The effects of an assertive discipline approach on disciplinary problems in selected high schools

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THE EFFECTS OF AN ASSERTIVE DISCIPLINE APPROACH ON DISCIPLINARY PROBLEMS IN SELECTED HIGH SCHOOLS

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With grateful appreciation to those who have given their time, talent, patient understanding, and loving support to me.

The Faculty and Staff

My Committee

My Friends

My Family

God

"I can do all things in him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)
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ABSTRACT

This study explored the effectiveness of an assertive discipline approach in six Atlanta high schools. The major research question guiding the study was: To what extent does an assertive discipline approach influence the incidence of in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and disciplinary referrals when used by assertive and nonassertive administrators.

So that an adequate sample could be selected for the study, a survey was conducted to identify six public high schools in Atlanta using the assertive discipline approach. Forty-five administrators responded to a questionnaire containing 17 questions.

Three null hypotheses were posted for testing that related to the selected discipline variables: (1) There will be no significant difference in the incidence of in-school suspensions between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach in the Atlanta high schools, (2) There will be no significant difference in the incidence of out-of-school suspensions between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach in the Atlanta high schools, and (3) There will be no significant difference in the incidence of disciplinary referrals between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach in the Atlanta high schools. The t test was used for testing the hypotheses.

The interpretation of results of the t tests of differences between sample means for three null hypotheses showed that the null hypotheses were not rejected. The primary conclusion drawn from the findings was that there was no significant
difference in the incidences of in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and disciplinary referrals, for high school administrators who used Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach as compared to a nonassertive discipline approach with ninth and tenth grade students in six Atlanta high schools.

The findings also indicated that within each of the six high schools in the sample, some administrators preferred an assertive discipline approach while others used a nonassertive discipline approach. Therefore, the influence of one discipline approach within a school was counter-balanced with an alternative discipline approach.

Another mediating factor which may have influenced the results of the study was the interactive group process stipulated by the student discipline guidelines. The guidelines stipulated certain reporting, documentation, and notification processes which required the input and influence of others (other administrators, teachers, parents, students) in the decisions regarding a disciplinary problem. While the administrator had the authority to make the final decision regarding a disciplinary action, he may not have behaved consistently in accordance with a specific discipline approach.
INTRODUCTION

The decade of the 1980's has become a period for renewal in the educational system; one which continues to see an internal house cleaning prompted by external forces. The educational establishment has not decided to act on its own behalf until outside pressure has become too great. President Reagan's Commission on Excellence in Education, sponsored by former Secretary of Education, Terrel Bell, issued an ultimatum that the schools of America must be willing to uphold tougher standards and require competent teaching for fear of losing any more ground to illiteracy and ignorance. If America is indeed a nation at risk, then a possible solution must be found to deal with every component of the educational setting (Bell, 1983).

In line with the commission's report on excellence, President Reagan has spoken out on the issue of school discipline and the pervading number of calls involving truancy, vandalism, rape, and other serious crimes committed in the nation's schools. He has suggested that a task force be set up to explore new possibilities for curbing violent acts against teachers and students. For 14 of the past 15 years, the Gallup Poll has highlighted discipline as the nation's number one school problem (annual Gallop Poll, 1983).

THE PROBLEM

The problem of discipline in the public schools is so pervasive and complex that it is difficult to imagine what key elements might quell disruptive behavior, establish classrooms suitable for learning, and meet the needs, rights and privileges of both students and educators.
PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study will explore the effectiveness of Lee Canter's approach to assertive discipline as a disciplinary alternative in six Atlanta high schools.

DELIMITATION

The study was conducted in six Atlanta high schools. Those selected for the study included public high schools in different sections of the Atlanta system. Forty-five administrators participated in the study. Data used for the study were obtained from records of inschool suspensions, out-of-school suspensions and disciplinary referrals for ninth and tenth grade students.

STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESES

1_Ho: There will be no significant difference in the incidence of inschool suspensions between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach.

2_Ho: There will be no significant difference in the incidence of out-of-school suspensions between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach.

3_Ho: There will be no significant difference in the incidence of disciplinary referrals between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive approach.
ASSUMPTIONS

The study was conducted with the assumptions that administrators responded in an honest and accurate manner to the survey questionnaire, and each Atlanta high school had accurate records of information dealing with in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and disciplinary referrals.

LIMITATIONS

The results of the study can be generalized only to six high schools in Atlanta.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following definitions are listed in order to clarify meanings and concepts for those terms that were used most frequently in the context of the study.

