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DISCIPLINARY REACTIONS OF TEACHERS TOWARDS STUDENTS IN DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL INTERACTION AREAS

Key words: teacher, pupil, disciplinary interactions, school discipline.

ABSTRACT

The aims of the study were to establish what kind of problems teachers encounter during lessons and other situations connected with school work, in what educational areas teachers may encounter some dysfunctional and pathological behaviours of students, and what are their reactions in such situations. Two groups of teachers took part in the study. One group consisted of physical education teachers and the other of teachers of other subjects. In general, in all educational interaction areas, non-PE teachers used verbal disapproval, took students to task, and gave marks for students' bad behaviour more often than PE teachers, who more frequently used nonverbal reactions, excluded students from classrooms, made accurate remarks, turned the situation into a joke and gave students subject marks. It is also possible to enumerate universal reactions used by teachers from both groups such as notifying the class teacher, serious talks with individual students and individual reprimands of students.

INTRODUCTION

Among the problems of modern schools maintaining order and discipline seems to be most significant. The present-day image of school is totally different from the one parents of our students remember, e.g. school janitors securing the entrance to the school and knowing all the students by their first names have been replaced with magnetic doors and monitoring systems. However, the greatest change has occurred inside schools, not only in terms of school organization but also in the sphere of relations between students and teachers. For example, in most schools there are procedures regarding students leaving classes earlier, teachers during the breaks are obliged to monitor toilets and monitoring systems prevent any kind of students' dysfunctional behaviour. Some schools employ

professional security agencies which maintain safety and peace at school. Other schools organize special training sessions on drugs and aggression among pupils and on ways of maintaining discipline in class.

An analysis made by American researchers proves that maintaining discipline is the biggest problem modern teachers have to face. According to Veenman [21], teachers who have just started working are the most prone to disciplinary and pathological problems connected with students. Polish teachers deal with the same problem; however, its scale is not as big as in the United States and Western European countries. In fact, problems with maintaining discipline occur not only among novice teachers but also among their more experienced colleagues [17].

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In recent years, relations between students and teachers have altered in Poland and this change has truly resembled a social revolution. The democratic system and free market has made people more equal, especially, in the social sphere. Consequently, we have achieved equal rights to express our opinions, sympathies, beliefs and views. In Robertson's view [18], the rights of pupils and teachers have become equal. Because of that, dysfunctional behaviours of pupils such as loud expressions of discontentment, criticizing and expressing disapproval of teachers, or ignoring aggressively (directly or indirectly) teachers' orders have become very common. More and more often teachers have to deal with aggressive students who are not eager to learn, and to cooperate with parents who are not necessarily objective and who blame teachers for their children's problems.

These negative tendencies affect contemporary schools and relations between teachers and students. The reasons for this situation are innumerable. The teacher is no longer the guide of pupils in the world of established values. Today everything becomes questionable. If good education does no longer guarantee good jobs, pupils begin to question the usefulness of knowledge they have to acquire. The role of a teacher is losing its significance.

This present study examines teacher-student relations as well as relations between their worlds. According to many researchers [19, 15] there are more misunderstandings, tensions and lack of understanding for the needs, feelings and emotions between the worlds of students and teachers than ever before.

METHODS

The aims of the study was to establish what kind of problems teachers can encounter during lessons as well as in other situations connected with school work; in what educational areas teachers may encounter some dysfunctional and pathological behaviour of pupils and what are teachers' reactions in such situations.

Two groups of teachers were examined. One group consisted of physical education teachers and the other of teachers of other subjects. The division into the two groups was based on different reactions to stressful situations and disciplinary problems in class displayed by the two groups of

teachers. For example, mathematics teachers, expect their pupils to sit in silence throughout the whole lesson, restrain from unnecessary movements and listen to the teacher. On the other hand, during PE classes pupils are expected to energize themselves and stimulate spheres otherwise forbidden during other classes. PE classes are characterized by students' freedom of behaviour, dynamism of lesson stages, and what is important, psychological relaxation. Despite the differences between these two types of classes, they share one aspect: teachers' similar position in treating students' dysfunctional behaviour. Aggressive behaviour of any kind towards fellow students and teachers should be perceived by teachers of all subjects as a serious violation, and in such situations an appropriate reaction from teachers is necessary.

