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Rapport: Its Essence and Institution in the Classroom

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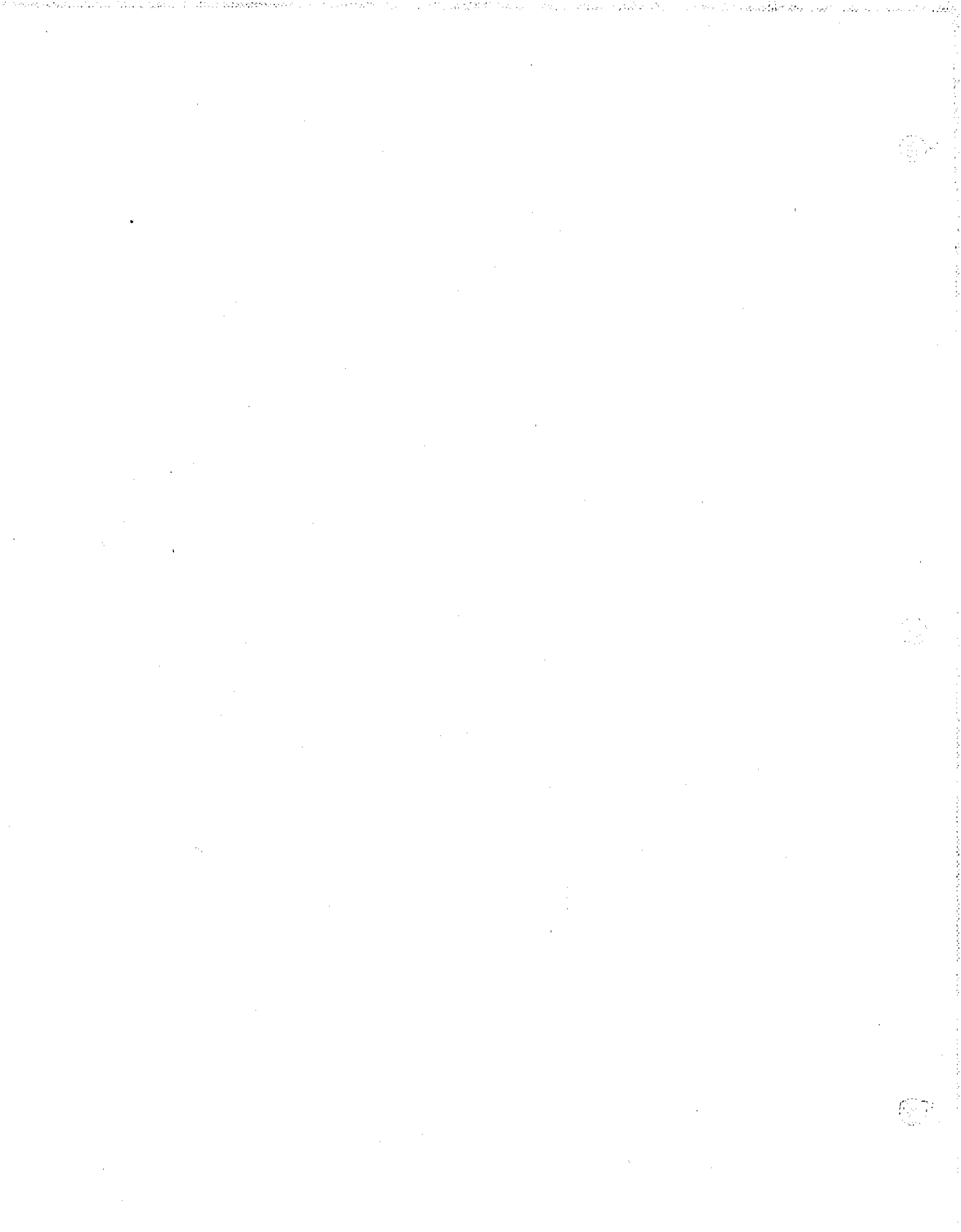
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R A P P O R T
ITS ESSENCE AND INSTITUTION IN THE CLASSROOM

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1967

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at the
School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont.

