. The following week, the class will be introduced to a new dialogue, and the basic sequence of lessons we observed here will be repeated.

In the classroom next door, an intermediate class is studying. The students are seated around a rectangular table. On the table there are a few toys and instruments. Again there are posters around the room, this time of more complicated grammar. As we listen in, the teacher is introducing a story from a reader. She gives synonyms or descriptions for the new words. She reads parts of the story and the students do choral and individual reading of other sections. New words, families of words, and expressions are listed at the end of the story for reference. The intermediate students are encouraged to add their own new words and phrases to the lesson with their translations. The students use more complex tenses and language structures.

The teacher presents the first story and lists of related words and structures to the accompaniment of a Beethoven piano concerto in much the same way as the beginners' dialogue is read, followed by a shorter second reading to Bach. The following days include reading, singing, discussions, story-telling, grammar and pronunciation games, and writing, all orchestrated in a creative and playful fashion.

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 points about English grammar and vocabulary. These are in bold print in the dialogue.	The teacher should present and explain 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.

<p>12 The teacher reads the dialogue with a musical accompaniment. She matches her voice to the rhythm and intonation of the music.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>13 The teacher reads the script a second time as the students listen. This is done to different music.</p>	<p>A calm 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.</p>
<p>14 For homework, the students are to read the dialogue at night and in the morning.</p>	<p>At these times, the distinction between the conscious and the subconscious is most blurred and, therefore, learning can occur.</p>
<p>15 The teacher gives the students hats to wear for the different characters in the dialogue. The students take turns reading portions of the dialogue.</p>	<p>Dramatization is a particularly valuable way of playfully activating the material. Fantasy reduces barriers to learning.</p>
<p>16 The teacher tells the students that they are auditioning for a play.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>17 The teacher leads the class in various activities involving the dialogue, for example, question-and-answer, repetition, and translation.</p>	<p>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.</p>

18 She teaches the students a children's song.	Music and movement reinforce the linguistic material. It is desirable that students achieve a state of infantilization so that they will be more open to learning. If they trust the teacher, they will reach this state more easily.
19 The teacher and students play a question-and-answer game.	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.
20 The student makes an error by saying, 'How you do?' The teacher corrects the error in a soft voice.	Errors are corrected gently, not in a direct, confrontational manner.

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.

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 in the target language (for example, dialogues) and write in it (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 dialogue clear. The teacher also uses the native language 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?

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

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.

- **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 that they were someone else and to introduce themselves as that person.

- **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 dialogue and has called her students' attention to some particular grammatical points that arise in it, she reads the dialogue in the target language. The students have copies of the dialogue in the target language and their native language 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 rises and falls with the music.

- **Second Concert**

In the second phase, the students are asked to put their scripts aside. They simply listen as the teacher reads the dialogue at normal speed. The teacher is seated and reads with the musical accompaniment. Thus, the content governs the way the teacher reads the script, not the music, which is pre-Classical or Baroque. At the conclusion 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 dialogue out loud, individually or in groups. In the lesson we observed, three groups of students read parts of the dialogue in a particular manner: the first group, sadly; the next, angrily; the last, cheerfully.

- **Creative Adaptation**

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 do not 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 Desuggestopedia 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 Desuggestopedia 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 Desuggestopedia.

- 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?

B Apply what you have understood about Desuggestopedia.

- 1 Most teachers do not have control of the classrooms in which they teach. 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 Make a list of 10 grammatical points about the target language that you would want to display on posters to encourage beginning students' peripheral learning.

References/Additional Resources

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