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THOMAS GORDON'S COMMUNICATIVE PEDAGOGY IN MODERN EDUCATIONAL REALITIES

ABSTRACT

In the article the principles, strategies, methods, techniques of communicative pedagogy of American scientist Thomas Gordon and system components of effective communication training for parents, teachers and administrators are enlightened. It has been determined that the main principle of Thomas Gordon's pedagogy is an interactive way of knowing the world, which is realized within communicative activities through which any views and opinions are transferred to the partner, and his reflection on the expressed opinion is perceived that helps enrich the experience of interpersonal interaction.

The concept, based on Thomas Gordon's educational system, according to which a child is not the property of parents, and is characterized by his/her own identity, different from his/her parent's identity and is entitled to his/her own life, a unique personality, privacy, independence has been marked. The main goal of Thomas Gordon's educational system has been revealed: child's development, his/her creative potential, rather than subordination to some external ideals or beliefs, alien to his/her nature. Thomas Gordon stresses that it is necessary to create conditions for child's development, rather than try to bring up such a type of person which adults created in their mind.

Thomas Gordon's conflict resolution strategy, based on six stepwise algorithm has been characterized: 1) recognition and definition of conflict; 2) search for possible solutions to the conflict; 3) critical evaluation of solution projects; 4) choice of the most appropriate solutions; 5) examining ways of introducing defined solution; 6) monitoring the results of performed actions. The features of using pedagogical heritage in the content of pedagogical education in different countries have been studied. Outlined recommendations for implementation of communicative pedagogy ideas in the realities of Ukrainian education have been outlined.

Key words: *interpersonal communication, education undefeated, effective training, parents, teachers, administrators, international educational space.*

INTRODUCTION

In the international learning space Thomas Gordon is known as a theorist and practitioner of humanistic teaching concept entitled "Education without defeat" which is based on the theory of equal (symmetric) interpersonal relationships between people, particularly between adults (teachers, educational specialists, parents) and children (preschoolers,



pupils, teenagers, youth). We would like to emphasize that pedagogical heritage of Thomas Gordon is a mandatory component of the content of pedagogical education in foreign countries, such as Australia, UK, Canada, Germany, the USA, Poland, etc.

Today, for Ukrainian pedagogical realities, the application of such pedagogical approaches which enable conflict resolution in a humanistic way, direct teachers to tolerant interaction with students, orient mentors towards identifying authentic behavior and creating a special atmosphere of acceptance and trust is extremely topical. In this context, Thomas Gordon's concept being an effective educational system, which is proved in practice, deserves closer scientific and practical interest. However, the pedagogic of the American scientist remained ignored by domestic researchers.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the article is to characterize communicative pedagogy of Thomas Gordon in the context of current educational realities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

In the Ukrainian scientific and educational environment the results of studying the experience of teachers' training in the United States of America are represented in the works of such Ukrainian researchers as Y. M. Belmaz (high school teachers' training), I. V. Hushlevska (professional functions of a teacher), V. S. Dykan (reflexive approach to future teachers' training), N. G. Kravtsova (John Dewey's pedagogical activity), V. O. Kovalenko (John Dewey's pedagogical ideas), T. S. Koshmanova (pedagogical education in historical aspect), T. V. Larina (professional development of teachers in associations), M. P. Leshchenko (training of teachers to aesthetic education), N. V. Mukan (professional development of secondary schools teachers in the system of lifelong learning), A. A. Sbrueva (reforming of education system), L. V. Ruban (John Holt's pedagogical activity), T. V. Chuvakova (adaptation of young teachers to work conditions).

