

# Letters

## Assertive Discipline Works

In response to the articles that debate Lee Canter's Assertive Discipline program (March 1989): I believe in both Assertive Discipline *and* respect, dignity, belief, and hope with regard to students. Curwin and Mendler purport that to have one is to deny the other; this misrepresents the facts.

Canter's approach is not a power play. It is a sensitive and positive, yet assertive, approach to dealing with deviant behavior in our schools. But, most important, it works. So why not use it in our schools? What better approach do Curwin and Mendler have to offer?

JAMES H. VANSCIVER  
Superintendent  
Lake Forest School District  
Harrington, Delaware

## Responses to Patricia Dombart ("The Ultimate Punishment," March 1989)

The irony I find in Bennett's suggestion that Catholic schools take up the challenge to succeed where public schools have failed is that Catholic schools *are* succeeding in this challenge. The overwhelming majority of our students respond to our standards and develop into productive, caring members of society.

Catholic schools are operating in today's world with today's child. For the sake of our students, we need to maintain our status as an organization that will counteract the value-free society imposed on our children.

ELEANOR R. MENNA  
Teacher—Grade 8  
Our Lady of the Angelus School  
Rego Park, New York

For me, the irony of Dombart's perspective is that she apparently thinks kicking out kids who fail is appropriate. However, Catholic schools are not in the practice of "getting rid" of failures. As a Catholic elementary school principal, I spent a large portion of my

time finding and facilitating resources and services for children who "failed." No child was "kicked out" for being absent, falling asleep in class, or challenging the school rules, as Dombart suggests they would/should be.

Dombart defines teaching as having perfect conditions (enough time, total cooperation) so she can teach (individualize, make assignments, coach). She wouldn't like teaching in a Catholic school either. Perfect conditions don't exist. In a Catholic school, Dombart would be expected to teach with the resources available and create a loving environment for *all* of her students.

JANE CLARK LINDLE  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Administrative  
and Policy Studies  
University of Pittsburgh  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Dombart uses her narrow and negative experience to give a false picture of what Catholic schools are and do in the inner city. The days of rigid respect are so old they aren't worth mentioning except, I guess, to entertain young students. The Sisters I know live in the inner city and are as streetwise as the students they are helping to become better writers, readers, and thinkers. Furthermore, they've been there for years—after many public schools have closed—still fighting for students' civil rights.

If Catholic schools are doing something right, then the students are winners. No school system is right for everyone. That is why we need to support diversity.

JEANNETTE ABI-NADER  
Associate Professor,  
Teacher Education  
Gonzaga University  
Spokane, Washington

In my area of the country, certain types of students are better served by the Catholic schools than by their

public counterparts. In the past two years, over 20 such students have arrived at our doors from the public schools. With some of these students we succeed; with some we fail, and they drop out of school. And, of course, some of our students are asked to leave our school. We extend due process to those students, and no action is taken without the involvement of their parents.

The school that lets a few disruptive students prevent teachers from teaching should review its pupil support services and its in-school suspension program. There are many creative ways to deal with troublesome students. Dombart should indeed be allowed to *teach*.

BRIAN MCNAMERA  
Principal  
Notre Dame-Bishop Gibbons  
High School  
Schenectady, New York

I take exception to Dombart's "The Ultimate Punishment." I am disappointed that *Educational Leadership* would print something so naive, biased, and hurtful to a group of educators who are making a great contribution, especially in the inner cities of this country.

I would like to write "The Ultimate Reward"—stories of success and motivation for students who have exercised their right to pursue the form of education they choose.

MARY RITA CROOKSTON  
Erievue Catholic High School  
Cleveland, Ohio

## Opposing Views on Whole Language

While I have the highest respect for Kenneth Goodman's contributions to the field of language study, I was disappointed with his response to Heymsfeld (March 1989). Heymsfeld made some intelligent and well-docu-

mented assertions about how whole language and direct instruction approaches might support each other in the classroom.

