

The Student-Instructor Tango: Instructor rapport, student self-concept, and course engagement.

Student success has become a key goal of community colleges but what factors drive success within a classroom? Prior research has found that both teacher behaviors and student traits can impact success within a classroom (Komarraju, 2013; Lammers & Gallaspy 2013). Students who feel that their instructors have good communication skills, positive rapport, and are caring and supportive are more likely to rate their instructors positively and tend to do well in the course (Lammers & Gallaspy 2013; Wilson, Ryan, & Pugh, 2010; Keeley, Smith, & Buskist, 2006). One issue with these studies, however, is that they often measure student success in terms of final course grade and fail to account for student variables, such as academic self-concept, that may also impact success (Komarraju, 2013). The current research examines the relationship between instructor rapport, academic self-concept, and course engagement in community college students. Participants were 194 community college students from a mid-sized college in the Southwest. Participants completed a 96-question survey that measured their levels of academic self-concept, ratings of teacher behaviors, instructor rapport, course engagement, and demographics. Results found that students' academic self-concept was related to their overall course engagement at a global level, being engaged in all college courses ($r(193) = 0.20, p < .05$). Students who had a positive self-concept about their courses also rated themselves as more engaged in their courses, on the whole. Beyond student characteristics, instructor behaviors and traits also were related to the level of engagement that students reported. Instructor rapport, as measured by the 9 item Student Instructor Rapport Scale, was positively related to both student engagement at the global level ($r(193) = 0.18, p < .05$), and engagement at a course-specific level ($r(193) = 0.38, p < .05$). Rapport also related to how students perceived their instructors, with high levels of rapport correlating with greater endorsement of positive teacher behaviors ($r(193) = 0.65, p < .05$), and their ratings of their own academic self-concept ($r(193) = 0.17, p < .05$). While students' self-reported GPA did relate to academic self-concept, with high GPA related to higher self-concepts ($r(193) = 0.21, P < .05$), it did not relate to any of the measures of rapport or teacher behavior. Taken together, these findings indicate that positive teacher attributes can strengthen student engagement within a course and that engagement can have positive carryover effects into other courses. Since engagement is associated with a positive academic self-concept, perhaps having these high rapport experiences within courses can serve to bolster student success in all courses. Future research is needed to examine if there are specific behaviors that teachers display that are most likely to impact rapport and to differentiate if these relationships hold true in various class settings, such as online courses.