

# Build and Sustain Rapport

# 2

*Water is fluid, soft, and yielding. But water will wear away rock, which is rigid and cannot yield. As a rule, whatever is fluid, soft, and yielding will overcome whatever is rigid and hard. This is another paradox: what is soft is strong.*

—Lao-Tzu

Rapport is the dance in relationships that opens the door and invites learning. As important as it is to establish credibility, and it is important, we want to be mindful that if we as presenters stay within patterns that only convey credibility, it will become counterproductive to participants' learning. So the dance of rapport must begin early. Once credibility is established, the next goal is to build and sustain rapport. You establish credibility to appeal to the participants' intellectual curiosity about the presenter and the content, whereas you establish rapport to start building a relationship between yourself and the group in order to support participants' learning.

So what exactly is rapport? What does it look like? What does it sound like? How does it feel? Although it might be very difficult to describe or deconstruct, it is easy to identify. When you are a participant in a workshop or seminar, you absolutely know if and when the presenter has rapport with the participants. You can see rapport by how they are sitting, how they are breathing, and how they are interacting with the presenter and each other. I believe rapport can be consciously initiated and maintained by a presenter, and as a presenter you want to get prolific at using the skills that support rapport. That includes knowing the skills, understanding the context, and applying them across a range, intensity, and frequency.

A successful learning experience is when your communication patterns are congruent with your intentions.

As you ease into the presentation, you build rapport to create a learning environment in which relationships contribute to the learning. It is not my contention that you should follow a rigid choreography, nor do I suggest it. I am adamant nonetheless that the dance steps followed in the first 5 minutes of any presentation are crucial and contribute significantly to the overall success of the session. The intention is not to be inflexible; rather, it is to be flexible and to access a deliberate framework of skills. Think of the tension between flexibility and inflexibility like the tension on a rope that is being pulled from two ends. At one end is the rigidity of the choreographed steps; at the other end, the rich dynamic and complex nuance of implementation—much like the tension between implementing academic standards while honoring academic freedom. What we want is to be precise, accurate, and appropriate with the skills that contribute to rapport. The first 5 minutes of any presentation often determine whether you will be working from the first and 10 or the second and 25. A first down is still possible; it just requires a whole lot more footwork.

### **Why Rapport Is Important—Can't They Just Learn It?**

You lay the groundwork for a successful learning experience when your communication patterns are congruent with your intentions, and rapport significantly contributes to participant learning. How important is rapport? Mast (2007) looked at physician-patient interaction and found that doctors with higher rapport significantly impacted patient satisfaction when compared to doctors who did not establish rapport. In a study by McCafferty (2004), it was found that the learning of English language learners was accelerated when they mirrored the nonverbal patterns of the teachers. The mirroring of gestures and other nonverbal patterns forms the foundation of rapport (Wells, 1999).

As a presenter, by increasing your own awareness, consciousness, and strategic implementation, you encourage participants to perceive you as knowledgeable in the content area as well as receptive and respectful of what they bring to the topic. So as a presenter, you absolutely want to be purposeful in your intent. You want to focus your attention on your intention. That intent is to establish an optimum learning environment high in rapport and cognitive challenge that accelerates and deepens learning. When there is rapport, participants feel psychologically safe yet cognitively responsive. They are fully present, open, and receptive. That state of mind makes it possible for them to find value. As a presenter, you can enhance participants' learning by being more aware of your intent so that you can be deliberate and skillful with the communication patterns that establish and maintain rapport.

Having an understanding of human physiology helps you determine your options and guide your choices. When making a presentation to a group of people, chances are good that you are introducing something new or different to them. Whether it is a new concept, innovation, or protocol is of little consequence. The very fact that it differs from the status quo can cause participants to be resistant and defensive. The probability of defensiveness and all the accompanying physiological changes gets ratcheted up when it is a forced march. Looking at the initiatives and research in education from the past 20 years, it is inevitable that as a presenter you will be delivering a change initiative message to some participants who are defensive or resistant. Recognizing this self-evident truth allows you to be proactive and strategic in reframing the message in order to respectfully support the learning of this type of tough crowd.

### Rapport Reroutes Threat Responses

Humans are hardwired to protect themselves from outside threats, whether they are actual or perceived assaults or insults. Emotional threats in the absence of rapport run the risk of initiating the release of cortisol, and this hormone makes it more difficult to engage the higher-level thinking skills. Emotional threat in the absence of rapport results in cognitive dissonance. In fact, looking at MRI results, Westen et al. (2006) found that the mere fact of listening to someone who holds a different point of view from our own causes decreased activity in the thinking part of our brain. The contention is that establishing rapport prior to introducing ideas that may challenge participants is critical to fending off the type of cognitive dissonance that limits thinking. Knowing this, one of the objectives is to choreograph the steps of rapport and lead the dance partner to a state low in emotional threat and high in cognitive responsiveness. In this state, the door of consideration is wide open.

Creating the psychological safety for real learning requires a carefully choreographed dance in the pursuit of rapport. When this is executed skillfully, participants are more willing to follow the presenter's lead while feeling safe enough to risk cognitive vulnerability and the examination of deeply held assumptions and beliefs. Having been participants in a respectful learning environment, they leave the presentation different in skill, knowledge, or disposition because they accepted the invitation to examine their thinking and consider different possibilities. Thoughtful design and a respectful learning environment make that possible. And the first step in that journey is rapport.