**Assertive Discipline** — An approach to discipline conceived by Lee Canter that acknowledged a take-charge, assertive approach on the part of the educator. The procedure was basically teacher oriented and placed rule making under the teacher's authority. Negative consequence, punishment, positive consequence, and reward are selected for the benefit of the educator as well as the students.

**Incidence** — A value determined by dividing the number of occurrences of a disciplinary problem in a school by the number of ninth and tenth grade students in that school.

**Inschool Suspension** — The temporary forced withdrawal of a pupil from a classroom by school officials for various disciplinary reasons and the reassignment to a designated area within the school for a specified number of days.
Out-of-School Suspension — The temporary forced withdrawal of a pupil from school by school officials for various disciplinary reasons.

Disciplinary Referrals — The sending of a student to the office for any disciplinary problems other than truancy.

Administrator — Principals, Vice Principals, and Department Chairpersons.
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Assertive Discipline

Canter (1976) defined the assertive educator as one who clearly and firmly communicates his/her wants and needs to his/her students and is prepared to reinforce his/her words with appropriate actions. The educator responds in a manner which maximizes his/her potential to get his/her needs met, but in no way violates the best interest of the students. Designed after and modified from assertiveness training, assertive discipline has been described as a take-charge approach. Educators placed in positions of authority and responsibility must gain self-confidence in their ability to control disruptive student behavior. Educators cannot afford to be passive or hostile in their behavior toward students. Lee Canter indicated that the assertive discipline approach is meant to create educators who mean what they say and say what they mean. The approach has neither been perceived as a lasting solution to all discipline problems, nor has it guaranteed that there would be teacher-student rapport. The approach suggests that the assertive educator can maximize the potential for the development of a teacher-child relationship.

An assertive educator will expect students to behave. A student's self-destructive behavior will not be tolerated. Canter (1976) indicated only one commandment of assertive discipline: "Thou shalt not make a demand thou art not prepared to follow-through upon." Hollow threats that an educator would impose have no bearing upon students who are not compelled to face the negative consequences for their actions. The nonassertive educator would constantly impose
such threats, never act upon them, and be placed in a position of frustration and powerlessness. A hostile educator might forcefully dislodge students from their desks and either verbally or physically abuse individuals, causing irreparable harm. Educators who are persistent in their demands and promise to take action will stand a better chance of having students change their behavior. Students will realize that educators are both sincere and immovable in their resolve to have an assignment completed or a disruptive act stopped immediately.

Canter (1976) contended that when an assertive educator placed limit-setting consequences on the behavior of students, the consequences will either be positive or negative. Canter stated that this placed the responsibility on the student to behave accordingly and that the individual will learn the natural consequence of his/her inappropriate actions, if he/she chooses not to abide by the rules.

The negative consequences that are finally decided upon should be:

1. Ones that educators are comfortable using...

2. Something the child does not like, but is not physically or psychologically harmful.

3. Provided to the child as a choice.

4. Provided as soon as possible after the child chooses to disregard your request.

5. Provided in a matter-of-fact manner, without hostile screaming or yelling.

6. Provided every time the child disregards your limits. The message sent to the child is, again: "I care too much about you as an individual to allow you to act in an inappropriate, self-destructive manner without doing all I can to help you stop: I care too much about myself as a educator and as
an individual to let students take advantage of my wants and needs" (Canter, 1976).

An educator must persist in using the negative consequences; therefore, the selection of consequences is not as important as their being carried out effectively and consistently. The follow-through of the negative consequences becomes critical in affirming the educator's determination to do something about the disruptive student's behavior.

The reverse side of the consequences concept presented by Canter (1976) was the use of positive consequences (i.e., rewards) that students may receive as a result of their appropriate behavior.

Positive consequences must include:
1. Responses educators are comfortable with.
2. Something the child wants and enjoys.
3. Provided as soon as possible after the child chooses to behave appropriately.
4. Provided as often as possible.
5. Planned out before being utilized.

Canter's positive reinforcement has been advocated in order that the educator not be viewed as an individual who may only know how to punish and not praise. The author contended that rewards can become bribery if the educator permits himself/herself to be viewed as an individual who may only know how to punish and not to praise. Certain positive consequences may be faded out gradually and offered less often in order to affect appropriate student behavior.

The previous discussion involving assertive discipline pointed out Canter's focus on this procedure as person and situation specific. As a classroom procedure, assertive discipline takes the form of all the previously mentioned
components. The educator should implement a maximum of five classroom rules in the first week of class: rules that meet the needs of the educator and do not infringe upon the rights of the students. Five negative consequences (i.e., punishments) should also be created by the educator with a severe clause to be used as a final resort in order to control the disruptive student. A list of five positive consequences (i.e., rewards) would be utilized to reinforce students for their appropriate behavior. Once again, consistent and uniform practice must be carried out by the educator to put the planned course of discipline into action.

