

EWELINA ŚWIDRAK

POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF THE PERCEPTION  
OF DISCIPLINE IN THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION  
AND CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGICAL LITERATURE

Teaching discipline to children and adolescents at schools is a controversial issue. On the one hand, it has negative connotations, bringing to mind coercion, unpleasant punishments, and restrictions on the child's freedom and activity; on the other, educators highlight the necessity of keeping discipline in the classroom to cover the lesson material. So is discipline simply a necessity or are there any positive aspects to disciplining students? What methods of discipline should be used so that they are both effective and unrestrictive on the child's activity? The answer to these questions is to be found in the various definitions of the concept of discipline, which reflect its historical meaning. The aim of this analysis is to demonstrate the multidimensional understanding of the concept of discipline and the consequences of this multidimensionality for contemporary educational practice.

I. THE UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING  
OF DISCIPLINE FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE END OF THE 19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

Over the centuries school discipline has been perceived and enforced in various ways. Already in antiquity discipline was present in the education of

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EWELINA ŚWIDRAK – Doctor of Humanities, Assistant at the Department of Psychopedagogy Institute of Pedagogy at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland, Al. Raclawickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, Institute of Pedagogy.

children and adolescents. In ancient Europe it was especially emphasised in Spartan education (the *agoge*), which emanated from the military character of that state<sup>1</sup>. During the whole educational cycle children and adolescents were obligated to conform to strict rules of moral rectitude such as no heed to bodily comforts, a disdain for softness and effeminacy, a stout heart in the midst of suffering, unwavering courage in the face of danger, sobriety and modesty, contempt for loquacity, and the succinct expression of one's ideas in words (laconic speech)<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, with the passing of time, Spartan education turned from strict discipline into an inhumane, harsh drill, the ideas of which were later used by totalitarian ideologies<sup>3</sup>.

Contrary to Spartan education, in which the good of the State was of primary importance, in ancient Greece, and later in ancient Rome, it was the personality and individuality that mattered. All-round training and education were paramount. Discipline therefore constituted only a part of a young person's education and the methods of discipline were not too sophisticated, as "the birch and the strap were very popular with educators who used them on the child from his or her earliest age to the end of his or her school education"<sup>4</sup>.

In the Middle Ages discipline and keeping discipline were tantamount to harsh punishment, including mainly corporal punishment. In order to inculcate discipline and obedience in students, teachers meted out punishments so severe that today it is difficult to imagine that a youthful organism could ever bear them. "Food was scant, in many schools students were fed with vegetables only. They lived in very small, cold, and bleak cells, which did not abound either in light or air. Students were given little spare time, which was filled with church services and studying. Saying prayers for long hours day and night and complying with the commands of superiors on the one hand and the system of severe corporal punishments on the other were aimed at suppressing youthful pride and inculcating the fear of God and the duty of submission to the will of the elders and the Church into students' minds. (...) At schools children were beaten without ceasing, often severely. According to the contemporaneous mindset, a child who was not punished properly for his or her transgressions would not find peace after death until the deserved

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<sup>1</sup> See S. KOT, *Historia wychowania*, vol. I, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie "Żak" 1995, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> See K. BARTNICKA, I. SZYBIAK, *Zarys historii wychowania*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie "Żak" 2001, pp. 32-33.

<sup>4</sup> S. KOT, *Historia*, p. 83.

punishment was meted out on his or her dead body. Children were punished even when they had committed very small transgressions or were not at fault at all as educators were convinced that any bad inclinations, which were inherent in human nature, would be suppressed. In some schools on certain days all students were flogged without exception as a form of atonement for any transgressions they had committed or could have committed since the last punishment<sup>5</sup>. Beating was even attributed to mystical qualities liberating man from sin and threat<sup>6</sup>.

In the Renaissance respect for the a human being was the most important postulate of the epoch, and humanism pioneered a new direction in the way of thinking about school discipline. The thinkers of this epoch and the eras that came afterwards advocated the reduction and finally the elimination of corporal punishment. One of the leading humanists, Erasmus of Rotterdam, demanded that parents and school have understanding and warmth for children. The schools of that time, in which schoolmates plagued a child while the teacher birched him or her, outraged Erasmus. Other scholars who demanded the reduction of corporal punishments were Juan Luis Vives<sup>7</sup> and, in Poland, John Amos Comenius. The latter advised “not to enforce studying with beating, but to arouse the child's interest in the material, since not being able to teach something is attributable to the teacher, who cannot or does not even try to arouse the student's eagerness to learn”<sup>8</sup>.

In the Enlightenment John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau propagated natural education, in which a child, who at his or her birth did not have any innate ideas, developed unassisted, did not need obligatory guidance, and was supposed to be given freedom in his or her education. They postulated further reductions in corporal punishments, which, however, were acceptable in exceptional circumstances. The only transgression, which, according to Locke, deserved beating, was wilful and persistent defiance, for which he saw no other remedy. However, in this situation he advised that the punishment to be dispensed be not about blows, but shame. Locke was of the opinion that “shame for a misdeed, which deserved punishment, is the only inhibition able to make man follow the path of virtue”. In the Poland of the Enlightenment period Stanisław Konarski, who shared Locke's ideas, loathed the beating of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, pp. 134-135.