Rapport is a short-term psychological state in which the lines of communication are wide open. The people involved have nearly all of their

conscious thought processes focused on what is being said and what they have to say. They are open to considering the information being presented and are not defensive. This is easier with participants who like you and respect your work. It can be a challenge getting into rapport with those who hold you in less regard, as Barrett (2018) suggests.

### **Blink. There Goes Rapport**

“With all due respect, I disagree with your idea. I think . . .”

The presenter listens to the participant’s comment and intellectual challenge and then says, “Isn’t that an interesting idea? But I think . . .”

Our hunch is that many of us have been participants in a presentation during which someone put forward an idea or question only to be shot down by the presenter. It does not take the group long to recognize that they are not in a safe learning environment. The likelihood that learning will take place becomes obstructed as the incoming data seem to threaten what the participants know or believe. Survival is the brain’s primary function. We are hardwired to then become defensive and are less able to process with an open mind. Regardless of whether the information might help us do our jobs better, we switch into our protective mode and defend our current practices and beliefs. As Glickman (1998) tells us, without the will to change, there can be no change. Rapport is essential for change.

When you have rapport with a group, there is a harmonious connection. It is an essential ingredient in building a climate of trust. I agree with Costa and Garmston (2002) that “you can draw on specific verbal and nonverbal behavior to nurture the relationship” (p. 77). While trust usually happens over a longer period of time, rapport happens in the moment. It is the cornerstone of learning because it is through rapport that you establish the open psychological pathways that allow participants to even consider ideas different from their own.

### **I Hear You**

*The colossal misunderstanding of our time is the assumption that insight will work with people who are unmotivated to change. Communication does not depend on syntax, or eloquence, or rhetoric, or articulation but on the emotional context in which the message is being heard. People can only hear you when they are moving toward you, and they are not likely to when your words are pursuing them. Even the choicest words lose their power when they are used to overpower. Attitudes are the real figures of speech.*

—Edwin H. Friedman



## Resistance Is Futile

It was about an hour into a 2-day session focusing on ways to attract more men into the teaching profession.

The presenter asked the group to surface their thinking as to reasons why men might not be choosing teaching as a profession. One participant, using a credible voice accompanied by a high breathing pattern, said, “Who the heck would want to become a teacher? There aren’t enough books for every student. There is no money for professional development. Class sizes are too large!” His nonverbals were easy to read. He was emotionally on high alert. Upon hearing this, the presenter made a deliberate and strategic move that began with one small step away from the location where she was standing when the comment was made. Using the same voice tone, pace of speech, breathing pattern, and emotional energy as the participant, she said, “As a committed educator, the lack of resources becomes frustrating.” She paused with a palm-up gesture in the direction of the participant, who said, “Absolutely!” and he breathed. The presenter breathed calmly and in an approachable voice said, “And that is the reason we are asking these questions; we want to make teaching as fulfilling a profession as it can be.” While the presenter made this statement, the participant continued to breathe calmly and for the remainder of the day was an attentive, engaged, and positive contributor. He did not breathe high at any time during the rest of the day.

This dance was deliberate. The presenter recognized the downshift and matched the participant’s nonverbal patterns. Once the participant acknowledged that he was heard, the presenter shifted to an approachable pattern. Because they were in rapport, she was able to short-circuit the downshifting pathway and bring the participant into a more constructive state that led to the generation of ideas as opposed to a litany of complaints.

## The Neuro Connection

In Chapter 1 I discussed mirror neurons and their connection to breathing. It turns out that these same premotor neurons are tightly linked to empathy and rapport. Psychologists have pondered for years why humans have the capacity to feel bad when someone else feels bad. Research reported by Ginot (2009) links mirror neurons to “how people ‘get’ the emotional states and behavioral intentions of others” (p. 8).

Watching sports on TV is another excellent example of mirror neuron systems in action. Think about it: you are sitting in your den, watching a game—only watching. When a great play happens for the team you are rooting for, you experience good feelings. When the advantage goes the other way, you have feelings of defeat, frustration, or sadness. Why? In one sense, it makes no sense. You are not playing the game; you are not there; you are not part of the live audience. Yet you feel as they do. Mirror neurons provide an intriguing explanation for this behavior.

Taking this a step further, if you know that humans have mirror neuron systems and you know that consciousness is not necessary to activate the system, then as an effective presenter you can tap into the mirror neuron system of participants. Having rapport is the observable data point indicating that the mirror neuron complex may be stimulated. By tapping into participants' mirror systems, you can increase their positive emotional connection to the content, to each other, and to you.

### Rapport Opens Thinking

Goleman (2006) tells us that rapport and empathy are expressed nonverbally. And Rosenthal et al. (1979) found that rapport always entails three elements: shared positive feelings, mutual attention, and a well-coordinated nonverbal duet. As these three arise in tandem, rapport is catalyzed, and there are patterns you can adopt to make this happen (mirroring breathing, gestures, voice tone, energy, etc.). “Rapport is so thick that their [both parties involved in the communication] posture and movements mirror each other as though intentionally choreographed” (Goleman, 2006, p. 27). Furthermore, in *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance*, Kendon (2004) describes the importance of gesture in the development of rapport and the contribution to learning.



