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THE TEACHING OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP  
SKILLS BY USING THE PROGRAMMED  
INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Education at Massey University.

Pennee Kuntavong

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the acquisition of interpersonal skills by a sample of undergraduate students enrolled in the education course at Massey University. A programmed text developed by the experimenter, was used to train the subjects in these skills.

Three groups, two experimental and one control, with eight subjects each served as the sample for the study. The first experimental group worked with a programmed text, a tutor and audio-visual materials. The second experimental group, worked with the programmed text alone. The third, acting as a control group, did not have any materials or training sessions.

It was expected that the second experimental group with only a programmed text would develop as effective interpersonal skills as the first group, without the addition of audio-visual resources and a tutor.

Analysis of the data revealed that the subjects in the first experimental group showed the greatest improvement in interpersonal skills. The second experimental group had significantly better results than the control group but nevertheless was inferior to the first experimental group.

It was concluded that whilst the most productive means of inculcating communication skills was by the interaction of a programmed text, a tutor and audio-visual materials, a programmed text alone was of value in developing interpersonal skills.

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

Within Thai society one can frequently witness a traditional style of relationship between young people and members of the older generation. Young people, according to Thai custom, are expected to show complete respect and obedience to their elders. This is generally manifested in a passive, non-questioning, and submissive attitude in the presence of their superiors. This cultural pattern is evidenced clearly in the interactions between teachers and students. The authoritarian teacher is very much the basis of the Thai educational system. Teacher attitude and behaviour in the classroom serves to reinforce the traditional pattern of respect and obedience by students.

It is usual to find students who appear to be good listeners, but who are rather inactive in their interactions with teachers. It would appear that this passivity has its source in the traditional culture where an individual's outwardly quiet disposition is regarded as a positive expression of respect towards elders. A more active stance is usually perceived by teachers, lecturers, parents and older members of the society as an indication of disrespect. Active student participation in classroom interactions hardly occurs. The role of the teacher involves the use of power with confidence to manage and control events in the classroom.

This particular type of interaction has similarities with more traditional relationships between teachers and students in western societies. Hargraves (1972:139) indicates that the teacher has power which derives from many sources - from his status as an adult, from his traditional authority as a teacher, and from his expertise in the subject matter he is teaching. The traditional interaction between teacher and student can be demonstrated as in Figure 1.

Figure 1.

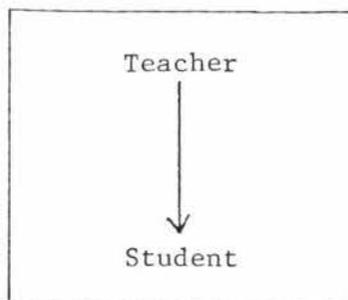


Figure 1. Traditional teacher-student relationship.

Figure 1 illustrates one way communication between teacher and student in traditional approaches. It does not allow a humanizing approach to learning and teaching which would be characterized by both parties being actively involved. This approach is continued by a lack of understanding of the importance of active and reciprocal student-teacher interactions.

The consequences of teacher dominated pedagogy within the Thai educational system would seem to be:

- unquestioned teacher control over organization and transmission of knowledge.
- uncritical and passive student reactions to bodies of knowledge.
- absence of meaningful and beneficial active communication between teacher and student.
- prevalence of student apathy, lack of personal development and meaningful learning.

An increase in the teachers' awareness of the importance and value of developing effective two-way communication would assist in changing these kinds of consequences towards more active involved learners.

Schofield (1972:80) stated that "the art of teaching is a process by which an individual, aided by certain material resources, initiates students into mastery of selected knowledge, skills or

attitudes. Therefore ... careful attention must be given to all the components of the process: communication, material resources, the student and the body of knowledge, skills and attitudes, which are constantly changing."

From this standpoint, the following model of teaching can be demonstrated:

Figure 2.

