Project "INNOVATION AND GOOD PRACTICES EXCHANGE THROUGH ADAPTATION AND TESTING OF SUGGESTOPEDIA AS A HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHING METHOD" – IGETADAPT

COURSE FORM

IO 2 "BASIC SKILLS SUGGESTOPEDIA Tools (BSS Tools)"

Partner:	Technical Training Cyprus, Larnaca
Tittle of the course:	ORAL ENGLISH COURSE FOR LOW-SKILLED PEOPLE: SUGGESTOPEDIA IN CYPRUS
Aim:	To provide an introductory training to low-skilled people in order to boost their motivation and responsiveness during a standard English course for better oral interaction.
Objectives & outcomes:	To raise the self-esteem of the participants. To boost their motivation. To warm-up the participants for the next step. To achieve better results in spoken and written English. To demonstrate that there is always a second chance.
Duration:	5-Day oral English course
Intensity (hours per week):	3 h daily (180 min)
Target Group:	Low-skilled, low-qualified adults
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ORAL ENGLISH COURSE FOR LOW-SKILLED PEOPLE: SUGGESTOPEDIA IN CYPRUS

Technical Training Larnaca, Cyprus

BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

To what extent may the teaching method of Suggestopedia promote learning in the second language classroom? As a teacher of English as a foreign language, I have often wondered about this issue. The basic assumption is that most teachers surely have the vision that everybody can learn.

However, schools treat most students as if they can learn in the same way. My experience as an EFL-teacher for both low-skilled and immigrant students in Cyprus is that not everybody fits into teaching systems if focus is mainly on analytical, left-brain teaching methods.

The functional organization of the human brain is separated into the left and right hemispheres. The left hemisphere seems to be specialized in processing information by logical, linear, sequential, analytic, objective, literal and structured ways, while the right hemisphere is known to be the creative one, processing information by fantasy, random, patterned, intuitive, holistic, general and integrated ways.

However, they work together in synthesis, or holistically in suggestopedic terms. This synthesis can be illustrated by how we learn the words of popular songs very easily. The left brain is processing the words and the right brain is processing the music. No students are strictly "left-brain only" or "right-brain only"; most are either left-brain dominant or right-brain dominant. The human diversity indicates that not every teaching style fits the students' learning style. Quite logically, a class of adult students with low qualification is surely more challenging for me as a teacher when it comes to reaching the aims.

As part of globalization, English has developed into the global language. Statistics show that English is the official and semi-official language in more than 70 countries, and every fifth person in the world knows some English.

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Regarding the necessity for immigrant and low-skilled students to acquire a language core of English quickly, and thanks to the **Erasmus project IGETADAPT** I have found a teaching method (the method of Suggestopedia), which appears very interesting and intriguing for both trainees and me.

Suggestopedia promises a holistic approach to teaching and learning, focusing on both the left and right brain. The learning process involves the use and memorization of words, structures and sounds.

Additionally, emotions, colors, images and memories are included in what is here called "language core". Acquiring this quickly and efficiently is important to give the students the idea that they are successful.

Please, take note: low-skilled people tend to underestimate their own abilities or judge their lack of success from a negative perspective. Thus, the topic of this oral 5-Day English course will involve the attitudes and experiences of Suggestopedia as a teaching/learning language method from both teachers and adult low-skilled students in Technical Training Larnaca, Cyprus.

The objective of this course is to provide a short, introductory training in English to low-skilled adult students by use of Suggestopedia as a teaching method to reach a certain level in terms of expressing oneself in a set of everyday situations, pronunciation accuracy, motivation and creating the notion that "we are not that old to learn", or laconically said: to boost motivation (so that later on these students enroll with confidence in a standard course). Most often these are the cornerstones, which lead to motivation and interest loss in low-educated people. They neither feel supported by teachers, nor can handle the pace of the race.

ON SUGGESTOPEDIA

Already in the 1960's Bulgarian psychiatrist and professor of education Dr Georgi Lozanov and his team of more than 100 researchers and teachers started the research work on how to enhance learning potential, based on the idea of using more of the brain and mind at the moment of learning. The findings of 20 years of research were developed into the teaching system called Suggestopedia. It is a pleasurable method, by which Lozanov asserted it was possible to learn a language by means of three hours tuition a day for four weeks.

