

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF THOMAS GORDON'S COMMUNICATIVE PEDAGOGY IN UKRAINIAN EDUCATIONAL REALITIES**

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The article analyses the possibilities of using the communicative pedagogy of the American scientist Thomas Gordon in the Ukrainian educational space in the medium of English language. The communicative pedagogy emphasises the need for special pedagogical approaches that allow teachers to interact tolerantly with students in the atmosphere of acceptance and trust. The goal of our research was to verify the hypothesis that CLIL approach while studying Thomas Gordon's heritage in English, using authentic materials, provides students with the opportunity of deeper understanding his ideas and values. The experiment participants, future teachers, were pre- and post-assessed for the levels of English language and awareness of Thomas Gordon's approach. Moreover, the efficiency of the language and pedagogy connection was proved by practice supervisors who observed students performance during their practical studying at schools. Due to the application of authentic materials, reading manuscripts in original, listening to Thomas Gordon's speeches and lectures, students were fully immersed into the researcher heritage and demonstrated a better understanding of his ideas. As practice supervisors claimed, such students demonstrated a higher level of conflict prevention skills, class management skills, tolerant communication with children and created the atmosphere of trust and acceptance.

**Keywords:** communicative pedagogy; Thomas Gordon; implementation; research; attitude; language skills; pedagogical and language competence; future teacher.

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### **Introduction**

It is well known that knowledge, skills and comprehension are developed not only through the learning process but also through sociocultural context which implies interaction with peers, teachers and community. The productive interaction, as well as the learning process, is interconnected with cognitive and metacognitive experiences, motivation, needs, emotions, and relationships. It is agreed that the high level of culture of communication and interaction skills provide teachers with the ability to maintain classroom management and support students' self-efficacy and autonomy. Communication is an art that should be taught at all levels of the educational process. Universities have to develop effective communication skills, tactics of talking and conflicts solutions in order to equip graduates with tools for the successful professional career.

The ideas about improving education through enhancement of teachers' social and communicative competence are important for Ukraine since our educational realities require such pedagogical approaches that provide the opportunity for teachers to resolve conflicts, tolerantly interact with students, create an atmosphere of acceptance and trust. The results of learning and upbringing depend on the effective communication among the participants of the learning process. Moreover, interaction skills are a key factor in creating an effective and successful educational environment.

Thus, Thomas Gordon's research on communicative pedagogy seems a useful humanistic approach relevant to students' needs and abilities. Thomas Gordon developed the foundations of communicative pedagogy that combines the following components: communication between parents and children; communication between teachers, pupils and parents; interpersonal communication in situations of professional and everyday life. The communicative pedagogy is focused on relationship building and problem solving because it claims that good relationships between teachers and students are more than just principles (Gordon, 2003). It is obvious, that students of pedagogical, mathematical and other departments, as future teachers, need to acquire the main principles and foundations of this approach. Speaking about communication, we should mention that knowledge of foreign language communication strategies, comparing its methods and principles with those of the native language foster students' deeper understanding of the communicative pedagogy.

In our research, we implemented the interdisciplinary approach to teaching students the basics of communicative pedagogy developed by Thomas Gordon, an American educator, psychologist and researcher. The purpose of the article is to verify the efficiency of the interdisciplinary approach to pedagogical studies and ESP learning of students-future teachers in studying Thomas Gordon's communicative pedagogy. The hypothesis of our research is built upon the idea that if students are taught using the authentic English language educational materials, in our case Thomas Gordon's pedagogical works, publications and speeches, the level of the pedagogical concept acquisition as well as English language level will be enhanced.

### **Theoretical background**

Thomas Gordon is the author of a model of classroom management called Teacher Effectiveness Training (TET). The management style promotes problem-solving techniques, positive relationships and communication strategies. Thomas Gordon's communicative pedagogy is based on the canons of humanistic psychology, which provide an opportunity to realise the principles of democratic pedagogical interaction.

The ideas of Thomas Gordon's communicative pedagogy are connected to the problems in Ukrainian pedagogical science referring to the acquisition of pedagogical skills by future teachers. The analysis of psychological and pedagogical literature shows that the researches of Leshchenko (2005), Ogienko (2016), Shcherbakova (2017), Soldatenko (2008), Yalanska (2017) and other scientists are devoted to methods of improving pedagogical proficiency, developing communicative skills of teachers. Leshchenko (2014) emphasised that at the present stage of development of pedagogical science it is necessary to focus attention on the importance of human relations between people during the educational process, which should be based on the principles of dialogue communication and interrelations. Chernyak (2017) conducted a theoretical analysis of the leading ideas on personality upbringing in Ukrainian and international education studies.

