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Chapter

The Power of Appearance: Students' Impression Management within Class

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Abstract

Although educational research acknowledges that social perception processes are relevant for understanding but also evaluating situations, the topic of impression management (IM) has achieved only little attention so far. Individuals have discussed rather as passively exposed to the mechanism of social interaction and perception processes. This contribution changes perspectives and addresses the question of conscious impression management within classes. The chapter asks whether students use self-presentation tactics in order to deliberately navigate the impression their teachers should have of them. By means of an empirical study, country- and gender-specific differences with regard to impression management were found. Likewise, students with a high educational aspiration and good school grades scored higher or at least differently on impression management than students with a low educational aspiration level and low school grades. And students with a high educational aspiration but low grades try to overcome this discrepancy by means of personally adapting to the teachers' expectations. Even though the influence mechanism of impression management on school success cannot conclusively be answered, this paper opens new perspectives on the scientific discourse of social inequality as well as teaching quality and discusses implications for teacher education.

Keywords: impression management, self-presentation tactics, social interaction processes, teacher-student relationship, student engagement

1. Introduction

Teaching can be understood as a form of pedagogical action and communication (cf. [1]). Teachers meet a group of students, and only through the effort of all involved, successful teaching and learning is possible (cf. [1–3]). Social interaction between teacher and students but also between students themselves is a necessary but also momentous fact. In contrast to fleeting everyday encounters, students and teachers work together over a longer period of time. Within the framework of teaching and class organisation, they (compulsorily) enter into a long-term relationship (cf. [1]). As numerous social-psychological studies have shown (cf. [4, 5]), mutual perception is (socially) constructed and dependent on attitudes, expectations and experiences. Such expectations, norms and rules also exist at school, as the following quote illustrates: "At school, teachers and students interact.

Their actions are linked to social expectations and roles. [...] If expectations are met, recognition and reward follow, if they are not met, rejection, punishment or even sanction follow. [...] The better students adapt to teachers' expectations and ideas and the better they succeed in camouflaging themselves by integrating both curricula [official and secret curriculum, authors' note], the greater the chance for a successful school career" ([6], pp. 101 and 109, translated from German by the authors). Empirical studies confirmed that on the one hand, students are able to influence teachers' perception and assessment (cf. [7, 8]) and on the other hand that the teachers' perception has consequences for students. Thus, as, for instance, the following references [9, 10] emphasised, students, who are perceived as more committed by their teacher often have better grades than those who are perceived as less committed, with the same school performance. In this context, Reichenbach [11] speaks of privileged students and means that those students who know and understand how to present themselves according to expectations and norms have a higher chance of success at school. Impression management (IM) therefore plays an important role not only in everyday life (cf. [12, 13]) but also in school careers (cf. [11, 14–16]). The aim of this contribution is to elaborate conceptually as well as empirically students' IM within class. Thus, despite its obvious significance, IM of students has received little interest from educational research so far.

2. Impression management

2.1 The presentation of the self

The topic of IM has gained some attention within sociology (cf. [13]) as well as social psychology (cf. [17]). Commonly, impression management is defined as an individual's active efforts to cast himself/herself in a certain light, to present, create and maintain a specific image in public (social situation) with a particular purpose (cf. [9, 13, 18]). Since IM is concerned with the image a person tries to convey to another person, on the one hand, IM expresses itself in self-presentation. On the other hand, self-presentation tactics serve the purpose of IM. Self-presentation therefore is a process "by which people [try to] convey to others that they are a certain kind of person or possess certain characteristics" ([17], p. 3). Consequently, the self has an inherent role in IM and can be defined as a cognitive structure that allows a person to think consciously about himself/herself and allows interpretation which are directed towards understanding one's own inner world (cf. [17, 19]). Although one could argue that self-presentation is involved in every social encounter whether conscious or not, in literature, it is often used as synonym to impression management, which describes a conscious process of managing the self-presentation. With regard to the school context, a student might be more or less concerned about the image the teacher has of him/her and therefore invests more or less in IM. If the student is more concerned and provided, he/she understands the expectations and norms of the teacher; he/she will probably invest more in presenting the self as being committed, motivated and interested within class. In other words, to care about the impression one leaves in a situation requires that students are aware of social perceptual processes and the fact that one always leaves an impression, whether intentional or not. Leary [17] distinguished between four levels of impression monitoring. On the level of *impression oblivion*, a person is unaware "even of the possibility that others are forming impressions of him or her" ([17], p. 49). This level is, however, relatively rare [17]. Nevertheless, students who are at this level of oblivion may be at a disadvantage because, as mentioned earlier, grades are also influenced by how teachers perceive their students' commitment.