#### Surfacing Resistance

A session is just under way, and the presenter concludes her impact statement; credibility has been established.

She takes a step to the side and, with more modulation in her voice and a slightly tilted head, begins to outline the structure of the day, identifying break times, ending times, and other housekeeping details. She notices more relaxed breathing, more fluidity in the movements of the participants. As she states the presentation outcomes using a credible voice and then nods with affirmation, the group nods with her.

Using an approachable voice and a new location, she begins, "Given these outcomes," as she points and looks at the visual display. She turns to the group while extending a sweeping and curved, palm-up hand gesture and, in an approachable voice, continues, "What might be some of your expectations during our 3 days together?" Pausing briefly, she continues in an approachable voice, "Please," then shifts to a credible voice and says, "share with a neighbor." Without hesitation, participants turn and engage with their partner. After about 2 minutes the presenter, now standing next to the easel, brings the group back from their activity and, using an approachable voice and inviting gesture, says, "Let's hear some of your expectations." As the silent pause fills the room and the palm-up gesture invites participants to share, hands rise and participants willingly voice their expectations.

One participant says, "I want to be able to learn some skills I can use right away." The presenter, standing still, head gently tilted and maintaining direct eye contact with the speaker, continues to be silent a moment after the participant completes the statement. Using a palm-up gesture and holding a hand in a curved pose, the presenter paraphrases the comment and says, "So, you want concrete skills that you can apply in your classroom." The participant says, "Yes!" and the presenter writes "Concrete and applicable skills" on the easel.

This presenter engaged in an intentionally choreographed dance. The dance began and connections were started between the presenter and the group. There are deliberate moves and communication patterns that help to establish rapport. The intention is to support learning. You want participants to be open to new learning and be comfortable (but not too comfortable—more on that later) with you as the presenter, with the group, and with the content. There are various ways to create one-on-one rapport as well as group rapport. It can happen naturally and be established very quickly if you listen attentively to the audience and pay close attention to your verbal and nonverbal communication. When people are communicating well, they are relaxed, comfortable, and in alignment. There is a parallel in voice tone, language, gesture, stance, and breathing. Mirroring or matching is how you offer back without attaching any judgment to what you say or do.

### Using Rapport to Neutralize Resistance

Our experience with groups has taught us that if we do not ask a contentious group how they feel about attending the presentation or their relationship to the content, they will make their feelings known through

behaviors that are counterproductive to learning. Consider the following story, written in the first person, from a colleague about a session with district leaders.



### Reframing Resistance

I was tasked with working with a group of district curriculum coordinators to start planning for the implementation of a mandated professional learning program. As I walked into the room, one of the coordinators was sitting in the chair that was reserved for the presenter, me. His arms were tightly crossed, and he glared at me as I walked in. His posture and breathing were clear indicators that said, "You are not welcome here." In fact, the rest of the people in the room appeared to mirror the same sentiment; it was pervasive. In short, I was there to tell them what they needed to do to be in compliance, and they were there because they had to be. Resistance is easily recognized in a captive audience.

Recognizing the intense resistance, I knew my original opening would not be effective with this group, so it was put on hold. Instead, I decided to open with a question. Striking an approachable stance, with my head tilted significantly and my shoulders raised, I also raised my hand and said, "Who here feels they have more work than time to do it?" Several hands tentatively emerged. "And that may very well be true in the short run; however, what we found is that once this program is implemented it builds capabilities and capacity. That makes our jobs easier. As you think about that, what are some of your thoughts about being here today?"

Time and space were given for each participant to respond. Tensions eased, bodies relaxed, breathing calmed some. Once all the participants had had a chance to verbalize their feelings, they were more present in the moment and more open to hearing the message.

So what was delivered beyond the verbal message? First, remember that the presenter's intention was to get the group to shift from feeling nonreceptive and resistant to being at least willing to listen. Prior to the beginning of the opening statement, she was in a credible stance. As the opening statement began, she shifted to an approachable stance and then raised her hand as she said, "Who here. . . ." Some participants raised their hands, others nodded, and some even answered affirmatively. As she said, "And that may very well be true . . ." she was already in a different location, just a step or two from the initial location, and her voice



continued in an approachable tone. After a 3-second pause at the end of that phrase, she began the next statement using a voice of passion. The voice of passion includes a whisper with a pace of speech slightly slower than the previous statements. Her palms were facing upward as she concluded the statement. She paused and took a step back toward, but not all the way back to, the initial location and said in an approachable voice, “As you think about that. . . .” Within seconds, several participants took deep breaths and appeared to shift to a more relaxed and attentive posture. Their feelings of frustration were acknowledged, and both individually and as a group they started breathing more slowly, their pace of speech slowed, and they even looked at the presenter. And as the group voiced their feelings, the group shifted to an increasingly calm disposition.

