

Strategies for Solidifying Teacher and Student Connect

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Abstract: Teachers can bring about a difference in their students' lives, both personally and educationally. Their rapport with their students can modify their behavior, effort, performance and change the social dynamics of a class. Putting in effort to memorize their names and addressing them by using their names conveys to them that their unique identity is being respected. Listening attentively to them whenever they need them, understanding their fears, frustrations and stresses also forges bonds. Seeing beyond the mistakes of their students, understanding their culture, beliefs, getting to know their mindset, caring beyond their books, believing in their individuality, believing in their abilities despite their failures, being authentic with them so that they can trust them and motivating them to see possibilities of success despite their failures can promote cooperation, respect, receptivity and compliance on the part of students. Having a zero tolerance policy for violation of class rules dealing tactfully, objectively but firmly with errant students and that too without any bias is also vital. Sharing personal stories can humanize them and be very inspiring for students to believe that they can rise above adverse circumstances and be successful despite hurdles. Instead of standing behind the podium and facing his students, today a teacher needs to step from behind the podium, metaphorically kneel down beside his students' desks and work alongside them. It is important to win students' hearts while getting inside their heads.

Key Words : Rapport, listening, authentic, cooperation, compliance.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Teachers have the power to make a difference in their students' lives both personally and educationally. They need to reframe their mentality, try to understand their students and be closer to that so that they are able to develop "friendship of usefulness". [1] (Klonoski 2003) them. If students feel connected to their teacher, they are able to "successfully rebound even after academic disappointments" (Downey 2008). Teachers' rapport with their students modifies their behavior, effort and performance. It opens avenues of communication, achievement and problem solving. It reduces stress, stabilizes the classroom environment and infuses positivity into the classroom atmosphere. While teachers often receive training on instructional pedagogies, designing effective lesson plans and classroom management, they are hardly equipped with strategies for building rapport and connecting strongly with students. Lack of connection proves to be a major roadblock in learning and only a good rapport between teacher and student can guarantee acceptance of the instructional strategies. Students need educators who are adept in building relational capacity, handling conflict in a classroom and meeting their expectations so that their tomorrows can be shaped.

2. Discussion:

Students may not be a teacher's employer, but they are the reason for his employment. And it is a teacher's first and foremost duty to meet not only the academic needs of his students but also their emotional needs by being truthful in his words as well as actions. Disciplining misbehaved students is necessary but it should be tackled in such a way that it does not lead to their hostility and aggression and cause disruption in the classroom environment. Arrogance, stubbornness and defiance of students has to be dealt objectively by the teacher in such a way that his emotions do not interfere with his judgment. He should be able to delve into the issues which are deeply rooted in their brains and causing them to behave like that. Instead of reprimanding them, he needs to speak directly to them and "see" them beyond their mistakes instead of quitting on them. Just as waves may rock a boat and pose a threat to its stability, but the captain of the boat dauntlessly and skillfully maneuvers it to safety, the teacher does not have to panic and quit on disorderly and erring students.

A teacher may walk into the classroom zestfully to teach his students but they may slam the relationship door in his face. They are not ready to open their doors and let him cross the threshold without making an assessment of his authenticity. If they let the wall remain intact, they terminate any possibility of rapport, close their eyes and ears, which of course impacts their learning and achievement. They will chip away the wall that have erected only when trust is built. Then they will shed their fears, apprehensions and inhibitions. They will be ready to accept constructive criticism,

weaknesses, and most importantly seek assistance. But for that to happen, an educator needs to stand patiently to before their closed doors and refuse to turn away, till they open their doors and become receptive enough to welcome him to their safe spaces.

Understand Students' Culture

It becomes a lot more easier for a teacher and his students to forge connection if they share the same culture because then have a lot of commonalities in their behaviors, practices, speech etc. But lack of understanding of their culture may impede connection. That makes it very important on the part of a teacher to try to learn about his students' culture and understand them better in order to reach them.

Care Beyond the Books.

