

Shakespeare through suggestopedia?

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This article explores the feasibility of using Suggestopedia to teach literary appreciation of a Shakespeare play. It describes the criteria for a suggestopedic text and examines the viability of using a Shakespeare play as such a text. A brief description of the course, which was presented to a group of students at Denneoord College for Continued Training in Stellenbosch, is given, as well as the results of various forms of evaluation.

Die doel van hierdie artikel is om na te vors of Suggestopedia gebruik kan word om letterkundige waardering van 'n Shakespeare-drama te onderrig. Dit omskrywe die kriteria vir die Suggestopediese teks en ondersoek die moontlikheid of die Shakespeare-drama as so 'n teks gebruik kan word. 'n Beknopte omskrywing van die kursus, wat aan 'n groep studente van die Denneoord-kollege vir voortgesette opleiding te Stellenbosch aangebied is, word gegee, asook die resultate van verskeie vorms van evaluering.

Rationale

The investigation described in this article was conducted to test whether Suggestopedia can be used to teach the understanding and literary appreciation of a Shakespeare play to first or second language (L₁, L₂) college students.

The aversion that some students have for Shakespeare is a problem that frequently has to be faced by lecturers in English. At school level the complexity of the Shakespearean text often forces the high school teacher to resort to a laborious line by line explanation/translation/analysis of the entire play. Consequently the beauty of the language, the humour, the suspense and the universality of the message, plot and characterization are lost to the pupils. It may be an exaggeration to maintain that for the average college student the study of a Shakespeare play is tantamount to the study of a foreign language. It is not an exaggeration to say that most college students fail to recognize that the study of Shakespeare is in the appreciation of English literature.

Apart from testing the viability of using Suggestopedia to study a Shakespeare play, the objectives of the experiment were to ascertain whether a Shakespeare play itself could be used

effectively as a suggestopedic text and whether the use of Suggestopedia would bring about any improvement in the students' attitude towards and appreciation of the writings of Shakespeare.

The target group

The students were ten female candidates for a Diploma in Education at Denneoord College for Continued Training in Stellenbosch. All the students were taking the third year English First Language course for which Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* had been prescribed. With the exception of one student this was to be the group's first post-matric exposure to Shakespeare. Nine of the students were Afrikaans speaking and one was English speaking. All of them had passed the English Higher Bilingualism Examination (E) and were reasonably well-trained in the techniques of literary appreciation and critical analysis. The average age of the group was 21 years 7 months and the average I.Q. 112,6.

Structure of the course

The class met for fifteen 90 minute sessions for a period of six weeks. The course started on 7 August 1986 and ended on 11 September 1986.

Two 90 minute sessions were held per week for the first 3 weeks and 3 sessions per week for the final 3 weeks.

Text

Instead of a text written especially for a course in literary appreciation, an adapted version of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* was used. In this way one of the major problems encountered by the convert to suggestopedic teaching, namely the writing of a suitable text, was circumvented. As far as the target group was concerned, such an approach had two distinct advantages: the prescribed Shakespeare play for their third year course in English First Language was dealt with very thoroughly and, as prospective primary school teachers, the students gained first-hand experience of the principles and unique effects of Suggestopedia.

To assess how suitable a Shakespeare play is for

LORENZO: Sweet soul, let's in, and there expect their coming.
And yet no matter: why should we go in?
My friend Stephano, *signify* I pray you
Within the house, your Mistress is at hand
And bring your music forth into the air.

Exit Stephano

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears; soft stillness, and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony:
Sit, Jessica, look how the *floor of heaven*
Is thick inlaid with *patens* of bright gold,

There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still *quiring* to the young-eyed *cherubins*

Such harmony is in immortal souls,
But whilst this *muddy vesture of decay*

Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it:
Come ho, and wake *Diana* with a hymn,

With sweetest touches pierce your Mistress' ear,
And draw her home with music.

2 The text should introduce the target group to 1 500 to 2 000 new words during the course (Dhority 1984:8 – 2).

use as a suggestopedic text, cognizance should be taken of the criteria for such a text. In the section below, criteria compiled from three sources are listed and these are followed by a brief discussion of how far the Shakespeare text met each requirement.