The assertive discipline approach included justification for the educator to contact both administrators and parents and ask for their assistance in dealing effectively with a disruptive student. Canter (1979) stated the following: An assertive approach may be helpful when an educator first confronts the parents of a disruptive child. The educator must neither appear as a hostile disciplinarian nor appear as a passive figure who will continue to tolerate the child's disruptive behavior. Discussions over the telephone or personal conferences with parents should be conducted in an honest and sincere manner. The same assertive approach may be quite useful in acquiring the parents' support when decisive action must be taken toward a student who cannot be controlled through the classroom assertive discipline procedure. The educator's discipline plan will have been articulated with the principal beforehand. Both parties will know what happens to students when they are sent to the office. Because the student has been classified as an extreme disciplinary case, the principal may decide to have the student participate in an inschool suspension or may impose a stricter punishment. These alternatives may follow a special assertive discipline plan put into place by the administration.

Canter (1979) suggested that placing a tape recorder next to disruptive students will monitor their behavior and serve as a record for any future parent
conference. An educator might have the option to send a disruptive student to another teacher's room by prearrangement to sit quietly and study.

Assertive discipline has been and continues to be implemented in schools throughout the United States. Questions that deal with the fundamental principles of the procedure have been asked by some educators. Gay (1982) inquired whether the rules, which are teacher made, may be considered rational. Because the teacher is perceived as an authority figure, students may not be permitted to display any measure of nonconformity by assisting in the rule-making procedure. The author has questioned whether the long-term effect of assertive discipline promotes free thinking on the part of students. If the needs of teachers are being met, are the needs of the students being met as well? Whether assertive discipline has been developed as another technique to control students and is not adequately suited as an educationally sound procedure may constantly be debated by educators, especially those with a student-centered philosophy.

Related Studies and Articles

The misgivings that educators might have concerning assertive discipline may be expressed by their agreement with the support of other accepted educational concepts. Wagner (1982) emphasized the need for teachers to be student centered and to open lines of communication with students. Young people must realize that teachers are more than just machines that operate in a dictatorial fashion and neglect legitimate student concerns. The student-centered teacher, Wagner has argued, will promote student self-worth and accomplish the task of helping students to learn. Some teachers attempt to make disciples of their students, placing unrealistic demands on their classes. These teachers often are so keen on the subject that they disregard elementary rules of courtesy in working with
people. The student-centered school may also be described as having greater interest in the personal development of individuals. Deibert and Hoy (1977) investigated 40 high schools, administering Likert-type instruments, to determine the degree of self-actualization acquired by students. The authors hypothesized that..."the more custodial the pupil control orientation of the school, the less self-actualized the students." Self-actualized students would also be inner-directed and concerned with the present and their self-support rather than living in a situation dependent on the past or the future. The hypothesis was confirmed: a more humanistic view of the school setting would help students meet their individual potential. The limitations of the study conducted by Deibert and Hoy (1979), which included a select group of academic English students, prevent it from being broadly generalized. However, other authors have stated: ".there is beginning to emerge a substantive body of research and points to the atmosphere of the school and the student's sense of involvement and identification with school as crucial factors in the student's growth and development." (Coleman, 1966; Heath, 1970; Hoy, 1972)

In an effort to determine whether robust classrooms (i.e., simply active classrooms that were interesting places, not requiring strict control) were more prevalent under conditions where strict teachers confronted disruptive students, Estep, Willower, and Licata (1980) tested the hypothesis that the stricter the control, the less self-actualized the student. Robustness was determined from a RSD (Robustness Semantic Differential Scale). The hypothesis was rejected. If teachers are to be more enthusiastic and in turn make classrooms less boring, then the study supported the premise that a strictly controlled classroom is not conducive to robustness (i.e., activity) as is a more humanistic one.
In contrast to those studies that support student decision making, or at least a balance in the classroom, other educational research has advocated a teacher-controlled environment.

Kounin's (1977) studies of classroom management and teacher control characteristics have been the impetus for consideration of techniques which lend support to the assertive discipline approach. Kounin discussed the forms or qualities of desists in light of a ripple effect (i.e., ...the effect of this desist event upon other members of the classroom). Also involved in teacher-student relationship differences in situational environments and the role of the person who admonishes the desist: a teacher, parent, or another significant adult. Therefore, the teacher-student relationship must be considered independently because of its unique characteristics.

