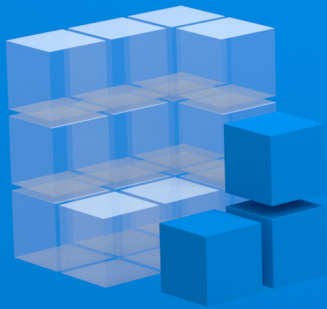# 03

Maximising opportunity to learn

Great teachers manage the classroom to maximise opportunity to learn

No model of teaching effectiveness could be complete without classroom management: managing the behaviour and activities of a class of students is what teachers do. Yet is it also controversial. Different teachers have very different styles, values and priorities.

Summary of Dimension 3

3.1 Managing time and resources efficiently in the classroom to maximise productivity and minimise wasted time (e.g., starts, transitions); giving clear instructions so students understand what they should be doing; using (and explicitly teaching) routines to make transitions smooth

3.2 Ensuring that rules, expectations and consequences for behaviour are explicit, clear and consistently applied

3.3 Preventing, anticipating and responding to potentially disruptive incidents; reinforcing positive student behaviours; signalling awareness of what is happening in the classroom and responding appropriately

One of the most persistent findings of the 'process-product' classroom observation tradition is the importance of 'opportunity to learn' and 'time on task' (Creemers et al., 2013; Muijs et al., 2014). No teacher will be surprised to learn that being presented with curriculum content in an accessible format and having time to engage with it are found to be necessary for learning to take place. Managing lessons so that time is used productively is a core teaching skill. Specific practices, such as giving clear instructions and establishing routines and rules, support this. Managing student behaviour comes under this heading too: dealing with disruption, but, crucially, preventing it happening in the first place.

Classroom management and efficiency are featured in all the frameworks for teaching quality we have seen, but different frameworks seem to cut this dimension in different ways. We have gone with three strands, though each comprises a collection of techniques, practices and principles: (1) using time efficiently, (2) establishing clear rules, and (3) managing disruption. We also note that how these phenomena are manifested in a particular classroom depends on a lot more than just the skill and behaviours of the teacher: characteristics of the students and the wider school environment/policies, for example, are both important factors (Bennett, 2017). The same teacher seen teaching a difficult topic to a class containing individuals with persistently challenging behaviours in a school where the rules are unclear or inconsistently applied, might look very different with a fun topic, a class full of biddable students and in a school with strong behaviour support.

Nevertheless, our purpose is not to evaluate teachers but to help them improve. If there are skills that teachers can learn to improve the efficiency, stability and focus of their classrooms, then those skills should be captured in our model so that we can give teachers good feedback about their current status, likely areas and directions for high-leverage improvement effort, and ongoing progress and growth.

Elements of Dimension 3

1 The first element of this dimension relates to the efficient use of time and resources. Great teachers plan activities and resources so that everything works smoothly. Settling down time at the start of a lesson or after a transition is minimised – students get started on meaningful work straight away and work right up to the end of the lesson. Part of this is about giving students clear and simple instructions so they know exactly what they should be doing. Routines can also be an element of great teaching – explicitly teaching students a pattern of behaviour that will be used regularly.

2 The second component is about the consistent and fair application of rules. Rules and expectations should be clearly understood and accepted by all students. Violations should be rare, but when they do happen are treated fairly and appropriately, and as consistently as possible, so that students know that predictable consequences will follow.

3 The third element concerns preventing and responding to disruption. One of the features of great teaching is that disruption is not seen, but this is often because the teacher has successfully anticipated and prevented it happening. Kern and Clemens (2007) review research on 'antecedent strategies' – whole-class and individually-targeted strategies that teachers can use to "establish a classroom environment that is positive, orderly, predictable and motivating" as a way of preventing disruption and managing student behaviour. The term 'withitness' was coined by Kounin (1977) to describe a teacher's awareness of what is happening in the classroom, even when their attention appears to be elsewhere. Great teachers do not actually have eyes in the back of their head, but their students may think they do. A key part of this skill is that the teacher signals their awareness, perhaps with just a look or movement, so students feel they are under surveillance. Great teachers also use praise and positive reinforcement to support desired behaviour (Calderella et al., 2020). When disruption or disorder does occur, teachers respond firmly and appropriately to minimise the effect on learning. Great teachers draw on targeted approaches that are tailored to the individual needs of students with a history of challenging behaviour.

Evidence for Dimension 3

A large body of evidence supports the use of these strategies to promote learning, so much so that it hardly needs unpacking (for example: Creemers & Kyriakides, 2011; EEF, 2019; Kern & Clemens, 2007; Moore et al., 2019; Muijs et al., 2014, 2018; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997; van de Grift et al., 2017). Praetorius et al. (2018) present evidence of correlations between measures of attainment and classroom management from 1,000 classrooms across ten studies, with a median correlation of 0.18 – the largest of their three dimensions.