A teacher should engage in small conversations with his students before the class and greet them as they enter the classroom to forge bonds with them. Going beyond asking them whether they have done their homework, he should ask them how they spent their weekend, what are their favorite pursuits, what are their career plans and so forth. Basically, he should go beyond their curriculum and get to know their mindset by gaining insight into their choice of books for reading, research topics they opt and project management skills. Going beyond their books can enable him to create rapport with them. Students' response to their teacher is that of cooperation when they believe that he or she cares for them and considers them as worthy individuals and not just as academic achievers. Caring teachers are able to manage their classrooms more effectively via discipline, problem solving, and established expectations. They are more likely to keep their students motivated and remain focused on task.

Believe in Students' Individuality

Though all students are students, they are all quite different as individuals. Their interests, skills, backgrounds, families, beliefs etc. are all different Just as each herb and spice ---- salt, turmeric, cumin, pepper, garlic, basil or curry leaves --- brings excellence to a certain dish, each student brings a unique flavor to the classroom. A teacher should acknowledge distinct identity and constantly offer them opportunities to reveal their skills and talents to develop rapport with them. Unfortunately, if he has the "teacher knows best" attitude, it can be detrimental to the individuality of students. Students should be allowed to be themselves in their journey of learning and evolution.

Believe in Students' Abilities

A teacher's personal biases about the abilities of his students and his unfounded assumptions may lead him to make certain statements which create doubts in students' minds about their abilities to accomplish tasks and reach their goals. Instead of motivating them to see possibilities of success despite their failures and fanning the educational fire in their souls, he might just extinguish the fire. Instead of giving them a fresh chance each day, if he holds their past failures against them, he would plant seeds of resentment in their minds which makes them erect an invisible wall that becomes difficult for him to penetrate.

Listen to Students

Instead of ignoring students' stresses, frustrations and fears, if a teacher is addresses their needs and devotes some minutes to explain, clarify or simply listen to them, he exhibits priority in their relationship and students will remember him. His sending the message that they are important enough for him to make extra time to help them solidify their success and address their emotional needs can fortify their connection. Providing students his or her e-mail address to reach, promptly responding to their queries, having for students a walk-in policy during the non-teaching portion of the duty day and creating a class blog for them to post their questions could convey the message of care. The message of caring will be an investment and students will also in turn make themselves available based on the principle of reciprocity.

Learn Students' Names

A person's name is very important for him as it gives him a distinct identity. Knowing students' names, addressing them by their names and pronouncing them correctly also matters in communicating care and forming connection with students. A teacher who is not bothered to learn the names of his students makes them feel invisible and insignificant. Putting in efforts memorize names by looking at their faces while taking attendance and using names while calling on students even though their hand is already raised can enable him to create that personal touch.

Build Trust

Trust develops through relationship building. Lack of trust and inability to see beyond barriers hinders rapport. Students do not open the "relationship door"[2] and come closer without seeing the real face of their teacher as an individual. While the student is peering through peephole of the closed door, instead of walking away, the teacher needs

to wait patiently and garner trust so that he opens the door. Once he opens the door, it will lead to relational capacity which furthers positive academic performance as they become more cooperative, respectful, receptive and compliant.

Kneel down beside Students.

At times individuals who join teaching as a profession find the classroom environment so challenging frustrating that they quit within months, signaling a lack of consistency to students in the classroom. Their constant admonishment with the motive of “making them better”, their negative words due to the stressful situations within the classroom and their flight by quitting teaching profession steals away the little hope students had nurtured by. In bygone days, a teacher would stand behind the podium and stand facing his students, but now he needs to step from behind the podium, metaphorically kneel down beside their desks and work alongside them.

Deal Appropriately with Erring Students

A teacher should have a "zero tolerance policy"[3] for violation of class rules. Undoubtedly, a clear delineation of authority in the classroom is necessary but it should not hamper a direct connection and prove detrimental to students' academic achievement. A student's misbehavior should not be ignored by a teacher but should be dealt with appropriately by trying to ascertain the root of the problem, making the erring student accountable for his misconduct, making him realize that his behavior is unacceptable and he will have to face punitive action. If a student violates class rules repeatedly and interferes with class instruction, he should be asked by the teacher to step outside, stay after class or come to his desk to discuss the happenings. The importance of adhering to classroom rules should be reemphasized to him and he should be made to offer a resolution and commit a plan of action. What is important is his ability to trust that the teacher's action was not one done out of malice but out of care. The teacher gives him the chance to move forward by learning from mistakes and does not let their relationship collapse. He must give his student the opportunity to start with a clean slate and redeem himself. What is worth remembering is to speak *with* the students instead of *at* them.