No difference in the ripple effect occurred using a variety of desist qualities, with the exception of anger. Students who like a teacher in the first place, have low motivation, and are given a firm desist may pay attention to what they are doing in the classroom (Kounin, 1977). Many other variables are present in the classroom which easily determine if a desist technique is effective or ineffective.

Educators must, according to Kounin, possess "withitness": they must know what is happening at all times in the classroom. By the practice of overlapping, a teacher can handle two things at once in a classroom in order to keep control. The teacher who attends to the student causing the disruption and at the precise moment will be able to alleviate many major problems before they become too serious.

Kounin (1977) also studied movement management and various components of the classroom that deal with both verbal and physical actions by the teacher and increase or decrease in pace. This situation would depend on the props used, the
actual physical movement, or the psychological shifting of learning processes on the part of students. He concluded that:

...it is more important to maintain momentum by avoiding actions that slow down forward movement than it is to maintain smoothness by avoiding sudden starts and stops. And techniques of movement management are more significant in controlling deviancy than are techniques of deviancy management as such. In addition, techniques of movement management possess the additional value of promoting work involvement, especially in recitation setting.

Teachers must not only consider movement management, they should keep students alert to activities occurring in the classroom. In regard to variety and the sequencing of what students learn, if there is too much repetition that satiates the class, then learning will not be enhanced and disruptive classroom behavior may ensure. Progress must be made through physical movement and mental conceptualization. According to Kounin (1977), teachers are aware of the time required to go over certain materials in order that oversatiation does not replace suitable mastery of a defined subject area. Kounin considered all the above-mentioned techniques to be only a portion of the complex technology necessary to manage a classroom. Planned management can be administered in any way that a teacher chooses; however, the setting up of a group-oriented discipline procedure does not by necessity negate individual attention and teacher consideration.

Commenting on Kounin's (1977) study of the ripple effect, Sumner (1978) characterized five managerial techniques which might easily be perceived as a function for the assertive discipline approach:

1. Threatening control techniques produce disruptive behavior and fail to prevent future misbehavior.

2. When control techniques are focused on the task at hand, students may gain more interest in the subject.
3. As the teacher's expertness in the subject matter increases, so does the ability to control misbehavior.

4. Clarity points out the misbehavior and points out preferred reactions; this technique produces good results.

5. If a teacher's techniques are effective with class leaders, the teacher may be able to gain effective control over the entire class.

Effective educators working in an assertive discipline classroom will find themselves keeping students on task and attentive, attending immediately to specific individuals who are disruptive in order to minimize the disturbance, and acting in as consistent and uniform a manner as possible.

In their investigation of what characterizes effective classroom managers, Emmer and Evertson (1980) commented on a study they conducted in 1980. They found better managers did set up a policy for behavior so students would know what was expected of them. Those teachers also specified expected academic work standards and clarified the organization of the classroom as to how it would be run. "Better managers also were good monitors and dealt with inappropriate behavior promptly." Teachers who could adapt their teaching style to a heterogeneously mixed group and assist lower achieving students also had fewer disruptions in the classroom.

The Phi Delta Kappan (1981) emphasized the necessity for external discipline and also took into account student development of internal discipline. After being created, rules must be examined carefully for their teaching value and most importantly, "...the staff must commit themselves to teaching positive behavior." Assertive discipline teachers must evaluate the need for certain rules and eliminate those that are not broken. They must serve as models and attempt to work together within a schoolwide discipline program. Once again, consistency of
application among administrators and teachers seems essential for a schoolwide assertive discipline program to be effective.

A number of studies, directly related to classroom management, which validate various components of the assertive discipline procedure, have been reviewed in a publication for the Educational Testing Service (Weber et al., 1983). The study of Berliner and others (1978), entitled the "Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study," indicated "...that classes with behavior problems requiring frequent teacher reprimands do not tend to be the classes in which most learning is occurring." The Teacher Effectiveness Project conducted by Brophy and Evertson (1976) was also cited. They concluded that a few rules, which are well defined and explained at the beginning of a school year, are characteristics of a successful classroom manager. Hair and others (1980) also investigated rule making. They felt that teachers should require students to learn responsibility, let their expectations for the class be known, and have students assist with the creation of rules. This last point is a variable that assertive discipline teachers may want to incorporate into their approach. Just as assertive discipline is built upon the development of rewards and punishments, so too does the study by Hair and others (1980) advocate the consistent use of consequences that reward or punish.

