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The re-emergence of Suggestopedia: teaching a second language to adult migrants in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Despite previous critical studies on the method, Suggestopedia has re-emerged as a popular method for second language teaching and learning in Sweden. In this article, we focus on what characterises Suggestopedia teaching in Swedish as a second language for adult migrants. Taking a sociocultural perspective, specifically regarding the concepts of mediation, artefacts and scaffolding, we analyse teaching observations and interviews with teachers and students in four classes. The analysis reveals the existence of several mediational mechanisms, in terms of e.g. different visual, aural and fictive artefacts, as well as of scaffolding through a certain sequencing of tasks and mediational texts to help students learn Swedish. Although Suggestopedia as an approach serves to facilitate the students' learning in many ways, greater attention can be paid to the students' experiences when conducting the lessons.

Introduction

Language education plays a crucial role in migrants' inclusion in a new society. When the number of refugees migrating to Sweden and many other countries peaked in 2015, attention was paid to how migrants could learn the new language efficiently. This situation resulted in national policy measures introducing new education programmes for adult migrants. Different initiatives were taken at the local level, including working to identify 'new' ways of teaching adult migrants the language. One such initiative was taken in two municipalities which are the focus of this article, where teachers at two schools implemented and worked with the pedagogical approach of Suggestopedia. Suggestopedia was originally developed by the Bulgarian educationalist and psychiatrist Lozanov in the 1970s and was based on Suggestology theory which in turn is informed by psychotherapy, neuropsychiatry and yoga techniques (Lozanov, 1978). The basic assumption in Suggestopedia is that interpersonal communication is both conscious and subconscious. All stimuli are complex and they require interpretation. A person's underlying capacity can be developed through a process of suggestion, whereby the teacher uses different stimuli to help the learner replace negative thoughts with desire and creativity, and at the same time facilitate memorising (Lozanov, 1978).

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Suggestopedia seems to have attracted renewed interest in language education, in Sweden. A review of language teaching conference themes over a period of 30 years shows that whereas Suggestopedia and other similar classroom pedagogies were frequently practised in 1978-1980, they were absent in 2010 (Stapleton, 2013). But more recently, there are regional projects, some funded by the European Union, in which the method is applied or serve as an inspiration in formal and non-formal language education for migrants (see e.g. Högskolan Väst, 2018; Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, 2018) and it has been used in in-service training for teachers (see e.g. Sveriges radio, 2019). Nonetheless, there is limited scientific research on the method. Lozanov has been criticised for making extensive claims without having sufficient empirical scientific support. There are deficiencies in how his results are obtained and presented. For example, there is no information about how the control groups in his studies have been taught. In an early study, it is only mentioned that they have been given conventional audio-linguistic and audio-visual teaching and some of his later studies include no control groups at all (see Scovel, 1979). Similar criticism has been directed towards many later studies on Suggestive-Accelerative Learning and Teaching Techniques (SALT), an approach developed from Suggestopedia. The control groups and the experimental groups are too different from the beginning, and they have different amounts of time to learn (Dipamo & Job, 1999).

With the renewed interest in Suggestopedia for Swedish second language (L2) teaching for adults (Högskolan Väst, 2018), and due to the limited research on the approach, we aim to further the understanding of how Suggestopedia is adopted, formulated and practised in contemporary Sweden. More specifically, we seek to answer what characterises Suggestopedia teaching practices in Swedish as a second language for adult migrants drawing on a socio-cultural perspective.

In this paper, we first introduce some basic concepts of sociocultural learning theory, as a framework of the analysis. After that, we present the main features of the approaches of Suggestopedia and the sociocultural perspective in second language teaching. We then state our research methods; classroom observations and interviews with teachers and students, after which we bring up significant teaching artefacts and the strategy of repetition. Moreover, we analyse the interaction between teachers and learners, before the final discussion.