<sup>6</sup> See T. PILCH, *Kara w wychowaniu*, in: *Kara w nauce i kulturze*, ed. J. Utrat-Milecki, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2009, p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> See K. BARTNICKA, I. SZYBIAK, *Zarys historii wychowania*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>8</sup> See S. KOT, *Historia*, p. 316.

children and adolescents and allowed punishment only as a last resort – for the child's stubbornness, impertinence, and defiance. “Even reprimands and punishments should be tempered with courtesy and humanness, and the teacher should convince his or her student with clear arguments that he or she deserves a reprimand so that he himself or she herself has to acknowledge the fact that the teacher is guided by fairness and paternal love”<sup>9</sup>.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century education, including the understanding of discipline, was heavily influenced by the ideas of J. F. Herbart. According to Herbart, the entirety of the educator's job is composed of three basic areas: government (over children), teaching, and the rearing of children. “Government means more or less discipline, which is a preliminary means that should anticipate education proper; its aim is to overcome the child's stubbornness, keep him or her in order, and thereby avert anything that could, from the outside or from the inside, hinder the influence of the educator's work. Government makes use of measures such as supervision, engaging the child in play or work, commands and orders, threats and punishments etc. Punishments, if at all possible, should appeal to the child's sense of honour and be meted out immediately; however, the teacher's authority and the child's attachment to him or her make them less necessary. Government is no longer necessary when the child matures in terms of mind and will, i.e., when he or she is able to be in charge. After government ensures peace and removes any obstacles, teaching can take place, which is intended to be the kind of teaching aimed at educating”<sup>10</sup>.

To sum up, in the history of education, including the history of school from the times of ancient Europe to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, discipline was identified with corporal punishment, except in ancient Sparta, which during a certain period of time had a specific system of discipline that was observed rigorously and was based on a precise code of conduct, personality formation, and even the Spartans' way of speaking. Unfortunately, this system also turned into a drill with the dominance of corporal punishments as educational methods.

Despite the advocacy of reducing corporal punishments, which reappeared throughout the ages, there were not many propositions of alternative methods of keeping discipline among children. Teachers were advised to look into

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<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 341.

<sup>10</sup> In: S. KOT, *Historia wychowania*, vol. II, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie “Żak” 1994, p. 155.

themselves and analyse their techniques, as problems with discipline in class could stem from e.g. their insufficient knowledge, lack of teaching skills, or inability to get children interested in the lesson (J. Amos Comenius). There were, however, no specific propositions concerning ways to improve the teacher's job.

School until mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century was meant to prepare children and adolescents for the loyal and obedient fulfilment of their duties, but not for unassisted, responsible work. As a result, it was full of commands and a detached atmosphere not conducive to uninhibited activity. Education in such schools was mechanical; students were supposed to learn the material, whereas the teacher had to transmit and revise it<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, in the history of education in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century, corporal punishment was never completely eliminated, but only restricted awareing of the harm caused to children. What an interesting concept of harm is not anti-values, which does not have its opposite. In the area of positivity axiological lack harm must be sufficient, perhaps because it was so difficult to propose alternatives to physical punishment to develop the students' discipline<sup>12</sup>.

#### 1. THE UNDERSTANDING OF DISCIPLINE AND THE METHODS OF UPHOLDING IN SELECTED PEDAGOGICAL CONCEPTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, under the influence of cultural liberalism, the Herbart school – which was formalised, freedom-restricting, and hostile, and in which students were forced to study and disciplined with various kinds of punishment – started to be criticised. The liberal thought was accompanied by the development of psychology and paedology, both of which attached great importance to the individual, and by the development of sociology, which in turn emphasised the necessity to adapt an individual to the needs of the community.

The movement known as the New Education, which emerged at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, brought the postulate of paedocentrism, a child-centred pedagogy. Its authors called for the giving up of the primary role of the teacher and the adaptive demands of the environment for the sake of education arising out of the child's natural needs and taking into consideration his or her stages of development. Education consistent with the spirit of Rousseau's pedagogy

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<sup>11</sup> See Cz. KUPISIEWICZ, *Z dziejów teorii i praktyki wychowania*, Kraków: Impuls 2012, pp. 188-191.

<sup>12</sup> See J. LIPIEC, *Fenomenologia krzywdy*, in: *Krzywdy. Zagadnienie teoretyczne i problemy praktyki. Podręcznik akademicki*, ed. W. Tulibacki, Olsztyn: Olsztyńska Szkoła Wyższa im. Józefa Rusieckiego 2003, p. 21.

was supposed to respect the natural pace of development of each child and to avert any artificial acceleration and heteronomous aims<sup>13</sup>.

Similarly to the advocates of the New Education, but more explicitly, the representatives of anti-authoritarian pedagogy also stood up against coercion in schools and authoritative education, which imposed a certain way of thinking and behaving on the child. As Nelill believed, school should be freed of drill for the sake of putting into practice freedom in the child's education. The child had the right to an uninhibited development at school, in which he or she would be free to be himself or herself. In such schools teachers were to give up discipline, admonishment, and instruction etc.

Unfortunately, the mere negation of the former methods of disciplining students created a vacuum, in which the following question remained unanswered: what methods of education and discipline should be used to be compatible with the student's nature and to be able to ensure his or her obedience? The answer to this question called for the rejection of obedience and discipline as educational aims and for a change in the understanding of the concept of discipline, and not only in the methods of keeping that discipline.

The individualistic trend that developed thanks to psychology was counteracted by the social trend connected with the development of sociology, which also contributed to the change in the way of thinking about discipline. Dewey and his views on schools played a significant role in this matter. According to Dewey, the school system which adequately organised the child's experience made it possible for society to last and develop. The basic aim of school was to educate and socialise the young generation in such a way that in the future it could serve society<sup>14</sup>. In this context the phenomenon of discipline acquires a new meaning and aim. Values, norms, and the codes of conduct present in society should become the basis for the student's discipline. Discipline ceased to be only about keeping order in class and became a means to fulfil higher aims and values, at the same time preparing the child for social life. Thereby discipline started to be perceived also in a positive light, as a means to an end.

