Benefits of Humor in the Classroom

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**Benefits of Humor in the Classroom**

Educators believe that being humorous in the classroom can be a useful skill. It can help students become motivated in their studies, help in comprehension, and help bring up students’ self-esteem. Most importantly humor is known to reduce stress, which can be very beneficial in the classroom. There are many positive results that show humor is beneficial in the classroom. Despite all of the overwhelming research, some educators believe that humor is not appropriate in the classroom (Hooper & Minchew, 2008). Humor is “the ability to be funny or to be amused by things that are funny” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). It should be used in the classroom for more effectiveness of learning and understanding (Wanzer, 1997). Humor benefits students as well as teachers. Teachers find better participation from the student, when they teach with humor. Instructors can have a better rapport with students and better overall liking if students find their teacher humorous. According to Gorham & Christophel, teachers use humor to “reduce tension, to facilitate self-disclosure, to relieve embarrassment, to save face, to disarm others, to alleviate boredom, to gain favor through self-enhancement, to convey good will, or to accomplish some other prosocial goal” (1990, pg. 58). Laughter is known to help with behavioral problems from students. Laughter and humor are universal and extremely important in the learning environment (Goodwin & Judd, 2005).

 Students are more attentive and work harder in the classroom when the teacher incorporates humor with learning. Teachers have found that the student has a better learning outcome and enhanced learning environment (Wanzer, 1997). When teachers are first using humor in their classroom, they have to be aware of their audience. The humor used can differ within an elementary, middle school, high school, or college classroom. If teaching middle school, high school, or college level the humor could be different between the sections of classes. In college, professors find that their enrollment of students could be doubled because of the humorous teaching (Pilkey, 2004).

 When using humor in the classroom teachers should only use positive humor. Negative humor should not be tolerated in the classroom. Negative humor could include sarcasm and cynicism (Freda & Pollak, 1997). Sarcasm is “a mode of satirical wit depending for its effects on bitter, caustic, and often ironic language that is usually directed against an individual (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Being cynical is “doubting or contemptuous of human nature or the motives, goodness, or sincerity of others (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Using negative humor in the classroom can “diminish learning, enhance stereotypes, and limit a person’s perspective” (Freda & Pollak, 1997, pg. 176).

 The purpose of this research study was to discover the effects of humor on the learning environment in an urban, upper elementary classroom setting. Humor will be defined as language or actions that can be interpreted as amusing to others. The nature of this research topic dictated the use of qualitative elements between student and teacher interactions. In the study the researchers looked at, how humor affects students engagement and the different types of humor teachers use in the classroom. The biggest limitation we had in conducting this research project, was limited student access caused by district protocol.

**Humor in the Classroom**

 There are many reasons to use humor in the classroom. According to Skinner and Fowler there are five reasons why teachers should use humor to benefit their classroom and their students. The first reason is students retain more information and learn more when the teacher is using humor while presenting information. Humor is used to enhance achievement of the content. Second, using humor in the classroom promotes and creates a positive environment for learning. It creates a safe climate for learning (2010). Skinner and Fowler say that, “a healthy climate is a setting in which students feel valued, emotionally safe, and free to actively participate and experiment” (Skinner and Fowler, 2010, pg. 20).

The teacher can use humor in the classroom because it maintains the students’ attention. In college classes, students will retain 70 percent of the information in the first 10 minutes. Then students will retain only 20 percent of the information the last 10 minutes of class. Using humor will keep students paying attention and may retain more information when the lecture also includes humor (Skinner and Fowler, 2010).

 When teaching a difficult subject, humor can be very effective. Humor can reduce anxiety; when using humor with teaching a difficult subject it can play a role in facilitating and maintaining interest. The last reason to use humor in the classroom is because students really enjoy it. Students will be more willing to take a class offered by a teacher who integrates humor into the class. Skinner & Fowler state that students will be more likely to give that teacher a better course evaluation, at the college level. Humor can contribute to a healthy learning environment and makes students feel more comfortable in the class (Skinner & Fowler, 2010).

 Although there have not been many studies researched on humor and laughter in the middle school setting, Freda & Pollack believe there is a strong relationship between humor and effective teaching. During the middle school ages students are trying to find the balance of being more consistent and being rebellious. Teachers can help with that process by using positive humor in the classroom and help children achieve that balance (Freda & Pollack, 1997).