Sociocultural learning theory as a conceptual framework

This study concerns how Suggestopedia-inspired teaching is designed and staged in Swedish second language (L2) classrooms. In order to examine this, we draw on a socio-cultural understanding of learning. Accordingly, learning is seen as something that happens in an interplay between people both in an actual local context and in society in general. A central concept is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). In Vygotsky's words, the ZPD refers to:

> … the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86)

A common interpretation of ZPD is, as the quotation indicates, that support for developing one's ability to solve a problem (i.e. doing a certain task) can be facilitated through the

guidance of the teacher and by working together with students who have developed more capacity in solving the problem. According to the sociocultural perspective, human potential is also enhanced in interaction with different tools, both physical objects and intellectual resources (like language, routines and concepts), which are used to facilitate learning. These *artefacts* and social support *mediate* the learning (e.g. Vygotsky, 1986). For example, there can be *mediational texts* and *mediational artefacts*, which structure the learning across different units of lessons and become a point of reference in the learning process (Hammonds & Gibbons, 2005).

One form of mediation is *scaffolding*. Originally, the term referred to the supporting activities used by teachers or peers in the learning process and which, as the learner becomes able to carry out the task independently, can eventually be removed. Consequently, the teacher must be aware of what the learners know, what the limits of their abilities are, and the need to control those parts of the task that are currently beyond their abilities (Wood et al., 1976). This definition, however, has been criticised for its lack of interaction between the mediator and the mediated, and for being directed solely by the mediator. Instead, scaffolding can be regarded as a process which requires a mutual understanding between the teacher and the learner and a negotiation of goals and practices (Díaz Maggioli, 2013; Smagorinsky, 2018). As Hammonds and Gibbons (2005) stress, moreover, scaffolding takes place both at the macro level, when planning the teaching – it is *designed in* – and at micro-level in the interaction with the learners.

Furthermore, scaffolding is about giving support in a particular situation rather than being an overall strategy. It also implies that the learner actually succeeds in completing a task within a process which the teacher supports, and that this process ultimately leads to the learner achieving the ability to carry out the task more independently (Maybin et al., 1992).

By applying the concepts of mediation, artefacts and scaffolding, we will analyse what the teachers do when they teach according to the Suggestopedia method and how the students view their participation in these activities.

Two different approaches to teaching a second language

There are varying views on how to teach L2 successfully (see Stapleton, 2013). In this section, we provide an overview of Suggestopedia, before describing what previous research says about L2 teaching from the more well-recognised sociocultural perspective.

Teaching in line with Suggestopedia

In Suggestopedia, both the memory and the personality of the learners should be stimulated. Thus, the content must be structured in meaningful units and the methods and materials used should be artistic (Lozanov, 1978; Lozanov & Gateva, 1983). The students need to be mentally relaxed to concentrate on the learning, and no negative words or gestures should be used in the teaching or in disciplinary actions. The teachers should be enthusiastic, radiate sympathy and display a positive attitude towards the students. At the same time, they must also be authoritative (Bancroft, 1999).

In a second version of Suggestopedia, there was then a greater emphasis on grammar and translation (Bancroft, 1999) and the elements inspired by yoga and hypnosis were

replaced with more extensive use of the arts, such as music, drama, dance and painting – which served to create a relaxed atmosphere and boost the students' motivation.

In Suggestopedia, there is also a particular type of roleplay, which in contrast to other types of roleplay, is pursued throughout a course. The teachers introduce the frameworks and let the students choose a role, which can include a fictitious name, profession and nationality. They then return to these identities in different staged scenarios and can use their new language to exchange information about their fictitious identities. This role-play has the advantage of creating situations where the students can relax, and where they have to activate connections between language, thoughts and feelings. It also encourages dialogue (Mateva, 1997b).

A study of a group that was taught L2 according to Suggestopedia and another group that was not, shows that of three features specific to Suggestopedia – music, relaxation and suggestion, it was a suggestion, which included helping the students to develop a motivation and a positive self-image, stood out. It was central for the students' positive effect in language classes (Shimbo, 2008).

