

# Alternative literacy training for business and industry

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*Because there is an enormous need for literacy training in a developing country like South Africa, various organisations, including government departments, have embarked upon devising and presenting courses to meet this demand. Despite the useful and meritorious work done across the country, a certain measure of doubt is cast upon the effectiveness of these courses by questions raised about the basic approaches regarding the role of the instructor, the learner and the course material.*

*It is argued that a literacy course, widely used in business and industry, is not conducive to optimal learning. This conviction is strengthened by examining the nature and contents of the teaching material and the proposed method of instruction. An alternative literacy programme based on a suggestopedic/SALT method, currently in the process of being applied in a mining environment, is presented as a possible viable alternative. However, the application of this approach presupposes the adequate training of instructors. While it has become practice that any literate person may in principle qualify as a literacy instructor, it is suggested that effective literacy training can take place only when administered by suitably qualified instructors and not merely by willing individuals.*

*Omdat daar 'n geweldige behoefte is aan geletterdheidsopleiding in 'n ontwikkelende land soos Suid Afrika, het verskeie organisasies, insluitende regeringsdepartemente, onderneem om kursusse te ontwerp en aan te bied om in hierdie behoefte te voorsien. Ten spyte van nuttige en verdienstelike werk wat deur die land gedoen is, is daar 'n mate van twyfel oor die effektiwiteit daarvan as gevolg van vrae wat ontstaan het oor basiese benaderings ten opsigte van die rol van die instrukteur, die leerder en die kursus-materiaal.*

*Daar word geredeneer dat 'n geletterdheidskursus wat algemeen gebruik word, onder andere in die sake- en industriële wêreld, nie bevorderlik is vir optimale leer nie. Hierdie oortuiging is versterk deur 'n ondersoek van die aard en inhoud van die kursusmateriaal, asook die voorgestelde onderrigmetode.*

*'n Alternatiewe geletterdheidsprogram, gebaseer op 'n suggestopediese/SALT-metode wat tans in 'n mynongewing toegepas word, word as 'n moonlike lewensvatbare alternatief aangebied. Die toepassing van die benadering veronderstel egter voldoende opleiding van instrukteurs. Terwyl dit in die praktyk algemeen aanvaar word dat enige geletterde persoon in beginsel kwalifiseer om as geletterdheidsinstrukteur op te tree, word voorgestel dat effektiewe geletterdheidsopleiding alleenlik kan plaasvind wanneer dit geadministreer word deur opgeleide instrukteurs en nie deur enige gewillige individu nie.*

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## 1 Introduction

The aim of this paper is to propose an innovative, learner based strategy for literacy training in business and industry. This proposal stems from encouraging results that have been attained in the design, presentation and evaluation of foreign language courses for beginners in a mining environment, using innovative strategies (cf Puhl 1989)<sup>1</sup>. The students who were involved in the above-mentioned programmes were literate, even though many of them were in command of only the basic skills. The strategies that were used in these courses did not only facilitate accelerative learning, but, even more important, it contributed to growth in, and development of self-conception amongst the learners. Strategies and methods that have these inherent qualities can be extremely powerful to address the typical problem of a lack of self-confidence which is prevalent amongst illiterates. On the basis of the specific results attained in second language teaching for literates with elementary skills, and in view of the encouraging results attained in the experimental presentation of aspects of literacy courses in a mining environment utilizing this approach, it is argued that a **suggestopedic/SALT literacy program**<sup>2</sup> could make a significant contribution towards alleviating literacy problems encountered in business and industry.

However, this proposed strategy may also be applicable to other environments, since it sets out to accelerate the learning process to achieve meaningful results in a short time, and, since it calls for commitment and subsequent investment, it would probably be best suited for application in business and industry.

In the following sections a number of general and specific considerations relating to literacy training will be considered. This will be followed by some comments on the aims and nature of a literacy programme that is currently being used by a variety of institutions throughout Southern Africa. The outlines of a suggestopedic/SALT literacy programme for possible implementation in business and industry will then be presented. In exemplifying the method, attention will be paid to circumstances such as those prevailing in a mining environment.

## 2 Components of a literacy programme

The most common aim in literacy programmes is "getting adult people to read and write". Activities relating to this aim, however, have many facets, some of which are unfortunately very often ignored in the composition of these programmes. One such example is that "adult

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1 This is a research report covering the first phase of an ongoing project entitled **Upgrading of language, literacy, thinking and teaching skills at GFTS**, which is a joint venture between the Gold Fields Mining Company and the Institute for Language Teaching at the University of Stellenbosch.

2 The term suggestopedic/SALT is used here in the same sense as in van der Vyver and Botha (1989: pp. 2-3): "SALT (System for Accelerated Learning and Teaching) is the American version of Lozanov's Suggestopedia." (...) "By using the terms suggestopedic/SALT and Suggestopedia/SALT, the author and co-author therefore want to express identification (at least with present insights) with Suggestopedia's premises and principles, but simultaneously they want to express solidarity with the connotation carried by the word SALT in the sense that they (the author, co-author and colleagues) are continuously searching for anything with which the quality of teaching and learning can be improved and the outcome accelerated." These premises and principles are now applied to literacy training.

people” are simply treated as a homogeneous group and all the material is developed accordingly. A common feature of many approaches is that they are extremely prescriptive in nature: a decision is made on behalf of the learners regarding their needs and what they should know to “become literate”. Little if any real attention is paid to the specific wishes of the individual learner.