It is often believed that to be in rapport, there must be agreement. The real beauty of rapport is that sharing others’ views is not at all a prerequisite. What is needed is a sense of being open to and respectful of their thinking. It is a question of both receiving and offering information without attaching judgment. In the previous story, the presenter did not necessarily agree with the participants, but she did hear and could understand their frame of reference and she also acknowledged their perceptions. By doing that, the stage was set for rapport building. “Set” in the sense that the group had shifted from high alert, high threat with a hijacked amygdala to a state in which their thinking could be accessed. The learning environment was prepped for putting ideas on the table in a way that allows people to consider those ideas even when they are different from their own. An initial step for developing rapport with others is listening to hear, not to speak. The next step is to let them know they are heard and understood. It is much more likely that people will listen once they sense they have been heard.

### **There Is Something Coming**

We all know that on traffic signals a green light follows a red light. Imagine what driving would be like if the traffic lights changed from green to red with no yellow light. How comfortable would approaching an intersection like that be for you? As a conscientious driver approaching the intersection, you would probably become tense from the anticipation of the immediate signal change. If the light changed from green to red with no yellow, your arms and legs would tense up as you slammed on your brakes, and, rest assured, you would stop breathing. Additionally, if you were in a conversation with the person next to you, there is a good chance that as the light changed and you hit the breaks, you would also stop talking and all thoughts about that conversation would leave your mind. The freeze in thought while driving is similar

to the neurological and physiological response you have when there is no foreshadowing in a training environment.

Imagine what an all-day workshop would look like without a yellow light to foreshadow what was coming. What might you feel or think? Without foreshadowing, there is a good chance that any rapport between the presenter and the group would be lost when whatever was approaching arrived without warning, as in the following example.

Have you ever attended a session at which a presenter said, “Are there any questions?” and no one asked any questions? Not even you, even though you had a question? If this is an experience you have had, the hunch is that there was no foreshadowing. If the presenter had only said, “In about 10 minutes, after we finish this segment, there will be an opportunity to ask some questions. You may already have some, so jot them down in your notes and we will address them soon.” Foreshadowing using a yellow light like this often results in a tide of questions and comments.

Foreshadowing can be effectively used at the onset of any training to let people know how they may feel throughout the day. Knowing that some adults feel uncomfortable practicing in front of their peers, we consistently let participants know that they might feel uncomfortable at times because we offer the opportunity to practice and rehearse. This foreshadowing is done not to prevent or circumvent their discomfort; rather, it is done to let them know how they might feel so that when they do feel that way they have anticipated it and can continue to learn and not downshift. We also foreshadow this bit of discomfort to let them know that if they are feeling that way, they are in fact learning.

### **The Black Diamond Learning Zone**

We want to create a zone of disequilibrium that is uncomfortable enough to catalyze learning while emotionally safe enough to prevent downshifting.

A good friend took her family to their annual ski holiday. Each year her brother-in-law inquired about how well the sisters skied each day. For years she would say, “Great!” One year he asked, “What’s your criterion for great?” That’s when she realized her criteria for doing well was that none had fallen, which meant they had not really pushed themselves from year to year. They were destined to forever

be intermediate skiers mastering the blue hills. So to improve in their sport, she had to push them onto a black diamond run. She had to get them out of their comfort zone and into their learning zone. And they improved. Did they feel uncomfortable as they were learning? Absolutely! As we know from Vygotsky (1978) and Piaget (1963), we have both a comfort zone and a learning zone. There is disequilibrium as we learn new concepts and skills, and that makes us feel a little uncomfortable. And unless we feel comfortable enough to feel uncomfortable, we won't learn. This is why rapport is so important.

Why is this important? Because using a foreshadowing technique supports rapport by not surprising people when shifts happen. If people are feeling comfortable through the whole presentation, then according to Piaget (1963) and Vygotsky (1978) they are not learning anything new. We want to create a zone of disequilibrium that is uncomfortable enough to catalyze learning while emotionally safe enough to prevent downshifting.



### Practice 2.1 Foreshadowing

Think of an upcoming training situation that you are responsible for planning. Next, identify two points in the training where you want the following to occur:

1. Participants will share their thinking.
2. You will let participants know they will be doing some hard thinking.

Create a narrative and choreography that serve as foreshadowing while maintaining rapport.

## Resistance and Rapport

Educators do not have enough time during the day to get done what they already have to do. It is inevitable that as a presenter you will encounter some resistance when presenting something new that the audience perceives as training for an add-on program. One of the most effective ways to encourage people to breathe and let go of some of their resistance is by simply acknowledging it. By acknowledging their resistance, you let them know that you have considered their different perspectives and understand them. This requires some specific choreography so that you

can put the resistance out *there* and not have it stick to you. So what you say and how you say it are of equal importance.

To completely understand and successfully implement the dance that acknowledges resistance, you must first explore four communication points of reference. These are physical points of reference drawn from the works of Grinder and Poyatos. *One-point* communication is when you, the presenter, refer to yourself. This can be done by gesturing toward yourself. *Two-point* communication is between you and a participant, table group, or whole group. *Third-point* communication is toward an object in the room, perhaps an easel, the screen, or participant work. The third point is inanimate and present in the room. *Fourth-point* communication is to a person, place, event, or thing not present in the room. As you will discover in Table 2.1 and Practice 2.2, the fourth point is used to name the resistance, thus assigning to someone or something other than the group. This move contributes to creating psychological safety and maintaining rapport with the group.

