Creating an Effective Learning Environment : A Dose of Laughter Helps

Abstract

Humor is a valuable teaching tool for establishing a classroom climate conducive to learning. This article identifies opportunities for incorporating humor in the college classroom, reviews the impact of humor on learning outcomes, and suggests guidelines for the appropriate use of humor. Humor can be used effectively as a strategy in the class room to increase a student's performance, producing positive physiological benefits, reviews the impact of humor on learning outcomes and suggests guidelines for the appropriate use of humor. Humor is a valuable teaching tool for establishing a classroom climate conducive to learning. Today learning and training has a greater impact on the skill of teacher, which are advocating management oriented approach to evaluate the e-learning. This paper identifies opportunities for incorporating humor in the college classroom, reviews the impact of humor on learning outcomes, and suggests guidelines for the appropriate use of humor.

Dr. K. K. Patra
Professor & Dean - Administration
RIMS
Rourkela

Introduction

Humor is a consequence of language. Language is an approximation of thoughts through symbolic manipulation, and the gap between the expectations inherent in those symbols and the breaking of those expectations leads to laughter. Irony is explicitly this form of comedy, whereas slapstick takes more passive social norms relating to physicality and plays with them (Malone, 1982). In other words, comedy is a sign of a 'bug' in the symbolic make-up of language, as well as a self-correcting mechanism for such bugs. Once the problem in meaning has been described through a joke, people immediately begin correcting their impressions of the symbols that have been mocked. This is why jokes are only funny when told the first time.

Gone are the days, when models of teaching including the Socratic Method rely on the analysis of hypothetical situations that involved solving problems or formulating strategies to discuss given situations. The principles of this approach have been embraced by problem based learning. Under these learning methods, participants develop a holistic view of the process and are re-continually made aware of how individual subject disciplines relate to the problem at hand. With the advancement of the complex and dynamic situation, there is a change in the procedure to provide adequate knowledge in the various fields of

management. From the ancient time, the profession of teaching has been considered to be a noble profession. Teacher played a vital role in shaping the destiny of society and promoting the cause of peace. They are known as the makers of the pillars of the nation. To make the teaching more effective, the teacher should understand the principles of learning and situational approaches to the learning process, problems of individual learners and remedial measures.

Background and Purpose

Indian economy is modernizing very rapidly and there is a greater need to provide the next generation of managers with high quality of teaching and training. In order to update and enrich the knowledge the students, every teacher or trainer should develop new methods of teaching tool, which will give a good mileage. There are various methods of teaching of learning, which are usually provided by the teachers or trainers such as case study, instructional video tapes, self-assessment, lecture, computer simulation, multi-media presentations, audio and video conferences, sensitivity training etc. Humor is another way of attracting the attention of the students in the classroom environment.

The heart of training and development theory is learning theory. Learning is an adjustment on the part of the individual. Learning is facilitated when this student learns because he wants to, when he feels a need for learning and has a goal which he associates with the necessity for making adjustments . Learning is generally considered to be any change in an individual's response or behaviour resulting from practice to experience. It is difficult to understand the inner workings of the mind in learning, only the results of the learning process are observable. Learning is the process by which individual acquires various habits, knowledge, skill and attitude that are necessary for meeting certain objectives. Learning also changes the behaviors of individuals. There are three areas in the study of psychology of learning. They are (i) learner (ii) the learning process and (iii) the learning situation. The various learning processes are learner, learning materials, learning methods, methods of instruction, environment, psychological factors, individual differences etc.

Subjects

Humor-An Antidote for Stress

Humor is a valuable teaching tool for establishing a classroom climate conducive to learning. It identifies opportunities for incorporating humor in the college classroom, reviews the impact of humor on learning outcomes, and suggests guidelines for the appropriate use of humor. Appropriate and timely humor in the college classroom can foster mutual openness and respect and contribute to overall teaching effectiveness. Teachers must be creative because of the critical role they play in creating an environment conducive to optimal student learning. Humor is often identified as a teaching technique for developing a positive learning environment. One of the most valuable assets anyone can have is a good sense of humor. It can help us through the toughest times and make life infinitely more enjoyable. Humor can lead us to better health, relationships and achievements.

Humor and laughter can be effective self-care tools to cope with stress. An ability to find humor gives us a sense of perspective on our problems. Laughter provides a physical release for accumulated tension. Humor is a wonderful stress reducer, an antidote to upsets. Laughter relieves tension. In fact, we often laugh hardest when we have been feeling most tense. It is an individual thing - what is funny to one individual may be hurtful to another. It is wonderful when people can poke fun at themselves. We can also do this with stressed friends, but we have to be careful and respectful in what we say. If we think of something funny that may help the friend, say it if we feel it will ease their tension and not be offensive. It will often throw in a quip or joke when we think it is appropriate. When it is done sensitively, laughter is a great gift to people we care about.