C. Rogers (the representative of the doctrine of non-directive teaching) proposes the giving up of directive pedagogy, that is pedagogy of coercion, for the sake of an educational process based on mutual independence and absence of control. C. Rogers opts out of impinging on the child through role

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<sup>13</sup> S. SZTOBRYN, *Pedagogika Nowego Wychowania*, in: *Pedagogika. Podręcznik akademicki*, ed. Z. Kwieciński, B. Śliwerski, vol. I, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie "Żak" 2006, p. 286.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. J. DEWEY, *Szkoła a społeczeństwo*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie "Żak" 2005.

models or authorities for the sake of the child's unassisted discovering of knowledge. The teacher is characterised by authenticity, readiness to provide help, empathy, and flexibility. There is no room for coercion and discipline or imposing one's will on the child. The teacher-student relationship is almost a partnership and is full of kindness and sympathy. Such a humanistic, child-centred attitude by the teacher contributes to a better awareness of the child's needs and problems and thereby ensures discipline according to the principle that in a positive educational environment there is no room for revolt and unwelcome behaviour<sup>15</sup>.

The originator of non-authoritarian teaching, T. Gordon, more explicitly than Rogers, opposes coercion used by adults towards children. He emphasises that teachers do not have any right to impose their will and solutions on children. They cannot tower over children, "win" in their relations with children in order not to be defeated. Using authority based on power is both harmful and ineffective, because it brings revolt, resistance, and problems with discipline. Gordon rejects coercion in the form of punishment just as he opposes the use of rewards. He claims that in such case a child learns not to acquire knowledge, but to get a good grade. Rewards as a result weaken intrinsic motivation, e.g. to learn. In addition, schoolchildren who learn for grades might betray their personal honesty by cheating, copying, and cribbing from others. Gordon also thinks that all inappropriate behaviour on the part of the student stems from a lack of mutual understanding between the student and the teacher and reluctance to listen to one another. By assisting the child in overcoming difficulties in class by finding out about his or her needs and problems, listening to him or her actively, and striking up conversations with him or her, the teacher overcomes problems with discipline<sup>16</sup>.

In the Montessori education method the teacher does not control the child, but accompanies him or her in his or her development, and the child, by use of special teaching aids, explores the world with his or her senses and acquires scientific knowledge. Education means providing assistance and support to the child in his or her individual development, and the only method of motivating students is arousing their curiosity and interest in the subject of the lesson.

Montessori rejected the traditional method of disciplining students with punishments and rewards in order to alter their behaviour. She assumes that the child is interested in the world and wants to gain knowledge; the teacher's role is then to organise the child's environment in such a way that he or she wants

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<sup>15</sup> See B. ŚLIWERSKI, *Współczesne teorie i nurty wychowania*, Kraków: Impuls 1998, pp. 115-135.

<sup>16</sup> See *ibidem*, pp. 135-155.

to explore the world through play. Montessori's students are given absolute freedom. If interested in selected teaching aids (building blocks, the alphabet, etc.), they do not cause behaviour issues; therefore, keeping discipline is unnecessary and there are no problems with discipline among students<sup>17</sup>.

The changes in perception of discipline were accompanied by a change in the approach to the methods of disciplining schoolchildren. An important discipline of psychology, which contributed to the broadening, organising, and verifying of knowledge about methods of teaching discipline among students, was behavioural psychology, and especially Skinner's system of positive and negative reinforcements (punishments and rewards). This author, based on the research conducted by the Russian scientist I. Pavlov, came to the conclusion that the whole of human behaviour can be explained as a response to environmental stimuli. Certain responses can be enhanced or removed thanks to stimuli, that is rewards and punishments. A reinforcement (a reward) enhances the intensity or frequency of a behaviour, whereas a punishment reduces it<sup>18</sup>. Further research and subsequent views on the effectiveness of rewards and punishments in education demonstrated that punishments as a method of teaching discipline were hardly effective and could even be destructive of the student's psyche, while rewards always brought positive effects and better motivated students to behave in the ways welcomed by their teachers. By way of example, according to I. Jundziłł, there are punishments that can educate children, and harmful punishments which do not educate them. The former include taking away the child's privilege(s), explaining to him or her what he or she did wrong, expressing sadness and disappointment, and denying him or her pleasure. Harmful punishments are first of all physical punishments, which bring about anger, hatred, aggression, wish for retaliation, and a sense of powerlessness and injustice. They also include threatening the child, which leads to anxiety neuroses and phobias; terms of abuse; shouting at the child; and isolating him or her from others<sup>19</sup>.

The traditional way of disciplining students by meting out various punishments therefore turned out to be ineffective, or effective only in the short term, and in many cases harmful to the sensitive psyche of the child. Educators turned to rewarding the student for good (desirable) behaviour, which made children better motivated to act in a disciplined way.

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<sup>17</sup> See R. KUCHA, *Pedagogika Marii Montessori*, in: *Pedagogika. Podręcznik akademicki*, vol. I, pp. 324-333.

<sup>18</sup> See C.H. EDWARDS, *Dyscyplina i kierowanie klasą*, Warszawa: PWN 2006, pp. 76-77.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. I. JUNDZIŁŁ, *Nagrody i kary w wychowaniu*, Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia 1986.



The system of rewards and punishments is present almost in every contemporary school, which proves the usefulness of Skinner's theory; still, however, the basic objection to this theory is the criticism of the assumption on which it is based. It says that man does not have an intrinsic will controlling his or her behaviour; he or she does not work towards aims, but is controlled by his or her own environment<sup>20</sup>. Such thinking was opposed by e.g. C. Rogers, his student T. Gorgon, and M. Montessori, who advocated the giving up of rewards and punishments in education for the sake of absolute latitude and "freedom" without control and authoritarianism. These factors led to a breakthrough in the way of thinking about school discipline. Discipline, so far associated with enforcing obedience by way of coercion, started to be perceived as an internal trait or a set of such traits constituting part of the child's psyche. T. Gordon named this "new" kind of discipline "self-discipline"<sup>21</sup>.

Discipline "was deprived of" the former means of keeping it. As a result, educators proposed alternative possibilities in the form of preventive measures aimed at preventing any undesirable behaviour from occurring, such as the creation and cultivation of a positive atmosphere in class and at school, and the establishment of a good student-teacher relationship.