The aim of the study was to examine differences and similarities between the ways discipline is perceived by teachers of physical education and teachers of other subjects. More precisely, the research aimed to define in what kinds of school situations teachers from both groups participate, and what kinds of reactions they prefer while dealing with the same educational situation. The following research question was posed: Do PE teachers and teachers of other subjects differ with regard to the type and frequency of disciplinary reactions they use? The research hypothesis was that that a teacher's professional category (PE vs. other subjects) diversifies the type and the number of disciplinary interactions used in class.

Independent variables were both professional categories of teachers as indicated on questionnaire forms. Dependent variables consisted of disciplinary interventions used by teachers inside and outside school as well as the number of disciplinary reactions made by teachers. Both sets of variables were examined by means of the author's own questionnaire.

During their professional careers teachers encounter various reactions of pupils in situations inside and outside school. In such situations they have to make pupils alter their behaviour or undertake intervention not only during lessons, but also outside school, where theoretically the teacher's authority does not reach.

The following five areas of interactions between teachers and pupils, each involving some

kind of a hierarchical relationship between teachers and students, were distinguished:

1. Regular lessons, during which pupils can in innumerable ways disturb classes by causing some disciplinary problems. Here, the role of the teacher is to bring order to the class.
2. Breaks between lessons, during which pupils very often break common rules, behave aggressively and irresponsibly. The reactions of a teacher in school hallways are to prevent such behaviours and to minimize their results.
3. School outings (e.g. to the cinema, theatre, sport competitions). These are situations in which the teacher has to pay particular attention to the behaviour of the pupils, especially on the way to the destination (on public transportation), after their arrival at the destination and on their way back.
4. Trips, camps – outside the school, lasting a few days, e.g. sport camps (PE teachers) or integration trips (teachers of other subjects). The types of students' behaviour on school trips are multiple and specific. Pupils may break the rules of the place where they stay by curfew violations, wandering off the place, smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol.
5. Teacher's way to and from school. On their way to and from school teachers can witness various behaviours of their students outside classes. It can be presumed that teachers do not react to some pathological situations they may witness; however, the majority of them do, feeling the sense of their pedagogical mission.

In the teachers' reactions questionnaire, behaviours of students against school discipline were categorized into: rebelling against school discipline; rebelling against the teacher; and rebelling against fellow students, in each of the five areas of disciplinary interactions outlined above. The teachers' reactions were divided into four groups: verbal reactions, informal reactions, formal reaction and nonverbal reactions.

Verbal reactions are usually aimed at making pupils aware of the inappropriateness of their actions and attitudes. These reactions include reprimands, talks, persuasion, negotiation and sharp verbal reactions. Nonverbal reactions are connected with the teacher's body language towards the pupils. They include gestures, facial expressions, social distance and glances. These are signals, which are closely linked to temperament. Formal interventions usually include punishments and

rewards as listed in the school statute, e.g. giving marks, analyzing pupils' behaviour, notes in the class register, informing the principal or the parents. The informal reactions are commonly accepted actions or teacher's individual reactions such as giving students extra tasks for misbehaving, detentions, isolating a student from the rest of the group or ignoring bad behaviour.

Nineteen types of students' behaviour which caused problems in the five areas of educational interactions were itemized in the questionnaire, with a broad choice of teacher's disciplinary reactions of the teacher. Each card of the questionnaire included a description of one educational situation (area of interaction between the teacher and the pupil) and a choice of disciplinary reactions. The respondents were to mark their reactions and determine how frequently each reaction is used in case of some discipline problems.

The survey sample was randomly selected from secondary school teachers from Kraków, Poland. A layered and proportional selection was used [1]. During the selection the first step was to stratify elements of the population into homogeneous subsets which made up the collection of all secondary schools in Kraków. The next step in sample selection was to make the layers of schools according to the districts of Kraków. The old administrative division with four main districts was used (Old Town, City Centre, Podgórze and Nowa Huta). Due to the fact, that the number of schools in each district differs significantly an additional form of group selection – proportional selection – was introduced. Consequently, the appropriate number of schools in a given district was drawn, proportionally to the number of schools in a district. Altogether, 30 secondary schools were chosen for analysis.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the sample characteristics. 881 secondary school teachers from Kraków took part in the survey, including 655 women (74.35%) and 226 men (25.65%). The sample included 195 (22.13%) PE teachers and 686 teachers of other subjects (77.87%). The respondents' average work experience was 14.28 years (OS = 8.22); the shortest teaching experience was 1 year and the longest 41 years.