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In 1978 delegates from UNESCO had studied the suggestopedic method and found it a generally superior method for many types of students, compared with traditional methods. In the report, which is still accessible online, the method is recommended for use in school. It also suggests teachers to be trained for the purpose. However, a year after the release of the report, Lozanov and his closest associates were arrested and kept in internal exile for about ten years, due to Lozanov's anticommunist attitudes. This is probably why Suggestopedia has had little dissemination. About 35 persons around the world have been trained in Suggestopedia by the founder himself.

The following integrated principles constitute the foundation of suggestopedic pedagogy.

- Suggestion

The name of the method, Suggestopedia, refers to the way the teacher presents a lot of learning stimuli – communicative suggestions, and how the learner is allowed to choose among these. The pedagogy is based on a reflection of humanistic and holistic approaches, activating both the conscious and subconscious together – a dual-plane communication. Meanwhile speaking with a person, everything surrounding you will leave behind a peripheral impression, in addition to the impression of the speech itself. The suggestopedic teacher's means to elicit these impressions are divided into artistic, didactic and psychological aspects; and comprise:

- ✓ A harmonic and inviting classroom of colors and shapes.
- ✓ The use of learning material in accordance with the suggestopedic demands, hence ethics and aesthetics.
- ✓ The use of learning material that can make learners succeed.
- ✓ Communicating positive feelings towards the teacher's profession, the subject and the learners.
- ✓ Creating a positive and relaxed atmosphere by means of communication (e.g. music, the teacher's body language, mimics, voice and joy).

An optimal learning environment depends on the student being presented to as many positive stimuli as possible. As Lozanov himself says: "The essentially emphasized real humanization of learning, and the friendly relationships within the group, so characteristic of the method, raise hopes for a new culture of society now and in the future." Suggestopedia is therefore

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not only about teaching a language. The learners' experiences are equally important – the development of their personalities and the encouragement of positive feelings.

The main claim of the method is to make learning work not only on the conscious level of the human mind, but also on the subconscious level – the mind's reserves. To successfully tap into these, the method stresses the importance of the learning environment. Lozanov emphasizes that it is essential for all students to feel comfortable, confident and relaxed in the classroom, as the aim is to create an atmosphere in which spontaneous acquisition of knowledge and skills takes place. As a consequence of the dual-plane communication of mind, Lozanov claims that the brain does not accept isolated pieces of information. Following this postulate about the brain, Lozanov's research on efficiency in language learning concludes that grammar and text must be taught as a whole unit, and consequently, teaching must also focus on the subconscious level, which is where the long-term memory is. If focusing on the conscious level, only the short-term memory is activated, and accordingly less information is gained.

Suggestopedic pedagogy draws largely on peripheral perceptions, also denoted as "weak signals" by Lozanov, which constitute the resource of the subconscious. Peripheral perceptions implement the long-term memory; however, the situation is dynamic, and the perceptions enter consciousness if attention is deliberately directed to them. Even though peripheral perceptions are part of subconsciousness, they are easy to understand and utilize, and therefore controllable, Lozanov argues.

Anti-suggestive barriers: again, a learning situation adapted to the natural way of how the brain works, requires focusing on the artistic and psychological aspects, as well as the didactic. However, a certain balance between these is needed. Lozanov identified three mental filters, or barriers, of the brain, which serve as a kind of mental protection:

- ✓ The emotional barrier; explicitly recognizable with children intuitively saying "no" to anything that is new and unfamiliar to them. The reaction is most often of a subconscious character.
- ✓ The logical barrier; related to what contends against man's common sense, most often dealing with rational people's relatively conscious reactions.
- ✓ The ethical barrier; occurring when one perceives disharmony in relation to one's own ethics and culture. The reaction is most often of a subconscious character.

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When understanding how the barriers work, Lozanov argues that the teacher can easily guide the learners beyond these, in order to tap into their subconscious resources. However, it requires knowledge, practice, sacrifice, and love for humans, and the teacher profession.

