

Using Humour in the Classroom to Create Positive Teaching-Learning Environment

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of the present paper is to discuss and analyse the use of humour in today's classrooms. This paper also attempts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how humour can be employed in teaching-learning process thus contributing to learning. We all know that teaching is a very important and serious work, but teachers do not have to be serious to be effective teachers. In simple words, they are not supposed to be humourless. Humour, like beauty, is in the eye / ears of the beholder. It is funny if our students feel/perceive/ so. Alfred E. Smith rightly said that "If you can make people laugh, you can make them think, and make them like and believe you" It is humour that can develop a good rapport between teachers and students, which is also one of the important characteristics of good teachers. Students not only learn a great deal from humorous teachers, but they also enjoy the process of learning.

Humour in the classroom is especially helpful in the present environment of cut throat competition, where both the students and the teachers are under pressure and stress. Apart from this, some other unprecedented challenges for learners and teachers are also to be taken care of. Keeping all these challenges in mind, it would be beneficial for everyone, if humour is a part of the teaching-learning process. Present author believes that use of humour would bring a sense of pleasure and create a common, positive emotional experience that the students would share with each other and the teacher. A teaching-learning environment would be created where there is acceptance, unconditional positive regards, teachers are receptive and learners are active. Humour in various forms like healthy jokes, funny cartoons, funny stories, funny videos, funny pictures, funny stories, or funny experiences related to topic would bring positive results in the creation of conducive and positive teaching-learning environment.

1. Introduction

We cannot deny the fact that there would be better learning with the creation of a positive learning environment. The use of humour in the classroom can help to create a more positive learning environment by breaking down barriers to communication between the teacher and the taught. Barriers between the teacher and the taught are barriers to learning. Psychological wall between the teacher and the students can be broken with the help of sensible and decent humour. There are many differences between teachers and students such as position, title, age and other consideration that create natural barriers to communication and learning that must be broken down by teachers for effective teaching with the help of humour.

Humour is defined as an attitude, a perspective, a set of skills, techniques, strategies that can help learners in their better academic achievement. Laughter is the best medicine in stressful situations (Penson, Partridge, Rudd, Seiden, Nelson, Chabner & Lynch, 2005). Describing the importance of humour, Charlie Chaplin rightly said, "A day without laughter is a day wasted"

Humour improves the relationship between learners and teachers (Aylor & Opplinger, 2003; Ulloth, 2003).

Humour creates a relaxed and free atmosphere where learning can be enhanced. When learners are free, relaxed, thinking becomes eminent. Tensed environment is a stumbling block for thinking. Use of humour clearly differentiates effective and ineffective teachers. Humour is considered as an effective tool for effective teaching (Jeder, 2015). Humour is advocated

to facilitate learning (Chabeli, 2008). Contributes to a positive learning environment and for creating a more personalized class environment (Anderson, 2011). Identified as a teaching technique for developing a positive learning environment (Kher, Molstad & Donahue, 1999), improved communication with students (Golchi & Jamali, 2011), Humour strengthens the memory helping in learning (Casper, 1999), essential to teaching and learning (Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977), contribute to positive classroom, to class unity and learning (Kristmanson, 2000). Enhances students' learning (Strean, 2011; Abdullah & Akhter, 2015; Alatalo & Poutiainen, 2016). And an effective way to ensure effective teaching and learning. It is a motivating factor and also an effective pedagogical teaching technique (Nadeem, 2012; Alka, 2017). It softens classroom atmosphere and creates a positive climate in the classroom, allowing an appropriate learning environment (Lei et al., 2010; Jeder, 2015). Improving learning (McCabe, Sprute & Underdown, 2017). Humour can aid meaningful learning (Garner, 2006).

Humour and creativity are related and there is a connection between Ha Ha and Aha. (Goodman, 1995). It is physically not possible to laugh and snore at the identical time (Berk, 1998).

By teaching students to be able to laugh at themselves, teachers are indirectly teaching students how to cope in the real world for survival, in this way humour is one of the most important survival skills we have.

2. Positive humour

Positive humour refers to an attitude or perspective that reduces the tensed environment in class. Learners are relaxed,

open and feel accepted. The atmosphere is more sociable and learners can talk to each other in class freely without feeling intimidated by the teacher. The teacher who makes use of humour, motivate learners and promote learning, making teacher more approachable and appealing to learners. Learners experience learning with enjoyment and thus thinking and creativity takes place (Goodman, 2005). Research on humour in education reveals that humour affects students physically it relaxes muscles, stimulates blood circulation, improves respiration, exercises the lungs, chest muscles, controls hormones that relieve stress, strengthens immune system, increases the production of endorphins, and lowers the blood pressure (Berk, 1996; Berk, 2002; Caron, 2002; Mahoney, 2000). The evidences on humour in education reveals that humour also affects students psychologically as it decreases anxiety, stress, tension, improves self-esteem and morale, increases motivation, curiosity, comprehension, and thereby improving the quality of life (Anderson & Arnould, 1989; Bennett, 2003; Berk, 1996; Garner, 2006; Philaretou, 2006; Stambor, 2006). Humour is useful in creating bonding, influence, motivate it relieves tension and works as best stress mitigator (Michalik, & Sznicer 2017). Pleasure arising due to humour causes the release of endorphins which influence feelings and thinking, creating a state of alertness and increased memory (Fry, 2002). It has a positive effect on learning (Chabeli, Malesela, & Rasepae, 2014).