On the second level, the *pre-attentive impression scanning*, a person manages the impression at a rather unconscious or pre-attentive level while focussing on other things. If a person is "consciously aware that others may be forming impressions of him or he" ([17], p. 49), he/she is at the level of *impression awareness*. On the level of *impression focus*, a person is consciously aware of the impression he/she makes, and all the person's thoughts are concentrated on this impression and the consequences. This level might be very stressful, as a person has no room for other things or foci. Leary [17] highlighted: "ironically, then people may be so consumed by thoughts of the impressions they are making that they end up making undesired impressions." In the context of school, a student might be so focused on how he/she appears during an oral speech that he/she will not be able to focus on the speech's content. Most of the time, students probably move between levels 2 and 3 as the line between consciousness and unconsciousness is often very blurred. When managing the impression one wants to leave in a situation, however, impression awareness is required. Nevertheless, not everyone seems to be equally successful in self-presentation. Goffman [13] stressed that for successful self-presentation, the public (i.e., the teacher) must be convinced of the sincerity of the presentation. For this to succeed, even the impressionist must have a clear idea of what his audience expects; he must know how judgements come about and possess sensitivity for what the respective social situation demands (cf. [20]). Meaning, the successful handling of school demands and expectations requires that newly entering children quickly understand the role they have to play, the position they have to fill and the rules they have to follow. They need to recognise how an institution works, and they need to acquire the necessary organisational knowledge (cf. [16]). Some students might intuitively know how to make a good impression. From a sociological perspective, knowing how to behave appropriately can be explained with the concept of frame (cf. [21]). Frames are cultural specifications providing guidelines as to how to engage in situations (cf. [22]). It is to assume that students, familiar with a cultural context, usually know that it is beneficial to *show* interest in the learning subject during class (and not only to *be* interested) and to demonstratively *show* their own motivation (and not only to *be* motivated). Moreover, it is beneficial if motivation and interest is missing in a situation, to present the self at least as if interested and motivated (cf. [13]). Even though IM can be related to pretending and deceiving, it does not necessarily have to be false and untrue. A positive IM is likewise important independently of the presence or absence of motivation and interest in the given situation. Motivation, however, to present the self in correspondence with the teacher's expectations is needed.

2.2 Motivation and function of impression management

Presenting the self is an inherent part of every social situation regardless of whether the individual is aware of it. Thus, individuals involved in social encounters constantly seek information from each other in order to define the situation, formulate expectations and align their own behaviour accordingly (cf. [13, 17, 22]). Motivation to regulate how they are perceived by others might result from the belief that the impressions others form of them are relevant to achieve a certain goal which is valuable or important to them or to overcome a discrepancy between the impressions they desire others to have of them (presented self [19]) and the image they think others actually hold of them (appearing self [19]; see also [1, 17]). In the context of school, a student might wish to enter university and therefore is interested in good grades. If this student understands that grades are influenced not only by performance but also by the impression he/she makes in terms of commitment, interest and motivation, he/she is likely to invest more in IM. Likewise if a student

experiences a discrepancy between actual school grades and educational aspiration, he/she might invest more in IM (cf. [1]) or if the student wants his/her teacher to have a certain (good) impression of him/her, but does not yet think to appear as such (cf. [19]). IM and self-presentation tactics are, however, not only influenced by the person's goals and attributed value but also by norms and roles. Norms specify how people should act and what images they should or should not convey in particular situations and are gender-, context- and culture-specific (cf. [17]). For instance, boys are encouraged to act independent, powerful and competent, whereas girls are encouraged to be expressive, interpersonal and nurturant [17]. These different expectations result consequently in different self-presentation tactics. Beside influencing other people's behaviour and attitudes, IM serves the individual for constructing and maintaining the self-esteem as well as emotional regulation. But it has also an interpersonal function as a certain degree of concern of one's public impression is considered essential for smooth and successful social interaction (cf. [13, 17]). With regard to school, students' are being concerned about a good impression contribute to a more smoothly running teaching with less disturbances (cf. [1, 16]). Managing a good impression in social situations (i.e., during teaching) is therefore also linked to courtesy and respect for the other(s) (cf. [1, 11, 13]). To teachers this means that it should be important to them that all students understand the expectations, norms and cultural frames of schools and classrooms. Teachers can thus support their students in presenting themselves in a good light by discussing such norms and expectations as well as successful impression management.

2.3 Students' impression management within class

Empirical studies such as the self-fulfilling prophecy [23], the halo effect [4, 5] as well as the Matthew effect [24] confirmed the significance of a positive perception of the student for school success. These studies, however, took a rather unidirectional perspective on the teacher-student relationship and the social interaction process, picturing the students as rather passively exposed to the teachers' expectations. Attributing the students as an active part in the social interaction process and attesting them the power to be able to influence the teachers' perception has not been the focus of research so far. Nevertheless, there are a few studies reporting that students are actually able to self-verify and to influence the teachers' perception (cf. [7, 8]). In the 1980s, some researchers asked students for advice they would give their younger siblings to succeed at school, implicitly addressing students' self-presentation tactics (cf. [14, 25, 26]). Eder [14] identified nine different categories of advices, recommended to younger siblings: (1) cooperation and learning, (2) demonstrative engagement, (3) identification, (4) integration, (5) situational adaptation, (6) personal adaptation, (7) ingratiation, (8) resistance and (9) distance and withdrawal. An analysis of the nine categories showed that four categories (2, 5, 6 and 7) represent self-presentation tactics which consciously aim at conveying to the teacher the image of a motivated, interested and competent student [27]. Maschke and Stecher [16] operationalised these nine categories of students' advices and assigned them to three dimensions: (1) learning work, (2) relationship cultivation and (3) self-assertion. The dimensions learning work and relationship cultivation were also related to IM. The amount of quantitative studies on students' impression strategies is very small. By means of qualitative studies, however, the students' awareness of IM's importance as well as their conscious employment of IM strategies was confirmed (cf. [1, 28]). Woods [28] found that students use different strategies and tactics in order to meet the teachers' expectation and to attract positive attention—for example, through a positive