The seven laws of Suggestopedia Lozanov says about learning: “Fatigue is not caused by the scope of material, but by the manner of its presentation”. He denotes the communication between suggestopedic teaching and learning as presentation, which he summarizes as seven intertwined laws, and simultaneously eliciting how Suggestopedia differs from traditional teaching methods. The seven laws follow here:

1. Love

By teaching with an active love for human beings, the teacher will attain the real, delightful and stimulating relaxed concentration required as a prior condition for learning.

2. Freedom

In suggestopedic teaching focus is on taking part in all the different activities, rather than learning. Lozanov argues that learners will then start naturally to use their active knowledge when they are ready, denoting it as freedom of personality to choose.

3. Knowledgeable teacher

The teacher, or the suggestopedist, knows the way to create and support subconscious communications with the learners’ hidden reserves of mind. During the last sessions though, the teacher has more the role of the “supporting mother”.

4. Complex teaching material

A huge bulk of systemized learning material is provided for suggestopedic teaching, including intensive repetitions. A course of four weeks contains about 2500 words, which is about two to three times more than is the case of traditional teaching. Furthermore, the need for an even flow during the sessions in order to keep the learners’ energy high. Smooth transitions are a way to camouflage all the repetitions of structures and vocabulary.

5. Interaction of global-partial-global

The hierarchical structure and interaction of the material, part-whole (global) relation with the prevalence of the holistic, is essential to the harmony of the teaching process, Lozanov claims. Every detail of the system is linked to the purpose of the whole, words and grammar do not exist separate from the language; they are part of the context. Due to the extensive use of peripheral

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perception, dual-plane approach and subconsciousness, it is possible to teach/learn the global and the partial simultaneously. Moreover, this interaction is decisive for learning a new language five to ten times quicker, compared with traditional methods, Lozanov claims. In addition he emphasizes, that Suggestopedia paves the way more easily and in a more pleasant manner, which also provides a good health effect.

6. Golden proportion

The golden proportion, 1.618, has been recognized as the greatest harmony in nature for centuries, and it also exists in Suggestopedia, according to Lozanov. For example, the first active concert session lasts for 50 minutes and the receptive concert session lasts for 30 minutes. That is 30:50=0.6. In teaching it is all about a harmonic rhythm of variation of classroom activities versus levels of energy, e.g. small/big group constellations, extrovert and active/introvert and passive, laughter/seriousness, and motion/sitting still etc.

7. Classical art and aesthetics

Classical music, songs and art images constitute an important part of suggestopedic teaching, stressing the fact that art communicates a lot of non-specific stimuli and peripheral perceptions. In addition, it inspires and distracts learners so that they forget their eventual fear of making mistakes.

5-DAY ORAL ENGLISH COURSE

The programme of a suggestopedic course always follows this structure for each chapter of the text:

- Introduction
- Concert session (active and receptive)
- Elaboration
- Production

Taking in consideration the fact that the course is oral, then there are no concert sessions, but classical music is used as background, while working on the primary and secondary elaborations of the situational set of dialogues.

The oral course takes 5 days (Monday to Friday), 3 hours daily (+ 30 min pause), 15 hours in total.

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As previously mentioned, the aim of the course is:

- ✓ to boost motivation, but apart from that it aims at
- ✓ eliminating didactogeny, as well; didactogeny is a generalized fear of learning, which affects low-qualified people in general - the less someone knows, the less she/he wants to learn; this said, it means that low-skilled people lack the tools to improve their current situation;
- ✓ better oral presentation, and
- ✓ better spoken interaction.

❖ DAY 1

Situation minimum: Introducing each other.

The first introduction includes the picking of new fictitious identities and takes 50 minutes. Based on the holistic perspective, chunks, or formulaic sequences, also denoted as clusters of words, are presented from the very beginning. The chunks are written on posters and placed on the walls to work the subconscious aim of the pedagogy. The learners are inspired to select new identities, which they borrow from the country and culture of the target language. Providing numerous tasks and activities is important to attain the learners' successful engagement. By means of the chunks, new identities, tasks and activities, a fictitious world is created, from which the learners develop a vocabulary and grammatical structures. The learners are all included in the act of introduction, they are inspired to sing, to act, to play, to joke etc. Nobody is asked individual questions, everybody participates spontaneously.

