

## A Relative Comparison Made of Two Teaching Methodologies: The Examples of ‘Suggestopedia’ vs. Total Physical Response

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### Abstract

*The necessity to offer comparative teaching methodologies is a reality most teachers face in the classroom setting. No two students comprehend language arts in the same way because of previous learning experiences, temperament, and expectations. As a result, teachers must frequently choose between two or more second language teaching methods to effectively address students' needs. This paper uses a comparison made between Total Physical Response and Suggestopedia methods as an example of how to choose a practical approach to teaching. The ability to consider traits, strengths, weaknesses, and results in an evaluative manner can help teachers to gain insight in order to determine which method is most effective for teaching language and then to recognize the similarities and differences between these methods. The methods examined in this paper in no way reflect the only approaches open for instruction. It is hoped that a generalized teaching approach which blends the best of many teaching methods may be adopted, adapted, and considered for purposes of instruction.*

### Introduction

A relative comparison of two “innovative” methods (Larsen-Freeman, 2000) or “designer methods” (Nunan, 1991) of second language teaching can be made using Total Physical Response (TPR) and ‘Suggestopedia’ as working models. Both methods may be compared in terms of teaching effectiveness using some of the evaluation methods suggested in J.C. Richards and T.S. Rodgers’ *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (1986: 154-168). A comparison of TPR and Suggestopedia is made in order to determine which method is most effective for teaching language and then to recognize the similarities and differences between these methods. An overview of the two methods is given, with focus placed on the strengths and limitations of each. Finally, an assessment of which method is more favorable is provided.

The basic premise behind each method is roughly the same since each of the originating methodologists is known to have borrowed greatly from the notion of “Confluent Education” (Galyean, 1977). This approach serves as a basis for both since it promotes awareness-raising principles such as the body movement for language training reinforcement that are found in TPR (Asher, 1982) and in the relaxation training techniques found in Suggestopedia (Lozanov, 2006). Terms such as *approach*, *method*, and *technique* differ, yet are considered almost synonymous. *Method* may be defined as “a set of procedures, i.e., a system that spells out rather precisely how to teach a second or foreign language” (Celce-Murcia, 2001). This discussion concentrates solely on how the term *method* applies to TPR and to Suggestopedia and how the term *method* is used to mean a conceptualization of language. *Method* is considered as more specific than *approach* and less specific than *technique* (Richards, 1984) for use in this comparison.

### ***Methodological Effectiveness***

One level of applicability for any language teaching method is how it may be compared to any other method used. Similarities and differences found between methods may determine the underlying theoretical assumptions, practical applications, and commonality of those methods. The use of a method often implies a decision about the content of instruction and how that content will be taught to students, so as a result, emphasis may differ and priority may be given to content over instruction. A theory of learning can be expressed as a component of any given method and is fundamental to how differences are to be seen whatever comparison is made. Each choice of method is seen as an outcome (Richards, & Rodgers, 1986)

A good comparison can be made when regarding the effectiveness claims of any selected method's strengths and / or weaknesses based on their efficiency. A language course or program's effectiveness is determined in relation to the "specific goals, objectives, and characteristics" it has (Richards & Rodgers, 1986: 155). Evaluation criteria should include enough adequate data relating to the effectiveness, acceptability, and efficiency of a chosen language teaching program, such as the total Physical Response (TPR) or Suggestopedia methods.

The most difficult kind of research data to provide is the kind which offers evidence concerning one method's effectiveness over another in order to obtain program objectives (Richards, & Rodgers, 1986). Effectiveness data refers to the extent a particular method or methods have been found to effectively instruct language learners in the fundamental areas of comprehension, retention, and acquisition. The "minimum need" of data should include documented studies wherein a method has been used with reference to a specific set of objectives. This data must be able to reliably validate any measurable gains in learner proficiency relative to those stated objectives (Ibid.).

The question of how effective teaching may be defined is summed up in Blum's (Blum, 1984:3~6) listing of the twelve perceived characteristics of effective teaching, as found in (Richards, & Renandya, 2000:21):

- 1.) Instruction is guided by preplanned curriculum.
- 2.) There are high expectations for student learning.
- 3.) Students are carefully oriented to the lessons.
- 4.) Instruction is clear and focused.
- 5.) Learning progress is monitored closely.
- 6.) When students do not understand, they are re-taught.
- 7.) Class time is used for learning.
- 8.) There are smooth and efficient class routines.
- 9.) Instructional groups formed in the classroom fit instructional needs.
- 10.) Standards for classroom behavior are high.
- 11.) Personal interactions between teachers and students are positive.
- 12.) Incentives and rewards for students are used to promote excellence.