A report on the use of Suggestopedia when teaching Swedish to refugees, indicated that students appreciated the variety of activities, the clear structure of the teaching, and the informal and playful atmosphere. Language tests conducted on two occasions showed how the majority of participants developed both their listening comprehension and speech, as well as their grammatical and lexical competence. Furthermore, the study illustrated how the Suggestopedia-inspired teaching helped to relieve the stress experienced by participants. However, the researchers pointed out that the teaching was problematic in that the choice of content and method were teacher-directed, and thus little attention was paid to the participants' experiences outside the classroom. Additionally, the teaching was monocultural rather than intercultural, because all the ficti-tious identities were Swedish (Högskolan Väst, 2018).

Teaching l2 according to a sociocultural perspective

A more contemporary approach to L2 teaching is based on a sociocultural perspective. Studies in this field generally focus on the education of children and young people, and raise issues that teachers need to consider in the design of their teaching and the interplay with the learner in order to scaffold the learning successfully. Among other things, tea-chers should pay attention to the participants' prior experience and knowledge of the subject and language and should consider the sequencing of tasks – gradually moving from basic to more challenging tasks (Hammonds & Gibbons, 2005). The teaching/learning tasks should be connected to each other, but should be repeated in various ways (Walqui, 2006). It is also important that teachers are explicit in their instructions and build up stu-dents' meta-linguistic and meta-cognitive awareness (Gibbons, 2008). Another feature is the use of a variety of sources and semiotic resources, e.g. visual and aural aids. Such med-iational artefacts or texts have been seen to lead to conversations between students, and they also become a point of reference later on in the teaching and learning process (Ham-monds & Gibbons, 2005).

In their interaction with learners, teachers should refer to the students' experiences of previous lessons, as well as their context outside the classroom, and should relate these to the learning aims. Other interventions include picking up on and building on what the

students say while at the same time recasting their formulations into a more accepted discourse, summarising crucial points, using cued elicitation (that is, giving verbal or body language hints about the responses expected from the students), and helping the students to elaborate further on their reasons (see e.g. Hammonds & Gibbons, 2005). Rather than taking too much responsibility for the students performing correctly, teachers should use prompts for the learners to engage in solving the problem by using their own (choice of) language. The support from teachers must be balanced between overt correction and implicit mediation. Learners who have the potential to respond to the latter are closer to mastering the language. Teachers' support must always stem from an assessment of where in the learning process the student is (Lantolf & Poehner, 2010).

Furthermore, the students should participate actively in the learning process (Gibbons, 2008), for example by working in smaller groups and by being encouraged to deploy translanguaging strategies, that is using all their linguistic resources – not just the L2 – to understand the teaching and to create meaning (Cummins, 2015).

To conclude, the scaffolding practices should be used together, ultimately in such a way that the students can take on the role of apprentices dealing with contextualised and relevant tasks (Gibbons, 2008).

Method

To analyse how the Suggestopedia method is formulated and practised, data has been collected from two local contexts where two teams of teachers worked at two Swedish for immigrants (SFI) schools in two municipalities. These municipalities and schools were chosen as they worked structurally with implementing Suggestopedia in their L2 teaching. The teachers participated in a project which aimed to encourage the use of Suggestopedia as a teaching method.

To identify how the teaching was structured and implemented, we carried out observations of eight lessons in four different classes. The length of each lesson was approximately one and a half hours. At one school, the teachers were responsible for one class each and were only occasionally teaching together, while at the other school, two teachers always taught their class together. The number of students attending the lessons ranged from nine to fifteen. The majority were women. The students were of different ages and had different mother tongues. Most of them spoke Arabic or Somali. The focus of the observations was on how the teachers and the students acted in regard to each other, and in regard to the various artefacts that were used.

The five teachers involved in the observed lessons were interviewed. All were women with many years of teaching experience, and they had participated in a non-formal training to become a certified Suggestopedia teacher. The semi-structured interviews lasted for about 50–75 min and concentrated on their teaching approaches. The teachers who taught as a couple were interviewed together.

