

EDUCATING PSYCHE

Educating Psyche() by Bernie Neville is a book which looks at() radical() new approaches to learning, describing the effects of emotion, imagination() and the unconscious() on learning. One theory discussed in the book is that proposed() by George Lozanov, which focuses on the power of suggestion().

Lozanov's instructional() technique is based on the evidence that the connections() made in the brain through unconscious processing (which he calls non-specific mental() reactivity()) are more durable() than those made through conscious processing. Besides the laboratory evidence for this, we know from our experience that we often remember what we have perceived() peripherally, long after we have forgotten what we set out to learn. If we think of a book we studied months or years ago, we will find it easier to recall peripheral() details - the colour, the binding(), the typeface(), the table at the library where we sat while studying it - than the content on which we were concentrating(). If we think of a lecture we listened to with great concentration, we will recall the lecturer's appearance and mannerisms(), our place in the auditorium(), the failure of the air-conditioning(), much more easily than the ideas we went to learn. Even if these peripheral details are a bit elusive(), they come back readily() in hypnosis() or when we relive() the event imaginatively(), as in psychodrama(). The details of the content of the lecture, on the other hand, seem to have gone forever.

This phenomenon() can be partly attributed() to the common counterproductive() approach to study (making extreme efforts to memorise(), tensing muscles, inducing() fatigue()), but it also simply reflects() the way the brain functions. Lozanov therefore made indirect instruction() (suggestion) central to his teaching system. In suggestopedia(), as he called his method, consciousness is shifted away() from the curriculum() to focus on something peripheral. The curriculum then becomes peripheral and is dealt with() by the reserve capacity() of the brain.

The suggestopedic approach to foreign language learning provides a good illustration(). In its most recent variant() (1980), it consists of the reading of vocabulary and text while the class is listening to music. The first session() is in two parts. In the first part, the music is classical() (Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms) and the teacher reads the text slowly and

solemnly(), with attention to the dynamics()of the music. The students follow the text in their books. This is followed by several minutes of silence. In the second part, they listen to baroque() music (Bach, Corelli, Handel) while the teacher reads the text in a normal() speaking voice. During this time they have their books closed. During the whole of this session, their attention is passive(); they listen to the music but make no attempt to learn the material.

Beforehand(), the students have been carefully prepared for the language learning experience. Through meeting with the staff and satisfied students they develop the expectation() that learning will be easy and pleasant and that they will successfully learn several hundred words of the foreign language during the class. In a preliminary() talk, the teacher introduces them to the material to be covered, but does not 'teach' it. Likewise(), the students are instructed() not to try to learn it during this introduction.

Some hours after the two-part session, there is a follow-up() class at which the students are stimulated() to recall() the material presented. Once again the approach is indirect. The students do not focus their attention on trying to remember the vocabulary, but focus on using the language to communicate() (e.g. through games or improvised() dramatisations()). Such methods are not unusual in language teaching. What is distinctive() in the suggestopedic method is that they are devoted() entirely to assisting recall. The 'learning' of the material is assumed() to be automatic() and effortless(), accomplished() while listening to music. The teacher's task is to assist the students to apply what they have learned paraconsciously(), and in doing so to make it easily accessible() to consciousness. Another difference from conventional() teaching is the evidence that students can regularly learn 1000 new words of a foreign language during a suggestopedic session, as well as grammar() and idiom().

Lozanov experimented with teaching by direct suggestion during sleep, hypnosis and trance() states, but found such procedures() unnecessary. Hypnosis, yoga(), Silva mind-control(), religious ceremonies() and faith healing() are all associated with successful suggestion, but none of their techniques seem to be essential() to it. Such rituals() may be seen as placebos(). Lozanov acknowledges() that the ritual surrounding suggestion in his own system is also a placebo(), but maintains that without such a placebo people are unable or afraid to tap() the reserve capacity of their brains. Like any placebo, it must be dispensed() with authority() to be effective. Just as a doctor calls on the full power of autocratic() suggestion by insisting that the patient take precisely() this white capsule() precisely three times a day before meals, Lozanov is categorical() in insisting that the

suggestopedic session be conducted exactly in the manner designated(), by trained and accredited() suggestopedic teachers.

While suggestopedia has gained some notoriety() through success in the teaching of modern languages, few teachers are able to emulate() the spectacular() results of Lozanov and his associates(). We can, perhaps, attribute mediocre() results to an inadequate placebo effect. The students have not developed the appropriate mind() set. They are often not motivated() to learn through this method. They do not have enough 'faith'. They do not see it as 'real teaching', especially as it does not seem to involve the 'work' they have learned to believe is essential to learning.