 Building a rapport is vital at the middle school level. One very effective way that a teacher can help build a rapport with their students is with humor. If students see a teacher laughing at him/herself or laughing with the students, it can build a positive classroom environment. Students then feel that they can trust their teacher because the teacher has let their guard down. When the teacher builds rapport with the class, it can eliminate a lot of stress from the students and the teacher. When a student is acting out and the teacher confronts the student with humor, it usually will diffuse the student’s problem that they are having and helps refocus the student. When students feel comfortable to laugh with the teacher and laugh together about situations, the students will have a better understanding with the teacher. Teachers should make sure that the humor they are using is appropriate for the classroom and will not offend any students (Freda & Pollack, 1997).

 Teachers need to remember to laugh at themselves also. When a teacher makes a mistake and points it out to the class, it shows the students that everyone makes mistakes and teachers are human. When the teacher does make an error it is important that the teacher does not get mad at the students and is willing to laugh at themselves. When students see teachers willing to admit to their mistakes, it lets the students feel that it is okay to have slip-ups and admit to them as well. Students need to be able to recognize when it is and when it is not okay to laugh at somebody. Having a good teacher role model will help show students when it is appropriate to laugh (Freda & Pollack, 1997).

A humorous classroom can dictate higher self-esteem in the students. When teachers are using humor they are encouraging students to also use humor. When students use humor in the classroom, they are taking a risk. But students could experience temporary setbacks and embarrassing exposure if the humor is not taken correctly. All of these skills can develop better self-esteem and students will eventually learn to laugh at themselves without feeling embarrassed. It is important for students to learn the skill of humor because it is a tool for growth and wisdom (Freda & Pollack, 1997).

**Ways Teachers Can Use Humor**

 Teachers may be uncomfortable when first using humor in the classroom, Weaver II and Cotrell have a list of 10 things a teacher can do to become more comfortable in the classroom:

1. Smile/Be lighthearted.
2. Be spontaneous/ natural.
	1. Relax control a little/ break the routine occasionally.
	2. Be willing to laugh at yourself/ do not take yourself seriously.
3. Foster an informal climate/ be conversational and loose
4. Begin class with a thought for the day, a poem, a short anecdote, or a humorous example.
5. Use stories and experiences that emerge from the subject matter. Use personal experience.
6. Relate things to the everyday life of students. Read the student newspaper. Listen to “their” music and see “their” movies.
7. Plan lectures/ presentations in short segments with humor injected. Plan a commercial break. Use a slideshow.
8. Encourage a give-and-take climate between yourself and students. Play off their comments.
9. Ask students to supply you with some of their jokes, stories, or anecdotes. Share them.
10. Tell a joke or two. Do outrageous things. Admit you are no good at it. Appear human to the students. (Weaver II & Cortrell, 2001, pg. 170).

If a teacher is just starting to use humor in the classroom the first thing they should do is smile and laugh. This shows the students that the teacher is human and they have a fun side. If a teacher has been serious in the past it is probably because they feel they need to stay committed to their discipline and avoid humor. Another reason is because they feel they need to promote a proper and professional image to the students. Students also believe that is extremely important for instructors to go with the flow. Being able to go with the flow and be spontaneous helps students relax in the room and feel more comfortable (Weaver II & Cortrell, 2001).

**How to Use Humor in the Classroom**

While in the class, the teacher could use a variety of techniques to show and demonstrate humor. The instructor could start class with a thought relating to a previous day’s topic, a poem, statement, observation, or a joke. This technique can get the students attention encouraging them to participate from the beginning of class. Teachers who use personal stories and share experience from their lives let students know that teachers were also young once, and they have stories just like the students, but keeping in mind all stories need to remain appropriate. Students tend to open up more and be more comfortable with the teacher when they are using humor. During instruction time, it is important that the teacher breaks up the lecture to allow processing time and effectively deliver content. Students do not enjoy hour long lectures with the teacher non-stop teaching, because they lose interest. If the instructor is able to include humor it will break up the time and keep the students’ attention. When teachers talk about subjects that relate to the students, students are able to create those required connections to the material. If teachers watch television shows, movies, and listen to students’ music, they can more easily connect subject information to the students. This can also show that teachers are able relate to students’ daily issues. (Weaver II & Cortrell, 2001).