positioning within question-answer teaching. In our own study [15, 27], student's IM within German teaching was studied. The study's focus was on the students' self-presentation tactics that deliberately try to convey a positive image of the self as being interested, motivated and competent. Based on the self-presentation tactics of Eder [14], five different dimensions of IM could be extracted: demonstrative engagement, self-promotion, situational adaptation, personal adaptation and ingratiation (see Section 4.2). While demonstrative engagement describes the active effort to appear as interested and committed through participation, situational adaption tactics are used not to let demotivation or disinterest show. Personal adaptation and ingratiation describe tactics that rather invest in relationship work with the teacher. Self-promotion takes somehow a special position as it refers to showing one's own competence in situation in which one does not entirely understand what the teacher tries to explain. It was found that those students who experience a discrepancy in the sense that they perceive themselves more positively (real self)[1] than they think they are perceived (appearing self) or that they want to be perceived more positively (presented self) than they think they are perceived seem to invest more in their relationship work with their German class teacher through conscious impression management [15]. These results confirm the hypothesis that experienced discrepancy is a motivator for IM [17].

3. Research questions

With regard to the empirical part of this contribution, the aim was to deepen the understanding of students' IM within class and to analyse motivational aspects but also context-related differences resulting from the cultural context as well as from gender norms. Therefore, the first question addresses country-specific differences in terms of IM. The second question asks whether female students differ in their IM from male students. Question three, finally, studies the relationship between school grades, aspiration level and IM and asks for interactional effects on IM (discrepancy hypothesis).

1. Are there any country-specific differences with regard to IM in math teaching?

2. Are there any gender-specific differences with regard to IM in math teaching?

3. Is there a correlation and interactional effect of aspiration and school grades with IM?

4. Method

In order to answer the research questions (see Section 3) a paper-pencil questionnaire study with foremost closed items on IM was conducted. Data collection took place during a school lesson (class wise), and it took the students about 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Trained test administrators ensured a standardised survey process. The survey was conducted by class. All items were

[1] The distinction between real, ideal, appearing and presented self was made by Fend [19]. The real self describes the way I see myself; the ideal self is the self I would like to be/become. The self I think others attribute to me is the appearing self (as I think to appear/be perceived by others), and the self I wish others would attribute to me is called presented self.

related to math teaching and its belonging teacher.[2] The sample is an occasional sample, not randomly drawn.

4.1 Participants

A total of 293 students at the secondary II level (seventh-tenth grade) responded to the questionnaire. In order to test for country-specific differences, 202 students were at Austrian grammar schools (69%) and 91 at Swiss grammar schools. About 46% were female (135) and 154 students were male (4 missing answers). The average age was about 14.5 years (SD = 1.6 years). Since all students questioned were at a grammar school which prepares them for university entrance, it is not surprising that 65% of the respondents are aiming for an education at university. However, 35% of the students did not mention at the time of survey that they aspire to enter university but had other perspectives or more immediate goals such as obtaining the graduation certificate of grammar school. About 5% of the students reported to have insufficient math grades, about 38% of the students had sufficient math grades, and about 32% had good and another 24% very good math grades. **Table 1** gives an overview of the sample characteristics.

4.2 Scales and measures

Besides some socio-demographic variables such as gender, country and age, the newly developed questionnaire included questions on educational aspiration and school grades in math as well as items on IM (adapted for math teaching). The scales, dimensions and items as well as some scale characteristics will be described in more detail.

4.2.1 Scale: impression management

As mentioned (see Section 2.3) in a previous study [15, 27], students' IM was operationalized and validated with regard to teaching of German and its belonging teacher.[3] Based on school-specific coping strategies identified by Eder [14], this instrument was supposed to capture the student perspective on self-presentation tactics. By means of a CFA with latent constructs [27], a five-dimensional correlative factor structure was confirmed. For this current study, the correlative five-dimensional IM scale for German teaching was adapted to math teaching. All items could be answered on a four-point Likert-scale ranging from *does not apply* to *applies*. An even number of response categories was chosen to avoid a neutral response opportunity.[4]

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[2] It is to assume that students adapt their IM depending on the school subject but especially its belonging teacher. Therefore, the items of IM were formulated with reference to math teaching.

[3] The sample of validation consisted of 201 students at Austrian grammar schools [27].

[4] There has been some methodological discussion about whether an even or odd number of response categories should be used when constructing a questionnaire with closed answer format [29]. The central argument for collecting and measuring a construct with a straight response category (with four or six levels) is that the participants questioned are deprived of the opportunity to position themselves indifferently or (only) in the middle of the item [29]. From a conceptual point of view, it would not make sense to have a neutral answer response when asking students about their deliberative effort for IM. Therefore, an even number of four-answer categories was chosen as it is also often applied in the PISA study when questioning attitudes or behaviour.

