

THE DUAL MEANING OF THE TERM "DISCIPLINE"

Dr. Morton Tener
Associate Professor
Glassboro State College
Glassboro, New Jersey
Associate Secretary
The Curriculum Development Council
for Southern New Jersey

This article attempts to illustrate that the term "discipline" can have positive implications.

At present, discipline to most children and most adults is a negative word, at least it has decidedly unpleasant connotations. It has become synonymous with the word punishment. The degeneration of the meaning of the term probably reflects the practices resorted to and attitudes held by many teachers and parents.

An analogy can be made between the terms adjustment and discipline. Two teachers may agree on the definition of adjustment—to bring in proper relationships, — but they may disagree on the interpretation of adjustment. To one individual, adjustment may be described as conforming; to another, adjustment may indicate overt spontaneous behavior. As with the term discipline, two parents or teachers may agree on the definition of the term—to regulate and control—but they may be worlds apart in respect to its interpretation.

Too often discipline is concerned with procedures for compelling the child or adolescent to act in prescribed ways dictated by the parent or teacher with little consideration of the method used, or its effect upon the child concerned. So, here we see discipline as a controlling agent and a possible punishing agent.

Discipline, as defined by Webster, is the training which conditions the behavior of an individual. Unfortunately, discipline has often been used by adults to restrict natural inclinations. But, when adults can see discipline as a conditioning agent and not as a controlling agent, no longer will the word discipline and punishment be used interchangeably.

Behavior patterns are a result of prior conditioning. This conditioning, if properly applied, can lead to future positive actions on the part of young people. Too often in discussions of discipline, we concentrate upon a specific act and talk of this behavior situation as being indicative of an individual behaving "good or bad" instead of thinking about direction that can be given to children.

How can parents and teachers condition for positive behavior?

Learning "that" is not automatically related to learning "why." A child may learn that a certain code of behavior is expected in a specific situation, but learning a code of behavior does not guarantee that the learner comprehends the reason for conforming or realizes the results of not conforming to the code. Learning "why" provides one with insight and has implications for learning.

This last point brings us back to the concept of positive discipline. A learning situation which concentrates upon "why" is goal oriented, and, in turn, enhance self-discipline. This type of climate is one in which students know, recognize, accept and practice acceptable standards of conduct. These standards cannot be taken for granted, but must be consciously developed and maintained.

Emphasis upon self-discipline may seem idealistic, but the majority of our students demonstrate its presence daily when standards are reasonable and understood. When the individual recognizes that certain demands are necessary so that the greatest good for the greatest number can be realized, and when one understands the purpose and values of certain behavior patterns, one can be depended upon to make a sincere attempt to adjust.

Possibly in the near future educators and lay people will take this controversial word discipline and promote a uniform, positive interpretation and make it a valuable instrument when dealing with children.

The Cooper-Grant PTA of Camden City has many Spanish speaking people in their membership. This year the president, Mr. Roland Taylor, has a Spanish interpreter as a vice president. The business meeting is given in English then translated into Spanish. At their Founders Day meeting, several 25 year pins were presented. All of the proceedings were translated into Spanish and presented so all members present could understand the meaning of the gifts. The attendance at the Cooper-Grant PTA meetings has improved this year. It is the feeling of the president that having a Spanish translator encourages the Spanish members to attend and participate, as they are able to understand what is taking place at the meetings.



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