Modelling the Generation and Maintenance of Classroom Rapport

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This paper describes a modelling project that was aimed at investigating the generation and maintenance of classroom rapport. The project used a concise version of a modelling tool known as the Experiential Array to uncover the beliefs, cognitive strategies, emotional states, and external behaviours of three teachers who are highly proficient at generating and maintaining rapport through deliberately taking an interest in students' lives outside the classroom. Recognizing that rapport is a personal construct that may be developed in many ways, we describe common elements of rapport creation in detail. The paper also functions as an example and introduction to modelling as a useful way to pursue teacher development.

この論文では，どのように教室の雰囲気を作り、保つのかを調査するための, モデリングプロジェクトについて述べる。教室の雰囲気作りに実績のある、三人の教師について調査を行った。三人は、教室から一歩出た後に生徒がどうしているかにも興味を持つことで、うまく教室の雰囲気作りをしてきた。Experiential　Arrayとして知られている、モデリングツールの中でも簡単なツールを使って、この三人の教師の信念や気持ち、どのような方法を考え、どのように行動しているのかを明らかにする。教室の雰囲気作りについては、教師によって色々なやり方がある事は確かだが、この論文では、上手に教室の雰囲気作りをする方法に共通していることについて詳細に述べる。また、「教師の技術向上とは何か」を追求する、効果的な方法を知ってもらい、是非活用していただきたい。

WHAT DOES it mean for a teacher to be in rapport with a class of students, and how do we know when rapport is present in a classroom? In this paper, we seek to more fully understand the ability of exceptional teachers to both achieve and sustain classroom rapport. Three skilled teachers were modelled using a tool called the Experiential Array (Gordon & Dawes, 2005) in order to discover the specific ways in which they are able to generate and maintain classroom rapport. In modelling terms, these skilled teachers are known as *exemplars*, and the authors of this paper were the *modellers*.

At a deeper level, this research project was aimed at highlighting the use of modelling as a tool for professional development by showing how teachers can model both the surface and underlying structure of a chosen exemplar's ability such as rapport. It is hoped that the results of this modelling can eventually be made available in a form that can be used by any teacher to generate and maintain classroom rapport.

We begin by noting the limitations of observation as a tool for professional development and suggesting that modelling can be a potentially richer means of fostering teacher growth. Next,

we explain the methodology, which includes the specific steps taken, using the Experiential Array in order to model each exemplar. This is followed by a discussion of the key findings for generating and maintaining rapport, including the similarities and differences between the exemplars. Finally, we summarize some of the main elements of rapport as well as the main advantages for modelling taken from this study and also suggest ways that modelling can be used for teachers' professional development and in future research.

Background

Many avenues exist for teachers to pursue professional development in order to build their teaching skills. To that end, Johnson and Golombek (2002) suggested, "Professional development emerges from a process of reshaping teachers' existing knowledge, beliefs, and practices rather than simply imposing new theories, methods, or materials on teachers" (p. 2). One method that can potentially lead to a deep level of professional development is the practice of modelling exceptional teacher abilities, on both conscious and unconscious planes.

Lortie (1975) wrote on the theme of unconscious modelling. What he termed *the apprenticeship of observation* has had a strong influence on teaching practices, especially on novice teachers. According to Lortie, teachers often formulate their teaching practices from their experiences as students through unconsciously modelling the teaching skills of those they have deemed to be effective during their school years. Lortie noted that "the average student has spent 13,000 hours in direct contact with classroom teachers by the time he graduates from high school" (p. 61). Lortie further stated that many novice teachers, in particular, often end up teaching as they have been taught through unconsciously assimilating the teacher models they have observed. Moreover, they may also have formulated conceptions of teaching that draw upon their perceptions of the values and practices of their former teachers (Liston & Zeichner, 1991). A gap in development can result for such novice teachers if they do not have a deeper level of conscious understanding and the ability to reflect on the hidden beliefs, assumptions, and processes that anchor the teaching practices their teaching models were emulating. This gap exists because novice teachers have not gained access to dialogues with their former teachers that would facilitate the emergence of deeper understandings. This is not to suggest that novice teachers, or any teachers for that matter, are lacking their own beliefs and ways of conceptualizing teaching. Rather, they are "not likely to make useful linkages between (the) teaching objectives and teacher actions" (Lortie, 1975, p. 63) that underlie the structure of those whom they have unconsciously modelled during their student years. If teaching preconceptions that are developed through mere observation remain unanalysed, they may fossilize into an intuitive and imitative approach resulting in a rather limited understanding of teaching.