	Math teaching[a]
Total N	293
Austrian	202 (69%)
Swiss	91 (31%)
Female	135 (46%)
Male	154 (53%)[b]
Average age (SD)	14.5 (1.6 years)

[a]*The items on impression management were directed to the math teaching and its teacher.*
[b]*4 cases missing.*

Table 1.
Sample characteristics.

- *Demonstrative engagement* describes a conscious tactic of students to present themselves as motivated, interested and committed through active cooperation: *During math lessons I often get in touch with my teacher so that he/she thinks I am motivated*. (Three items)

- *Self-promotion* describes a students' tactic to present themselves as competent (knowing and understanding) even if one does not fully understand the subject of teaching: *In math lessons, even if I do not know the right solution, I try to behave as if I knew it*. (Three items)

- *Situational adaptation* is a rather adaptive tactic with the aim of not letting one's own noncommitment be noticed: *I will not let you tell me if I'm not interested in math lessons*. (Five items)

- *Personal adaptation* describes students adapting to the teacher's expectation of showing interest and motivation (relationship management): *In math lessons I sometimes fake motivation in order to leave a positive impression*. (Four items)

- *Ingratiation* is an active relationship management, with the aim of signalising recognition, respect and obedience to the teacher: *I pretend to meet the math teacher's expectations*. (Three items)

In order to analyse the reliability of IM dimensions, the extracted factor solutions were compared to the one of the German teaching sample (reference sample), and Cronbach's alphas were calculated. **Table 2** presents the scale characteristics for the math teaching sample. It shows that Cronbach's alphas of the different IM dimensions were ranging between 0.63 and 0.87,[5] which can be considered satisfactory for social science studies [30]. Furthermore, **Table 2** shows that the average scores of the five dimensions of IM were semantically between *somewhat does not apply* and *somewhat applies*.

4.3 Hypotheses

Since there are culture-specific norms which influences IM and self-presentation (cf. [13, 17]) and since school culture of countries probably differ in certain norms

[5] The Cronbach's alphas are comparable to the German teaching sample in which they varied between 0.66 and 0.86. Furthermore it showed that students answering the items with reference to math teaching and its belonging teacher did not differ in their mean score on IM dimensions compared to the students who answered the questions with reference to German teaching (reference sample).

	Sample size (n = 293)	
Dimensions of IM	**Mean (SD)**	**Cronbach's alpha**
Demonstrative engagement	2.63 (0.87)	0.87
Self-promotion	2.13 (0.82)	0.74
Situational adaptation	2.85 (0.68)	0.81
Personal adaptation	2.57 (0.69)	0.70
Ingratiation	2.62 (0.70)	0.63

Table 2.
Scale characteristics on IM for math teaching sample.

and expectations, it was assumed that students from Austrian grammar schools differ on average in their scores on IM from students from Swiss grammar schools. Differential learning environments have an individual influence on the description and development of cognitive and noncognitive outcomes of students. Such contextual factors can also be identified at the institutional or organisational level within the framework of educational spaces. Based on differences in the school structure between the Swiss and Austrian school education systems, but given the fact that studies comparing IM between students of Austrian and Swiss schools are missing, an undirected hypothesis was formulated (Hypothesis 1), which should be understood as rather explorative in nature. Likewise it was argued that genders also are confronted with different expectations and norms [17]. Therefore, it was expected that male students score higher on self-promotion and female students score higher on IM concerning explicit relationship management (personal adaptation and ingratiation, Hypotheses 2). In general, students with a higher educational aspiration level are expected to be more interested in a positive IM and therefore score higher on the self-presentation tactics (Hypothesis 3). Likewise, students with good grades are expected to have higher scores on IM (Hypothesis 4). With regard to the motivation of IM [17], it is expected that students experiencing a discrepancy (high aspiration level but low school grades) are more interested in a good IM and therefore score higher on its dimensions (Hypothesis 5).

- **Hypothesis 1**: Students from Austrian grammar schools differ in their IM from students from Swiss grammar schools.

- **Hypothesis 2**: Due to gender-specific norms, it is expected that on the one hand, male students score higher on self-promotion (demonstrating competence, Hypothesis 2a) and on the other hand, that female students score higher on personal adaptation (Hypothesis 2b) and ingratiation (Hypothesis 2c), both aiming at conscious teacher-student relationship management.

- **Hypothesis 3**: Students who aim at entering university (high aspiration level) score higher in the IM dimensions than students with a lower aspiration level.

- **Hypothesis 4**: Students with good grades are expected to score higher on IM than students with lower grades.

- **Hypothesis 5**: Students with a high aspiration level but low school grades (discrepancy experience) score higher on IM than students with low grades and low educational aspiration level.

The methods used in order to test these hypotheses are discussed directly when presenting the corresponding results (see Section 5).

