The Role of Trust and Rapport in Teaching

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Abstract

Within the classroom, the establishment of trust between both students and teachers is dependent on many different elements. More often than not, a student’s insecurities surrounding the fear of seeming unintelligent, impedes their learning experience. Because of this issue, trust is needed in order for actual active learning and development to occur. Through naturalistic observation, the relationships between students and teachers in the classroom were noted and analyzed using a specific set of parameters in order to come to a conclusion on the manifestation of trust and rapport. The expectation is that teachers who utilize their skills of emotional intelligence and implement teaching strategies that put an emphasis on the building of trust and rapport, create positive learning atmospheres where students are engaged.

Keywords: trust, rapport, emotional intelligence, learning experience, classroom environment, teaching strategies

Introduction

Trust is inherent to teaching. Due to student anxiety, trust in the classroom remains a relevant and multifaceted topic. The question of how teachers facilitate trust and rapport in the classroom to stimulate learning. The implementation of tailored teaching methods, establishment of effective classroom management and emphasis on emotional intelligence all are ways in which trust can actually be developed further in spite of the obstacles present.

Buskist & Saville (2001) in their article explores the definition of rapport, the medium through which trust is built and maintained. The extent to which students believe in a teacher’s capability to follow through with their class goals, the student’s ability to work towards accomplishing said goals, the teacher’s ability to show that they genuinely care for their students‘ learning and well-being, and the connection between students and teachers as they become motivated in actively learning are all facets of rapport, making it not only a process but an outcome that is achieved after the necessary conditions have been met (Buskist & Saville 2001). The way in which teachers create identities for themselves and how they relate and convey subject matter to students plays a role in their defining of themselves and their classroom atmosphere. Vulnerability is a prominent factor in the formation of rapport, as it bridges the gap between students and teachers. From vulnerability comes the establishment of a learning environment that is conducive to effective teaching (Buskist & Saville 2001). Other factors included: taking a genuine interest in students, knowing their names, sharing personal stories with the class, finding ways to make content relevant to students, and having the empathy to realize and accommodate for students that have problems that inadvertently affect their learning experience (Buskist & Saville 2001).

In a similar study by Webb & Barrett (2014), behaviors exhibited by teachers that facilitated the development of trust included knowing students ‘names, having enthusiasm for their job, responding to emails in a timely manner, having availability to meet outside of class, and having a positive attitude in combination with a down to earth nature. As a result of both studies, it can be seen that rapport is able to not only build trust, but facilitate student motivation and interest in learning, as well as student receptiveness to the content being taught.

Lim, Tang, & Tan (2012) conducted a qualitative, observational study using video recorded lesson observations, interviews with teachers about teaching style, and interviews with students. The analysis of the data implied that teachers recognizing unspoken social cues, acting like a friend, outwardly showing concern, understanding cultural backgrounds of students, and practicing patience, all contributed to the effective function of rapport in the classroom (Lim, Tang, & Tan 2012).

Similarly, the study by Loughrin, Berry & Tudbull (2003) indicated that classroom awareness and versatility in teaching styles allows teachers to become more responsive to the needs of their students, reiterating the idea of the learning process being more than knowing and teaching being more than telling. The relationship between teachers and students becomes symbiotic as one feeds off of the energies and efforts from the other, resulting in a collaborative effort when it comes to maintaining trust and respect.

Gurland & Grosnick (2003) explains in their study that the power hierarchy between children and adults implicitly affects the level of trust present and is a factor to be cognizant enough, creating an inherent gap in both the relationship and the level of trust present. The study implies overall that expectancy effects play a role in children’s perception of adults and the rapport that is built afterward. Children’s expectancies were significantly correlated with their perception of the adult’s communicative style, whether or not it was accurate to reality. The children’s expectancies and perceptions biased their judgements of whether or not they can establish a strong rapport with said adult.

In terms of teaching, as explained by Corrigan & Chapman (2008), the interpersonal relationship between teachers and students indicates that regardless of power structures, trust and mutual respect provide a viable baseline.
for bridging the gap.

Likewise in a more applicable and specific context, Bruney (2012) elaborates on various subtopics related to the development of rapport between students and teachers, focusing on the effect of being the authority figure on student performance, teacher authenticity in relation to students, building self confidence in the classroom, and the establishment of mutual respect in the symbiotic relationship. Common themes were found and analyzed, noting the effective practices of teaching with trust and how they supported student engagement. Teacher authenticity, believing in students, self-perception of both students and teachers, the impact of the teacher persona, and the effect of consistency in teaching were all significant factors in the establishment of trust (Bruney 2012). Rule formation, technical teaching prowess, active involvement of both teachers and students, as well as effort put into rapport building yielded cooperative students who were eager to learn (Stanard 1986).

Gregory & Ripsky (2010) also mention the effects of trust on encouraging and maintaining student commitment to “the rules, norms, and tasks of the classroom”, revealing it to be intrinsic to classroom management. Alongside this, is the idea that the emotional undercurrent of teaching is significant in aiding classroom management, the student-teacher rapport and the facilitation of learning, as there is a “statistically significant positive relationship [that] exists between emotional intelligence and secondary school teachers” (Naqvi, Iqbal, Muhammad, Akhtar, & Naeem 2016). The implications of the study are interesting to note, especially when considering other outside factors such as the teacher’s role as a leader and guide, and teacher stress as well as the classroom management aspect of teaching (Naqvi, Iqbal, Muhammad, Akhtar, & Naeem 2016). The importance of emotional intelligence in teaching styles is also recognized.

