

STATE AND DEVELOPING OF DISCIPLINE AT LOVER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Discipline is essential in class. Without it the educational process is difficult if not impossible. In this manner students and teachers will not meet curricula goals. There are and there will always be some kind of conflicts between teachers and students, but they should not evolve to become a problem that threatens achieving curricula aims. Teachers (especially elderly teachers) often express pessimism about contemporary students. They say that today's students have less knowledge and that they misbehave more often than previous generations.

A research was conducted among students which tried to determine the rate of discipline in schools in Celje to see if these statements are true. Questionnaires were distributed to students of one primary and one high school in Celje, Slovenia. Answers were collected from 234 students. On the one hand, it was found out that senior high school students have the worst level of discipline of all the grades involved in the study. They themselves assess their class atmosphere as less disciplined. They report that teachers use a lot of time to calm the class down. All this is probably a factor in lower average mark that the senior high school students report to have. On the other hand, it was found out that teachers do not react to the disturbance or they are trying to be repressive. These are not the correct ways of dealing with discipline issues.

Keywords: *state of discipline, contemporary students, discipline problems.*

Introduction

Before a young teacher first sets foot in a classroom he/she is only focused on what and how to teach. Discipline is not in his focus but if he wants to fulfill the curricula objectives he will have to demand at least some level of discipline in class. Discipline is a set of preventive techniques that support student's self-control and help to lower the number of conflicts (Bluestein, 1997). Discipline acquisitions are preventive and corrective activities. Narrowly speaking it means activities that we conduct when there are discipline problems. In broader meaning discipline means to set up and to maintain a system that allows educational process in a class (Pšunder, 2004).

Only a few decades ago it was fairly easy for teachers to resolve discipline problems by, for example, administering a corporal punishment. For a long time, it was socially acceptable that teachers could spank a child. A corporal punishment was considered as a part of education. One of the biggest milestones in this field was Convention on the Rights of the Child (General Assembly UN, 1989) which defined a child as a person with human dignity. Childhood was marked as a privileged and protected life period. A child got the right to voice his opinion. In terms of discipline the Convention on the Rights of the Child sets that discipline in schools has to be enforced in a way that respects human dignity. Not only this means that you cannot use corporal punishment but when restoring discipline, you have to consider human dignity of a child (Pšunder, 2004).



Many teachers encounter discipline problems during their work in classroom. It is somehow expected that conflicts and problems occur between students and teachers. According to Slovene literary language dictionary (Fran Ramovš Institute of the Slovenian Language, 2014) conflict is a spiritual state of helplessness because of contradicting interests. Rebellious nature of youngsters searching their identity often results in misbehaving in class. They interrupt the efficiency of a group or individual work with their behavior (Wirth, 2016). If there are too many such distractions in the classroom, the discipline problem emerges.

Conventional discipline methods for restoring order in the classroom that are available to teachers have drawbacks. These methods are: lectures (preaching), threats, rewards, punishment, comparison, anger, criticism, corporal punishment (no longer permitted), commands, note to parents, sending the child to principal's office (Koenig, 2008). Teachers should not enforce discipline by conventional disciplinary methods because they may have the opposite effect. The punished student often does not understand his/her faults and regards the punishment as his failure and handicap. Instead, as Chelsom Gossen and Amstutz and Mullet recommend, teachers should use restitution. Restitution means to correct wrongdoing or damage. Biblical principle "an eye for an eye" does not provide positive effect either. Restitution gives the victim a proper compensation and the perpetrator a way to repent himself in the different ways. In that way restitution tries to inhibit further mistakes and misbehavior (Chelsom Gossen, 1993) (Amstutz & Mullet, 2005).

A disciplinary climate is positively related to student performance, therefore at least some level of discipline should be demanded in class. The orderly environment helps students' performance and weakens the impact of students' socio-economic status on performance (OECD, 2011) (OECD, 2013). Based on the results of PISA 2003 survey there is a statistically important and non-trivial link between disciplinary suitable environment and the results of mathematical test in countries of Canada, Denmark and Norway. This survey was conducted between youngsters of age 15 (Sortkaer & Reimer, 2016). Fortunately, a PISA survey (OECD, 2010) found out that most students from participating countries enjoy order in the classrooms.

Without the basic level of discipline in class the educational process is nearly impossible. This research was conducted in order to determine the rate of disciplinary problems in schools in Celje, Slovenia. Hopefully its results and suggestions will help to improve the level of discipline and consequentially contribute to the educational process.

Methodology of Research

General Background

This research is a local case study. Case study is a specific research strategy which is frequently used to describe general principle. Case study enables us to examine a bounded system (for example a class, a clique, a school, a community etc.). It provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract principles. One of their strengths is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognizing that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects. In that manner case studies can establish cause and effect (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Research lasted from April to June 2016.