The study results confirmed the research hypothesis that teachers' professional category determined the type and number of disciplinary procedures used at schools. The analysis of the

number of teachers' reactions was made in relation to the frequency, taught subject and type of reaction in class situations. Figures 1-6 demonstrate the results of the study.

Table 1. Characteristics of the research sample

		Subjects taught				Total	
		non-PE		PE		N	%
		N	%	N	%		
Sex	w	563	82.07%	92	47.18%	655	74.35%
	m	123	17.93%	103	52.82%	226	25.65%
All		686.00	100%	195	100%	881	100%

$\chi^2(1) = 96.92; p < 0.001$

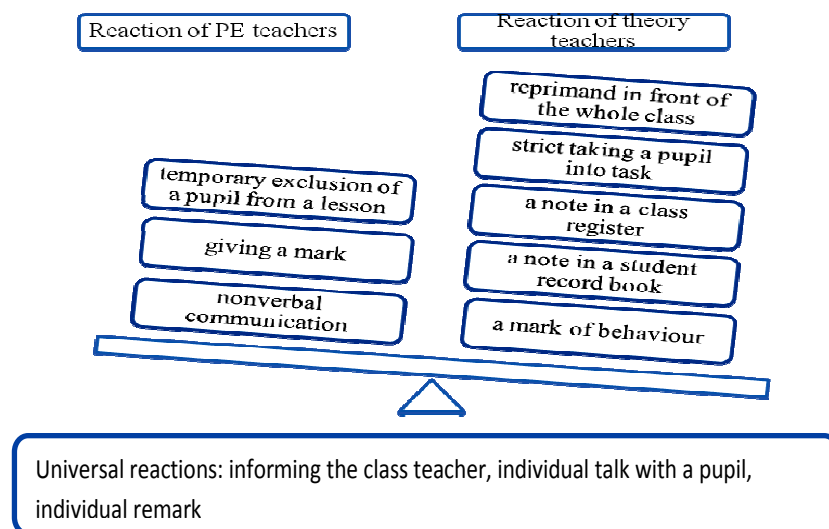


Figure 1. Most common reactions of PE teachers and teachers of other subjects to pupils' problematic behaviors in class

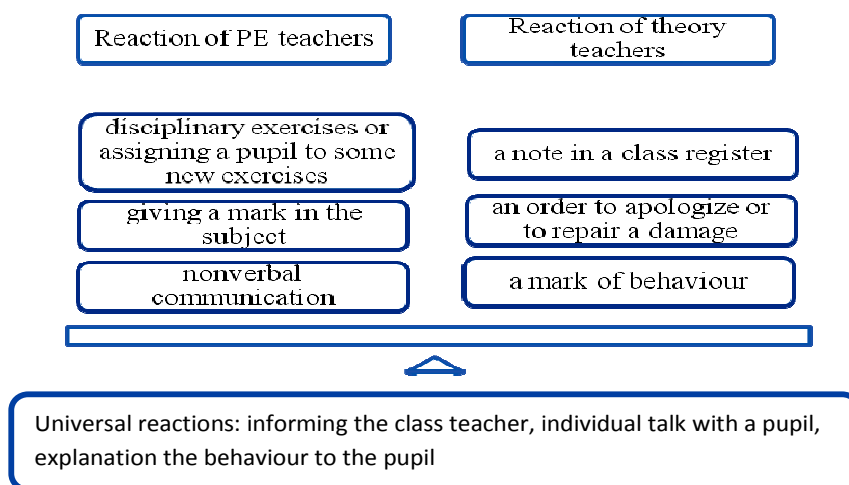


Figure 2. Most common reactions of PE teachers and teachers of other subjects to pupils' problematic behaviours during breaks

