

CHANGES IN THE THEORY OF DISCIPLINE
IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS FOR THE
PERIOD 1909-1959

BY

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

"Discipline"¹ is always associated with the work of a teacher. The school board, when about to decide upon a teacher, inquires very carefully as to whether the teacher is, or is likely to become, a good "disciplinarian." School visitors will usually judge more by the "discipline" of the school than by anything else. Even the principal or superintendent makes large use of his judgment of the teacher's "disciplinary" powers when forming estimates of teacher efficiency. There is scarcely any factor more important to the success or failure of a teacher than the ability to govern and control the class successfully.² The importance given to discipline problems stimulated the desire to determine changes in attitudes regarding discipline theory.

Statement of Problem

One of the most controversial questions in education today has been what kind of discipline will encourage the fullest development of the varied inclinations of students. There have been some psychological principles and some advances in recent years in the field of discipline which may help to guide views on educational policies.

¹Discipline is defined in Chapter Two, pp. 4-5.

²Heinmiller, Louis E., A First Book in Education, The Century Company, New York & London, 1925, p. 149.

It has not been the purpose of this study to treat the magnitudal aspects of discipline, but only in determining changes in the theory of discipline at the secondary school level in the past fifty years. The belief has been that teachers will have achieved decisive results only in so far as they conduct themselves in a fashion somewhat appealing or rewarding to their pupils. This conviction has lead to the selection of this investigation as given in the title, "Changes in the Theory of Discipline in Secondary Schools for the Period 1909-1959."

The inquiry seemed to revolve around two questions of primary importance, those being:

1. What changes in the theory of discipline have been made in the past fifty years?
2. What is the status of attitudes regarding the handling of disciplinary infractions today?

Procedure

In order to understand and appreciate the disciplinary theories of the secondary school, literature was reviewed. General discipline theories of the past fifty years were examined to note changes that have occurred in disciplinary thought. Insight into present-day attitudes of handling disciplinary infractions was gained through attendance at sessions of the Ninth Annual Family Life Conference and by faculty members.

Limitations

It was not the intention in this investigation to present a patterned

solution of discipline theory, but only to set forth findings during the period 1909-1959 as specialists have stated for the reader's consideration. Because of lack of time, references on discipline theory of the past fifty years were limited to the Montana State College library. The determination of present day attitudes on discipline was limited to opinions of representative faculty members at Montana State College and to information obtained at the Ninth Annual Family Life Conference.

To gain an understanding of the disciplinary practices of the secondary school a review of literature was made. Results are presented in Chapter II.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of literature of developed discipline theory has revealed important and appropriate changes in the educational practices of the time.

The purpose of the review of literature was to organize and set forth views and ideas of experts on changing conceptions of discipline theory in the secondary school. Literature was surveyed with the following points in mind: (1) Definition of discipline; (2) Objectives of discipline; (3) Earlier conceptions of discipline; (4) Modern conceptions of discipline. The discussion about defining discipline comes first in the study.

Definition of Discipline

Discipline has been a tricky word. Different people have meant different things by it. Avent's discussion in defining discipline was as follows:

In common parlance, the word discipline ordinarily implies control. If the teacher is a good disciplinarian, he or she has no difficulty in controlling the school children. It does not necessarily imply that the teacher is a bad punisher of the children. It does imply that the teacher has those traits of character and of preparation that make for easy government and control of the children for the purpose of the school.³

³Avent, Joseph E., Beginning Teaching, The author, Univ. of Tennessee, Knoxville, Tennessee, 1927, pp. 370-371.

Webster has given a list of definitions of discipline, including two that, when applied to secondary school youngsters, spring from opposing philosophies: "Control gained by enforced obedience to dogmatic rules" and, using the word as a verb, "To train in self-control to given standards."⁴ It has been the opinion of this writer that those who uphold the democratic ideal prefer the second definition.