The theoretical basis of the research includes the tenets of methodology of comparative pedagogy (N. Abashkina, N. Bidyuk, V. Zhukovskyy, N. Mukan, L. Puhovska, A. Sbrueva), theory of biographical study (N. Dichek, N. Pobirchenko, O. Sukhomlynska), the concept of development of pedagogical skills (I. Zyazyun, O. Lavrynenko, N. Tarasevych). Such theoretical methods of research as the biographical method (for setting the basic periods of professional and educational activities of T. Gordon), the meaningful analysis of pedagogical heritage of T. Gordon (for identifying the main ideas of communicative pedagogy of T. Gordon), the comparative-pedagogical method (for determining the characteristic features of the use of the tenets of communicative pedagogy of T. Gordon in the content of pedagogical education in different countries) were applied to achieve the goal of the study.

RESULTS

Thomas Gordon (1918–2002) is an outstanding American scientist, a brilliant representative of the humanistic psychology school, Carl Rogers' student, the founder of the association "Gordon Training International", who developed the principles of communicative pedagogy that combines the following components: 1) communication between parents and children; 2) pedagogical interaction of teachers with students and parents; 3) interpersonal interaction of managers, leaders in the professional environment.

The communication training program "Parent effectiveness training" was the first program developed by Thomas Gordon in 1975. The implementation of this program through the system of organized courses for the whole country gave it the status of the national movement that united parents who were learning to build relationships with the children on the principles of democracy, tolerance and trust. In the United States "Parent effectiveness training" courses were sponsored by many private institutions, non-governmental



organizations aimed at providing assistance to parents of disabled children, single parents, parents-residents of Indian reservations, parents of children who were educated in American schools abroad (Gordon, 2004).

The next step in the development of communicative pedagogy was to develop a project dedicated to teacher effectiveness training to implement the methods and techniques of the educational process that led to the creation of cognitive-active pedagogical environment aimed at the development of student's personality in the field of equal interpersonal relationships. "Teacher effectiveness training" took place in public and private secondary schools throughout the United States and stimulated the establishment of the democratic-communicative philosophy of school life (Gordon, 2004).

Collaboration with teachers enabled the development of special educational programs for school managers. Later the theory of effective human interrelations was laid by Thomas Gordon in the basis of a new course for managers of different companies (cultural, educational, medical, industrial, commercial, etc.) (Gordon, 2004). At this stage, the international association "Gordon Training International" is occupied with the spread and development of Thomas Gordon's ideas (Gordon Training International).

The defining principle of Thomas Gordon's pedagogy is an interactive way of the world cognition implemented through communicative activities through which any views and opinions are transferred to the partner, and his reflection on the expressed opinion is perceived that helps enrich the experience of interpersonal interaction.

Thomas Gordon's pedagogical system is based on the concept that a child is a human with typical entire variety of human traits, feelings, reactions, values that create preconditions in order to be a free, self-sufficient person. A child is not the property of parents, and is characterized by his/her own identity, different from his/her parent's identity and is entitled to his/her own life, a unique personality, privacy, independence.

The main aim of Thomas Gordon's pedagogical system is child's development, his/her creative potential rather than subordination to some external ideals or beliefs, alien to his/her nature. The idea is that a child should become what he/she can be, even if it does not meet the expectations of his/her parents. To be who he/she really is means a natural right of a child. Thomas Gordon emphasizes that it is necessary to create conditions for the child's development and not to bring up such a type of person which adults created in their mind.

The specter of pedagogical objectives that enable the realization of the main goal is aimed at the creating conditions for the development of the following characteristics of a child: autonomy, independence, creativity, the ability to expand his/her capacity; independence in solving his/her own problems, the capacity for their constructive solution; ability to meet his/her own needs, ability of self-control and self-esteem; self-esteem and positive self-esteem; ability to cooperate with other people, to understand and respect their needs and not to forget about their own ones; authenticity during expressing and identifying his/her own feelings; the ability to self-organize, limit own freedom and will; internal self-discipline; efficiency and results in the course of realization of life opportunities (Gordon, 2000).

Among these objectives the development of self-esteem plays a special role, which is associated with feelings of love and child's positive perception of himself/herself. Only feeling love and loving himself/herself, a child may gradually evolve from dependent to independent person who is able to find the strength to solve his/her own problems, and bear frustration and adolescence ordeal with patience.