The main task of Thomas Gordon's communicative pedagogy is to help a teacher in mastering the ability to interact with students (2003). The scientist always accentuated that the quality of the relationships between a teacher and students significantly affects the effectiveness of learning. As a result of his research, Thomas Gordon developed a special course for teachers where he introduced new communicative methods of interaction and classroom management, focusing on children behavioural needs satisfaction. He emphasised that a teacher should always be tolerant, empathic, skilful in conflicts resolutions, knowledgeable in managing the negative children's behaviour to provide the formation of self-confident and independent personality.

In order to implement his theory and realise it in classrooms, Thomas Gordon (2003) developed four basic components of TET: the behaviour window, active listening, I-message and no-lose conflict resolution. The method of I-message is used to prevent conflicts as a teacher assumes full responsibility for future plans and needs of children. For example, to avoid the misunderstanding of classrooms rules, a teacher says: "I'd like you to think of some class rules and on Friday we will develop a chart of them together". Such message implies openness, directness and honesty while interacting. The method of active listening is about changes in people. It implies that a teacher sees things from the student's point of view, accepts the total meaning of the message, and responds to feelings showing sincere interest and understanding of the problem. "The behaviour window" is the concept of problem ownership. Teachers should clearly identify who owns a problem – the child or the teacher. If a child misbehaves, it does not mean that he or she accepts it as something wrong, for example, noise or playing games during the lesson is a problem for a teacher, not a child. This method is connected with a conflict resolution, when after the teacher identified the problem, it is necessary for him to determine its reasons, find out why the child is angry rather than to demand the correction of behaviour.

The Finnish researcher Talvio (2014), who analysed and implemented this approach, stated that it contributes to student's autonomy, well-being, creates better classroom atmosphere and helps to deal with challenging interaction. Such situations often arise unexpectedly and affect the learning environment. Training social interaction skills contribute to teachers' self-confidence and skills to respond quickly and in an efficient way without negative consequences (Talvio, 2014).

The understanding and applying of the communicative pedagogy principles and methods are crucial for young teachers who are responsible for our future generations upbringing. Therefore, we decided to introduce this concept to fourth-year university students-future teachers. As the majority of Gordon's works have not been translated into Ukrainian, we combined English for Specific Purposes for future teachers and pedagogical studies. Furthermore, we strongly believe that authentic materials are more beneficial for the concept understanding as well as for the language development.

The key reason of using authentic materials is that they illustrate natural language use and reflect a native speaker's message without the medium of other language. In our paper we would like to analyse the

benefit of the complex authenticity concept for ESP in terms of its constituents: authentic resources, authentic activities and authentic tasks (Vaičiūnienė, 2012). Implementing authentic resources fosters students' motivation and autonomy when students develop their own strategies for learning the real language. It is especially significant for students if they understand the professional value of the discourse that helps them to bridge the gap between classroom English learning and real life communication. Authenticity of activities and tasks is related with students' professional needs and skills they have to develop to perform in the future career.

### Methods

To achieve the goal in the process of carrying out the experimental part, the following methods of research were used: theoretical methods of research (content analysis of Thomas Gordon's pedagogical heritage); empirical methods (questionnaires, interviewing students with the purpose to determine their attitude to the idea of introducing Thomas Gordon's communicative pedagogy, interviewing supervisors of students' pedagogical internship at school, observations of implementation by students of communicative pedagogy principles during internship); statistical methods to compare data before and after the experiment and confirm the validity of the results.

The experiment involved 50 future teachers – 30 students of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and 20 students of Poltava V.G. Korolenko National Pedagogical University. During the experiment, students attended 12 CLIL classes, once a week (3 months in 2017). Prior to our experiment, students studied ESP. The main textbook for future teachers was “English for language competence and educational literacy” (Isaieva, 2013). A flexible system of exercises helped students to acquire informative and instructive material in order to increase the language level and the level of pedagogical competence. The textbook is based on the communicative approach and is aimed at the development of pedagogical and English language communication skills in terms of the CLIL approach, that suggests the connection of English and pedagogy studies.

We divided students into 2 groups: experimental (15 students from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and 10 students from Poltava V.G. Korolenko National Pedagogical University) and control one (15 and 10 students from the same institutions, respectively). Students from the experimental group were taught the main principles of Thomas Gordon's approach through English language medium (5 interdisciplinary connected lessons). The main authentic resources were his books, articles, recorded workshops, interviews and speeches. Students of the control group were taught the same topics but through Ukrainian language medium during traditional lectures on pedagogy using Ukrainian translations of some of Thomas Gordon's works (5 lessons) and separate non-integrated English language classes. Before the experiment, the students had a questionnaire on communicative pedagogy and Thomas Gordon's pedagogical heritage to determine the students' awareness of and attitude toward his ideas. The questionnaire was written in English and used in both groups. It included the following questions:

1. What pedagogical approach did Thomas Gordon develop?
2. What classroom management techniques did Thomas Gordon suggest?
3. What is the essence of communicative pedagogy?
4. What communication technique requires the listener to understand, interpret, and evaluate what (s)he hears?
5. How do you understand the statement “You have to hear what the child has to say”?
6. How do you understand the word “authority”?
7. What does “self-discipline” mean?
8. What benefits do you expect to have from learning the suggested topics in the course of the experiment?

