

Teacher Competencies Overview

What are teacher competencies? Competencies are the skills and knowledge that enable a teacher to be successful. To maximize student learning, teachers must have expertise in a wide-ranging array of competencies in an especially complex environment where hundreds of critical decisions are required each day (Jackson, 1990). Few jobs demand the integration of professional judgment and the proficient use of evidence-based competencies as does teaching.

Why is this important? The transformational power of an effective teacher is something many of us have experienced. Intuitively, the link between teaching and student academic achievement may seem obvious, but what is the evidence for it?

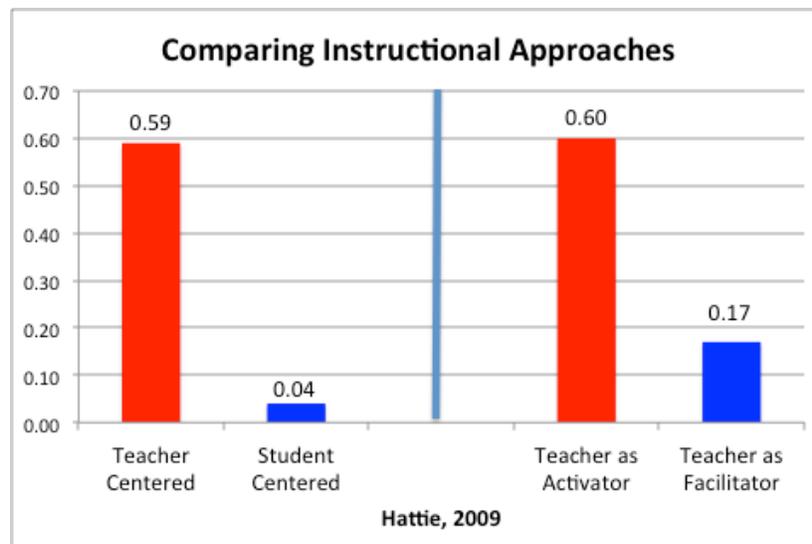
Research confirms this common perception of a link and reveals that of all factors under the control of a school, teachers are the most powerful influence on student success (Babu & Mendro, 2003; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). What separates effective teachers from ineffective ones, and how can this information be used to support better teaching? We can now begin to build a profile of exemplary classroom instruction derived from effectiveness research (Wenglinsky, 2002; Hattie, 2009).

Which competencies make the biggest difference? An examination of the research on education practices that make a difference shows that four classes of competencies yield the greatest results.

1. Instructional delivery
2. Classroom management
3. Formative assessment
4. Personal competencies (soft skills)

Further, the research indicates that these competencies can be used to organize the numerous specific skills and knowledge available for building effective teacher development.

Instructional delivery: Research tells us what can be expected from a teacher employing instructional strategies and practices that are proven to lead to increased mastery of lessons. Better learning happens in a dynamic setting in which teachers offer explicit active instruction than in situations in which teachers do not actively guide instruction and instead turn control over content and pace of instruction to students (Hattie, 2009).



Is there a diverse set of practices that teachers can efficiently and effectively use to increase mastery of content for a variety of curricula? The structured and systematic approach of explicit instruction emphasizes mastery of the lesson to ensure that students understand what has been taught, become fluent in new material, and can generalize what they learn to novel situations they encounter in the future.