Humor is an effective, simple and inexpensive way to decrease stress. It can be a crucial factor of learning environments and of communication. It is a stress-relieving method for numerous reasons. First, humor functions as a distraction, interrupting the chain of thought that results in stress. Effective humor also results in laughter, which is a physical release of tension. Humor shifts the focus of attention away from oneself and focuses it instead on others (Martin,1987). This shift of attention enlarges people's anxiety-narrowed perspective to include the misfortune of others, thereby reducing the perceived need to stress about their own problems. Humorous stories often help people to recognize that however bad their situation might be, there is always someone who is worse off.

Humor is an aspect of human behavior that many people consider essential for interpersonal communication. Despite this, research in human-computer interaction has almost completely neglected aspects concerned with the automatic recognition, generation, or use of humor. This article addresses three important research questions related to the recognition and use of verbally expressed humor, demonstrating empirically that computational approaches can be successfully applied to these tasks. The research demonstrates that it is possible to automatically construct a very large collection of humorous texts, that automatic classification techniques can be effectively used to distinguish between humorous and non humorous texts, and that an automatic method for the selection and addition of contextualized humorous text can improve the user experience and overall quality of two widely used computer based applications.

External stressors include

- The Physical environment: Noise, bright lights, heat, confined spaces.
- Social (interaction with people): rudeness, bossiness or aggressiveness on the part of someone else.
- Organizational: rules, regulations, red tape, deadlines.
- Major life events: death of a relative, lost job, promotion, and new baby.
- Daily hassles: commuting, misplacing keys, mechanical breakdowns.

Internal stressors include

- Lifestyle choices: caffeine, not enough sleep, overloaded schedule.
- Negative Thinking: Pessimism, self-criticism, over-analyzing.
- Mind traps: unrealistic expectations, taking things personally, and exaggerating, rigid thinking.
- Stressful personality traits: perfectionist, workaholic, pleaser.

Benefits of Humor in Effective Teaching

There must be a powerful ground on which humor can be taken as a recognized asset in the workplace today. Following points will clarify how humor shows its relentless and eternal effects at workplaces:

- Humor makes communication easy and comfortable

Humor is the most effective way to share and understand the information. Communication means to convey ideas, opinions, information, emotions etc. to the other person. It is complete not only with transfer of message but with transmission of understandings. Communication is an essential to a classroom environment as blood is to human body. It assumes added importance with growth of complexities of business operations and competition from outside world.

- Humor cuts down stress

Developing a sense of humor can provide a significant protection from stress. Stress is one of the main causes of workplace sickness, poor attendance employee burn-out etc. It has been proved that humor is experienced as a great stress reliever. Humor and laughter both enhance our physical and mental well being. It dissolves the feelings such as depression, anger, and anxiety.

- Humor shapes interactions

Humor leads to the development of staff cohesion and feel a team effort. Now-a-days, electronic mails, internal mails help the employees to share among themselves various humors for making co-worker smile and laugh. Humor not only enhances the interactions but also keeps us connected with other by creating the enthusiasm at workplace.

- Humor boosts your productivity

In order to keep the classroom environment lively and interesting, teachers had to develop lots of stories, jokes etc. Humor talks are energizing the students in many ways. Humor moments increase the productivity as it not only energizes the people around, also freshens them up by breaking the monotony which ultimately helps them to open up their brain cells for a more creative effort.

- Humor shapes viewpoints

Research shows that laughter is an effective way for people of all ages to release pent-up tensions or energy, permit the expression of ideas or feelings that would otherwise be difficult to express and facilitate coping with circumstances. Humor develops an emotional attachment and dedication to professional life. It can really change the view point and attitude of taking things in a positive manner.

Methods

Approaches to Experimental Learning

There are various categories of people involved in any work. They are classified into four approaches such as:

- Intuitive Approach

Learning is an inevitable consequence of experiences which describes what has happened and what will be achieved.

- The Incidental Approach

It involves learning by change from activities what jolt an individual into conducting a port-mortem. When people using incidental learning are particularly affected by something, they are inclined to mull over what happened in an informal, unstructured way. People using incidental learning tend to use the benefit of hind sight as a way of rationalizing, even justifying what happened.