3. Positive Effects of Humour

Research reveals that use of humour results in increased heartbeat and deep respiration, allowing for strong blood flow to the brain. As one's brain receives more oxygenated blood, an increased sense of arousal and alertness occurs (Tortora & Derrickson, 2010). Humour reduces anxiety, tension and stress (Berk 2000). Humour can increase motivation, can enhance self-esteem, can also enhance learning and improving the recalling power of learners. (Garner, 2006). Humour unleashes creative thinking (Korobkin, 1988). It can also decrease academic stress, anxiety toward subject matter (Korobkin, 1988). Appropriate use of humour may benefit students, making them relaxed, leading to improved performance of students (Berk, 2000). Humour can make complicated issues easy to comprehend and digest (Ridanpaa, 2014). Humour can establish a positive learning environment (Ocon 2015). Humour can clarify points, increase understanding and retention. It can be used to provide relief in a tensed class (Billings & Halstead, 2009). Humour works as a psychological tool that helps students cope with stress and sometimes laughter is the best medicine (Check, 1997). Research shows that humour enhances students' health by alleviating pain and psychological discomfort (Check, 1997). Humour can be beneficial to classroom learning (Fisher, 1997). Humour sets the tone for a more relaxed atmosphere resulting in the creation of a positive climate conducive to learning (Pollak & Freda, 1997).

The absence of humour may be an indicator of poor bonding for a group (Korobkin 1988). Absence of humour creates a tensed learning environment resulting in decreased learners' participation in learning (Chabeli, Malesela, & Rasepae, 2014).

Negative humour: Negative humour is disruptive and can divide learners (Kelly, 2005). Several studies (i.e., Garner, 2006; Wanzer, Frymier, Wojtaszczyk, & Smith, 2006; Shatz & Coil, 2008; Anderson, 2011) indicated that positive humour is related to increasing students' perceptions of learning and the learning environment, whereas negative humour can negatively influence students' learning.

Further, too much use of humour in the classroom distracts learning (Quinn & Hughes, 2013). Inappropriate, unhealthy jokes targeting any caste, creed, culture or group give invitation to conflict in the class and a loss of interest in learning (Chabeli, Malesela, & Rasepae, 2014). Too much humour destroys intended purpose of humour (Story & Butts, 2010).

4. Advantages of Using Humour in the Classroom

1. Humour reduces stress and tension in the classroom. A reduction of tension and stress in addressing troublesome material. Jokes may be used simply to relieve stress or to make the teacher seem approachable. Helping learners cope with stress and anxiety (Check, 1997; Chabeli, Malesela, & Rasepae, 2014).
2. It develops good understanding between teachers and taught. A psychological wall which is not easily visible, but it is there can be broken with the humour (Tirupati, 2013).
3. Humour builds a learning relationship through the joyful and perfect matching of head and heart.
4. Improves retention of information
5. Promotes creative understanding.
6. Non-threatening environment is maintained by the use of humour in the classroom. This is crucial for promoting meaningful learning (Gravett, 2005).
7. Creation of a positive social and emotional learning environment giving a flip to increase in learning. The use of humour in the classroom can help to create a more positive learning environment by breaking down barriers to communication between the teacher and the students. These barriers are in fact the barriers to learning. Teachers must break them in order to be effective.
8. Learners are self-motivated.
9. There is a tremendous effect on the attendance of the students with the use of humour.
10. Improving the test performance of learners. Humour improves performance in exams (Hackathorn, Garczynski, Blankmeyer, Tennial, & Solomon, 2011).
11. An increase of interest in learning thereby increasing participation in learning process. Humour encourages the participation of learner in learning process.
12. Humour can improve attitudes, boost morale, and increase self-esteem making the learners self confident.
13. The creation of a strong psychological bond between students and teachers. Strong relationship between teachers and students is essential for congenial atmosphere in the class.
14. Humour develops positive attitude among students.
15. Humour can promote a sense of acceptance in the classroom.