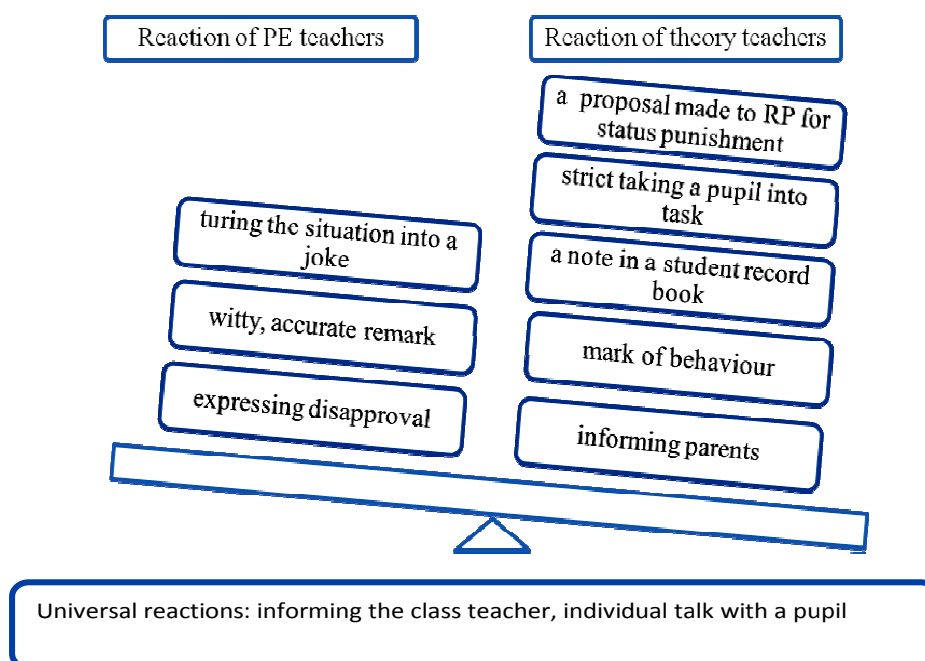


Figure 3. Most common reactions of PE teachers and teachers of other subjects to pupils' problematic behaviour outside school

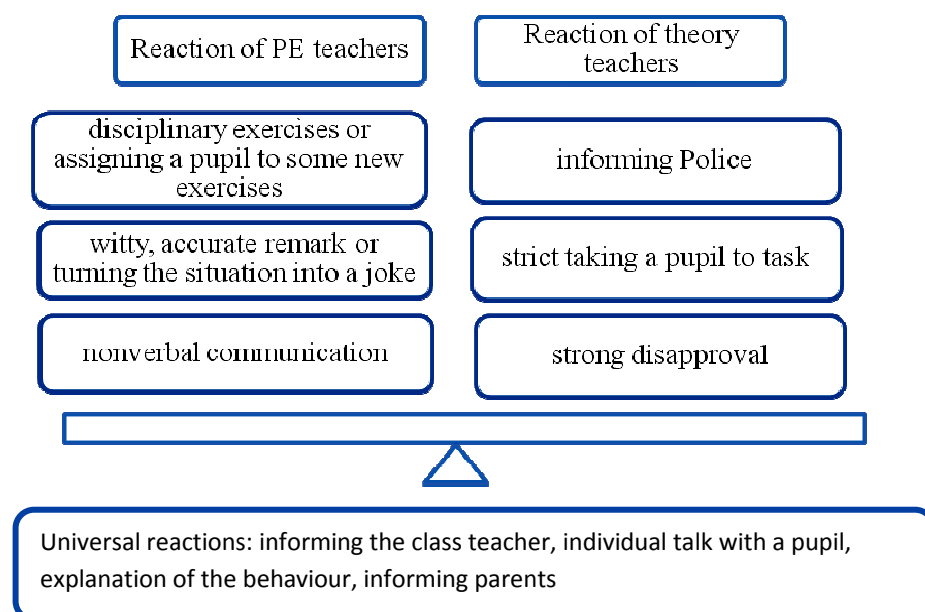


Figure 4. Most common reactions of PE teachers and teachers of other subjects to pupils' problematic behaviour during longer school trips