Methods may be best judged in terms of how those chosen methods comply with and then deliver according to the items on this or any similar listing of characteristics.

### ***Method Selection Process***

Before any comparison is made, certain issues should be addressed regarding how the selection of a potential teaching method is made by any instructor. In the recent past, some individuals who proposed specific instructional guidelines having well-defined classroom procedures did so in an effort to gain recognition for their own research or in order to achieve some form of financial gain. Many in the language teaching community have seen such methods as inflexible, leading some applied linguists (Richards, 1984) to seriously question the usefulness and applicability of these methods for teaching English as a second or foreign language. Skeptics (Stevens, 1977:5) have even gone so far as to argue against any "best method" direction in teaching, instead advocating a more principled, encompassing and holistic approach.

Much has changed since the time when wholesale adoption of any teaching method was considered advisable to the teaching profession. The question of why most methods are no longer considered effective as teaching tools remains. (Richards, 2000:10) gives the answer to this question with a set of probable explanations:

- 1.) Methods are too prescriptive.
- 2.) Methods are quite distinctive in their earlier stages, and become rather indistinguishable from each other in the later stages.

- 3.) Methods should be empirically tested through scientific quantification to possibly determine which one is “best”.
- 4.) Methods become vehicles of “linguistic imperialism” (Philipson, 1992), targeting the disempowered periphery.

Therefore, it is no wonder that many of the methods used today are incorporated into lesson plans on a partial, piecemeal, or in an abridged manner. (Richards & Renandya, 2000) follows up this explanation by quoting David Nunan’s (1991) call for a “unified approach” based on “enlightened choice”:

It has been realized that there never was and probably never will be a method for all, and the focus in recent years has been on the development of classroom tasks and activities which are consonant with what we know about second language acquisition, which are also in keeping with the dynamics of the classroom itself.

The question of how to select a method applicable to any classroom setting also remains. Celce-Murcia (2001) continues in the discussion by providing teachers with a list of five things they may do to make the right choice of a language teaching method: (1.) Assess students needs; (2.) Examine instructional constraints; (3.) Determine individual student attitudes and learning styles; (4.) Identify the discourse genres, speech activities, and text that allows students to learn; and, (5.) Specify how language learning will be assessed.

The selected methods of Total Physical Response (TPR) and Suggestopedia will now be presented for the sake of relative comparison.

### ***Total Physical Response (TPR)***

Total Physical Response (TPR) is considered as the best known ESL approach involving physical movement (Celce-Murcia, 2001). It is a language learning method developed in the late 1960s by Dr. James Asher, a professor of psychology at San Jose’ State University, California to aid in the learning of foreign languages.

TPR asks teachers to give students commands, model the command behavior, and then to gradually “wean” the students from direct observation of the teacher’s movement patterns. As a behavioral method, TPR relies on the assumption that when a student learns a second language, that language is internalized through a process of code breaking similar to the original first language development of the student. This process allows for a long listening period and the development of comprehension to take place prior to speech production. Students are called upon to respond to commands requiring physical movement based on the coordination of both speech and action that will create a low affective filter conducive to learning (Krashen, & Terrell, 1983).

The TPR method considers there to be too much focus placed on individual students within a traditional language classroom. The anxiety this produces should be eliminated to allow learners not to feel self-conscious or become defensive (Brown, 2000: 107). To complete the picture of the TPR classroom, Asher offers the following assessment of the role of a teacher who uses his method, “The instructor is the director of a stage play in which the students are actors” (Asher, 1977: 43-see Asher, 2006). Asher’s labeling and ordering of classroom activities seems to be built on the structural view of language, because TPR has a syllabus and the teacher’s role is one of “drill master, director, and motivator” (Richards & Rodgers, 1986: 154).

