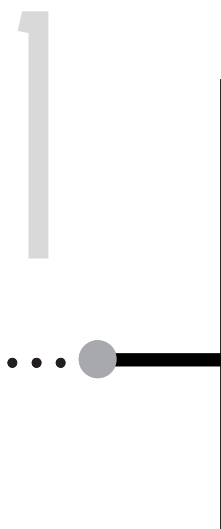


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# THE CRITICAL ROLE OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Teachers play various roles in a typical classroom, but surely one of the most important is that of classroom manager. Effective teaching and learning cannot take place in a poorly managed classroom. If students are disorderly and disrespectful, and no apparent rules and procedures guide behavior, chaos becomes the norm. In these situations, both teachers and students suffer. Teachers struggle to teach, and students most likely learn much less than they should. In contrast, well-managed classrooms provide an environment in which teaching and learning can flourish. But a well-managed classroom doesn't just appear out of nowhere. It takes a good deal of effort to create—and the person who is most responsible for creating it is the teacher.

We live in an era when research tells us that the teacher is probably the single most important factor affecting student achievement—at least the single most important factor that we can do much about. To illustrate, as a

result of their study involving some 60,000 students, S. Paul Wright, Sandra Horn, and William Sanders (1997) note the following:

The results of this study will document that the most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher. In addition, the results show wide variation in effectiveness among teachers. The immediate and clear implication of this finding is that seemingly more can be done to improve education by improving the effectiveness of teachers than by any other single factor. *Effective teachers appear to be effective with students of all achievement levels regardless of the levels of heterogeneity in their classes.* If the teacher is ineffective, students under that teacher's tutelage will achieve inadequate progress academically, regardless of how similar or different they are regarding their academic achievement. (p. 63) [emphasis in original]

Researcher Kati Haycock (1998) uses the findings of this study and others conducted by William Sanders and his colleagues (e.g., Sanders & Horn, 1994) to paint a dramatic picture of the profound impact an individual teacher can have on student achievement. The point is illustrated in Figure 1.1, which depicts the differences in achievement between students who spend a year in class with a highly effective teacher as opposed to a highly ineffective teacher.

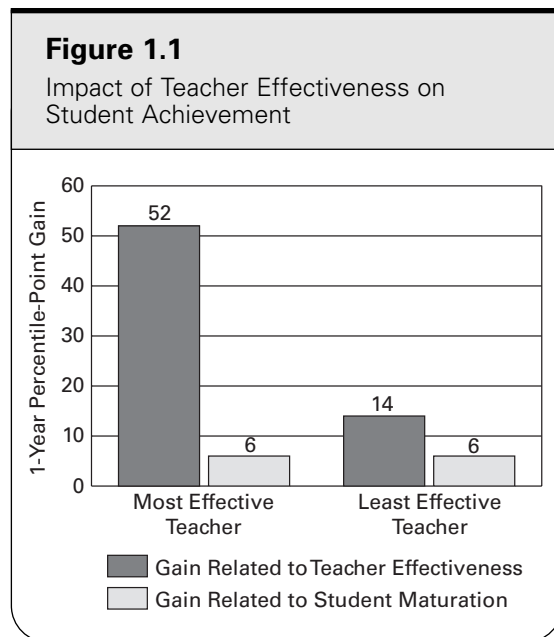
According to Figure 1.1, students in the classes of teachers classified as the most effective can be expected to gain about 52 percentile points in their achievement over a year's time. Students in the classes of teachers classified as least effective can be expected to gain only about 14 percentile points over a year's time. This comparison is even more dramatic when one realizes that some researchers have estimated that students will

exhibit a gain in learning of about 6 percentile points simply from maturation—from growing one year older and gleaning new knowledge and information through everyday life (see Hattie, 1992; Cahen & Davis, 1987). The least effective teachers, then, add little to the development of students' knowledge and skill beyond what would be expected from simply growing one year older in our complex, information-rich society.

Sanders and his colleagues, who gathered their data from elementary school students in Tennessee, are not the only ones to document dramatic differences in achievement between students in classes taught by highly ineffective versus highly effective teachers. Haycock (1998) reports similar findings from studies conducted in Dallas and Boston.