After the experiment, the students' knowledge of and attitude toward the communicative pedagogy were assessed by means of a post-experimental questionnaire and reports from the internship supervisors on students' achievement during their implementation of Thomas Gordon's ideas into the pedagogical process. In order to assess the changes in the English language level, students had to write a letter with recommendations to parents whose children had problems in behaviour, communication and study. The letters were assessed according to criteria of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages that included content, communicative achievement (how the writing is appropriate for the task using functional language patterns), organisation and language.

The main topics the students learned were: Dr. Thomas Gordon's pedagogical heritage; key terminology of Gordon's model; active listening; classroom management; I-message; application of Thomas Gordon's classroom management techniques. The final questionnaire consisted of topic-oriented questions. Students of

the experimental group had an English version and students of the control group – a Ukrainian translation of the same questionnaire.

### Results

The results of the pre-experimental questionnaire revealed that only 32% of students from both groups were interested in the experiment, however they were afraid that it would be difficult for them to study in English; 28% – expressed doubts; 31% – said that they did not need it, and 9% – were completely indifferent. That is, only 1/3 of the respondents could be called positively oriented towards studying in English. The answers to questions about Thomas Gordon and his approach demonstrated a low level of students' understanding and interest in the topic, as only 15 % of students showed real interest and commitment. The rest of them (85%) were rather negatively oriented, perhaps because not all students associated their future career with pedagogy.

After the short course (5 lessons) on communicative pedagogy in English and Ukrainian languages, students were asked to complete the final questionnaire (20 questions). The questions were the same in English and Ukrainian version and dealt with the content of educational material. Some of the questions were:

1. What is Active listening?
2. How can you apply I-message?
3. How will the psychological and emotional state of students be balanced using Thomas Gordon's classroom management strategy?
4. Why do most parents and teachers think that children eventually will develop inner control automatically, as a direct result of adults applying outer control (discipline)?
5. Why does not adult-imposed ("other-imposed") discipline produce self-disciplined children?

Students of the experimental group answered the questions in English and students of the control group answered in Ukrainian. The results showed a deeper understanding in students of the experimental group: 20 students out of 25 answered all the questions correctly. Students of the control group did not provide full answers and there were some questions left unanswered: 13 students answered 15 – 17 questions out of 20 correctly.

Concerning the language writing task fulfilment, it was obvious that students from the experimental group demonstrated better results than the students from the control group. The results of the assessment of organisation and language did not differ much. The main difference was in the content and communicative achievement. For this task, students received 12 points in total (4 maximum for each criterion). The data are presented in table 1:

**Table 1**

**Results of the language writing task**

Criterion	Experimental group (25 st)		Control group (25 st)	
	students number	points	students number	points
Content	15	4	9	4
	7	3	7	3
	3	2	6	2
	0	1	3	1
Communicative achievement	13	4	5	4
	8	3	8	3
	4	2	7	2
	0	1	5	1
Organisation	20	4	18	4
	3	3	5	3
	2	2	2	2
	0	1	0	1
Language	18	4	16	4
	4	3	4	3
	3	2	5	2
	0	1	0	1

We also assessed the reports on the students' pedagogical internship at schools. The students had four weeks of internship during which they gave lessons and provided some extracurricular work with students. The supervisors' reports were based on a lot of criteria related to pedagogical achievements in general, but we were

interested in the achievements of students in classroom management (maximum total grade – 15 points): communication with children, setting behavioural rules, dealing with conflict situations and misbehaviour, formation of self-control and self-discipline skills. Most supervisors assessed the level of these skills higher in students of the experimental group. They had fewer conflict situations, better communication mode, suggested adequate conflict solutions due to the application of Active listening and I-message techniques. So, according to the reports, 25% of students of the experimental group received 15 points, 65% received 10–14 points and 10% received less than 10 points. The results in the control group were as follows: 10% of students got 12–14 points, 50% got 10–12 points and 40% of students got less than 10 points.

### Discussion

The purpose of the experiment was to determine the students' attitude to the proposed content of the educational material and to observe Thomas Gordon's communicative pedagogy implementation into the Ukrainian educational realities. The main idea of the approach is to increase the level of teachers' tolerance and their constructive interaction with students. The conditions of the experiment included providing future teachers with the relevant learning and training environment. It is also worth mentioning the results of the research work of the Polish scientist H. Retter (2005), who also was studying the experience of American scholars-educators and emphasised the importance of using American experience in the educational space.