**TABLE 2.1 Anticipating Resistance: Choreographing an Opening**

VERBAL	NONVERBAL
Thank you for coming this morning.	Maintain direct eye contact with group. Use a mix of credible and approachable voice with an open, palm-up gesture.
As if you had a choice!	Pause with the hands vertical. Stand still and wait for a laugh.
On the agenda are four topics.	Look at agenda, use a credible voice, pause after each topic. With the last topic stated, turn to the group, freeze your body, and count internally, 3-2-1.
Before we get started . . .	Silently walk a few feet from the easel (facilitation space).
I imagine a number of you would rather be _____ today and are resistant to being required to attend this workshop.	Gesture to the fourth point. Pause periodically. Use credible voice. At the end, stand still, pause, and silently count 3-2-1. Then move halfway back to the easel.
There is good reason to want to be with your students. For those of us in education, that is where our passion lies.	Speak in an approachable voice. Use a palm-up gesture to the group and inclusive language ( <i>our</i> ).
Sometimes in order to serve our students well, we have to take care of our own learning.	Take a few steps toward the front center of the group. Speak in an approachable voice and use gestures of inclusion, palms up. Use downward beat gestures accompanying the words of your message like a maestro directing an orchestra. Pause, stand still, and silently count 3-2-1.
Our first agenda item is. . . . (And get started.)	Turn and walk toward the easel. Point to the first agenda item using a new voice pattern, pace, and volume as you state the first agenda item.

The script and choreography in Table 2.1 describes one way to acknowledge resistance. Read the verbal and nonverbal components, and then complete Practice 2.2.



### Practice 2.2 Acknowledging Resistance

For an upcoming training, take a few moments to think about possible sources of resistance. Name the resistance in the space below.

Next, craft a narrative and design the choreography to identify and deliver the message to your group. Consider using Table 2.1 to facilitate your thinking, and then practice the dance.

### What Rapport Sounds Like

When you are leading a workshop or meeting, rapport can be somewhat trickier to hear because there are so many voices in the room. One way to hear it is to listen for matches in language styles. By “language styles,” I am referring to the types of verbs, adjectives, and nouns used when someone speaks. Table 2.2 lists over 100 words and organizes them according to sensory modality: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and digital. Words in the digital category can be thought of as those with no sensory connection; in a sense they are “sense-less.” The digital category is most easily recognized by thinking about bureaucratic speak. For instance, pick four or more of these words and make a sentence (e.g., “The proposal is *excellent* at *modeling* an *optimum* yet *integrated paradigm* with *variable systemic* applications”).

The key to finding Table 2.2 useful is to first listen to participants speak and hear their sensory modality language. Then to help maintain rapport, use language from the same modality category when talking with them; seek congruence. Many of us find that when you speak using the same modality, there is greater fluidity to the conversation and a more open sharing of ideas.

TABLE 2.2 Sensory Modalities

VISUAL	AUDITORY	KINESTHETIC	DIGITAL
see	hear	feel	think
view	listen	grab	procedure
insight	sound	pull	tendency
reflection	tone	grasp	knowledge
watch	accent	rub	model
show	musical	sticky	theory
look	call	get hold of	principle
picture	tune out	wrestle	meaning
focus	jingle	warm	know
scan	say	touch	specific
appear	click	pressure	interesting
reveal	resonate	handle	obvious
hazy	rhythm	texture	random
misty	harmony	heavy	special
observe	clash	firm	typical
image	speak	slip through	usual
glow	amplify	catch	excellent
brilliant	dialogue	slimy	basic
vivid	ring	smooth	understand
shine	chime	gritty	integrated
dim	discord	pushy	incremental
flash	noise	sting	enhanced
sparkle	quiet	contact	systematic
highlight	melody	itchy	optimal
bright	buzz	concrete	compatible
transparent	shout	wobble	paradigm
opaque	announce	snag	contingency
mirror	mute	solid	idea
snapshot	loud	tight	interactive



## Practice 2.3 Matching Language

Read the following statements and questions. Decide whether the statement is visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or digital. For each question, construct an answer or paraphrase. Suggested responses are in italics.

1. It seems to me the additional work you are asking us to do will really bog us down and force us to wrestle with time management as well as struggle with balancing everything we have to do in a work day. *For you, the additional work may pull you in different directions and put pressure on your time?*
2. It would be more useful for me to have a snapshot from each part of the program so I can see the whole picture at one time while still seeing the individual frames. *So clarity for you is being able to see individual pictures within a panorama?*
3. How does that theory model effective teaching and integrate best practices in a way that is coordinated and systematic? *Specifically, you want to know how to achieve effective teaching through best practices?*
4. If we are not careful, students could slip through the cracks and we would be unable to help them grasp the content standards in time. *As we grapple with this issue, in what ways might we catch the students who are falling?*
5. This new program is interesting although not compatible with the current paradigm. *In what ways do you consider it interesting?*
6. It appears we will gain some insight into student understanding with this new program. *As we focus on student understanding, how might the information brighten our views?*
7. We need to dialogue. *You're suggesting an additional conversation?*
8. I'm wrestling with it. *Does anything feel useful to you?*
9. Wow, this resonates with me. *Tell me specifically, what sounds useful to you?*
10. It is obvious that the new integrated, systematic model will optimize a balanced procedure. *Obvious in what three or four basic and specific ways?*