One of the most important classroom environments is a “give and take climate”. Many teachers at the college level strictly lecture and do not give time for students to respond or ask questions. Ways to make the classroom environment more positive and engaging is to start asking questions and wait for a response. The teacher could also do short surveys, or break the group up into smaller groups for discussion. Humor can usually start from class discussion and small group discussion. Students will participate in group and small discussion when they feel comfortable. Humor will be likely to make the students more relaxed and comfortable (Weaver II & Cortrell, 2001).

Ways to use humor in the classroom according to Pilkey are create a welcoming entry such as a funny bulletin board. Celebrate days in the classroom such as, National Pizza Month or Rubber Eraser Day. Have students start the day with a daily joke. Let students be comedians also with their writing or oral presentations. Have “Academy Awards” at the end of the school year. Let every student receive an award and have the students give a speech. Make sure to use different humor throughout the year because not everyone enjoys the same type of humor. Different humor methods could include: role playing, rap songs, trivia, students as teachers, and improvising (Pilkey, 2004).

Boerman-Cornell believes that humor is the most powerful tool for teachers to use because it can make students excited about learning. When teachers use humor, the teacher can make the boring topics interesting. He also says that when using humor in the classroom, the teacher has to be careful. The subject used should not be taken anymore lightly because the teacher is using humor. That topic should not be made fun of but humor should be used to make it more fun and easier to learn. Students will use humor in the classroom to gain more confidence. When a student makes a joke and their peers laugh at it gives that student confidence. Laughter is a tool that students and teachers use as a sign of approval. So, if laughter is used wrongly, such as to make fun of someone, that can hurt feelings and it has been used incorrectly. Humor and laughter are needed in the classroom, but it needs to be used in the right way, and not to bring other people down (2000).

Most common uses of humor in the classroom are jokes, riddles, puns, funny stories, and humorous comments (Wanzer, 1997). Trunfio believes that high engagement humor could even include juggling, magic, stand-up, and other skills and techniques. Teachers may feel less likely to do this type of humor because it is more challenging. Turnfio says that this type of humor will engage students in the classroom (2011). In the classroom the teacher could put on plays for the students and hey can put in their own humor. Younger students could also act out the book they read and could dress up in character. This could provide humor to the whole class and would be a fun learning activity (Freda & Pollak, 1997).

When humor is used correctly in the classroom it can be very beneficial to students, when humor is not used correctly it could diminish students’ desire to learn. One of the least beneficial ways to use humor is using sarcasm. Sarcasm can be a form of bullying. Usually most young students are afraid to speak up to their teacher. So, if the student feels bullied by the teacher they will really be discouraged to speak up. Typically, when the student is older, such as middle or high school, the student is more confident and will speak up and tell the teacher. According to Beane, in the 1940’s to the 1960’s the saying was, “Children are to be seen and not heard” (Beane, 2010, pg. 64). This saying shows that teachers could be mean to the students in any form including being sarcastic to the students (2010).

**Research**

Interestingly while researching humor in the classroom, most of the research to see if humor is actually beneficial to the students is usually mostly focusing on college students. There was only one data research study completed on elementary students and two focusing on middle school students. One study focused on what gifted elementary students thought was humorous. This elementary and middle school data study was completed by Jacqueline Dowling. The reason for the research was to see what elementary and middle school students thought was funny (Dowling, 2014).

The development of humor in school age students has a developmental pattern. Second and third graders develop a subjective and concrete humor. This would include slapstick humor, clowning around, word play, and bathroom humor. In fourth and fifth humor goes from prosocial to antisocial jokes. Humor usually comes from peer’s mistakes and opposite gender jokes. Also, sixth graders become cruder, this could include jokes that are more sexual, body humor, and overall grossness humor and jokes (Dowling, 2014, pg. 122).Sixth graders say more sophisticated jokes and riddles because they are developing more of an abstract mind. They are now able to be engaging and can joke with the classroom teacher.

When researching, little information was found on what girls and boys found humorous. Dowling did not find much difference in humor between boys and girls. The differences that were found was that boys ages six to eleven tended to have, “ more frequent laughter, acted silly by clowning around and saying funny things, and showed more hostility in their laughter and humor” (Dowling, 2014, pg. 123). Boys tend to initiate humor more while girls tend to laugh more about the humor. Girls tend to laugh about expression of humor and practical jokes. Boys will laugh more at the mistakes of the other students. Of course every child is unalike and humor will be different for every student (Dowling, 2014).