Another study conducted in four elementary schools by Ersavas (1980) attempted to determine the effectiveness of assertive discipline. Questionnaire surveys were sent to four populations. "...222 parents, 222 fifth grade students, 57 teachers, and 4 principals..." The questionnaire surveys were administered in presurvey and postsurvey fashion and sought responses to questions that dealt with the classroom and the entire school. Separate questionnaire surveys were developed for each population. The author was responsible for directing two workshops on assertive discipline in order that comparisons could be made to
determine any significant differences among groups in the four schools before and after the implementation of the procedure. Ersavas (1980) concluded ". . . that assertive discipline has an extremely positive effect at each of the four schools who participated in the study.

The question that dealt with whether assertive discipline developed positive student attitudes toward school, reduced behavior problems, and increased teacher satisfaction was asked by Bauer (1982) in his study. Bauer looked at teachers, administrators, and ninth grade students in two schools: one using assertive discipline and the other using different type procedures. Two instruments were used — one measured teacher role perception, and the other determined what discipline problems teachers thought were most widespread or frequent. The students were asked to respond to 84 questions dealing with morale and what their attitudes were about the school they attended. The findings of this study revealed that certain types of discipline problems (only 8 of 20 listed) may be reduced with the assertive discipline approach. Only the classroom problems were reduced; the total schoolwide discipline problem, as measured by the number of suspensions, was not reduced. Bauer found that male students were basically more prone to become involved in discipline problems than females. "The discipline problems that were significantly different between the two samples were related to the development of social skills. The problems that were related to learning activities were not statistically significant." Teachers in the assertive discipline schools were shown to have a more positive attitude about their roles as well as feeling they had authority and cooperation with the administration. These same teachers also indicated that their effectiveness in the classroom was greater, so they could allow more time for instruction and less for disciplining disruptive students. One of the most significant findings that Bauer (1982) reported involved student morale.
"Data collected from the School Morale Scale showed that the school using assertive discipline had fewer discipline problems." Bauer recommended that the study be replicated in other schools that utilize assertive discipline and those that do not.

The related literature suggested that an assertive approach does reduce the discipline problems, when the educators consider the school climate, school rules, student population, social skills of the students, morale, perceptions of the educator, and student attitudes toward the administration. The literature supported the research findings that only the classroom problems were reduced by assertive discipline and a significant difference in schoolwide discipline problems did not occur.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the hypotheses to be tested, the sample selection, data collection procedures, questionnaire development, data treatment, and the reporting of the data. Assertive discipline has been researched to a minimal degree. This study will add to the research by asking how effective assertive discipline has been in reducing the incidence of disciplinary problems and actions in six Atlanta high schools. The following null hypotheses were formulated for testing.

HYPOTHESES FOR TESTING

1.\( H_0: \) There will be no significant difference in the incidence of in-school suspensions between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach.

2.\( H_0: \) There will be no significant difference in the incidence of out-of-school suspensions between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach.

3.\( H_0: \) There will be no significant difference in the incidence of disciplinary referrals between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive approach.
SAMPLE SELECTION

So that an adequate sample could be selected for the study, a survey was conducted to identify the Atlanta high schools that were using the assertive discipline approach. Postage paid, double-survey cards were mailed to 13 high schools in Atlanta (Appendix A). Six cards (approximately 50 percent) were returned. The high school principal or other administrator was sent the definition of assertive discipline and asked to respond to four questions:

1. Does a majority of the faculty use assertive discipline?
2. When discipline problems are referred to the office, are they handled under the guidelines of an assertive discipline approach?
3. For what length of time has assertive discipline been used on a schoolwide basis both in the classroom and at the administrative level?
4. Would you (the school) be willing to participate in a study on assertive discipline?

Twenty-five administrators responded positively to questions 1, 2, and 4. They also completed question 3 with the period of time that assertive discipline had been used. Twenty administrators responded negatively to questions 1 and 2. Question 3 was not completed and question 4 was answered positively. Of the 25 administrators that used assertive discipline and who were willing to participate in the study, 15 had used the procedure for two years. Ten had used the procedure for one year.

The responses on the questionnaire were used to determine which administrators were assertive and nonassertive. The Likert-type scale for the questionnaire responses ranged from a low of 1 to a high of 5. The choices which corresponded to the scale were never used, seldom used, neutral, usually used, and
always used. Administrators who responded that they usually used (4) or always used (5) the discipline methods were classified as assertive. The ratings on the questionnaire for the assertive group ranged from 68 to 85. Administrators who responded that they never used (1), seldom used (2) or neutral (3) were classified as nonassertive. The ratings on the questionnaire for the nonassertive group was below 68.

DATA COLLECTION

A questionnaire was sent to the administrators of six Atlanta high schools. The administrators were instructed to complete the questionnaire. The administrators were asked to inspect their disciplinary records and gather the necessary data for completion of the questionnaire. The administrators were asked to return the questionnaire as soon as possible. In the event that the questionnaire was not returned within the prescribed date, a phone call was made to the administrator as a second follow-up.

QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

The items on the questionnaire consisted of positive and negative aspects of Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach. The administrators were asked to complete the entire questionnaire including that portion dealing with demographic and general information. Specific items were designed to obtain information concerning inschool suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and disciplinary referrals. The questionnaire was refined as a result of feedback from a pilot study.
DATA TREATMENT

The data for three hypotheses were analyzed using the t test. The data were divided among three groups. Group one was the number of in-school suspensions (N = 200) for the assertive and nonassertive discipline approaches. Group two was the number of out-of-school suspensions (N = 132) for the assertive and nonassertive discipline approaches. Group three was the number of disciplinary referrals (N = 202) for the assertive and nonassertive discipline approaches.

REPORTING THE DATA

Administrators were assured that neither they nor their schools would be identified by name and that group data would be reported. For each of the hypotheses tested, the results were presented in tables.

The data obtained from the responses to those items on the questionnaire that asked the administrators to explain some aspect of the discipline procedure were included in the discussion portion of the study.
Chapter 4

FINDINGS

The research tested the null hypotheses, at the .05 level of significance, that high school administrators who used an assertive discipline approach did not differ from high school administrators who used a nonassertive discipline approach, with respect to the incidence of disciplinary actions taken for ninth and tenth grade students at six Atlanta high schools.

To test the hypotheses, a questionnaire to measure assertive and nonassertive discipline approaches was administered to a sample of 45 high school administrators in six Atlanta high schools. Based on the responses obtained from the questionnaires, 25 administrators were classified as using an assertive discipline approach and 20 administrators were classified as using a nonassertive discipline approach.

The number of disciplinary actions were recorded for the 25 administrators using an assertive discipline approach and the 20 administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach. The disciplinary actions were recorded in three categories: inschool suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and disciplinary referrals.

The t test was used to test the null hypotheses of no difference between sample means for the sample of 25 administrators who used an assertive discipline approach and the sample of 20 administrators who used a nonassertive discipline approach. The .05 level of significance was specified for rejecting the null hypotheses. The .05 level of significance provided a cutoff point for deciding whether the difference between two sample means was large enough so that it
could not be attributed to sampling error alone. Results obtained under this criteria were considered statistically significant.

The interpretation of the calculated $t$ value was done with the aid of a Fisher and Yates Statistical Table for values of $t$ at the .05 and .01 levels of significance.

The data collected from the random samples were at the interval level of measurement. The data were analyzed with the aid of a computer software package for statistical treatment of data.

Three null hypotheses were specified:

1. $H_0$: There will be no significant difference in the incidence of inschool suspensions between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach.

2. $H_0$: There will be no significant difference in the incidence of out-of-school suspensions between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach.

3. $H_0$: There will be no significant difference in the incidence of disciplinary referrals between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach.

The number of disciplinary actions taken for ninth and tenth grade students in the categories of inschool suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and disciplinary referrals are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 shows the number of disciplinary actions for 25 administrators who used an assertive discipline approach. The data showed that the largest number of disciplinary actions was in the category of disciplinary referrals, followed by inschool suspensions and out-of-school suspensions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>In-school Suspension</th>
<th>Out-of-School Suspension</th>
<th>Disciplinary Referral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>871</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 shows the number of disciplinary actions for 20 administrators who used a nonassertive discipline approach. The data showed that the largest number of disciplinary actions was taken in the category of inschool suspensions, followed by disciplinary referrals and out-of-school suspensions.

**TABLE 2**

DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS USING A NONASSERTIVE DISCIPLINE APPROACH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrator</th>
<th>Number of Disciplinary Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inschool Suspension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>682</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The statistical analysis of data presented in Tables 1 and 2 was used to test the null hypothesis for:

\[ H_0: \text{There will be no significant difference in the incidence of inschool suspensions between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach.} \]

The results of the t test for the first hypothesis, \( H_0 \), are presented in Table 3.

**TABLE 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T TEST FOR INSCHOOL SUSPENSIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assertive Discipline Approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonassertive Discipline Approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interpretation of the t test at the .05 level of significance and 38 degrees of freedom showed that the calculated t value, therefore, was -.859 and the t value from the statistical table was 2.021. In order to reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance and 38 degrees of freedom, the calculated t value must be equal to or greater than the table t value of 2.021. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. There was no significant difference in the incidence of inschool suspensions between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach.
approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach for ninth and tenth grade students in six Atlanta high schools.