TPR is advocated as part of the Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell, 1983), where roughly tuned input is minimally comprehensible and grammar is not the focus of the lesson (Harmer, 1991). It may be characterized in this manner: learners are physically active and mobile, there is no assumed relationship among learners and it emphasizes the importance of individuals acting alone, procedurally speaking, TPR is largely mechanical in its delivery, placing the most classroom emphasis on listening skills. This method considers stress, defensiveness, and embarrassment as major blocks to successful language learning. TPR sees the learner’s commitment and attention as central to overcoming these personal barriers. Mediation, memory, and recall of linguistic elements are thought of as central issues to the method. Learning with TPR is seen as multi-modal, so that “more involvement must be provided the student than simply sitting in his seat and passively listening. The learner must be somatically and physiologically, as well as intellectually, engaged” if learning is to effectively take place (Curran, 1976; 79).

### ***Limitations of TPR***

This section is comprised of a partial listing of the limitations of TPR as an effective teaching method in a classroom setting based upon the literature.

- “The experimental support of the effectiveness of Total Physical Response (TPR) is sketchy (as it is for most methods) and it typically deals with only the very beginning stages of learning”. (Richards, & Rodgers, 1986: 97).
- “Proponents of Communicative Language Teaching would question the relevance to real-world learner needs of the TPR syllabus and the utterances and sentences used within it. Asher himself has stressed that Total Physical Response should be used in association with other methods and techniques.” (Richards, & Rodgers, 1986; 97).
- TPR is considered to be especially effective in the beginning levels of language proficiency, but loses its distinctiveness as learners begin to advance in their competence (Brown, 2000; 107).
- It is easy to overuse TPR. “Any novelty, if carried on too long, will trigger Adaptation, no matter how exciting and productive the innovation, people will tire of it.” (Asher, 2006).

### ***Strengths of TPR***

This section is comprised of a partial listing of the strengths of TPR as an effective teaching method in a classroom setting based upon the literature.

- TPR has enjoyed a wide reception throughout the language teaching profession because of what is seen as its two most conspicuous characteristics: It encourages—indeed, practically forces – multi-sensory involvement and resulting multi-sensory images, and it meets in an integrated way student needs that are physical and social as well as cognitive. (Stevick, 1996; 132).
- TPR offers a student response to new material that is more quickly and firmly embedded in the memory because it is tied to experience, to emotion, and to existing motivations (Stevick, 1996: 132).
- TPR can be used to practice and teach various things, so it is well suited to teaching language / vocabulary connected with actions (Stevick, 1996.).
- TPR may be incorporated into the communicative, interactive classroom as part of learning activities to provide both auditory input and physical activity (Brown, 200: 107).
- TPR can benefit learners by delaying production until speech “emerges” naturally (Brown, 2000:108).
- TPR may be effective for reasons other than those proposed by its author and do not necessarily demand commitment to the learning theories used to justify them (Richards, & Rodgers, 1986: 97).
- SLA skills may be rapidly assimilated if the teacher appeals to the students’ motor-sensory system. An understanding of the spoken language must be developed in advance of speaking (Asher, 1982).
- Understanding and retention is best achieved through movement (total movement of the student’s bodies) in response to command sequences. The imperative form of language is a powerful tool that can be used to guide students towards understanding as it manipulates their behavior—many of the grammatical structures of the target language learned through the use of the imperative (Asher, 1982).
- Never force students to speak before they are ready, because as the target language is internalized, speaking will automatically emerge (you must decide, as the teacher, when to encourage students to participate orally in class (Asher, 1982).

### ***Suggestopedia, Suggesto logy, De-suggestive Learning, and De-suggestopedia***

Suggestopedia is a teaching method developed in the 1970s and is said to be based on a modern understanding of how the human brain works and how we learn most effectively. It was originated by a Bulgarian psychotherapist named Georgi Lozanov, who founded his study on the notion of “Suggestology”, or how the power of suggestion may be used as an integral part of language learning.

The name Suggestopedia derives from a combination of the two words *suggestion* and *pedagogy*. Lozanov claimed that by using a method of positive suggestion, one can teach languages approximately three to five times quicker than conventional methods. However, as improved by the originator, Suggestopedia focuses more on “desuggestive learning” and is now most often called “desuggestopedia” (Lozanov, 2006). Lozanov reserves the use of this methodological title strictly for himself, through a for-profit training / certification facilities located in Vienna, Austria (Lozanov, 2006). Lozanov proposes that students naturally erect psychological barriers to learning, and these barriers are based upon the fear that the student will not be able to perform, which limits the student further in terms of their own ability to learn.

