

Discipline

What Research Really Shows About Assertive Discipline

The effectiveness claims made by Canter and other advocates are not supported by the limited research that has been conducted in the program's 12 years of existence.

In the October 1988 issue of *Educational Leadership*, Lee Canter ("Let the Educator Beware: A Response to Curwin and Mendler") cited studies that he believes provide strong support for the effectiveness of Assertive Discipline. He has also stated that Assertive Discipline is based on research and will produce an 80 percent reduction in student misbehavior (Canter and Associates 1987). Canter has made this statement repeatedly (Canter 1979a, 1979b, 1983) but has provided no evidence to support it.

A Small Database

We believed that a program in existence for 12 years and so widely used (reports suggest that 500,000 people have been trained in Assertive Discipline) would have generated an extensive database (Canter and Associates 1987). We therefore reviewed the literature (Render et al. in press, Render et al. 1987) and reported only studies in which information was gathered in some systematic way and in which results were presented. We found only 16 studies (10 dissertations, 3 journal articles, and 3 other reports) meeting

our criteria. Equally surprising is the nature of the studies. Not one study systematically investigated the program's effectiveness compared with any other specific approach. The studies of Assertive Discipline have been generated primarily by beginning researchers, and no strongly generalizable data have resulted. The research is sparse and unsophisticated.

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Figure 1 presents a brief description of the existing studies of Assertive Discipline. We have presented the information as it was reported without any interpretations of the data.

Limited Evidence

The claims made by Canter (1988) and also made in Barrett's (1987) review are simply not supported by the existing and available literature. We would agree that Assertive Discipline could be helpful in severe cases where students are behaving inappropriately more than 96 percent of the time, as in the study by Mandelbaum and colleagues (1983). We would also argue that teachers such as the one in that study would benefit from *any* intervention. However, we can find no evidence that Assertive Discipline is an effective approach deserving school-wide or districtwide adoption.

Canter has also stated that teachers have no need for educational literature; they need "answers" (1988, p. 73). We believe teachers deserve answers based on more than limited studies that suffer from a lack of generalizability to various settings, teach-

Author(s)	Subjects	Variables	Findings															
1. Ersavas (1981)	Teachers, administrators, and 5th grade students.	Perceptions of AD implementation.	The school with the highest California assessment program achievement results experienced the least growth from AD. Students who perceived themselves as reading better than their peers experienced the least growth from AD.															
2. Bauer (1982)	Grade 9 students drawn from high school using AD. Comparison from high school not using AD (no N reported).	Reduction of discipline problems. Increasing student satisfaction. Improving student attitude.	AD effective in discipline areas related to social skills. Problems related to learning not affected. Teachers reported greater satisfaction. No increase in student morale or attitudes (no data reported).															
3. Henderson (1982)	Elementary teachers (no N reported).	Locus of control, pupil control ideology, self-concept, assertive teacher characteristics.	Teachers trained in AD were significantly different from controls on all measures. No study was made of behavior of these teachers' students.															
4. Moffett, Jurenka, and Kovan (1982)	67% of district teachers (N = 94)	Teachers' perceptions of AD.	21% perceived student behavior as somewhat improved; 48% as improved in an observable degree; 30% as totally improved. Authors claim that AD "virtually eliminated classroom disruptions."															
5. Crawley (1983)	Teachers (N = 52) and students (N = 580)	Perceptions of teachers trained or not trained in AD. Perceptions of students of teachers trained or not trained in AD.	"... There are no benefits measured by this study derived from Assertive Discipline training."															
6. Mandelbaum, Russell, Krouse, and Conter (1983)	One 3rd grade classroom (N = 31) and the teacher.	Student out-of-seat behavior (OB). Student inappropriate talking (IT) measured in percent of time.	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Before AD</th> <th>After AD</th> <th>Remove AD</th> <th>Reinstate AD</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>OB</td> <td>96%</td> <td>45%</td> <td>87%</td> <td>42%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>IT</td> <td>99%</td> <td>54%</td> <td>91%</td> <td>65%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Never did out-of-seat behavior occur less than 35% of the time.</p>		Before AD	After AD	Remove AD	Reinstate AD	OB	96%	45%	87%	42%	IT	99%	54%	91%	65%
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7. Ferreira (1983)	Elementary students in one school of 356 students (1979-80) and 365 students (1982-83).	Number of students referred to office for disciplinary reasons.	During 1979-80 school year 350 students referred to office. During 1982-83 school year 247 students referred. Referrals changed from interpersonal problems to on-task behavior problems. No indication of what actually happened in classrooms.															
8. Ward (1984)	Not reported.	Classroom disruptions.	Before AD—1709 disruptions/100 students/day. After AD—1044 disruptions/100 students/day. Seven other variables were significantly related to the results.															
9. Allen (1984)	7th, 8th, and 9th grade students (N = 353).	Disciplinary referrals.	There was a 31.8% ($p < .05$) decrease in referrals from 3,646/year to 2,492/year. A survey of the staff indicated that AD was effective. The number of referrals after AD suggests the school still had a severe discipline problem.															