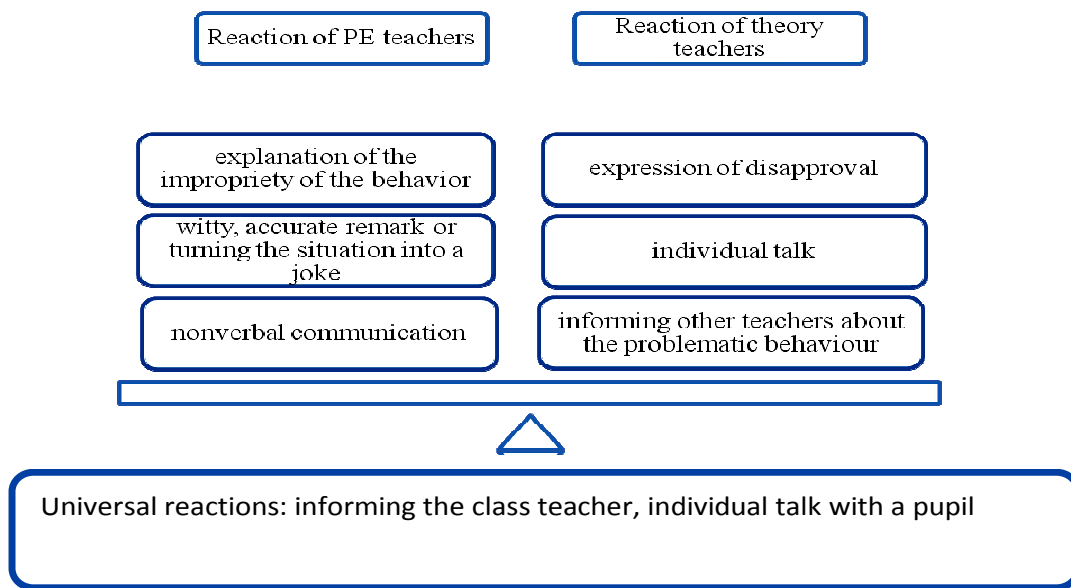


Figure 5. Most common reactions of PE teachers and teachers of other subjects to pupils' problematic behaviors on their way to and from school