- The Retrospective Approach

This involves learning from experience by looking back over what happened and reaching conclusions about it in a more structured way. The retrospective approach reviews mishaps and mistakes, but in addition, lessons are drawn from routine events and successes. Learning is extracted from a diverse range of small and large, positive and negative experiences. People using the retrospective approach conduct reviews, sometimes in their heads, sometimes in conversation and sometimes on paper.

- Prospective

It involves all the retrospective elements, but includes an additional dimension. Whereas retrospection concentrates on reviewing what happened after an experience, the prospective approach includes planning to learn before experiences. Future events are seen not merely as opportunities to learn.

MIKE'S CHARM Principles

C	Communication
H	Humor
A	Attitude
R	Recognition
M	Mutual Respect

1. Communication

Communication is the sum total of all the things that a person does, when he wants to create an understanding in the mind of another. It involves a systematic and continuous process of telling, listening and understanding. Communication is not confined to transfer of message, idea or opinion. But it means transmission of understanding and ensuring that the receiver understands the same in same sense and spirit which the sender intends to convey.

2. Humor

Humor is an effective, simple and inexpensive way to decrease stress in the class- room environment. It can be a crucial factor of learning environments and communication. It is a stress-relieving method for numerous reasons. First, humor functions as a distraction, interrupting the chain of thought that results in stress. Effective humor also results in laughter, which is a physical release of tension. Humor shifts the focus of attention away from oneself and focuses it instead on others. This shift of attention enlarges people's anxiety-narrowed perspective to include the misfortune of others, thereby reducing the perceived need to stress about their own problems.

3. Attitude

An attitude is an emotionally colored predisposition to behave antagonistically or protagonistically, sympathetically or unsympathetically, with respect to any referent, whether it is a person, a group of persons, an institution, a practice, an object or an idea. A positive attitude toward innovation is crucial and indicative of a state of readiness to sustain or use that innovation. Those referents, with respect to which the attitudes are protagonist, are values. When our attitudes towards certain referents are antagonistic, those referents are aversions. We tend to have positive or negative attitudes towards almost everything we experience, but the intensity of the attitude in many cases is so mild as to make us relatively unaware of any feeling about the referent (Davis & Kleiner,1989).

4. Recognition

Recognition and effort speak to the attitudes and beliefs of students, and teachers must show the connection between effort and achievement. It also shows that although not all students realize the importance of efforts, they can learn to change their beliefs. Recognition is most effective if it is contingent on the achievement of certain standards. These can be improved by sharing stories and keeping a long of their weekly efforts and achievements, reflect on it periodically and even mathematically analyze the data. It is also said that the recognition works better than tangible rewards.

5. Mutual respect

An individual human being in a complex world is essentially an experience of relationships i.e. with things, with other persons, with organizations, and with ideas etc. Most of the troubles in this world arise from unsatisfactory relationship wherein one person or group tries by one means or another to coerce another person or groups into behaving in some involuntary manner.

Procedures

Humor should not be limited to an opening joke or story. Because of its value as an attention-getter and retention strategy, look for ways to use humor within the context of the learning objective.

Humour Pointers

Laughter is described by humor researchers as a response to pleasurable and/or amusing physical, emotional and/or intellectual stimuli that affect the brain in interesting and very complex ways. Before implementing humor talks in a classroom environment, one has to identify the situations which will be suitable for the deliberations:

- Asking oneself what is the purpose of using humor in the classroom.
- Assess the level of students/audience.
- Making humor relevant and related to content.
- Using humor as lead-ins to lesson proper.
- Telling humorous stories in episodes.

Guides for Using Humor

- Forcing humor removes genuineness from the situation and alienates the participant. Be honestly positive and good-humored, and encourage an environment for humor.

- Feel comfortable laughing and having fun with this topic.

- Remember that humor is subjective, and what is funny to some may be offensive to others. Supportive humor, rather than mocking, sarcastic, political or religious humor, is more likely to complement the subject of your humor-and-depression course.

- Rather than being funny, support and appreciate the humor of the participants.

Humor: Innate or Acquired

The question that puzzled was whether humor was innate or acquired. Research shows that the ability to use humor is a skill that can be acquired. The skill can be taught or caught, as humor is contagious.

Table 1: Various Health and Psychological Benefits of Humor

Health Benefits of Humor	Psychological Benefits of Humor
• Improving mental functioning • Exercising and relaxing muscles • Improving respiration • Stimulating circulation • Decreasing stress hormones • Increasing the immune system defenses • Increasing production of endorphins	• Reduced anxiety • Reduced tension • Reduced stress • Reduced depression • Reduced loneliness • Improved self-esteem • Restored hope and energy • A sense of empowerment and control

Results

Using humor to enhance climate and promote retention: Humor has many benefits when used frequently and appropriately in the classroom and other school settings (Sousa,2006).