The culmination of the variety of sources all led to the foundation for the given research on the development of trust and rapport in the classroom. The link between power structures and their effect on rapport was defined in a broader sense by Gurland and Grosnick (2003), while Corrigan & Chapman (2008) defined trust as an effective start to bridging the hierarchal gap between teachers and students. Bruney’s (2012) findings on emotional intelligence and fostering trust in the classroom served as another cornerstone to my proposed research as it specifically defined rapport and trust within the context of a classroom setting, as well as hinted at certain elements that would aid the symbiotic relationship between student and teacher. Buskist & Saville (2001) defines how to establish rapport and reveals the importance of it in the classroom when contributing to student engagement, interest, receptiveness, and the facilitation of trust, something that is reinforced by Webb & Barrett’s study (2014). In the same vein, Lim, Tang, & Tan (2012) outlined the various elements of teaching style that foster the connection between students and teachers, referencing aspects of teacher relatability found in Loughrin, Berry & Tudbull’s study (2003). Stanard (1986) gave more specific examples of maintaining order and trust within the structures associated with classroom management, as did Gregory & Ripsky (2010). Meanwhile, Naqvi, Iqbal, Muhammad, Akhtar, & Naeem (2016) revealed how emotional intelligence affects student performance, a characteristic necessary in building both rapport and trust. By synthesizing aspects of each study together and providing new insights as a result of this, the research questions of "How can the teacher facilitate the building of trust and rapport to stimulate learning in the classroom?" and “What is the relationship between teaching style and trust?” can be answered adequately, as the view of the topic of trust and rapport in an academic setting is covered holistically. The following study focused on further defining these elements and how they manifest in classrooms in order to better delineate the effect of the relationship between teaching style and the establishment of trust.

Methods

The participants of the study included two high school teachers and students from the Massachusetts Department of Secondary and Elementary Education. They were observed via a pre-recorded lecture video found online. Participants did business as normal, as I observed the varying teaching styles between the two teachers and recorded the reactions of students. There were no materials needed for this study aside from a way to record the results found while observing the various classrooms, as well as a laptop in order to view the pre-recorded videos chosen. A simple T-chart for the operationally defined variables and an explanation of each instance where trust, rapport, or emotional intelligence occurs, is what the main note taking consisted of.

Trust can be defined as the number of instances in which a teacher exemplifies aspects of reliability and supportiveness as they contribute to the overall classroom atmosphere being built. This can be seen as the teachers’s own confidence as they teach, indicated by tone of voice or preparedness, and consistency of action, as seen when following through with their words and instructions. Rapport can be defined as the number of times a teacher establishes personal interaction between themselves and the student(s) within a single class period. Telling jokes, using specific/relevant examples aimed towards students in their teaching, and referring to students by their names are all ways rapport is maintained.

After observing the participants, I compiled the notes together and found patterns between the teachers observed, keeping in mind the research question at hand when generating possible theses. Because this was naturalistic observation, the interpretation of the results culminated in the generation of a thesis to explain what happened in the virtual classroom, with the specific examples used to answer the overarching research questions of “how can teachers facilitate the building of trust and rapport to stimulate learning in the classroom?” and “what is the relationship between teaching style and trust?”

Results

In the experiment the main protease of SARS-CoV-2, shown Trust was divided into subcategories of confidence and consistency, while rapport was divided into instances of jokes, targeted examples, and usage of names
(See Figure 1). Using pie charts to convert the tallying of instances, Teacher 1’s teaching style was found to be evenly split between trust and rapport (See Figure 2). However, her rapport was overwhelmingly built by name usage rather than jokes, with 44% outweighing the 6%.

Teacher 2, as depicted by the results, had a different teaching tendency (See Figure 3). With 45% of her style leaning towards trust, the remaining 55% of rapport indicated a heavier reliance on the latter characteristic. 40% of the rapport was created by name usage but unlike Teacher 1, she neglects to use jokes and instead opts for targeted examples, making up the remaining 15%. As a result, Teacher 2 has more of a reliance on rapport building within her teaching style with a 55% majority, whereas Teacher 1 equally uses trust and rapport with a 50% split between both characteristics.

Discussion

Although Teacher 1 was evenly split between trust and rapport occurrences within her teaching style, she was able to create a classroom atmosphere that was conducive to motivating students. There was more receptiveness and focus given to the content being taught, unlike Teacher 2. Because Teacher 2 utilized rapport more than trust, she created a learning environment that was more personal and involved with students, modeling emotional intelligence. Both teachers exemplified various sub-characteristics of trust and rapport within their individual teaching styles, reiterating how the establishment of them in the classroom go hand in hand.

This is significant because the effect of trust is many times glossed over when thinking of leading a classroom as a teacher, despite the fact that it plays a factor in student performance and the overall positive learning experience for both students and teachers alike. The relationship between the teachers and students are established by rapport and strengthened by trust, the appearance of said concepts varying between different teachers, classrooms, learning experiences, and students. Emotional intelligence plays a role within trust and rapport, as being emotionally conscious of students and their behaviors allow for teachers to adequately react and adapt to the classroom climate.

The study takes into account the power hierarchy that determines the level of trust able to be achieved between teachers and students, the effect of the teacher as an authority figure on trust, the establishment of mutual respect and self-confidence in the classroom, the effect of rule formation and technical teaching prowess, teacher mindfulness, rapport’s effect on student interest and receptiveness to teaching, and simply how to build rapport. By synthesizing the significance of these points and deriving the study’s focus from them, it allows for an insightful view of the research topic that previous studies have neglected to explore.

Some further routes for the same vein of study would be to go back and observe live teaching settings in order to cater to some of the unknown variables associated. I also would recommend allowing students and teachers to provide feedback on the lesson observed in order to gain perspective from both sides, as it is again, a symbiotic relationship.

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References