On the other hand, consciously modelling excellent teachers can be a more effective developmental tool because it unearths both the surface level abilities and deeper level connections that facilitate such abilities. To be clear, modelling should not be confused with mere teacher observation, as Johnson (1999) noted:

> Simply observing teachers teach does little to help us to understand the reasoning and rationale behind teachers' instructional practices. However, when teachers explain their instructional practices, we begin to understand the wide range of instructional (and other) considerations that influence what and how teachers think about their teaching. (p. 127-8)

Expert teachers have certain skills and capabilities that separate them from those who are average. Modelling techniques (see Bandler & Grinder, 1975; Dilts, 1994, 1998) make it possible

to uncover the structure of an expert's skills and capabilities to discover how specifically they are able to achieve such exceptional results. In order to understand modelling more fully, we turn to Lawley and Tomkins (2000) who defined it as

> a process whereby an observer, the modeler, gathers information about the activity of a system with the aim of constructing a generalized description (a model) of how that system works. The model can then be used by the modeler and others to inform decisions and actions. The purpose of modeling is to identify "what is" and how "what is" works—without influencing what is being modeled. The modeler begins with an open mind, a blank sheet, and an outcome to discover the way a system functions—without trying to change it. (p. 22)

Such an approach to modelling can be observed in Gordon and Dawes (2005), who highlighted its practical nature as "the process of identifying and describing in a useful way those patterns that make up a particular ability. . . . once we know the patterns, we can make them our own and begin to manifest the ability" (pp. 4-5). To that end, they developed a practical modelling tool called the *Experiential Array* that can allow people to model the structure of exceptional abilities for the purpose of achieving similar results themselves. This modelling tool allows people, including teachers, to explicitly model the abilities of others in ways that uncover the structure of not only the surface-level techniques, but also the deeper underlying beliefs and assumptions that facilitate such abilities, which can lead to greater professional development.

Rapport

Rapport is at the heart of every healthy classroom. It is the critical ingredient that allows teachers and students to create a cohesive community together. But what is rapport? Rapport is defined in the Webster dictionary as a "relation marked by harmony, conformity, accord, or affinity" (Rapport, 2014). Simply put, and for the purpose of this paper, rapport can be seen as getting on the same wavelength as students. It is that shared sense of oneness amongst the people in the classroom when there is a willingness to engage and focus on tasks. Bolstad (1992) has noted that teachers need to be focused on both community and tasks to be effective. In essence, creating rapport through building community helps to facilitate students' willingness to participate in tasks. John Grinder, who is one of the cofounders of Neuro-Linguistic Programming, considered rapport as "holding the attention of another's unconscious mind" (Grossi, 2010), which illustrates another important point—people are not usually consciously aware of the creation of rapport. Understanding how gifted teachers generate rapport and the ways that they are able to hold the attention of their students' conscious and unconscious minds is central to this paper.

It has been noted by researchers (e.g., Nguyen, 2007) that students who are in rapport with a teacher are more motivated and able to learn more easily. Unfortunately, there are times when students can be in apathetic and unmotivated states, which no doubt makes rapport building more challenging. For example, Sturge (2012) commented, "I saw 10-15 students clustered at the rear of the classroom, sitting as far as possible from the instructor. About half of those students had their heads resting on their desks in a display of disinterest" (p. 1). Burden (2002) examined Japanese university students in particular and noted groups of students who felt they had little control, were unmotivated, and were clearly out of rapport with their teacher. In contrast, research by Saito and Eisenstein-Ebsworth (2004), based on interviews with Japanese EFL students, showed that they preferred teachers who are open-minded, present, respectful of their culture, and willing to make adjustments to meet their needs. Thus, working on the creation of rapport is a goal

that can help teachers and students to develop more cohesive learning communities.

Although there is previous work examining rapport in the classroom, these researchers have targeted theoretical issues including politeness, locutionary acts, and maintaining face (Spencer-Oatey, 2000). Other research on rapport has focused on situations where it has broken down (Sturge, 2012). Teachers need to create rapport with students in a variety of situations such as the beginning of a course, the beginning of a lesson, and the beginning of specific activities, to name just a few. It is also important for teachers to re-establish rapport or repair it during times when student response is lacking, when the class is tired or bored, or when students are being "problematic." This paper takes a practical approach through the modelling of exceptional teachers who demonstrate the ability to create rapport and then finding ways to replicate this ability.