This study included asking students questions and had focus groups. There were 27 boys’, ages ranging from seven to twelve years. There were 31 girls’ ages ranging from seven to twelve years. The grades included second grade, fourth grade, and sixth grade. The results showed that the “children, boys especially, most often laughed about the minor misfortunes of self, peers, family members, and pets” (Dowling, 2014, pg. 126). The students often laughed at events that they could still describe, such as one student’s father step in cat urine. The participants of this study also found that their own actions were humorous. Some of the students thought back of a time that they did something funny. One of the examples was the student caught the football, fell, and then rolled down the hill. Another time that students will laugh is when something funny just happens randomly. One child said that one time his step mom was vacuuming and the dog ran up and started barking at the vacuum cleaner. This is an example of something obvious happening and the child thought it was humorous (Dowling, 2014).

Other examples of students finding humor in situations in this study included breaking the rules and making others laugh. When students think that the teacher is breaking the rules, they find that very humorous, such as the teacher dancing with the students. Bathroom humor was very funny to the students. Almost all of the students spoke up and told a story or a joke relating to this topic. Most of the students spoke about a television show or movie that included some type of bathroom humor. Some of the television shows that included in this study were *Full House*, *Hannah Montana*, *Suite Life of Zack and Cody*. Books that were considered funny to the students were *Junie B. Jones* series, *Cat in the Hat*, and *Walter the Farting Dog*. Movies that were comical included *Night at the Museum*, *Transformers*, *Wild Hogs*, and *George of the Jungle* (Dowling, 2014).

When students were asked about what humor meant to them, all of the responses included: something that is funny or hilarious and makes you smile or laugh out loud. The second graders had a harder time to give a simple definition for the word humor. The fourth graders after giving the definition of humor, they also responded that humor makes you feel better. The six graders gave the same response but went further and said, “Humor makes you laugh and makes you feel good” (Dowling, 2014, pg. 132).

One data study was found on a classroom of white Irish males. The school that the study was completed in was an all-male school secondary school. The study done by Cliona Barnes, it was to focus on, “strategic use of humor to resist and block challenges in the classroom” (Barnes, 2012, pg. 239). The teacher in the study is a male; he likes to makes jokes to the students. He talks to the students about the sports that they compete, drinking alcohol, and girlfriends. He also uses slang that the students use. He also teases the more out-spoken students in a “good nature” way. The study showed that the male teacher feels that it is very important that the students are on his side in the classroom and that the he is liked (Barnes, 2012).

The teacher works hard to conduct humor in the classroom. He said that he had conflicting feelings about using humor in the classroom. He feels that when he uses humor in the classroom the boys are more off topic more easily and is hard to keep the lesson going. But he feels that humor is important in the classroom because he wants the students to be in a “good mood” and keep coming back to his class. This study showed that boys enjoy humor, but tend to get off topic, and the humor that the boys use can be mean to their classmates. The teacher enjoys using humor but does not like it when the class gets off topic and is mean to other students (Barnes, 2012).

Doris Bergen completed a research study and researched what gifted elementary students thought what was humorous. There has only been a few studies done that related to humor and gifted students. The purpose of this research was to see the characteristics of gifted student’s humor. The study was for only gifted students and parents had to sign for the student to participate. There were 74 children that participated, 40 males and 34 females, between grades four to six. Children came from seven different schools. Because there was such an age gap between fourth and sixth grade, the students were put into two different age groups. One group was ages seven to nine, the second group was ages 10-12. Throughout this study students needed to explain what they found funny, evaluate their own sense of humor, and solve riddles. The first part of the interview as questions, the questions were what is your favorite funny television show, book, and why you think that is funny. Then next part consisted of student’s self-report. They had to answer 18 questions relating to how funny they believe they are. The last part was when the students had to figure out the “punch line” to five riddles. They were given up to three hints, if needed (Bergen, 2009).

The result of the first question was answered by the students with many responses. Some of the response to the child’s favorite television show was *The Amanda Show*, *Ed, Edd*, *and Eddy*, *Friends*, and the most popular show was *Sponge Bob Square Pants*. When the students were asked why they believed their show were humorous 77 percent of students responded saying because the character did an incongruous act. There were 39 books that students thought were funny. Harry Potter had the most votes and Captain Underpants was second. Sadly, 15 percent of students have not read any books that they found humorous. Just as the television shows, the reason the book made the student laugh was because of incongruous action that the character did. When the students were asked what makes them laugh at school, 71 percent of students said when a classmate or a teacher did an incongruous act. When at home the children are home, 79 percent of students said that an incongruous act from a family member has made them laugh. When students needed to say a joke, 90 percent of students said the joke correctly and 70 percent of students could explain why the joke was funny (Bergen, 2009).