This prescriptive approach is clearly reflected in teacher training and material design, which form two integral components of a literacy programme. Although some programmes claim to be “learner-orientated” and call for “pleasant and stress-free surroundings”, their rigid and uncompromising nature is clearly reflected in prescriptions such as “they must do their homework, ... they must attend class” etc. Such remarks are very often an indication of a weakness in a system or method that lacks internal motivational qualities.

The question why literacy programmes should be presented is beyond any discussion. Within the South African context and, more specifically, within the black population group, where 9 million functional illiterates in a total adult population of 14 million have been estimated (Wedepohl 1984), the necessity for literacy programmes is quite obvious. It is important for any organization or company, however, to be quite clear about its own motives and priorities for being involved in any venture of this kind. This is even more applicable to business and industry which employ a very large group of these people.

Running a literacy programme naturally has problems of its own that need to be addressed. French (1988:27-28) points out that these problems include

- (i) low budgets for an activity with a relatively low priority and status amongst other educational objectives and needs;
- (ii) physical factors concerning the learners and the learning environment: literacy programmes are usually presented after hours, after a hard day’s work, and very often in an “unsuitable” environment;
- (iii) the prescriptive nature of literacy programmes “designed in the hope of compensating for the poor training of the teachers”;
- (iv) the medium of instruction and the language preference of the learner in a multilingual society, and
- (v) the differences in needs “... in terms of urban and rural constituencies, entry levels, languages, occupations, and even the generation gap ...”.

While it is generally accepted that provision should be made for

- (i) literacy;

(ii)  
numeracy (basic maths), and

(iii)  
basic second language learning

within Adult Basic Education (ABE), it is the contention of the author that the simultaneous development of thinking skills can strengthen the basis of all these activities.

In this process, however, the following general and specific considerations should be taken into account:

## **2.1 General considerations**

### **2.1.1 Target language for literacy**

In a unilingual society there is no problem as far as the medium of instruction is concerned. The situation in a multilingual society such as South Africa, however, is extremely complex. On the one hand there are the two official languages, English and Afrikaans, in which most of the day-to-day information is conveyed. On the other hand there are nine indigenous languages, of which at least one is the mother tongue of a great majority of illiterate adults. While some of these illiterate adults may be able to speak and/or understand one of the official languages, many are migrant workers and come from rural areas where there is very often a need for (written) communication in the vernacular. Thus, whilst illiterate migrant labourers may feel a need for literacy in one of the official languages, the need for literacy in the mother tongue may also be very real. "In a country in which families are very often separated by the institution of migrant labour, correspondence is a major objective of the literacy learner, a recurring theme being the desire for privacy and control over personal information" (French 1988:27). Within the specific context of business and industry, it would probably be beneficial to conduct literacy programmes in the vernacular for people not speaking English or Afrikaans, and to use English or Afrikaans as a target language in literacy courses for those who can already speak one of these languages.

### **2.1.2 Pre-packaged programmes**

Specific caution should be taken in the use of pre-packaged literacy programmes. The reason for this is quite obvious: programmes are very often material-orientated, i.e. the material (syllabus) to be covered takes precedence over the learner and his /her needs. Learners as individuals or as groups may differ considerably and this undoubtedly has an influence on the success of such programmes. Wedepohl (1988:1 in quoting Werner) is very clear on this point:

"(A training course) needs to be redesigned not only for each area and set of conditions where it is taught, but each time it is taught ...".

This seems to be a tall order, although the point to be made is that no real blueprints seem to exist when it comes to effective literacy training programmes. Fortunately some common denominators (such as similar jobs, similar places of origin and similar social needs) do exist within any given environment, which in turn could give an indication of the type of programmes that could be developed. Consideration should therefore be given to the development of a set of different literacy programmes catering for the needs of different groups within the specific environment.

### 2.1.3 Development of expertise

It is important that literacy and literacy programmes should have a standing in their own right within an organization. Literacy should not be considered merely as a sub-part of language programmes or programmes in thinking skills, but should be viewed as a type of activity that requires specific skills and expertise. A solid foundation in suggestopedic/SALT language teaching skills would be very beneficial to a person entrusted with the development of a literacy programme. Literacy training needs to be viewed as an ongoing activity that demands continual refinement and development in terms of method and material.

## 2.2 Specific considerations

Some specific considerations regarding the learner, the method and the material need to be taken into account in the development and presentation of a literacy programme.

### 2.2.1 The learner

It is important to bear in mind that literacy programmes are geared towards adult learners and that it is an oversimplification to relate these programmes to those used in teaching children to read and write. Adult learners possess various qualities and experiences, totally absent in young children, that need to be tapped and built on in the learning process.