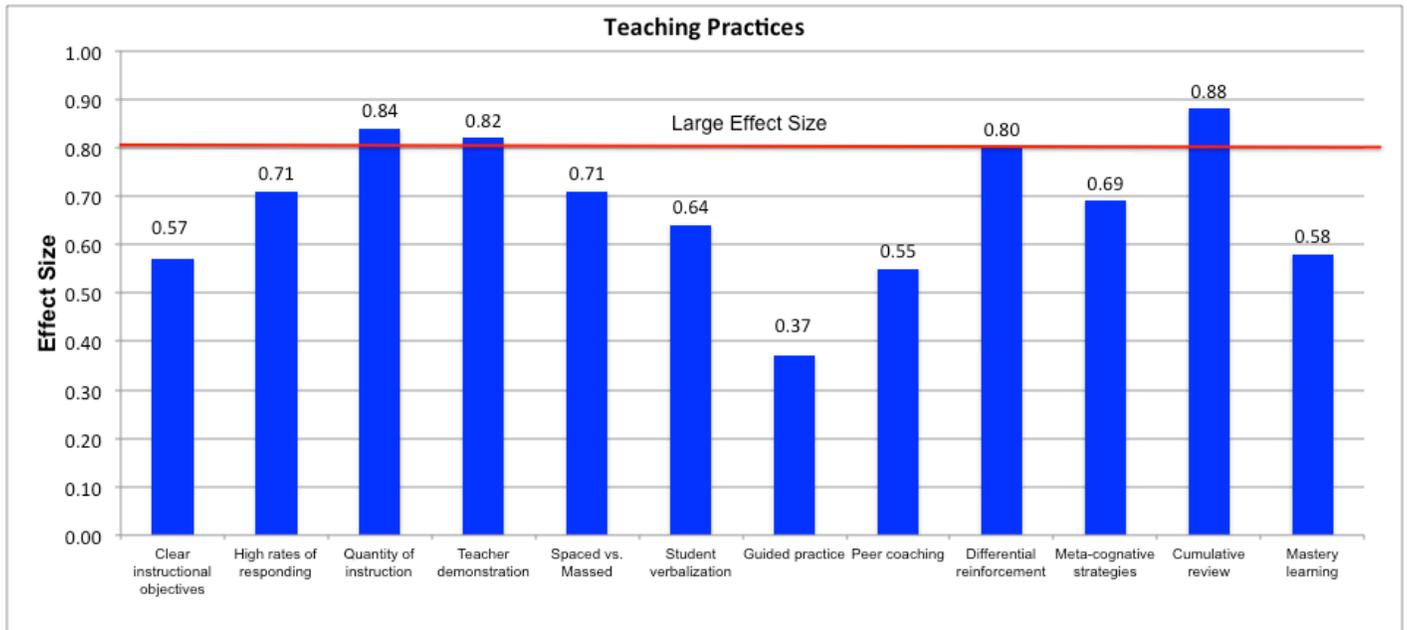
The following are hallmarks of an explicit approach for teachers (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Knight, 2012).

1. Teacher selects the learning area to be taught.
2. Teacher sets criteria for success.
3. Teacher informs students of criteria ahead of the lesson.
4. Teacher demonstrates to the students successful use of the knowledge/skills through modeling.
5. Teacher evaluates student acquisition.
6. Teacher provides remedial opportunities for acquiring the knowledge/skills, if necessary.
7. Teacher provides closure at the end of the lesson.

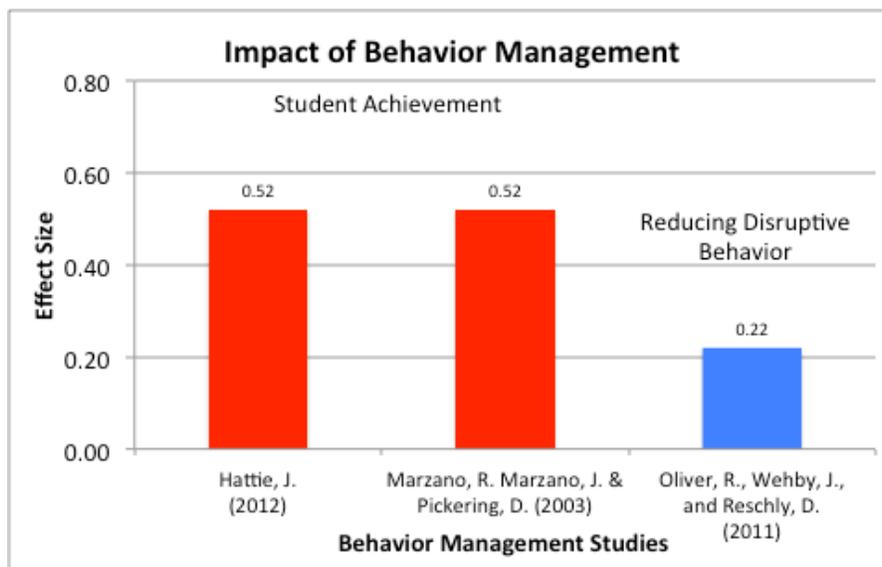
A common complaint of an explicit instruction approach is that it does not offer sufficient opportunities for students to build on acquired knowledge/skills in creative and novel ways that help them to assimilate the material. The reality is that all effective instruction, regardless of philosophy, must aid students in generalizing newly taught knowledge/skills in a context that is greater than a single lesson. An explicit model accomplishes the goal of building toward “big ideas” by first emphasizing mastery of foundation skills such as reading and mathematics, and then systematically introducing opportunities to integrate these critical skills in discovery-based lessons to maximize students’ experience of success.

Effective explicit instruction practices include these features.

