Editorial: Research on school discipline

The proper functioning of any social system, including schools, requires the regulation of the behavior of its members. This regulation is achieved through rules and social norms, the abidance of which (discipline) is required. Conformity to norms, which are there to allow the proper functioning of society, is a characteristic attribute of democracy. Indiscipline weakens a society's accepted social norms and can lead to anarchy and the gradual destruction of said society.

Discipline in schools is an evergreen topic. In the last decades it has been a repeatedly occurring theme on the TV and in film productions, in newspaper articles, and discussions in families and among school staff. It is a topic that polarizes the opinions of the discussants being them teachers, students' parents, or the wider public.

The variability of opinions on discipline, which are sometimes even contradictory, is connected to the fact that the issue of discipline relates to the most fundamental questions about education. The theory and practice of school discipline has undergone a complex historical development, in which it is possible to observe its shifting between freer conceptions and stricter ones. This supports the principle that the optimal conception of discipline leads to both the synthesis of and harmony between individual freedom and the demands of society as a whole, which regulates and reasonably restricts freedom. It is in accordance with Goethe's famous idea, that the moral strength of an individual is in his/her ability to restrict his/her own desires. Nowadays, under the influence of very dynamic social development, many values (even traditional ones) are being destroyed. Among other issues, the problem that the issue of discipline has become vague has arisen.

The issue of discipline is hard to grasp scientifically, both theoretically and empirically. Nowadays there exist a wide range of "white spots" (insufficiently mapped areas) related to school discipline, ranging from the philosophical, anthropological, biological, sociological, legislative, ethical, and psychological aspects of (in)discipline in society and schools to the factors behind misbehavior, including the relationship of discipline to religious and cultural customs in different countries and world-regions, post-modern ethos, or the effectiveness of school disciplinary prevention programs and the issues of self-discipline and self-control.

Discipline is an electrifying topic, but at the same time it is a topic both theoretically and empirically dissuasive. The complexity of discipline is caused, among other things, by the fact that the phenomenon of discipline is conditioned both historically and socially. We can observe how discipline is conditioned by historical period, religion, type of social organization, the production, technical, educational and moral level of a society, or even the climatic conditions or the prevalent way of obtaining food in that particular society.

Furthermore, discipline represents both a situational category and an instrument. It is not bad or good on its own. It always depends on the historical and social context, the given situation and particular conditions. Furthermore, discipline is not only the aim (in the sense of morality) of education, but also its precondition, instrument, and result.

Based on what has been mentioned above it is clear, that in the area of conscious conformity to norms, i.e. discipline or school discipline, there are more questions than there are answers, more question marks than exclamation marks. These questions, however, are not caused by lesser skills of researchers in social sciences, but by the overall complexity of the phenomena of (in)discipline. Consider, as an example, the question of the causes of or factors influencing misbehavior. The problems with the detection of the factors (and the degree to which they influence the behavior of an individual) stem from the theoretical assumption that the same type of misbehavior can be caused by different factors and different relationships among those factors. On the other hand, the same factors can cause different types of misbehavior under different conditions.

The content of this monothematic issue consists of five papers: four studies and one discussion paper. The authors are researchers from the U.S., Poland and the Czech Republic.

Jiří Mareš in his overview study reviews 121 publications on student indiscipline from the Euro-American sociocultural environment between 1986 and 2017. He focuses on the definition of and types of indiscipline in schools; a variety of factors influencing student indiscipline; approaches to student indiscipline assessment; and the consequences of student indiscipline. The author also presents three conceptual approaches to solving student school indiscipline.

Boguslaw Sliwerski in his study analyzes the term discipline in alternative schools world-wide. He tries, among other things, to answer the question, whether there is a difference between the assumptions and practices of education in public and alternative schools. The core of his study is an analysis of discipline in the context of authoritarian education, anti-authoritarian and democratic education, schools of freedom, and self-education. The author focuses his attention on the current situation for teachers while emphasizing the broadening of both the concepts behind alternative schools and concepts of school discipline.

Stanislav Bendl, Hana Vonkova, Ondrej Papajoanu, and Eva Vankatova in their paper present methodological approaches to school misbehavior measurement. They also discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the respective approaches especially with regards to large-scale school misbehavior measurement. In this context the authors propose an innovative approach that would combine student self-reports and peer-reports of school misbehavior with the anchoring vignette method.

Robert H. Horner and Manuel Monzalve Macaya present a whole school approach to establishing safe and disciplined school environments called Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). They summarize the core features of the approach across three tiers of support in PBIS and review empirical support for the approach and its implementation. The authors also discuss some "lessons learned" about the implementation of the approach in schools.

The final discussion paper by Michal Zvírotský is focused on self-discipline. The author perceives self-discipline as an important educational category and at the same time a virtue, even though it might appear that this has vanished from contemporary educational discourse, despite the fact that many theoretical texts on education consider it to be the goal of educational activity.

We hope that the papers contained in this monothematic issue will provide interesting stimuli for readers when thinking about the issue of discipline. The phenomena of discipline is, however, that complex and multi-layered that it would deserve an (almost) infinite series of monothematic issues dedicated to it, to explore it fully.

Stanislav Bendl, Hana Vonkova