Suggestopedia claims that learners may have only been using five to ten percent of their total mental capacity in any given learning task, so that the brain can process and retain much more material if given “optimal” conditions for learning, such as those present using the method of Suggestopedia.

The intended purpose of Suggestopedia is to enhance learning by lowering the affective filter of learners (Harmer, 1991) Lazanov's current website, "Suggestology and Suggestopedy" claims that "suggestopedia is a system for liberation from the "preliminary negative concept regarding the difficulties in the process of learning" (Lozanov, 2006) that is established throughout a student's life. De-suggestopedia focuses more on what Lozanov describes as "de-suggestive learning". The method claims that it is effective by working not only on the conscious level of the human mind but also on the subconscious level, or the mind's reserves (Lozanov, 2006a).

Suggestopedia was summarized (Bancroft, 1978), (Racle, 1979), (Schaefer, 1980) in an effort to introduce it into North America. Another summary of Lazanov's method reviews Suggestopedia's mixture of yogic practice and Russian extrasensory perception research used to create a learning method that capitalized on a relaxed state of mind technique offering a maximum potential for retention (Brown, 2001:27).

Suggestopedia concentrates heavily on the students' states of mind, seeing in their wants and their relaxation the key to successful learning (Harmer, 1991). The role of the teacher is seen as a "benevolent dictator with unquestionable authority and unbeatable confidence" (Long & Richard, 1987).

### **Typical Techniques / Key Features of Suggestopedia**

Diane Larsen-Freeman's *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (2000:79-81) provides expanded descriptions of some of the common / typical techniques closely associated with Suggestopedia's appeal as a teaching method:

- (1.) Classroom Set-up - *Emphasis is placed on creating a physical environment that does not "feel" like a normal classroom, making students feel as relaxed and comfortable as possible.*
- (2.) Peripheral Learning - *Students may absorb information "effortlessly" when it is perceived as part of the environment, rather than as material "to be attend to)". "Peripheral" learning is encouraged through the presence of posters and decorations featuring targeted language features.*
- (3.) Positive Suggestion - *Teachers appeal to students' consciousness and sub-consciousness in order to better orchestrate "suggestive" factors involved in the learning situation). The teacher assumes a role of complete authority in the classroom*
- (4.) Visualization - *Students are asked to close their eyes and visualize scenes and events, to help them relax, facilitate positive suggestion and encourage creativity. Self-perceived and psychological barriers to learners' potential to learn are "de-suggested" during this stage.*
- (5.) Choice of New Identity - *Students select a target language name and / or occupation that places them "inside the language they are learning. Students are encouraged to be child-like, take "mental trips with the teacher" in order to become more "suggestible".*
- (6.) Role-playing - *Students pretend temporarily that they are someone else and perform in a role using the target language.*
- (7.) First Concert - *Teacher does a slow, dramatic reading of the dialogue synchronized in intonation with classical music. Baroque music is played softly in the background to increase mental relaxation and potential to take in and retain new material during the lesson. Students work form lengthy dialogs in the target language, with an accompanying translation provided into the student's native language.*
- (8.) Second Concert - *Students put aside their scripts and the teacher reads at a normal speed according to the content, not to the tempo of the accompanying pre-Classical or Baroque music- this typically ends the class for the day.*
- (9.) Primary Activation - *Students 'playfully" reread the target language out loud, (individually or in groups). Errors are tolerated.*
- (10.) Secondary Activation - *Students engage in various activities designed to help the students learn material & use it more spontaneously.*

### **Limitations of Suggestopedia**

This section is comprised of a partial listing of the limitations of Suggestopedia as an effective teaching method in a classroom setting based upon the literature.

□ "Suggestopedia has probably received both the most enthusiastic and the most critical response of any of the so-called new methods" (Richard & Rodgers, 1986:152). Suggestopedia has been well received in the popular press (*Parade*- March 12, 1978) and repudiated in Scovil's 1979 *TESOL Quarterly* review where he characterized Suggestology as "package of pseudo-scientific gobbledygook".

He added that Lozanov's work showed "eloquent" experimental data with "highly questionable" results (Scovil, 1979: 258-261). That author went even further in the same source as to criticize Suggestopedia by citing Lozanov's "innumerable references to ...memorization.. to the total exclusion of references to 'understanding' and/or 'creative solutions of problems that convinced that reviewer at the very least that "Suggestopedia... is an attempt to teach memory techniques and is not devoted to the far more comprehensive enterprise of language acquisition" (Scovil, 1979).