To sum up, in the 20<sup>th</sup>-Century, discipline, so far associated with enforcing obedience by way of coercion, started to be perceived as an internal trait or a set of such traits constituting part of the child's psyche. This "new" kind of discipline was known as self-discipline. Discipline ceased to be associated only with obedience enforced through corporal punishment, uncomfortable coercion, and imposing one's will and views on the child; instead, it became a positive value, the student's pride and joy.

## 2. A TYPOLOGY OF THE CONCEPT OF DISCIPLINE

Discipline is an equivocal concept, which manifests itself in the various definitions of the concept in the past and in the present. The way of defining this phenomenon depends also on the formerly-adopted theory or concept of education. Below you will find definitions of the concept of discipline divided into two categories:

- traditional definitions (former definitions – connected with obedience and referring to the Herbart school of thought)
- liberal – treating discipline as man's internal trait.

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<sup>20</sup> See. C.H. EDWARDS, *Dyscyplina*, p. 77.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. T. GORDON, *Wychowanie w samodyscyplinie*, Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX 1997.

Discipline was formerly understood as a short whip with several straps, which was a tool to mete out corporal punishment at home or at school, or a tool used for self-flagellation. Discipline was also the act of whipping oneself or flogging another with such a whip. The history of education demonstrates that teaching discipline to children has always been associated with dispensing corporal punishment; therefore it also meant corporal punishment itself. S. Żeromski in *The Labours of Sisyphus* (originally *Szyfowe prace*) writes “A big calendar in a green cover hung by the door leading to the schoolroom, together with a leathern five-fingered whip with a handle resembling a roe deer’s leg”.

In the educational process, by means of discipline understood as a tool of punishment or as corporal punishment itself, the child was taught the virtue of obedience, which, being a concept close to the concept of discipline, calls for a definition.

Obedience, as stated by B. Dunaj, is an attitude characterised by submission, self-discipline, subordination to rules, regulations, and commands, rigour, and discipline.

According to W. Doroszewski, obedience means “being obedient; forcing another to obey, comply with the law and commands; rigour; submission”. According to S. Dubisz, obedience means “compliance with the law and the observance of discipline; discipline; rigour; submission”.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the words obedience and discipline were used interchangeably. Then in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, harsh criticism of coercion and corporal punishment at school contributed to the emergence of negative associations with the word obedience. All the same, however, until the outbreak of the Second World War, the concept of obedience was present e.g. in the school education of S. Hessen, who argued that coercion and freedom at school did not exclude one another, but intermingled; he thus saw obedience in a positive light. He explained that obedience, which contained an element of coercion, did not restrain the child’s freedom, but was closely associated with man’s effort and self-improvement. This self-improvement was aimed at getting man’s thoughts in order and facilitating the fulfilment of his or her tasks<sup>22</sup>.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century obedience and discipline started to mean one and the same thing. The first Polish-language dictionary by B. S. Linde identified discipline (“dyscyplina”) with obedience (“karność”)<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> S. HESSEN, *Podstawy pedagogiki*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie “Żak” 1997, pp. 100-102.

<sup>23</sup> M.S.B. LINDE, *Słownik języka polskiego*, vol. I: A-F, Lwów: Wydawnictwo “Gutenberg Print” 1854, p. 25.

The concept of obedience, which was still present in school education in the interwar period, was gradually replaced following the end of the Second World War, by the concept of discipline.

The other group of traditional definitions refers to the concept of the Herbart pedagogy, and defines the phenomenon of discipline as “compliance with norms, rules, and regulations, obedience, rigour, the established order of things”. Examples of such definitions are as follows<sup>24</sup>.

As stated by K. Hołysz, “discipline means the extent to which students behave properly, are involved in what is going on in class, and demonstrate an attitude to perform tasks”<sup>25</sup>.

According to B. Milerski and B. Śliwerski, discipline is “one of the ways or means of educating the child, the aim of which is to subordinate him or her to the existing norms and another’s authority”<sup>26</sup>.

As stated by P. Szachniuk, “discipline is a relatively-permanent submission of one’s own behaviour to specific requirements defining various codes of conduct”<sup>27</sup>.

According to A. Murawska, discipline is understood as “compliance with the law, rules and regulations, the established order of things, and subordination in service to another”<sup>28</sup>.

Discipline, as stated by K. Łaszczevska, “usually means proper conduct, compliance with the rules determining relationships within a certain group of people; therefore, we speak of discipline in a schoolroom”. According to this author, what discipline brings to mind is “order, cooperation, awareness and the observance of the existing rules and procedures, and recognition of the rights of other people”<sup>29</sup>.

Discipline in the cited definitions is a measure of the consistence of students’ behaviour with norms and standards that are expected to be obeyed in the classroom at a given time; therefore, proper behaviour on the part of schoolchildren is identified with discipline. Furthermore, discipline involves compliance with certain externally-imposed norms and rules expected to be followed at school, and is associated with rigour and submission to another’s

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<sup>24</sup> S. MIESZALSKI, *O przymusie i dyscyplinie w klasie szkolnej*, Warszawa: WSiP 1997, p. 85.

<sup>25</sup> K. HOŁYSZ, *Kierowanie klasą i dyscyplina*, “Wychowawca” 2006, No. 11, pp. 18-19.

<sup>26</sup> *Pedagogika: leksykon*, ed. B. MILERSKI, B. ŚLIWERSKI, Warszawa: PWN 2000, p. 50.

<sup>27</sup> P. SZACHNIUK, *Dyscyplina w klasie – jak ją utrzymać?*, “Dyrektor Szkoły” 2005, No. 10, pp. 51-53.

<sup>28</sup> A. MURAWSKA, *Dyscyplina*, in: *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XXI wieku*, ed. T. Pilch, vol. I, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie “Żak” 2003, p. 820.

<sup>29</sup> K. ŁASZCZEWSKA, *Nie ma wychowania bez dyscypliny*, “Wychowawca” 2007, No. 2, p. 5.

authority. The existing understandings of discipline, the essence of which are compliance with certain rules and proper conduct that is consistent with existing standards, suggest that discipline is imposed externally by the authority of people in power, which means by the teaching staff, when it comes to the school environment. It is puzzling that in contemporary pedagogical literature these definitions are to be found both in scholarly monographs (journals and encyclopaedias) and works of popular science such as “Wychowawca”.