Criteria for a suggestopedic text

1 The appearance and format of the text should have a positive suggestive impact. It should be new, different and attractive (Dhority 1984:8 – 3).

Each act of the prepared text was printed on different coloured paper in a parallel column format with the text in the left column and the glossary in the right column as indicated in the example printed below. (The extent to which explanations and synonyms should be given in the text obviously depends on the proficiency of the target group.)

announce

*sky
shallow dishes –
the stars*

*singing to childlike
heavenly spirits*

*mortal body made
of dust*

*goddess of chastity
associated with the
moon*

This criterion does not apply as the experiment does not involve the acquisition of a second or a third language. However, the general language

proficiency and vocabulary of the students would be increased by exposure to Shakespeare.

3 The text should consist of approximately 9 acts comprising a coherent, dramatic story with richly developed, authentic characters, situation and plot (Dhority 1984:8 – 2).

Few critics would fault a Shakespeare play in respect to characterization and plot delineation.

The text of *The Merchant of Venice* was shortened and adapted to form 9 acts in the following way:

- Act 1: Act I scenes i and ii
- Act 2: Act II scenes iii, v, vi, viii and Act III scene i
- Act 3: Act II scenes vii and ix
- Act 4: Act III scene ii
- Act 5: Act III scene iv, Act IV scene i line 1 to 118
- Act 6: Act IV scene i line 119 to 297
- Act 7: Act IV scene i line 297 to 450, Act IV scene ii
- Act 8: Act V scene i line 1 to 119
- Act 9: Act V scene i line 120 to 305

The text was ordered thematically so that, for example, Act 2 of the text incorporated the relationship between Shylock and Jessica, her elopement with Lorenzo, Shylock's reaction to her betrayal and the effect that this event and the loss of his fleet might have on Antonio. Act 3, or the third concert, included the casket scenes involving the Prince of Morocco and the Duke of Arragon but excluded Act II scene i, Portia's first contact with the Prince of Morocco. In the fourth concert (Act 4) Bassanio's choice in the casket scene was dealt with to finish off the casket theme started in the third concert. In this particular experiment a shortage of time forced the exclusion of certain scenes, such as Act II scene i (Portia and Morocco) and Act II scene ii (the meeting between Launcelot and Gobbo). Such changes should not be necessary under normal circumstances.

Considerable liberties were thus taken with the chronological sequence of the play. Such a thematic ordering does, however, seem justified when one considers that the play is not presented in one sitting as on the stage where the switches in scene and theme serve a dramatic function. Feedback from the students after completion of

the course, indicated that no confusion was experienced during their independent pre-examination rereading of the play. On the other hand, concerts arranged according to the chronological sequence of the play would probably be equally effective.

4 The concerts should consist of approximately 600 words each (Dhority 1984:8 – 2).

As this criterion is obviously meant for L2 or L3 texts, it was felt that the concerts on Shakespeare could be longer. In this experiment the average number of words per Act or concert was 1970. However, as the Shakespeare text calls for mastery of language consisting of complex structure and imagery, written in blank verse and requiring sophisticated intellectual and emotional responses, fewer words per concert, an average of approximately 1700 words, would be preferable.

5 The text should be written in dialogue (Dhority 1984:8 – 3).

Obviously a play presents no problem. Any text writer would find it difficult to emulate the fluency, functionality and ingenuity of Shakespearean dialogue.

6 Dhority suggests that the left facing page of the text should be used for sparing, often humorous explanatory glosses of words, phrases and forms which will facilitate comprehension and enhance interest (Dhority 1984:8 – 2). Although this technique was not used in the experiment, the text lends itself to such stimuli and their effectiveness is dependent only on the originality and artistic prowess of the presenter.

7 Blair (1982:105) supports the concept of massive input and suggests that the text should provide a rich source of language information, a *gem mine* from which *the learner is allowed to mine what he finds functional and interesting to him*. Researchers like Hart, Lozanov and Krashen all recommend increasing the volume of real, multi-sensory input factors up to ten times what students presently receive (Dhority 1984:9 – 1).

The concentrated, poetic quality of a Shakespeare play presents a wealth of sensory, emotive and intellectual stimuli seldom equalled in literature. It was interesting to note to what extent the elements of repetition and artistic

stimulation, that are central to the suggestopedic cycle, increased the students' sensitivity to nuances.