Methodology

In earlier work on rapport, Cullen and Deacon (2013) studied the ability of two highly experienced teachers to create rapport successfully in the classroom. To achieve this, a research instrument called the Experiential Array, developed by Gordon and Dawes (2005), was used. The Experiential Array is a graphical format that provides a way of documenting and beginning to understand the infinite complexities of human performance. A simplified version of the array is shown in Figure 1. As can be seen, the main sections of the array are

- beliefs,
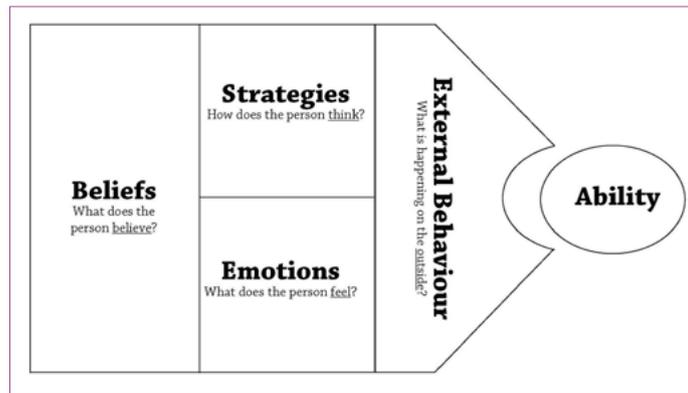- strategies,
- emotions, and
- external behaviour.

Figure 1. A simplified diagram of the Experiential Array modelling tool.

In order to conduct this study, a step-by-step process was followed in the modelling of each exemplar. Accordingly, the following five steps were utilized.

Step 1. Identify a Person (an Exemplar) who is Skilled at Doing Something that You Would Like to be Able to Emulate

Three such teachers who excel at creating rapport with students were identified in this project. All of the teachers showed a high level of awareness and interest in professional development and a strong commitment to both helping their students and taking their teaching to the highest possible level.

Step 2. Define the Ability Size (Chunk *in Modelling Language*) that You Plan to Model

In earlier modelling work (Cullen & Deacon, 2013), it became apparent that rapport is a large construct and modelling projects in this area can benefit by being more clearly focused. Thus, the current study more narrowly defined the chunk size to include the specific ability to create rapport by having an interest in students' lives outside the classroom. As with many modelling projects, this particular chunk was identified as an important element by the exemplars themselves. In this way, when defining the chunk size (and deciding on many other elements of modelling), it was useful to make use of the exemplar's ideas because they were the "experts" for the skill, and it was their map of the world that was likely to be most useful.

Step 3. Carry out the Modelling Using the Experiential Array in Macro or Micro Form

In this situation, there was not time to carry out the modelling using the full macro version of the Experiential Array (see Cullen & Deacon, 2013 for an example of using the full array). Therefore, we used a more condensed micro form that includes four core questions (as suggested through personal correspondence with David Gordon, one of the creators of this modelling tool), each corresponding to one of the four major sections of the Experiential Array (see Figure 2).

As was seen in Figure 1, these four aspects of beliefs, strategies, emotions, and external behaviours are conceptualized as unconsciously combining and supporting each other to enable the exemplar to carry out the skill being modelled. To understand these aspects effectively, it was important to take notes while listening carefully to the answers that the exemplar gave to each question. As we knew that the exemplar's replies could fit in a nonlinear manner into any of the four questions, it was

useful to use a chart (Figure 2) to take notes. Summarizing what was said helped to clarify the model. It was also important to pay attention to the exemplar's nonverbal behaviour as well as the words being used. The modelling sessions were video recorded so that full attention could be given to the exemplar during the modelling and the video could later be referred to for more detail.

Modeling outcome: _____
Q1: "What is important to you when you are doing that?"
Q2: "What are you thinking about as you are doing that?"
Q3: "What are you feeling as you do that?"
Q4: "What are you doing in your behavior as you do that?"

Figure 2. A micro version of the Experiential Array using the concise questions grid.

Step 4. Organize and Refine the Model

At this point, there was a mass of scribbled notes, arrows, and keywords. Modelling is an organic and often messy process and these notes needed to be organized and refined into a more us-

able form. As we reread the notes and watched the video again, we had follow-up questions for the exemplar that helped clarify and enrich the model. The key here was to discover the differences that make a difference to the model—in other words, we aimed to notice what was core.

Step 5. Try on the Model

When we had the model in a clear form, we began to take on that person's map of the world for the purpose of assimilating their ability to carry out the skill. In order to do so, it was helpful to do the following:

1. Talk ourselves through the beliefs and behaviours that were suggested in the model; considering whether it was compatible with our own beliefs;

2. Imagine watching ourselves in the classroom (or other appropriate place) carrying out the skill while taking on the attributes of the exemplar;

3. Imagine that we could actually step into our own bodies as we carried out that skill, noticing how it felt in our own bodies; and

4. After mentally rehearsing the model several times, trying it out for real, actually taking on those beliefs and behaviours in the classroom. (A teacher who tries this method may want to decide a time period, for example 1 week, in which to give him- or herself permission to try on these new beliefs and behaviours.)