1. **Well-designed and planned instruction:** Instruction that is well planned moves students from their current level of competency toward explicit criteria for success.
 - Instructional design with clear instructional objectives: The teacher should present these objectives to students for each lesson.
 - Scope and sequencing: The teacher should teach the range of related skills and the order in which they should be learned.
2. **Instruction that offers sufficient opportunities for successful acquisition:**
 - High rates of responding for each student to practice the skill: The teacher should provide sufficient opportunities for unpunished errors and ample reinforcement for success.
 - Sufficient quantity of instruction: The teacher should allocate enough time to teach a topic.
3. **Teaching to mastery:** Students need to learn the knowledge/skills to criteria that are verified by teachers or students’ peers.
4. **Teaching foundation knowledge/skills that become the basis for teaching big ideas:** Current lessons should be built on past knowledge to increase fluency and maintain mastery of material. The teacher should relate lessons to complex issues and big ideas that provide deeper meaning and give students better understanding of the content.



Classroom management: Classroom management is one of the most persistent areas of concern voiced by school administrators, the public, and teachers (Evertson & Weinstein, 2013). Research consistently places classroom management among the top five issues that affect student achievement.



To put its in perspective, classroom management was associated with an increase of 20% in student achievement when classroom rules and procedures were applied systematically (Hattie, 2005).

A good body of research highlights four important areas that classroom teachers should be proficient in to create a climate that maximizes learning and induces a positive mood and tone.

1. **Rules and procedures:** Effective rules and procedures identify expectations and appropriate behavior for students. To be effective, these practices must be observable and measurable.
 - Schoolwide rules and procedures: Clearly stated rules identify, define, and operationalize acceptable behavior specific to a school. These rules, applicable to all

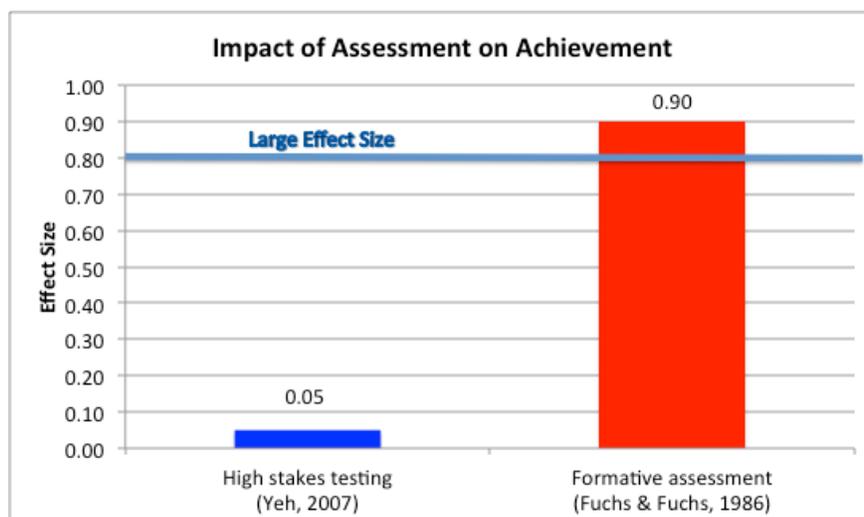
students, are designed to build pro-social behavior and reduce problem behavior in a school. They distinguish appropriate from problem behavior as well as specify consequences for infractions.

- Classroom rules and procedures: Another set of clearly stated rules establishes acceptable behavior specific in a classroom. These rules need to be consistent with schoolwide rules, but may be unique to meet the needs of an individual classroom.
2. **Proactive classroom management**: These are the practices that teachers and administrators can employ to teach and build acceptable behavior that is positive and helpful, promotes social acceptance, and leads to greater success in school. The key to proactive classroom management is active teacher supervision. The practice elements that constitute active supervision require staff to observe and interact with students regularly. The goal is to build a positive teacher-student relationship by providing timely and frequent positive feedback for appropriate behavior, and to swiftly and consistently respond to inappropriate behaviors.
 3. **Effective classroom instruction**: The key to maintaining a desirable classroom climate is to provide students with quality instructional delivery aligned to the skill level of each student. This enables students to experience success and keeps them attentive.
 4. **Behavior reduction**: These practices, designed to reduce problem and unacceptable behavior, are employed in the event the first three strategies fail. Behavior reduction strategies include giving students corrective feedback at the time of an infraction, minimizing reinforcement of a student's unacceptable behavior, and guiding students in how to behave appropriately.

Formative assessment: Effective ongoing assessment, referred to in education literature as formative assessment and progress monitoring, is indispensable in promoting teacher and student success. It is frequently listed at the top of interventions for school improvement (Walberg, 1999).

Feedback, a core component of formative assessment, is recognized as an essential tool for improving performance in sports, business, and education. Hattie (2009) identified feedback as the single most powerful educational tool available for improving student performance, with a medium to large effect size ranging from 0.66 to 0.94.

