



The Centre for PEACE
Research and Development

Developing rapport with students and differentiation are interrelated tasks of *individualisation*.

When a teacher does both of these tasks *appropriately*, they are a successful and effective teacher!

- Both practices involve engaging, persuading and appealing to individuals; one-on-one and in group settings.

Appropriate differentiation requires the teacher to be confident with the subject content, knowledge of required outcomes and the use of a range of engaging methods to hook their students (i.e. voice, humour, pragmatics, appeal to interests, technology, games etc.)

Understanding the layers of difficulty within the content that point towards the curriculum requirements is at the core of differentiating. Furthermore, identifying the modes for delivering the layers of content that align with the student's needs can be achieved through developing rapport.

**“Teacher-student relationship is crucial to student engagement.”
(Sir Kenneth Robinson)**

Students are very astute and have an uncanny ability to spot a fraud. If teachers fail to communicate and engage authentically, any interactions becomes forced and undervalued. Taking the time to formulate genuine relationships with your students is beneficial to not only the dynamic of the classroom, but to the level in which the students want to work for the teacher. It has been found that genuinely conversing with students can promote reciprocal interactions and markedly increases productivity in learning situations. In particular, when working with students who have a tendency to ‘act out’ or ‘refuse to work’, the level of rapport established can inspire the students to work harder and refocus more easily, aware, that not doing so could significantly impact the rapport already developed. The students value how they are seen and want to maintain that level of reciprocal respect.

If teachers want students to genuinely invest in what they have to say (their lessons) then they must genuinely invest in the student's lives and what they have to say.

Confidence in subject content provides scope to be able to move away from explicit teaching, go off-task, elaborate on interesting topics and develop relationships. When a teacher has confidence in the subject content they can spend time getting to know the student's needs, learning abilities and interests. Flexibility in communication and impromptu skills are vital to developing relationships. These skills assist when tech fails or there are sudden shifts in student behaviours.

As discussed in “Content Knowledge for Teaching What Makes It Special?” (Ball et.al 2008) The best approach we know for developing relationships and differentiating in a classroom is for teachers to be have “technical content knowledge,” a scope of pedagogical frameworks and teaching practices, prior knowledge of students’

backgrounds, academic data and positive personal attitudes towards education. Extending this understanding is Professor Donna Cross (*Teacher wellbeing and its impact on student learning*) who states that the most important aspect to developing healthy relationships and connectedness in a school environment is the personal health attributes of the teacher (self-awareness and wellbeing).

The above encapsulates an understanding of a teacher's requirements to inspire students. Having the energy, time and awareness to actively show genuine interest in each student; their life, their future, their interests and their day develops common ground. From common ground the teacher can probe to gain insight on how to best approach their pedagogy. With common ground the teacher is more likely to be passionate and the student is more likely to engage in the teacher instruction with a desire to leave an impression. With this knowledge teachers can fake common ground and engage students. The challenge comes when there are so many students with mixed abilities and behaviours in a single classroom. Therefore, a genuine and passionate teacher will be more efficient with developing rapport and achieving outcomes.

“Every student needs a champion ... they don't learn from people they don't like.” (Rita Pierson)

In conclusion, teachers need more opportunity to learn content deeply, differentiate and develop relationships. They are not robots ... yet, they are told they must effectively deliver a large amount of content to a broad range of students in a limited timeframe. Something needs to change! Teachers will always, and should be, teachers of subject matter first and develop rapport second but these tasks go hand-in-hand for a teacher to be most effective in a classroom.

Once a teacher has a thorough understanding of content they are primed to performing to their potential and the priority can shift to developing rapport and differentiation.

There are common issues persistent in most educational settings that cause disruption in the classroom; distractions, such as student's lives outside of the classroom, capabilities, health and disinterest in subject matter. Rapport and differentiation is a teacher's priority for resolving these issues.

Focus on Boys:

One focus that will significantly help with facilitating an effective lesson is the ability to engage boys in reading. Boys reading levels have always been an area of concern for quality education organisations. The following information can be used to improve reading among boys and potentially improve the outcomes for all students in a classroom:

- Acquire knowledge of a student's deep interests and select texts to engage them
- Facilitate learning using a range of modes (technology, audio books, magazines, group reading, teacher narrates)
- Ask the student to select an appropriate text
- Consequences rarely work (threat of failing, detention, calling home)
- Identify a success criteria for each lesson
- Use language that generates narrative in the classroom (open-ended questions, surveys, emotional language)
- Associate main themes to the lives of individuals in the classroom
- Comprehension tasks (read, then create)
- Use humour regularly, when appropriate
- Educate students on the importance and joy of reading and storytelling
- Develop reading ability and a keen interest in research and knowledge from a young age
- Print text on different colour paper
- Pause - discuss regularly, move their bodies, go outside or role play.
- Debate different perspectives when students show interest
- Provide opportunity for student to express their favourite and least favourite parts
- Be tolerant in the disparities between readers
- Be tolerant when students are distracted... *inspire* them to read on
- Reading drains energy quickly and it takes practice to get good at
- Identify student's learning styles at a young age
- All geniuses, which we know of, have one thing in common – they read!
- Celebrate authors for their achievements (Novels, poems, plays and films all have writers etc.)
- Read everything in your environment – signs, notices, menus, pamphlets, magazines, instructions, recipes, ingredients, lists, receipts, subtitles, clothes etc.
- Ask students to summarise the lesson

Further reading:

http://changingminds.org/disciplines/teaching/classroom_management/confident_teacher.htm

Me Read? No Way!

Ministry of Education's website, at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca>

EXAMPLE LESSON PLAN:

*I do this once or twice a term – usually, just as assessment is being released.

Rapport isn't always developed by being popular or funny - sometimes it's just about showing a genuine interest in the individual student and finding (faking) common-ground (similar interests or gaps they *want* help with)

Your task is to create an opportunity to discover common-ground. Here are some key factors for your approach.

- Give every **individual** your most valuable commodity – your time.
- Get on their level. Then, you can attempt to bring them on to your level. (i.e. use *some* of their language, wear clothes that interests them, copy some of their body language, join in some of their conversations.)
- Open up to them and let them see you are an interesting person – even just attempting this will help build rapport - **Talk with them, not at them!**
- *Your students want to see that you are “real” and in-touch with their reality.*

Notes:

Do not prepare your students for this lesson.

Lesson:

Set students to work planning/working on their assessment. Or something similar.

Call up students individually to your desk and have a seat waiting for them. Have a personal, light-hearted discussion (about them).

Give them the opportunity to talk – the more you allow them to talk, the more you will see opportunity to connect with them (Some students will be reluctant – use your probing skills).

- Ask them how they are traveling in general?
- Ask them how they are coping with school work, are they accessing support available to them?
- Ask them if they understand the task?
- Ask them what content they are planning to cover for their assessment?
- Who will be helping them with their assessment?
- Offer them some suggestions...
- Invite them to ask questions when they feel they are stuck.

After each question: wait for a reply, show interest and ask them to elaborate.

Make sure you do this on a day you are smiling lots.

If you feel the need, take notes after you speak to each student.

Yes, this task is time consuming – it might take two lessons to get through every student – some students may be absent. Try your best to follow up.

Reflection:

You now have content that can be used to personalise the experience for every individual in your classroom.