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The Influence of Rapport on Students' Opinions Towards Interest in Learning, a Future Career and Their Personal Life

La Influencia del Rapport en las Opiniones de los Estudiantes Hacia el Interés en el Aprendizaje, una Carrera Futura y su Vida Personal

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to know the opinion of a group of students about the role that rapport plays in both their personal and professional lives. The study was conducted as a result of the authors' interest in how teachers' interaction with students affects both their motivation, and their opinions toward a class. The research was of a qualitative nature since what is sought to be found are students' opinions. The study employed both personal semi-structured, and focus group interviews as the main methods to collect data. Participants of the study were Mexican and Canadian undergraduate students. The analysis of the interviews revealed four predominant themes: (1) aspects that make students feel interested in a class, (2) building rapport elements, (3) the influence of rapport on pursuing a teaching career and (4) rapport and its influence on students' personal life.

Keywords: Rapport, interest, influence

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es conocer la opinión de un grupo de estudiantes sobre el papel que juega el "rapport" en su vida profesional y personal. La investigación se llevó a cabo como resultado del interés de los autores sobre cómo la interacción de los maestros afecta su motivación, y sus opiniones respecto a la clase. El estudio fue cualitativo, ya que se enfocó en las opiniones de los estudiantes. Las principales técnicas de recolección de información incluyeron entrevistas personales semiestructuradas, y grupos focales. Los participantes del estudio fueron estudiantes de pregrado de Canadá y México. El análisis de las entrevistas mostró cuatro temas principales: 1) aspectos que hacen sentir a los estudiantes interesados en la clase, 2) elementos que desarrollan "rapport", 3) la influencia de "rapport" en la elección de una profesión, 3) la influencia de "rapport" en la vida personal de los estudiantes.

Introduction

Chickering & Gamson (1987) claim that a principal factor contributing to student motivation and engagement is teacher-student interactions. If these interactions are positive, students should feel more at ease in the

classroom and enjoy the learning environment (Rodriguez, Plax & Kearney, 1996).

As teachers-researchers, we agree with the above, since we have observed that some students who do not have a supportive relationship with their teacher, tend to struggle academically and behaviorally in school. In our experience, positive and supportive relationships between teachers and students are essential for creating an effective learning environment. Therefore, it is critically important that teachers become more observant of how their relationship is with their students both individually and collectively.

Although research is growing in this area, more empirical evidence is needed on aspects of student-teacher relationships to integrate this skill into existing teacher programs.

This study describes affective strategies, and relations that students believe a teacher can have to engage students in the learning process successfully. The study aims to extend this line of research, and provide a further understanding of teacher-students relationship, opinions and the possible influences on students' lives.

Literature underpinning the study

Rapport has been involved in several areas of knowledge. For instance, marketing researchers emphasize the relationship between companies and customers (Gremler & Gwinner, 2000), while medical researchers consider the importance of physician-patient contact (Kell Julliard, 2008), yet teaching is one of the fields most related to rapport, since a teacher work consists of interpersonal contact with people (Guerra, 2019).

According to the Oxford dictionary (2018) rapport means: A close and harmonious relationship in which the people or groups concerned understand each other's feelings or ideas and communicate well, nevertheless it has been defined and operationalized in different, though complementary, ways. Nadler (2007) defines rapport as positive mutual attention that is marked by affinity and harmony, while Faranda and Clarke (2004) describe rapport as a relationship built on mutual trust and harmony, and Brookfield (1990) defines it as glue that binds education relationships together.

Altman (1990) states that rapport is a mutual phenomenon characterized by mutual attentiveness, mutual respect (Kyriacou, 2009), mutual openness (Granitz, Koernig, & Harich, 2009), and mutual understanding (Carey et al., 1988). The mutual attention, however, must be positive or harmonious in nature (Rodríguez-Manzanares, 2012).

The rapport between students and teachers leads to several positive student results, including attitudes toward the teacher and course, student motivation, and student engagement (Gallagher, 2013).

Frisby and Myers (2008) explain the possible benefits of rapport building in a classroom setting: an instructor who maintains positive rapport with students could achieve a sense of liking, increase motivation, and improve students' satisfaction.

Studies of student-instructor rapport in traditional university courses have found a positive association between rapport and student outcomes. They include greater orientation toward achievement, lowered test anxiety (Creasey, Jarvis, & Knapik, 2009), better class attendance, improved attention in class, more studying, higher levels of enjoyment in class, more contact with the instructor, greater probability of taking the instructor for future courses (Benson, Cohen & Buskist, 2005), better reasoning, more learning, higher efficiency, higher perceived course grade, higher actual course grade, higher motivation, better attitude toward the course, and better instructor evaluations (Wilson & Ryan, 2013).