5. Results and discussion

5.1 Mean differences in impression management between countries

In order to test Hypothesis 1 that students from Austrian grammar schools differ in their average on IM in math teaching from students from Swiss grammar schools, t-tests for independent groups were calculated by means of the statistical program SPSS (Version 24). Significant country differences were found on four of the five dimensions on IM in math teaching. Only with regard to situational adaptation was no country-specific difference found. Generally, students from Austrian schools achieved higher mean scores on the dimensions of IM. Consequently, students from Austrian schools seem more involved in active impression management conveying the image of a competent, motivated and interested student that respects the teacher. The effect sizes[6] were, however, rather small between 0.36 and 0.40 (see **Table 3**). This study is not able to conclusively clarify these differences between countries, as there is a lack of information on different norms and expectations of students. Studies including school culture characteristics of different countries would be valuable for further understanding how context characteristics influence IM and self-presentation tactics.

5.2 Mean differences in impression management between genders

Hypothesis 2a–c assumed that male students score higher on self-promotion but less on personal adaptation and ingratiation than females do. Results showed, however, that—according to expectation—gender only differed significantly in the mean score of ingratiation and additionally on situational adaptation (method of analysis: independent sample t-test, SPSS; Version 24). Female students had higher average scores on both dimensions and seem to try more not to show disinterest or demotivation during class and try to ingratiate more than male students do. The effect sizes were, however, rather small with 0.26 and 0.40, respectively (see **Table 4**). The hypothesis that female students invest more into relationship management was therefore only partially confirmed. In order to analyse whether these

	Austria	**Switzerland**		
Scale	**Mean (SD)**	**Mean (SD)**	**t-value**	**Effect size d**
Demonstrative engagement	2.7 (0.86)	2.4 (0.88)	$t(285) = 2.72$; $p < 0.01$	0.36
Self-promotion	2.2 (0.83)	1.9 (0.74)	$t(290) = 3.22$; $p < 0.001$	0.39
Situational adaptation	2.9 (0.68)	2.8 (0.68)	$t(287) = 1.5$; ns	—
Personal adaptation	2.6 (0.68)	2.4 (0.68)	$t(284) = 3.06$; $p < 0.01$	0.40
Ingratiation	2.7 (0.66)	2.4 (0.75)	$t(285) = 3.03$; $p < 0.01$	0.38

Table 3.
Mean differences in impression management between students of Swiss and Austrian schools.

[6] Effect sizes were calculated using the formula *Hedges' g* in order to correct for unequal group sizes [31]. As Hedges' g is often used similar to Cohen's d, the abbreviation effect size d is used.

	Female students	Male students		
Scale	**Mean (SD)**	**Mean (SD)**	**t-value**	**Effect size d**
Demonstrative engagement	2.7 (0.89)	2.6 (0.86)	t(281) = 0.82; ns	—
Self-promotion	2.2 (0.83)	2.1(0.79)	t(286) = 1.15; ns	—
Situational adaptation	3.0 (0.63)	2.7 (0.70)	t(283) = 3.21; $p < 0.001$	0.40
Personal adaptation	2.6 (0.68)	2.5 (0.68)	t(280) = 1.49; ns	—
Ingratiation	2.7 (0.68)	2.5 (0.70)	t(281) = 2.14; $p < 0.05$	0.26

Table 4.
Mean differences in impression management between female and male students.

findings result from different gender-specific expectations that influence self-presentation tactics, it would be beneficial to include in a further study also information on such expectations.

5.3 Relationship between grades and educational aspiration with IM

In order to test Hypotheses 3 and 4, the educational aspiration as well as the math grades were dichotomised. Students who already knew they want to enter university were assigned to the group *aspiration high* which correspond to 65% of the participants. The others were allocated to the group *aspiration low*. Students (56%) reporting a math grade that means semantically "good" or "very good" were allocated to the group *high grades*, the others to the group *low grades*. By means of a 2×2 factorial ANOVA, it was tested for main and interaction effects of educational aspiration and math grades (independent variables). The dependent variables (DV) were the five dimensions of IM. For each DV a separate ANOVA was calculated. **Table 5** summarises the results of the ANOVA. With regard to Hypothesis 3, it was found that the educational aspiration level had an influence on self-promotion ($F(1, 277) = 4.482$; $p < 0.01$) as well as on ingratiation ($F(1, 273) = 4.61$; $p < 0.05$). In alignment with expectations, students in the group *high aspiration* scored on average higher on self-promotion (mean = 2.21, SD = 0.85), than the group *low aspiration* (mean = 2.02, SD = 0.73) as well as on ingratiation (mean = 2.70, SD = 0.66), than the group *low aspiration* (mean = 2.52, SD = 0.73). Effect sizes of these main effects were, however, rather low ranging between 0.265 and 0.271. With regard to Hypothesis 4, school grades were found to have an influence (main effect) on demonstrative engagement ($F(1, 272) = 7.661$ $p < 0.01$), self-promotion ($F(1, 277) = 6.523$; $p < 0.01$) as well as situational adaptation ($F(1, 274) = 4.526$; $p < 0.05$). The two dimensions of IM aiming more at relationship work seem not to be affected by student's school grades. Put differently, independent of the math grades, students tried more or less to ingratiate and personally adapt to the image of a good student. In accordance with Hypothesis 4, students in the group *high grades* scored on average higher on the IM dimension of demonstrative engagement (mean = 2.76, SD = 0.86) than the group *low grade* (mean = 2.49, SD = 0.85). Likewise, students with high grades scored on average higher on the dimension situational adaptation (mean = 2.92, SD = 0.66) than the group *low grade* (mean = 2.77, SD = 0.66). There are at least two possible explanations for these results: (1) investing more into demonstrative engagement of commitment and effort as well as investing more in not letting demotivation and disinterest show leads to better grades, and (2) understanding teaching as a trade, students with better grades trade for them with

