

Discipline

Response to Render, Padilla, and Krank: But Practitioners Say It Works!

The decision to implement a program should be based on many factors, in addition to research; from a practitioner's standpoint, Assertive Discipline works.

Remember the six blind men of Indostan who went to see the elephant? They argued that it "is very like a wall . . . is very like a spear . . . is very like a snake . . . is very like a tree . . . is very like a rope." In his fable, Hohn B. Saxe concluded that the men were "Each in his own opinion, Exceedingly stiff and strong. Though each was partly in the right, And all were in the wrong" (Saxe, "The Blind Men and the Elephant," Boston, 1852).

So also can it be said of authors who criticize the programs of others without basis. Like the blind men, Render, Padilla, and Krank are both partly in the right and partly in the wrong.

Partly Right

I too am surprised that so little research about Assertive Discipline is available. That concern, however, is not limited to the study of Assertive Discipline; in fact, no other copy-

righted classroom management program is better researched. Render, Padilla, and Krank are correct in chastising the research community for fail-

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ure to compare the program's effects with other approaches to classroom management. Is that an indictment of Assertive Discipline? Does the absence of that comparison mean Assertive Discipline lacks a support base? To both questions, the answer is "no."

Other studies, beyond those examined by Render, Padilla, and Krank, indicate that from a "practitioner's perspective," Assertive Discipline achieves the outcomes that Canter and Associates promote (1976). The sample findings in Figure 1 come from school districts and state organizations; the publications cited are reports to their constituencies.

Partly Wrong

Render, Padilla, and Krank are also partially wrong in their findings. I do not choose to challenge their chart of studies, item by item. However, the information they present appears to come from

a reading of abstracts rather than the complete research. I uncovered enough discrepancies to cast doubt on their conclusions. For example:

- Ersavas (1981) studied four schools. Render, Padilla, and Krank report "the school."

- Bauer (1982) studied 315 students and 23 teachers at a high school where Assertive Discipline was used, and 255 students and 45 teachers at a different high school where Assertive Discipline was not used. Render, Padilla, and Krank state "no N reported."

- Henderson (1982) studied 25 teachers with Assertive Discipline training and 25 teachers without. Render, Padilla, and Krank state "no N reported."

- Crawley (1983), in summarizing his own research, states, "The research may not have been properly designed to avoid contamination from variables not controlled."

There are others. But the errors, omissions, and even value judgments that understandably result from attempting to reduce a 100-plus page research document to one or two sen-

tences are not as important as the conclusions that Render, Padilla, and Krank draw.

As an Administrator

Would I as a site administrator let these findings guide me in the decision to train my staff in Assertive Discipline techniques? I would be interested, but my decision would be influenced by many other factors. Professional educators, unlike professional researchers, use a variety of sources from which to draw conclu-

Location/Author	Subjects	Variables	Findings
1. Cartwright School District Phoenix, Ariz. (1982)	445 teachers All district records of behavior referrals	Tardiness Bus referrals Weapons referrals Theft Classroom management techniques	Down 54% in the district Down 71% in the district Down 71% in the district Down 88% in the district 86% of teachers felt student behavior improved.
2. Compton, Calif., School District Swanson (1984)	30 principals 241 teachers 258 parents 72 secondary students	The need for Assertive Discipline Implementation time Teaching time Program effectiveness	66% felt the program was needed. 85% felt outcomes justified the administrative implementation time. 83% of teachers felt it freed more time for instruction. Conclusion: "Program is perceived as a success. The goals and objectives of this program have been achieved to a significant extent."
3. Lennox School District Inglewood, Calif. Moffett, Jurenka, and Kovan (1982)	94 K-12 teachers (67% of district)	Student behavior	78% felt that student behavior was observably or totally improved.
4. Troy City Schools Troy, Ohio Becker (1980)	100 elementary teachers 33 teachers of grades 7-8 40 teachers of grades 9-12	Student behavior Teaching time	91% of elementary teachers, 99% of teachers of grades 7-8, and 95% of teachers of grades 9-12 felt that student behavior was observably or totally improved. 86% of elementary teachers, 99% of teachers of grades 7-8, and 90% of teachers of grades 9-12 felt more time was spent on educational experiences and less time on disruptive behavior.
5. State of Oregon Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (1980)	Random sample from over 7800 teachers and administrators trained in Assertive Discipline (workshops sponsored by COSA) (N = not reported)	Student behavior	81% felt schoolwide student behavior was improved. 79% felt there was a decrease in classroom management problems.

Fig. 1. Findings from School Districts and State Organizations about Assertive Discipline

No other copyrighted classroom management program is better researched than Assertive Discipline.

sions. These sources include the network of local administrators and professional organizations. I've even made phone calls to officials in districts, for example, like Irving, Texas (C. Green, personal communication, August 19, 1988), where they have just completed their eighth annual district-wide new teacher training in Assertive Discipline. Lennox School District, which is cited both in the findings of Render and his colleagues and here, also continues to report the success of its program. Assertive Discipline is now a regular part of the district's new teacher training (Moffett et al. 1987).

As a Principal

As a principal, did I want to know if it worked before we began the program? Certainly. My information, however, came from practitioners who told me "it works," from my observations of schools that used the program, and from the personal commitment of my faculty to employ a discipline program that would encourage students to be self-managers. I found that teachers who did not use positive recognition as part of their management system did not use Assertive Discipline (McCormack 1981). It is not necessary for research to support, as Render, Padilla, and Krank imply, that "any particular educational approach" works before an administrator makes a program decision.

No Basis for Criticism

My point is, if their findings supported the position that the approach did *not* work—and Render, Padilla, and Krank do *not* come to that conclusion—there would be a reasonable reason for rejection. The findings they cite, on the other hand—improved student self-perceptions, greater teacher satisfaction, improved student behavior, fewer office referrals, reduction of classroom disruptions, improved time-on-task, better student teacher preparation, and appreciation of the program by students and staff—support the benefits of Assertive Discipline. The researchers "doth protest too much, methinks." □

Author's note: I reviewed all of the following references to check Render, Padilla, and Krank's research. Not all of these references are cited in the above text.

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