

HUMOR: AN INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY TO REJUVENATE MUNDANE TEACHING

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Every teacher aims to be the best teacher for his students. Pursuit of the effective teaching lies in student engagement. Humor is a driving force to illicit response from the learners. It is an inventive instructional strategy for creating classroom environment amiable to learning. The present paper reviews the significance of humor as a renovator of classroom to laughter-theatre for providing conducive environment; a stress buster to reduce fear and anxiety; as an ice breaker to fuel learner engagement; a contagious malady to build group cohesion; a facilitator to think out of the box and a miracle tonic to enhance learners' achievement which eventually leads to rejuvenate mundane teaching. It also differentiates humor from sarcasm and proposes guidelines for appropriate use of humor in educational settings.

Keywords: Humor, instructional, sarcasm, rejuvenate, mundane

Students bunk classes and go to theatre where they find pleasure. In literature too, the traces of truancy can be found in the characters of Tom Sawyer in "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" and Swaminathan in "Malgudi Days". Attendance has always been an issue in schools and colleges. Even before compulsory education became prominent, Shakespeare mentioned in his famous drama (As You Like It, Act II) "the whining schoolboy with his satchel and shining morning face creeping like a snail unwillingly to school". In the present time it is very challenging to retain students in the class. Some institutions try to make their students sit by imposing the compulsory attendance policies. The reasons explored for the bunking classes come up with the statement "If we find pleasure outside the classroom so what is in the point of staying inside?" To avoid boring lectures, to hang out with friends, to have fun at the campus the classes are missed out. Boredom is the major pedagogical impediment to teaching (Smith, 2007) it is believed that teachers have ability to spark students' interest in classes and humor acts as fuel to ignite the students' interest by turning the classroom into laughter theatre. Out of all the literary genres the comedy is the most admired by the all the ages. Laughter is a paramount part of human communication in almost each and every communicative event. It is the shock absorber that eases the gusts of life. "Through humor, you can soften some of the worst blows that life delivers. And once you find laughter, no matter how painful your situation might be, you can survive it."(Cosby) Beyond the fun aspect, humor can be an inventive strategy to engage students and trigger learning. Using humor and cheering laughter in the classroom does not expect teachers to act as clowns. The responsibility of the teachers is to make the

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learning process enjoyable and fruitful and if it can be done by incorporating humor so one must not hesitate to do it. It is believed that all students get involved more actively and learn readily when they feel safe, supported and engaged. The association established between the instructor and the student promotes effective teaching. (Polio & Humphreys, 1996; Azizinezhad & Hashemi, 2011).

The practice of making use of humor to enlighten lectures is evident from the times of Babylonian Talmud. About 1700 years ago a Talmudic sage named Rabbah, always used to start his lecture by saying something humorous. Rabbi Meir, one more Talmudic sage, would dedicate some time for parables in his lecture. These sagacious personalities recognized the worth of humor in teaching (Friedman, 2002). In the present day world, the education has become synonymous with cut throat competition. Every parent expects his child to be the above of all. The over expectations of the parents, mundane teaching, dread courses, authoritarian teachers all become the causes of stressfulness. Humor is a good stress buster. As an instructional strategy, it can help in reducing student anxiety, upholding attention and improving learning outcomes (Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Korobkin, 1998; Wanzer & Frymier, 1999; White, 2001). In the atmosphere where anxiety is low and comfort levels are high leads to success. Learning thrives when we find teachers with a sense of humor as humor is a miracle tonic to enhance learners' achievement. It promotes comprehension and retention by making the learning interesting. Rashidi *et al.* (2014) compared the different uses of humour among EFL learners which have been used in public schools with one enrolled in language learners institutes of Iran by using Pedagogical humor questionnaire. The findings revealed that language institute teachers and learners use humor more than the learners and teachers of schools. Participants of both the groups shared the belief that humor could be a productive tool in learning EFL. Ronald & Nanda (2009) measured changes in attitudes and anxiety and their relationships to achievement levels of undergraduate and graduate statistics by employing a single-sample pretest-posttest design. Statistically significant t-ratios in the predicted directions and practically significant effect sizes were found for attitudes toward course content and anxiety for all classes. These affective characteristics also had moderate correlations with composite achievement. The association between humor and academic achievement is well acknowledged. Hickman & Crossland (2005) found positive correlations between teachers' and parents' use of humor and academic success pursue students into higher education. Learning and laughter go hand in hand. In *The Laughing Classroom*, Loomans and Kolberg (1993) have illustrated how to renovate the classroom into a studio, comedy club, bus station and museum. Using humor not only benefits students but it is as beneficial to teachers' own behavior also as it helps them to see stressful situations in a more positive way. According to Burford (1987) humor plays significant role in the coping strategies of students and teachers in a similar way. Humor changes the position of teacher from authoritarian to