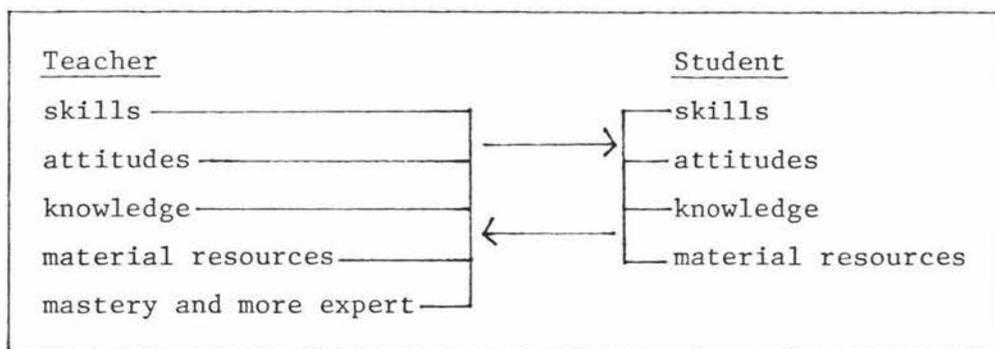


Figure 2. Schofield's teacher-student interaction model.

This teaching model shows an awareness of the importance of communication. It also highlights the recognition of students as vital elements in the teaching-learning process.

Gage (1968) indicated that the most effective teacher at any level of education is one who humanizes his classroom, treats every student with respect, and makes each individual feel significant as a person. He also provides students with well-defined standards of values, demands for competence, opportunity to discover knowledge and concepts for themselves and guidance towards the solution of problems.

Maslow (1971:189) stated that "the thing that the teacher or helper should do is to accept the person and help him learn what kind of person he is already. What is his style, what are his aptitudes, what is he good for, not good for, what can we build upon, what are his good raw materials, his good potentialities?"

The foundation for meaningful teaching and learning is effective communication. This is largely the responsibility of the teacher. Teachers must help students to explore, understand and act on their personal worlds making use of the students' own ideas, attitudes and skills.

A major question is the appropriateness of this type of interaction within the Thai educational system and society. To consider the students' frame of reference may be threatening to the Thai teacher who may fear a loss of respect leading to disciplinary problems. Traditional Thai society believes that only strict teachers can promote good classrooms.

To emphasize interpersonal relations in the classroom situation could lead to a change from power based on age and status to mutual respect with an acknowledgement of a skills difference. Presently some directors or other managerial staff are younger than their workers. The older and lower status workers do maintain respect for younger leaders - a respect based on their knowledge and skills. This indicates that in Thai society there are some examples of alternative relationships.

For minimizing disciplinary problems in school, there are some research findings that demonstrate the advantages of effective communication. Stoffer (1970), for example, indicated that the problems of discipline often arise from the teacher's lack of understanding of the pupil's immediate experience, infringement either purposely or accidentally on the student's dignity, or insincere communication.

Harbach and Asbury (1976) found that negative behaviours decreased when teachers initiated facilitative conversation and communicated empathic understanding<sup>1</sup> to students with behaviour problems.

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1 Empathic understanding here involves the teacher's ability to understand the student's experiences from "inside" and a sensitive awareness of the way the process of education and learning is seen by the student.

This evidence suggests that the advantages of effective communication far outweigh any disadvantages for disciplinary control, and there is nothing at this point to suggest that it would be different in Thai society.

The implications for social change arising out of this approach would be far reaching and may be resisted for a time. However, with increased western influence on the Thai society, traditional teacher-student relationships are weakening or declining. Relationships are now becoming less rigid and less formal. One contributing factor for this is that there are increasing numbers of teachers who have been trained in psychological and educational theory. This knowledge is derived from western textbooks. Also, a teacher is not the only source of knowledge as in the past. Students can learn from other media.

In line with this, it is suggested that Thai teachers should pay attention to and develop the skills of effective communication in order to accentuate the positive aspects of such changes which are taking place.

Training in interpersonal skills usually requires the aid and interaction of experts in training situations. In Thailand, where this sort of expertise is scarce, an alternative approach to teaching may initially be necessary. This author will be returning to Thailand in the near future and would like to work in the area of teacher behaviour. A question is whether any alternative approach would aid in the acquisition of interpersonal skills at an adequate level. Programmed instruction may be an appropriate method. It has the advantages in that:

- it allows the students to work at their own pace.
- it is a useful substitute for experts especially if experts are unavailable.
- it provides frequent opportunity for students to actively respond to subject matter, and offers immediate feedback to them as to the accuracy of responses.
- training in skills needs time for learners to incorporate the ideas. A programmed text may be used as a means of introducing the knowledge of effective communication.

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of using a programmed text in the field of training in interpersonal skills. It is hoped that the outcome of this investigation would provide useful indications as to the value of using only a programmed text, especially in a situation where there is a scarcity of training resources and personnel.