

Establishing Rapport in Higher Education Classrooms

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Teacher-student rapport has been discussed in previous research, but the communicative behaviors that foster it have yet to be identified. The current study looked at several teacher communicative behaviors to determine which are the best predictors of rapport building. The results suggest that students feel rapport is most influenced by a socially supportive teacher. Using humor and demonstrating homophily aid in building rapport as well. These findings suggest that teachers should strive to be socially supportive, humorous, and perceived as similar to students. However, nonverbal immediacy was not found to be a significant indicator of rapport. Studies have indicated that immediacy is an important characteristic for teachers to have, but these findings do not indicate that this characteristic has a positive influence on rapport building between teachers and students. In addition, teacher clarity was found to reduce rapport. This finding is interesting because instructors are taught to be clear, but this characteristic appears to have a negative effect on rapport built between teachers and students.

Si des recherches antérieures ont abordé le rapport enseignant-étudiant, elles n'ont pas encore identifié les comportements communicatifs qui le favorisent. La présente étude s'est penchée sur plusieurs comportements communicatifs de l'enseignant afin de déterminer lesquels sont les meilleurs prédicteurs de l'établissement d'un rapport. Les résultats indiquent que les étudiants estiment que le rapport est le plus influencé par un enseignant qui les soutient socialement. Le recours à l'humour et la démonstration de l'homophilie aident également à établir un rapport. Ces résultats suggèrent que les enseignants devraient s'efforcer d'apporter un soutien social, d'avoir de l'humour et d'être perçus comme semblables aux étudiants. Cependant, l'immédiateté non verbale ne s'est pas avérée être un indicateur significatif du rapport. Des études ont indiqué que l'immédiateté est une caractéristique importante pour les enseignants, mais ces résultats n'indiquent pas que cette caractéristique a une influence positive sur l'établissement de rapports entre les enseignants et les étudiants. De plus, on a constaté que la clarté de l'enseignant réduisait le rapport. Ce résultat est intéressant car on apprend aux enseignants à être clairs, mais cette caractéristique semble avoir un effet négatif sur les rapports établis entre les enseignants et les étudiants.

When students and teachers have developed a positive relationship and rapport has been established, students benefit in various ways (Martin & Collie, 2019; Sneyers & De Witte, 2017; Wilkins, 2014). Student learning has been positively influenced by teachers engaging in relationship building behaviors (Mazer et al., 2014). Additionally, strong student-teacher relationships, in general, have been found to have a positive influence on the distinct variables of cognitive learning, affective learning, and student motivation (Docan-Morgan & Manusov, 2009).

Therefore, teachers should be attempting to develop rapport with their students. Frisby and Buckner (2017) suggested teacher communicative behaviors such as homophily, social support, clarity, and humor help in this process. The current study examines these variables with the addition of immediacy to determine which teacher communicative behaviors predict rapport building.

Literature Review

Teacher-Student Relationships

Rapport building between teachers and students generates positive relationships that lead to various positive results for the student, whereas a lack of rapport has generated negative results for the student (Martin & Collie, 2019). More specifically, negative teacher-student relationships have generated feelings of distress and insecurity for the student, which have negatively affected a student's ability to dedicate effort towards educational activities, as well as social activities in the classroom (Spilt et al., 2012). Therefore, if students feel like they are not connected with their instructor, it could help explain why students lack feelings of self-motivation within higher education courses. Additionally, if a negative student-teacher relationship generates feelings of isolation, students may be less inclined to interact with their classmates or instructor. This negatively influences the educational experience for students.

Positive teacher-student relationships have fostered positive student emotions, which have helped students adapt to the classroom more easily (Eryilmaz, 2015). A potential obstacle for teachers when trying to develop the student-teacher relationship is exchanging emails with students. Students can lack the proper etiquette when emailing their teachers, which has led to their teachers not responding to the message (Kuehl et al., 2014). A relationship cannot be developed if one party is not reciprocating communication with another. Therefore, it is important that teachers adapt to their students' style of interaction online and overlook the possible lack of etiquette and grammatical errors their students may be committing. This strategy could be seen as an immediacy building behavior, which again, theoretically has had the potential to develop the teacher-student relationship (Frisby & Martin, 2010).