(Continued)

(Continued)

- 11. I'd like to share the interesting ideas that teachers typically experienced during the pilot program. *What new knowledge enhanced your experience?*
- 12. I'd like to highlight some of the insights that appeared during the pilot program. *Tell us what appeared to be the most vivid outcome for you.*
- 13. I'd like to announce what resonated with the teachers during the pilot program. *Let's hear what you have to accent—the buzz about the new program is exciting.*
- 14. I'd like to capture what the teachers got a handle on during the pilot program. *I'd like to capture your feelings on the firm benefits of this program.*

Key

STATEMENT/QUESTION	V	A	K	D
1			X	
2	X			
3				X
4			X	
5				X
6	X			
7		X		
8			X	
9		X		
10				X
11				X
12	X			
13		X		
14			X	

In addition to recognizing and matching sensory language, another useful model for revealing how a person is thinking comes from Dilts with collaboration by Gumm (see Gumm et al., 1982). This model relies on eye patterns (see Figure 2.1) to access learning modalities and is a good



indicator of Dunn and Griggs's (1988) VAK (visual-auditory-kinesthetic) model that so many educators are familiar with. Take caution that eye patterns alone should not be the only source for determining someone's style. Using eye patterns along with word selection and body movements provides valuable data for a presenter who wants to establish and maintain rapport as well as support adult learning.

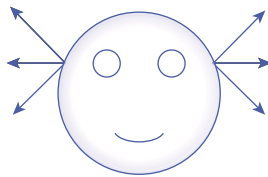
**FIGURE 2.1** Eye Pattern and Thinking Modality

**Eyes left,  
constructing:**

Up = visual

Middle = auditory

Down = kinesthetic  
feeling



**Eyes right,  
remembering:**

Up = visual

Middle = auditory

Down = internal  
dialogue

This model of accessing eye patterns can be useful when presenting because accessing eye patterns can be a view into how people are thinking, much the same way that gestures give a more complete understanding than words alone. For example, a participant asks you a question and uses kinesthetic language such as, "I have been wrestling with that concept for some time, and nothing seems to hit me with any concrete applications." You might reply, "What if anything feels more firm or seems to make an impact on your thinking?" Then watch. As the participant thinks, and if he is congruent, you should see him look down while thinking and forming his response. This can confirm his preferred thinking modality in the moment. By knowing his preferred thinking modality (in this case, kinesthetic), you can maintain rapport with him by staying in a kinesthetic dialogue as long as he continues to do so.

### What Rapport Looks Like

Sit in any restaurant and discreetly look around the room. You can see when people are in or out of rapport just by observing their nonverbal patterns. If they are in sync, we say they are in high rapport. If they are out of sync, we say rapport is missing or low. What does in sync look like? In a sense, it looks like a reflection in the mirror. This transient, subtle, yet powerful skill of rapport is a mirroring of the physical characteristics of the person or group you are communicating with.

One-on-one rapport is easier than group rapport because you only have to match one person. I will continue to explain rapport from a one-on-one perspective and extend the learning to the whole group by the end of the chapter. As you will discover, the patterns of rapport are the same in any setting; the difference between one-on-one and group rapport has to do with perception and where you, as a presenter, look to access the data informing you when you have group rapport and when you lose it.

The challenge in mirroring body movements to gain rapport lies in the subtle difference between mirroring and parroting. When done well, mirroring results in an increase in receptivity, openness, a sense of trust, and a sense of being listened to and understood. Parroting, on the other hand, comes across as offensive, condescending, satirical, and many other negative perceptions. So what is the difference between parroting and mirroring?

A short answer is that parroting is an immediate and exact match in word, tone, breathing, and gesture. Mirroring is more of a reflection, and it is delayed by about 3 seconds. No matter how good the mirror, reflections are not perfect images of the original. Think about physical mirrors—there are distortions as a result of imperfections in the glass, and the angle of the reflection is different from the angle of the source of the image. Interestingly, a reflection is also opposite the original. Just think about reading the word *ambulance* in your rearview mirror and then turning around to face it, only to find that it is backwards. These subtle differences are enough to make a huge difference in rapport when communicating.

Gaining rapport takes practice. It is not perfect every time, and it can be lost in a heartbeat. Losing rapport can result from something you did or from an external source in the room, like the sound of a door opening, a phone ringing, or something as simple as a third person interrupting or joining the conversation. Because rapport is ephemeral and in some cases almost elusive, it is recommended practicing in a safe and welcoming environment.

One place that is great for practicing rapport is in a restaurant because the livelihood of the server depends on her ability to establish rapport.



### Harbor Rapport

In Boothbay Harbor, Maine, I went with a group of about eight Mainers, all professional developers and leaders in mathematics education, to a restaurant. We took a seat at a rectangular table, and the waitress walked up and asked if we wanted drinks. A few

folks hemmed and hawed. The waitress abruptly said, "I'll come back in a few minutes." Her response was out of sync with the group, who perceived that she was being rude by being abrupt. Of course, we must remember reality is what you perceive and not what you intend. The server most likely did not intend to offend; however, at our table that was the perception.

