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**SOME NOTES ON THE PSYCHOHYGIENE OF  
THE INTENSIVE TEACHING OF FOREIGN  
LANGUAGES**

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It is necessary for each teaching process to observe a certain psychohygiene. This is how diseases are avoided and the mastering of the syllabus is improved. In medicine there are the so called didactogenic diseases – diseases which result from bad organisation of the teaching process.

If the observation of the psychohygiene in the teaching process is so crucial for one’s health, for good self-confidence and the success of the students (and also of the teachers), how much more important has not the

psychohygienic regime to be for the intensive teaching methods! The intensification and acceleration appear to contradict the psychohygiene of the teaching process totally and from this point of view, they should attract the attention of the relevant medical authorities.

First of all one has to specify what one understands by the concept of intensive and accelerative teaching. Is it the regular daily work in the classroom – 4, or 6, or 8, or 10 hours? During some months – 12, 10, 6, 4, 1 etc.? Can we accept as intensive or accelerative the teaching of foreign languages where the classes meet for 4 or more hours daily but every second day or twice a week? Where is the measure? Where is the norm? Maybe the teaching of a foreign language is intensive and accelerative if the syllabus given in class for one lesson is more per volume than usual? But here again – where is the norm? How much more voluminous could this material be - 10%, 20%, 50%, 100% etc.? The intensification and acceleration according to the criteria increase and the summing up of the number of lessons for classwork or the increase of the volume of the material taught in one lesson can not be defined from the point of view of brain work hygiene. And from the point of view of methodological tradition they can only be compared to the norms accepted by it. These norms for “load“ came into being through the centuries-old experience of the abilities of our brain. Given that they do not consider the potential abilities of the brain, its reserves, this experience forms the social suggestive norm as well. This is not a mistake, not a lapse of nature. It is the logic development.

The methodical norms are in fact psychohygienic norms. Hence each time one does not adhere to them, a good and most realistic, factological and methodological argumentation is required. The intensive and accelerative methods, regardless of whether they include these terms in their names or are so only in their nature, have to have this assurance.

As far as intensive and accelerative methods are most often seen as variants or “adaptations“ of suggestopedia, we have to go back to the source in order to see how the question of psychohygiene was decided upon there.

First of all, a lot of material can be mastered if a large volume has been introduced. It is clear that one can not speak of suggestopedia when in teaching one introduces for mastering in a time unit syllabus not more than the volume of material of the traditional methods. Here several questions arise. How much bigger should this material be? Some people think that if this increase is only 10 - 20% above that accepted by tradition, learning will be easy and without any pressure and still be suggestopedia or intensive or accelerated etc. This is one of their basic mistakes, because in those cases the teacher will still work in the frame of what is permissible by the social suggestive norm. The students understand that as well. They prepare themselves psychologically for greater pressure under which they would still learn this material. Independent of the concert sessions, games, songs and the other “relaxing“ methods, the students think that all this is done for their sake, so that they will not become tired while they acquire this increased programme. The end effect will be a pleasant method with

decreased acquisition and increased fatigue. Neither central nor additional reserves will be revealed. In such a case one does not work in the so-called “suggestopedic zone“ of the brain, of intellect, of personality, of mind. Traditional psychophysiological mechanisms are activated and the psychohygiene of the teaching process is not provided. In such work good results are achieved not with the “zero beginners“ but with the “false beginners“. The most common commercials are about work according to this type of method with the group of “false beginners“, people who have learned for a short while and then forgotten. According to the composition of the group, its entry level and the character of the methods, in some cases transitory psychotherapeutic results might occur. In spite of the way such methods are being commercialized, it is not genuine suggestopedia; it could easily become that, however, after a certain qualification of the teachers.

The new syllabus in suggestopedia exceeds 200, 300% of that adopted by the social suggestive norm. So the student understands immediately that he could not acquire this material with hypertension and effort. The activation of other psychophysiological mechanisms is necessary. The student places himself in the hands of the method and the teacher. And just here starts suggestopedia, the skill, the new personality of the teacher and the student. The activated new psychophysiological mechanisms consist of the activation of the entire central and additional reserve complex where psychohygiene plays the crucial role. But with the suggestopedic introduction of the new material many other problems occur. Particularly important is the correct structure and system of the syllabus. The organisation of the new yet enormous syllabus has to be as close as

possible to the mirror image of the brain functions. On the physiological, biochemical, and psychological level one has to provide structure-holistic activation of the central nervous system, of the mind, of the personality. At the same time one has to consider the conscious and the paraconscious acquisition and manipulation of the syllabus. The spontaneous acquisition of part of the material (because of individual preferences) and the easier and more pleasant acquisition of the rest of the material (because of the variative relaxation and the complex artistic enforcement of the information signals from the different and mutually connected semiotic systems) create the feeling of ease and pleasure. This process is considerably supported by suggestopedic art, created, explained and applied by E.Gateva. The natural needs of the brain are satisfied. It receives simultaneously enough feedback as volume and as structure. This “at last“ normal feedback causes satisfaction. All additional methods such as games, songs, etc. are mutually connected and provide the entity of the reactions of the personality during the process of teaching. This applies particularly in the case of beginners because it corresponds to their set-up of doubt, uncertainty and fear of starting something new. With the more advanced groups the correlation between the elements mentioned, which are connected into a system, is different, as could be seen from our manual for the second course.