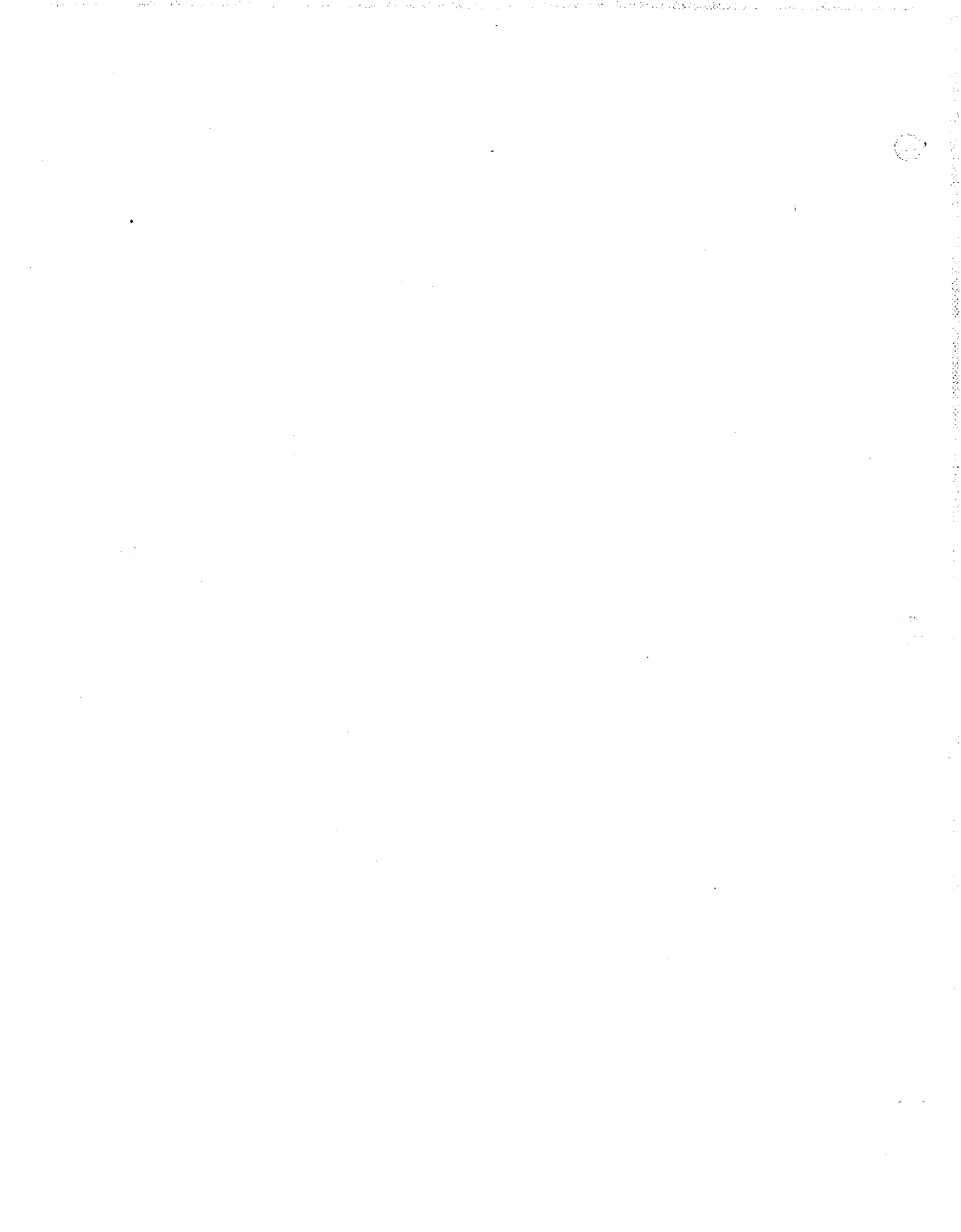
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This project report by Oden L. Oak is accepted
in its present form.

Date Jan 23, 1974 Principal Advisor Raymond Clark

Project Advisors: Ms. Marji Winters Marji Winters



P R E F A C E

The bulk of this project took the form of teaching at the School for International Training for three weeks during July 1973. The class was taught for five hours a day, five days a week, and included nine Japanese and three native French speakers.