The adult learner sees literacy as a way to personal independence: to get to grips with important information that may influence his/her life. The individual has certain needs that have to be fulfilled, thus it is extremely important that literacy training be placed in the correct context. The learner should in all instances have clarity about why he/she is taking part in a specific literacy course. There is nothing as boring for the teacher and learner as irrelevant material taught and "learnt" in a non-supportive environment. **Topics affecting the day-to-day life of the learner should therefore form the basis of any literacy programme.**

It is not only necessary that relevant topics should be addressed in literacy programmes but an even more conscious effort should also be made to develop the thinking skills of the participants. While issues affecting his/her day-to-day life should form the focus of the programme, the participant should also be given the chance to solve problems relating to these issues.

Furthermore, an integral part of thinking skills, numeracy should be incorporated in literacy programmes. The learner has a great need to read prices, time tables at railway stations, etc., and specific attention should be given to this aspect and its functional integration in literacy programmes.

Another important aspect that has to be taken into consideration in the presentation of a literacy programme is the learner's emotional state, his/her anxieties and fears. For many adults it may be very embarrassing to admit that they cannot read or write. Consequently such learners are very prone to any negative remark or suggestion, be it within or outside the class. It is therefore extremely important not only to see the task of the literacy teacher as teaching a specific syllabus but also as building up the confidence of the learner. One way in which to build learner confidence is to make the learners part of the whole process and to give them an optimal chance to express themselves. Hence the learner needs to be encouraged to play an active role in class, i.e. not only to respond to instructions given by the teacher but also to enter into discussions, later even to write up his or her comments, etc. In a sense, literacy can be seen as a boost to the self-concept of the individual. It is therefore necessary to adopt a teaching method that enables the learner to develop at his/her own pace without fear of appearing to be ridiculous. It is the opinion of the author that a suggestopedic/SALT environment where small groups get together in a supportive atmosphere would be most conducive to achieving this goal.

### 2.2.2 The method

Through the years, many methods have been developed to teach adults to read and write. After analysing various methods, Wedepohl (1988:72) singles out two methods that in the opinion of the author could, with some specific suggestopedic/SALT adaptations, be used in literacy programmes, for instance, in a mining environment. A distinction should, however, be made between what could be called "structural" and "non-structural" approaches. A widely used set of literacy programmes<sup>3</sup> of the Department of Education and Training (DET) may be considered as "structural" in the sense that the main emphasis is on the material to be covered, and this should be done in a prescribed manner. Although an effort is made to make it "learner-friendly", with some suggestions to the teacher on how to approach and handle the learner, in principle it remains a prescriptive course.

The following two methods may be considered as "non-structural" in the sense that they leave room for improvisation on the part of the teacher as well as the learner. These methods are commonly referred to as the **Language Experience Method (LEM)** and the **Freire Method**. In conducting a literacy programme within a community in Montagu in the Cape, Wedepohl (1988) used a combination of these methods reportedly with great success. A combination of some aspects of these two methods, enhanced with suggestopedic/SALT principles and presented within a typically suggestopedic/SALT environment, could be an extremely powerful method in literacy teaching.

The LEM basically amounts to the following: the learner's own words are the first thing that he/she learns to read. In this approach the group leader (teacher) has some important functions:

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3 These programmes are available in the official languages, as well as in most of the indigenous languages of Southern Africa. Due to the fact, however, that no direct quotes may be made from these works without the prior consent of the Government Printer, only indirect references will be made.

- “- the group-leader encourages learners to talk about something which is close to their own experiences; while they talk, the group-leader writes down some of the sentences they say - exactly as they say it;
- the group-leader then writes these sentences on the board and teaches learners to read them; first the whole sentence, later individual words” (Wedepohl 1988:72).

**The Freire Method** may be ascribed to Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator who “... believed that literacy could help people to free themselves from political oppression. Learners would talk about social problems and then learn to read key words taken from those discussions...”. This kind of literacy teaching can work in favour of learners’ interest. But it can also be misused to manipulate learners into furthering a particular organisation’s political aims” (Wedepohl 1988:22). On the other hand, any method may in principle be misused. This method comprises the following different steps:

- “- Educators first find out what the problems are in the learners’ community.
- They then produce “codes” (pictures, stories, plays etc.) which illustrate these problems.
- The educator shows these “codes” to learners in class.
- Together they discuss the problem, analyse what the causes are and decide what to do about it.
- A key word, which relates to the problem, is written on the board.
- Learners learn to read this word by breaking it up into syllables.
- They then learn to build other words with these syllables” (Wedepohl 1988:72-73).

Some specific points concerning this method and its possible integration with other components in a new literacy programme do, however, need to be pointed out. Step 1 clearly calls for an extensive analysis of the needs of the learners concerned. Steps 2 and 3 pertain to contextualization. The material to be learnt is placed in context in a way very similar to that found in suggestopedic/SALT teaching. Step 4 (the discussion of the problem) calls for the development of thinking skills, which may also include aspects of numeracy. Step 5 is the partial transformation of the problem and/or its solution into the written medium, which in turn forms the input for creative (generative) learning in steps 6 and 7.

The syllabification aspect, i.e. that words are broken up into syllables and taught accordingly, should work very well with African languages, as these languages are syllabic in nature.