The statistical analysis of data presented in Tables 1 and 2 was used to test the null hypothesis for $H_0$: There will be no significant difference in the incidence of out-of-school suspensions between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach.

The results of the $t$ test for the second hypothesis, $H_0$, are presented in Table 4.

### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t Value</th>
<th>Degrees of Freedom</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assertive Discipline Approach</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16.72</td>
<td>16.10</td>
<td>-1.31</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonassertive Discipline Approach</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>17.40</td>
<td>18.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$p = .05$

The interpretation of the $t$ test at the .05 level of significance and 40 degrees of freedom showed that the calculated $t$ value, therefore, was -1.31 and the $t$ value from the statistical table was 2.021. In order to reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance and 40 degrees of freedom, the calculated $t$ value must be equal to or greater than the table $t$ value of 2.021. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. There was no significant difference in the incidence of out-of-
school suspensions between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach for ninth and tenth grade students in six Atlanta high schools.

The statistical analysis of data presented in Tables 1 and 2 was used to test the null hypothesis for 3Ho: There will be no significant difference in the incidence of disciplinary referrals between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach.

The results of the t test for the third hypothesis, 3Ho, are presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5

T TEST FOR DISCIPLINARY REFERRALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>t Value</th>
<th>Degrees of Freedom</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assertive Discipline Approach</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>34.84</td>
<td>10.37</td>
<td>.778</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonassertive Discipline Approach</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32.50</td>
<td>9.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interpretation of the t test at the .05 level of significance and 44 degrees of freedom showed that the calculated t value, therefore, was .778 and the t value from the statistical table was 2.021. In order to reject the null hypothesis at the .05 level of significance and 44 degrees of freedom, the calculated t value must be equal to or greater than the table t value of 2.021. Therefore, the null hypothesis
was not rejected. There was no significant difference in the incidence of disciplinary referrals between those administrators using Lee Canter's assertive discipline approach and those administrators using a nonassertive discipline approach for ninth and tenth grade students in six Atlanta high schools.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY

Society's fascination with and struggle to enforce discipline has been prevalent in the American school system for decades. The modern era has witnessed movement away from the sole use of corporal punishment in public schools. Disciplinary alternatives have been implemented that either consider the benefit of the individual above the group, the group above the individual, or some combination of the two.

Described as a teacher, take-charge approach, assertive discipline and its effectiveness in the Atlanta high schools were considered by the researcher in this study. The study conducted an investigation of the incidence of in-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and disciplinary referrals. The purpose of the study was to explore the effectiveness of Lee Canter's approach to assertive discipline as a disciplinary alternative in six Atlanta high schools.

Chapter 1 presented the background of the problem and clarified the assumptions and limitations for the study. The topical presentation of materials in Chapter 2 directed attention to Lee Canter's specialized approach to discipline and the impact on administrators, teachers, and students alike. After almost 8 years of use in the American school setting, the promises of assertive disciplinary change needed to be measured against the reality of assertive use in schools.

The procedure undertaken for this study included investigation of six Atlanta high schools and the incidence of disciplinary problems and actions in those schools.
CONCLUSIONS

The interpretation of results of the t tests of difference between sample means for three null hypotheses showed that the null hypotheses of no difference were not rejected. The primary conclusion drawn from the findings was that there was no significant difference in the incidences of inschool suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and disciplinary referrals for high school administrators who used Lee Canter's approach to assertive discipline as compared to a nonassertive discipline approach with ninth and tenth grade students in six Atlanta high schools.

The findings also indicated that within each of the six high schools in the sample, some administrators preferred an assertive discipline approach while others used a nonassertive discipline approach. The influence, therefore, of one discipline approach within a school was counter-balanced with the alternative discipline approach.

The discipline guidelines afforded the high school administrators discretionary power regarding disciplinary actions. The administrators functioned within the bureaucratic structure of the school system, but it was the administrators' discretionary power rather than the bureaucracy which explained the lack of significant difference in the incidence of inschool, out-of-school, and disciplinary referrals.

Another mediating factor which may have influenced the results of the study was the interactive group process stipulated by the student discipline guidelines. The guidelines stipulated certain reporting, documentation, and notification processes which required the input and influence of others (administrators, teachers, parents, students) in the decisions regarding a disciplinary problem.
While the administrator had the authority to make the final decision regarding a disciplinary action, he may not have behaved consistently in accordance with a rigid discipline approach.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research of the problem of student discipline was indicated. Schools, parents, and the community regarded the maintenance of discipline as a prime influence in the type of learning environment within a school. Student discipline deals with many disruptive behaviors or overt acts by students that interfere with the ongoing instructional process in the classroom and the learning of other students.