Wiles mentioned that a clear distinction must be made between discipline and disciplining and further stated that:

Where discipline exists, no disciplining is necessary. Where an individual is not controlled by the group self-discipline, disciplinary action must be taken. It is polite in some circles to pretend that disciplining is never necessary. Such would be the case if a teacher were perfect in his or her work with the class, but no one is. The teacher, even though striving for group self-discipline, will find it necessary to take disciplinary action on behalf of the group. Class morale cannot be allowed to suffer because an individual refuses to be controlled by the self-imposed discipline of the class.⁵

Although authorities differed much on defining discipline, they were together on its objectives.

Objectives of Discipline

The objectives for which policies and measures of discipline are

⁴The New American Webster Dictionary, New American Library, New York, 1955, p. 103.

⁵Wiles, Kimball, Supervision for Better Schools, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1955, pp. 225-226.

employed were expressed by Douglass as follows:

1. Establishing and maintaining favorable study conditions free from distractions and misbehavior
2. Establishing and maintaining respect for authority within the school
3. Developing, on the part of the pupils, ideals, interests, habits, and skills making for self-government and good citizenship.⁶

The relative importance attached to each of these objectives in the minds of the principal and the staff may materially influence the policies and devices employed. The changing conception of the relative importance of the various possible outcomes of methods of discipline together with a better understanding of adolescent human nature have wrought marked changes in the principles and measures employed during recent years.⁷

Changes which have taken place in the objectives and principles of discipline were centered largely around the increased emphasis placed on permanent educational values as compared with the emphasis placed on maintaining order in the school. This has implied the training of individuals to do acceptable and useful things, rather than restriction of individuals by punitive measures, and that each should govern his own conduct rather than to be dependent upon government by others.⁸

When referring to educational disciplinary measures that substitute

⁶Douglass, Harl R., Organization and Administration of Secondary Schools, Ginn and Company, Boston, 1945, p. 265.

⁷Ibid., pp. 265-266.

⁸Ibid., p. 267.

desirable forms of behavior for undesirable, Terman and Almack stated that:

The drive which eventuates in wrong actions should be directed into approved channels. Rebellion and conflict with authority suggest an unwise and unhealthy condition of restraint. An attempt should be made to obtain free expression of the many and varied interests of the child, and repression will be correspondingly lessened. The teacher who is a good manager is able to secure attention and maintain control without effort, and without the conscious knowledge of the pupil. The program should be so arranged as to require rather intense concentration for a short period on one type of task, to be followed by a shorter period of relaxation, with concentration again on another type of work.⁹

In recent years much emphasis has been placed upon the educational value of social interaction among pupils, and the principle of building a well-knit classroom group has been widely stressed. Beginning teachers have sometimes been advised to start off the school year by asking pupils as a group to formulate and adopt a set of rules of good behavior. This may have been done with too little consideration of the full implications for the problem of maintaining order. In many situations educators must decide to jeopardize or sacrifice order for the sake of educational gains; yet there have been many situations where greater order was a prerequisite for making desired gains.¹⁰

⁹Terman, Lewis M., and Almack, John C., The Hygiene of the School Child, The Riverside Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1929, pp. 337-343.

¹⁰Ladd, Edward T., "The Problem of Keeping Order: Theoretical Help from Two New Fields," Harvard Educational Review, vol. 28, no. 2, Spring, 1958, pp. 137-142.

With this brief picture of the emphasis placed on different discipline objectives, consideration will be given to the discussion of earlier conceptions of discipline.

Earlier Conceptions of Discipline

Until the last decade or so the first two of the previously mentioned objectives of discipline were emphasized to the relative neglect of the third, and the third objective was only realized as one of the disciplinary outcomes of the first two.¹¹ During the period of 1909-1939, literature revealed a criterion considered by many to be the most important for rating teachers. This criterion was the degree of fear that teachers were able to develop in pupils in regard to deviating from standards of behavior acceptable to the staff of the school.