The students rated themselves very funny. On a five point scale, five being the funniest, the average of the students was almost a four. It did not matter if the children were younger, older, male, or female, all students rank themselves very high. It was found that girls tend to laugh at funny situations and laugh at the situation, but they try not to funny. When the students had to answer riddles only one percent of the students did not solve the riddle after receiving four hints. About 40 percent of students solved the riddle after getting two hints. The results of this study showed that humor “age group differences did not show significance on any item except one” (Bergen, 2009, pg. 432). This study cannot compare humor between gifted students and typically developing students because the Bergen only focused on gifted students (Bergen, 2009).

**Research of Humor Benefits in the Classroom**

While researching there was only information for techniques to use humor while teaching language arts. When trying to find research for math and other subjects, it was not available and not any research had been completed on those subjects. Language arts can easily incorporate humor in the specific topics. Students can build a higher vocabulary because they can be using a new humorous expression for the assignment. Hopper and Minchew state that idioms and adages are great and that they provide humor. Teachers can also use humor to teach poetry. When teaching poetry, teachers tend to stay focused on the seriousness of poems. But there are many poems in the world that are humorous along with serious. In everyday writing, humor could be included. Many times students focus writing on the seriousness and do not realize that they can write about items or times in their lives that make them laugh (Hopper & Minchew, 2008).

There are many activities to do in a classroom that can include humor, one technique to make language arts more fun and enjoyable is incorporating a skit that Johnny Carson would do on his television show. The skit was called “How Hot was it?” This can be used in the classroom if a student is struggling or for the students for a writing assignment. It brings different ideas for the paper and can also be very funny in the classroom. With the students permission, the teacher will read a sentence from their paper, “I was very tired when I returned from our vacation trip”, then the rest of the class response, “how tired were you?” Then the writer of the paper will say all the ways she was tired, when she gets stuck that is when the rest of the class can shout out other ways that she was tired. This technique works well because students will use descriptive words and it is a group activity so everyone can be involved (Hopper & Minchew, 2008).

One way to teach correct writing techniques can be shown to the students by using the grammar words incorrectly. William Safire wrote a book to show how teachers can use techniques to teach language arts in the class, here is a list to teach students the correct way of writing a paper by using the incorrect form:

1. No sentence fragments.
2. Avoid run-on sentences they are hard to read.
3. Use the semicolon properly, always use it where it is appropriate; and never where it isn’t.
4. Reserve the apostrophe for its proper use and omit when it’s not needed.
5. Don’t use contractions in formal writing.
6. Don’t overuse exclamation points!!!
7. Never, ever use repetitive redundancies.
8. If any word is improper at the end of a sentence, a linking verb is.

When incorporating humor with a subject, it is important for the students to know when you a kidding are being serious. The list above is little jokes for what not to do when writing. If a student did not know that list is ways not to write a paper, they could use it as a guide and not know what is right and wrong for writing (Safire, 1990).

**Types of Humor That Should Not Be Used**

 Sarcasm is usually hard to understand and is easily mistaken for what the teacher usually meant. Most times sarcasm is mean and hurtful to the students. Even if the teacher meant for the sarcastic remark to be joking the students may not take it that way and could be offended by the remark. John Dewey is a philosopher for education and social reform. He believes in self-disciplined freedom and support that students need to be learning knowledge from the teacher but also students need to take their own experience into account. Dewey prompted this question, “How can an 11 year-old child (or a student of any age) be excited about learning when his or her teacher’s actions, attitudes, beliefs, and values devalue curiosity and promote unquestioned compliance?” (Beane, 2010).

 Many times when teachers or administrators use sarcasm they use it because they are surprised by the student’s actions or behavior. How teachers respond may determine the students perception, Beane gives some examples of sarcasm used by teachers. “What’s the matter with you? Ever since school started you have been late for everything including going home! Can’t you ever be on time?” The next example, “Next time we do math try to open your book to the right page!” These are both examples of sarcasm and both could be said in a different way such as, “I’ve noticed you’ve been late to classes since school started three days ago. How about meeting after lunch today for a few minutes and you can tell me what is going on.” Another way to say the next example is lean over to the student and talk in a whisper and say, “Can I see you after math today for a minute or two before you head to reading?” Eliminating sarcasm and saying it the different way can show the student that the teacher does care. The student may share with the teacher if something is happening in their lives because they feel safe and comfortable. Beane believes that by getting rid of teachers using sarcasm in the classroom, students may become better motivated in the classroom, and become more passionate and more “inspired” learners (2011).

