



A Critical Analysis of the Disciplinary Interventions in “Classroom Management That Works”: Two Decades Later

Twianie Roberts, Gloria Daniels, Jordan Level, Treniscia Murrell, Janelle Russell

College of Education, Tennessee State University, Nashville, USA
Email: trober25@tnstate.edu

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Abstract

In 2003, Robert J. Marzano, Jana S Marzano and Debra J. Pickering wrote “Classroom Management That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Every Teacher”. The book is utilized in school districts across the United States. It provides research based classroom management strategies for educators. The year 2023 marks the 20th anniversary of the original publication of the book. Since 2003, **Black Lives Matters, Zero Tolerance discipline policies and School to Prison pipeline** issues have forced educators and policy makers to examine the relationship that school discipline polices have with equity, race and incarcerations. This critical analysis of the disciplinary interventions in “Classroom Management That Works” will examine the proposed classroom interventions from the historical perspective of graduate students at a Historically Black College-University.

Subject Areas

History, Mathematics

Keywords

Marzano, Classroom Management That Works, Black Lives Matters, Zero Tolerance Discipline Policies and School to Prison Pipeline

1. Robert Marzano—Classroom Management That Works

Robert Marzano has held many roles in education. With a Bachelor of Arts in English, Master’s degree in reading and language arts, and a doctorate in curriculum and instruction, Mr. Marzano is a leader in educational research. He is a speaker, an author of more than 30 books and 150 journal articles and is the co-

founder and CEO of Marzano Research in Colorado established in 2012. Marzano's book, *Classroom Management That Works*, was first published in 2003. It is currently in its sixth edition. The book is available through eBook, pdf file, and hardback cover. The average customer review on Amazon, rates a 4.4 of 5 stars. Comments range from how overdue the interventions are to how the interventions are narrowly focused based upon certain behaviors. Marzano's research has been used in many studies related to researching strategies that work for classroom management. In Gage's research, teachers implemented classroom management practices utilizing Marzano's approach. Practices that corresponded with Marzano were: feedback, opportunities for response, supervision, and active instruction with a sample size of 1242 students from 65 elementary schools, each school ranging from 251 - 832 students. Research indicated that a positive relationship between teacher and classroom management practices must be established to increase student outcomes (Gage, 2018) [1].

2. Introduction

During the Obama administration, issues related to the school to prison pipeline were highlighted. The school to prison pipeline data examined correlations between suspensions and students subsequently entering prison. Zero-tolerance policies were in use in schools across the United States (Blad, 2020) [2]. These policies provided a definitive consequence for certain actions (ex. bringing a weapon to school), regardless of the circumstances. The Black Lives Matter movement examined the treatment of people of color in all aspects of society. Students of color, which includes African American and Hispanic students, are more likely to be disciplined and suspended than white students (Bacher-Hicks, 2021) [3].

The purpose of this book critique is to show the connection between Robert Marzano's "Classroom Management That Works" interventions and issues related to equity, race and incarcerations. The significance of this critique is to show how the book's recommended interventions potentially influenced the Black Lives Matters movement, Zero Tolerance discipline policies and the School to Prison pipeline.

3. Classroom Management That Works

Classroom management begins with the teacher. According to Marzano, the three roles of the classroom teacher include designing instruction, classroom curriculum, and implementing classroom management techniques. These techniques require the development of rules and procedures. Rules and procedures typically include expectations, transitions, materials and equipment, group work, and teacher-led activities. Positive teacher and student relationships are critical for classroom management and student success. Teachers communicate the appropriate levels of authority to ensure classroom control. In order to do this, teachers must have the appropriate mental set. Mental set refers to "withitness"

and emotional objectivity. Withitness is the ability to identify and quickly address behavioral problems. The student's responsibility/role in classroom management must be developed. This is attained through modelling, rules, procedures, expectations and reinforcement. This should occur on the first day of school. Classroom rules and procedures should be taught and reinforced at the beginning of the school year through various activities. This is further reinforced if school-wide management policies align with and support classroom practices.