8 Kussler and Bodenstein (1985:12) emphasize that the text should be able to serve as a starting point for the activation of the material being presented and Dhority (1984:8 – 3) says that it should be a *creative springboard* to communication.

The richness and complexity of the text make it ideally suited to a variety of activations which promote communication, understanding and insight (see **Structure of the lessons** for some examples).

9 According to Kussler and Bodenstein (1985:13) the text should have a literary quality *which responds to the aesthetic and ritualistic significance of the concert session*, it should be creative, imaginative and ingenious and the content should be able to create a sense of anticipation.

The text of *The Merchant of Venice* answers all the above criteria.

10 It should be sufficiently universal to facilitate identification with the characters and their dilemmas and yet it should remain exotic enough to sustain curiosity and interest (Kussler and Bodenstein 1985:14).

Post-course feedback from the students indicated that activations like role-play and the placing of a particular character in the "hot seat" enabled the students to identify with the characters; "The characters came alive through role-play" and "The characters were more real than those in the stage production", were two of the comments received. Obviously the suggestopedic emphasis on visualization also played a major part.

The setting of the play is ideal for stimulating interest in a different culture and environment and frequent use was made of posters, pictures and slides of the geographical, architectural, historical and artistic features of Venice. (See **Psychological setting** and **Mental relaxation**).

11 The principles of Suggestopedia must be incorporated into the text in a holistic sense: they should feature as internal elements of the text, they should constitute and determine its plot, its message and its style. This means that the

positive aims which a course sets out to achieve both academically and psychologically, should be suggested by and articulated in the text verbally, albeit not explicitly. (Kussler and Bodenstein 1985:13).

This is the only relevant criterion which is not met by a Shakespearean text. However, the positive aims of Suggestopedia can be incorporated by the teacher during, for example, the periods of mental relaxation, the activations, and of course, through his own attitude. In this experiment the mere fact that the students were actually reading a Shakespeare play with understanding and enjoyment did much for their self-esteem and their faith in their own unlimited potential.

Theoretically a consideration of the above criteria shows that a Shakespeare play should function effectively as a suggestopedic text. This was certainly borne out in practice during the experiment.

A DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE

Physical setting

Although the room used for the course was by no means ideal, it was decorated with attractive plants, posters and relevant peripheral stimuli and fitted out with a carpet, easy chairs, a lamp and a music centre. The "Sesame Room" quickly generated a feeling of warmth and a sense of belonging.

Psychological setting

An attempt was made to place the whole course within a meaningful context that would also contribute towards the positive aims and principles of Suggestopedia. To arouse curiosity and a sense of anticipation and to implant positive suggestions, the students were asked to become British tourists who could choose their own names and addresses (Caroline Windsor, for example, daringly chose to come from Shrewsbury in Shropshire!). The lecturer became the tour guide on their trip to Venice where the group would be lucky enough to attend a performance of *The Merchant of Venice*. To familiarize the students with the sites which feature in the play, slides were shown of prominent Venetian landmarks like St. Mark's piazza,

the Basilica, the Doge's palace, the canals and the Rialto bridge.

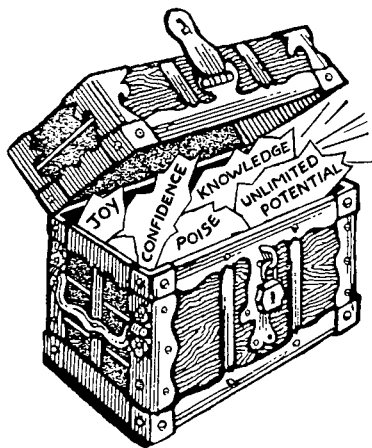
Physical relaxation

The "exercises" in this component of the course were planned to convey a sense of relevance and contextual unity. The "tourists" were asked, for example, to help the more elderly in the tour bus to stow their luggage on the rack above their heads, to pick grapes or olives in the orchards and vineyards of Italy, and to pay for them with imaginary lira or to become gondoliers on the canals of Venice.