	SS	df	MS	F[a]	Effect size d
Demonstrative engagement					
Aspiration level	0.759	1	0.759	1.037	ns
Math grade	5.607	1	5.607	7.661**	0.338
Aspiration*grade	0.707	1	0.707	0.966	ns
Error	199.078	272	0.732		
Self-promotion					
Aspiration level	2.826	1	2.826	4.482**	0.265
Grade	4.112	1	4.112	6.523*	0.309
Aspiration*math grade	1.657	1	1.657	2.628	ns
Error	174.628	277	0.630		
Situational adaptation					
Aspiration level	0.441	1	0.441	0.958	ns
Math grade	2.084	1	2.084	4.526*	0.259
Aspiration*math grade	0.582	1	0.582	1.265	ns
Error	126.161	274	0.460		
Personal adaptation					
Aspiration level	1.589	1	1.589	3.499	ns
Math grade	0.615	1	0.615	1.354	ns
Aspiration*math grade	2.498	1	2.498	5.501*	0.54
Error	123.524	272	0.454		
Ingratiation					
Aspiration level	2.173	1	2.173	4.610*	0.271
Math grade	0.541	1	0.541	1.148	ns
Aspiration*math grade	0.635	1	0.635	1.347	ns
Error	128.709	273	0.471		

[a]**p < .05, **p <.01, ns = nonsignificant.*

Table 5.
Tests of 2 × 2 factorial ANOVA: Statistics for main effects and interactions between grades and aspiration on IM.

demonstrative engagement and situational adaptation. Contrary to expectation, students with high grades had lower mean score on self-promotion (mean = 2.01, SD = 0.79) than the group *low grade* (mean = 2.31, SD = 0.82). Again, there are at least two explanations possible: (1) there is no need for good students to show competence as their school performance already shows, and (2) good students are more aware of the "risks" of faking competence and understanding. Thus, if self-presentation is successful, the teacher is convinced that the students understood the content and proceeds to the next topic/step. Teachers may not recognise students' incomprehension and erroneous concepts. Due to the fact that there was only one measurement point (cross-sectional study), these various possible explanations cannot be conclusively clarified. Consequently, longitudinal studies are needed. Effect sizes of these main effects were, however, rather low ranging between 0.259 and 0.338.

Although Hypothesis 5 which states that students with a high aspiration level but low school grades (discrepancy experience) score higher on IM than students with

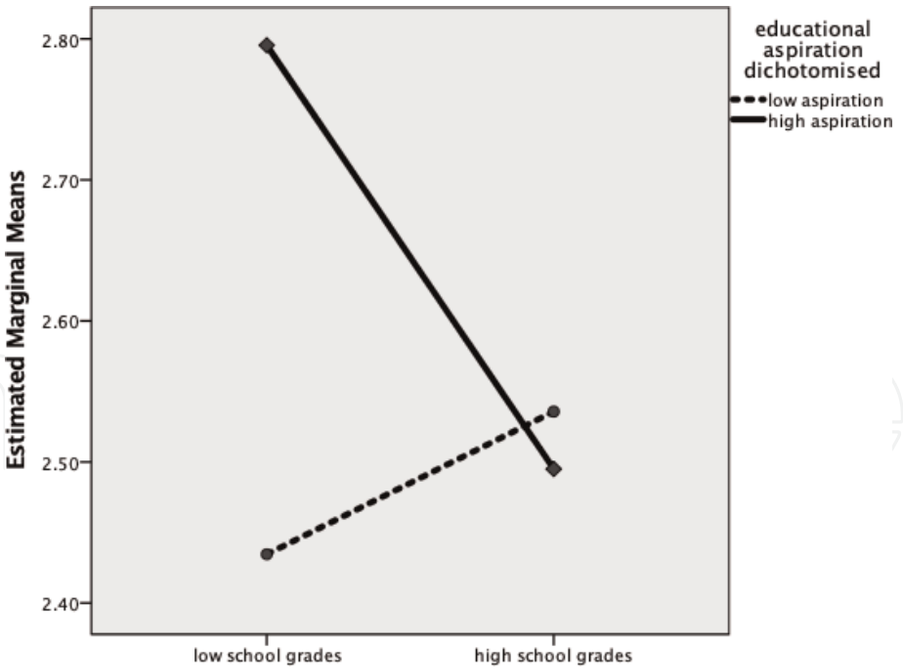


Figure 1.
Interaction effect of grade and aspiration regarding personal adaptation.

low grades and low aspiration level was apparently true comparing the mean scores of these two groups, only one significant interaction effect was found, namely, with regard to personal adaptation ($F(1, 272) = 5.501$; $p < 0.05$), with a medium effect size of 0.54. As **Figure 1** shows, students with a high educational aspiration but low math grades scored on average the highest on personal adaptation (mean = 2.80, SD = 0.64), students with low math grades and low aspiration the lowest (mean = 2.43, SD = 0.65). Students with a low educational aspiration but good math grades (mean = 2.54, SD = 0.67) scored similar like the students with a high aspiration level but low math grades (mean = 2.50, SD = 0.71). Students who want to start at university, but currently do not have good math grades, might hope to achieve better math grades when pretending and faking motivation and interest in order to leave a good impression. This would, however, require that students regard grades as influenceable by other factors than mere school performance (assessed through math exams).