**Humor Helps Physically and Mentally**

 Besides humor helping in the classroom, humor can help teachers and students physically. It can improve the bodies by improved respiration and circulation. Humor lowers a humans pulse, blood pressure, and also exercises the chest muscles. It also increases the oxygen in the blood and releases endorphins into the bloodstream. Using laughter and humor in the classroom reduces anxiety, relieve stress, and helps mental sharpness. By using humor in the classroom it helps the teachers and students physically and mentally (Garner, 2006).

**Improves Overall Performance in Class**

 Humor is known to be beneficial in the classroom environment but it also can increase student’s overall performance on exams and quizzes. Teachers use humor to get rid of the students test anxiety. The teacher could read the students a sample question and make it humorous. Students will then laugh and help them calm down and reduce anxiety right before handing out the test (Hopper & Minchew, 2008). It is also known to increase student’s comprehension on the tests and quizzes. A study was completed to see if humor really does help with classroom performances. The study also shows if it enhances test scores on the three levels of Bloom’s taxonomy. The three levels of Bloom’s taxonomy include knowledge, comprehension, and application. This study was done at the college level. To see if humor benefits students was researched through six quizzes in a social psychology course. The quizzes assessed the learning from the three levels of Blooms taxonomy. There were 18 males and 33 females, who were involved with this study (Blankmeyer, Garczynski, Hackathorn, Solomom, & Tennial, 2011).

 The teacher throughout the semester taught with and without humor. The humor that was included in the lecture was puns, jokes, riddles, personal anecdotes, and multi-media. The lectures that included with humor were about 40 percent of the lecture. There were six quizzes given throughout the semester. The results showed that when the teacher used humor the scores were higher than when the teacher did not use humor. With the results it shows that using humor is very beneficial to the students but also beneficial to the knowledge and comprehension level on the Bloom’s taxonomy. Interestingly, humor does not benefit to the application level on Bloom’s taxonomy. Some student’s performed the same on all of the quizzes, showing that humor did or did not make it better or worse for the students. The conclusion from this study showed that humor does improve students learning. It is also beneficial to the classroom. It shows that when the teacher does provide humor in the lecture, the students are more likely to pay attention and helps fight boredom in lecture because students pay more attention (Blankmeyer, Garczynski, Hackathorn, Solomom, & Tennial, 2011).

 Garner conducted a survey to college level students. It included both male and female, the class that conducted the survey was to see if humor does increase students’ performance in statistics class. There was a series of three 40 minute lecture. One group was in the non-humor lecture and the other group was in the humor lecture. In the humor group, the teacher stopped at minute 15 and 35 and told a joke. The jokes were already planned and the teacher knew what joke he had to deliver. After the lecture all of the students would complete a brief survey about the assessment of the class, overall opinion of the class, and impression of the instructor (Garner, 2006).

 The results of the study show that the retention of the lecture was extremely high for the group that was included with humor. It also showed that humor “can have a positive effect on student enjoyment and content retention” (Garner, 2006, pg. 179). With this study it showed that with humor in the classroom it can relax the atmosphere and provides a break for the students and the teacher. Also, it shows that you do not have to have a lot of jokes in the classroom to make an impact. This 40 minute lecture only included two jokes and it had an impact on the students remembering the information (Garner, 2006).

**Conclusion**

When looking for research that related to humor in the classroom, it was hard to find studies for elementary students, middle school, and high school. Most of the students were college age. I could only find one gender based study and it was for white males. I could not find any that was for only girls. There were a couple of studies that were based for middle and elementary students. These studies included both males and females. I was not able to find any studies that focused on high school students. Most of the studies said it can be difficult to see if humor does really benefit the classroom because everyone finds different humor funny.