Eight semi-structured interviews with students were also conducted – four from each school, comprising six women and two men. Seven of them attended the observed lessons. while one was currently attending a course in an ordinary class but had previously been enrolled in a Suggestopedia class. The respondents were of different ages and had various educational backgrounds, for example in terms of where they came from and how much Swedish they had studied. These interviews lasted between 20 and 50 min. In two

interviews a multilingual teacher acted as a translator. The focus of the interviews was on what was happening in the teaching and learning, and how the students viewed their participation. To obtain more information about the context, the project leader and a principal from one of the schools were also interviewed. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. As the data was collected in Swedish, transcripts from the field notes and interviews used as illustrations in the article have been translated by us.

The data was analysed thematically (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, we obtained familiarity with the data by reading the field notes and transcripts. Then we identified a number of themes relating to how the teaching was structured and implemented. Drawing on the concepts of artefacts and mediation, including scaffolding, particular attention was paid to identifying which artefacts were used and how, and which other mediational mechanisms were included.

The study has undergone ethical vetting and has been approved by the regional ethical committee in XXXX. Prior to the observations and interviews, all participants were informed about the study and its conditions. They agreed orally to their participation and a consent form was signed by the interviewees. All data has been anonymised to avoid any participant being identified.

Findings

In the first section of this article, we describe how the Suggestopedia teaching was designed and conducted. In the following section, we then draw on a socio-cultural understanding of learning to analyse this kind of teaching and learning practice. We focus on the different types of artefacts and the repetition used by the teachers, to mediate the learning after which we analyse the teacher/learner interaction with the concepts of mediation and scaffolding.

The structure and content of the teaching

The data shows that the teaching was arranged in a certain order, following the Suggestopedia circle (see Lozanov & Gateva, 1983). Each circle began by introducing the dialogue – the written story on which the current teaching theme was based. At the first school, the teachers performed a short play together containing a large number of words from the dialogue. The lead teacher then explained what these words meant. At the other school, where the learners were emergent readers and studied a more basic Swedish, the teachers said that they introduced the circle by reading from the dialogue, while explaining the meaning of words at the same time. They then dealt with different parts of the dialogue.

In the next step in the cycle, the teachers read the *dialogue* aloud while music by Mozart was played in the background. In these *active concert sessions*, the students read the text simultaneously in their own dialogue booklets. In a later session – the *passive concert session*, with Baroque music playing in the background – the students *only* listened to the teacher reading the dialogue. The teachers who taught learners with little previous education, however, said that they would show the text on the smartboard during the reading. They felt that their students needed to use their vision and not just their hearing to remember the words.

In the following steps, there were a number of *activations*, exercises like board games or other tasks, in which students interacted with each other and with written words and pictures connected to the dialogue. In the earlier activations, the students could see the words written at the same time as they were expected to use them orally. In the latter activations, the students needed to remember the words themselves without written support. However, since they were working together, they still got support from each other.

A final concluding element was an overall activity, to sum up the whole dialogue. This could, for example, involve arranging a number of different activities which the students alternated between.

The teachers created all the materials – the dialogues and the activations – themselves. At the first school, the teachers had eleven dialogues and they focused on every dialogue during a five weeks period. In line with the curriculum, some lessons were reserved for writing. The teaching of writing skills was inspired by the genre pedagogy, involving explicit teaching of the structures and language that is significant for different types of texts. This model is also represented by a circle. In the first step, the students' subject knowledge should be built up. The students then familiarise themselves with a text that serves as a model for a particular genre. At this stage, they discuss the genre meta-linguistically. In the third phase, the students collectively write a text in the particular genre with support from the teacher, using the subject knowledge they have previously developed. Finally, they work independently on a similar task (Johansson & Sandell Ring, 2015). Thus, the students also encountered texts other than the dialogues.

In the other school, the teachers taught students who had little previous education, therefore they used fewer dialogues (thus far) and worked with the students for much longer. They conducted sessions on reading and writing at a more basic level. They also gave some lessons in music and health, often outside the classroom. For example, they took the students to a weekly singing session at the municipal arts school.