There are other opportunities for interaction teachers have included in their classes to help students establish a positive relationship with the instructor (Oyarzun & Morrison, 2013). The teacher should be consistent with how often they are interacting with each individual student. There should be no instances of a "teacher's pet" because this particular classroom dynamic has produced negative effects for the students involved (Trusz, 2017). Teacher consistency in how often they communicate with each student could positively influence the teacher-student relationship, which, in turn, should positively affect the students' learning experience. Furthermore, providing students with opportunities to interact with one another could help combat feelings of isolation. When developing a positive classroom atmosphere, it has been found that classroom connectedness has a positive impact on the students' overall performance (Frisby & Martin, 2010). Thus, rapport building between teachers and students is important for teachers to consider when attempting to set their students up for academic success.

Rapport

Frisby and Buckner (2017) defined rapport "an overall feeling between two people encompassing

a mutual, trusting, and pro-social bond” (p. 127). In other words, when rapport is established between two people, there are feelings of trust, both parties enjoy interacting, and both feel socially accepted. Frisby and Buckner (2017) also discussed how they believe rapport can be established specifically through various behaviors. They categorized rapport into two dimensions; the first is enjoyable interaction and second, personal connection. Enjoyable interaction means that both parties should experience satisfaction and gratification while communicating with one another. Personal connection is related to how both parties are linked together beyond the social roles of simply a teacher and a student interacting. Therefore, the interaction between teachers and their students should be a positive experience for both interacting parties, and they should also feel connected on a personal level. If this is done, the argument could be made that rapport has been established.

Frisby and Buckner (2017) also identified five specific strategies instructors can utilize to build rapport with their students. The behaviors are, “attentive behaviors, common grounding behaviors, information sharing behaviors, connecting behaviors, and courteous behaviors” (Frisby & Buckner, 2017, p. 128). Attentive behaviors are similar to immediacy behaviors, such as using the students’ names when conversing with them. It is important to understand that immediacy has been treated as a form of building rapport, rather than treated as its own separate entity as various studies have done. Common grounding behaviors occur when a teacher is perceived as likeable and friendly by their students. Information sharing behaviors occur when a teacher is perceived as clear by their students. For example, teachers with a firm grasp on course content who also appear credible are illustrating examples of information sharing behaviors. Connecting behaviors can occur when a teacher uses humor in the classroom and the students perceive their instructor to be humorous. Lastly, courteous behaviors occur when a teacher is perceived as empathetic by their students. A teacher could be supportive to their students beyond an academic level. Social support from a teacher would be perceived as a courteous behavior by students. All of these behaviors could be effective tools teachers can use to establish rapport with their students. The current study will test these relationships empirically.

Immediacy

Immediacy was originally described as a form of liking where people will be more attracted to people they like, rather than people they do not like, and immediacy reduces the physical and psychological distances between communicators (Mehrabian, 1971). Over time, immediacy has been developed and often studied in a classroom setting. Nonverbal immediacy has been more heavily researched than verbal and has been shown to have more tangible effects than verbal, so nonverbal immediacy will be specifically targeted. Nonverbal immediacy behaviors have been defined as consisting of, but not limited to eye contact, appearing relaxed, gesturing while speaking, smiling, facial expressions, tone of voice, postures, and movements in the classroom (Baringer & McCroskey, 2000; Finn & Schrodt, 2012). These behaviors can theoretically help students feel closer to their instructor, which in turn, should assist in establishing rapport. It is important to differentiate between variations in immediacy among different contexts. One example of this differentiation is associated with instructor eye contact. There has been a big difference established between an instructor making effective eye contact with their students and an instructor giving their students a stare down for disciplinary reasons (Kelly et al., 2015). Understanding the nuances between the specific immediacy behaviors is essential for teachers because student perception is usually the deciding factor towards whether or not the relationship

extends past the traditional student-teacher relationship found in a standard pedagogical setting.

As previously mentioned, immediacy has been defined as a form of attentive behaviors (Frisby & Buckner, 2017). Previous researchers have found engaging in immediacy building behaviors allows teachers to build positive relationships more effectively with their students (Gilchrist-Petty, 2017; Sözer, 2019). Thus, nonverbal immediacy is a factor that could potentially affect the development of rapport in the classroom.

