



Singapore Journal of

# Scientific Research

ISSN: 2010-006x

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## Teacher Effort Is Linked to Difficult Students' Inherited Traits

***Challenging students take up more of their teachers' time -- and the difference between a tougher student and an easier one appears to be genetic, according to a new study published in Psychological Science, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science. The study looked at young twins in the U.K. and asked their teachers how much of a handful they are.***

"Policy-wise, there's a lot going on, blaming teachers for what's going on in the classrooms," says Renate Houts of Duke University, who cowrote the study with Avshalom Caspi and Terrie E. Moffitt of Duke, Robert C. Pianta of the University of Virginia, and Louise Arseneault of King's College London. Many school systems have considered paying teachers based on how much the children in their classes improve. "One of the things that seems to be missing is that teaching is more of a relationship. You have to consider both sides of that relationship, the children and the teachers," Houts says.

To look at how students affect teachers, the researchers used data from a twin study that followed 1,102 pairs of British twins from age 5 to age 12. Twin studies are useful because comparing fraternal and identical twins shows what differences between children are inherited and which are not. The study included questionnaires for the children's teachers about how much of their time was taken up by each child?

The researchers found that children who were more challenging at age five required more teacher effort at

age 12. They also found that it's something about the children that makes it that way -- something heritable. They can't tell what it is, but they can tell it's there, and that their challenging behavior isn't, for example, the teacher's fault.

"What happens in the classroom isn't just a function of the teacher. It's also the kids who are in the classroom," says Houts. And it's possible to make life easier on teachers. It might be smart to spread the challenging students evenly between classes, for example.

Also, parents and teachers should consider working with children early on their challenging behaviors, so they don't cause as much trouble for teachers later. "If a teacher has to take time out to give individual attention to five challenging kids in her classroom, she can't focus on the whole classroom," Houts says.

R. M. Houts, A. Caspi, R. C. Pianta, L. Arseneault, T. E. Moffitt. The Challenging Pupil in the Classroom: The Effect of the Child on the Teacher. *Psychological Science*, 2010; 21 (12): 1802 DOI: 10.1177/0956797610388047