The use of artefacts

Visual artefacts

There were many pictures on the classroom walls: paintings, photos and flashcards depicting objects, animals, people and logos. Most of these included a written word, phrase or sentence, and there were a few flashcards with text only. In line with the Suggestopedia model and socio-cultural approach, the teachers intended these pictures to stimulate the learners' senses, but many of these items were also taken down and interacted with in different exercises to mediate learning.

One type of artefact was the fictitious environments that the teachers created using a vast number of pictures and objects. When the teachers from the different classes introduced the new dialogue together in a play, this involved two of them visiting the third one at her holiday cottage. To depict this visit, they used photos of the teacher's actual holiday cottage and its garden. When the teachers said that they were going to the patio, a photo of the real garden appeared on the smartboard behind the stage, and a patio had been created in the classroom in front of the photo. Once the teachers had 'entered the garden', they held up the photos one by one, explained what they represented and used them in the dialogue of the play. *Have you eaten strawberries? They are delicious.*

Visual semiotic resources were also used in the dialogue booklets, which the teachers said they had created in line with Suggestopedia principles. The booklets featured photos relating to the content of the text, which was positioned in the middle of the page and used italics for the narrative sections and non-italics for the dialogue. According to teacher 3, the central positioning of the text drew attention to it, and using only a few words on each row made it easy to read. Another way to support the reading was the use of different colours in the text to indicate which of the characters said something in the dialogue.

Another type of visual artefact is the smartboard. The teachers used it to write and display images. The following excerpt from the field notes provides an example. In this activity, each smartboard slide represented one page of a booklet called 'Writing to pictures' that the teachers had produced as a handout. The students were to participate in the construction of sentences, which would reflect the different pictures.

> A new slide is shown. The sentence is: *X* (a student in the class) *is standing and pointing at the children*. The teacher elaborates on the sentence when it is completed. When she comes to the word *at*, she points to her finger on the other hand, to show the meaning of it. She talks about the difference between *barn* [children] and *barnen* [the children] [plural in the definite and indefinite forms]. *De här barnen* [these children], she says as she points to the children in the photo and compares them with children generally. When she writes the word *pekar* [points], she says peee … She draws out the word, while waiting for the students to come up with suggestions.

The excerpt shows that the artefact of the smartboard allowed the teacher to combine the pictures with her body language (pointing) to help the students learn grammar and understand the meaning of a word. Furthermore, these semiotic resources were also combined with an oral explanation of words and with a particular emphasis on the pronunciation of certain words or parts of words when writing them.

With the visual artefacts, central in Suggestopedia to stimulate the senses of the learners, the teachers, in parallel with the socio-cultural approach, also came to mediate the students' abilities to e.g. read a text or understand certain words. The students, too, regarded the visual tools as a means of support for their learning. As one of them said:

> It's mostly gestures and facial expressions and words, and everything. Pictures. They all have, all have senses. And that's good (…) Then you understand [by using all the senses]. (Student 7 via an interpreter).

Aural artefacts

Aural artefacts were prominent too. During the active and passive concert sessions, the students listened as the teacher read the dialogue at a certain pace while classical music played in the background. Another type of aural artefact was the songs used in the teaching. All dialogues were linked to a certain Swedish song. The students listened to the song and joined in with singing it. In one class, the teachers also sang other songs together with the students. Sometimes, the students sang in harmony. Sometimes they volunteered as lead singer.

The teacher also applied *echo reading*. This involved selecting phrases from the dialogue, reading them with different intonations and letting the students repeat each phrase in groups, as similarly as possible. For example:

> A little while later, they come to the word *vitrutiga* [white checked]. It is repeated a number of times, both in separate parts, *vit* and *rutiga* [white and checked], and with a greater emphasis on certain vowels, like ruutiga. The teacher beat time with her foot to some words: *hung-rig-a* [*hung-ry*]. She whispered other words. (Later that day the teacher said that she sometimes whispered because she wanted the students to practise their listening and hear the difference between how things are pronounced for themselves.) The teacher also uses various styles of sentence intonation, so that her voice sometimes goes higher and sometimes lower.