Classical definitions of discipline are also present in statements and comments made by teachers themselves. B. Krzywosz-Ryniewicz, in her research from 2004, asked teachers what the term “discipline” meant to them. This was an open question. On the basis of their definitions, by means of the so-called peer-group method, she distinguishes two categories in which the teaching staff describe this phenomenon. Teachers most often said that discipline meant

- the observance of the school’s rules and regulations by the student (70,5%)
- the student’s submission to the teacher’s authority (49,2%)
- the student’s respect for the teacher (21%).

The least-popular categories, which do not have much in common with keeping discipline, include

- the teacher’s fairness
- mutual trust (2.5%)
- the teacher’s respect for the student (4.9%)<sup>30</sup>.

The other group of definitions related to the liberal understanding of the concept of discipline suggests that discipline is one of man's personality traits or that observing discipline stems from internal motivation, i.e. the will to do so, and is not enforced by coercion or rigour.

S. Mieszalski distinguishes between several ways of understanding the concept of discipline, one of them treating discipline as “man's individual personality trait. Such person has an intrinsic sense of discipline and traits such as orderly thinking, matter-of-factness, language precision, composure, diligence, and self-control”<sup>31</sup>.

T. Gordon presents a two-fold understanding of the phenomenon of discipline. He distinguishes discipline enforced or imposed externally, and internal discipline, which he defines as self-discipline<sup>32</sup>. The author considers the latter meaning to be the right one.

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<sup>30</sup> B. KRZYWOSZ-RYNIEWICZ, *Dyscyplina w szkole – kontrola zachowania i uczenia się*, in: *Powinności wychowawcze nauczyciela. O teorii i praktyce wychowania w szkole*, ed. J. Lubowiecka, Olsztyn: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego 2004, pp. 114-128.

<sup>31</sup> See S. MIESZAŁSKI, *O przymusie*, p. 85.

<sup>32</sup> See T. GORDON, *Wychowanie*, p. 29.

According to A. Murawska, discipline, not to be understood only as compliance with rules and regulations, can be also considered to be one of man's personality traits (internal discipline); it is then associated with composure, self-control, and voluntary submission to moral and intellectual values regardless of troubles or difficulties resulting therefrom<sup>33</sup>.

The pedagogical literature introduces also the concept of conscious discipline. W. Okoń claims that discipline means "the compliance of an individual or a social group with codes of conduct, the value of which he or she accepts without question. The codes have to be internalised and made part of one's nature; compliance with such codes stems from man's internal motivation"<sup>34</sup>. W. Okoń's definition of discipline is close to that of self-control and to his understanding of discipline as man's personality trait. As Okoń further argues, "the opposite of conscious discipline is discipline based on the enforcement of norms which an individual or a group of people deem unjust or unfair. The chances of introducing conscious discipline are greater in a school where there are no significant discrepancies between the systems of values represented by teachers and students; the same applies to the familial environment and the relationship between the values of parents and children. The basis for introducing conscious discipline either to schools or private homes is an educational process in which children and adolescents are treated as partners and have the right to be respected by others, but also in which the demands that are made on them correspond to their capabilities"<sup>35</sup>.

The pedagogical literature clearly distinguishes between two approaches to teaching discipline, which is visible in the abovementioned views on the educational process in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Definitions describing discipline as an external coercion are contraposed by definitions portraying it as a highly-desirable trait, where the willingness to observe it results from one's internal motivation.

The two abovementioned contemporary understandings of the concept of discipline related to the historical development of the concept and its various depictions in educational theories introduce a lot of confusion to pedagogical practice. One of the most difficult aspects of working with students is maintaining order and discipline in the classroom; parents in turn reflect on how to deal with a defiant two-year-old or a rebellious adolescent at home. In Poland resorting to violence towards minors is forbidden; as far as education is concerned, educators favour conversation, persuasion, and rewards. All the

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<sup>33</sup> See A. MURAWSKA, *Dyscyplina*, p. 821.

<sup>34</sup> W. OKOŃ, *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie "Żak" 2004, p. 130.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 131.

same, however, as the 2013 report by the Polish Ombudsman for Children demonstrates, “60% of Polish parents still use, or are advocates of, corporal punishment and discipline based on coercion. Still, however, this report demonstrates certain progress when compared to the report from the year 2012, when 70% of parents declared readiness to mete out such punishments”<sup>36</sup>. Comparing to other European countries, we are a society of strict settings. We have the lowest rate of rejecting parents smacking as a method of punishment, and the highest rate of allowing the beating<sup>37</sup>.

Some parents represent the historical view that corporal punishments can be meted out only in the last resort, when “nothing else works”. This is, however, a myth that has been fostered over the centuries and repeated by renowned educationists such as Peztaozzi. As a result, it is difficult to dispel.

Polish society give its consent to punish the child through beating and, consequently, scenes of violence towards children and smacking them in public places do not meet with surprise or objection.

There are, however, parents who do not mete out corporal punishments. They have to answer the question of how to teach discipline to their children and how to teach them self-discipline.

## II. MANAGING DISCIPLINE IN THE CLASSROOM

Maintaining discipline in the classroom means watching over the children during study hours – in other words, observing their behaviour, responding to it, and influencing it in such a way that it does not disturb the course of the lesson<sup>38</sup>. Keeping discipline also involves the elimination of dysfunctional behaviour and the facilitation of desirable behaviour. It can therefore consist of the teacher’s restrictive classroom behaviour, the aim of which is to eliminate students’ real behaviour, on the one hand, and in the teacher’s methods aimed to facilitate accepted and desirable behaviour among students on the other<sup>39</sup>.

The two ways of keeping discipline among schoolchildren result from different understandings of the concept of discipline.