Yusra Sulaiman (2014) shows that positive teacher-student relationships influence students' learning and that essence emerged from a connected relationship (caring, support, trust, and respect) which support students' self-confidence, foster students' self-trust and increases student's motivation to learn, influencing their professional

development towards future career pathway. An earlier study found that experience level is essential to develop a better relationship with students as teachers can better understand the psychological, emotional, intellectual, and learning needs of the students and can better apply the teaching pedagogies. Secondly, the trust level of the students, as well as teacher, develops over time (Nasir Hussain, 2013). In addition, when teachers form positive bonds with students, classrooms become supportive spaces in which students can engage in academically and socially productive ways (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Also, Birch & Ladd (1997) state that kindergarten children, who did not have a good relationship with their teacher, exhibited less classroom participation and achievement, these negative relationships continued to affect the quality of the students' relationships in first and second grade.

Teacher's characteristics when building rapport

Due to its importance, numerous textbooks on teacher training have discussed the issue of how teachers can build rapport with their students in the classroom. In professional literature, most guidelines on how to construct a positive environment for learning mention the establishment of support, warmth, and openness, the ability to be friendly, genuine, positive and attentive to what the students say, the use of informality and humor to close the distance between the teacher and students, and make the students more involved in the learning process.

Doff (1988) highlights the importance of 'social language' or 'chatting' as an opportunity for the teacher to establish contact with the class and helps students to feel relaxed and ready to learn.

Brown (1994) recommends that teachers can establish a relationship of trust and respect with their students by: (1) showing interest in individual students, (2) giving feedback on individual student's progress, (3) inviting students to express their thoughts and feelings, (4) valuing and respecting students' ideas, (5) sharing humor with students but not ridiculing them, (6) working with students as a team and not against them and (7) expressing true happiness when students succeed (p. 421).

Benson et al. (2005) describes characteristics of instructors with good rapport as encouraging, open-minded, creative, engaging, accessible, happy, having a good personality, creating class discussion, approachable, concerned, and fair.

Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (2012) organized instructor characteristics that build rapport into more general categories such as interacting socially, caring and bonding, supporting and monitoring, and communicating effectively.

The study

According to Marzano (2003) teacher actions have twice the influence on student; yet rapport has been avoided in favor of other variables, such as methods of teaching, modes of testing, and techniques of assessing teaching effectiveness (Yusra Sulaiman, 2014).

Empirical studies consistently show supportive teacher-student relationships have been associated with improved student academic achievement (O'Connor & McCartney, 2007); Benson et al. (2008) also found rapport to be associated with positive student perceptions (enjoyment of the subject and the professor) and behaviors (attending, studying, and paying attention) therefore, studying the development of rapport among Mexican and Canadian students could shed light on this interesting area.

Having said that the study aims to collect student's opinions, it seems correct to employ research techniques which help gather data in detail. Thus, it is possible to move onto a presentation of the particular techniques employed in this investigation.

Research questions

The aim of this study was to investigate how teachers build rapport with students. This resulted in the formulation of research questions given below which formed a guide to the study.

Main question

- How does rapport have an effect on students' opinion towards a class?

Subsidiaries questions

Subsidiary questions were formulated to obtain structured opinions about rapport.

- How far does rapport help to generate students' interest in a class?
- How far does rapport help students be attracted to a subject?
- How far does rapport motivate students to think they would one day pursue a teaching career?
- How does rapport have an effect on students' personal life?

The questions above aim to explore the participants' perception about how teachers build and establish a harmonious environment between them and their students. This may result in a description of rapport for these participants and the way it affects the teaching and learning process.

Research method

Research was of qualitative nature since what is sought to be found are students' opinions. Qualitative data collection consists of gathering data using forms with general, emerging questions to permit the participant to generate responses; gathering word (text) or image (picture) data; and collecting information from a small number of individuals or sites (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative data provides the researcher with responses that will best help understand the research questions. The data was collected using a semi-structured interview schedule, and a focus group to achieve the objectives proposed.

According to Patton (2002), "the case study approach to qualitative analysis constitutes an specific way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data; in that sense, it represents an analysis process. The purpose is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest" (p. 447.). Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection (Creswell, 2014).

Yin (2009) suggests that a case study approach is often the primary design of a qualitative investigation and provides a detailed, in-depth examination of a person, group, or settings and holds explanatory evidence related to "how," "why," and "what" aspects of the questions that served as the impetus to the study. Instead of attempting to explain teacher-student relationships by controlling variables, this study instead strove to understand the diverse opinions of seven students from different contexts.