 There is some research that proves that humor is beneficial for the classroom and for overall improvement of health. I feel that it is very important to include humor in the classroom, because it can relax students, reduce test anxiety, and improve the overall mood of the classroom. There is many ways to add humor to the classroom, such as using jokes during lecture, creating humorous bulletin boards, or include humor in student’s assignments. Teachers could include humor in the beginning of class or throughout the lecture. The instructor could provide jokes, make puns, or dress up as a character. When a teacher includes humor in their teaching it does not have to be humorous the whole time. Many times teachers feel that they cannot be funny to the class because the lecture has to be humorous the whole time. This is not the case, just adding one or two jokes in the lecture will help students pay better attention and retain more information (Blankmeyer, Garczynski, Hackathorn, Solomom, & Tennial, 2011). The humor that the teacher uses should never bring down a student and the remark should never be sarcastic. Most students are not able to read sarcasm correctly, so many times the student will take the sarcastic remark wrong and their feelings will be hurt (Freda & Pollak, 1997, pg. 176).

 Sadly, some college instructors still believe that humor does not belong in the classroom because they believe the subject they teach is too serious for humor. The professors feel that including jokes is just a distraction to the students and that they are here to learn, not to hear jokes (Garner, 2006). Most college students agree that instructors should not be allowed to tell filthy jokes, embarrass students, or use sexist language. This is because it can bring a student’s confidence down (Check, 1986, pg. 333).

 Teachers will use humor to “reduce tension, to facilitate self-disclosure, to relieve embarrassment, to save face, to disarm others, to alleviate boredom, to gain favor through self-enhancement, to convey good will, or to accomplish some other prosocial goal” (Gorham & Christophel, 1990, pg. 58). Humor is beneficial to teachers and students it makes the classroom environment relaxed. Also, students will pay better attention in class and will work harder in the classroom when the teacher incorporates humor with learning. Teachers have found that the student has a better learning outcome and enhanced learning environment (Wanzer, 1997).

**Methods**

**Participants:**

 This research was conducted on 16 teachers in an urban middle school, teaching grades five through eight. The participants were from varying subject areas. The surveyed teachers have been teaching anywhere from one year to over 30 years. Teachers were recruited to complete the questionnaire using the district teacher communication forum. The questionnaire was available for teachers to take at their convenience for two weeks on the site. The in-class research observations were completed in three different classrooms; 5th grade Math, 7th grade Math, and 8th grade Language Arts. The classrooms were selected based on teacher willingness to allow for observation.

**Procedures:**

 The researchers created a questionnaire over Humor in the Classroom and posted it to a school’s teacher communication forum website for two weeks before no longer accepting responses. The researchers provided explicit details regarding the reasoning for the study. The participants were able to take the questionnaire at their convenience. Participants were able to answer the questionnaire with more than one response per question. Some responses overlapped. Participants were never asked to identify themselves by name. During the classroom observations, one researcher spent approximately one hour in each classroom. One classroom was recorded using a video tape recording device, while the others observations were of note taking strategies. Questionnaire results varied based on the teacher and particularly the grade level of the students. When doing in-class research, the use of humor and type of humor varied to meet the needs of the student age. The research questionnaire asked teachers questions regarding types of humor used in their classroom, how it benefits student engagement, and what they use humor for most. Participants were also provided an area to provide detailed comments that they deemed beneficial to this study.

**Results:**

 After the research participants finished the questionnaire, the results were sent to the research team immediately. The researchers were able to sort through the results and identify common trends throughout the participant responses. The participant responses determined there was a correlation between teachers using humor in the classroom and student engagement for an upper elementary/middle school urban classroom.

 Due to the focus school’s district protocol for research conduction, we had limited access to student opinion regarding humor in the classroom. The researchers also had limited access to the classrooms that were able to be observed and recorded due to state testing preparation and state testing schedules.

 The analysis of the data yielded various themes and trends between teachers and humor in the classroom. When asked about the types of humor used within their classroom, out of 16 participants, 13 responded to using sarcasm. 10 participants responded to using jokes; two responded to using riddles, idioms, and puns. Participants use humor within their classroom by acting out the jokes, using funny faces, laughing at themselves, being silly, and using creative voices. One participant said that “unintended humor is the best humor to use within the classroom”. Participants responded to using various comic strips, YouTube videos, jokes of the week, slapsticks, and attention grabbers as differing methods for using humor in the classroom. During the observation, the researcher was able to watch the participating teacher use sarcasm as a bell ringer assignment. Students are not allowed to have gum in the school, so to poke fun at the students the participating teacher created a word problem about how much money is spent on gum per day per week per year by the students.

 Participants were asked to describe how they think humor affects their students’ engagement. Many of the respondents felt that using humor made the teacher relatable and made it easier for students to see the teacher as human. One participant said, “Using humor helps us get a common ground where we can both laugh even for a second we connect. This allows the doors of communication and trust to open for deeper learning experiences. Students will not process if they feel closed or shut down.” Many participants felt that using humor makes the teacher more approachable and allows the students to feel comfortable. One participant also said it was important for students to see humor being used appropriately between teachers.