### 2.2.3 The material

Two different skills are normally developed in a literacy programme: skills to relate sound structures to graphic symbols (reading) and motor skills to represent these graphic symbols (writing). The development of these skills, however, should always take place in a meaningful context, which calls for deliberate thinking on the part of the learner as well as the teacher. **A literacy course thus basically calls for three types of material: reading, writing and “thinking” material.** Whereas some flexibility may exist with reading material (the material may vary in topic, complexity, etc.), writing material is in principle defined in the sense that a limited number of items (letters and numbers) have to be learnt to be identified and represented graphically. Although the development of thinking skills may be separated from the above-mentioned skills (a person may possess good thinking skills despite the fact that he/she may not be able to read and/or write), the systematic development of specific strategies for thinking skills will undoubtedly form an excellent vehicle for the teaching of reading and writing skills. Details of the nature of the proposed material are presented in section 4 below.

## 3 Comments on DET literacy programmes

Different versions of a literacy programme of the Department of Education and Training entitled **A course for adults to learn to read and write** are currently in use across the country. This course comprises a **Teachers’ Guide** (with general instructions on method) and a number of **Beginners Course Units**, inter alia in different African languages, each containing language-specific material. For the purposes of this discussion, aspects of the **Teachers’ Guide** and some units of the **Xhosa course** are reviewed. Although it is possible to go into great detail about the nature and content of these courses, it is the intention of the author merely to point out some of the more obvious deficiencies of this programme. Although this programme may be useful in a rural, noncompetitive environment, it can definitely not be regarded as one that can yield meaningful results, i.e. the type of results needed in a highly competitive environment (within business and industry) where time and efficiency are of the utmost importance.

### 3.1 General observations

The following general observations may be made with regard to the course as a whole:

#### 3.1.1 The teaching method is extremely rigid and prescriptive

As a whole the course is highly prescriptive with regard to the method employed, leaving little scope for creativity. Each and every lesson is prescribed in detail to such an extent that it even becomes absurd: it is stated, for instance, that learners should repeat a particular word three times and not four or five times and that the teacher should as far as possible always stand in the same spot when he addresses the group. Even the position where a learner should place his/her books is prescribed!

The use of flash cards and peripheral stimuli (wall charts) is prescribed for each lesson, resulting in an atomistic approach that culminates in nearly every class beginning with a phrase that the students are going to learn one more letter that evening. This type of approach is inadequate in facilitating optimal learning, as has already been proved by other holistic and contextual approaches.

The method employed is so rigid that it requires no real participation from the student save passive repetitions. This situation may probably be ascribed to the lack of qualified teachers hence these extraneous instructions. There does, however, seem to be an inherent contradiction in this approach: on the one hand everything relating to the syllabus is prescribed in the minutest detail for the “unqualified” instructor, whilst on the other hand, some psychotherapeutic feats are expected from the same instructor. The instructor is advised, inter alia, to make a point of finding out how each person in class sees himself/herself, and this should determine the instructor’s approach to the student and the work. The most fundamental point to be made is that, as with any type of teaching, there is little hope of running an effective literacy programme without well-trained instructors.

### 3.1.2 The contents of the course are too general to be effective

The course is obviously too general to cater for the specific interests and needs of individuals and/or groups. It is intended for “adults” as a homogeneous group, disregarding age, “qualifications”, interests or even physical handicaps. Some specific instructions are therefore required on how to handle people with sight and hearing problems. From a didactical point of view this is a totally untenable situation. Teaching should always be directed at specific and realistic target groups and not just at a community as a whole.

### 3.1.3 The course material is uninspiring

All these beginner courses start out with the presentation of single words without being put into any context whatsoever. The English course commences with the words **apple, ant, bird, bed, cat, cow**, etc., which give a clear indication that teaching the alphabet is a prime point of departure. The structure of the language material then takes over, with undue emphasis placed on phonics: scores of words such as **fan, fat, sat** are presented with the instruction to the students to repeat the words, without them needing to know the meanings. Learning sounds without meaning is meaningless in itself.

The Xhosa course, on the other hand, starts with a nonsense word **sana**, presumably to facilitate the teaching of the letter “a” to start with. It then totally disregards the alphabet and teaches it randomly, even using wrong syllabifications.

The impression is that material was gathered in an *ad hoc* fashion without any real pattern. If the emphasis had been on form, it may at least be expected that the most frequent and relevant forms would be taught. It is, however, clear that no frequency analysis preceded any of these courses. If this had been the case, syllables such as **ku, wa, ba, nga, kwa, ndi, nge**

**nda, ngo, and nto** would have been taught in Xhosa instead of the wrong **mli, mlo, mlu** syllabic forms and the **si, sa, se** forms, which do not even occur amongst the 10 most frequent consonant-vowel (CV) combinations in this language (Roux 1990:34). Comprehensive data on word and syllable frequencies should be a driving force for structure-orientated learning material.

There is very little to interest the learner in these courses. To be blunt: it is inconceivable that this type of sterile material could be presented for a whole year with the hope that students would “like” it or even profit from it. There is a strong possibility that students will drop out of the course at an early stage.