The music is processed by the right part of the brain, and thus contrasts the learners' left part of the brain in their involvement of listening. Both parts of the brain are trained. The primarily auditory learners listen to the teacher and acquire the word pictures peripherally. The visual learners on the other hand, focus on the text displayed on the walls, while simultaneously listening to music and the teacher.

The pedagogical intention is to let the music open for a holistic use of senses in the learning situation. This is in line with Lozanov's claim that the brain does not tire when all senses are evoked. The music adds an emotional dimension that activates greater parts of the brain. In other words, the matching of music with speech paves the way to the long-term memory.

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When the introduction is over, the teacher steps back and lets the learners work with fun and varied tasks. That is the "Primary Elaboration". However, the teacher is present all the time, listening, and guiding if required, "like a mother teaching her child to cycle" (one of Lozanov's distinctive expressions), letting go little by little. The tasks are divided into two groups, those that take place in relation to receptive knowledge, that is to say tasks in which to understand and recognize words and structures, and those that take place by means of activated or automatized knowledge, that is to say tasks where to speak freely, for example role plays.

Lozanov's ideology is a natural way for the mind to work, referring to how the child acquires its first language. It is presented as a whole for the child, and already at seven months, the child can select single words, before it later speaks the language in full sentences.

Any grammar structure that is presented orally can be used or activated in tasks and activities in the elaboration phase. There is a continuous repetition in Suggestopedia; however, the repetition is never verbatim, the subject matter is always differently presented, for example by means of singing a song with a didactic purpose or doing a gymnastic walk-and-talk exercise. Allowing the learners to work in small groups is also a strategic technique on repetition, which opens for collaborative learner efforts and oral activity. This usually accounts for good learning and is usually appreciated by the learners as well.

The last session of the cycle, the production, is short. The aim is to sum up what has been learnt. The learners are simply asked to enact in couples a dialogue on a fixed theme and the others have to follow and understand. There is no kind of interrogation. It is just to speak and enjoy one's understanding.

- DAY 2

Situation minimum: Learning by asking questions about each other.

Due to the current circumstances posters and didactic songs were prepared in accordance with the holistic thinking of Suggestopedia. These posters contain brief dialogues on the daily situations discussed at the course. The songs follow well-known melodies with the lyrics made-up by me for training purposes.

I do now ask the students to focus on the posters. The information there is absorbed peripherally. If needed, they have a glance at them.

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During the course the aims for the students were to learn to present themselves, talk about fictitious families and jobs, be able to book and pay in a café, in addition to tell what they were going to do during a trip to London.

The aim for the teacher is to enhance the students' learning by means of didactic, psychological and artistic material, discussed in the "Common Methodological Framework" by Mrs. Mateva.

- DAY 3

Situation minimum: At the market: food and goods.

Printed images are the main didactic material to work with during this session. Again, there are short dialogues on the walls.

The holistic perspective permeated the two first sessions (5+3 hours) by presenting as much grammar as possible, as well as informative facts about English names and English-speaking countries. The students received the grammar subconsciously as I spoke the target language all the time, incorporating adjectives (for example nationalities), numbers, negations, pronunciation, extended vocabulary (for example professions and phrases), nouns, articles, questions, and verbs.

Everything was done in a playful manner by means of body language and miming while I simultaneously was having a dialogue with the students. This switching also characterized the activities. When I had introduced a structure within a context, it was the students' turn to answer and act out.

Let me give an example; I, with my hat on, acting out as Eliza Johnston: "You remember what I told you about my work. What do you think Bruce, my husband, works as?" The students guessed. Afterwards they walked about, telling each other about their jobs. The one activity automatically led to the other – a steady flow in the teaching was kept going. The hat is one example that illustrates the automaticity from one activity to another. The students, with no further comments, immediately perceive my switching from being the teacher, to entering into the fictitious role as Eliza Johnston.

In other words, the students were active, using the language in an automatic way, or they sat still, taking in and recognizing the language. Both listening and speaking skills were practiced.

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❖ DAY 4

Situation minimum: Presenting a topic of interest.

On some occasions the students moved around in the classroom, for example when practicing verbs. The vocabulary of verbs was expanded upon. Bingo and drawing became new means of learning.