The excerpt illustrates that the pace and the voice were significant tools in the teaching and learning of pronunciation. With the echo reading exercise, the teacher provided support for the students by first giving an example herself and then letting the students help each other by pronouncing words collectively.

The teachers had various reasons for using aural artefacts. Through singing and echo reading, the students could practise their pronunciation and vocabulary. The teachers also said that many of these activities were joyful and helped the students to remember more and that the music contributed to a wider variety of activities, which is a central feature of Suggestopedia, and which is also recommended from a socio-cultural perspective.

The role of music in their learning was a subject that the students frequently brought up in the interviews. Student 1 felt that the concert session could sometimes be boring. Others appreciated it since it helped them to concentrate. 'When you concentrate on the music you learn more. You become calm and listen, you learn more and focus on the language.' (Student 6 via an interpreter.) Another student (student 7) said that singing together in the class had helped to enhance her listening skills.

Fictitious identities

Another artefact significant for Suggestopedia is the fictitious identities that the teachers, and sometimes also the learners, assumed (see Mateva, 1997b). These identities went beyond the plays staged by the teachers for the students, as they played the same role, with a particular name, profession, family situation, etc., throughout the course.

In one lesson, the teacher introduced the idea of fictitious identities. She did this by describing her own fictitious identity in detail. She told the students about the meaning of her fictitious name, and about her profession and her family. The information was highly detailed, evoking a great deal of laughter and numerous comments from the students.

During the next stage, the teacher handed out ready-made fictitious identities to the students. Once each student had received an identity, including their name, their profession and where they lived, the teacher wrote statements on the whiteboard which the students completed about their own fictitious identity: My name is … , I work as … , I use to … , In my job … , I live in … . In contrast to the other lessons observed, the students got some opportunities to choose their own formulations, and they could decide how much they would say when answering it. *I use to meet many passengers at work* or *I use to carry out renovations and build houses*. In this sense, the exercise included clues for the learners to deal with the problem themselves by using the language freely, instead of providing correct sentences, something which is advocated from a socio-cultural approach.

According to the teachers, the fictitious identities had many advantages. Since they involved different scenarios, they could help to make the students aware of which norms applied in different situations. They allowed the students to practise idiomatic expressions, which was helpful when making contact with ethnic Swedes. Through these identities, the students could also learn about different professions. The teachers also thought that the fictitious identities were joyful, that they captured the students' imaginations, and helped them to forget about their own lives and their often difficult experiences. The students' views of the fictitious identities reflect this latter aspect. Student 2, for example, said:

> It's best when we use our imagination. We forget our own lives. We only have our imagination. 'I work as a care worker, I like to travel to Australia, I have no children.' I believe this is the best. Maybe you can forget all your troubles.

The students also described the fictitious identities as creative activities, which helped them to learn in different areas or to understand different scenarios and words.

Repetition in varying forms

A central idea in Suggestopedia is that the students should come across words over and over again. This was explicitly stated by the teachers and during the lessons, there was a great deal of repetition of words, both within a single activity and with some words being deliberately repeated in different activities during the same class. The keywords in the dialogue were first presented in the introduction to the dialogue. The students also came across these words and phrases in the concert sessions, and they reappeared in the activations. In addition, they were also displayed on the wall. The following is an example of an activation where words from the dialogue were used again.

> Teacher 2 reads the dialogue they are currently working with. The student who has received the flashcard with the title of the dialogue – *Who lights the stars* – and the picture representing a starry sky holds up the cards and hangs them on a string attached to the wall. When another student hangs up her picture, the teacher says that it looks like housework: 'She's hanging out the clothes to dry.' [In doing so, she makes a connection to a sentence from the dialogue.] Every sentence written on the flash cards corresponds to something in the dialogue. They are either key sentences from the text, such as *Who lights the stars*?, or they include words that have been introduced to the students through the dialogue, such as *to associate* or *conveniences*. One man says that the word *wonder* appears in another sentence that the teacher reads.