Participants

Participants of the study were Canadian and Mexican students from the School of the Education at Trent University, and students from the School of Foreign Languages. Four second-year students from Canada and four last year Mexican students.

Data collection techniques

Interviews have long been the dominant technique in qualitative research. Qualitative interviews are sometimes called intensive or in-depth interviews. According to McDonough and McDonough (1997) the interview is probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research. This study employed semi-structured

interviews as the main instrument to collect data. The study conducted personal semi-structured, and focus group interviews.

Semi-structural interviews make reference to a framework of the areas to be covered during their development. The direction in which the conversation moves the structure of the questions is left to the interviewers' within each topic, the interviewers are free to conduct the interview as they think fit, to the questions they consider appropriate (Corbetta, 2003). The reason why this type of interview was chosen was because it gives both the interviewer and the interviewee ample freedom to go into details, while at the same time ensuring that all the necessary information is collected (McDonough and McDonough, 1997).

In a focus group, participants "respond in their own words, using their own categorizations and perceived associations" (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990, p. 13). For these and other reasons, focus groups can be useful for a better understanding of the participants' opinions and views. This method produces a fairly high level of participant involvement, leading to relatively spontaneous responses from students. Because participants interact with one another and not only with the interviewer, the interaction has the potential for providing greater accessibility to participants' opinions

Audio recording allowed the researcher to transcript the interviews and focus group; studies have shown that recorded interviews allow the interviewee and interviewer to develop, and foster a better relationship and rapport during the proceedings, which led to the interviewee disclosing more detailed and in-depth information (McDonough and McDonough, 1997).

Skype was needed it for Trent students interviews since one of the researchers met the participants in Canada. Skype allows researchers to interview research participants anywhere in the world, as long as the participant has access to a telephone or computer with a webcam. Skype interviews can be recorded through the software on a computer, or by using a separate digital audio recorder; in this study, a smartphone was used as an audio recorder for the interviews.

Data analysis

A Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) was needed to treat the data; CAQDAS refers to the wide range of analysis software that supports a variety of analytic styles in qualitative work (Atlas.ti®). The researchers opted to use Atlas.ti® since it allowed them to analyze, codify, and categorize the information within the focus group and interview transcripts. The following chart shows the record of most relevant codes, and categories collected, in which all the transcripts of each interview and the focus group were codified with a total of 31 codes and four categories.

Table 1: shows the most relevant codes and the four categories

Most relevant codes	Categories
Teacher - Student Relationship	Aspects that make students feel interested in a class
Teaching method	
Trust	Building rapport elements
Communication	
Experience	The influence of rapport on pursuing a teaching career
Relationship	
Role model	
Personal life	Rapport and its influence on students' personal life
Personality	

Findings and discussion

Overall, the data presented here, within certain limitations, offers insights into participants' experiences, opinions and beliefs, addressing the research questions.

CAQDAS resulted to be a very helpful tool in doing initial coding and creating categories, assisting in the organization of data, providing a formal structure for writing and storing memos to develop the data analysis. The resulting analysis and interpretation provides a description of each category developed regarding rapport.

Aspects that make students feel interested in a class

Student's opinions agreed that rapport could affect their interest to attend a class. The patterns of their responses focused on the teacher-student relationship, and on how the teacher delivers the subject, this means that the teaching method a teacher uses is a factor for students to feel attracted to a class. Research indicates student motivation is often connected to teacher practices (Wilson & Ryan, 2013).

Participant seven [00:02:13] *"depending on how teachers present or teach a subject could make students hate or like it, you know? So, like for example, like a teacher who likes, calls out on students to answer a question. They're probably not going to like that class if they don't like being called out."*

This suggests that the teachers should opt to follow diverse teaching methods, which support students' different learning process; classroom success and student engagement is increased when teachers plan to accommodate the unique differences in students and differentiate instructional content, process, products, and the learning environment.

Building rapport elements

Trust and communication were two key elements that came out of the interviews. The following extracts sheds light on the matter:

Participant seven [00:01:17] *"So, the safer the student feels with that teacher the more they're probably willing to learn."*

Participant four [00:00:27] *"I guess it's the confidence that the teacher gives you if you have very good communication with the teacher it gives you more confidence to express yourself."* [English version]

Researches have shown that communication and trust are key aspects in the building rapport process, for example, Carey et al. (1988) found that developing trust between students and teachers can contribute to students' academic performance. Students who feel their teachers are not supportive have less interest in learning and are less engaged in the class (Brown, 1994). Therefore, it is essential for teachers to reflect on their relationships as well as their practice.