With the main characteristics of suggestopedia which were briefly described here, we want to point out that the psychohygiene of the the teaching process is provided not so much by the amusing games, songs, pantomimes and other methods as by the global nature of this type of

teaching process. We have to underline that the mirrorship of the methods with regard to the brain functions and personality characteristics is dynamic, variative and directed simultaneously at the common characteristics of all the students in the group and at those of each individual student. Naturally, in order to achieve this perfection of the individual approach in the group one needs high professional mastery. However, this eases the work and releases the reserves, which immediately increases the psychohygienic level of the teaching process considerably, and the latter is connected with the ease of the reception of the relevant relaxation level. When the concentrative psychorelaxation is received not after instruction but spontaneously in connection with the organisation of the educative communication it is always accompanied by ease of acquisition and creative processing which is very valuable for the psychohygiene.

All that has been said about suggestopedia in one respect or another, applies to the intensive and accelerative methods of teaching foreign languages. Another question is whether suggestopedia itself could be called an intensive or accelerative method. If we accept the increase of the lessons in class, the adding up of more lessons in one day and more days in one week as an intensification feature – yes, suggestopedia often works according to this scheme. It works, however, on the scheme of normal school teaching as well. Hence, according to this feature suggestopedia is and is not an intensive method. The scheme of making the lessons denser in class is applied most often when in an “emergency“ one needs to help people who are about to go abroad or to help people who need it for other

reasons. Then they acquire (if they are “zero beginners“) over 2000 new words and the basic grammar in one month, they can speak, read and translate. They make some mistakes but can communicate at a satisfactory linguistic level. In the second month, the course gives them an additional volume of knowledge and considerably reduces the mistakes. At the same time all the rest of the reserves in the reserve complex, which we have already mentioned, are released, i.e., the psychohygiene and the creative development of the personality are provided.

According to the second feature – the introduction of increased volume of the syllabus for a time unit – suggestopedia is and is not an intensive method. If we speak about an increase of the programme of 20-30 %, this is not suggestopedia. But if the programme, compared to the traditional methods and the social suggestive norm, is increased by 200-300 % and more, this is the basis for suggestopedia. According to this criterion it could also be called an intensive method. But other questions arise here as well about how this material is structured, how it is organised, how it turns into a mirror image of the brain functions and the characteristics of the personality.

The concept of accelerative teaching is not necessarily synonymous with the concept of intensive methods. At the same time any excellent example of traditional teaching can be called accelerative if it speeds up and improves the results. This concept has not been defined until now from the point of view of the specific psychophysiological laws and their visible performance – the reserve complex, which have already been discussed.

Up to now there is not enough convincing methodological, phenomenological and psychophysiological data to support the fact that accelerative teaching “operates“ in the so-called “suggestopedic zone“. The same applies for intensive methods. In spite of that, both groups of methods (as well as similar methods which have different names but are actually based on intensive and accelerative principles), could be accepted **for the time being** as interstitial and transitional between variations of the traditional methods of teaching foreign languages will cease to be interstitial and transitional to suggestopedia and will turn into variations of suggestopedia when it is proved scientifically and convincingly enough that they release the same reserve complexes (central and additional, by-product ones) and have the same psychohygienic back-up as suggestopedia. Of course, this is a long process because until now in this sphere colleagues who have not been trained or have not completed their training with us (because of reasons which are clear) are using old variants, sometimes with very negative effects.

When we discuss the question of the psychohygiene of the intensive methods of teaching foreign languages we should not omit the main terminological question – the name of those methods. Why are there so many different names for a group of methodical approaches? It is well known that aside from intensive methods, accelerative methods and suggestopedia, there are dozens of other names of methods which claim to be working in the same area. There are several reasons for that. One of them, which is directly related to the question of psychohygiene of the teaching process, is the name “suggestopedia“. Many colleagues were



disturbed by the term “suggestion” because in their mind “suggestion” means hypnosis or some kind of pressure. And in this case, of course, one could not speak of psychohygiene of any kind because hypnosis is a method, which must only be applied in clinical medicine for the treatment of certain diseases. It is also applicable for some experimental purposes. In the mass teaching practise, however, it is not recommended; in some countries it is even forbidden. Hypnosis creates the conditions for brainwashing. It programs the personality and causes automatic subordination. It can occur in some forms of deep relaxation, in monotonous signals but in suggestive influence as well. And this is where great confusion occurs. The mixing up of cause and effect – influence and condition. And more important – one forgets that there are different types of suggestion. Some of them are not clinical, like the influence of some works of classical art. They do suggest but they do not hypnotise us. For it is these influences that without manipulating us leave us the freedom to choose, stimulate the entire personality to create, are similar to inspiration and are the research object and the means of work in suggestopedia. As there is no other more suitable unambiguous term, we choose the term suggestopedia with the understanding that we shall always define which kind of suggestion we mean. “To suggest” is understood and applied in the sense of “to offer”, “to propose”. That is why when we introduce the great amount of material, we do not pressurise but leave the brain first to absorb alone what is closest to its needs, and after that with an increase of information, we go on to the next stages of suggestopedia. This mirror-like offer, which responds to the “demand” of the student’s brain, is one of the

crucial factors for psychohygienically easy teaching in spite of the great amount of material presented for acquisition.

The other factors which lead to the great number of names of methods with analogical aims do not relate to psychohygiene and shall not be discussed here.

Maybe we shall briefly mention the methods, which do not claim to release reserves and be variations of suggestopedia, but use one or two approaches of the arsenal of suggestopedia taken out of context from the whole system. E.g. methods which stress relaxation only, or music or any kind of art, or communicative principles, or games and the entire participation of the individual etc. When separate techniques of suggestopedia have been used and been made into independent methods, they are probably successful to a certain extent, but one could hardly expect them to have the deep psychohygienic influence to release the reserve complex, which is the very basis of suggestopedia.

And finally one should stress that the psychohygienic purpose, reaching deep psychotherapeutic influence, has been researched and confirmed in a number of works. Only now do we have the opportunity to publish other, more recent research, which also confirms the great psychotherapeutic and psychohygienic strength of suggestopedia.