Mental relaxation

The period of mental relaxation was used particularly for establishing and reinforcing the positive attitude to learning which is a cornerstone of Suggestopedia. In addition to Early Pleasant Learning recalls and visualizations, the group was asked, for example, to imagine that the course was similar to a treasure chest or casket. During the mental relaxation the imaginary casket was opened and the students were asked to visualize the brilliant and extremely valuable jewels inside that would soon become theirs. In this way, basic suggestopedic aims such as the joy of learning, the discovery of unlimited potential or the increase in self-confidence were pictured as sapphires, rubies or amethysts. A positive psychological link was also deliberately established between the aims of the course and the casket theme in the play itself. This was reinforced by the use of a colourful poster depicting a casket and its suggestopedic "jewels".

FIG. 1



To stimulate the imagination and to encourage visualization the "tourists" were sometimes taken on an imaginary gondola sight-seeing tour through Venice, or asked to picture a scene from the text taking place in a particular spot in the city to which they had already been introduced through pictures or slides. This technique was also used as a mind-calming exercise to end off a session on a quiet note. It also served as a consolidation of what had been learnt.

The structure of the lessons

Two basic lesson structures were alternated throughout the course. This meant that every second lesson contained two concerts, that is, both an active and a passive presentation of the text.

It should be remembered that the aim of the course was to increase understanding and literary appreciation of a Shakespeare text, and not, as in most suggestopedic courses, to increase language proficiency. Thus it was felt that emphasis on the text, rather than on activations, was justified.

The following are outlines of two typical sessions:

Type A

WEEK 5. SESSION 10. THURSDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 1986. 08h40-10h25.

08h40-08h42 Students welcomed, rapport established.

08h42-08h47 PHYSICAL RELAXATION: imitation of the movement of doves in St. Mark's Piazza.

08h47-08h55 MENTAL RELAXATION: flight of a bird over Venice. (Music: Pachelbel, Canon in D.)

08h55-09h05 ACTIVATION: ball game. Review of character traits, for example, Teacher: "Antonio" (throws ball)

Student 1: "Generous. Gratiano." (throws)

Student 2: "Garrulous. Nerissa." (throws)

09h05-09h30 ACTIVATION: 1. Students are asked to write down a definition of the concept "mercy". A short discussion follows in which their definitions are compared to Portia's.

2 Role-play. Three Venetians, Salerio, Solanio and Gratiano, and their followers (the class is divided into three groups) meet under the Campanile and argue whether Portia, Antonio or the Duke shows the most mercy in the play.

09h30–09h35 PRELUDE (DECODING): A quick review is given of the techniques used by Portia to defend Antonio during the court case. The group is encouraged to speculate on what she will do next.

09h35–10h05 ACTIVE PRESENTATION: FIRST CONCERT. Act IV . i . 297–450, Act IV . ii . (Music: Mozart, Clarinet Concerto in A major K. 622.)

10h05–10h08 RELAXATION: stretching and settling down for second concert.

10h08–10h25 PASSIVE PRESENTATION: SECOND CONCERT. (Music: Vivaldi, Baroque Flute Concertos.)

Type B

WEEK 5. SESSION II. FRIDAY 5 SEPTEMBER 1986. 12H30–14H00

12h30–12h32 Students welcomed, rapport established.

12h32–12h34 PHYSICAL RELAXATION: digging for a treasure on a desert island.

12h34–12h41 MENTAL RELAXATION: opening of Suggestopedia treasure chest and examining of jewels. (Music: Smetana, The Moldau.)

12h41–12h55 ACTIVATION: quick quiz. The Italian quiz master, Valentino Froggerino (a frog puppet) “knows everything” about the play. The students are challenged to correct his erroneous statements, for example, FROGGERINO: (with a heavy Italian accent) *Jessica, she is a loyal and loving daughter.*

12h55–13h10 ACTIVATION: creative interpretation. Each student is given a quotation from the play containing some figure of speech which she has to illustrate graphically on newsprint, for example “And foot me as you spurn a stranger cur.” (The drawing below is an example of the work received.)