For kinaesthetic reasons, a ball was sometimes taken into use, for example for marking turns. The third (3+2 hours) and fourth (2 hours) sessions contained slightly advanced tasks, mainly intended for group work. Pictures from old magazines became useful for illustrating and telling others about one's interests, house and family. Focus on the different verb tenses became stronger, by means of miming and role playing.

❖ DAY 5

Situation minimum: Discussing digital media (Facebook, internet).

In the last session, a dialogue was role-played. The students interacted and spoke English without any interruption or correction from me. The role-play consisted of words and phrases known from previous activities but used in the context of digital media.

In other words, at first the students listened to a complete text, before they attended activities focusing on special grammar structures (and where they had to interact between each other and to search information in the internet), and finally presented their own simple, but complete dialogues, based on the previous theme.

After each session, I made notes on observations of the students' participation.

Lastly, to complement the observations, the students were asked to express their points of view on the suggestopedic method. They mentioned that being proactive was a game-changer.

DISCUSSION

In addition to knowing the language, the suggestopedist needs to show thorough knowledge about personality traits. A new identity requires a conceivable appearance, in order to make the stories work, and to make the students create their new identities and associated stories.

Mastering the playing and switching between different roles certainly demand a lot of energy, as well as acting skills.

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To support our suggestopedic pedagogy, we seek to lower the students' anti-suggestive barriers in the classroom, mainly by means of the physical atmosphere.

In addition, our voices play an important role when addressing the students to make them feel comfortable, as well as balancing the rhythm for the sake of making the students learning words and sentence structures. The suggestopedist strives to convey an atmosphere of trust, truth and honesty. The students sense this, and allow themselves to overcome the barriers and enjoy the sessions. The suggestopedist bases the teaching on the knowledge of a holistic world, aware of the conscious and subconscious aspects of life, that efficient learning is suggestive and indirect by nature, not direct.

The students are all the artists who participate in the pedagogical theatre. Response is their reaction to the suggestopedic lesson.

The physical atmosphere is the suggestopedist's artistic expression of the learning environment, how he/she endeavors to make the students receptive, spontaneous and creative, in order to gain access to their long-term memory. In addition, the atmosphere leaves the students with a feeling of being cared about. The physical surroundings and atmosphere seem to trigger the students' various learning styles. Everybody speaks and interacts very actively and seems to have a good time. In the elaboration and the production phases the students tend to repeat.

The global-partial-global student experience is the intensive working part of the theatre, tied together by a systematic and holistic perspective. This is where the decoding occurs. The global perspective is first introduced to the students through the assuming of new identities. The introduction contains all the words and structures included in the text that will soon be presented to them. This is an appropriate learning situation with for example learners with little academic background. The fictitious identities might also give a break from traumatic life situations for some of the students.

At school one's dream can come true, so to say, which might work as a positive element in itself. In a relaxed mood, with lowered anti-suggestive barriers, the reserves of the mind are reached. This is the key for the students when trying to produce the new language. Because of the variety and massive exposure as to learning material and activities, it gives every student the opportunity to excel at some point. Exercises where the students can recognize words and

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structures are built on receptive knowledge. When the language transforms to active knowledge, the students are invited to speak freely. This is the final global perspective, the production session.

Spontaneous language acquisition expresses the result deriving from the students' experiences, which is communicated to the suggestopedist. A side effect of the result is the students' health gain, unfolding in joy and caring about each other.

CONCLUSION

Acquiring a language core is essential for communicative competence. In this respect Suggestopedia seems to promote efficient learning for young adult/adult low-skilled people, which was the main aim of the project **IGETADAPT** funded by the Erasmus programme.

The major value of the present 5-day oral English course is that the findings do not contradict what is generally known and previously discussed about Suggestopedia.

In addition, all the students could speak but made some mistakes. These, however, made no hinder for communication. Nobody was afraid of talking. They were eager to learn more, it seemed. When the students enjoy coming to the classes that is a sign that the suggestopedists have been successful.

Based on the term test results, the suggestopedic implementation seemed to affect the learning of English in adult low-skilled people positively.

The students' attitudes and feedback on how they think the method has influenced their learning was very constructive.

It is well known that a good laughter is the most efficient relaxing factor. Pleasant emotions deriving from it stimulate higher intellectual activities. Overall, the course demonstrates teaching, learning and acquisition by means of joy in the classroom, which is the most important finding of this course.

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