The article reports on empirical research into the differences in child-rearing practices between present-day families and families living at the turn of the 21st century. The concept of child-rearing practices is addressed from the point of view of social theories of learning and socio-cognitive theories which constituted the basis for the research discussed. Results show that a portion of practices significantly differs in each group, and a portion remains unchanged. The biggest difference concerns ‘deferment of gratification’ as a factor for the development of many social skills. In the present-day family group this child-rearing effect has largely disappeared.

Child-rearing practices are an essential factor in the activation of educational processes understood here as mechanisms of development. This claim derives from W. Mischel’s (1973) social learning theory as well as K. Busseya and A. Bandura’s (1999) socio-cognitive theory. Both theories focus on modelling as one of the main mechanisms responsible for learning behaviour considered as a socio-cultural standard. Accordingly, one can view child-rearing practices in general from two perspectives: from the point of view of formal development mechanisms, or in terms of the influential content triggering these mechanisms. Formal mechanisms of development should be seen as relatively constant and unchanging. Following the conventions adopted by neo-behavioural cognitive theories we can talk about learning through observation, direct learning, indirect experience or modelling (Bussey, Bandura 1999, p. 686). These processes, however, are realized through concrete content hidden in stereotypes, social reinforcement, social pressures, the stratification and segregation of the sexes, social sanctions, etc. (Chomczyńska-Miliszkiewicz 2002, p. 91). While the mechanisms of development,