Teacher Clarity

The information sharing behaviors, discussed by Frisby and Buckner (2017), used to establish rapport by instructors are most easily understood by exploring teacher clarity. Teacher clarity is defined as, “a cluster of teacher behaviors that contributes to the fidelity of instructional messages” (Finn & Schrodtt, 2012, p. 113). Teacher clarity has been dependent upon how the information is presented by the instructor, preferably in a way that students can expand their level of understanding of the course content, as well as their ability to retain the information accurately (Titsworth et al., 2015). For example, presenting course information in a way that is unique and memorable but also allows the students to grasp the information effectively illustrates an acceptable level of teacher clarity. In addition, identifying if the current methods being implemented are found useful by the students towards developing rapport with their instructors can have implications related to the level of instructor clarity currently achieved, or not achieved by teachers. When establishing rapport, students should perceive their instructors to have achieved an acceptable level of clarity with their dissemination of information.

If course content is presented in a clear fashion, then the likelihood of the student remembering the information increases. In its simplest form, teacher clarity has been defined as a “teacher’s ability to present information in a way that students understand” (Rodger et al., 2007, p. 92). In essence, if teachers are being clear in their educating as perceived by students, they are achieving teacher clarity and their students can experience a number of positive effects. For example, teacher clarity has positively influenced student motivation, has decreased feelings of anxiety among students, and has allowed a clear teacher to increase feelings of self-efficacy when attempting to complete new assignments (Rodger et al., 2007). Learner apprehension and cognitive learning have also been found to be positively influenced by a clear teacher (Chesebro, 2003). Therefore, investigating the how students perceive the importance of teacher clarity when establishing rapport with their teachers should be further explored.

Teacher Humor

A teacher who has used an appropriate amount of humor has had a positive impact on the student-teacher relationship (Wilkins, 2014). Effectively using jokes in class has created a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere for the students (West & Martin, 2019; Wilkins, 2014). Using humor well can benefit a teacher’s goal of establishing rapport with their students, but it is important for instructors to understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate humor and how it affects the rapport between teachers and students.

Furthermore, effective use of humor has been found to lower performance anxiety for the students and increase student enjoyment of the class (Swanson, 2013). However, if students perceive the teacher’s jokes as inappropriate or distasteful, this can negatively affect the students’ perceptions of their teacher’s credibility (Frymier et al., 2008). Therefore, as a teacher, one must

be careful in how humor is used and know whether or not a joke is appropriate, as humor use could affect rapport.

Homophily

Homophily has been defined as a “defining feature of friendship,” that is illustrated by similarity between both parties within an interpersonal relationship (Richmond et al., 2018, para. 1). Simply put, the similarities between relational partners explain homophily. Humans have been found to gravitate towards people that they perceive as similar to them in various ways (Voelker et al., 2013). These similarities can take many forms, such as, gender, ethnicity, age, interests, hobbies, etc. (Voelker et al., 2013). If there is enough perceived similarity between relational partners, then a relationship has a greater potential of developing.

If homophily, or perceived similarity, exists between students and their teacher, then they have been more likely to communicate regularly with their instructors (Myers & Huebner, 2011). When a teacher can establish common ground with their students, they have been perceived as personable and easy to communicate with by their students who value this behavior (Frisby & Buckner, 2017; Hudson, 2013). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that educators should do their best to be perceived as relatable and comparable by their students when attempting to generate rapport, in addition to establishing common ground with them often.

Establishing common ground has been done by discussing subjects important to the students and using relevant examples specific to the students’ interest (Webb & Barrett, 2014). This behavior could involve being well-versed in popular culture that their students consume. Similarly, if a teacher was seen as trying to put themselves in the position of the students, this was positively received by the students and assisted the teachers in their quest to establish rapport and develop the relationships with their students (Webb & Barrett, 2014). If students view their instructor as similar to them and easier to communicate with, then homophily has been established. This study will investigate if homophily also influences rapport.

Social Support

Social support occurs in a healthy relationship where one of the individuals is experiencing problems or difficulties. They have then received encouragement or assistance from the other person in the relationship, either in the form of information, advice, or other means of help, so the individual facing difficulties has felt cared for, appreciated, and loved (Sari & Fakhriddiana, 2019). Essentially, social support is present when a person is going through a difficult time and, as a result, the person with which they have a healthy interpersonal relationship aids them by giving them guidance, information, and support during the difficult experience. If the person attempting to be socially supportive successfully generates feelings of love, appreciation, or care, then the individual being supported can benefit emotionally and mentally, and hopefully overcome their difficulties more easily. People have received social support from a variety of people such as family members, friends, and even educators (Sari & Fakhriddiana, 2019). Therefore, if a teacher has the ability to be a social support system for their students, it is important to consider the impact this variable has on rapport.