Sample Selection

An anonymous research was conducted among students of one primary school (student age from 6 to 14) and one high school (student age from 15 to 18) in Celje, Slovenia. Answers were adopted from 234 students. In focus were students of age 13, 14, 15 and 18 of one primary school and one high school. Students of age 13 and 14 are at the end of primary education. Students of age 15 began their secondary education and students of age 18 are at the end of their secondary education. Questionnaires were distributed to students in focus. 234 of them responded, therefore our results cannot be representative for the whole student population. Representativeness is a property of a sample which tells us that the sample is similar to the primary base (Kožuh, 2009) (Kožuh, 2013).

Instrument and Procedures

The tool used in research was a questionnaire. Questionnaire has to be reliable, applicable and objective (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The individuals who conduct a research must not affect the results of the analysis. The repeated research with the same questionnaire and the same sample must yield the same results. Questionnaire has 13 questions. These questions have closed answers. Some of them have an option of an open answer to clarify the selected closed answer. Questionnaires were distributed to the students to acquire their answer. The data gathered with the questionnaire were then analyzed.

Data Analysis

Data were processed using quantitative methods. Statistical qualitative methods were used only for open answers (open answers are summarized). Because of the small, but random, sample descriptive statistics was used. Frequency distribution was employed for the analysis. Despite the sample is too small to be representative and the research results cannot be generalized to the whole population it shows us some tendencies in level of discipline in schools.

Results of Research

Structure of tested population can be seen in table 1. Quantitative results can be seen in table 2 and in figures 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Table 1. Tested population.

| Students | Student age | Number |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| 8 th grade primary school | 13 | 62 |
| 9 th grade primary school | 14 | 42 |
| 1 st grade high school | 15 | 59 |
| 4 th grade high school | 18 | 71 |



Results in columns 8th, 9th, 1st, and 4th grade are represented in percentages [%].

Table 2. Quantitative results.

| Statements | Possible answer | 8 th | 9 th | 1 st | 4 th |
|--|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| State your gender | Male | 53 | 60 | 69 | 80 |
| | Female | 47 | 40 | 31 | 20 |
| State the number of students in your class | 15-20 | 0 | 0 | 50 | 1 |
| | 21-25 | 68 | 52 | 2 | 1 |
| | 26-30 | 32 | 48 | 48 | 98 |
| | 31-35 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Assess of the class atmosphere | Very good (5) | 13 | 5 | 54 | 5 |
| | Good (4) | 62 | 62 | 30 | 21 |
| | Bearable (3) | 19 | 31 | 14 | 47 |
| | Bad (2) | 5 | 2 | 0 | 27 |
| | Very bad (1) | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Assess your school | Easy | 40 | 73 | 31 | 68 |
| | Difficult | 60 | 27 | 69 | 32 |
| Usage of cellphone during class without teacher's permission | I never use cellphone during class | 82 | 69 | 34 | 4 |
| | I use cellphone at some classes | 18 | 31 | 50 | 69 |
| | I use cellphone at every class | 0 | 0 | 26 | 27 |
| Disturbance of class by you | I am that one that disturbs class | 11 | 3 | 5 | 6 |
| | I am not that one that disturbs class | 89 | 97 | 95 | 94 |
| Disturbance of class by other students | I am disturbed when others disturb class | 69 | 83 | 37 | 48 |
| | I am not disturbed when others disturb class | 31 | 17 | 63 | 52 |
| Disturbance of class in other ways | Class is disturbed in other ways | 2 | 2 | 9 | 13 |
| | Class is not disturbed in other ways | 98 | 98 | 91 | 87 |
| Appropriateness of teachers' reaction | Appropriate | 79 | 100 | 81 | 42 |
| | Inappropriate | 21 | 0 | 19 | 58 |

Marks are spanned from 1 (insufficient) to 5 (excellent). Better average marks are reported by primary school students in comparison to high school students (Figure 1).