Further research should focus on lower grade levels to determine at what levels certain disciplinary methods are effective and at what developmental level of students certain disciplinary methods are no longer effective.

Another area for further research would be to determine the level of training and preparation received by administrators on how to discipline in a high school setting.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX
Dear Administrator,

Recognition that in today's school educators are using alternative forms of discipline prompts one to ask, how effective are these approaches? In an attempt to evaluate the use of Canter's assertive discipline, I am seeking your assistance in order to gather data for a proposed thesis.

Your response to the attached postage-paid survey card will allow me to finalize plans for conducting a general survey of high school administrators in Atlanta who are using assertive discipline as a discipline approach. Participating high schools will receive an abstract of the study.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Respectfully yours,

Jerry D. Woodfork

---

PLEASE RESPOND TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND RETURN THIS POSTAGE-PAID SURVEY CARD BY APRIL 24, 1986.

Does a majority of the high school administrators use assertive discipline? Yes  No

When discipline problems are referred to the office, are they handled under the guidelines of the assertive discipline approach? Yes  No

For what length of time has assertive discipline been used on a schoolwide basis (at the administrative level)? ____________________________ (years)

Would you (school) be willing to participate in a study?

Administrator's Name _______________________________________________________

High School ______________________________________________________________

Address ______________________________________________________ Zip ___________
April 30, 1986

Dear Colleague,

Would you please participate in a research study concerned with school discipline? The enclosed Administrator Questionnaire about discipline has been designed for you to complete in a relatively short period of time.

Your thoughtful and complete responses will be an important part of a larger body of information being gathered in the Atlanta Public Schools for use in this study. Let me assure you that group data will be analyzed and no mention of the school or you personally will be made in the study.

You will receive an abstract of the final report which I trust will prove informative to you and your school staff, since you will have played a significant part in its development.

Thank you for participating in this study.

Respectfully yours,

Jerry D. Woodfork
Graduate Student

Enclosure: Questionnaire
DISCIPLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Please indicate the level of your agreement by circling the appropriate number after each item.

5 = always used  4 = usually used  3 = neutral  2 = seldom used  1 = never used

1. It is not necessary for teachers to state the rules of order to children in order to maintain discipline during the academic year.

2. Children will behave better in class if they are aware of the consequences of their negative behavior.

3. It is not necessary to give children rewards for good behavior.

4. It is necessary to remove a disruptive child from that particular class setting to another class setting.

5. Sending a letter or note home to parents is usually a waste of time in maintaining discipline.

6. It is a good idea to place the names of disruptive students on the chalkboard or bulletin board.

7. Disruptive behavior will be curtailed if the students who are acting out are sent to the discipline office.

8. Suspension (inhouse or out-of-school) is a waste of time in maintaining order in the classroom.

9. The rules of conduct should be explained to students at the beginning of the academic year.

10. A note sent home to parents is usually a good way to maintain order in the classroom.

11. Too much emphasis is placed on disruptive students, while too little rewards are given to students with good behavior.
12. Placing the name of disruptive students on the board is an excellent way to maintaining order in the classroom.

13. It is not really necessary to have strong school leadership to maintain good conduct in the individual teacher's classroom.

14. Suspending students for negative behavior is one of the best ways of keeping order in the school.

15. There is a direct relationship between the level of discipline in the school and the learning environment of that school.

16. If privileges are taken from students who consistently misbehave, eventually discipline problems will decrease.

17. Without strong administrative leadership, a school's discipline problem will not work.

Demographic Information

Please answer the following questions by circling or filling in the blank.

1. What is the ninth and tenth grades student enrollment from September through December for the 1985-1986 school year?

2. What is the total number of in-school suspensions for the ninth and tenth grades student enrollment from September through December for the 1985-1986 school year?

3. What is the total number of reported disciplinary referrals for the ninth and tenth grades student enrollment that occurred from September through December for the 1985-86 school year?

4. What is the total number of out-of-school suspensions for the ninth and tenth grades student enrollment from September through December for the 1985-86 school year?

Thank you for your cooperation in completing this questionnaire.
ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATION AND POLICY STUDIES

APPROVAL OF THESIS

Full name of student:  Jerry D. Woodfork

Advisor:  Philip A. Bradley

To the Committee on Graduate Study:

The attached thesis:  The Effects of An Assertive Discipline Approach on Disciplinary Problems in Selected High Schools

has been approved by the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Specialist in Education degree and is recommended for acceptance.

(Signature)  Philip A. Bradley

Dean:  Alfred E. McWilliams, Jr.

Date:  2/19/84

FORM C-9C