Do not Let Your Emotions Interfere

Both the cognitive and the emotional skills are required for building rapport. When we are dealing with people who matter in our lives, we do take time out for resolution of conflicts, forgive them and move forward with the relationship. Students also deserve to be given a chance to start each day anew. A teacher should not allow his emotions to interfere even when a repeat offender breaks a class rule because that would ruin his chances of having any rapport with him in future also. Even though he feels agitated or even angry, he should look at the student and say nothing. Pausing and counting backwards from five helps in responding without letting emotions interfere and dealing objectively with the situation. The teacher should not allow the student's previous actions to interfere with the steps that he is about to take. He should be able to respond without bias and question himself if he would have said the same thing if it were some other student (insert name) from the class. And it also helps to establish mental safety checks by forcing himself to think of one positive about the defiant student when a negative thought pops up about him.

Share Experiences with Students

A teacher should share his experiences with his students so that they get to know him as a person with values, mistakes and stories of his personal and academic struggles. Integrating personal stories within the curriculum lets students see commonalities, starts the process of building trust and forging connections. They start realizing that their teacher has a heart that pumps something other than chemical equations! Stories of his rise above adverse circumstances can inspire them to persevere, not give up in the face of problems and kindle hope of seeing light at the end of the tunnel.

Be Accessible to Students beyond Classroom

Being accessible to students beyond the class time and devoting time to look into their concerns promotes closeness between teacher and his students. A teacher who, despite his busy schedule, takes the time out for his students whenever they need him will be respected and remembered. But if he says to his student, “Come back to me later,” chances are that he will not come back later and his doubts will prevail. The teacher should be able to recognize when there is an immediate need and say, “Let me help you now.” so that the student knows that his well-being and not solely pay cheque is in the teacher's heart.

Do Not Lie

Alignment between the words and actions of a teacher is mandatory for building trust in the student-teacher relationship. Verbal and non-verbal mistruths stall rapport as students are quick to recognize inconsistencies. As adults we need not disclose each and every bit of information that we possess, but whatever information we decide to share should be truthful. Lying in the classroom may take different forms. Telling students that they will be held accountable for their actions but then failing to carry out consequences for misbehaving, is indirectly lying. Also, telling them of his

belief in their ability to achieve but not providing them demanding tasks, is a lie. Telling students of his availability to meet after school and but leaving as soon as the bell rings, is also a lie.

Share Your Intention to Uplift

Positive affirmation nurtures relationships with students whereas constant complaining and fault-finding by teachers lowers self-esteem, which in turn impacts comprehension very negatively. So, a teacher has to be extremely cautious with the way he uses his words with students as they can build or shatter his confidence but never be erased from memory. Heedlessly uttered words can dampen their dreams. A teacher must not transfer to his students stories of his own or other's failures as it would discourage them. On the other hand, his words of encouragement to them to do their best can boost their confidence and help them achieve their goals.

3. Conclusion

The bonds educators make with their students can stimulate a life of productivity despite the hurdles in their journey of learning. Developing rapport with students dismantles the barriers that impede academic progress. Teachers should be able to view each and every student in the class from multiple perspectives and consciously assess their needs in all aspects and not just their subject area. If they are able to observe their students not only with their physical eyes but also with their intuitive eyes, they will be able to peep into their souls, know their intentions, their rationale and will be able to support their growth. Their genuine desire to build a connection with their students can help them elicit their interest rather than frustration. The above mentioned strategies can be beneficial to teachers for building a relational capacity with their students. When teachers are able to maintain both friendship-like qualities and leadership role, they can provide their students much more than instructional strategies in their journey of evolution.

References:

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