When the server returned, she began taking drink orders. Since we had just come out of a full-day session on nonverbal patterns, one of the participants at the table decided to establish rapport and try to get the waitress to shift her breathing—to lighten up. To do that, when the waitress got to him, he paused and asked her a question about the menu using the same abrupt language pattern she was using. She responded back, mirroring him. Then he shifted his pattern by turning to look at her and saying in an approachable voice, "You know, you would know best between the crab cakes and the clam chowder. . . ." Before I tell you what happened next, it is important to know that this was a conscious and deliberate act on the part of the person asking the question. His intention was to get the other person to shift and follow his lead, which is one characteristic of rapport; specifically, it is rapport not only when we match but also when we lead and have the other person follow our nonverbal pattern.

So what happened? The server shifted to the level of friendliness we had when we first walked in. Upon hearing the comment and implied question, she let out a little humble aside statement, paused, took a deep breath, and then matched the same approachable voice and gestures used to ask the question. As she continued taking orders around the table, that same welcoming, humorous, and delightful personality remained.

Let's think of a whole group and what rapport looks like. In the *Evasive Obvious*, Grinder (2008) explains that group rapport is recognized when a group responds to the presenter in unison. For instance, the presenter may tell a joke and everyone laughs at the same time. Or the presenter may effectively use a third point and everyone looks at the third point at the same time. Grinder suggests that any time the entire group does something at the same time, there is high group rapport.

Since many of the readers of this book were or are teachers, you may be thinking, "Yeah, right. Get a whole group to do something at the same time? Try teaching third grade, seventh grade, twelfth grade, heck any grade, and see if you can get everyone to do something at the same time."

Yes, that is a great challenge indeed. Getting a group to do something at the same time takes training, so why not train the group using an indirect approach? By “indirect” I mean don’t tell the group you are training them; just go ahead and do it. An example is one I often use at the beginning of my workshops, and many gifted presenters use a similar strategy. The purposes for using this strategy, “Like Me,” include establishing group rapport and assessing the group’s experience, interests, and connections to the work into which we are about to venture.

Since one purpose for this activity is group rapport, evidence of rapport will be synchronicity. You can have individuals in the group stand when the “like me” statement applies to them. For instance, in a group of teachers you might say, “I am a teacher with 5 to 10 years of experience.” Those who recognize themselves in that statement stand and say, “Like me.” It is most effective to make several statements, including some with humor if it fits your personality. The key is to orchestrate it so that those who fit the description respond in unison.

Another skill for establishing group rapport is related to unison of response. In this instance, I refer to releasing the group to do an activity. Generally, it is fairly safe to assume that at the beginning of any workshop, group safety is not as high as it will be once the group is formed. Adult groups pose several challenges in professional workplace learning environments, one of which is related to creating enough safety in the room so that adults willingly share their learning with a colleague, table group, or whole group. This type of rapport building takes practice and time.

There are specific strategies you can use to be more effective at establishing rapport with adult groups. In a learning environment, it is generally considered more psychologically safe to share an idea with one person than to share that idea with three or four people or an entire group. So to build positive group rapport, consider having some of the first participant interactions in groups of two. As the smoothness in transitions increases from pairs to whole group, slowly move the group to work in trios and fours.

When debriefing the activity—whether in pairs, trios, fours, or whole table—to increase the safety and maintain rapport, keep the question source ambiguous. For instance, when asking a question, instead of asking, “What do you think about . . .,” ask “What did you and your partner discuss about . . .” By increasing the distance between the source and the answer, ambiguity remains and psychological safety is ensured. As the answer is shared, whether right or wrong, the groups’ reaction is to the response and not the person. There is no judgment made about the person. Orchestrating

well-crafted questions ensures safety for participants and is a strong and useful skill for maintaining group rapport.

The importance of crafting and implementing good questions that promote psychological safety and push cognitive challenge cannot be over-emphasized. In all adult learning situations, there is a broad range of knowledge, experience, and ego. How many staff meetings have you attended where territory is secured and boundaries defined? We had a delightful staff at a school where I once worked. The staff had high rapport with each other and low rapport with the principal. Every staff meeting had similar patterns. An agenda was read, a topic raised, and then, like clockwork, a hand would come up from one of the faculty. Using a credible voice, stiff gestures, and direct eye contact, the challenge was laid down. The principal would vent steam out his ears, and the staff would sit still with a sense of shock. The principal and teacher would exchange statements for about 5 minutes as the rest of the staff sat silently. Eventually the principal or staff member would say, “We can talk later” or “I disagree. Let’s just continue with the agenda.”

### What Rapport Feels Like

When you are in rapport with another person or with a group, you feel connected. All of your energy is centered on the interaction that is taking place. All the surrounding stimuli are blocked out, and you are not searching for what to say. The conversation flows, and there are no pregnant pauses.



#### Phony Rapport

A friend told me about a time she was talking with her sister on the phone. Because they lived some 3,000 miles apart, phone conversations were the most common form of communication. In this conversation, the sister was talking about a situation she was having at work. It was making her uncomfortable, and she wanted to figure out what to do and what my friend thought about the situation.