4. Crime and Punishment: A Critique of Traditional Disciplinary Practices in Educational Programs

Many aspects of the disciplinary practices suggested in Marzano's book, while having been successful in some settings, presents several questionable outcomes for certain cultural diversities, specifically, as it relates to separation and exclusion. Examining the many accepted practices and comparing them to the work of the authors of *Discipline With Dignity*, one is compelled to believe that true discipline considers not only the students behavior, but the totality of expected social values, coupled with teacher and school administrative introspection (Curwin *et al.*, 2018) [4]. As one seeks to explore different aspects of classroom management interventions and embark upon a systematic change of mindset that will positively affect students, both while in the school setting and into adulthood a different approach can be found. Gerlinger's longitudinal study has shown that exclusionary discipline in school is related to higher rates of delinquency later in life (Gerlinger, *et al.*, 2021) [5]. Exclusionary discipline involves removing a student from the educational setting. Examples of this include detention, time out and classroom suspension.

The "Think Time" intervention described in Marzano's book, presents some positive and negative connotations. In "Think Time", students typically are separated from a regular classroom setting and placed into another setting with students who are in the same "Think Time". Some schools call these exclusionary discipline plans think time rooms, reflection rooms, reset rooms, etc. In essence, they all have one goal in mind; students with behavioral issues that disrupt the learning environment are encouraged to think about the behavior that led to the separation. Furthermore, they are asked to reflect on the mindset, emotions and other attributes that led to the misbehavior. Lastly, each student is encouraged to initiate a personal plan. This plan, in theory is to help students deal with any future situations differently. "Think Time" is designed to assist students that engage in potentially chronic behavioral issues and practices. When these rooms are implemented with empathy (without shame or "a fear of being in trouble"), students will feel freer to open up about the thought processes that led to their disruptive behavior (Brummer & Thorsborne, 2021) [6]. In one study, the data suggests a link between students being disciplined in school and being able to transition appropriately (positively) into adulthood (Davison, 2021) [7].

Experienced educators, instead of utilizing exclusionary discipline, tend to embrace and implement the notion of controlling behavior with instruction. As suggested in “*Discipline with Dignity*”, there is a perpetual tone of an “informal system” of curbing undesired student behavior within the classroom setting. The traditional “cut-throat”, method that involves strict rules, expectations and consequences, has evidently perpetuated a sense of a lifelong expectation of a continuation of punishment without correction. Imagine Johnny, who comes from a culture in which his daily practices within the family and community involves being very animated, vocal, and unrestrained. For him, this type of behavior encourages a sense of belonging. It is here where he has learned to grow and adapt to the world around him. He has entered kindergarten, and suddenly, he is asked to sit down, be still and not to interrupt. Often, when this behavior is not corrected as quickly as desired, Johnny finds himself in time out, or a think time situation. Even though he is isolated from his regular classmates or classroom and may feel some shame; at least he is in a place where he can relate to, and maybe even connect to other students who are in “trouble”. It is here where he has once again found a sense of belonging and cohesion. Johnny is a teenager now and has been identified by the school system as being a troublemaker. Consequently, he has a chronic history of discipline. He graduates from high school and now the expectation is that if he does not completely and silently conform to society, he will be isolated (placed in prison, unemployed...) Taking a dignity-based approach to addressing student behavior, is a more effective approach. The educational system will produce a society of individuals that learn not only knowledge and skills from academia, but also the social skills in realizing that true discipline is learning how to resolve problems within the community, classroom or work setting.

Another interesting aspect of Marzano’s work is his approach to assertive discipline. This discipline approach has a connotation of taking a cold, business-like stance, in some implementations. Here the teachers are encouraged to exhibit emotionless responses to a student’s behavior when addressing them. It can be deduced that the inception of this type of discipline may have been brought to fruition by the influence of the idea of remaining fair with all students. However, being fair does not always mean being equal. Since different students are different people, they must be approached as such. There are many intricate factors that make up the person who is called “Student”. Although assertive discipline involves harsh, and sometimes stern responses from teachers, it does not promote the support of upholding an environment of dignity and respect. In like manor, when examining the tangible recognition method of discipline; there exists a twofold issue relating to student self-image, and their perception of the way their peers see them. A classic example is a red, yellow, and green, behavioral peg system. Students that are displaying the desired behavior remain on green. When there is a warning issued regarding disruptive or undesired behavior, the student would then select a yellow peg. When a student ar-

rives at red, he/she is somehow obligated to try to get himself back to a yellow or a green, to avoid a consequence. Not only is this a shame-based, and sometimes a humiliating approach to controlling behavior, it can affect self-esteem.