### **3.1.4 The potential of the average learner is disregarded**

The course seems to be based on the assumption that adult learners have a very limited potential, that they will not be able to cope easily with the material and that they will need a lot of time to complete the course effectively. This gross generalization is made despite the fact that there is no information about any learner before he/she starts the course. The basic problem is that adults are treated as a homogeneous group, which clearly cannot be the case. These false conceptions regarding the potential of the adult are clearly reflected in numerous statements: learners must be told that they shouldn't be in a hurry to learn, or, that they will not be able to learn well if they are in a hurry. Moreover, learners are told that they will be able to write a letter only in a year's time.

It is astounding that teachers are encouraged, and even instructed, to convey so many negative suggestions to the learners. Apart from the fact that it exposes an inherent weakness in the method (the implication is that you have to work slowly otherwise you will not learn), it clearly shows a disregard for the ability of the students. The suggestion is quite clear: you cannot learn fast and it will take you one year to learn how to write a letter! Within a teaching environment it is imperative to create and maintain positive expectations in the students at all times. Apart from these negative suggestions, the course as a whole reflects a disregard for the inherent potential of the learner, with an overt suggestion that it is difficult to learn.

### **3.1.5 The course is based on false conceptions regarding the nature of the learning process**

In the preparation of the group-leaders for their duties, they are advised to explain to the students how a person learns. It is explicitly stated that these students do not know how to learn. Without going into detail on this issue, it is clear that suggestions such as these reflect ignorance, for instance, about the relationship between “learn” and “study”. It is explicitly suggested that these people have never learnt anything. From a pedagogical point of view, students should not be burdened with irrelevant material. The following analogy suffices: the ability to drive a car is totally unrelated to a knowledge of the working of a combustion engine.

Rather than telling a student how to “learn”, an environment conducive to learning should be

created. The student should be engulfed with interesting and stimulating material and opportunities should be created for optimal participation. Finally, extensive use should be made of the environment through the intelligent use of peripheral stimuli (which function on the subconscious level) to enhance the learning process.

When looking at the way in which phonics are treated in this programme, it also becomes clear that there is very little understanding of the principles governing the reading process. There are well-known strategies that may be employed in correlating letter sequences with sounds; the repetition of a letter in isolation is not, however, one of these strategies. The instruction to the instructor that the students must be able to say the letters **Dd, Ee, Ff** becomes virtually impossible, as some consonants cannot be pronounced in isolation. They must be followed by a vowel, even if it is only the neutral vowel, as in “duh”. The pronunciation of the vowels on the other hand may vary depending on the context: using the word **engine** to illustrate the sound quality of the letter “e”, for instance, caters only for the initial “e” but not for the final “e”, which is voiceless. What about the sound quality of “e” in **equal**?

The point to be made is that it is obvious that these courses lack a solid scientific base. The courses are not based on a knowledge of principles relating to the way in which people learn (be it consciously or sub-consciously); instead they tend to put across a specific set of material in any way to any “homogeneous” group.

### 3.1.6 Motor skills are developed

One of the few positive points of these courses is the visual material presented to facilitate motor skills through the writing process. The correct procedures for writing are explained and ample exercises are given.

## 3.2 Specific observations

The following specific observations may be made with regard to one of the “Beginners Units”, in this case the ISIXHOSA course. It needs, however, to be stressed that all the general observations above hold true for this course and that only one or two language-specific deficiencies will be pointed out here. It is the considered view of the author that there is a need for relevant contextual material to be taught in all these literacy courses in the African languages and, seen as a whole, the existing courses simply do not meet this need, hence these limited remarks on language specifics.

Apart from the uninspiring and unrelated material, the Xhosa course abounds in grammatical and morpho-phonological inconsistencies, which can be very confusing to the learner who already knows and uses the language. Consider the example from the first lesson where the drawing of a baby is presented with the word **sana**. The wall chart similarly contains the word **sana**. The study leader points to the picture saying “sana” and requests the students to repeat the word, thus implying that the sound (word) **sana** means “baby”. Any Xhosa, however, knows that this is not true, as the word still requires the compulsory prefix **u**, i.e. **usana**, to

indicate that it is a baby(singular). The form **sana** may as such refer to anything baby-like or baby-ish. The only explanation that could possibly be given for the use of **sana** instead of **usana** is that a specific form or set of consonants and vowels is to be taught first (reason unknown) and that the semantic content is of little importance. Ironically, however, the correct form (i.e. including the prefix) is presented for the word “frog”, **isele**, in a later lesson where the next noun is presented.

As a second example: a sentence is defined as a number of words arranged next to one another in such a way that they make sense, but then an example is presented which contradicts this definition. The example **Anna lalisa usisi** is, however, a non-sentence in Xhosa, as it lacks the necessary concords to make it a declarative sentence (**uAnna ulalisa usisi**) or punctuation marks to convert it into an imperative sentence (**Anna, lalisa usisi!**).

As a final example, some syllabification exercises may be considered. As such these types of exercises are extremely useful and strongly recommended in, for instance, the Freire Method. Furthermore, the African languages are perfectly suited to these exercises, as they are all inherently syllabic in nature. Unfortunately, again probably due to a lack of knowledge of the phonotactic structure of the language, wrong syllabification rules are presented to the learners, for instance **umlilo** (“fire”) is syllabified as **u-ml-i-lo** instead of **u-m-li-lo**.

The basic point to be made concerning the language material used is that it should be treated with extreme circumspection. It is doubtful whether such a programme is the answer for a company with ideals for effective literacy training.