FIG. 2



13h10–13h35 ACTIVATION: dice game. The class is divided into two groups. Each group member throws the dice and has to complete a question card supplied with the same number, for example:

FIG. 3

6
<p>1. SUPPLY THE MISSING WORDS</p> <p>2. NAME THE SPEAKER</p> <p>"IF I CAN CATCH HIM ONCE</p> <p>UPON THE _____ ,</p> <p>I WILL FEED FAT</p> <p>THE ANCIENT _____</p> <p>I BEAR HIM"</p>

(The answers were given on the back of the card.)

13h35–13h55 ACTIVATION: analysis of motives. Shylock (lecturer or student) is placed in the “hot seat” and questioned about his actions and his motives.

13h55–14h00 MIND CALMING: to create an awareness of Shylock’s dilemma, the students, who are relaxing in their chairs, are asked to imagine the nature of the feelings experienced by Shylock and his actions after he leaves the court room. (Music: Mozart, Clarinet Concerto.)

Means of evaluation

1 The following pre- and post-course tests were compared.

1.1 The new South African Group Test

These tests were administered and graded by Mr M.B. Brits of the Bureau for Student Counseling at the University of Stellenbosch on 31 July and 12 September 1986. The purpose of the tests was to ascertain whether a concentrated learning programme has any significant effect on the I.Q.’s of the target group.

1.2 The PHSF (Personal, Home, Social and Formal) Relations Questionnaire (Human

Sciences Research Council, South African Institute for Psychological and Psychometric Research.)

These tests were administered by Mr M.B. Brits on 1 August and 12 September 1986. They were then graded by the writer in accordance with HSRC guidelines. The purpose was to test whether a course in Suggestopedia has any significant effect on the self-image and self-confidence of the group.

1.3 Literature tests and examination

The idea of comparing the results of literature tests written early in the year on *Pride and Prejudice* with the results of the final examination on *The Merchant of Venice* only occurred when the end-of-the-year cumulative marks for Literature were being calculated. The purpose of such a comparison was to try to determine

whether any increase in understanding and appreciation of literature had taken place.

2 Post-course oral and written evaluations

The students were asked to make two post-course evaluations, namely:

2.1 Their opinion of Suggestopedia as a method of instruction;

2.2 A comparison between their pre-course and their post-course attitude to Shakespeare.

Results

Limitations such as the size of the target group and the fact that it was not randomly selected prevent the tests from having much scientific credibility. Nevertheless, the results are interesting and are supported so positively by student feedback that it is felt that they warrant mention.

Table 1.1 The new South African group test: A Comparison between pre- and post- tests

Students	NON-VERBAL I.Q.		VERBAL I.Q.		TOTAL I.Q.	
	PRE-TEST	POST TEST	PRE-TEST	POST TEST	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST
1.	117	118	120	122	120	122
2.	127	131	123	136	127	137
3.	123	129	119	125	122	129
4.	98	117	129	131	115	126
5.	106	96	108	116	107	105
6.	135	127	122	129	130	131
7.	100	98	101	107	100	102
8.	107	135	107	120	107	129
9.	96	101	95	86	94	93
10.	104	109	104	105	104	107
Group average	111.3000	*116.1000	112.000	*117.7000	112.6000	*118.1000

It would seem that the positive increase in the average verbal I.Q. as given in Table 1.1(*) can probably be attributed to the course followed by the target group. Furthermore, it appears as if a concentrated language course also has a benefi-

cial effect on the non-verbal I.Q. of the participants. The results of the Total I.Q. can lead one to the interesting conclusion that an increase in the intellectual prowess of a target group does occur after intensive training.

Table 1.2 The PHSF relations questionnaire: A Comparison between pre- and post-tests

Categories	Number of students	Average for Test I	Average for Test II
Self-confidence	10	31.4000	28.7000
Self-esteem	10	26.4000	23.8000
Self-control	10	27.6000	25.3000
Nervousness	10	26.5000	25.0000
Health	10	32.5000	32.3000
Family influences	10	28.8000	28.8000
Personal freedom	10	34.4000	35.7000
Sociability:			
Group	10	27.9000	25.8000
Sex	10	28.7000	29.1000
Moral sense	10	36.8000	35.4000
Formal relations	10	28.4000	27.3000
Desirability	10	16.0000	16.8000

The results given in Table 1.2 seem to contradict those in Table 1.1 as the post-course averages in test II are lower than those in test I. They also do not reflect the opinions given in reports from teachers of suggestopedia that indicate marked improvements in self-image and self-confidence in the target groups during a suggestopedic course, particularly in students who are generally reticent. This attitude was experienced to such an extent during the Shakespeare course that even the students remarked on the change that had taken place in one of their class mates. It is further borne out by post-course feedback from the students themselves as reported in 2.2.