Hopefully, after the chalk dust had settled and the students were on their respective buses heading off to their various homestay points in the United States, they were better armed to tackle the mysteries of the English language and culture.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

You have just finished observing a class and are checking your notes as to how the class went. Objectively, you come to the following conclusions: The teacher had carefully prepared his lesson and knew the subject area thoroughly, as evidenced by his ability to field questions with prompt and accurate answers. The students were attentive and well-behaved, with very little extraneous talking or other disruption. The material which the teacher covered seemingly was learned by the students because of their performance during the teacher's five-minute review at the end of the period.

Technically, everything was well-executed, and objectively you would have to say that this was a good lesson, but still you feel that something was missing -- that something which has you smiling as you leave the classroom, or had you softly laughing during the period. This something is not a technique, method or degree of professionalism of the teacher; it's really nothing and yet it's everything; it's the rapport the teacher has with his students.

The Intangible - Personality

Establishing this rapport is the essential requirement for having the proper classroom situation. A great deal of it depends on the intangibles, the personality of the teacher and of the students, and the degree of strictness or leniency the teacher exercises.

So much of whether the students want to work with the teacher or not depends on his personality, that it seems almost impossible for him to consciously try to establish this rapport. All of us are potential experts on the subject. We have all witnessed teachers who have been "good guys" but who could not control a class, and conversely, the "bears" who maintained an orderly procession of exercises, but who were dull and who created hostilities in some students who could not function constantly under someone's thumb. I can count, at least, on the fingers of one hand the number of teachers I have seen, whom I respected, whose classes were fun and interesting, from whom I learned, and who had the attention and discipline from the students without demanding it.

Some Helpful Hints

Developing rapport, creating an atmosphere of learning without sacrificing a mutual liking and respect between student and teacher, does depend on personality, but there are certain factors which the teacher can be aware of as he improves his relationship with his class.

The teacher should be on time and well-dressed and groomed. This may seem extraneous to establishing rapport, but I believe it is necessary to establish your image as the teacher. Students may be late to class and show up in a T-shirt, cut-offs and sandals, but even in this permissive, casual day and age the students still prefer and even expect the teacher to be available on time and to look presentable.

If for no other reason, it will help distinguish the teacher from the student.

So many times teachers do not listen to students. This is especially true in ESL classes where the teacher, during a drill, will call on a new student before the responding pupil has finished his answer. Or, sometimes the teacher is so caught up in the cacophonous tone of a foreign accent, that the meaning of what the student is saying will be lost. If you show the student enough respect in listening to him, he will be more likely to return the respect.

Rewarding students for correct responses is necessary for establishing a feeling of worth. This can be done verbally or by means of a facial expression. There is a trap that many teachers fall into, however, which is an automatic rewarding for every response of every student. Every teacher finds himself saying "good" or "very good", "excellent" or "O.K.", to such an extent that very soon it becomes meaningless and students recognize this quickly. If your praise becomes habitual and automatic, it can become harmful as the student may be inclined to think you are trying to "butter him up" with artificial praise. I think the best way to convey praise for a student's response is with facial expression. Smiling, opening the eyes widely and excitedly show the student you emotionally feel the praise for his performance rather than by merely paying lip service with a compliment.

Heading Off Problems

To establish and maintain rapport, the teacher has to be able to recognize and act upon potential problem situations before they begin to disrupt the class and lessen his effectiveness as a teacher. One such problem is how to deal with the person who cannot pay attention. In my class I had one Japanese boy, the youngest in the class, who tended to drift occasionally, but I usually could bring him back into the proceedings through indirect means. If we were working with the

past tense, questions such as, "Did you go to the Kettle last night?" - or - "Did you get enough sleep last night?" - would let him know that I was aware that he was not paying attention. By avoiding a confrontation, he usually joined in again. Other methods of getting his attention would be to interject an aside to the class by asking them a question such as, "Do you know what some teachers do when they see one of their students sleeping?" After no one gave the proper response, I went over to this boy's desk and pounded my fist on it as a demonstration of what some teachers felt they had to do to get attention, but I added that I personally thought this was too violent. The students' reaction was that they considered this amusing, and yet the message was received for I had the boy's attention for the rest of the period.

Rapport between one student and another is as important as the rapport between the teacher and his class. Listening to what one's peers have to say not only involves good manners but deals with the concept of intra-class respect. Of course, this does not always develop naturally so the teacher has to be ready for any incident that could fragment class unity. The following anecdote, I believe, exemplifies this process.