Note that although observation of teachers in the classroom is clearly useful for the purpose of verifying actual teacher behaviour, it was not employed in the current study. For a study that included classroom observation, see Cullen and Deacon (2013).

Results

Table 1 (next page) is a summary of the key results of modelling the three exemplars in their ability to generate rapport through taking an interest in students' lives outside the classroom.

Discussion

Upon reviewing the results of the modelling sessions with the three teachers, it was clear that each teacher was certainly uniquely skilled in his or her ability to generate rapport in the classroom. At the same time, it appeared as common and central that all of the teachers

- acknowledged that it is worth spending time on rapport building;
- demonstrated a high level of optimism and positive engagement with the students; and
- respected students as individuals.

These three teachers have different strategies and behaviours in their pursuit of their core aims, but they are still able to achieve the same goal of generating and maintaining rapport through an interest in students' lives outside the classroom. Below is a summary of some of the key points that emerged from the teacher responses. The summary is organized according to the four modelling questions.

Q1 (Beliefs): What is important to you when you are doing that?

This question aimed to identify teacher beliefs, the beliefs that enable them to carry out this ability of generating rapport (enabling beliefs) and the beliefs that motivate the teachers to carry out the ability (motivational beliefs).

Table 1. Modelling the Ability to Generate Rapport Through an Interest in Students' Lives Outside of the Classroom

Questions	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3
1. What is **important** to you when you are doing that?	Showing I have regard for my students. Using prior knowledge of students. Students feel safe in the classroom and with the information I use. If I open up to the students they will open up to me. Gaining knowledge about the students and their lives.	Content-based lessons. Focus on students' role in society (e.g., what do you buy and how does that affect society?) Connecting students' lives to social issues, e.g., bullying, power harassment, nuclear energy, role and position of women in society. Helping students grow as people: to care about something and to take action.	Remembering the importance of rapport. Be conscious of rapport. Treat all students equally and fairly. Learn students' names and then learn something more: something interesting and unique about each student. Use humour.
2. What are you **thinking** about as you do that?	Not thinking about only instruction, instruction, instruction but how do I incorporate my knowledge of students into the lesson? Not really thinking, the actions have become internalized. Spending some time on the students as human beings.	Is this making a difference? How can I present these topics in a way that is connected to their lives? Are the students actively involved? Are they tuned out or tuned in?	What are my students thinking? How can students build student-to-student rapport in my class? I'm remembering to take time with each student. Sometimes I am not thinking. Unscripted communication is natural and most interesting. So I have to listen and respond in the moment.
3. What are you **feeling** as you do that?	I am feeling successful. I am feeling motivated and there is a feeling of mutual motivation between the teacher and students. It feels gratifying to have rapport with students.	Excited, motivated, kind of loving the students, really caring for the students.	Enjoyment, fun, excitement, and spontaneous. Sometimes I feel time pressure as I have a lot of topics to cover and don't want to spend too much time just on rapport-building activities.
4. What are you **doing** in your behaviour as you do that?	Writing down knowledge of students before class. Remembering it and using it. Telling jokes, creating humour. I'm laughing, energized, and enthusiastic. Demonstrating knowledge of students own language and culture and using it in a comical way.	Telling stories about the importance of self-esteem, taking action, values, and finding answers outside of the box. Using student quotes in the lesson. Sitting with students in their discussion groups (being with them). Showing videos, such as TED talks. Moving around the room—using anchors, e.g., kinesthetic anchor of always telling a story in the same place in the room. Acknowledging students are dealing with difficult questions.	I go away with students before the semester begins. We go camping and do team-building exercises together. I see students outside of the classroom. In class I am being open, friendly and honest (e.g., when I don't know an answer to a difficult question I admit it and try to find the answer.)

Enabling Beliefs

- Treat all students equally and fairly.
- See students as human beings.
- Show positive regard for students.
- Give permission to oneself to be imperfect and thus model that ability to the students, for example, "When I don't know an answer to a difficult question I admit it and try to find the answer" (Teacher 3).
- Recognize the importance of rapport as essential for carrying out learning tasks, for example, "I am not thinking only about instruction, instruction, instruction—but also how do I incorporate my knowledge of students into the lesson" (Teacher 1).