16. Humour can promote students to think in creative and divergent ways. It helps learners in generating ideas, resulting in making learners creative and imaginative. An increase in divergent thinking. Divergent thinking is an important element in creativity which involves a new way of looking at things which enhances problem solving skills of learners (Martin, 2007). And humour promotes creative and divergent thinking (Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997).
17. Improvement in physical and psychological (mental) health, absence of negative emotions resulting in enhancing students' self-perception.
18. Work hard to learn subject matters. Humour creates opportunities to have rest, relax and understand the difficult matter. Humour helps in comprehension; helping the learner to understand the content better as it becomes simpler for them. Difficult concepts become easy for learners.
19. Development of group feeling among learners by building group or class cohesion.
20. Reduces self consciousness.
21. Humour is best food for imagination.
22. Prepare open-minded students. Learners feel free to engage and propose solutions to each other.
23. When teachers have a good sense of humour and they use it properly, students become good listeners.
24. Students are less afraid and inhibited about asking questions or making comments/suggestions, giving alternative solutions in humorous environment (Chabeli, Malesela, & Rasepae, 2014).
25. Failure is taken as learning experiences. A teacher who makes mistakes and is willing to admit it or laugh at himself/herself when this happens it is indirectly a lesson for the students that it is also okay for them to make mistakes and to be creative, take chances, look at the things in different perspective, and even making mistakes in the learning process is acceptable.
26. Humour assists in the development of problem-solving attitude among learners. Humour in teaching develops the learner's thinking and reasoning power thereby improving their ability to analyse situations so that they can apply their existing knowledge to new problematic situations.
27. Humour helps learners construct their own understanding (Dormann & Biddle, 2006).
28. Humour helps learners in making meaningful connections, leading to better learning.
29. Humour promotes integration of theory and practice to enable learners to apply what they have learnt. Transferring their theoretical knowledge into practical, real and natural settings.
30. Humour helps learner to think and move beyond the four walls of the classroom and look at the problem in a new, different and broader perspective.

5. Physiological Benefits from Humour are

Humour is directly or indirectly useful in the classroom in the following ways:

1. Relaxes muscles and reduces pain (Mimi M. Y. Tse et al. 2010).
2. Stimulates blood circulation.

3. Good for Heart (Miller, n.d).
4. Improving respiration.
5. Exercises the lungs.
6. Exercises the chest muscles.
7. Increases the production of endorphins hormone.
8. Making the immune system strong.
9. Stimulates the cardiovascular system (Miller, n.d).
10. Lowers the blood pressure (Peeples, 2017, O'Riordan, 2008).

6. Precautions of Using Humour in the Classroom

1. Do not to make the classroom, a "comedy circus" where students are not taking anything seriously.
2. The use of humour should not distract learners from the seriousness of the subject matter being discussed. Humour usage is to attract the learners towards subject.
3. There is a fine line between the sensible use of humour and its overuse or misuse. An effective teacher should know what humour is and what is not and one should not cross this line.
4. Dark/negative humour that involves embarrassing students should not be used by teachers. Unhealthy jokes can make students feel uncomfortable in the class.
5. Only 'no hurt' humour should be acceptable. Sarcasm should never be given a place in the school. Humour should not be hurtful or offensive – humour is something on which everyone can laugh. The humour is non-hostile and non-derisive of others. When considering the use of humour, a teacher needs to consider the subject, tone, intent, and the situation.
6. Avoiding comments/statements that are regarded as not appropriate or insensitive to any specific student or group or any culture, any caste or creed etc.
7. Humour that is bouncer, students simply do not get because of the simple reason, that is, they lack the necessary background to understand it.
8. Avoid humour which is irrelevant to the subject matter. All the humorous statements or activity must be deeply related with the concept under discussion.
9. Humour that includes disturbing, violent, or sexual content or references to any caste creed, religion or group should not be used. It should be kept in mind that humour that isolates is not humour in real sense.
10. Humour does not remain humorous when it is delivered in an awkward way. Proper delivery of humour is also important.
11. Use yourself as an example – Sharing a personal story or citing a personal experience and tying it to the subject under discussion opens up discussion in the class and the potential for students to share their experiences.
12. Humour involving personal attacks on students or groups should be avoided.
13. Teachers should resist the temptation to be humorous at someone else's expense.
14. Humour should be a small part of the teachers' overall interactions with students.

7. Conclusion

Humour is essential for mental well being of the learners and can reduce anxiety and stress, thereby helping learners to learn difficult subjects easily. Use of humour will benefit teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders in education as it will help in the creation of conducive atmosphere which will make the classroom interactive, engaging and free from tension, anxieties and stress. The students will love learning, the teachers will love teaching, and parents will see improvement in the learners and more acceptances for learning.

Humour is useful in reinforcing group values, creating bonding, inculcating team spirit, it can be used to persuade, motivate, influence, unite and for expressing criticism without being abrasive. It will be useful in crisis situations as it relieves tension and is one of the best stress mitigators. It helps learners to face challenges coming in their way rather than running away and succumbing to it. It can also serve as a tool to defuse conflicts among learners and teachers. Presence of humour makes working atmosphere more enjoyable.

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Therefore, an awareness of the use of humour in the classroom is critical for making teaching learning process effective.

Using humour does not mean that a teacher lacks discipline and forgetting what is his/her role and main aim in the classroom resulting in not being able to have proper classroom management or control in the classroom. This will give invitation to indiscipline. Ensuring discipline should be the top priority of a teacher irrespective of the teaching approach used by him. Therefore, all the teachers must be careful as far as the negative effect as well as the effect of the absence of humour is concerned. It is necessary to be balanced in approach. Therefore teachers should carefully use humour with proper planning, otherwise it may prove to be a wrong medicine.

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