



## 2 Easy Ways To Build Rapport With Your Students

Building rapport with students can be a remarkably effective way to improve classroom management. But there is some confusion over what rapport is and how one goes about building it.

Rapport is nothing more than a connection you make with your students **based on their positive feelings for you**. When they like you and trust you, and when you in turn like and believe in them, you'll form a bond that makes classroom management a lot easier.

It's as simple as that.

But rapport isn't something you can force upon your students. Teachers who try to engage individual students directly... *"Hey, what's your favorite video game?"* ...often find the interaction brief and awkward and the results less than influential.

To build genuine rapport, you have to draw students *to* you. You have to use your personality, your humor, and your charisma to get students to want to be around you and take an interest in who you are.

It's this natural appeal that allows you to effortlessly make personal connections with students and influence their behavior choices – often without ever having to say a word.

The idea of using one's everyday personality to draw students in and build rapport makes sense to most teachers, but many struggle with how to put it into practice. What exactly does it look like?

I've gotten this question a lot over the years, and the truth is we all have different personalities. We all have our own unique talents, traits, sense of humor, and joie de vivre.

The simple answer is to just be likeable and rapport building will take care of itself. However, I know how helpful it can be to hear specific examples. So in that spirit, here are two easy-peasy ways you can build rapport today – and see results almost immediately.

### **1. Smile until they smile.**

I love this strategy and find it works even when I've never met the students before. You can use it anytime you're passing out materials, checking student work, taking attendance, or anytime you have occasion to make eye contact with individual students.

Let's say for example you're taking attendance. As you say each student's name, you would take a moment to look up and smile at the student. You would then continue making eye contact and smiling until the student smiles back at you. And that's it.

What it does is allow you to make an instant positive and personal connection with each student. It communicates a thousand wonderful things in just a couple of seconds. And when you're finished, each student will see you in a different light.

You may notice other students begin to giggle as you do this. That's okay. It's all good. Sometimes I make funny faces instead of smiling or I'll exaggerate a frown until they do the same. It's really fun. And lest you think your students are too old or too cool, I've used this strategy with sixth-graders to great effect and wouldn't hesitate to use it with older students.

## **2. Tell a story about your childhood.**

If you're a regular reader of this website, or if you've read the book *Dream Class*, then you know the power of storytelling. Nothing... nothing, nothing, nothing is more effective. Done a certain way, it can put your students in the palm of your hand. It does, however, take some practice.

Telling a story about your childhood is a good place to start. It places you in an environment they're unfamiliar picturing you in, but one in which they can closely identify with. You become, then, not so different than them – making connections easier.

I've found stories about adventures or comedic hard luck to be most effective. But really anything with a twist or a surprise works. Acting out the story is also especially effective. But it's important you have fun with it; stories about your dog Snowflake dying are verboten.

Why storytelling works so well is in some ways still a mystery to me. There is no doubt that your students will love it and love you because of it. If you become a good storyteller, it will completely change your teaching and will dramatically affect the influence you have with your students.

### **Tearing Down Walls**

It's important to note that one of the keys to building rapport is **what you don't do**. Many teachers have a hard time building rapport because they respond emotionally to misbehavior. They show frustration, they scold, **they lecture**, and in so doing they erect a giant wall between themselves and their students.

Building rapport is about tearing down walls, some of which are put up by your students before you even meet them.

There is a lot to this topic, and we'll touch on more in the weeks to come, but one thing is for certain: Building rapport has the potential to impact every important area of your teaching – classroom management, difficult students, motivation, independence, academic progress – and then some.

How's that for a smile and a five-minute story?