#### 4.1 Components of a suggestopedic/SALT literacy course

It is the opinion of the author that the suggestopedic/SALT method contains all the elements lacking in other methods to facilitate meaningful teaching and learning, even on a break-through level. The method allays all fears in the learner and it creates a positive, relaxed and supportive learning environment, which is crucial to the learning process. This feature of the method is, incidentally, highly rated by large numbers of participants in previous language courses (Puhl 1989:38). There is evidence that workers enjoy these types of classes, that their confidence is built up and that they “think better”. The most valid reason, however, for deciding on this method lies in its encouraging results (Puhl 1989:41-44). The author is convinced that a well-executed suggestopedic/SALT literacy programme, enhanced with strategies from the LEM and Freire methods, would drastically cut the time (and money) spent on traditional literacy programmes. Even more important is the conviction that the quality of teaching and the subsequent results would be superior to those of traditional courses.

The examples presented here refer mainly to a mining environment. However, they may be adopted for any similar context.

#### 4.1.1 Needs analysis

It is extremely important that the material taught should be relevant and have a direct bearing on the everyday life and needs of the students. A thorough analysis of the needs of these people must be made beforehand. It is important to speak to the illiterates themselves to determine their needs and not to determine these on hearsay. Things that may be quite obvious to the literate person could be a great problem to the illiterate. It would be a good strategy to make a distinction between their needs in the immediate mining environment and their needs within broader community life. These needs could include

signing their names;

writing and reading their addresses, personal particulars, etc.;

reading and writing their own letters, newspapers, etc.;

reading notices in the hostels, at their places of work, etc.;

using a telephone and taking messages;

reading instructions on products, medicines, etc.;

reading timetables at stations, bus terminals, etc.;

reading the names of stations, shops, etc., and

filling in forms at any specific mining office, post office, etc.

Apart from determining these specific needs, it is also necessary to determine the main **topics of interest** of the potential learners.

#### 4.1.2 Development of material

After having determined the literacy needs of the illiterate workers on the mines, appropriate material for teaching reading, writing and thinking skills needs to be developed. True to the nature of suggestopedic/SALT teaching, this material would not only form the input for the classes but would also be used as various types of exercises (Dhority 1984). It is suggested that the material be organized as a dramatic story prepared in dialogue format, that is familiar to the students and with which they can identify. The story should be divided into separate modules to be taught in a specific order. A story reflecting the experiences of a person who comes to work on the mines for the first time could form the basis of the whole course. The following story-line could be pursued in meeting the needs of the students and in preparing “codes” (pictorial stimuli) a la Freire (Wedepohl 1988:72).

## **Topic: Recruitment**

What were the problems that the student encountered during recruitment? What did they want to read or write? What did they not understand? Consider the following as an example:

### **Needs:**

- 1 To read the notice about where to report for an interview (reading skills).
- 2 To write their names and addresses (writing skills).
- 3 To understand the system of remuneration, i.e. why they do not receive all their money in cash (thinking skills).

### **Codes:**

- 1 Pictures of a typical recruiting situation: people standing around in queues, recruiting officers sitting at desks, etc. Authentic notices used with recruitment in the form of wall charts.
- 2 Authentic forms from all walks of life (the post office, bank etc.) that require the completion of a name and address.
- 3 Drawing: a bag of money (say R100) with two arrows going from the bag, one pointing to a bank (the logo of a specific bank could even be used) and the other to a person.

Over and above these codes there should be a good supply of all letters of the alphabet in various formats; for instance, 10 small “a” symbols of various sizes (preferably between 15 cm and 30 cm in height) cut from cardboard, wood or polystyrene. These symbols should include the two “a” types, i.e. a printed “a” and a written “a”. They could even be painted in different colours. The same material would be needed for a capital “A” (at least 10) for each letter of the alphabet in fact. This material would be basic to the course and would be used repeatedly in all lessons. Thus it would be beneficial to use durable material in the manufacture of these letters.

## **Topic: Living on the mine premises**

What are the typical problems encountered by the students living in the hostels? Are there sanitary problems? Food problems? Water and electricity problems? Problems with stealing? etc.

What are the likable things about the hostels? The social life? Beer parties?

What are the things that they do not understand? For instance, why are men not allowed to take women into the hostels?

Codes should be developed from these topics to the extent that they form the point of departure for a specific lesson. The detail of the presentation of such a lesson is presented in the following section. It should always be borne in mind that these codes should lead to the teaching of reading and writing words, phrases and sentences originating from the codes themselves. At the same time there should be a code to induce the teaching of a particular thinking skill. For instance, a picture/drawing of a woman entering a men's hostel could lead to the implementation of a PNI or C&S "tool" in thinking skills (de Bono 1986a, 1986b) through an oral discussion of the participants. From this exercise in thinking skills (naturally without bothering the students with any technicalities or even with the name of the particular tool), words, phrases and sentences will be used that can be included in the teaching material.

### **Topic: Working underground**

What are the problems of working underground (be specific)? What are the benefits? What signs need to be read and understood?

Codes should be developed depicting underground scenes that reflect the problems, fears, wishes, etc. of the students. A discussion of these codes will give rise to a number of words, phrases and sentences, which will then be taught.