Table 2: Various benefits derived out of humour in the classrooms

Physiological Benefits	
Provides more oxygen	Brain cells need oxygen and glucose for fuel. When we laugh, we get more oxygen into the bloodstream, so the brain is better fueled.
Causes an endorphin surge	Laughter causes the release of endorphins in the blood. Endorphins are the body's natural pain killers, and they also give the person a feeling of euphoria. Endorphins also stimulate the brain's frontal lobes, thereby increasing the degree of focus and the amount of attention time.
Moderates Body Functions	Scientists have found that humor decreases stress, modulates pain, decreases blood pressure, relaxes muscle tension and boosts immune defenses. These are all desirable outcomes.
Psychological, Sociological, and Educational Benefits	
Gets Attention	The first thing a teacher has to do when starting a lesson is to get the students' attention or focus. Because the normal human brain loves to laugh, starting with a humorous tale (such as a joke, pun, or story) gets the learner's attention.
Creates Positive Climate	Students are going to be together in a classroom for about 180 days. We need to find ways to help this increasingly diverse student population get along. When people laugh together, they bond and a community of spirit emerges-all positive forces for a climate conducive to learning.
Increases Retention and Recall	We know that emotions enhance retention, so the positive feelings that result from laughter increase the probability that students will remember what they learned and be able to recall it later.
Improves Everyone's Mental Health	Schools and all occupants are under more stress than ever. Taking time to laugh can relieve that stress and give the staff and students a better mental attitude with which to accomplish their tasks. Let's take our work seriously but observe ourselves lightly.
Provides an Effective Discipline Tool	Good natured humor (not teasing or sarcasm) can be an effective way of reminding students of the rules without raising tension in the class room.

Discussions

Humor has been associated with a host of positive physiological and psychological effects. Researchers have identified that educators who use humor in their instruction are more positively rated by their peers and their students; others have suggested that humor may enhance learning.

	HUMOR IS
❖ Telling jokes	❖ A playful approach
❖ Dismissing serious concerns	❖ Lightening up
❖ Disruptive	❖ Creative
❖ Derogatory	❖ Team building

Humor in the classroom: Views of the students

From the survey, it is found that humor is an instructional context suggests seven findings:

- Students view humor as an effective teaching tool to facilitate their learning;
- A wide range of low-risk humor techniques can be very effective in reducing anxiety and improving learning and performance;
- Strategies for using humor must be planned well and executed systematically to achieve specific outcomes;

- Both content-specific and generic humorous material tailored to the characteristics of each class can be effective in appropriate applications;
- Humor tends to be more effective when two or more of the senses, especially visual and aural (written and oral), are involved rather than just one sense;
- Offensive humor should never be used in the classroom; and
- Strategies for using humor in this study are adaptable and can be generalized to any discipline and course content.

Conclusions

Humor is the capacity to perceive, appreciate, or express what is funny, amusing, incongruous, ludicrous, etc. A lot of learning has lost its play and has become very concrete and literal, very exacting. It moves towards an end or a conclusion rather than turning ideas on their sides and considering them and laughing about them and being whimsical about them. Some of the best teachers are humorous teaches who see the playfulness of the language and are quick and intuitive. Learning is at its best when it is deadly serious and very playful at the same time, when I say deadly serious, I mean that learning should be disciplined and that people should find ways of learning how to ask questions, how to think about evidence, and how to find out the truths that are out there. According to Torsten Husen, "Educational innovations certainly do not come about automatically. They have to be invented, planned, initiated and implemented in a way that will make educational practices more adequately geared to the changing objectives of instructions and make them more consistent with the changing". The ever increasing technology methods, styles and equipment load make it next to impossible for the average instructor or faculty member to be an effective innovator in the classroom and still maintain the quality of materials for learners.

References

Davis, A., & Kleiner, B.H. (1989). The Value of Humour in Effective Leadership. *Leadership and Organizational Development Journal,* 10(1), 1-3.

Malone, P.B. (1982). Humor: A Double-Edged Tool for Today's Managers? *Academy of Management Review,* 5(3), 357–360.

Martin, M.W. (1987). Humor and Aesthetic Enjoyment of Incongruities. In Morreall, J. (Eds.), *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor,* Albany: SUNY.

Raymond, M.S. (1990). *Planet without Laughter*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Sousa, D.A. (2006). How the Brain Learns. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Vassilis, S. (2002). Religion and Sense of Humor: A Priori Incompatibility?. Theoretical Considerations from a Psychological Perspective. *Humor*, 15(2),191-214.