Formative assessment consists of a range of formal and informal diagnostic testing procedures, conducted by teachers throughout the learning process, for modifying teaching and adapting activities to improve student attainment. Systemic interventions such as Response to Intervention (RtI) and Data-Based Decision Making depend heavily on the use of formative assessment (Hattie, 2009; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).



The following are the practice elements of formative assessment (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1986).

1. **Assessment:** (Effect size 0.26) Assessing a student's performance throughout a lesson offers a teacher insight into who is succeeding and who is falling behind. It is important that teachers collect and maintain data gained through both informal and formal assessments.
2. **Data display:** (Effect size 0.70) Displaying the data in the form of a graphic has a surprisingly powerful effect on formative assessment's usefulness as a tool.
3. **Data analysis following defined rules:** (Effect size 0.90) Formative assessment is most valuable when teachers use evidence-based research and their own professional judgment to develop specific remedial interventions, before it is too late, for those falling behind.

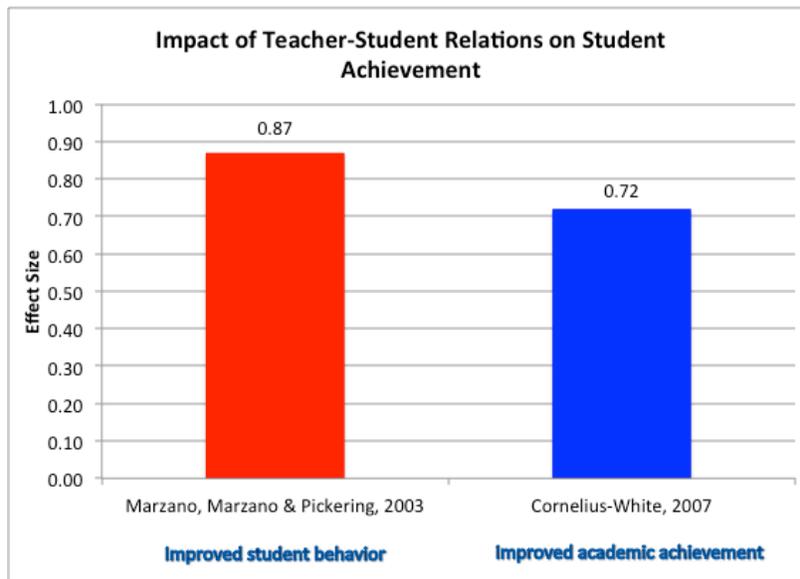
Personable competencies (soft skills): An inspiring teacher can affect students profoundly by stimulating their interest in learning. It is equally true that most students have encountered teachers who were uninspiring and for whom they performed poorly. Unfortunately, effective and ineffective teachers have no readily discernable personality differences. Some of the very best teachers are affable, but many ineffective instructors can be personable and caring. Conversely, some of the best teachers appear as stern taskmasters, but whose influence is enormous in motivating students to accomplish things they never thought possible.

What soft skills do successful teachers have in common? Typically, the finest teachers display enthusiasm and excitement for the subjects they teach. More than just generating excitement, they provide a road map for students to reach the goals set before them. The best teachers are proficient in the technical competencies of teaching: instructional delivery, formative assessment, and classroom management. Equally significant, they are fluent in a multilayered set of social skills that students recognize and respond to, which leads to greater learning (Attakorn, Tayut, Pisitthawat, & Kanokorn, 2014). These skills must be defined as clear behaviors that teachers can master for use in classrooms.

Indispensable soft skills include:

1. Establishing high but achievable expectations
2. Encouraging a love for learning
3. Listening to others
4. Being flexible and capable of adjusting to novel situations
5. Showing empathy
6. Being culturally sensitive
7. Embedding and encouraging higher order thinking along with teaching foundation skills
8. Having a positive regard for students

What does research tell us about personal competencies? Quantitative studies provide an overall range of effect sizes from 0.72 to 0.87 for effective teacher-student relations. Better teacher-student relations promote increased student academic performance and improve classroom climate by reducing disruptive student behavior (Cornelius-White, 2007; Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003).



Conclusion

There is abundant research to support the notion that teachers play the critical role in improving student achievement in schools. What teachers do in the classroom is crucial in this process. The breadth of high-quality research accumulated over the past 40 years offers educators a clear picture of how to maximize teacher competency in four critical categories: instructional delivery, classroom management, formative assessment, and personal competencies. There is now ample evidence to recommend these competencies as the core around which to build teacher preparation, teacher hiring, teacher development, and teacher and school evaluations.

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