A possible code for a thinking skill is an underground worker smoking a pipe or standing on the wrong side of a winch. This could lead to a good C&S exercise.

### **Topic: Going to town**

All the problems encountered by an illiterate going to town for the first time should be encoded: catching a bus (the names of the various destinations as depicted on the front of a bus could be taught); getting off at the right stop (different names of bus stops); going to a specific shop (the names of different shops - authentic logos could be used); buying specific merchandise (the prices of various items); etc.

A possible code for a thinking skill is a man standing in front of a shop window looking at a number of commodities ranging from necessary items to luxury items. He has to make some choices. This could be good material for PNI or FIP exercises.

Other topics that could form part of the story as a whole could include

### **Partaking in sports**

### **Promotion to another job**

## **Communicating with friends and family at home**

To **summarize**: the following sets of material need to be developed on the basis of the needs, experiences and wishes of the participants, which should be determined beforehand:

- Set 1:** A written story depicting the experiences of a person going to work on the mines for the first time. This story should be lively, humorous and of such a nature that it could well be the life story of any one of the students. It should be divided into different chapters. At first the story should be told or read to the students and form the input for different discussions and teaching activities. This material, or parts of it, could be used at various stages during the course as reading material. At the end of the course the story could be read by the students on their own.
- Set 2:** A comprehensive set of pictures or drawings (**codes**) depicting different scenes from the story above. These codes should be such that they could generate lively discussion by the students. They should incorporate wall charts, flash cards and other typical peripheral stimuli.
- Set 3:** A set of supporting material consisting of alphabetic letters and numbers, preferably made of wood or polystyrene, as well as various types of authentic forms (application forms, etc.), commercial posters, etc.

In the following section it will be shown how this material could be presented within a suggestopedic/SALT framework. A detailed example of the presentation of one topic (Recruitment) will be given. In principle the other topics could be handled in the same way.

### **4.1.3 Presentation of material**

The following discussion assumes a working knowledge of suggestopedic/SALT language teaching on the part of the reader as well as a knowledge of the teaching of thinking skills. Short motivations for specific actions are presented where necessary. This is a broad outline of a possible presentation within a two-hour slot. It should, however, be emphasized that the suggestions are of a preliminary nature and would naturally have to be backed by sound research and development strategies.

**Target group:** 12 totally illiterate pre-selected students

**Venue:** A typical suggestopedic/SALT classroom with specific peripherals consisting inter alia of names, surnames and street names on separate charts spread across the walls of the room. The letters of the alphabet should also form part of the peripherals, although these should not be clustered but spread at random around the room. It would be preferable for the letters to be contained in larger visual images.

There is ample evidence from work by Lozanov, Hall and others (Dhority 1984:7-3) that

remarkable learning results have been obtained by using visual stimuli integrated into the instructional environment without the instructor drawing specific attention to them. Dr Lawrence Hall of Howard University in Washington, DC is reported to have used these techniques to teach the Russian Cyrillic alphabet to students in just a few hours (Dhority 1984:7-3, and personal communication with Dr Hall).

**Procedure:**

- 1 Welcome the students to the class; engage in small talk; show interest in each student; have the students greet one another; build a supportive atmosphere. It is very important for the instructor to establish and maintain a good rapport with his /her students.
- 2 **Input A:** Present a progressive relaxation exercise with accompanying music. Make sure that the learners are totally relaxed. Ask them to concentrate on the story that you are about to tell them; start reading from the first chapter of the story concerned with recruitment. This input is necessary to present a bigger picture (i.e. the context) and to present a rich and varied input (i.e. making use of many names, surnames, etc.). The text could contain a scene where a person is asked his name by a clerk. The person states that his name is “Silo” but is misheard. He is then requested to repeat his name, which he does whilst syllabifying it as “Si-lo, Si-lo” and finally completely as “Silo”. The clerk then writes down his name, whilst spelling it out loudly as “S-i-l-o” and then as “Silo - oh, thank you sir ...”, etc. With this type of input the learner is put in an authentic situation where he receives a multi-level input. He first hears the full form of the word to be learnt, followed by two syllabified versions and then again by the full form. The word is finally spelled out and vocalized again as a whole. Only one example is presented here but the text should be written so that all the relevant teaching material is handled in a similarly natural and unpretentious way. The point to be made here is that, even before any deliberate teaching is undertaken by the instructor or before any conscious learning has taken place (seen from the angle of the learner), the student has already been confronted with important material in various forms, which facilitates the learning process. Here learning takes place on a semiconscious level and in an authentic and credible environment. This type of teaching is furthermore far removed from the direct approach, which usually commences with the announcement: “Today we are going to learn the word Silo.”
- 3 **Physical exercise:** A stretching exercise would suffice.
- 4 **Input B:** With input A, the teacher had the opportunity of selecting and focusing on specific words, phrases, etc., which are activated (taught) at a later stage. With this input phase the learner is given the opportunity (unwittingly) of selecting more material that can be activated. A code (drawing) depicting one or more of the scenes of the story just heard is presented to the students and they are asked to speak about it. They can describe the actions, why and when they took place, who the characters

are, etc. They should be encouraged to speak freely and even to add to the story. During this phase the instructor deliberately writes down key words, names, expressions, etc., used by the group on a flip chart. Some initial teaching of thinking skills can take place during this phase, as the instructor can ask questions such as “Do you think that it was good for Mr X to do this or that?” and subsequently lead the group to do a PNI (naturally without telling students that they are using a specific “tool”). The main objective of this input phase is to isolate material that will be explicitly activated.