Another criterion that Douglass¹² has considered still important to a lesser degree among educators was the ineffective standards often employed as a means of influencing pupil conduct because these standards met with the approval of the community. Fear of what people would say controlled procedures in many schools to such an extent that the influence on pupils' character and behavior was only dimly envisaged, as revealed in Thorndike's statement: "The question of the disciplinary value of any training is a question of fact to be measured, not an article of

¹¹Douglass, op. cit., p. 226.

¹²Ibid., p. 266.

educational faith to be assumed."¹³

In days gone by the authority of the principal was not conventionally accepted as a matter of course.¹⁴ The methods of discipline were such as to invite the antagonism of the pupils, solidifying them in the common cause of resisting oppression, according to Douglass.¹⁵ With the development of larger schools and saner methods of government a rapid emergence from that state has taken place. The passing concept of the educative value of discipline was associated very closely with training young people in obedience to authority, in doing distasteful things without protest, and in developing patience, endurance, and self-restraint.¹⁶

Believing that all acts are registered permanently on the brain, and that habits formed become part of the personality, James¹⁷ felt that a disciplined education was essential. He maintained that:

The hell to be endured hereafter, of which theology tells, is no worse than the hell we make for ourselves in this world by habitually fashioning our characters in the wrong way. Could the young but realize how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct while in the plastic state.¹⁸

¹³Thorndike, Edward L., Education, The MacMillan Company, New York, 1917, p. 42.

¹⁴Douglass, op. cit., p. 266.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 266.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 266-267.

¹⁷James, William, The Principles of Psychology, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1893, vol. 1, p. 127.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 127.

Though theory and practice as to government of the schools have been in the stage of transition, new values, changes in relative emphasis, and methods adapted accordingly characterize the disciplinary program and procedure of the modern secondary school. In the following section these modern conceptions of discipline will be reviewed.

Modern Conceptions of Discipline

Physically children are maturing earlier. Recent comment by authorities has held that the fourteen- and fifteen-year olds of today are in fact young adults, with adult aspirations, but without a corresponding emotional and intellectual maturity.¹⁹ They are apt to resent the kind of discipline which their less developed predecessors could accept.²⁰

Modern philosophy of school discipline has not contemplated disorder in the school and has not lost sight of the value of having pupils respect authority. In addition, it has not entirely denied the necessities of keeping in mind the prejudices of the local community and the tendency of parents and citizens to criticize the administration of the school for the failure to accomplish with thirty pupils per teacher what they as parents have failed to do with an average of one child per parent.²¹ This current

¹⁹"Changing Child," The Times Educational Supplement, London, January 23, 1959, no. 2279, p. 125.

²⁰Ibid., p. 125.

²¹Douglass, op. cit., p. 267.

philosophy has insisted that these considerations move over and make room in the sun for a new type of objective, an educational objective to which the others should be secondary: order to be maintained in and of itself only so far as is necessary to maintain satisfactory work conditions.²²

Respect for authority should have been at least partly the deserved result of leadership and not merely a forced tribute from a weaker group. The approval of the community should have been the natural outcome of the more modern and effective program of character development and not a primary objective.²³

This review of modern conceptions of discipline has led to a study of an extensive survey of practices in school discipline in the following section.

Practices in School Discipline

During a ten-year study of school discipline--which included visits to over 800 schools in 32 states, interviews with more than 1000 administrators and teachers, and 4000 student-answers to questions relative to school discipline--Vredevoe²⁴ noted certain factors and practices within

²²Ibid., p. 267.

²³Ibid., pp. 267-268.