Use of the students' questioning in order to determine their attitude to the idea of implementing Thomas Gordon's communicative pedagogy gave the opportunity to define the most constructive methods of future teachers training, which will contribute to the improvement of their pedagogical skills. As for the students themselves, they did not simply analyse their knowledge of Thomas Gordon's communicative pedagogy but also began to feel themselves as active participants of the pedagogical interaction, realising the essence of communication mechanisms and taking a full part in the educational process.

The results of the research showed that students had a positive attitude towards the idea of implementing Thomas Gordon's communicative pedagogy. However, there was a certain percentage of students oriented negatively.

To our mind, some factors may be the reason for this. For example, the consequences of the upbringing of some respondents, that is, the experience they received from their parents. In any society, there is always a number of families who practice authoritarian methods of upbringing.

We consider the main result of the research is the confirmation of the feasibility of using and integrating Thomas Gordon's communicative pedagogy into the Ukrainian pedagogical realities, as the overwhelming majority of students-future teachers demonstrated a positive attitude to the studied pedagogical approaches. If we compare the results of the questioning received after introducing students with Thomas Gordon's strategies, with the results at the beginning of the experiment, we can see a perceptible decrease of the share of skeptically attuned persons (almost 68% at the beginning and less than 45% at the end of the experiment). Some of the students who could be classified as optimistically attuned ones experienced similar changes (almost 32% at the beginning versus slightly less than 60% at the end of the experiment).

We strongly believe that a noticeable change in students' attitude was achieved due to the interdisciplinary approach and the use of authentic materials. It is well known that the interdisciplinary approach is of great educational value as it enhances the development of cognitive skills (Repko, 2011). Another key factor is that students get the opportunity to learn how to differentiate the factual and process-based information and, thus, develop their structural knowledge.

From the interdisciplinary perspective, Fink (2003) suggests the "significant learning" approach. He claims that significant learning is a meaningful and lasting educational experience. According to Fink (2003), the greater range of skills students acquire, the more pronounced student's engagement and motivation are in the learning process. He defines six constituents of significant learning that fully reflect the interdisciplinary approach: integration of ideas and knowledge from multiple disciplines, holistic character of the educational process, immediate practical application of new knowledge and skills, understanding of social and personal impact of the topic, tolerance to interests and values that differ from one's own, providing the insight on how to learn and process information. Therefore, analysing the results of our experiment we consider our approach as a significant learning that bridges the gap between theory and practice, knowledge for exams and for real life.

The value of authentic materials application is hard to overestimate. In our opinion, students of the experimental group demonstrated better results during their internship due to the possibility of processing information from original sources, not translated into other languages. Reading Thomas Gordon's works in English contributes to the development of basic knowledge and a deeper understanding of his ideas. It should be mentioned that only a few works by this scientist were translated into Ukrainian, so students from the

control group were limited in resources. We also believe that reading and listening to authentic professional resources provide broad possibilities for professional knowledge development and contribute to the improvement of functional language knowledge that is one of the goals of ESP.

The explored strategies of Thomas Gordon's communicative pedagogy will substantially expand and complement Ukrainian pedagogical didactics. We also believe that their implementation into Ukrainian pedagogy is very timely, especially in the context of reforming Ukrainian education and adoption of the conception of "New Ukrainian School".

The implementation of Thomas Gordon's communicative pedagogy into Ukrainian educational practice proved effective as the positive attitude to the educational material was formed by adapting the content and methods of learning in accordance with the students' needs.

In our opinion, the implementation of positive ideas of foreign experience requires special research on determining the motivation of teachers to use such experience in their professional activities.

### Conclusions

As a result of the experiment, it has been proved that students' training based on the interdisciplinary combination of ESP and professional subject promotes the formation of future teachers' skills of constructive interaction with students during the educational and upbringing process, authenticity, open expression of the feelings, capability to express dissatisfaction in the case of unacceptable students' behaviour, ability to choose their own values, self-development and self-realisation.

During the experiment, students-future teachers learned the reasons that hinder successful communication, as well as studied Thomas Gordon's strategies for effective interaction with students: "language of acceptance", "active listening", "communicative messages", "no-lose conflict resolution", "modification of classroom environment".

All students who demonstrated a positive attitude to Thomas Gordon's communicative pedagogy, at the same time, showed good results in mastering English-language communicative skills, and the ability to apply them practically, in accordance with the communicative situation. The work on the proposed educational material has given an impetus to students to acquire new knowledge and increase academic progress.

Further research should be directed at studying the attitude of practising teachers towards the idea of implementation of Thomas Gordon's communicative pedagogy into their professional activities.

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