Fig. 1. Studies of Assertive Discipline (AD)

Author(s)	Subjects	Variables	Findings
10. Smith (1984)	Student teachers trained in AD (no N reported).	Student teachers' assertiveness.	Student teachers trained in AD rated themselves more assertive than controls. Supervising teachers agreed. No report on student behavior in these student teachers' classrooms.
11. Webb (1984)	Teachers K-12 (N = 129), principals (N = 12).	Perceptions of teachers and principals regarding effectiveness of AD.	86% liked AD; 82% perceived improved student behavior; 77% perceived improved control of student behavior; 43% perceived improvement in student behavior to be lasting.
12. Braun, Render, and Moon (1984)	Elementary and junior high students (N = 1,087), teachers (N = 86), and parents (N = 446).	Involvement of students in the establishment of classroom rules and consequences of misbehavior.	71% of students said they rarely or never were given an opportunity for input in establishing classroom rules or consequences for misbehavior.
13. McCormack (1985)	36 3rd grade classes; 18 using AD, 18 not. N = 687.	Off-task behavior during reading instruction.	Students in classes without AD off-task 13% of time. Students with AD were off-task 5% less. AD was said to account for 9% of the variance in off-task behavior.
14. Parker (1985)	Administrators, secondary teachers, students, and parents (no N reported).	Perceptions of AD.	AD favored by administrators. Teachers preferred their own discipline styles. Parents generally approved but did not expect or desire to see AD used with their own children.
15. Barrett and Curtis (1986)	Student teachers trained in AD (N = 248) 1981-82; student teachers not trained in AD (N = 288) 1982-83; supervisors (N = 396) rated student teachers not trained in AD in 1981-82. Supervisors (N = 307) rated student teachers trained in AD in 1982-83.	Perceptions of student teachers regarding their ability to use appropriate discipline techniques. Perceptions of supervisors regarding student teachers' use of techniques.	Student teachers trained in AD perceived significantly ($p < .05$) better preparation in use of techniques. Supervisors rated student teachers trained in AD significantly ($p < .05$) better at using appropriate techniques. Appropriate techniques were not defined. The use of assertive discipline techniques was not a focus of the study. The study does not support or fail to support the use of AD. The use of AD techniques was not studied.
16. Barrett (1987)	A review of literature on AD, all of which is included here.	The same variables listed above. Findings are drawn from several of the studies listed here—no others than listed here.	"Based upon research conducted at this early stage [AD] has proven to be effective." "It [AD] has been proven beneficial in both decreasing the number of referrals and as an effective means to increase on-task behavior of students." "[AD] also has proven significantly effective in reducing student disruptions."

Fig. 1. Studies of Assertive Discipline (AD) (Continued)

ers, subject areas, and grade levels. (We suggest that readers form their conclusions regarding Assertive Discipline by evaluating the data in the existing literature.)

Where Are the Facts?

Canter and Assertive Discipline advocates suggest that the program is "proven" effective. Even after years of investigation and numerous studies and replications, no reputable scholar would state that "the research proves" any particular educational approach. Ten dissertations, three journal articles, and three other reports is certainly limited evidence to support any educational strategy. We agree with Canter that "facts are hard to dispute" (1988, p. 71); however, facts result from systematic, scientific investigations, replications, and evaluations by scholars, not from hopeful claims and promotions. □

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We can find no evidence that Assertive Discipline is an effective approach deserving schoolwide or districtwide adoption.

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