More specifically, when a teacher is perceived as empathetic by their students, this would fall into the category of what Frisby and Buckner (2017) defined as courteous behaviors. An example of which might be a student running into a personal issue and not being able to complete an

assignment on time being granted an extension by a teacher compassionate towards their situation. This behavior can be defined as the teacher being supportive to the student's needs. Again, if a person assists the other during a difficult time and helps them overcome adversity, they are engaging in socially supportive behaviors. Therefore, the courteous behaviors discussed can be considered methods of how teachers can engage in socially supportive behaviors to benefit their students.

Social support is interpreted by students in the classroom context as teachers caring about them and making them feel appreciated. It has been found that social support can increase student engagement, but has also been found not to be a significant influence on student learning (Fischer et al., 2013). This could suggest that social support is important towards developing the teacher-student relationship, but may not factor directly into student success. Regardless, when developing rapport with students, teachers should consider the role social support has on how students perceive the relationship.

Considering the alternative to socially supportive behaviors, when a teacher appears emotionless to their students, they have had difficulty developing the student-teacher relationship and ultimately establishing rapport with their students (Quinlan, 2016). Emotion should be considered in the classroom environment and being socially supportive requires both emotion and empathy. Apparent lack of emotion can have a negative effect on the students' learning, enjoyment, and ability to communicate with their instructor. Teachers should consider their own emotional capacity when attempting to develop rapport with their students and understand the implications of failing to meet the expectations related to social support. Simply put, students have appeared to value when their educators are available to socially support them when possible (Boulton et al., 2013). Thus, social support is a factor related to establishing rapport that needs to be explored.

Research Question

The current study aims to determine ways that teacher communicative behaviors can develop rapport within their own classrooms. It is important for rapport to be established, but discovering which specific teacher behaviors should be a teacher's primary focus to accomplish rapport-building is necessary. Specific teacher behaviors that contribute towards developing rapport among teachers and students will be explored.

RQ: Which predictor variables out of immediacy, humor, teacher clarity, homophily, and social support, if any, predict rapport?

The results of this study will explain specifically which behaviors students value the most from their teachers in terms of creating rapport.

Methods

Participants

Once IRB approval was received, participants were recruited from communication courses at a mid-sized, Midwestern university using a research pool. This study obtained informed consent from all participants, and each participant consented to take part in this study. The targeted sample size was 138, which would allow a power level of .95 to detect a large effect. Fourteen cases were incomplete and were therefore omitted from the data analysis, resulting in a final $N = 124$.

The participants of this study were 41.9% seniors in college, 27.4% juniors in college, 1.6% sophomores, 25.0% freshmen, and 4.0% graduate or doctoral students respectively. The average age was 20.73 years old. The ethnicities were 91.1% White, 4.0% African American, 1.6% Asian, and 3.2% other or not specified. There was an imbalance in the gender distribution in this study with 81.5% of the participants identifying as female, whereas 18.5% identified as male.

The study utilized the method of asking students to think back to the teacher that they had most recently to complete the survey used by McCroskey et al. (2006).

Measures

A number of previously generated scales were used to gauge how teachers and students generate rapport with one another in the classroom. The target variable was rapport, which was measured using the modified rapport scale developed by Frisby and Myers (2008).

The predictor variables were measured by the following scales. McCroskey et al.'s (1975) homophily scale was used and the 8-item scale used in the current study yielded an alpha coefficient reliability of .70, which indicates an acceptable level of reliability.

Wilson and Locker's (2007) 23-item nonverbal immediacy scale yielded an alpha coefficient reliability of .89, which indicates a very good level of reliability. Sidelinger and McCroskey's (1997) 22-item teacher clarity scale yielded an alpha coefficient reliability of .94. Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield's (1991) 17-item humor orientation scale yielded an alpha coefficient reliability of .91. Malecki and Demary's (2002) 10-item social support scale yielded an alpha coefficient reliability of .95. Lastly, Frisby and Myers' (2008) 11-item modified rapport scale yielded an alpha coefficient reliability of .95. All scale reliabilities ranged from acceptable to excellent.

