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Teacher Survival Strategies

Rapport Building: How Personal can your Professional Persona Be?

Rapport is the degree that you are in harmony with the people around you. For teachers, building rapport with students is crucial. But, rapport is more than getting along.

"Getting along" is like playing chords on a guitar, piano or organ. The right notes seem to fit, while the wrong notes grate and irritate.

But "rapport" is like the hum of a tuning fork. The tuning fork vibrates at the same frequency as the note, and the tuning fork even sets up a sympathetic vibration when the correct note is sounded. A "Tuning Fork" Listening Mode with your Students The idea here is to connect with your students on a frequency that is in harmony. This is accomplished by attunement at an unconscious and at a higher-consciousness level. This can be described as an "intuitive level." Of course, you must like your students and respect them, or the rapport that you building will be short-lived and backfire. Faking rapport is worse than being mean and disagreeable with your students. You can be forgiven for being "uptight and an ignoble ___." (four or more letter words could be inserted here).

The reason is that faked rapport leaves an unconscious discomfort, and the unconscious mind is slow to forgive. It is possible for the conscious mind to rationalize away distrust and "give the rapport-deceiver the "benefit of the doubt." But, the unconscious reaction retains a pure memory and remains unswayed by rationalizations. Intuitive Listening: More than Reading Between the Lines" Intuitive listening with the intent to build rapport separates "winning-circle" Master Teachers from come-in-later, bringing up the rear "also rans."

Some teachers use this skill without practice, and their colleagues believe that the rapport builder has a "magic formula" that accounts for their success.

Other teachers might describe the observable part of what the Master Teacher does as "charisma."

But, charisma is a kind of rapport. And although rapport can not be earned, it can be lost. First Gain Rapport, then Lead Some fearful and confidence-lacking folks may object that building rapport is dangerous because the teacher could lock in to the negative thoughts and emotions of damaged and disturbed students.

But, this fear is groundless if the teacher is grounded in their own self-esteem.

Of course, a teacher that lacks self-esteem and holds a diminished self-concept should not be in the classroom, anyway. There are far easier and less rigorous ways to make a lot more money than to teach. And, our children deserve teachers who are people at their best. Sidebar It may be against employment laws for school district Human Resource Officers and Interview Committees to ask about emotional handicaps and mental illness, but mental health is a prerequisite for classroom teaching success. What the teacher does once rapport is established is to move from where rapport is established to a more mentally healthy, more harmonious, more functional level of awareness. The teacher moves to this level within himself or herself, and students follow suit.

If rapport is solid and firmly established, then students will move along to a more healthy level, drawn by the internal focus of strength and confidence that the teacher holds. Sidebar This process is similar to the Mutual Storytelling Technique, only the rapport process remains non-verbal, silent and below the conscious level of student awareness while the Mutual Storytelling Technique is verbal and rational. For a description of the Mutual Storytelling Technique, see. If the Strategy is not Conscious and Rational, Can it be Professional? Teachers have a subservient and unfettered trust in academic, cognitive, concept-oriented thought. It almost seems to be "blasphemy" for a teacher to espouse an intuitive strategy that bypasses the conscious mind. Worse, it seems sacrilegious to trust in a professional concept that does not rely on a "theory."

However, feel free to attach whatever theory you wish to your rapport building practice.

Your supervisor and colleagues are better left to form their own opinions about your stellar success with your students. Let them believe that you are a "born leader" or an outstanding coach. It is too difficult to explain that you just care about your students and that you trust in non-verbal, intentional communication.

Besides, the implied imperative at work creates difficulties with your colleagues.

Sidebar Here is how the implied imperative functions to impair collegial relationships. You describe just how easy it is to care about your students and how easy it is to trust in the basic goodness and personal capacity of your students. Of course, your colleagues are achieving less than quality results with their classroom management, "Don't smile before Christmas" approach. So, your describing the ease of the rapport building strategy is bound to irritate them because they will assume that you are "putting them down" by claiming that rapport building is "easy" when they are encountering so much difficulty. Keep these rapport-building secrets to yourself. They are secrets, not because they shouldn't be revealed; but because you should not reveal that you are using them. Caution: Never Tell Students that you are Building Rapport The same logic and rationale holds about explaining the rapport-building process to your students.

You must never tell your students what you are doing. Revealing the process to your students allows the conscious minds of your students to begin making excuses, building rationalizations, generating doubt and inculcating fear into

your relationship.

Rapport building must be kept "out of sight and out of mind (the conscious mind),"…the more secretive to the conscious minds of your students, the more professional the practice.

So, intend to build rapport on non-verbal, unconscious and higher-consciousness levels by listening to the trust and harmony between you. Let the vibrations be connecting you to your students be like a tuning fork, intuitive. And hold the intention to connect to your students until these vibrations or intuitions are well established and solid. Then, move your consciousness in a positive, caring, loving, friendly and supportive way toward the best self-concept that you can muster.

In the process, you may also become amazed at what your students have to teach you.

Positive rapport is a two-way street.

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