During one particular lesson, I had given each student a picture and had asked them to write a story using the five verb tenses which we had covered. After each one had completed his or her lesson, I would have each student read it before the class and then ask several questions about the story. While one Japanese girl was reading her narrative, I noticed a French girl was frowning and not paying attention. In fact, when she was asked a question she could not answer, saying that she did not understand the story because of the Japanese girl's accent. I felt some uneasy stirring in chairs, and countered with the following comments: I told her that obviously the Japanese girl was not native and that it would require more concentration to understand her English than it would require to understand my English; that the important thing to remember was communication. It was pointed

out that in a real life situation, the French girl might be placed in a position where she would have to speak English to someone who was not native and yet the information this person held would be necessary for her to learn in order, for instance, to catch a plane, to find her baggage, etc. It was conveyed that even in her current environment, SIT, the only way she could talk with most of the people would be in English, and that most of those people were non-native speakers. She accepted the explanation, made more of an effort, and similar incidents never arose again.

Flexibility

Maintaining consistency without falling into a rut is a fine line which must be toed by the teacher. Showing favoritism to one student is one of the quickest ways to alienate other students and thus to destroy rapport. At the same time, however, the teacher should be flexible. Varying approaches, games, and engaging in activities outside the restrictive nature of the classroom offer great opportunities to make the language become an alive and functional medium, and gives to the teacher a different contact opportunity with the students.

During the afternoon of the first full day of classes, I took my students to the volley ball court, divided them into two teams, and played a set of volley ball. This "method" was new to them and at first they were reticent. However, soon all were enjoying the game and learning new vocabulary words such as - rotation, spike, block, set-up and dink. Some of these words might seem a little specialized to be teaching intermediate students. (I would venture to say that few Americans know what "dink" means.) After-dinner volley ball games are a large part of the recreational life at SIT. The common language used is frequently English so this type of introduction could be of some benefit.

Another afternoon the following week, I took my class to a Howard Johnson restaurant, ostensibly to afford the students some practice in ordering food in English. I'm not certain how much English was learned or even spoken during this outing, but at least everyone enjoyed himself. Having an opportunity to change the five-hour-a-day classroom setting lessens the chances of producing irretrievably bored students, and probably heightens motivation.

Games

Of course, the classroom is the necessary setting where learning action takes place and this is where the teacher succeeds or fails. However, the classroom is confining only if the teacher allows its physical and traditional limitations to prevail. A teacher can enhance the competitive spirit of his students through the use of games. Their types and uses can be as numerous and varied as the teacher's imagination will allow. It is not my intention to begin an exhaustive discussion of games, but to herein cite two that I have employed which have been particularly successful. The first one I claim authorship of, as it applies to the ESL classroom, and is an adaptation of the age-old "Tic-Tac-Toe." A detailed explanation follows:

First, the class is divided into two teams. Ideally, the teacher should choose two captains of nearly equal ability and general knowledge of English, and allow them to choose their respective teams. Then, the teacher reads a passage of his choice, initially at a normal rate of speed and intonation so that students get accustomed to hearing English read with the speed and intonation that they will have to cope with in the future. A second reading is accomplished (read more slowly this time) with the usual pauses after obvious word-groupings. This will be the last time the students will hear the lecture read.

The "Tic-Tac-Toe" arrangement is then placed on the board with one team designated to be "X" and the other team "O". The boxlike drawing can be as large as the teacher wants to make it.

Fig. 1

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

Fig. 2

1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16

Each box is numbered, and a set of prepared questions contains numbers which correspond to each of the boxes. The first member of the first team chooses which box he wants to fill with appropriate symbols ("X" or "O"). The teacher then asks the corresponding question based on the reading. The student should have the prime responsibility for answering his question, but invariably his teammates will aid him. This innocuous form of "cheating" is beneficial in that the entire team becomes involved in answering every question.

If the correct answer is given, the teacher places the team's mark in the proper box. If the question is answered incorrectly, the opposing team has the opportunity to supply the correct answer and to receive its mark on the blackboard. When both teams respond improperly, the instructor should have a supply of extra questions which can be asked if that particular block is chosen again.