Procedures

The survey instrument was disseminated through the online platform of Qualtrics. Participants answered 116 questions related to their relationship with the teacher that taught the last class they attended (McCroskey et al., 2006). The survey was made available on a medium-sized Midwestern university's online research board.

Results

A multiple regression test examined if rapport could be predicted by homophily, nonverbal immediacy, humor, social support, and teacher clarity. All assumptions for the regression analysis were met. The results of the regression test yielded an R of .860 that explained 72.9% of the variance in rapport could be predicted by homophily, humor, social support, and teacher clarity, $R^2_{\text{adj}} = .73$, $F(5, 118) = 67.04$, $p < .001$. The results of the regression test suggest the predictor variables identified account for a significant level of variance in the dependent variable. During the analysis of the regression coefficients, the test indicated that homophily, $\beta = .18$, $t = 3.27$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [.16, .65], humor, $\beta = .27$, $t = 3.78$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.11, .35], social support, $\beta = .60$, $t = 8.17$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.59, .97], and teacher clarity, $\beta = -.18$, $t = -2.75$, $p = .007$, 95% CI [-.20, -.03], were significant individual predictors of rapport. Nonverbal immediacy was not a significant predictor of rapport, $\beta = .10$, $t = 1.29$, $p = .201$, 95% CI [-.04, .18]. Additional beta statistics for homophily, nonverbal immediacy, humor, social support, and teacher clarity are located in Table 1. Descriptive statistics for all variables can be found in Table 2.

Table 1

Beta Weights for Homophily, Nonverbal Immediacy, Humor, Social Support, and Teacher Clarity

| Variable | B | SE B | β |
|---------------------|-------|------|---------|
| Homophily | .406 | .124 | .177* |
| Nonverbal Immediacy | .069 | .054 | .097 |
| Humor | .227 | .060 | .269** |
| Social support | .782 | .096 | .604** |
| Teacher clarity | -.114 | .041 | -.178* |

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$; $N = 124$

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Homophily, Nonverbal Immediacy, Humor, Social Support, and Teacher Clarity

| Variable | M | SD |
|---------------------|-------|-------|
| Homophily | 24.27 | .12 |
| Nonverbal Immediacy | 90.11 | 15.08 |
| Humor | 60.31 | 12.73 |
| Social support | 39.93 | 8.28 |
| Teacher clarity | 87.15 | 16.82 |
| Rapport | 37.33 | 10.72 |

Discussion

The results of this study have provided unique theoretical implications specifically related to rapport and its causes. Rapport was found to be valued by students and viewed as a preferred relational result between them and their teacher. Results also indicate that the following teacher behaviors are significant when rapport is being developed among teachers and students: social support, humor, homophily, and teacher clarity. The implications of these significant behaviors are discussed further below.

Nonverbal immediacy was found to not be a significant indicator of rapport development between teachers and students, which contradicts the findings of numerous past studies. For example, in studies conducted by Gilchrist-Petty (2017) and Sözer (2019), they suggested that immediacy is a device teachers can use to significantly develop relationships with their students. This study challenges previous findings because data suggests that nonverbal immediacy is not significant to students in the context of teacher-student rapport building. At the very least, when considering the development of teacher-student relationships, one can argue that the findings of this study suggest nonverbal immediacy behaviors were found to be no longer significant to present-day students. Immediacy being found to not be a significant indicator of rapport can have major implications within the field of education, in addition to the understanding of the impact of certain teaching behaviors because of the historical importance linked to immediacy in the past.

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically speaking, the results of the study could reframe certain teacher behaviors that have been found to be of importance in the past. Specifically, nonverbal immediacy has been a popular area of study since the 1970s (Baringer & McCroskey, 2000). The bulk of immediacy research indicates that nonverbal immediacy is an extremely important factor for teachers to consider when developing relationships with their students. Research and educators alike have generally considered nonverbal immediacy to be important to students and serve as an effective student motivator (Tanriverdi Canbaz & Yavuz, 2016). However, the results of this study have suggested that nonverbal immediacy is not a contributing factor to rapport building and not as important to students as one might expect. It can be argued that nonverbal immediacy is enacting actions rather than interacting with students and thus does not affect the development of rapport. Meaning, teachers could theoretically be more invested in the behaviors they are engaging in, rather than the actual relationships with their students. When the relationship remains undeveloped, it can interfere with rapport building, which has the potential of ultimately negatively affecting student success.