Another aspect of Marzano's book that is worthy of mentioning is the concept surrounding direct consequence. Direct consequence is something that is implied in the name. If a student displays undesirable behavior, then he or she will receive a direct consequence. If the student disrupts the class habitually and this behavior cannot be adequately dealt with within the classroom, the student may be removed from class. What makes this method of correction inherently ineffective, is the fact that there is no chance for reflection and self-correction. As described in *Discipline With Dignity*, there is a distinct difference between a punishment and a consequence. Within this book, Marzano presents the difference in that a consequence is something that a student does to themselves, while punishment is something that is done to the student. The breakdown in Marzano's implementation is that students are not presented with an opportunity to address their behavior. A consequence can be something as simple as a call home, a letter home, or another traditional method. Introducing the notion of consequence, as opposed to punishment, sincerely prepares the students to be able to take corrective measures from a standpoint of community, instead of isolation. Therefore, while the intentions of Marzano's classroom management when dealing with students from certain social, economic, and even cultural backgrounds, are novel, this one blanket practice should not be used.

While Marzano's classroom management interventions, advice and implementation may have been well met, it would be amiss to assume that this type of punitive-based, isolation-invoked behavioral management system would work for every student. It has been documented that exclusionary discipline does not lessen future classroom disruptions (Wang *et al.*, 2022) [8]. Just like academic growth in education must be dynamic and individualized, so does a system for classroom behavior. This system of justice, crime and punishment resembles that of cities and states in the United States. The correlation is alarming. Instead of taking a punitive-like approach to classroom management, educational programs should explore the option of less crime and punishment, and more consequence and correction. An example would be a program like restorative practices implemented beginning at the elementary level. Here, schools take a social-emotional approach derived from indigenous beliefs of respect and dignity (Kervick *et al.*, 2020) [9]. Furthermore, by moving away from a rigid blanket approach to helping students behave a certain way in class, programs can begin to explore the "why" as opposed to the "what". Students will then be more likely to take on a disposition of being willing to self-correct for the betterment of self, the community, relationships, and positive connections.

5. Black Lives Matter and School Discipline

Black Lives Matter is a widespread social movement that was developed to pro-

tect and highlight the high incidences in black communities in the USA where individuals were getting killed. The movement started in 2013, and it has gained global recognition to cover black women, black people with special needs, undocumented folks, folks with records, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. Its primary focus since its conception was to abolish police violence against the black community and push out racism in the USA. The Black Lives Matter agenda has been marketed through social media and political movements to the level of gaining international recognition.

Black/Hispanic communities have continued to strive for acknowledgment of what they face every day based on their race and to shift focus on their over-policing conversation based on their origin. Black/Hispanic lives matter aims at offering value to Blacks and people of Hispanic origin for equal recognition and racial justice. In educational institutions, a discussion of practices and policies has emerged. The black lives matter movement is also focusing on conversations and reflections on how school communities engage in racial injustice. School communities have seen a disproportionate suspension rate of black and Hispanic students due to disciplinary issues. This highlights the need for restoration practices to develop healthy relationships and avert conflicts (Blacklives-matteratschool, n.d.) [10].

6. Zero-Tolerance Policies

“Zero-tolerance policies require school officials to give students a specific, consistent, and harsh punishment, usually suspension or expulsion, when certain rules are broken. Zero-tolerance policies were written into school handbooks in the 1990s, created originally to be a deterrent for bringing weapons into schools. These policies stemmed from law enforcement’s adoption of the “broken windows” theory and the Gun-Free Schools Act.