- 5 Activation A:** Any type of activation that is normally found in a suggestopedic/SALT class can be employed. As an example, consider the following activation to teach the form and function of the letters S, I, L and O as used in the name of one of the main characters of the story:

**Mimicry:** The form of the different letters is explicitly written on a flip chart and the wooden replica of each letter is shown. It is important that a letter is always presented in a consonant-vowel (CV) context, thus as IS, SI, OL or LO, because certain consonants are unpronounceable alone - try saying “b” without resorting to “b-uh”. Focus attention on the forms of the letters and their corresponding sounds - try making an “S” with your body. Invite students to work together as pairs and mimic, saying certain combinations aloud. One could try to make his body resemble an upright snake, whilst another could stand upright holding a hat above his head to resemble an “i”. This could result in a very pleasant learning experience and at the same time reinforce a specific visual image of a letter through the way in which it was mimicked.

**Competitive games:** Two teams are formed and encouraged to select specific letters from the wooden alphabet and to build a specific combination that they should try to learn as fast as possible. This activation reinforces identification of letters, which is supported and encouraged by the dynamics within the group.

**Writing:** Writing exercises can unobtrusively become part of the learning process if, as a form of activation, students are asked to trace a wooden form of a specific letter (in a large format) onto a piece of paper and then told to ask one of their friends to identify it. This could later be reduced to a smaller format, i.e. they could make the letter on their own on a piece of writing paper. This activity could also be managed on a competitive basis.

- 6 Visualization:** As part of the reinforcement process a visualization exercise such as the following could be considered:

The group is made to relax after the activation session. Suitable calming music is played and the participants are requested to concentrate on two wooden letters presenting the combination “SI”, for example, which are put up in front for everyone to see. Under the guidance of the instructor they are encouraged to concentrate (atten-

tively) on the letters, vocalizing them softly. Repeat this a number of times. They are asked to close their eyes, “see” the combination in their minds’ eye and vocalize. They should keep trying until they are able to visualize these combinations easily. As another type of concentration exercise they could even try to visualize not only the forms of letters but also their colours.

- 7 Input C:** The material to be presented here should lend itself to the explicit teaching of thinking skills and numeracy. Again a code is presented (a drawing of the bag with R100 in it) and the class is asked to remark on the code. This code would invariably reflect one of the real problems as determined through the needs analysis. The instructor should prompt the students to address the problem, implicitly making use of a pre-determined “tool” a la de Bono (1986a, 1986b). Key words and numerals are meanwhile gathered on the flip chart and treated, time permitting, in the same way as above, using some kind of activation.
- 8 Conclusion:** The session is concluded with the instructor getting the students to relax and close their eyes while they listen to typical Second Concert music (Dhority 1984). The instructor then takes them through the essence of what they have learnt (cursorily). This talk or summary should always contain positive suggestions, not only with reference to the material but also to the abilities of the students to succeed.

#### **4.2 Implementation of a suggestopedic/SALT literacy programme**

Two aspects that continually come to the fore in serious studies on literacy are that no real blueprints are available anywhere in the world that can meet the specific needs of different communities and that it is incorrect to treat all illiterates as a homogeneous group. This by implication restricts or even totally rules out the use of any “general” commercial literacy course for use by an institution that is serious in its commitment to literacy. It has been argued that probably the most widely used literacy programme in South Africa actually functions under these two incorrect premises: firstly, a blueprint is set and various literacy courses in all the languages found in South Africa are presented accordingly, and, secondly, all illiterates are treated as a homogeneous group. Furthermore, bearing in mind that serious and obvious deficiencies with respect to contents as well as to the underlying method exist in at least two language-specific literacy programmes (i.e. in Xhosa and English), everything points to the need for scientifically developed literacy programmes. These programmes should not only pay renewed interest to content (i.e. interesting topics and relevant material) and innovative didactical approaches but should also, in the first instance, be based securely on principles underlying human perception (visual and auditory) and cognition, supported by a detailed knowledge of human potential and by the ways and means of developing this potential.

The implementation of a suggestopedic/SALT literacy programme by any organization calls for

- (i) a commitment to regard literacy training as part and parcel of any staff development programme;

- (ii) the deliberate training of instructors in innovative (language) teaching techniques, and
- (iii) the conscious development, monitoring and refinement of literacy programmes for different target populations.

If we really are in earnest to make progress in the field of literacy, it should be seriously approached as a specialist field and not merely as an area in which willing individuals operate. It is conceivable that a well-designed programme utilizing all the possibilities of a suggestopedic/SALT approach in an imaginative way, would outclass most existing programmes and could play a great role in addressing the literacy problem of Southern Africa as a whole.

Looking at the overall challenges in this field, it is quite true that “a history is still to be made” (French 1988).

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