The modern world requires of people to review and critically evaluate their own attitudes and stereotypes, especially in education, because lifelong education requires verification of seemingly established ideas and values. According to Thomas Gordon, there are a number



of myths which are used by parents, raising children, and which should be subjected to refutation. The most important thing is to abandon the false anti-human principles of raising children that might lead not only to inefficient education, but to the tragedy.

Among the false basic educational principles, distinguished by Thomas Gordon, the most dangerous for parental pedagogy and requiring urgent review are the following: 1) a child is not a complete human being; 2) a child is inherently evil and requires strict discipline and physical punishment; 3) a child is the property of their parents, their continuation, and the most important thing in their life; 4) a child wants parents to restrict his/her freedom; 5) a child revolts against parents (Gordon, 2000).

In contrast to the inhumane principles, Thomas Gordon offers the following ones: 1) a child is a person and should receive humane respectful attitude as well as to all people; 2) a child is inherently good and his/her up-bringing should be based on love; 3) a child is not the property of parents, their reflection, and continuation. Parents have to take a child as he/she is, to feel his/her uniqueness and allow him/her to become what he/she might be, according to his/her abilities; 4) a child wants parents to take his/her who he/she is and needs some information how their behaviour influence their parents to modify and set the permissible limits of his/her actions; 5) a child resists and revolts against destructive methods of up-bringing, not against his/her parents (Gordon, 2000).

Some principles about teacher's personality are defined by Thomas Gordon as unacceptable. They mean that a teacher: 1) has to be the best and the most perfect person among people (so-called "superman"); 2) should be consequent, that is the person whose behaviour is programmed and predictable; 3) his/her actions should be consistent with all participants of the educational process; 4) always positively welcomes a child; 5) imposes his/her will and conviction on children; 6) imposes his/her own hierarchy of values on children; 7) imposes his/her cultural values on children; 8) uses power and authority in his/her interaction with children (Gordon, 2000).

In contrast to principles, inappropriate for successful pedagogical communication, the scientist formulates the following fundamental principles of constructive relationships with children: 1) a teacher should be natural and authentic; 2) it's impossible to be always the same, but it's necessary to express openly his/her feelings; 3) each teacher is entitled to his/her own position in the tutorial and educational process; 4) a teacher can express his/her disagreement with the child's behavior and actions and not perceive them as positive; 5) a teacher rejects threats if his/her will and commandments are not fulfilled; 6) a teacher enables children to have their own choice of the values; 7) a teacher shares his/her cultural values, but does not impose them; 8) allows children to independently affect their lives (Gordon, 2000).

An important feature of Thomas Gordon's communicative pedagogy is its focus on identifying and resolving conflicts. By Thomas Gordon, "conflict is a wave of true relationships between parents and children, it is a crisis that can weaken or strengthen, it is an event that can bring cause hatred, hostility or special mental intimacy. Conflict can divide or lead to happy harmony, it is both an apple of discord and a means of unity, it leads to ardent hatred or deep understanding. The way of conflict resolution largely influences the relationships between parents and children" (Gordon, 2000).

An important factor affecting the success of education is to identify and resolve conflicts, their interpretation as a natural phenomenon of a positive nature. If a teacher can regulate a process of constructive conflict resolution, each child will be prepared to self-help in resolving conflicts, which he/she will meet outside the family.



Approach to conflict resolution is based on the pedagogical action without defeat. Four basic positions are considered by Thomas Gordon as its main principles, which we will characterise in our article.

The first principle implies that every conflict should be solved by competent people who can apply confrontational or assistive communicative strategies. Confrontational strategies are used in the case when the educator has problems with a pupil and the educator informs him/her about it. Assistive strategies are used in situations when a child has problems and a teacher offers to help him/her. Skillful use of confrontational and assistive communication strategies creates the special space without conflicts.

The second principle is acceptance of a pupil who has some problems, as it enables improving his/her state and feelings, his/her guidance in solving problems (techniques, making it possible to accept).