 During the analysis of the data, researchers determined that the respondents used different amounts of humor depending on the group of students. One respondent felt that using humor with the special education students was difficult because they require background knowledge and sometimes the teacher has to explain the joke. A small group of teachers responded to using humor the least with their English language learners, because it is difficult to explain the joke to students learning the language. Another participant responded to not using humor with advanced students because there is such a focus on the content.

 

 

**Discussion:**

 In doing this research, we found that using humor can be very beneficial in providing a positive learning environment and that humor can be a powerful teaching tool in the classroom. Humor causes teachers to have a stronger, positive interaction with students and that results in a great student-teacher relationship. There are many different types of humor that have been identified and explored in this research. Some of them were: humor related to class material, funny stories (hopefully related to the content), humorous comments, self-disparaging humor, unplanned humor (spontaneous, unintentional), jokes, riddles, puns, funny props, and visual illustrations. Humor encourages students to be more open with their peers and teacher; it also improves their retention of the presented material. From the results we also learned humor should be used in moderation. Too much humor can result in a loss of respect, a hostile classroom environment, and sometimes deter away from learning objectives being met. Another thing mentioned, was that some of the teachers indicated that they don't use humor with advanced students but did not state why. From the previous literature review, sarcasm was stated as the worst form of humor to use as a teacher in the classroom but some of teachers that were surveyed admitted to still using this it.

**Observation Notes**

Observation Notes

Advanced Math

3/5 1:30-2:45

* · Funny voices to keep students engaged
* · Fun math stations activity to help students enjoy practicing math skills. Played music
* · Student was looking for her eraser during test time and teacher jokingly said “she ate it”
* · It was more towards the end of the day and the students had to take a math test so the teacher didn’t do much of teaching.
* · She plays a “Guess” game at the end of the day.
* · A guy teacher came in and “danced for a cupcake during after school program
* · Simplify- “simply-fly”

 Math

3/26 11-11:45

* · Some of the students like to chew gum during class, which isn’t allowed, so the teacher started the block with a problem solving story as the bell ringer. The problem challenges the students to figure how much money they would spend on gum per day, week, and month for a year if they spent 50 cents on each piece of gum. The teacher really just wanted the students to realize how much money they are wasting trying to chew gum during class because they eventually get caught with it.
* · Due to time purposes, the teacher had to move quickly through the real math bell ringer of the day before the students were sent to lunch.

 3/26 11:45-12:30

* · As I walked into class the students were having a group discussion on “things that annoy me”. The teacher shared his thoughts then allowed the students to jokingly share theirs.
* · Shared videos clips/scenes from *Family Guy* and *Seinfeld...*they were appropriate!
* · It was funny and something the students could relate to because all of them watch the TV shows.
* · The teacher jokingly shared “I hate when a student of mines act like they don’t understand English”. One of the students knew that the teacher was directing this comment towards him and his reaction sort of showed that he was kind of sad that the teacher called him out. This can be shown as sarcasm.
* · The writing prompt for the day is based off the class discussion and the students are to write about “things that annoy them”.
* · The teacher starts the timer of 15 minutes for students to write but 2 minutes in some students are still talking across the room laughing and sharing ideas.
* · Shows how humor sometimes can cause a distraction if it is not well controlled. Their needs to be an on/off button.
* · Students starts to jokingly express their ideas in regards to their classmates. Saying” I hate when Susie says….…or its annoying when Jake does……!”
* · Some of the students then start to argue back and forth
* · With 6 minutes left, the teacher then gets the class under control and quiet for the remainder of the writing time.

**Conclusion:**

With the data compiled, we found that there are many positive results that show that humor is beneficial in the classroom. For example, when teachers use humor students learn more, build a better relationship with their teacher, reduce stress, and encourage creativity in lesson planning. While there are many benefits to using humor in the classroom, teachers have to understand more about how to use it as an instructional tool and how it operates in the classroom. The manner in which humor is delivered also affects how it is received by students. Instructors delivering humor through sarcasm may be defeating the purpose usually served by humor. Teachers are great role models therefore should use appropriate humor in the classroom to be an example and also enhance learning. The thoughtful use of humor by instructors can definitely contribute to teaching effectiveness.

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