□The practicality of employing music, comfortable chairs and memorization to learn a language were also called to task, Suggestopedia has been disseminated through business enterprises such as language centers specializing in the prescribed techniques. Numerous promises and dubious claims have been to potential language learning in terms of advertising claims that have not been completely supported by research (Brown, 2001:28)

□Because Suggestopedia works on the sub-consciousness, it is often said that the method includes hypnosis or other techniques which gave negative impacts on human beings. Lozanov strongly denies this and claims that the method does not use techniques such as; hypnosis, NLP, breathing exercises, use of the brain's alpha waves, special diets, and so on (2006-Wiki-Suggestopedia)

□ Suggestopedia makes a considerable demand on time (one hour, five days a week), conditions, and resources. Small groups are necessary to be seated in comfortable rooms, while most other methods do not require such elaborate surroundings (Harmer, 1991:38).

□"Suggestopedic teachers require dramatic ability the method and related disciplines. It should be noted that the Eastern raja-yogic traditions may not appeal to some western students" in a classroom setting (Long, & Richards, 1987:135).

### ***Strengths of Suggestopedia***

This section is comprised of a partial listing of the strengths of Suggestopedia as an effective teaching method in a classroom setting based upon the literature.

□ Many aspects of Suggestopedia can be adapted to the communicative classroom without its wholesale acceptance. A relaxed, stress-free mind will help students gain confidence. Many techniques found in Suggestopedia foster meaningful interaction in the classroom. "And perhaps we should never underestimate the 'super-learning' powers of the human brain" (Brown, 2000:105).

□ Lozanov's research is of particular interest to language teachers because he developed and tested his theory in actual language classrooms, and not just in experiments with limited scope (Stevick, 1996: 134).

□ Suggestopedia has given the language teaching profession many valuable insights into the untapped power of the brain, the benefits of induced relaxation techniques in the classroom, such as the use of music as both a cue and as a stimulus to learn (Brown, 2001).

□ some principles in Suggestopedia may be successfully adapted to the American classroom: 1.) the more competence a teacher exhibits, the more secure the students will be and thus the more that they will learn. 2.) The less tense students are and the more that they are convinced of their own capacity for learning, the greater and the swifter will the learning (Long & Richards, 1987).

□The principal value of Suggestopedia is that it helps students to overcome important personal psychological barriers to learning a foreign or second language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 178).

### ***Conclusion***

Total physical Response (TPR) is the simpler method of the two examined methodologies and is much preferred by most language teachers in practice today. This task-based method promotes an active role for the student and a command role for the teacher. It is incorporated into most beginner level classes to impart instructions and simple commands. Its principal drawback is it remains limited in what it may offer to intermediate or advanced level language learner. Its greatest strength is that it does not require special equipment, materials, or extensive preparation and is easy to use by both teacher and student.

Suggestopedia is a very resource intensive method that draws much from behavioral psychology. Like TPR, it expects students to modify their behavior, but it is motivated by a subconscious effort brought about through a positive mental suggest. This method concentrates much of the teacher's efforts on establishing a suitable environment to achieve the stated teaching goals. Once the environmental conditions are achieved, then the learning process may begin, much like in "priming a pump".

This method is not advocated on a partial basis and is therefore an “all-or-nothing” proposition for the teacher. It remains controversial since retention data is unknown and much of the procedure involved remains as conjectural. Unfortunately, evaluation data is still lacking in the vast promotional literature on methods. Too often techniques and instructional philosophies are advocated from a philosophical or theoretical stance rather than on the basis of any form of evidence. Much has been written about methods and teaching techniques, yet the serious study of methods, either in terms of developmental practice or as classroom processes remains to be done by those closest to the subject, teachers. Few method writers locate method within curriculum development in order to integrate a proper set of processes that involve systematic data gathering, planning, experimentation, and evaluation. (Richards, & Rodgers, 1986). The real value of making such relative comparison is to make reasonable choices that will assist the students to gain confidence, awareness, and comprehension throughout the language learning process. Ultimately, the real skill of teaching remains the ability to choose wisely between guidance and mis-step.

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