Two aspects of the teaching can be seen in this example. First, the dialogue, regarded from a socio-cultural perspective, served as a mediational text, presenting a theme around which the majority of the learning activities revolve (see Hammonds & Gibbons, 2005). By repeatedly working with the dialogue in this way, the teacher provided support that helped the learners to understand and use the words in the dialogue. Second, the comment from the man about the recurring word indicates that he is paying attention to the words he is exposed to and can take a meta-stance towards them. The repetitions through the mediational texts supported his learning in that sense.

The teachers believed that it was important for the words to be repeated in different modes. As teacher 2 said about Suggestopedia:

It's about using lots and lots of repetition, but also varying the repetition […] The students shouldn't think that […] we do the same things all the time. Instead, they should feel that they are doing new tasks since I make up new games, new pictures […] well not new pictures. They are always the same in the case of repetition but used in different situations.

The students themselves also described the teaching as repetitive, and this was generally viewed as a positive thing.

Mediation and scaffolding in the teacher/learner interaction?

From the observations and interviews, the teacher/learner interaction can be described as collective, safe and teacher-led. In all the observed lessons, which reflected different stages of the Suggestopedia circle, the teacher and the whole class worked together, and the students often also spent a while working in small groups with board games and other activations. There was no time for the students to work on their own, other than during one lesson when they wrote down the sentences that they had created together on the smartboard. The students talked about these activities, such as playing games, singing and talking together, as positive experiences. The fact that they did things together helped them to talk. Also, they meant that they helped each other with translation and explanation. In line with the socio-cultural approach, the students' learning was, thus, constantly mediated by the understanding of their peers and the scaffolding given by the teacher through these collective activities.

Furthermore, the learners talked about feeling safe and secure in the learning process.

I believe that this is a good method. Usually, when learning, you get stressed. But with Suggestopedia, students feel safe, they feel safe to speak (…) It's better if you feel safe, then you can learn more. (Student 1)

I have classmates, and in my classroom there's a good atmosphere and conversations. My teacher is really nice to all of us. The pace of studies is good, no stress, they have a lot of respect (…) Here in my class, we help each other. And we speak without fear that others will laugh at you. We have a lot of respect. (Student 4)

These quotations illustrate the importance of a safe environment in order to create the right conditions for learning a language. A safe environment gives the students the courage to speak in their interaction with others. Ensuring that the students do not feel stressed and avoiding a climate where students laugh at each other when practising the language are important conditions for achieving this atmosphere. In addition, the teachers believed that the written support from the early activations, the repeated practice and the freedom to participate on their own terms should ensure that the learners felt safe.

But in spite of the teachers' ambitions to let the students talk a lot, the teachers dominated the interactions. They initiated most of the students' activities and led the conversations. Most of the conversations were between the teacher and the students, and the majority of the questions were non-authentic. The most common question was *What does X mean?* The students responded to the teachers by brief comments of what the teacher did or said, or by asking questions about the instructions and the visual and aural artefacts. Also, in the activations where the students sat in small groups and played board games or were given flashcards with pictures and text on to use in conversations with each other, they had little scope to express themselves freely. In line with the Suggestopedia model, readymade answers were written on the cards or the white board for the

students to use, especially during the early activations. This kind of support reflects the idea of a certain structure of repetition and that the students need adequate support to succeed with a task. Since the words in the early activations were still relatively new to the students, the teachers thought that they needed more support than in the later activations when the students had heard and used the words considerably more often. A parallel can be drawn with the idea that a difficult challenge needs more scaffolding (see Maybin et al., 1992). The authentic questions asked in the lessons were often those that could be answered with a simple yes or no: *Do you know where X is located? Do you like ironing?* During the session where the fictitious identities were introduced, however, the students had the opportunity to formulate themselves more freely. Moreover, the dialogue became authentic when the students asked the teacher questions. These questions were often focused on the meaning of a certain word, but sometimes they were asked to give an explanation about something the teacher had said. It did not mean, however, that the learners came to elaborate much of their ideas and there was little negotiation of the goals and content of the lessons. The scaffolding was directed by the mediator only.