²⁴Vredevoe, Lawrence E., "Practices in School Discipline," The American School Board Journal, The Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, July, 1959, vol. 139, no. 1, pp. 19-20.

the schools which developed better student-teacher relationship and decreased discipline problems. The factors and practices included:

1. Alert, competent and positive leadership on the part of school administrators.
2. An understanding of the adopted standards and rules, their origin, value, purpose, and their relationship to individual and group welfare and the educational process.
3. Emphasis upon self-discipline on the part of all individuals in the group.
4. Good conduct and citizenship characteristic of the faculty as well as student body. Courtesy, consideration, respect, professional dress and manner, and good speech were practiced by faculty members.
5. Standards and rules that were subject to review and change but enforced until changed by due process.
6. The emphasis in treatment of all discipline cases upon the individual involved and not the act. This represents a significant change in secondary school discipline theory in the past 50 years.
7. That students could expect fair but certain reprimand or punishment for violation of rules or standards.
8. Faculty and student cooperation in establishing, maintaining, and revising rules and standards.
9. The school's program was challenging to all groups.²⁵

Students questioned about discipline practices which they believed created the best relationships with faculty members mentioned the following in the order of their frequency:

1. Interpreting the reasons and purposes of the rules.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 19-20.

2. Fairness in enforcement.
3. Treatment which recognized maturity of student.
4. Consistency in enforcement.
5. Enforcement without embarrassment whenever possible.
6. Observance of the rules by teachers.
7. Opportunity to participate in making rules in areas where students are capable.
8. Elimination of waste of time of the many for the need to discipline the few. Students believed that some teachers spent too much time during the class period with discipline cases which should have been taken at another time.
9. Making the work so challenging that the students will be kept busy and interested.
10. Conduct on the part of the teachers which demonstrated competence in dealing with adolescents. Teachers who could win the respect of their students.²⁶

The following were characteristics of teachers that Vredevoe found had the least trouble with discipline in their classrooms:

1. Competent in teaching area
2. Knowledge of biological, sociological, and psychological characteristics of adolescents
3. Sense of security in position, administrative relations, and parental and public relations
4. Professional conduct, manners and appearance
5. Sincere interest in adolescence and teaching²⁷

²⁶Ibid., p. 21.

²⁷Ibid., p. 21.

In regard to the fundamental law of discipline, the statement was: "Plan definitely for discipline and then carry out your plan."²⁸

The review of literature revealed that good discipline was essential to having good schools. Practices which brought about better student-teacher relationships were those not so much related to the punishment of the transgressors but to methods of development and interpretation of the standards of the rules.

Having surveyed the characteristics, factors, and practices of school discipline, the next procedure was to determine the general discipline theories of the past fifty years and to examine attitudes of today. These results are reported in Chapter III.

²⁸ Heinmiller, Louis E., A First Book in Education, The Century Company, New York & London, 1925, p. 151.

CHAPTER III

GENERAL DISCIPLINE THEORIES OF THE PAST FIFTY YEARS

Literature was examined to determine general discipline theories in the past fifty years. It seemed very important to do this because disciplinary problems have ranked near the top in all surveys of teachers' difficulties and the problem of discipline has been the center of most school criticism.

Cutts and Moseley²⁹ have attempted to categorize the many writers and theorists into one of four schools. Their first school has refused to recognize discipline as a problem--or even to use the word. The authors of some of the most popular textbooks on curriculum and methods have belonged to this group. They have spoken of "classroom control," or "classroom management," or even "the so-called problem of discipline." They have implied that the teacher who practices what they preach will always have the full co-operation of all of his pupils. Teacher and class will always plan and work together happily and purposefully. Cutts and Moseley felt that perhaps these writers never have had to teach an over-aggressive child whose main purposes seemed to have been to hurt other pupils, avoid work, and irritate the teacher.³⁰

²⁹Cutts, Norma E., and Mosely, Nicholas, "Four Schools of School Discipline--A Synthesis," School and Society, vol. 87, no. 2148, February 28, 1959, p. 87.

³⁰Ibid., p. 87.

In contrast, the second, or "traditional," school outlined by Cutts and Moseley has believed that the only way to maintain good order is to punish all transgressors promptly and, if necessary, severely.³¹ If this were done, there would be little disorder in school and little delinquency out of school. The trouble, the traditionalists have stated, was that a combination of parental permissiveness and progressive education has produced a generation that does not know the meaning of discipline.