The third principle is a teacher's paying attention to his/her own needs. Neither teachers nor parents will be able to help pupils to solve their problems, if such their needs as safety, acceptance, recognition, respect are not satisfied. If a teacher does not take care of himself/herself, he/she will quickly realize that his/her power is not enough to meet the needs of other people.

The fourth principle means that every person involved in the pedagogical process should identify and self-discipline, take an active part in consolidating relations of cooperation. For the successful cooperation every community requires the establishment of rights, regulations, instructions, and patterns of behaviour. If all community members are actively involved in developing and determining the rights and obligations, and stick to them, conflicts, mutual misunderstanding and insults will be prevented (Gordon, 2003).

Designed by Thomas Gordon conflict resolution algorithm consists of six phases: 1) recognition and definition of the conflict; 2) search for possible solutions to the conflict; 3) critical evaluation of solution projects; 4) choice of the best solution; 5) implementation of working solution methods into practice; 6) monitoring the performed actions' results (Gordon, 2003). The first phase means that a teacher tells pupils about his/her needs, which are not satisfied due to the presence of the conflict, and examines the feelings of a child in connection with the conflict. It is the phase of needs and expectations, satisfaction of which leads to the conflict resolution.

The second phase involves teaching pupils as many ways to resolve a conflict as possible. This phase does not provide a critical evaluation of the proposed ideas concerning conflict resolution, but plays the role of peculiar collection of possible options to eliminate it.

The third phase means a critical evaluation of each option during its mutual analysis by a teacher and a pupil. In this phase, the acceptable ways to resolve a conflict are determined and those ways which can not be applied for various reasons are eliminated.

The fourth phase determines which way of resolution is the best one in the context of its most positive perception by both a teacher and a pupil, that is a decision phase.

The fifth phase is aimed at determining the conditions of the decision's implementation, which includes the clarification of conditions' exact nature, the sequence of their fulfillment; otherwise the presence of misunderstanding or vague formulation of conditions can lead to new conflicts. The sixth phase is focused on how conflict resolution affects the lives of its participants. If the used approach to its resolution is not positive or any of the sides can not fulfill the conditions for its resolution, it is necessary to return to the fourth or fifth phase of resolution, otherwise some new conflicts may appear.

Alternative educational strategies of Thomas Gordon are the following: the use of positive answers such as "yes" (supporting, confrontational and preventative), active listening;



proper understanding of children's needs; the use of "bargaining replacement"; replacement of the environment; the change of conflict resolution phase by reducing resistance; change from secondary senses to primary ones (Gordon, 2003).

For Ukrainian teachers the fact that in many countries Thomas Gordon's pedagogical heritage has become the subject of researches is noteworthy, and the basic principles of communicative pedagogy have been included into the content of pedagogical education. Taking into consideration the proximity and similarity of cultural-historical and political genesis of Polish society development, the study of Polish scientists' experience in the field of study of Thomas Gordon's pedagogical heritage deserves special attention.

The University of Lodz has become the Centre of Study of Thomas Gordon's Heritage. Under the guidance of Professor Boguslaw Sliwerski, a well-known expert in the field of general and comparative pedagogy, theory of training and adult education, doctoral thesis of Malgorzata Rosin "Non-authoritative pedagogy of Thomas Gordon in teachers' training" (M. Rosin, "Nieautorytarna pedagogia Thomasa Gordona w ksztalceniu wychowawcow") was defended in 1998. It was the first scientific work on this subject in the Polish learning space (Sliwerski, 1998). The main results of this study were included into the chapter devoted to Thomas Gordon's pedagogical heritage called "Non-authoritative pedagogy", which is a part of the textbook "Modern education theories and results of up-bringing" (Sliwerski, 1998).