Motivational Beliefs

- Consider how one wants students to be in the world outside the classroom, for example, "It is important that students care about something and take action [in the world outside the classroom]" (Teacher 2).
- Remember that a teacher is also a human being, for example, "being open, friendly and honest . . . if I open up to the students, they will open up to me" (Teacher 1).

Q2 (Cognitive Strategies): What are you thinking about as you are doing that?

Cognitive strategies used in creating rapport were surprisingly difficult to elicit in this study. This may be because the teachers' cognitive strategies have become automated. For them, rapport is such a natural part of classroom behaviour that they have moved beyond thinking about it. They have become proficient at this skill because they have successfully made it part of their automatic behaviour. Some examples follow.

- They continually pay attention to students' verbal and non-verbal responses in order to determine their level of engagement with the task and the other members of the classroom.
- They don't think only about instruction, but also how to incorporate their knowledge of students into the lesson.
- They deliberately spend some time on the students as human beings.

Q3 (Emotions): What are you feeling as you are doing that?

The greatest commonalities among the teachers were in this question, which refers to the emotions and feelings that the teachers experience as they engage in this skill. In doing so, they were careful to

- be thoughtful and considerate of students' needs and wants;
- stay optimistic;
- clearly care about their students;
- keep caring about what their students are leaving the classroom with; and
- maintain positive emotions such as excitement, sense of enjoyment, motivation, and gratitude both for themselves and for their students.

Q4 (External Behaviour): What are you doing in your behaviour as you are doing that?

All the teachers (in some form) recognized the importance of spending time in building rapport, whether it was through telling inspiring stories, remembering students' unique characteristics, or simply showing students that they remembered their names. All the teachers recognized the importance of one-to-one interaction, not just teacher–student interaction with the whole

class. This manifested itself through a variety of teacher behaviours such as the following:

- gaining knowledge about the students and their lives;
- learning students' names;
- discovering the uniqueness of each student by focusing on his or her hobbies or passions;
- demonstrating knowledge of student names and unique points by explicitly referring to them and, while showing respect for students, using their hobbies and names in interesting ways (an interesting example was a teacher's use of wordplay with a student's name, Yodai, who enjoys hip-hop, so the teacher played with his name in rap rhythm, greeting the student as "Yo-yo-yo-dai");
- recognizing that the students' own words are important and sharing them with the whole class later in the lesson or in a subsequent lesson, for example, compiling a list of quotes from student writing and using them in the next lesson;
- demonstrating knowledge of students' language and culture and using it for friendly humour; and
- deliberately engaging students outside of the classroom (for example, one of the teachers manages a small garden on campus and asks students if they would like to be part of it; another teacher goes on field trips with students and does team-building exercises with them, which help greatly in creating rapport).

Conclusion

In this study, we modelled three teachers who are exceptionally skilled at creating rapport. What makes the difference in these teachers' ability to create rapport? Perhaps the single most important belief held by these teachers is that rapport is a vital component of teaching and learning, and they fundamentally agree that it should be actively pursued and developed rather than expected to just happen.

In this study we aimed to show that modelling can be a user-friendly and valuable tool in uncovering the beliefs and behaviours of successful teachers. Identifying such useful teaching patterns can serve not only individual teachers, but could also be offered in teacher training and faculty development programs. In addition, the questions in this paper could be a useful starting point for teachers who want to reflect on their own abilities as individuals. In this study, we applied the results of the modelling informally in our own teaching. In future work, we plan to provide a more formal acquisition of the model. One example of an acquisition process is explained in Gordon and Dawes (2005).

Admittedly, there are limitations to the current study and it is important to consider the potential shortcomings herein. The modelling of rapport was based on three individuals, which is a small sample size. In addition, although these individuals were deemed to be experts in creating rapport, it would be useful in future work to try to base this judgement on a wider set of criteria such as student feedback and classroom observation. Although commonalities in rapport generation are useful to identify, we must also recognize that rapport is a very subjective skill and that many people achieve effective rapport in different ways. More data would allow us to produce more quantitative results, but it should also be pointed out that it is perhaps through the close examination of single case studies that teachers can find the type of rapport generation that is most suitable for their own context, personality, and teaching style.

As a final note, we would like to leave you, the reader, with the suggestion that you take the four simple questions shown in Figure 2 away with you and try them out for yourself—either as a self-modelling project or as we did—by identifying an ability that you would like to have more of in your classroom, finding

a few people who have that ability, and then going ahead and asking them these four little questions. Please don't take our word for it—find and learn the skills that you want to bring into your own classroom.

Bio Data

Brian Cullen is an Associate Professor at Nagoya Institute of Technology. His research interests include L2 creativity, materials design, music and song in EFL, and neuro-linguistic programming.

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