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<sup>36</sup> [http://www.brpd.gov.pl/uploadfiles/publikacje/dzieci\\_ofiary\\_przemocy\\_w\\_rodzinie.pdf](http://www.brpd.gov.pl/uploadfiles/publikacje/dzieci_ofiary_przemocy_w_rodzinie.pdf) [access on 13.06.2014].

<sup>37</sup> See T. PILCH, *Kara w wychowaniu*, p. 97.

<sup>38</sup> K. ŁASZCZEWSKA, *Nie ma wychowania bez dyscypliny*, pp. 5-7. See also: S. MIESZALSKI, *O przymusie*, p. 88.

<sup>39</sup> See P. SZACHNIUK, *Dyscyplina w klasie*, pp. 51-53. See also: S. MIESZALSKI, *O przymusie*, p. 88.

By treating discipline as compliance with externally-imposed requirements, the teacher will aim to teach obedience, and a means to this end will be the elimination of undesirable behaviour disturbing the course of his or her lessons

If, however, the teacher assumes that discipline is the student's internal trait understood as self-discipline and aims to teach it among his or her students, the repertoire of his or her methods will concentrate on facilitation of desirable behaviour and the prevention of undesirable behaviour from happening through his or her preventive disciplinary methods such as striking a rapport with students. The student's self-discipline results from his or her internal motivation to develop such traits as orderly thinking, matter-of-factness, language precision, composure, diligence, and self-control, which can take place only in an atmosphere of mutual sympathy and respect.

On the basis of the abovementioned ways of managing discipline divided into the teacher's disciplinary methods aimed at eliminating undesirable and facilitating desirable behaviour, this study further presents specific examples of the school's and the teacher's activities as assigned to those methods.

The elimination of undesirable behaviour stems from the centuries-old tradition of dispensing punishments, including corporal punishments, which were allowed both at school and at home in the name of the principle "the end justifies the means" (discipline understood as order and obedience). This common educational measure was already forbidden by law in Polish schools in 1783, which, unfortunately, is hard to believe as that law was later commonly violated<sup>40</sup> By way of example, the Japanese and the Swedish people deemed corporal punishment unlawful after the Second World War, but up to this day they occasionally dispense corporal punishments despite the law forbidding them. In civilised countries violence against children either at home or at school is forbidden by law. Unfortunately, however, in Poland corporal punishments are commonly dispensed in the familial environment. Nevertheless, this does not mean that punishments are not meted out in the case of schoolchildren. School has a certain range of restrictive practices at its disposal in order to manage the behaviour of students who break the existing rules. These practices include

- reprimands by teachers or form tutors (made in public – in front of the class or the school community or in private)
- talks with the headmaster or the school counsellor
- lowering of the conduct mark
- suspension
- expulsion.

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<sup>40</sup> In: K. ŁASZCZEWSKA, *Nie ma wychowania*, pp. 5-7.

In school practice the teacher's actions, even if inconspicuous on the surface, are not without significance in the specific circumstances of violating class or school norms. Teachers can interfere with students' behaviour verbally or non-verbally – through eye contact, gestures, facial expressions, and their attitude towards students. By way of example

- The teacher has the right to encroach on the student's personal space, e.g. to take away his or her personal belongings, check his or her notebook.
- The teacher demonstrates his or her authority by touching the student, e.g. by laying a hand on his or her shoulder while reprimanding him or her.
- The student is obligated to look the teacher in the eye; averting one's eyes is tantamount to showing disrespect.
- The teacher manages conversation in class by non-verbal encouragement to give answers, e.g. by casting a look at the student, holding out his or her hand, wagging his or her finger at the student<sup>41</sup>.

The other group of means used to keep discipline in the classroom is the facilitation of desirable behaviour and the elimination of undesirable acts through preventive disciplinary methods. These methods can be defined as the creation of circumstances conducive to maintaining order in class via competent management of the process of learning. These include, for example, effecting the appropriate pace of the lesson and the effective organisation of students' work, the proper transmission of the material, and the divisibility of attention, being the ability to do several things at one and the same time, leading discussions with the class, observing the activity of slower learners, and engaging brighter students in extra activity.

Another important issue is the management of students' attention, whereby the teacher is able to attract his or her students' attention to himself or herself and to his or her or others' comments.

A skill that is worth mentioning is the preparation and implementation of group work in the classroom. While planning group work, the teacher should assign students tasks compatible with their knowledge and skills and allocate students to groups in a suitable way.

The above preventive disciplinary methods should be accompanied by the teacher's solid preparation, his or her expertise, and clear, matter-of-fact, and logical way of speaking, proving his or her competence. Moreover, the teacher should teach the material with keenness and passion, which means that it makes a difference whether he or she is emotionally involved in teaching.

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<sup>41</sup> See J. ROBERTSON, *Jak zapewnić dyscyplinę, ład i uwagę w klasie*, Warszawa: WSiP 1998.



In order to be able to maintain students' attention, the teacher ought to accentuate his or her statements and comments, use gestures, and maintain eye contact with his or her interlocutor.

Difficulties with keeping discipline in the classroom can be mitigated by defining clear rules that will be consistently obeyed<sup>42</sup>. According to K. Hołysz<sup>43</sup>, such rules should be taught at the beginning of the school year. Teachers should begin their lessons with teaching children the rules and procedures, e.g.

- raise your hand before asking a question,
- listen carefully to other people,
- listen carefully to the teacher's instructions.

The other group of ways of preventing discipline problems in the classroom are methods aimed at establishing a positive student-teacher relationship and a friendly learning environment. For example, students can be praised – in particular in public, in front of the whole class or school community – or rewarded with high conduct marks and material gifts.