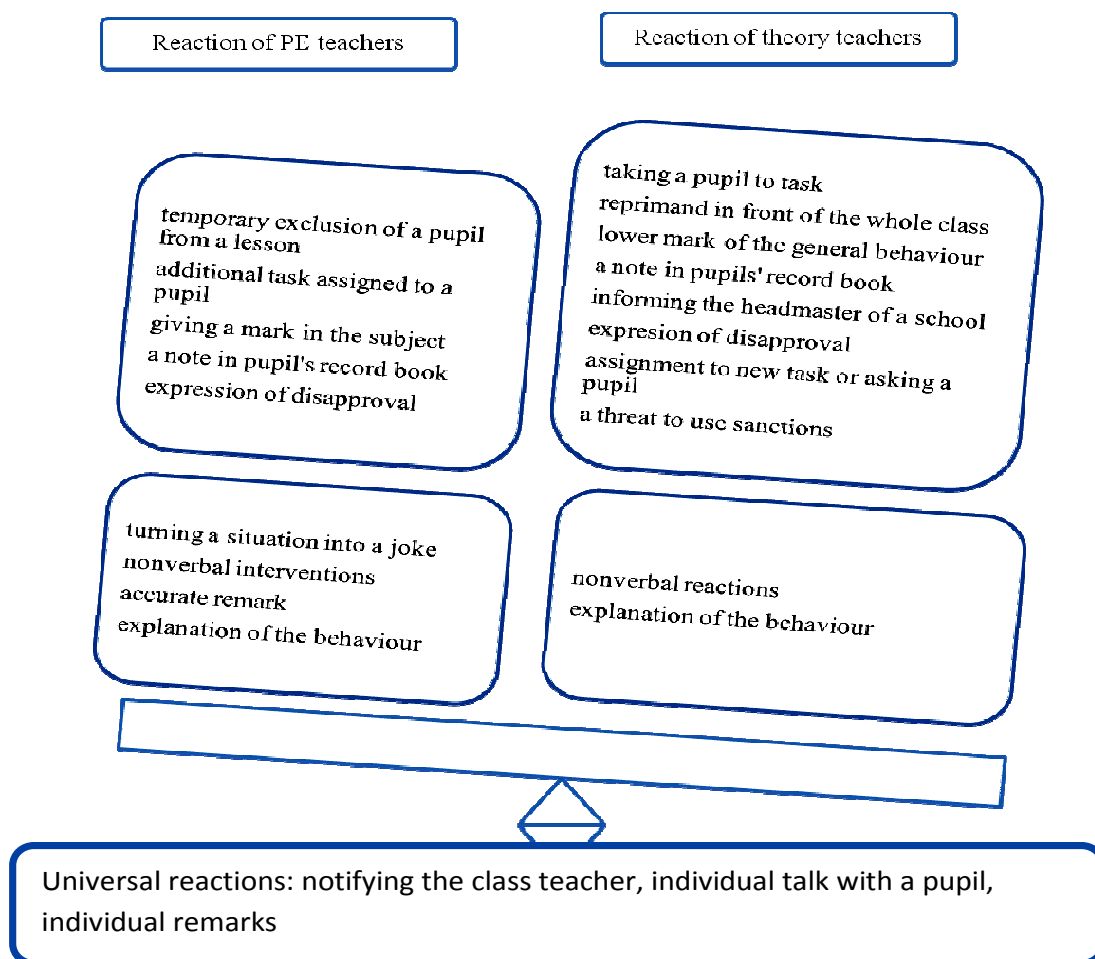


Figure 6. Main differences between PE teachers as and teachers of other subjects in choosing individual reactions regardless of specific educational interaction areas

If a pupil is late for class (Situation 1) the reaction of the PE teachers is most frequently to explain to the pupil the impropriety of such behaviour. They warn the pupil to use a sanction, and often ban the pupil from taking part in exercises or give him or her some extra task.

If a pupil disturbs a lesson (Situation 2) non-PE teachers, more often than PE teachers, express their strong disapproval, give him or her a severe reprimand, or serious and meaningful look. On the other hand, the PE teachers more often use reactions such as expelling a pupil from class, giving a mark or a warning.

In the situation when a pupil behaves in a very aggressive and provocative way (Situation 3) teachers of subjects other than PE react with a strict reprimand, a note in the class register, mark for bad behaviour, and a note to the school principal; while the PE teachers more frequently react by explaining the impropriety of the behaviour to the pupil, expelling the pupil from class or a note.

When pupils use bad language during classes (Situation 4) teachers of subjects other than PE very often react by giving the pupil a severe reprimand, a warning to use sanctions, a note in the class register, a mark for bad behaviour and a long and persistent look. PE teachers usually give the pupil an extra task or temporarily exclude the pupil from class.

If a pupil does not follow the teacher's order or follows it carelessly (Situation 5) the non-PE teachers usually call the pupil to order, give him or her extra tasks or asked questions connected with the topic of the lesson (and presumably give a mark) and/or inform the parents. The PE teachers, on the other hand, reprimand the pupil individually, express their dissatisfaction, turned the situation into a joke, temporarily exclude the pupil from class or use nonverbal interventions.

Comparing the reactions of the teachers, it can be stated that teachers of subjects other than PE more often use verbal methods of bringing the class to order, give notes in the class register or pupils' report cards. On the other hand, PE teachers are more eager to exclude the student from classes for some period of time.

It can be noted, however, that some reactions are used by both groups of teachers. They can be described as universal reactions used independently of the class situation and taught subject. They include individual remarks, requests for a change in behaviour and individual talks with the pupil.

During the breaks between classes, when a pupil destroys school equipment (Situation 6) non-PE teachers more often than PE teachers used rebukes, order the pupil to fix the damage done and give marks. In contrast, PE teachers used such disciplinary measures as giving extra exercises, knee bends or calling hand gestures.

In a situation when a pupil acts aggressively (Situation 7) teachers of subjects other than PE react by asking the pupil to change his or her behaviour, order the pupil to apologize to the fellow pupil or give marks for bad behaviour. The PE teachers usually give subject marks and were serious and strict.