Discussion

In this article, we have illustrated how several mediational mechanisms exist in the Suggestopedia practice for adult L2 learners. Thus, the study shows that Suggestopedia as exercised in the practices focused on in this study, corresponds to aspects promoted by a sociocultural perspective of L2 teaching and learning. Even in Suggestopedia classes, different types of artefacts and semiotic resources and the repetitive use of mediational texts are used in a number of activities to facilitate the students' learning and giving them an increased understanding and more advanced skills in Swedish. Another similarity with the sociocultural perspective of teaching is that the teachers use the sequencing of the task to provide scaffolding for activities to a greater extent when the students are less familiar with the words, before gradually reducing this support. In this sense, they move from basic to more challenging tasks (see e.g. Maybin et al., 1992). These actions show that the scaffolding is elaborate in the design of the teaching (see e.g. Hammonds & Gibbons, 2005).

Nonetheless, there are aspects of Suggestopedia that distinguish it from a sociocultural approach to language teaching and learning. The scaffolding is not much apparent at the micro level in the teachers' interaction with the learners. Whereas e.g. Hammonds and Gibbons (2005), Gibbons (2008) and Cummins (2015), highlight the importance of considering the students' prior experience and knowledge of the subjects and the language in the design, the instructions and activations in Suggestopedia – as implemented in the lessons focused in this study – provided little scope for the learners to come up with their own creative ideas and use their multilingual resources. Instead, the exercises tended to require certain readymade words or phrases and sentences. This may be relevant, as language learning involves developing one's vocabulary. However, the disadvantage is that the students use fewer of their own experiences when speaking the language. It was only once, when the students were given a fictitious identity, that they had some freedom to come up with their own answers. A possible reason for the relatively low number of authentic questions may be the emphasis on the teacher as an authority and the structured content in Suggestopedia (see Bancroft, 1999). But if the students lack the opportunity to articulate themselves, how will the teacher know what the

students already are able to and thus scaffold their learning process (see Wood et al., 1976)? Also, although the Suggestopedia method suggests that students should listen and speak actively, the teachers in our study were the ones who spoke most in the classroom. During all the class activities, the students mainly listened. This distribution is likely to be common in many classroom settings, regardless of the teaching approach (see Mercer & Dawes, 2014; Teo, 2016). But it also implies that the Suggestopedia teaching and learning practice is not a complete scaffolding process where the teachers and learners together negotiate what is being done and why (see Smagorinsky, 2018).

Unlike some previous studies (Lozanov, 1978; Lozanov & Gateva, 1983; see also Dipamo & Job, 1991; Scovel, 1979 for critiques of previous studies), our study does not focus on whether or not the method is successful. Instead, we have shown how Suggestopedia, as it is practiced in the L2 classrooms and scrutinised in this study, can fruitfully be regarded from a socio-cultural perspective. Our conclusion is that several features of Suggestopedia viewed from a socio-cultural perspective mediate students' learning, but that teachers who are inspired by this particular approach need to develop the scaffolding at the micro level. By including students' contributions to a greater extent when conducting lessons, teachers, along with the socio-cultural perspective, might potentially enhance students' learning. In that sense, this study supports the criticism of the Suggestopedia as being a teaching practice dominated by the teacher and her/his perspectives (see Högskolan Väst, 2018).

Taking into account that there seem to be a re-emergence of the use of suggestopedia as method for L2 language teaching in Sweden, in combination with a previous critique of such method, there is a need for further research into this matter. How is suggestopedia practiced today? How has it been re-shaped as compared to when it emerged in the 1970s? Does it, in its current form, contribute to students' learning? And if, how? We have only begun to touch upon some of these questions by reading contemporary practices of suggestopedia through the lens of a socio-cultural perspective of L2 teaching and learning.

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