The above division distinguishes between ways of keeping discipline in the classroom in respect of the character and aim of disciplinary measures. They might include methods aimed at eliminating undesirable or reinforcing desirable behaviour. The elimination of undesirable behaviour involves direct intervention on the part of the teacher in the student's behaviour and punishments he or she imposes in order to teach students submission to the teacher's authority. These measures are linked with the traditional understanding of discipline as compliance to existing norms and rules upheld by the teacher. The other way of keeping discipline in the classroom involves the reinforcement of desirable behaviour and consists of building a positive student-teacher relationship and creating circumstances conducive to effective classroom work. The above examples of preventive behaviour indicate that in educating and teaching discipline it is the student, with his or her specific needs and problems, that is of importance to the teacher. They also prove that sometimes an individual and sympathetic approach to a child and the teacher's reflection upon his or her own behaviour enable effective work in the classroom without using severe disciplinary measures. This relates to the modern, humanist approach to discipline in school education<sup>44</sup> <sup>45</sup>. Educators appeal for sympathy, humour, and the individual treatment of the child, as well as

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<sup>42</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 140.

<sup>43</sup> K. HOŁYSZ, *Kierowanie klasą*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>44</sup> See A. DANEK, *Dyscyplina a wychowanie*, "Wychowawca" 2006, No. 11, p. 23.

<sup>45</sup> K. ŁASZCZEWSKA, *Nie ma wychowania*, pp. 5-7.

the efficient management of classroom work in order to keep discipline in the classroom.

### III. DISCIPLINE AS A POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE VALUE IN EDUCATION

As the analysis presented so far demonstrates, the phenomenon of teaching discipline to schoolchildren can be perceived either in a positive or negative light. Discipline in the negative sense brings to mind coercion, demands, and punishment for nonconformity to school norms. Discipline seen as a positive value in the child's environment in turn helps him or her to develop traits such as orderly thinking, matter-of-factness, language precision, composure, diligence, and self-control. Moreover, as it follows from teachers' experience, discipline and the obligation to carry out the teacher's instructions seem necessary to ensure an undisturbed teaching process during the lesson. Coercion and discipline are therefore ever-present and inseparable elements of the school system. The aims, content, and requirements that constitute the curriculum are externally imposed by the culture in which students live.

For many years school has attracted criticism for making coercion play an important role in teaching. The opponents of coercion in schools argue that external motivation does not lead to students' development, but, on the contrary, disturbs or prevents development from happening. To sum up the viewpoints of the advocates of the aforementioned approach, i.e. E. Key and E. Claparede, one can say that discipline understood as compliance to externally imposed rules and norms kills the child's initiative, curiosity, and spontaneity; therefore, it goes against his or her nature. In today's school as created by Alexander S. Neill, which is free of any coercion, children have "the liberty to be themselves. To this effect", writes Neill, "we have had to give up all forms of discipline, admonition, advising, moralism, and religious instruction"<sup>46</sup>.

However, despite the common criticism of discipline based on coercion and the pejorative meaning (as opposed to freedom) of this concept, it is universally taught in the vast majority of schools all over the world. As a result, there has to be some rational explanation of the necessity for using coercion at school. Below you will find arguments, as presented in the literature on the subject, in favour of teaching discipline at school, presenting discipline as a positive value.

Discipline at school, as Hessen argues, is a necessary and certainly not negative phenomenon, with a positive educational effect. In his analyses

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<sup>46</sup> In: S. MIESZALSKI, *O przymusie*, p. 32.

Hessen uses the concept of obedience. As Hessen explains, obedience, despite coercion, does not restrain the child's freedom and is strictly connected with effort and self-improvement. This self-improvement is aimed at getting man's thoughts in order and facilitating the realisation of his or her tasks<sup>47</sup>.

E. Durkheim, explaining the necessity to use discipline in schools, indicates that a person who wants to serve society should submit to its demands whether he or she wants it or not. In other words, society is a construct that exists above an individual and people have to conform to it<sup>48</sup>.

J.S. Bruner claims that every student who comes to school possesses an internally motivated inclination to learn, despite externally imposed requirements. The author thinks that the sources of this motivation lie in students' three natural dispositions – curiosity, striving for competence, and the sense of satisfaction out of the successful completion of a task<sup>49</sup>.

Although the above argument justifying the necessity to use discipline at school appears valid, it seems that not entirely and not in each and every case does it present the phenomenon of discipline as a positive value.

It appears that solving the above dilemmas will be possible thanks to understanding the ambiguity of the concept of discipline and providing the answer to the question of what and when is more important – teaching the child obedience and compliance to norms or his or her acquisition of a sense of internal organisation and order.

Submission to a superior's authority is necessary for children, young people, and adults. However, not once has one to express his or her own opinion and stand against injustice and evil. As far as self-discipline is concerned, it is always desirable at work and at school. It is the opposite of chaos and lack of concentration on a task, and a synonym of order and organisation.

I believe that teaching discipline to the child, both as an intrinsic trait and an external pattern of behaviour, is not self-contradictory; however, the accomplishment of these aims is possible in different ways. It primarily depends on

- the child's age
- his or her personality traits
- his or her educational situation.

The child's age is of great significance to teaching discipline. His or her moral development starts with obedience to the commands of others and ends with behaviour patterns that are in compliance with social norms. At pre-school age the child is told by adults what he or she can and cannot do.

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<sup>47</sup> S. HESSEN, *Podstawy pedagogiki*, pp. 100-102.

<sup>48</sup> See S. MIESZALSKI, *O przymusie*, pp. 36-42.

<sup>49</sup> In: *ibidem*, pp. 69-70.

Initially the child respects adults' commands in order to avoid punishment; he or she tries to be obedient to people in power. Children do not understand the reasons and meaning of these commands. This type of morality is based on obedience<sup>50</sup>.

In the early school years children already understand the essence of moral norms, but they have not yet been internalised and they remain external in relation to the child. This stage in moral development is called *heteronomous morality*<sup>51</sup>.