Goodman responded with dogmatism ("one cannot reconcile direct instruction with natural learning") and rhetoric ("it redefines the learner as someone who is strong, active . . ."). And he provides almost no research support for his strongly advanced claims. He apologizes for this lack by observing that "practice gets ahead of theory and research."

The issue of how classroom teachers can profitably integrate both approaches is one that deserves careful reflection and analysis, not advocacy and polemics.

ALLAN A. GLATTHORN  
*School of Education  
East Carolina University  
Greenville, North Carolina*

Professor Glatthorn, whose work I respect, has laid a heavy rap on me: advocacy, polemics, rhetoric, and dogmatism.

Let's not confuse rhetoric with empty rhetoric. Redefining the learner as someone who is strong and active is not empty rhetoric; it is the essence of how whole language teachers view learners. My statement that "one cannot reconcile direct instruction with natural learning" expresses this contrast in how learners and learning is viewed. My view is based on extensive research, my own and that of others, including Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner.

Glatthorn has misunderstood my reference to practice's getting ahead of theory and research. Teachers and learners are doing so much in whole language classrooms, in many new and exciting ways, that it will take a while for theory and research to catch up with this new reality.

As for integration, that requires a strong theoretical base. Whole language has that base, and that's why it releases the energy and productivity Heymsfeld acknowledges. I sympathize with teachers who are eclectic,

but I am a staunch advocate of their right to go beyond eclecticism.

KENNETH S. GOODMAN  
*Professor of Education  
The University of Arizona  
Tucson, Arizona*

### In Defense of Pull-Out Programs

Allan Vann's contention that pull-out programs such as instrumental music take away opportunities to learn higher-order thinking skills (March 1989) gives the impression that these other classes have no learning value. That, of course, is not true. Students who participate in instrumental music, for instance, are not only better thinkers and problem solvers but also better citizens, as classroom teachers testify. The core classroom is not the only arena where important ideas, ways of thinking, and values are being taught.

CATHY HAINES  
*Graduate Student  
Educational Administration  
Cedar Rapids Community  
School District  
Cedar Rapids, Iowa*

### On Cooperative Learning

I read with interest the differing viewpoints about cooperative learning expressed by Robert Slavin and the Johnson brothers (April 1989). I think, however, that both sides missed the major point. The research on cooperative learning (summarized well in *No Competition* by Alfie Kohn) has clearly shown that cooperative and collaborative techniques are superior to traditional teaching. The real issue is not how much cooperative techniques can help but rather how we can train teachers to use them effectively. Researchers need to focus on how principals, teachers, and central administrators can work collaboratively to implement these potent classroom strategies.

DANIEL L. WATSON  
*Director, Staff Development  
Desert Sands Unified School District  
Indio, California*

### IN THE NOVEMBER ISSUE . . .

#### "What Schools Can Do About What Students Don't Know"

*Educational Leadership* lines up a lively exploration of ways to improve learning in our schools, including:

★ Gregory Anrig and Archie Lapointe's useful summary of findings from the National Assessment of Educational Progress

★ Harriet Tyson and Arthur Woodward's analysis of the alarming deficiencies in textbooks

★ Grant Wiggins' creative commentary on the folly of trying to teach too much

★ program pointers from major efforts in the reform of history, geography, mathematics, and science curriculums

★ Charles Fowler's clear statement on the lamentable lack of the arts in our schools

★ Bruce Joyce, Carlene Murphy, Beverly Showers, and Joseph Murphy's report of a successful staff development project based on the idea that improving student learning depends on improving teaching first.

Plus a surprising insight from classroom teacher Steve Landfried: we too frequently teach students to avoid proper responsibility for their own learning by "helping" them too quickly and excusing them too readily.

COMING IN DECEMBER/JANUARY: "Cooperative Learning"—differing views and many how-to-do-it's from the conceptualizers and the implementers of cooperative learning, the instructional strategy you're hearing about everywhere.

Copyright © 1989 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.