The customary rules of "Tic-Tac-Toe" apply. The first team that gets three, four or five (depending on the size of your arrangement) "X's" or "O's" horizontally, vertically or diagonally, wins. If each team successfully blocks the other, then the one with the most "X's" or "O's" wins.

Types of questions asked about the reading are very important. They should test the students' understanding and retention of the subject matter of the passage.

Comprehension of idiomatic expressions, specific word meanings, verb tenses, etc., should also be reviewed. Questions can be of the simple "Yes/No" answer variety, "Wh" questions, fill-ins, and completion sentences. To check vocabulary understanding, a simple, "What is a synonym (or antonym) for _____?" can be asked.

The following passage and set of questions can be used with an intermediate class of English learners. In this example, the "Tic-Tac-Toe" box contains nine squares, as seen in Fig. 1.

READING:

People have come to America from many nations for different reasons. Some came for economic advancement, others for adventure and curiosity, and still others for religious and political freedom.

The largest wave of colonists came from England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. They landed in Virginia in the late 16th century but had little idea of living conditions in the New World. Without any supplies from England, they soon starved. The first permanent British colony was Jamestown, Virginia, founded in 1607. Leaders of religious groups from England established colonies in New England in the 1620's and 1630's. Englishmen also settled Maryland and Pennsylvania as social experiments. Debtors freed from Britain settled in Georgia. If a person had no money, another colonist often paid his passage in return for services for several years. Such workers were called indentured servants and were almost like slaves until they had paid for their passage.

The peopling of the American continent was one of the great mass migrations in recorded history. By 1790 about four million colonists lived in the United States, half of whom were of English origin. That is why English language and institutions predominate in America today.

QUESTIONS:

1. What are two reasons why people originally came to America?

Answer: They came for economic advancement, adventure, curiosity and religious freedom.

2. What does "a large wave of colonists" mean?

Answer: In this sense, "wave" means a large group, i.e., they came over in such frequency that it resembled waves of an ocean.

3. Where and when was the first colony founded in America?

Answer: Jamestown, Virginia, 1607.

4. Give an antonym for "permanent".

Answer: Temporary, ephemeral.

5. Change to passive voice: "Englishmen also settled Maryland and Pennsylvania."

Answer: Maryland and Pennsylvania were settled by Englishmen.

6. Completion: "Debtors from England settled in the state of _____."

Answer: Georgia.

7. What is a debtor:

Answer: A person who owes money.

8. Persons who sold their work services in return for passage to the New World were called _____.

Answer: Indentured servants.

9. What was the population of the United States in 1790?

Answer: Four millions.

Extra Question #1: Change to future perfect progressive tense:

People have come to America for different reasons.

Answer: will have been coming.

Extra Question #2: How many original colonies formed the United States?

Answer: Thirteen.

In my teaching experience, I have found that this exercise never failed to stimulate interest and competitive feeling, even with uninspired classes. Even those students who were very poor in English and who could not answer questions without the help of their peers, still felt a part of the team and were happy or sad along with the rest when the outcome of the game was decided.

An additional dimension to the game is to offer a prize to the winning team. When teaching in Vietnam, my students were responsible for cleaning the room when the day was through. I gave the victorious group the opportunity to choose someone on the losers' side to accomplish this rather menial task. The selection of the victim always created a great deal of interest.

In conclusion, "Tic-Tac-Toe" has fun and entertainment value as well as learning value, and is just one more attempt to make the difficult study of the English language more palatable to foreign students.

The conception of the second game cannot be given in this paper. I do not recall exactly where I read about it but have a vague recollection that it was in a list of language games that Ms. Winters, the student-teacher supervisor for the Mexico MAT IV, showed me in Mexico:

Before going to class, the teacher must create a story in his mind which has as many characters as there are students in his class. On 3 by 5 inch cards, he identifies each character by name, with a brief description of who he is and what his relationship to one or more of the other characters may be. Then, each student must talk with every other student in turn, finding out who each one is and what the relationship is to himself. Then, by piecing together relationships and events, he uncovers the story itself.

I thought up a story about a robbery, and my cast included the robber, his father, wife and child, the bank manager, a teller, an eyewitness, and several others. It took a while for my class to get into asking questions, but once the pieces began to fall into place, the tempo picked up. They completely forgot about my presence in the classroom and spoke entirely in English. After one-to-one-and-a-half hours of this exercise, I suggested they take a break, but no one did so. Finally, after two hours, everyone (including my poorest student) had ascertained the identity of each character involved, and everyone was eager to present his findings.