After a few minutes of listening, my friend paraphrased and asked a probing question. She was really beginning to understand her sister’s situation, and her sister was becoming very clear in the direction she wanted to take. My friend was sitting near her computer as they were talking, not using it, just sitting near it. However, as they were talking, my friend noticed an

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e-mail notification and looked at it. The message was from a client and my friend realized she urgently needed to read it because of a particular time crunch they were experiencing. So she opened the e-mail and read it.

Before she got two sentences in, her sister said in a stern yet violated voice, "What are you doing? Are you reading e-mail?" What was my friend to do or say? She broke rapport and it was obvious—her sister knew my friend was no longer listening, no longer receptive to receiving the message. As humans, we intuitively and immediately know when rapport is broken, even at a distance of a few thousand miles.

We know the feeling of no rapport—it is distant and cold; there is little emotional connection or commitment. When we are in rapport, we are closer, more connected, and our emotions related to friendship, trust, and caring are activated. Why is so much chemistry and physiology influenced by rapport? The answer may surprise you.

### Roaming the Room

When participants are engaged in table group activities, the opportunity to roam the room provides the presenter with time to establish (and practice) rapport with table groups and individuals. The following scenario is offered to provide an example of how to approach someone who may not be in rapport with you and may not even want to be present in the session. By studying this scenario, you may develop the ability to recognize resistance and learn a few patterns that can make a difference in reaching the difficult-to-reach adult participants.



#### When Rapport May Be Tough to Establish

About an hour into a daylong session, you continue to notice one participant. He appears to make less direct eye contact with you than most others in the audience. He often side talks and appears thus far to superficially engage with the activities. Your sense at this time is that he is not strongly connected to the content, and in fact his behavior appears to be interfering with others at the table who are trying to participate. While presenting some content and setting up the next activity, you decide you will pay him a visit during the next table group activity.

You release participants into the activity and slowly make your way toward him. You approach in a way that he can notice you in his peripheral vision. As you approach his table, your eyes are on his notebook and you scan the table. Using a low-volume credible voice you ask, "So what are you thinking?" This question is delightfully ambiguous in that it asks what he is thinking but not about the subject, thus leaving it completely open for him to comment on something personal or related to the session content. The question also has a positive presupposition that he is in fact thinking. A positive presupposition in a question contributes to a more welcoming perception as opposed to a perception of being challenged or interrogated.

His response is a little aloof: "Not much."

Your response is a paraphrase and probe. "So there is not much here for you or . . . [pause]. I've noticed you for a while and was wondering if today's topic [looking at the workbook] is of value to you?" Then you look at him. As he responds, he slowly turns toward you. As he does, you look back at the work and listen to his response. If rapport is beginning, he will look to where you are looking. If this happens, then look back at him. If rapport is building, he will then look at you. As he turns, look back at the paper. This rapport-establishing skill is called *leading*, and it occurs when your patterns are mirrored by the other person's patterns. Once leading is successful, you can reduce it and begin mirroring him.

During his response, he reveals that he has done some of this before, did not find it useful then, and feels it will not be useful now. What a great opportunity to strengthen rapport. As he finishes his comment, you say, "Thank you." Then, gesturing toward him with a palm up and moving the gesture toward you, you say, "So you feel this may be a waste of your time. I felt the same way the first time I saw this [now switch your gesture to point toward the booklet and look toward the booklet] assessment program. What I found [gesture to yourself and look back at him] was that once we debriefed and evaluated our lessons, the modifications we made resulted in a huge difference in student achievement. It made a real difference."

The next step is to get a commitment from him. Consider asking, "As we continue looking at this program [look at the booklet and gesture toward the booklet, pause, then turn to him and gesture from him to you with a palm-up gesture, and use an approachable voice], let me know when you see something useful or hear an idea that resonates for you or think of a move that will tackle some of your challenges." This final statement is a VAK question. With careful observation skills, you will notice which phrase he responds to. It will be either visual, auditory, or kinesthetic. By recognizing

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where he is in the moment, when you return to presenting to the whole group, you can insert verbs supporting his modality. If you established rapport successfully, you will see a positive shift in his attention.

List three ideas you find important to remember from this scenario.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

List two skills you want to remember from this scenario.

- 1.
- 2.

## Summary

- ✓ Creating the psychological safety to support real learning requires a carefully choreographed dance in the pursuit of rapport.
- ✓ When people are communicating well, they are relaxed, comfortable, and in alignment. There is a parallel in voice tone, language, gesture, stance, and breathing. Mirroring or matching is how you offer back without attaching judgment to what you say or do.
- ✓ It is often believed that to be in rapport, there must be agreement. The real beauty of rapport is that sharing others' views is not at all a prerequisite. What is needed is a sense of being open to and respectful of their thinking.
- ✓ Foreshadowing using a yellow light (to use a traffic light metaphor) can be effectively used at the onset of any training to let people know how they may feel throughout the day. The foreshadowing is done not to prevent or circumvent their discomfort; rather, it is done to let participants know how they might feel so that when they do feel that way, they have anticipated the feeling and can continue to learn and not downshift.
- ✓ Orchestrating well-crafted questions ensures safety for participants and is a strong and useful skill for maintaining group rapport.