Many students under strict zero-tolerance policies are punished without a second thought. This type of disciplinary procedure has been proven in research to have an overall negative effect on students, and a disproportionately negative effect on minorities (Curran, 2019 [11], Curran, 2016a [12], 2016b [13]; Marchbanks *et al.*, 2015 [14]; Shollenberger, 2015 [15]). In an American Psychological Association report, a task force gathered data related to certain assumptions that coincided with zero-tolerance policies. One of the assumptions, similar to the broken-window theory, was that only with swift, strict, and uniform zero-tolerance punishments would students be deterred from breaking the rules. Further, the assumption was that this would in turn improve the overall behavior of the student and decrease disciplinary infractions in the school. However, the task force’s research found that assumption to be false. School administrators thought that removing subjective influences from the disciplinary process and following a blind-justice approach would make it fairer to students. This was part of the appeal of zero-tolerance policies, that the only factor for consideration was whether or not the rule was broken. However, the task force found that

this can result in a disproportionate number of students of color being disciplined, reporting an overrepresentation in suspension and expulsion for African American students, and less consistently for Latino students” (Maxime, 2018) [16].

Marzano’s discipline methods do not consider the factors involved in addressing discipline in a culturally diverse environment. He used an assumption of the British school system to offer a reflection of the American education system in addressing disciplinary problems. There is a need to have a healthy balance between unacceptable behavior, student consequences, and the correct behavior together with its consequences (Hagopian, 2020) [17]. The choice of disciplinary consequence by Marzano is guided by teacher reaction, tangible recognition, direct cost, group contingency, and home contingency. These are highly subjective ways to seek disciplinary actions as other factors may trigger a students’ disconnection from the school setting. Marzano neglects to consider the students cultural upbringing and incorporate more culturally relevant practices. With such considerations, “bad” student behavior can be minimized. The curriculum then becomes more relatable and interesting to the students.

According to Hagopian, having black teachers in schools from grades three through five reduces the chances of black boys dropping out of high school by 39%. Hagopian, further states that adding ethnic studies to education creates a transformation to the educational system as students are positively associated with the curriculum improving their overall GPA.

7. School to Prison Pipeline

In Chapter three “Disciplinary Interventions”, similarities are noted between the school to prison pipeline and Marzano’s classroom interventions. The school to prison pipeline was highlighted after the Obama era in which President Barak Obama worked to eliminate zero-tolerance policies in schools across the United States (Blad, 2020) [2]. With high suspension and expulsions, reinforcement and punishment had been tactics used in schools to promote the school to prison pipeline. Studies indicate that African American and Hispanic students disproportionately were more likely to be suspended than white students (Bacher-Hicks, 2021) [3]. According to Blad, federal data reveal significantly higher rates (2020). This caused school districts to create new alternatives and perform thorough investigations of suspensions and disciplinary tactics. According to new research, completing more years of school reduces time allowed for criminal activity (Bacher-Hicks, 2021) [3]. Research shows that disciplinary interventions used to decrease access of instructional time, increase the risk to engage in criminal activity, and restrict access to develop social and emotional skills (Dutil, 2020) [18]. The following statement connects well with the school to prison pipeline and the different strategies Marzano suggested to decrease disruptive behavior. “This shows students a glimpse of life in prison with isolation, restricting access, and taking advantage of students’ social advancement” (Dutil,

2020) [18]. According to Marzano's research used in chapter three, the data represents interventions associated with the results of decreasing the number of disruptions in class, at number one is teacher reaction.

8. Teacher Reaction

Teacher reactions are verbal and physical reactions to reinforce acceptable behavior and provide negative consequences. In this intervention, teachers decide whether a student is acting appropriately and apply or recommend to building administrators a consequence. In research from Dutil, teacher self-efficacy is the most influential factor in classroom management (Dutil, 2020) [18]. Teachers must believe that they can be effective classroom managers. If they do not, they will refer behavior infractions to school administrators. Hence, behavioral referrals may be related to a teacher's inability to successfully implement classroom management techniques. This may be compounded for teachers grappling with race and gender bias issues. This implies that teachers must rely on building relationships and know how to respond appropriately to classroom disruptions without attempting to use bias in their reactions. Based on discretion, individual preferences come into play and affect the student's success (Page and Jones, 2020) [19].