The discrepancy between personal experience and the results of the PHSF Questionnaire would seem to indicate that the test is too general; that external influences such as final examinations may have come into play and that the test does not relate closely enough to the students' newfound confidence in their oral proficiency, understanding and insight. The fact that no positive results were shown by the PHSF test will, hopefully, not deter further psychometric research to find the appropriate method of measuring the clearly-noted improvement in self-confidence.

1.3 Literature tests and examination

Although a comparison between the results of tests on two different works of literature and evaluated by the lecturer concerned can carry

little weight, it was still felt that an increase in understanding and literary appreciation had taken place.

Two pre-suggestopedic literature tests on *Pride and Prejudice*: Class average 54.2%

Two post-suggestopedic examinations on *The Merchant of Venice*: Class average 60.3% (The examination paper was moderated by the University of Stellenbosch)

2 Post-course oral and written evaluations by the students

2.1 Evaluation of Suggestopedia as a method of instruction

The students were given complete freedom in their response to the course. All ten responses were extremely positive and enthusiastic. Below are typed reproductions of three responses.

2.1.1

Something really different and really something! Unexpected methods.

Garrulous – One really can be talkative during this period.

Gorgeous surroundings.

Enjoyment – music, chairs, relaxation.

Satisfaction.

Talk.

O

Practice in speaking English! Playing games.

Everything was interesting!

Delightful tours to Venice, the sea, the mountains

...

Identity – new identity was real fun! Interesting way of representing.

Atmosphere – relaxed, calm and warm.

(Caroline Windsor)

2.1.2 Sesame room:

Relaxing; fantastic to be in!

Music:

Rediscovered auditory sense!!

Flowers:

Made it feel like being home.

Games:

Enjoyable; fun, laughter.

Debates:

Very stimulating; made you think.

Inner atmosphere:

Not always very calm/couldn't always put away "bad vibes"

Concerts:

Got better all the time

Homework:

Didn't always get round to the A.M.'s

Valentino Froggerino:

A star! (Better than Bill Cosby)

Mental relaxation:

The hanggliding was the best!

Peripheral stimuli:

Every day something caught my attention!

All in all:

. . . it was a ball!!

(Alice Mountbatten)

2.1.3 Sesame room

Escape . . .

World of hate

Questions and demands

Frustration and pressure

White walls and square desks

Green board and chalk-dust

Tests – Disappointment

Enter . . .

World of knowledge

Land of dreams

Answers and understanding

Coloured walls and easy chairs

Flowers and art.

Experience – Happiness.

(Bruce Donne)

2.2 Post-course assessment of the attitude of the students to Shakespeare

When they were asked to describe how they had felt about Shakespeare at school the following reactions were recorded:

“I was very negative . . . I found the language difficult and I didn't understand or like the play. In fact a Shakespeare play was just a vague mess.”

“At school Othello was difficult . . . even a play at The Space in Cape Town didn't help. I understood the story and little else.”

“We had months and months of Shakespeare and then had to learn answers to questions off by heart.”

Of the ten students only one said that she had always enjoyed Shakespeare. Post-course feedback included comments like:

“Shakespeare is easy . . . it's fun!”

“The play was part of me.”

“I gained tremendous insight into people and their motives.”

“For the first time I can speak with confidence about Shakespeare.”

It would seem that the presentation of Shakespeare at school level through the medium of Suggestopedia could not only combat aversion, but could also increase understanding of the play and appreciation for Shakespeare's literary genius.

At college level the more conventional teaching method of lectures plus critical analyses of the text by the class as a whole or in groups has proved to be successful in the past. However, the use of Suggestopedia could bring about an increase in:

- student involvement
- character identification and empathy
- unusual spontaneous retention of quotations and
- factual details
- understanding and insight
- enthusiasm for and enjoyment of Shakespeare.

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