Further, this finding has the potential of shaping future research on teacher behaviors and preservice teacher education. Immediacy has often been described as feelings of closeness, which one could assume has been relevant to rapport building (Fahara & Castro, 2015). Again, the argument can be made that feelings of closeness are relevant to rapport building. Research generally reflects this assumption and implies that immediacy has needed to be a teaching behavior utilized by educators due to students appreciating the nonverbal behaviors highlighted by immediacy (Fahara & Castro, 2015). However, the findings of this study contradict a viewpoint that is widely agreed upon in the field of education. This is interesting, to say the least, and has the potential to be a finding that leads to educational innovation in the future.

Results also indicate that students appreciate social support from their teachers more than the other predictor variables tested; students feel a connection with their teachers when they appear empathetic and supportive. This finding is consistent with previous research on social support (Sari & Fakhruddiana, 2019). Meaning, social support on an interpersonal level can be achieved in the classroom, and findings suggest that students value this teacher characteristic more than all others examined. Teachers should consider that students value when teachers appear to care about their welfare. This supports the assertion that teachers, when attempting to generate rapport, should empathize with their students. Furthermore, teachers should attempt to show their students that they genuinely care beyond what is expected. The importance of social support highlighted in the findings of this study could imply that social support provides researchers with the teacher characteristic that needs the most consideration within future research related to teacher-student relationships.

Humor and homophily were found to be significant indicators of rapport being generated between students and teachers. Humor being found as a rapport indicator is another interesting finding that can shape future research. Humor has been found to be a way teachers can develop the relationships with their students (Wilkins, 2014), and the findings of this study reflect that. If teachers can use humor appropriately and effectively, then rapport with students could be positively influenced. Examples of this are teachers using jokes in class and telling amusing anecdotes to their students, and the findings of this study support the notion that students appreciate these types of behaviors.

As previously stated, homophily, or perceived similarity between teachers and students has led to increased levels of teacher-student communication (Myers & Huebner, 2011). Homophily being found as an indicator of rapport is consistent with the assertion that homophily increasing teacher-student communication is important when generating rapport. Future research could use this finding to explore homophily further, and more specifically, how teachers can cultivate the feelings of similarity between themselves and their students.

Another interesting finding was that teacher clarity was found to be a negative predictor of rapport. Although the reasons for this finding in the current study are unclear, there are multiple potential explanations. Perhaps an instructor who is overly clear elicits fewer questions from students, which can remove potential opportunities for meaning-making and rapport-building through conversation. It is also possible that an overly clear teacher may create a classroom climate of rigidity that students find to amplify the power differential and reduce rapport. For example, if a teacher is too clear, they may be perceived as being too strict about assignment guidelines. Theoretically, being too unvarying with assignment guidelines can limit student creativity. This does not allow students to display their personality and discover alternative routes of achieving course goals. This can result in a student failing to connect with their instructor because they were unable to fully express themselves. Another explanation could be if a teacher is too heavily focused on presenting course content clearly, it does not allow the necessary time needed for developing rapport in the classroom. Previously conducted research suggested that teacher clarity can result in an increase student motivation (Rodger et al., 2007), which can also be associated with rapport building in theory. Findings of this study suggest that students do not consider teacher clarity important when building rapport with their teacher and is counterproductive to teacher-student rapport building overall. Further research is needed to explain this finding.

Practical Implications

Within the classroom, the results of this study can be easily applied to the behaviors of a teacher. When building rapport is an instructor's goal, time should be devoted to providing social support, being appropriately humorous, and cultivating perceived similarity between themselves and their students. Immediacy was not found to be a significant teacher behavior that educators need to address, although teacher clarity was found to negatively affect rapport and needs further inquiry on how to not damage rapport building. These characteristics have several implications on how teachers should conduct themselves in the classroom.

Specifically, this means teachers should be empathic, caring, and if possible, be seen as a resource for their students to rely upon outside of class. In other words, being a support system for students should be considered by educators. In addition, if a teacher can be perceived as humorous by their students, rapport can be fostered between teachers and students. This can be done in a number of ways, such as telling funny jokes, sharing funny stories, showing funny videos, or any other actions that the students perceive as humorous. All the behaviors discussed can be applied by educators in the classroom and the findings of this study imply that when these behaviors are applied successfully, then students and teachers are able to effectively generate rapport. The indicators of rapport that teachers should actively apply are humor, homophily, and social support, per the results of this study.