CONCLUSION

That ability to maintain control over and respect of your students, and at the same time to be well-liked, is so difficult to achieve. Yet it is the essence of what every teacher should strive for. What, then, are some things which can propel a teacher to fulfillment of this end?

1) Be prepared.

There are few things more obvious to a student than a teacher who has not prepared a lesson for a particular class. Besides being a potential source of embarrassment for the teacher, more importantly the teacher wastes his time and the students' time. Giving a class a period-long, busy-work exercise or attempting to lead a pointless, aimless discussion will hoodwink only the very gullible student into thinking he is doing something worthwhile.

Of course, the over-prepared teacher usually encounters problems at the opposite end of the spectrum. Over-preparation usually leads to too much control by the teacher, and not enough participation by the students. Inflexibility in a teacher constrains honest class reaction and response. Spoon-feeding information and receiving parroted-back answers is not good teaching. The teacher should be flexible enough to allow students to explore related and perhaps seemingly unrelated, tangential avenues. He should always be prepared to bring the class back onto the right track, however, and at the end of a class period should attempt to corral all comments and construct a thread of connective tissue throughout the proceedings.

2) Using the most important resource: the student.

Anyone who adheres to the standard conception of the student-teacher role, with the teacher as the giver of information, is missing the opportunity of utilizing his students as teachers.

For example, there is the teacher who has just finished a lesson on "Objects in the Classroom", which was nothing more than holding up or pointing to an object, saying its name and having the students repeat the name. The teacher can take himself entirely out of the picture by dividing the class into several groups, and selecting a "teacher" for each group. The student-teacher then goes through the same procedure that the teacher just used, this time making corrections in the errors of identification and pronunciation. The values inherent in this procedure include the following:

- (a) The student-teacher is forced into being an active member of the discussion for he has the responsibility for the correctness of the responses of others in the class.
- (b) By being placed in a smaller group, every student is going to be called on more frequently and thus will be forced into a more active role.
- (c) Students will become aware of what each of their fellow students is saying rather than just listening to the teacher's model and repeating. They will thus become critical of the form and quality of their peers' responses. In this way, hopefully, students will be listening to other students, which is often a more difficult task to accomplish than getting the student to listen to the teacher.
- (d) Motivation becomes more pronounced. Placed in a position of "teacher", the student tries to perform well, possibly in order to live up to the responsibility of his temporary promotion. In this situation, the teacher removes himself from the picture and allows the learning situation to carry on without his control.

3) Be aware of who your students are:

It is not enough to know the scholastic capabilities of students in order to prepare an effective lesson, but also to know their background and culture. Knowing students' degrees of maturity, intelligence, and knowledge of particular subject areas, is important but will not insure the success of a particular lesson as much as a knowlege of his culture will.



Let us take, for example, the ESL teacher confronted by a class of male Vietnamese students. He will probably find himself in trouble, if not thoroughly versed in the knowledge of grammar. I found that I could not tell my class anything without supporting it with grammatical evidence. The students seemed to be less interested in the way English was spoken than in the reasons why it was spoken in this way.

At least a partial explanation for this was uncovered during a discussion of education when I asked my students what subjects they had taken in school. The overwhelming majority of courses taken involved mathematics and the sciences, with a sprinkling of liberal arts. It was no wonder, then, that their interest in foreign languages would be from an analytical point of view. Thus the need for grammatical explanations.

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Rapport, then, is that quality or condition achieved through a person's ability to react and to interact with other people.

It is essential for a teacher to have rapport with his students, especially for an ESL teacher, because his classes are small and learning situations are intense and personal.

The teacher can employ games to engender a competitive and "good-time" rapport between students, and he can train himself to be an obviously attentive listener and thus gain students' respect by showing them a respectful, attentive attitude. He can employ many devices, some of which have been discussed in this paper. However, most of all he should be himself. Acting and reacting honestly and naturally shows others that you have confidence in yourself.

With this self-assurance, you can inspire others' confidence in you and thus can develop an atmosphere of rapport which will carry you through many difficult situations which can

use.