Per Marzano, "One of the clear messages from this study is that students have a strong sense of "fairness" when it comes to behavioral expectations. If they feel that teachers are behaving inappropriately, they will resist efforts to monitor their behavior. Again, it should be noted that this study surveyed college students, but it is reasonable to assume that the findings would generalize at least to high school students" (Marzano, 2003) [20]. Yet several recommended interventions may be deemed as highly "unfair" to students. They include:

8.1. Tangible Recognition

As its name indicates, tangible recognition involves the use of some concrete symbol of appropriate behavior. The teacher decides which behaviors are rewarded. This intervention assumes that no biases exist within the teacher. Research however indicates that Black and Hispanic students are disproportionately disciplined (Assessing the Role of School Discipline in Disproportionate Minority Contact with the Juvenile Justice System: Final Technical Report, 2018) [21]. Hence, excessive punishments and limited rewards may exist for Black and Hispanic students.

8.2. Direct Cost—Isolation Time Out

Refers to the removal of a student from the classroom to a location reserved for disruptive students. However, a teacher's discipline practices may be influenced by, "their conscious and unconscious understandings and enactments of race, class, and culture in school" (Carter Andrews & Gutwein, 2019 [22], Ruiz, 2021 [23]). The removal of a student from class, in some cases, limits classroom in-

structional time thereby hindering academic achievement.

8.3. Overcorrection

This is a procedure that is used when a student has misbehaved in a way that destroys or alters some physical aspect of the classroom. The following excerpt is from page 38.

Terrell was not happy about having to sit and repair all of the torn pages in the dictionaries in his classroom. Unfortunately, he had lost his temper in class the day before and damaged the dictionary he had been using. Further, this was not the first time he had damaged books in his possession. His teacher, therefore, scheduled several after-school sessions during which Terrell repaired books by taping torn pages and erasing stray marks. She also used this quiet, focused time to try to connect with Terrell and chat with him about ways to redirect his temper. (Marzano, 2003) [20].

The proposed “Overcorrection” intervention is unfair, cruel and demeaning. If there were 30 other torn and written in dictionaries in the class, the teacher somehow did not see the disruptive behavior of the other students. She then decided that one student should spend “several after-school sessions” repairing books by taping torn pages and erasing stray marks. Even in the criminal justice system, no one is expected to reap punishment because of another person’s violation. This intervention raises civil rights issues concerning cruel and unusual punishment and wrongful conviction. Wrongful because each individual should bear the responsibility of their actions, but not another person’s actions. The teacher knows that Terrell did not destroy all of the dictionaries, yet she insists that he repairs them all. This teacher’s behavior negatively impacts Terrell and the other students in the class. It sends the other students a message that even though they may do wrong, the “Terrell’s” of the world will be the ones sentenced/punished. Also notice the shaded message that Terrell had to “serve time” for his act ...” several after-school sessions”.

The teacher further insults Terrell by trying to “connect with him and chat about ways to redirect his temper.” Yet, she is oblivious regarding her unfair and unethical classroom management practices. Terrell may be wondering why this teacher’s sense of equity, fairness and compassion is lacking and why he has to take his personal time to “pay for” both his and other students disruptive acts. These practices potentially frustrate students to the point of anger, exhaustion and dropping out. This is how these practices help to support the school to prison pipeline, absenteeism and school dropouts.

9. Conclusions

One major concern in public schools is implementing interventions to manage discipline. A classroom is a place where dignity-affirming practices should be utilized. Since 2003, Black Lives Matters, Zero Tolerance discipline policies and School to Prison pipeline issues have forced educators and policy makers to ex-

amine the relationship that school discipline polices have with equity, race and incarcerations. Several interventions within “Classroom Management That Works” lack cultural sensitivity and fairness. At the same time, the interventions promote punishment strategies that align with the school to prison pipeline framework.

To retain discipline in the classroom, it is vital to follow and practice various culturally relevant respectful interventions that would make the class a learning zone for all students. Low self-efficacy and overreaction of teachers can hinder positive interventions. Teachers must become a resource and support system for their students’ (Syarifuddin, 2021) [24].

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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