6. Conclusion

Given the fact that compulsory schooling has not only expanded but has degraded to a preliminary state for attending higher educational institutions, the schools' function of selection in particular has become more important in recent years (cf. [1]). Consequently, school success students achieve during their school years is decisive for their future career. Not surprisingly, the quality of pedagogical diagnostics in the teaching profession has become a relevant topic of educational research (cf. [32]). But as discussed, student assessment (including summative and formative assessment) seems rarely to be based on purely objective measurement criteria but to open some scope for decision-making. Where there is scope for decision-making and consideration, there are consequently opportunities for social influence. The bigger this scope, the greater the significance of the many influences (or attempts to influence) on the impression made by the assessors (cf. [5, 20]).

Studies on teachers' judgement accuracy showed that on average the correlation between teacher's judgement and actual student's cognitive performance is only about 0.66. Depending on whether teachers judge cognitive performance or motivation, this coefficient is even lower (cf. [33, 34]). One discussed reason for this inaccuracy is that teachers can refer less to "hard facts" when they are assessing the student's self-concept than when they are assessing cognitive performance [33]. The question that could also be asked in this context is whether some students are more successful in conveying a positive self-image through successful impression management, which diminishes teacher's judgement accuracy regarding student's self-concept. There has been intensive research that teachers' perception on students' image has a profound influence on students learning (cf. [35]). Although IM and resulting social exchange processes are seen as important for school success, there are relatively few empirical studies that investigate the extent to which students as active agents have an influence on the teacher's student evaluation. On the contrary, the field of research seems to understand the student mainly as passively exposed to structural, contextual and teacher-based influences. The empirical results presented in this contribution confirmed, however, that students seem to be aware of their efforts in terms of (positive) impression management, not only in German but also in math teaching. They seem to know that they can avail themselves of specific tactics that can be applied for the purpose of self-presentation in different educational situations. It was found that students from Austrian grammar school scored on average higher on all five dimensions of IM than students from Swiss schools. The mean differences showed to be significant on four of the five dimensions. This indicates that different cultural norms might influence self-presentation tactics and corresponding behaviour. Whether these results have anything to do with different beliefs in authority or with the fact that in Switzerland, it is more frowned upon to present oneself as better (this can also be seen from the fact that acquired titles are rarely or only reluctantly listed by Swiss people), are theses to be examined. Likewise, gender-specific norms seem to influence IM within class. Although the effects were only significant with regard to ingratiation and situational adaptation, female students showed higher mean scores on all five dimensions of IM. This goes along with the argumentation that gender-specific norms expect females to be more expressive and interpersonal [17]. Thus the five dimensions of IM can be understood as a special kind of interpersonal expression, namely, to consciously present the self in a good way and connect with the teacher. Moreover, it was found that educational aspiration level had a significant effect on IM. Again, students with the already determined goal to enter university scored higher on all five dimensions of IM—even if the main effect was significant on only two dimensions (self-promotion and ingratiation). Furthermore, better school grades were linked to higher scores on demonstrative engagement and situational adaptation and to lower scores on self-promotion. Interestingly are the two significant main effects in terms of self-promotion. Whereas good students do less present themselves as being competent in situation in which they do not fully understand the school subject, students with high aspiration pretend more to being competent than student with lower educational aspiration do. This is important also for teachers to know. They should encourage their students to let them know if something was not understood fully instead of pretending to master subject matter. Because pretending to have mastered the subject matter of school may be detrimental to students' learning, especially if it leads to less effort on the part of the students. Finally, in alignment with the discrepancy hypothesis, it was found that students with a high educational aspiration (aiming for a university degree) but low grades (insufficient or barely sufficient) scored higher on all of the five dimensions than students with low

aspiration and low grades, with one significant interaction effect (personal adaptation). Against the background of these results, it seems to be reasonable and necessary to investigate more into what extent the use of self-presentation tactics pays. A developmental research perspective is needed in order to study whether good impressionists are really privileged as it was assumed [1]. Furthermore, it needs to be taken into account that due to a rather small sample size with an unequal group size of students from Austrian and Swiss schools, no hierarchical data analyses were conducted. It would be interesting to take class effects into account as well. Furthermore, the sample used for analysis was not randomly drawn but occasional which certainly is a limitation of the study. In addition, the instrument developed on the basis of the categories of Eder [14] took a rather limited view on impression management and primarily focused on acting as if. There is certainly a need to include other impression management strategies and also addressing strategies that do not aim at leaving a good impression and to ask for students' motivation. Despite some limitations and many open questions regarding student's impression management and self-presentation, this contribution offers theoretical as well as empirical hints and evidence for an in-depth discussion and reflection on further educational research topics:

- *Educational justice and equal opportunities*: IM could be discussed in addition to primary and secondary effects as another, tertiary, effect of social origin which shows to be important for school success. As [36] pointed out, these tertiary effects result from socially biased expectations, efforts and evaluations of the counterpart. Bourdieu [37] already stressed the importance of social capital and highlighted that "even manners (behaviour, ways of speaking, etc.) can be classified as social capital" (p. 191). This would mean that social origin would influence students' social understanding of social expectations and thus their IM which would not only affect teachers' perceptions and expectations but also their success at school.