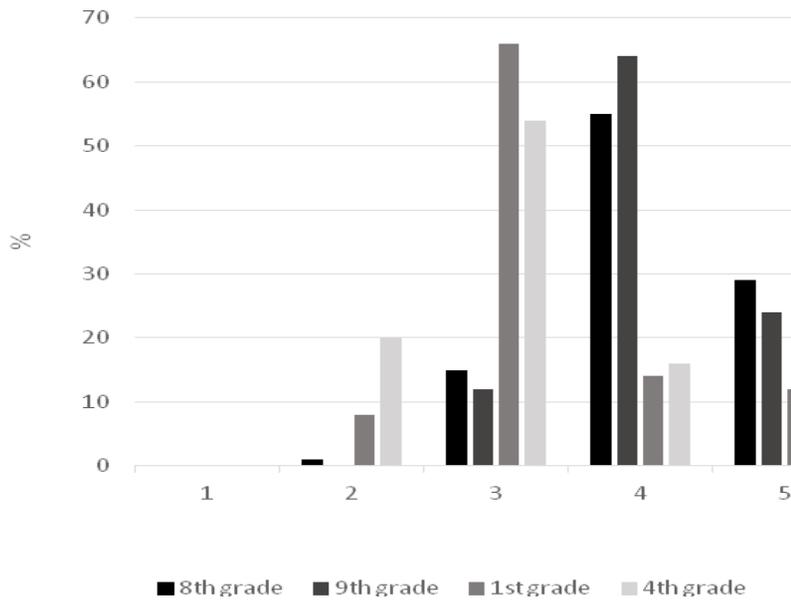


Figure 1: Average mark stated by the students that took part in a research.

4th grade high school students in greater percent than any other tested grade report that teachers use 50 % or more time for a lesson to calm the class down, so they can continue their work (Figure 2).

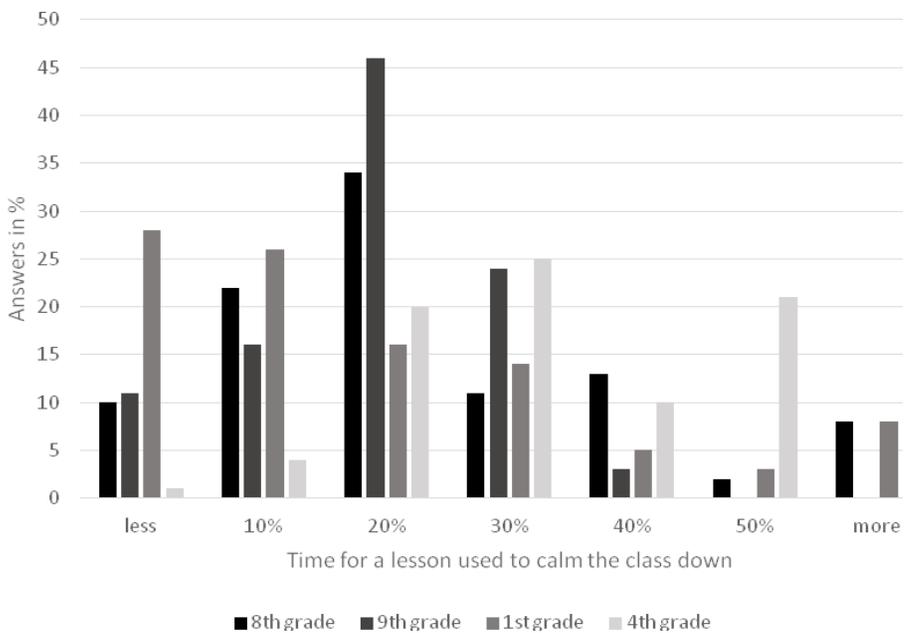


Figure 2: Time (in percentages of a time for a lesson) used to calm the class down stated by the students.



4th grade high school students in greater percent than any other tested grade answered that they do not obey every teacher equally (Figure 3).

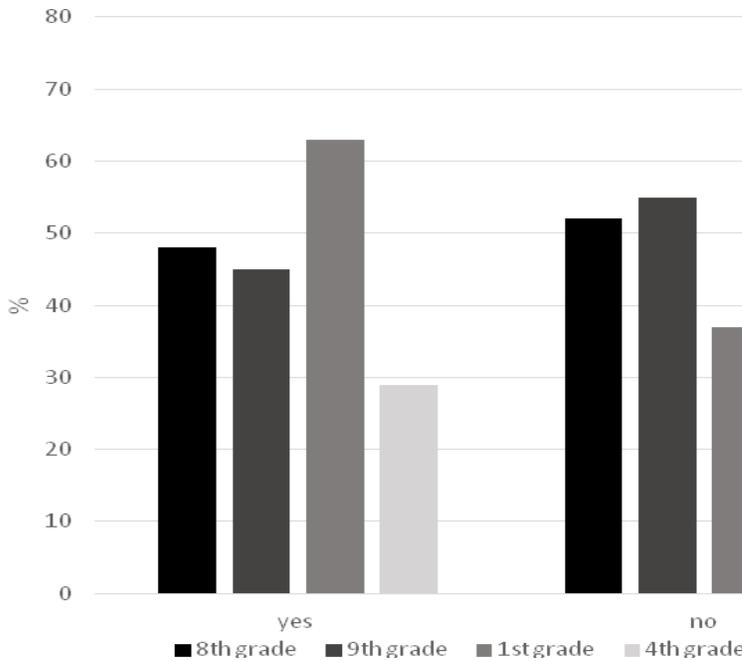


Figure 3: Results to the question “Do you obey every teacher equally?”