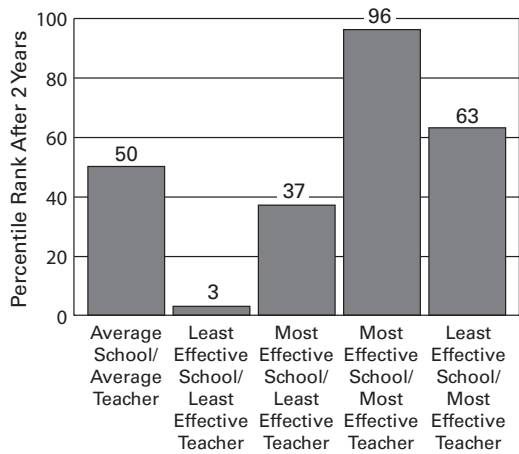
I have come to similar conclusions in my work, although I have taken a very different approach from that used in the studies that form the basis for Haycock's conclusions. Whereas the studies conducted in Tennessee, Dallas, and Boston were based on data acquired from students over time, I used a research process called meta-analysis to synthesize the research on effective schools over the last 35 years (see Marzano, 2000a, 2003b). That approach enabled me to separate the effect on student achievement of a school (in general) from the effect of an individual teacher. Figure 1.2 illustrates my findings.

To understand the impact that a teacher can make, let's consider each of the five scenarios in Figure 1.2. (For a detailed discussion of how the computations in Figure 1.2 were derived, see Marzano, 2000a.) As depicted in Figure 1.2, if a student begins at the 50th percentile in mathematics, let's say, and attends an average school and has an average teacher, her achievement will still be at the 50th



**Figure 1.2**

Effects of a School vs. a Teacher on Student Entering at 50th Percentile



percentile at the end of about two years. The student has learned enough to keep pace with her peers. But what happens to that student if she attends a school that is considered one of the least effective and is unfortunate enough to have a teacher who is classified as one of the least effective? After two years she has dropped from the 50th percentile to the 3rd percentile. She may have learned something about mathematics, but that learning is so sporadic and unorganized that she has lost considerable ground in a short time. In the third scenario, the same student is in a school classified as most effective, but she has a teacher classified as least effective. Although the student entered the class at the 50th percentile, two years later she leaves the class at the 37th percentile. In contrast to the two previous scenarios, the fourth presents a very optimistic picture. The student is not only in a school classified as most effective, but also is

in the class of a teacher classified as most effective. She enters the class at the 50th percentile, but she leaves at the 96th percentile. The fifth scenario most dramatically depicts the impact of an individual teacher. Again, the student is in a school that is considered least effective, but she is with a teacher classified as most effective. The student now leaves the class at the 63rd percentile—13 percentile points higher than the point at which she entered. It is this last scenario that truly depicts the importance of individual teachers. Even if the school they work in is highly ineffective, individual teachers can produce powerful gains in student learning.

Although the effect the classroom teacher can have on student achievement is clear, the dynamics of how a teacher produces such an effect are not simple. Rather, the effective teacher performs many functions. These functions can be organized into three major roles: (1) making wise choices about the most effective instructional strategies to employ, (2) designing classroom curriculum to facilitate student learning, and (3) making effective use of classroom management techniques.

The first role deals with instructional strategies and their use. Effective teachers have a wide array of instructional strategies at their disposal. They are skilled in the use of cooperative learning and graphic organizers; they know how best to use homework and how to use questions and advance organizers, and so on. Additionally, they know when these strategies should be used with specific students and specific content. Although cooperative learning might be highly effective in one lesson, a different approach might be better in another lesson. Some general strategies that have a good research “track record” in terms of enhancing student achievement have

been detailed in *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).

The second role associated with effective teaching is classroom curriculum design. This means that effective teachers are skilled at identifying and articulating the proper sequence and pacing of their content. Rather than relying totally on the scope and sequence provided by the district or the textbook, they consider the needs of their students collectively and individually and then determine the content that requires emphasis and the most appropriate sequencing and presentation of that content. They are also highly skilled at constructing and arranging learning activities that present new knowledge in different formats (e.g., stories, explanations, demonstrations) and different media (e.g., oral presentations, written presentations, video presentations, Web-based presentations, simulations, hands-on activities).