The influence of rapport on pursuing a teaching career

Teachers could influence students' path based on the relationship they have with students; in the same way, teachers establishing rapport have a huge and positive impact on students' knowledge attainment, and later on their professional development, according to participants statements, for example:

Participant six [00:02:52] *"So I had this teacher and watching her teach, make me realized that I wanted to do that one day to be able to teach students in the way she taught me, she always made me feel so good about myself, so I wanted to do the same thing for other students, so it definitely motivated me to become a teacher"*

Teachers have the capability to influence a student's path through the relationships they establish with students. In his phenomenological study on relationships in the classroom, Giles (2011) found that teacher/student relationships had the potential not only to affect a student's experience in the course, but also to alter the trajectory of their academic career.

Rapport and its influence on students' personal life

Carson (1996) suggests that the impact of instructor/student relationships is a long-lasting one, and participants opinions agreed with this statement.

Participants responses about how rapport influence students' life coincided that it is all up to the student personality,

Participant two [00:03:03] *"It has to do with how is each person, for example, I do not talk about that (personal life) to anyone"; Participant 1 [00:02:47] "I think that not everyone is the same because everyone has a way of being and maybe some do not like the teacher to have contact with him/her outside of class"* [English version]

Students also agreed that teachers could influence participants' teaching path, and that is the influence of rapport in their lives.

Participant three [00:02:21] *"If you saw a teacher explaining the topic well, you said oh! I want to be like him, there comes the personal thing I say"* [English version]

Chetty, R., Friedman, J. N., & Rockoff, J. E. (2011) found that being educated by teachers in elementary school who are highly trained, and who hold a deep knowledge of course content joined with having an effectual rapport with students had profound effects on students' lives.

Developing an ambiance of rapport may be vital for the success of many students, and must continue to be investigated for possible positive repercussions; due to rapport being a relatively new variable for educational inquiry, more research should be investigated to determine how rapport may influence students' life outside of the classroom.

The more teachers invest in students; the more likely these students are to actually succeed in academia and in life (Downey, 2008)

Conclusions

Findings provide data supporting the importance of building a good relationship between teachers and learners. Results show how this interaction could create a learning environment to support students.

Rapport building elements described in the study may not necessarily be generalized to other classroom settings, and further research is needed to determine if other students report similar opinions. Implications of this case study for the field of education are to serve as further support, for the inclusion of teacher-student interpersonal relationship strategies into teacher preparation.

This study could be further expanded by having a bigger sample of participants including students from other academic programs. Also, other investigations could be useful as a corroboratory source of further information.

Further research on how teacher relationships influence students' personal lives could also provide valuable information for the field of education.

Our recommendations, as a result of this study, are to begin incorporating elements of teacher-student interactions into instructional strategies.

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El Centro de Idiomas Extranjeros "Ignacio Manuel Altamirano"

CONVOCA

A los aspirantes interesados en cursar la **Licenciatura en Letras Inglesas** o la **Maestría en la Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés y Lingüística Aplicada** a participar en el Concurso de Selección para el ingreso al Ciclo Escolar 2020-2021, presentando el examen de admisión que se realizará los días sábados hasta el 29 de agosto de 2020, conforme a los siguientes:

REQUISITOS

Los interesados en participar deben realizar todos los trámites y procedimientos institucionales, además de cumplir con los requisitos descritos en el cronograma y el instructivo correspondiente a esta Convocatoria, los cuales son:

- » Leer y aceptar los términos y condiciones de la convocatoria y su instructivo.
- » Realizar el registro en las fechas establecidas en esta Convocatoria.
- » Comunicarse a la institución para realizar una cita para el examen de admisión.
- » Pagar el derecho de examen de selección.
- » Presentar el examen de selección y una evaluación de valores y actitudes en el lugar, día y hora señalados, mediante previa cita.
- » Ser aceptados mediante un concurso de selección, dentro de los periodos que al efecto se señalen.
- » Recibir una carta de aceptación por parte del Comité Evaluador de la institución.
- » En caso de ser seleccionado en la **Licenciatura en Letras Inglesas**, contar con Certificado de Bachillerato con un promedio mínimo de ocho (8.0) o su equivalente y entregarlo con la demás documentación solicitada el día y en el lugar establecidos, de acuerdo con los términos señalados en la institución.
- » En caso de ser seleccionado en la **Maestría en la Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés y Lingüística Aplicada**, contar con Título de Licenciatura, Cédula Profesional, Carta de motivos, Certificación TOEFL (500 puntos mínimo).



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