Analysing the above norms in school discipline one can notice that younger children, by obeying commands, discover that the world, including school, is full of rules that have to be followed. This empirical discovery, the essence of which is to take on the role of an obedient and submissive student, is a basis for understanding and, in consequence, the individual acceptance or rejection of norms. This process is therefore an important element in the child's socialisation. B. Krzywosz-Ryniewicz, describing the interrelations between discipline and the child's development, says "younger students do not know the school's rules and need more time to get accustomed to them. They need repetitions and revisions of the existing rules. Their disruptive behaviour does not result from the will to oppose class rituals, but simply from ignorance"<sup>52</sup>.

In the light of the foregoing, pre-school children and children in early school years at the stage of heteronomous morality only accept the norms of the adult world which they have yet not internalised; therefore, their education will require external discipline taught via punishments and rewards.

In the case of older children it is possible to teach them organisation and internal order thanks to already developed traits such as conscientiousness, reliability, and laboriousness etc.

In adolescence norms are contested, and anything connected with the adult world is negated. This is when the norms and rules advocated by peers acquire overriding importance. Adolescence brings many behaviour issues, so teaching discipline at junior high school is much more complicated. Students at puberty are prone to pick quarrels, provoke disputes and undermine existing norms and rules. The desire to discredit teachers is a manifestation of the need for autonomy and independence from adults, which is something normal at their age. Educators cannot, however, give up disciplinary measures, as children at this age look for a hierarchy of values and are still in

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<sup>50</sup> B. HARWAS-NAPIERAŁA, J. TREMPAŁA, *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka*, vol. II, Warszawa: PWN 2001, p. 118.

<sup>51</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 138.

<sup>52</sup> B. KRZYWOSZ-RYNIEWICZ, *Dyscyplina w szkole*, pp. 114-128.

the process of internalising norms and values; that is why it is important to show that these norms are functioning properly. Prudence, fairness, and consistency are of significance here. Using external means to motivate students to study, and teaching self-discipline to them, do not contradict one another; quite the contrary – discipline, which is understood as two-fold, is a good preparation for adult life.

The stage of moral autonomy is reached by humans no earlier than at about 20 years of age. This is when morality is completely internalised and mature, not based on other people's standards. Not only do people accept and acknowledge moral norms, but they also embark on an individual quest for rules consistent with logical thinking.

The internalisation of norms can, however, take place much earlier, since it is a long-term process connected with learning self-discipline. We can therefore assume that, at a later stage in development, also in junior high school, discipline is more and more conscious and evolves into self-discipline, based on a completed process of internalising norms and values.

Discipline understood as externally imposed requirements and norms is a value in the first stage of life and should not be perceived in a negative light; it is, however, an instrumental value, a means to end, which is known as self-discipline.

Understanding discipline as compliance to norms and rules, which aims to teach the child obedience, is a mistake at the later stages. When we build on the already developed traits of the child proving his or her self-discipline, it will be much more appropriate to use preventive measures for keeping discipline in the classroom and create circumstances conducive to a good atmosphere and organisation of classroom work.

Using only mild disciplinary measures, regardless of the circumstances, is also a mistake, because, e.g., in the case of teenagers, they might turn out to be ineffective.

If we make the above assumptions, discipline will always be a positive value; however, it will be enforced differently depending on the level of the child's development. Both the negative understanding of discipline and the implementation of either too-severe or too-mild disciplinary measures stem from one's misunderstanding of the aim of teaching discipline, false assumptions, and inadequate ways of dealing with discipline as far as the educational situation and the child's level of development are concerned.

The child's personality and temperament are also of significance in teaching discipline. Some children are more compliant by nature and they submit more easily to a group or their superiors, whereas others are individuals with their own opinions. They differ also in terms of the level of emotional sensitivity and readiness to carry out the teacher's instructions. When teaching

discipline one has to allow for the differences in students' personality and their individual needs and possibilities.

The life situation of the student is also an important factor to be taken into consideration. By way of example, teenagers in a difficult familial or school situation, who are usually underappreciated, need more rewards and more positive motivation.

I think that the approaches to the understanding of school discipline discussed in this analysis are not mutually exclusive and that they are useful in various situations depending on the child's age, level of maturity, personality traits, and familial or educational situation. It is up to the teacher, and his or her teaching skills, when to use a given method of teaching discipline to his or her students.

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#### POZYTYWNE I NEGATYWNE ASPEKTY POSTRZEGANIA DYSCYPLINY W HISTORII WYCHOWANIA I WSPÓŁCZESNEJ LITERATURZE PEDAGOGICZNEJ

##### S t r e s z c z e n i e

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie wielowymiarowości rozumienia pojęcia dyscypliny oraz konsekwencji wieloznaczności tego pojęcia dla współczesnej praktyki edukacyjnej. Na podstawie analizy literatury dotyczącej historii wychowania i edukacji oraz wybranych koncepcji wychowania wyróżniono dwa najważniejsze rozumienia dyscypliny. Dyscyplina jest z jednej strony postrzegana negatywnie, jako przymus zewnętrzny, a z drugiej pozytywnie – jako pożądana społecznie wewnętrzna cecha organizacji i porządku zwana samodyscypliną. Wydaje się jednak, że te dwa rozumienia nie stoją ze sobą w sprzeczności i niezależnie, jak rozumie się zjawisko dyscyplinowania, jest ono użyteczne w zależności od wieku, cech osobowości i sytuacji wychowanka.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wychowanie, dyscyplina, pedagogika szkolna.

#### POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF THE PERCEPTION OF DISCIPLINE IN THE HISTORY OF EDUCATION AND CONTEMPORARY PEDAGOGICAL LITERATURE

##### S u m m a r y

The purpose of this article is to present the multidimensional understanding of the concept of discipline and its consequences for contemporary educational practice. In the article, the understanding of the discipline was divided into two basic types. On the one hand discipline is understood negatively as an external compulsion; on the other hand positively as a socially

desirable trait connected with internal organisation and self-discipline. However, it seems that those two understandings do not stand in conflict with each other and no matter how discipline is understood, it is useful in child education, depending on their age, personality traits and situation.

**Key words:** education, discipline, school education.