The adherents of the third school have granted that children do on occasion behave disruptively, and they may have granted that a measure of control was necessary for the sake of other children.³² They stated that problems will disappear if the teacher can accept the child's behavior as a method of releasing tensions. The principal cause of disorder, according to this school, was teacher domination, which piled frustration on frustration and resulted in rebellion.

The fourth school maintained the principle of mental hygiene that all misbehavior was a symptom, and that, if the teacher can find the cause and correct it, the child will reform.³³ Common causes were said to be ill health, a curriculum that is too easy or too hard for the individual, and a cracked or broken home.

³¹Ibid., p. 87.

³²Ibid., p. 87.

³³Ibid., p. 87.

Celler³⁴ has reminded the teacher that if he or she were skillful enough to inspire the majority of the class with a desire to learn, little trouble from disorders would occur. Confident in the co-operation of the class as a whole, the teacher would be able to deal with the individual offender calmly. Celler mentioned that the teacher who firmly and consistently maintains good order has been regarded by the class as a good friend. The majority of students have felt secure and were encouraged to undertake adventures in growth because they knew they would not be allowed to go too far. Celler expressed that the troubled pupil welcomed a restraint which strengthens his efforts to control himself.

Schmehl³⁵ had indicated that boys and girls must learn that to be respected, they must be respectable, and that nobody can really be respectable unless they have enough self-respect to want to do the best they can for themselves; that is, to improve themselves.

Attempting to categorize Eckert's³⁶ lecture, "Discipline 1959--The Three-Dimensional Approach" to one of the four schools of school discipline mentioned above became a perplexing, if not impossible, problem. This new approach to discipline will be discussed in the following section.

³⁴Celler, Sidney L., "Practices for Effective Discipline," The Phi Delta Kappan, Fulton, Missouri, vol. 32, no. 9, May, 1951, pp. 389-390.

³⁵Schmehl, Carl E. W., "Freedom Unlimited," Baltimore Bulletin of Education, Baltimore, vol. 34, no. 1, November, 1956, pp. 25-26.

³⁶Eckert, Ralph G., "Discipline 1959--The Three-Dimensional Approach," in Report of Family Life Conference, Montana State College, Bozeman, June 22-26, 1959, p. 15.

Discipline 1959--The Three-Dimensional Approach

The morning session of the Ninth Annual Family Life Conference of June 25, 1959, presented a new insight into modern discipline theory--an approach not duplicated by other specialists in the field.

Eckert commenced his lecture with an introduction pertaining to the problems of discipline. He said:

Under the authoritarian method of discipline, people didn't worry about what it would do to the individual, simply bringing up children as they had been brought up. Freud's discoveries pertaining to the unconscious led to a fear of mishandling children which dominated discipline until Spock began urging parents to trust themselves.

Gesell's theory of permissive discipline produced the realization that children do not learn self-discipline unless they themselves are disciplined and that they gain satisfaction from discipline through the realization of goals. As Erick Fromm illustrated in his book Escape from Freedom, a democracy needs disciplined people, not the kind of conformists Germany produced, who twice brought war upon the world.³⁷

People working with youngsters have been in the midst of a dynamic concept of discipline. In meeting with a group of teachers who had been working on problems of discipline without much success, Eckert devised, as a basis of discussion, the three-dimensional approach, appearing to gain a fuller description:

At birth the child is incapable of making decisions, so they are made for him. This is called the area of "Law"; this

³⁷Ibid., p. 15.

area is not debatable. It is also a necessary part of the older child's environment, including the things he must do, such as going to bed at a certain time.