When a pupil does not follow the school rules (Situation 8) non-PE teachers rebuke the pupil or express their strong disapproval, while the PE teachers give the pupil an acute remark or a subject mark.

If a pupil uses bad language at school (Situation 9) teachers of subjects other than physical education give notes in the class register, while PE teachers more often inform the class teacher, give notes in the pupil's report card, give the pupil some extra tasks or use nonverbal measures.

It can be stated that during the lesson breaks teachers' disciplinary interventions do not differ much. Some of the reactions are commonly used by both groups under study, e.g. informing the class teacher (with the exception of Situation 9), individual talks with the trouble maker or explaining the impropriety of the pupil's behaviour.

In a situation when a pupil behaves badly on the way to a destination outside school on an outing (Situation 10) teachers of subjects other than PE tend to reprimand the pupil individually, whereas PE teachers threaten to use sanctions, or just make a joke out of the situation. If a pupil misbehaves in the venue, for example, in a theater (Situation 11) non-PE teachers take the pupil to task, threaten to take the pupil's privileges away or to make a note in the pupil's report card after arriving back in school. PE teachers in that situation usually use disapproval. When a pupil walks away from the group on his own (Situation 12) non-PE teachers use disapproval, explanation, give extra tasks, low marks for behaviour, inform parents or file a punishment listed in the school statute. In this case, PE teachers use an accurate situational joke. In this area the reaction of teachers from both groups are different when it comes to the frequency. However,

even here it is possible to enumerate certain universal reactions such as individual talks with a pupil or informing the class teacher about the problem.

During longer school trips PE teachers seem to use much more varied reactions and they use them more often. The PE teachers very often used witty remarks, turn the whole situation into a joke, assign the pupil some extra tasks or use nonverbal communication. However, if the behaviour of a pupil goes beyond the limits, PE teachers call the police. The teachers of other subjects much often react in Situations 15 and 16 (aggressive behaviour, alcohol drinking), by marking the pupil, showing strong disapproval, strict verbal reprimanding and explaining and limiting privileges the trouble maker has. In this area it is possible to observe universal reactions such as individual talks with the pupil, reprimand (apart from Situation 16), informing parents, describing the incorrectness of the situation and informing the class teacher.

If on the way back from school a teacher witnesses a problematic or a pathological situation, then non-PE teachers much more often react by expressing their disapproval of the situation, using individual talks with the pupil or notifying other teachers. On the other hand, PE teachers tend to talk with the pupil about the situation, turn the situation into a joke or use nonverbal methods. Among the universal reactions there are individual reprimanding of the pupil and notifying the class teacher.

In general, in all educational spheres, teachers of subjects other than physical education use much more often use severe verbal disapproval, taking the pupil to task, and giving a mark for bad behaviour. The PE teachers often use nonverbal reactions, exclude the pupil from classes, make accurate remarks, turn the situation into a joke and give subject marks. The most common universal reactions used by the teachers from both groups in all the educational situations include notifying the class teacher (all areas), individual talks with the pupil and individual reprimands of the pupil (some areas).

Universal disciplinary reactions of teachers are shown at the bottom of Fig. 6. Above, reactions of particular teachers are presented (PE teachers – left column; theory teachers, i.e. teachers of other subjects – right column), which are characterized by low severity towards the pupil. At the top of Figure 6, teachers' disciplinary reactions with high

severity are presented. These reactions have severe consequences for the pupil and are associated with punishment. Generally, regardless of specific areas and reactions, it seems that teachers of subjects other than physical education use much more severe and decisive responses than the PE teachers.

The study yields a positive answer to the question whether PE and non-PE teachers differ when it comes to the type and frequency of disciplinary reactions used. This differentiation can be a result of the specificity of the subject taught and conditions in which the lesson takes place. Frequent use of nonverbal reactions by PE teachers can be a consequence of the noise during classes as well as its dynamic nature (jumping, running, using sports equipment, e.g., balls). In these conditions verbal communication as well as verbal disciplinary reactions are harder to reach the addressee. What is interesting, the PE teachers also use nonverbal signals more frequently in educational situations outside school.

