

What is being in RAPPORT and why is it so important?

The Merriam-Webster dictionary states that rapport is:
a relationship characterised by agreement, mutual understanding, or empathy that **makes communication possible or easy**.

The word is often used to mean a **good interaction** between people in different positions or roles such as parent and teacher, teacher and student, doctor and patient, supervisor and worker, or speaker and audience.

In the context of education it is the **relationship that builds trust and connection, enables a positive environment for learning** to exist and **lowers resistance** to learning.

What are the building blocks of rapport?

Mirror neurones are those neurones in the brain's frontal cortex that, when activated, result in imitation or mimicry that many scientists now believe is the foundation of empathy. An 'internal understanding' of what someone else is doing, thinking and feeling.

So to build rapport we first need to think about what we want to get out of the interaction, whether that is 1:2:1 or in the classroom or staffroom!

If it is a happy, positive interaction then going in with a smile is a good start, if you go in grumpy, think of a classroom of mirror neurones coming 'right back atcha!'.
If your objective is to create calm then we need to be calm ourselves and not shouting or angry.

However a smile that is followed by a "good morning class" in a frustrated or disinterested **tone of voice** can just undo all that good work. Being authentic is incredibly important (people will 'sense' if you are being 'fake') and when you feel frustrated it can be difficult to manage those feelings.

It becomes much easier to manage your internal state and change it, when you have the right tools. State Management is covered in a separate pdf.

Rapport Tools

Noticing

Noticing the students **language patterns** and repeating some of their words back to them in response can 'say' "I hear you".

For example if a student says "I found that lesson horrible and really hard to understand" then saying "What did you find so horrible and hard to understand" will create faster rapport than "What was so difficult to understand?" (which can feel aggressive or judgemental. And they didn't say difficult, which may have a different meaning to 'hard', for them).

Notice whether the student is using language that is more **auditory, visual, kinaesthetic or auditory digital**

e.g. I hear what your saying, I see what you mean, I like the feel of that, That seems logical
are different ways of saying the same thing, the nuance though gives you an insight into which system your student best processes information in.

When working 1:2:1 you can drill down and respond in their representational system to create better understanding.

“It sounds like /looks like /feels like / makes sense that, you now understand. Great!”

In a classroom setting peppering your discussions with different representational words will help students to feel included.

Listening

Listening with the intent of understanding and not with the thoughts of what your next question or response will be, is hugely useful at school (and home!).

Often we have the thoughts of how a conversation will play out and so have our ‘ducks in a row’ before the other person finishes speaking. This can leave a lot of understanding on the table, and the assumptions we make may not be correct.

Being fully present in a 1:2:1 conversation, or a classroom discussion, fully listening and being available to the student will make them **feel valued** and **heard** and **encourage openness**, for example: asking questions when they don’t understand something or coming to you when something is bothering them or they are being pressured.

What if a child is agitated and speaking very fast and furiously? Well you can match their speed of speech and gradually **pace** them down by slowly slowing your own speed down to be more calm.

Body language

Body language is picked up faster than words, crossed arms, looking around the room when talking to someone, scowling, shaking your head when saying yes are amongst many signals that will be picked up and change the meaning of what you are saying to the listener.

Matching and mirroring

If your student is sitting in front of you and has their head leaning on one side, **mirroring** this (leaning your head to the opposite side, as if they were looking in a mirror) will tell their mirror neurones that you are in empathy with them. Similarly, if they cross their legs or pick up their drink, by subtly creating a mirror response you can get into rapport.

Matching is when you more generally ‘match’ their physiology or posture.

So for example if your student makes big hand gestures when they are speaking and normally you don’t use your hands at all, you may use your hands when speaking with them, it doesn’t have to go BIG, something is better than nothing!

Or perhaps they sit slumped forward and you usually you are straight backed, leaning in can be a way of signaling “we’re not so different”.

Map of the World

Everyone holds their own map of the world in their minds, built on their experiences, values and beliefs. Two people may be part of the same incident and still come out of it with different experiences because of seeing it from their own unique perspective.

Understanding their map of the world and meeting them there will help you find a connection and bring you into rapport. So perhaps finding something they are interested in and showing interest in that too, will give you a glimpse of how they perceive things which you can connect into.

Keeping in rapport

If a student is struggling, then focus on their strengths and how they do what they do in that area and find ways to scaffold on the new skills and learning onto those positives.

Focusing on the negative or what is going wrong will take you out of rapport.

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