4th grade high school students in greater percent than any other tested grade answered that they speak without teacher’s permission at every class (Figure 4).

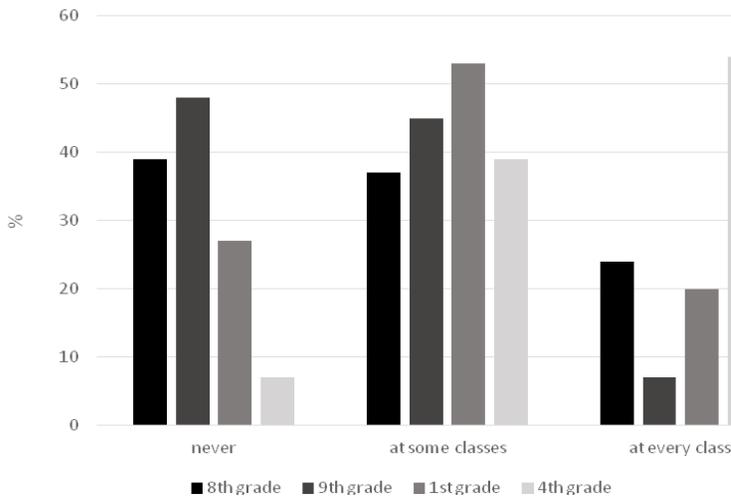


Figure 4: Speaking during class without teacher’s permission.

The open answers give us an interesting insight into the core of the conflicts. Students who answered that they do not obey every teacher equally established that they do so because some teachers demand less of them or they do not do anything about their misbehavior. Students that stated that they do chat during class without teacher's permission explained that they do so if the subject is easy. When asked how your teacher reacts when class is disturbed, students told us that teachers do not react to the disturbance in class or they are trying to be repressive. Students wrote that some teachers are yelling at them, calling them names, logging unjustified absence from the class to the troublesome students, sending them out of the classroom etc. These are signs of teacher's lack of authority.

Discussion

Results show that average marks in 8th and 9th grade of primary school are higher than average grades in 1st and 4th grade of high school. 75% of 8th graders assessed class atmosphere as very good or good. 9th graders did so in 67% and 1st graders in 84%. Only 26% of 4th graders assessed their class atmosphere as good or very good. Senior high school students in general assess their class atmosphere as less disciplined (more than 70% of them do not obey every teacher equally and they speak during class without teacher's permission more than any other tested grade) and their teachers use bigger percentage of lesson to calm them down. The reason for such behavior may be the fact that the senior students are going to leave the school and they are anxious because of the further challenges. At the same time the freshmen are new to the school and are still scared of a new environment. To verify the correctness of this assumption there should be more researches conducted with bigger sample from various years. The results of such research could show us where and when the pedagogical conflicts start and prepare us for the necessary corrective actions to prevent escalation of the conflicts to a problem.

What can teachers do?

- Give the students list of rules. Students should participate in the making of these rules.
- Be consistent and principled (Pšunder, 2004).
- Connect the punishment to the crime (for example if students litter they have to clean up the classroom, if they are late they have to stay after class ...).
- Perpetrator must be punished immediately after the crime because delayed punishment has no effect.
- Dress according to your profession.
- Avoid confrontation. Minor disputes can potentially escalate the war between students and teacher.
- Do not threaten that you will call parents. Just call them.
- Do not react to every minor incident. Before reacting leave yourself some seconds to think about it.
- Ask your colleagues for advice (Rubinstein, 2012).
- Use "teacher's look". Just look at the student for a second. This method is effective because it solves problems without confrontation (Rubinstein, 2012) (Koenig, 2008).



- Do not try to outyell the students. Whisper.
- Write a note to parents.
- Arrange a counseling session.
- Deliver “I” messages (Koenig, 2008).

Conclusions

Schools where this research was conducted have disciplinary problems. Results cannot be generalized due to a small sample but based on experience similar results can be expected in most schools. In our society it is hard to imagine a school which has absolutely no discipline problems. Students know their teachers and their boundaries and act upon them. Very few students admitted that they are the ones who create the disturbances in the class. Teachers should demand at least some level of discipline during class. Only in that manner students can be expected to meet curricula goals. All in all, teachers should use preventive activities to avoid discipline problems. It is best to prevent these problems before they emerge.

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