The third role involved in effective teaching is classroom management. This, of course, is the subject of this book. The following chapters detail and exemplify the various components of effective classroom management.

Before delving into classroom management, however, it is important to note that each of these three roles is a necessary but not sufficient component of effective teaching. That is, no single role by itself is sufficient to guarantee student learning, but take one out of the mix and you probably guarantee that students will have difficulty learning. Nevertheless, a strong case can be made that effective instructional strategies and good classroom curriculum design are built on the foundation of effective classroom management. As Long and Frye (1985) note in their

book, *Making It Till Friday: A Guide to Successful Classroom Management*, it is a myth to believe that

. . . effective teachers can prevent all discipline problems by keeping students interested in learning through the use of exciting classroom materials and activities. The potential for problems exists beyond academics. Students experience difficulties at home which spill over into the classroom; students experience problems with peers during class breaks and in the classroom which often involve the teacher; and students experience mood changes which can generate problems, to name just a few.  
(pp. 3–4)

Similarly, in their synthesis of the research, Edmund Emmer, Julie Sanford, Barbara Clements, and Jeanne Martin (1982) note that

At all public school grade levels, effective classroom management has been recognized as a crucial element in effective teaching. If a teacher cannot obtain students' cooperation and involve them in instructional activities, it is unlikely that effective teaching will take place . . . In addition, poor management wastes class time, reduces students' time on task and detracts from the quality of the learning environment. (p. 13)

## **A Brief History of Classroom Management Research**

It is probably no exaggeration to say that classroom management has been a primary concern of teachers ever since there have been teachers in classrooms. However, the systematic study of effective classroom management is a relatively recent phenomenon. Here we

briefly consider the major studies on classroom management. (For more detailed and comprehensive discussions, see Emmer, 1984; Brophy, 1996; and Doyle, 1986, 1990.)

Arguably, the first high-profile, large-scale, systematic study of classroom management was done by Jacob Kounin (1970). He analyzed videotapes of 49 first and second grade classrooms and coded the behavior of students and teachers. Kounin's findings are discussed in more depth in Chapter 5, but it is worth noting here that he identified several critical dimensions of effective classroom management. Those dimensions (among others) are (1) "withitness," (2) smoothness and momentum during lesson presentations, (3) letting students know what behavior is expected of them at any given point in time, and (4) variety and challenge in the seatwork assigned to students. "Withitness" involves a keen awareness of disruptive behavior or potentially disruptive behavior and immediate attention to that behavior; of the four dimensions, it is the one that most consistently separates the excellent classroom managers from the average or below-average classroom managers.

In 1976 Brophy and Evertson reported the results of one of the major studies in classroom management, up to that point, in a book entitled *Learning from Teaching: A Developmental Perspective*. Their sample included some 30 elementary teachers whose students had exhibited consistently better than expected gains in academic achievement. The comparison group consisted of 38 teachers whose performance was more typical. Brophy and Evertson's study, then, might be considered a comparison of exceptional teachers with average teachers. Although the study focused on a wide variety of teaching behaviors, classroom management surfaced as one of the critical

aspects of effective teaching. Much of what they found relative to classroom management supported the earlier findings of Kounin. Brophy and Evertson (1976) say this about their study:

Much has been said . . . in the book about our findings concerning classroom management. Probably the most important point to bear in mind is that almost all surveys of teacher effectiveness report that classroom management skills are of primary importance in determining teaching success, whether it is measured by student learning or by ratings. Thus, management skills are crucial and fundamental. A teacher who is grossly inadequate in classroom management skills is probably not going to accomplish much. (p. 27)

A series of four studies conducted at the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education in Austin, Texas, marked a milestone in the research on classroom management. The first study involved 27 elementary school teachers. The second involved 51 junior high school teachers. Results from the elementary school study were reported in Emmer, Evertson, and Anderson (1980) and Anderson, Evertson, and Emmer (1980). Results from the junior high study were reported in Evertson and Emmer (1982) and in Sanford and Evertson (1981). Both studies were descriptive and correlational in nature and identified those teacher actions associated with student on-task behavior and disruptive behavior. Again, Kounin's earlier findings were strongly supported. One of the more significant conclusions from these studies was that early attention to classroom management at the beginning of the school year is a critical ingredient of a well-run classroom.