If teachers can develop homophily, or perceived similarity, between themselves and their students, then the rapport between them can more easily progress. Referencing or sharing

personal characteristics and interests that align with the interests of the students can be a means of effectively using homophily to generate rapport. Educators should become more familiar with what their students enjoy, so that they can more easily apply homophily in the classroom when attempting to develop the teacher-student relationship and cultivate rapport. This can arguably be achieved by simply exploring the areas of interest of students. Social media, technology, word of mouth, among others are specific ways teachers can informally and easily gather this type of information. Teachers who are interested in building rapport should spend time developing these areas, realizing these characteristics will be influential.

Again, teachers need not worry about immediacy behaviors in their classrooms when considering rapport in the classroom. This finding is not reflective of past studies, but the data suggests that students believe teachers' nonverbal immediacy are not indicators of rapport. The results showing clarity as reducing rapport need further study because reducing clarity to improve rapport could theoretically have negative implications for other communication education constructs such as teacher credibility and cognitive learning. Teachers may wish to explore the idea of strategic ambiguity in the classroom to address the clarity findings.

Directions for Future Research

Further exploration is needed to provide a more in-depth understanding of each variable's relationship with rapport. Understanding the full scope of influence each variable has on rapport will be valuable for educators to understand. For example, conducting an experiment with an intervention specific to teacher humor and how it affects rapport in the classroom should be done to further explicate the findings of this study. Additionally, exploring how the variables tested exist alongside one another in the classroom will be useful to understand. Now that significance has been found for social support, humor, homophily, and teacher clarity when generating rapport in the classroom, exploring how they interact with one another in the classroom would be enlightening. For example, the idea of humorous homophily has been explored in the past (West & Martin, 2019). Further exploration of this phenomenon can identify specific teacher actions and how they potentially overlap with one another when applied and could also demonstrate if these teacher behaviors positively influence rapport simultaneously.

The current study examined traditional face-to-face classroom situations. Extending to see what similarities and differences may occur in an online setting could be valuable for distance education. Online classrooms have different obstacles and advantages than a typical face-to-face classroom. Therefore, investigating rapport generation in online contexts could garner valuable practical applications for teachers and students.

Limitations

The vast majority of the participants of this study shared similar demographic information. Specifically, the participants were largely White and female. The study was posted on an open research board, which led many similar participants to engage in the study. This could suggest that the findings of the study are specific to the students that contributed to the study. Findings could differ at an institution of a different size, an institution in a different location, or institutions with more a more diverse student/teacher population. This does not yield the results of the study inadmissible, but it does make the findings harder to generalize on a wider scale.

Also, participants of this study are students of higher education. This information could

suggest that findings are specific to college settings, and the teacher behaviors valued by K-12 students could differ. More research is needed to explore a wider age range of students.

Conclusion

Teachers who wish to build rapport with their students should spend the most time and effort on being socially supportive of their students; they should also be devoting effort to using appropriate humor and demonstrating homophily. This study also found that nonverbal immediacy does not contribute to rapport, and teacher clarity is a negative predictor of rapport. The teacher characteristics identified as significant predictors of rapport in this study can influence teacher/student interaction in both positive and negative manners, which instructors should understand when developing strategies to build rapport with their students.

Therefore, the findings of this study expand on the practice of developing student-teacher relationships and provide clarity when defining rapport. The findings of this study also highlight the need for future research in the educational context, as well as the need to explore the effectiveness of specific teacher behaviors. Specifically, the concepts of immediacy and teacher clarity should be further explored to discover if students in other situations feel like the participants of this study about these ideas. If similar findings are found, then the field of education would benefit from understanding the changes in the opinions and beliefs of their students. For example, if future results resemble those of this study, then teachers can be less concerned about their nonverbal immediacy behaviors. Also, teachers may need to change their strategies when considering teacher clarity due to the adverse effect it can have on rapport building. Similarly, replication of this study should be done to support the significance found for the rapport indicators, social support, humor, and homophily. Doing so will advance the findings of this study and assist present and future teachers in their effort to establish rapport with their students.

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