- *Another perspective on successful teaching*: Success of teaching and any social interaction is also a question of whether the participants succeed in structurally coordinating their (subjective) situations and perspectives. Cultural guidelines such as school or class rules and rituals help to avoid constantly falling out of one's role and to save one's own face [13]. In this respect, it is important that all students know how to interpret these cultural guidelines and can adapt their behaviour accordingly. This is also linked to the question of educational justice and equal opportunities (see first point). Students understanding expectations and adapting to them in a positive way probably lead to less disturbances and disruptions of teaching and enhance teaching quality. Because teachers who constantly need to address students' behaviour have less time to focus on and deepen content of subjects.

Consequently, there are several important reasons why IM should be a topic that is integrated to teacher education. One the one hand, good teachers should strive to create equal opportunities for all students. It is, however, known that teachers' perceptions are influenced by factors not fully determined by students' performance and that these perceptions have an influence on students' school success. Successful IM may impair the diagnostic quality of the teacher's judgement and undermine the ideal of equal opportunities, especially if not all students are equally aware of the importance of IM and not equally competent in managing the impression to present the self in a good light. Teachers should therefore be able to reflect

not only their own perceptions and expectations they have of different students but also the students' impression management. Engaging into the topic of IM might also help teachers to identify students who are considered as non-privileged, who, for example, do not understand socially demanded expectations and do not know how they can adequately meet these expectations. It becomes possible to promote their social-emotional abilities in order to enable them to successfully manage their impression. Teachers can support students to learn to care about the impression they make and to help them understanding social expectations and rules in diverse settings. This is also important for individuals later in life, when they, for example, apply for positions and need to present themselves in a job interview. Reflecting on impression management during teacher education thus supports teachers in their pedagogical effort to create equal opportunities. On the other hand, impression management of students might, as discussed above, also contribute to teaching quality and has direct use not only for the teacher but the whole class. Understanding successful teaching as a "product" of all involved (see introductory remarks) points to the importance of IM. IM—as it was outlined in this paper—describes the effort to cast the self in a positive light. Students who aim to leave a good impression will therefore not involve themselves in disruptive behaviour. With regard to this other perspective on successful teaching, every teacher should care to have in his/her class as many students which are concerned about conveying a good impression (namely of being interested and motivated) as possible. In this context, it would also be important for teachers to address students' demotivation to present the self in a good light. Leary [17] emphasised that IM also serves emotional regulation, and Woods [28] highlighted that students usually know social rules and expectations. If students' consciously decide against a positive impression management, one reason could also be that students are addressed inappropriately by the teacher. Gao [38] speaks in this context of the student's decision to resist from learning from a teacher for reasons of self-protection. The knowledge and reflection about the impression management of students thus helps teachers to gain a greater understanding of social interaction processes in the classroom and supports them in reacting appropriately to (un)desired processes.

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Abbreviations

IM impression management
DV dependent variable

Appendix A

See **Table 6**.

Dimensions of impression management	**Loading**	**Mean**	**SD**
In my math class, …			
Demonstrative engagement			
… I often put my hand up with the intention of making my teacher believe that I'm motivated.	0.92	2.66	1.01
… I actively take initiative with the intention of my teacher ascribing a high level of motivation to me.	0.92	2.66	0.91
… I often put my hand up with the intention of making my teacher think that I'm interested.	0.84	2.58	1.02
Self-promotion			
… even if I do not know the correct solution, I try to behave as if I know it.	0.87	2.38	0.98
… when many students put their hand up, I put my hand up too to make the teacher think that I know the answer even if this is not always true.	0.79	1.75	1.01
… I try to look as if I know the answer.	0.78	2.25	1.03
Situational adaptation			
… I do not let my disinterest show.	0.71	2.90	0.93
… I try to appear motivated even though I'm (sometimes) not motivated.	0.82	2.99	0.88
… I do not let it show that I'm not motivated.	0.76	2.74	0.93
… I behave as if I were interested in math.	0.71	2.82	0.91
… I behave as if I were motivated.	0.79	2.81	0.83
Personal adaptation			
… I sometimes fake interest because I want to leave a positive impression.	0.80	2.60	0.99
…I sometimes fake participation because I want my teacher to think that I'm a good student.	0.72	2.75	0.91
… I sometimes make my teacher believe that I have prepared myself for class even if it is not true.	0.56	2.39	0.99
… I sometimes fake motivation because I want to leave a positive impression.	0.82	2.53	0.92
Ingratiation			
… I pretend to fulfil my teacher's expectations.	0.79	2.74	0.90
… I pretend to follow my teacher's instructions.	0.76	2.61	0.94
… when my teacher explains what we are supposed to do, I pretend to find this important.	0.73	2.54	0.93

Table 6.
Item characteristic of the five IM dimensions.

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