facilitator (Ketabi and Simin, 2007; Kristamansan, 2000). When humor is planned as an instructional strategy, it makes the outlook flexible and improve communication between instructor and student by establishing an inviting environment (Duffy & Jones, 1995; Watson and Emerson, 1988) Humor in educational settings has numerous functions beyond simply making people laugh. It builds good interpersonal relationships. It can bring a class together and builds group cohesion. People respond more positively to each other when humor is prevalent. It brings togetherness by softening criticism. If humor is used to ridicule others, it weakens group cohesion. "When we hear laughter, we tend to laugh in turn, producing a behavioral chain reaction that sweeps through a group, creating a crescendo of jocularity or ridicule" (Provine, 2000). Children come into this planet as mere intricate masses of human potentialities. It greatly depends upon the teachers to unleash their creativity and shape their lives and destinies. (Donna C. Crossman, 2013). A study conducted by Roeckelein, 2002 reveals that there is significant correlation between humor and creativity. Humor facilitates creative process and stimulates children to think out of the box, view things from different and unusual angles and finally come up with the new ideas. "I use humor continuously in my creativity classes and workshops. It clearly generates an atmosphere of openness, relaxation, and affability which facilitates creativity" (Couger, 1995).

Every day is not the April fool's day and teachers are not trained to be comedians. Unfortunately teachers consider using humor equivalent to losing their authority and therefore avoid it. (Azizinezhad & Hashem, 2011). Humor as a pedagogical tool raises many questions in one's mind. When, where and how to make use of humor is a matter of inquiry among the teachers. Some teachers enjoy humor and want to inject it in teaching but they fear to look foolish. Humor can be employed in manifold ways in the class. It can be interjected in lectures as jokes, funny stories, parables, humorous comments, riddles, puns. (Comisky & Zillmann 1979). Syllabus provides the framework for a great learning experience. Humorous twist can be given to the syllabus to make the content interesting. Content developers can also integrate elements of humor in the script. Use of humorous video clips can contribute to better comprehension of content among students. Humorous educational T.V. programs such as "Sesame Street" and "The Electric Company" have been successful just because they embraced humor (Ghee, 1989). The episodes of "Mind your language" can be shown in the English classes and the class would burst into laughter. Students laugh at the silly behavior of the teacher and laughter becomes more and more intense when the teacher gets involved too. The teacher may share personal experiences to make students laugh. The possible warm-up session with joke can infuse readiness among students. Humor is mostly significant before exam because students are generally anxious and stressed out. Humorous questions can reduce students' exam anxiety. (McMorris *et al.* 1985). Berk

(2000) has suggested numerous strategies for infusing humor into examination, one of which is to include outrageously funny alternative to few questions of multiple-choice test. He also suggested mentioning the following utterance in the instructions at the top of question paper: ... is proposed exclusively for your entertainment. While teaching how to write descriptive paragraphs teacher can describe a humorous scene to the students and ask them to make image of the same in the mind.

Yesterday my five year old sister Jenny made the mistake of playing with makeup. She coated her face with flower scented pink grease. She smudged one eye with blue and the other green. A pool of sticky black muck topped each eye brow. Flame red lipstick was smeared in a jagged ring around her mouth. When Jenny came to show me she was still giggling.

Students' retention is improved when learning is done by using mnemonic devices. (Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977). Funny mnemonic devices can contribute to make the memorization easy for the learners. Humor may also be used to commune concerns related to managing classrooms. Humor can be profitably utilized to communicate inherent classroom rules, building rapport and developing understanding between the instructor and the students (Proctor, 1994). Parents may utilize humor as a study strategy to support their children in doing homework, it develops healthy parent/child relationships. Using humor at home not only profits the child in study, but it benefits parent as well. (Lovorn, 2008) Doyne et. al (2015) in an article "That's Funny: Comedy across the Curriculum" have suggested eighteen activities to teach *comedy* across the curriculum.

Inappropriate humor like humiliating remarks by teachers or insults dissimulated in fun can intimidate assault and can cause tension among students which may further block communication. Jeder (2014) mentions that humor is not always funny, especially when it is abusively used and it passes the ethical boundaries. Black & Forro (1999) points out that some forms of humor have many negative influences such as inhibiting communication, creating tension, triggering fear, stress and depression. According to Loomans & Kolberg (1993) misuse of humor generates an intimidating learning environment that suppresses communication and self esteem. Teachers need to be cautious of tripping over into sarcasm while sarcasm can injure, humor can be elevating. Insensitive humor and humor based on humiliating themes is not desirable to be permitted in the classroom or at home as it weakens the development of good citizenship. The humor should never be aimed at any individual or a particular group; humor reinforcing racial, ethnic and gender stereotypes must be avoided. (Snetsinger & Grabowski, 1993; Forsyth, Alterman & Forsyth, 1997).

"A day without laughter is a day wasted" rightly said by the great artist Charlie Chaplin. He also mentioned "My pain may be the reason for somebody's laugh, but my laugh must never be the reason for somebody's pain." So the teachers must be cautious regarding the use of humor and not cross the ethical boundaries as

digression may result into various negative consequences and destruct the human soul whereas when humor is used in view of moral considerations and embraced as an inventive instructional strategy it becomes a winning formula for the teachers to pursue excellence in teaching.

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