On the other side of the road is "Freedom"--freedom of choice for the child to do as he pleases unless there is good reason why he shouldn't. This is in contrast to the authoritarian method of discipline which prompts a mother to tell an older child to go see what the younger child is doing and tell him to stop doing it. It is important, however, not to give the child a choice if there isn't one and not to give him choices he is incapable of making. The older a child gets, the less apt he is to complete something if he is interrupted, which may be the result of our interrupting him too often. It is important to give the child warning when he is going to be interrupted, out of respect for his determination and in mental preparation for an act, since abrupt interruption can cause resentment.

Somewhere between two and three years of age a child can begin to be given choices and to make a "Decision after Discussion." About this time "They All Say No," or should, because it is a natural expression of their individuality. This is the time to gradually increase decision after discussion. At an older age, children can be given opportunities to make group decisions in the classroom. A school should not be all "Law" nor all "Freedom": a more balanced environment will be beneficial to the child in making decisions.³⁸

A preview of the four schools of discipline and the new three-dimensional approach has revealed that just as there are no formulas for good discipline, so there are no short cuts. Discipline is part of a life-long process. Good discipline calls for the willingness on the faculty to devote time and understanding to their pupils.

A summary of findings and conclusions drawn from the material reviewed are presented in Chapter IV.

³⁸Ibid., p. 15.

CHAPTER IV
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.

Summary

There are scarcely any factors more important to a teacher than the ability to control the class. Discipline implies control.

Changes which have taken place in the objectives and principles of discipline were centered largely around the increased emphasis placed on permanent educational values as compared with emphasis placed on maintaining order in schools.

In many situations educators must decide to sacrifice order for the sake of educational gains; yet there have been many situations where greater order was a prerequisite for making desired gains.

Earlier conceptions of discipline were such as to have invited the antagonism of pupils, solidifying them in resisting oppression. During the period of 1909-1939, literature revealed a most important criterion for rating teachers--the degree of fear they were able to develop in pupils in regard to deviating from acceptable standards of behavior.

Modern conceptions of discipline have denoted order to be maintained in and of itself only so far as necessary to have provided for satisfactory work conditions. The fundamental law of discipline is: "Plan definitely for discipline and then carry out your plan."

General discipline theories of the past fifty years have revealed the four following schools of thought: (1) Refusal to recognize discipline

as a problem; (2) Maintenance of good order by punishing all transgressors promptly and, if necessary, severely; (3) Measure of control necessary for the sake of other children; (4) Correction of symptoms of misbehavior and the child will reform.

The Three-Dimensional Approach of handling discipline problems has disclosed that the school should not be all "Law" nor all "Freedom" but a more balanced environment that benefited the child in making decisions.

Conclusions

Good conduct and good citizenship should begin with the faculty members. Competence on the part of teachers who have a feeling of confidence and security is basic in developing good relationships with students. Whenever punishment or disciplinary measures are required they should be suited to the individual rather than to the transgression. Fairness, consistency, and understanding should be characteristic of teachers in their treatment of disciplinary cases. Good discipline and teacher-student relationships are largely results of intelligent, co-operative, continuing, and united efforts on the part of all staff members and student leaders.

The general attitude toward the handling of disciplinary infractions today does not favor either "perfect order and respect at all costs" or "the freedom of pupils to do as they please." Instead, it favors the guiding of pupils to do what they should without too much compulsion and always with a keen eye on the probable long-time effects upon the pupil.

The school treatment of discipline must be planned in the light of other factors outside the school which are influencing the pupils' behavior. Most important of all in discipline is to keep pupils busy doing worthwhile things that they like to do. This is both the "calories" and the "vitamins" for the nourishment of a healthy personality and good social character.

The belief is that teachers will have achieved decisive results only in so far as they conduct themselves in a fashion somewhat appealing or rewarding to their pupils. That belief seems to be confirmed by general findings. The school youngster has a well-developed sense of fair play; he appreciates a square deal.

The analysis of reports in literature reveals that discipline is not a special code. Discipline is not a stock of punishments to be used only when the student's behavior is displeasing. Childhood experiences prove that lessons in discipline are best learned when feelings are warmest and most cordial.

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