Polish researcher Boguslaw Sliwerski emphasizes that Thomas Gordon's pedagogy is a peculiar way of the world's interpretation in terms of its rationality in the context of freedom, because: it enables pupils' transition to a higher, deeper level of consciousness; it makes it possible for a person to be free and perceive himself as a subject of his own activity; it contributes to the definition and evaluation of other people's culture as well as person's own culture; interpretations, which form the basis of Thomas Gordon's pedagogy, indicate its epistemological orientation, in the light of which every educational situation is unique in the context of cultural reasons and rationality of other people (Sliwerski, 1998).

According to Malgorzata Rosin Thomas Gordon's pedagogy is structurally dynamic as it expresses an attitude to alternative views on competence and, in this context, to interpretative antifundamentalism (Sliwerski, 1998). (Thomas Gordon believed that values and knowledge are not given to a person once and for ever, but are subjected to constant changes). A method of amending its own system of knowledge is subjected to lifelong education.

It should be mentioned that in the textbook "Modern education theories and results of education" Boguslaw Silwerski fairly indicates that "Thomas Gordon's pedagogy is not a set of specific recipes for conflict resolution as it pays attention to the generalized positions concerning realization of relations between cooperation and mutual support, which are implemented in the sphere of human-to-human respect. It prevents manipulation by any of the sides and is based on trust, respect for the needs of each participant of interaction. For pupils possibilities of development are created in the most desirable direction without the use of authoritarianism and coercion" (Sliwerski, 1998). Thus, Thomas Gordon's pedagogy is a way to find the understanding through communicative activity that allows to create one's own way of exploring and studying the world, contributes to understanding the partner of interaction, recounts one's own views and opinions.

Polish researchers suppose that Thomas Gordon's concept of "Education without defeat" is the pedagogical system, moreover a new educational paradigm as it is characterized by the following properties: the source of Thomas Gordon's concept is humanistic psychology; it is based on the theory of human relations with the emphasis on the principles of interpersonal communication; it is directed to the objection of authoritarian relationships, which are based on force and fear in the interaction between people, especially between a teacher and children; it asserts that the main cause of conflict is the



use of the communication barriers by the majority of teachers; it indicates that the educational relationships should be based on love, responsibility and fulfillment the needs of all participants of the educational process; it offers a training program for educators during the realization of which they acquire skills of effective communication and constructive conflict resolution; –as a result, by the use Thomas Gordon’s training, educational relationships are changing for the better, more efficient ones (Sliwerski, 1998).

Polish scientists believe that the proposed by Thomas Gordon anti-authoritarian pedagogy is more humanistic than pedagogy of adaptation and everyday rationalization.

The ideas of Thomas Gordon’s communicative pedagogy are included into popular in German textbook by Hein Retter “Daily communication in pedagogy” intended for future and actual teachers and translated into foreign languages, in particular Polish (Retter, 2005). In this textbook Thomas Gordon’s concept “education without defeats”, features of the use of active listening method, conflict resolution techniques (the whole chapter is devoted to it) (Retter, 2005). The ideas of Thomas Gordon are explained while studying the following topic: “Help in communication”, “Responding to the use of deadly phrases”, “Neurolinguistic programming: as non-directive way of talking”, “Determination of advisory functional principles”, “Practice of active listening and avoiding the false reactions”, “Methods of organizing conversations”, “Conflict resolution”. In the book the comparative analysis of Thomas Gordon’s ideas and communication theories of other scientists, such as S. Bachmair, P. Watzlawick, F. Scultz von Thun has been realised.

CONCLUSIONS

So, the work of Thomas Gordon is widely used in the systems of lifelong pedagogical formal and informal education in different countries. The ideas of his communicative pedagogy are still relevant and included into the content of professional teacher training in the international learning space.

The realities of Ukrainian education need the organization of training of all educators and teachers concerning the practical mastery of strategies, methods and techniques of effective interpersonal communication. The publication of books by Thomas Gordon, translated into Ukrainian, would contribute to the development of pedagogical competence of parents. Further studies deserve the theory and practice of communicative pedagogy in situations of communication with children who have special educational needs.

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