Temporary exclusion of a pupil from class is a reaction used much more often by the PE teachers due to the fact that a pupil's participation in games during the PE classes, e.g. a soccer game, can be considered a reward, and not enabling pupils to participate in this form of activity can be a severe punishment. Another reaction specific for PE teachers – giving a mark – is explained by the fact that a pupil can get a mark during PE classes not only for his or her physical skills but also for the attitude to the subject. If the attitude is not appropriate the PE teacher has a right to give a student a lower mark.

DISCUSSION

The knowledge about school discipline is quite extensive as seen in Western European literature. Many researches, e.g. Ernst [7], Canter [3], Gordon [9], Charles [4], Glasser [8], Edwards [5], Wolfgang [22] have tackled general as well as specific matters associated with school and class management, influencing the class and individual students and creating and maintaining class discipline. Literature in Poland on the subject is rather limited, however, recently a few interesting works have been published [13, 12, 2]. Still further research in the area is necessary because of constantly changing behaviours of pupils, high social expectations placed on teachers and

continuous evaluation of teaching effectiveness. Consequently, teachers have to improve their knowledge and methodological skills in order to meet the expectations of school and society.

As a result of the constantly changing pupils' behaviour it is necessary to monitor pupils' environment to be able to identify some new and problematic behaviours of pupils, define them correctly, identify their sources and prevent them. If prevention is not possible, these behaviors must be effectively put down.

The study used the author's own Questionnaire of Teachers' Interactions, whose usefulness had been assessed during pilot studies. This device allows examining disciplinary interactions without the need of introducing an external observer, with participants' complete anonymity. This is very important because the lack of participants' anonymity would certainly modify the answers, and an external observer would modify the behaviour of teachers and pupils. Thus, this questionnaire is extremely useful for measuring disciplinary reactions which display a broad picture of teachers' behaviour during lessons as well as their interactions with pupils.

The knowledge of pupils' possible reactions which can cause problems has a practical dimension as well. The more teachers know about pupils' potential disciplinary problems the better they can prepare themselves for their pupils' possible dysfunctional behaviour. On the other hand, the awareness of some disciplinary procedures used can be also extremely useful. The variety of disciplinary reactions is quite broad and it gives a teacher an opportunity to choose the appropriate reaction depending on the situation and personal qualities of a teacher and a pupil.

Because of the fact that the teachers can choose from a multitude of disciplinary measures – there is no one commonly used reaction – each teacher should decide about the appropriateness of the reaction applied. It means the understanding, knowledge and analysis of the rules, practices and regulations on which the reactions are based and confronting them with their own system of values and beliefs.

Literature abounds in information on causes of disciplinary problems as well as various methods of class management. Discipline models, strategies of dealing with problematic situations, ways of reacting to dysfunctional behaviour as well as precise disciplinary techniques can be found in a

number of studies. It is worth mentioning that in Western literature a great interest is put on general disciplinary systems, which are commonly used at schools and which integrate many subjects together with state institutions and out-of-school organizations.

Educational philosophies [5] are divided into several categories, usually based on the level of freedom or amount of control provided to pupils or teachers. The theories of children's development and discipline are based on the same model:

- theories of management that provide children with very limited autonomy and focus on the teacher, whose role is to monitor the behaviour of pupils and maintain control over them;
- theories of leadership that approve of a broad range of freedom of pupils but only when they are able to use it wisely and responsibly;
- theories of nondirective interventions providing pupils with unlimited freedom.

Each of these theories is associated with some models and theories of discipline. The modification of behaviour, assertive discipline and the Jones Model of Discipline are based on management theories. Logical consequences, sensible discipline and reality therapy/theory of choice are based on leadership theories. The effectiveness theory and transactional analysis [7] are based on the nondirective interventions theories.

Teachers' interventions, as proved by the above research results, can be divided into universal interventions used by the teachers in various areas and educational situations regardless of the subject taught, style of the class management, level of emotional intelligence and character; and specific interventions used more or less often depending on the given variables.

The ability to adjust reactions to variables makes the teacher choose an appropriate set of interventions adjusted to the situations, taking into consideration personal qualities and methods of class management. Such knowledge [10] certainly enriches teacher's development of competences and skills in managing and controlling the class, leads to maintaining better discipline in class and, consequently, attaining better educational results.

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