Critical and Creative Thinking and Humor

Regina Temple

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A Thesis Presented

by

REGINA TEMPLE

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies and Research of the University of Massachusetts at Boston in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

September 1992

Critical and Creative Thinking Program
CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING AND HUMOR

A Thesis Presented

by

REGINA TEMPLE

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ABSTRACT
CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING AND HUMOR
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REGINA TEMPLE, B.A., MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF ART
M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AT BOSTON
Directed by: Professor Delores Gallo

Schools need to be more creative in helping students devise adaptive methods so they can meet the challenges of the future. Critical thinking behaviors, such as the ability to analyze, compare/contrast, and evaluate, and creative thinking behaviors, such as fluency, flexibility, and originality, are needed to solve the complex problems which students face in today's world. This thesis suggests the idea that humor, particularly humor resulting from the recognition and resolution of incongruity, found in jokes, puns, metaphors, and visual representations, is related to and can facilitate the basic processes of critical and creative thinking, and hence facilitate complex problem solving.

This thesis examines the importance of finding ways to initiate humor into the educational experience by incorporating humor into the classroom and by incorporating it into critical and creative thinking activities. Humor is intrinsically enjoyable, facilitates retention, aids in coping with frustration and stress and is a mechanism for cultivating adaptive methods. The
teacher who uses humor makes learning more interesting and enjoyable and promotes a student's intellectual, social and emotional development. In order to teach for critical and creative thinking, instruction using and including the development of humor should be considered as both an appropriate goal and a motivating pedagogical strategy.

This thesis also suggests the relationship between humor and critical and creative thinking. Summarized are the three historical explanations of the origins of humor: superiority theory, relief theory and incongruity theory. Current research in critical and creative thinking as well as problem solving is explored. The psychological and sociological theories together with the functions of humor in relation to critical and creative thinking and problem solving are examined and elaborated upon.

Presented in this thesis are the results of a student survey which focused on the impact that humor had on classroom environment, on student attitude toward the teacher, and on student learning and memory. The results support the positive impact of humor on student learning. In conclusion, I describe the ways in which I use humor in my classroom to create a positive climate, to prevent and deal with management problems, and to facilitate learning curricula.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Youth growing up in today's world face many complex problems. Critical thinking behaviors, such as the ability to analyze, compare/contrast, and evaluate, and creative thinking behaviors, such as fluency, flexibility, and originality, are needed to solve complex problems. The first goal of this thesis is to suggest the idea that humor, particularly humor resulting from the recognition and resolution of incongruity, found in jokes, puns, metaphors, and visual representations, is related to and can facilitate the basic processes of critical and creative thinking, and hence facilitate complex problem solving. To date, little discussion has occurred regarding the role of humor in the development of critical and creative thought processes.

A secondary goal of this thesis is to examine the importance of finding ways to initiate humor into the educational experience by incorporating humor into the classroom environment, and by incorporating it into critical and creative thinking activities. It is important to help children develop a sense of humor. As Morreall (1987) notes "One of the most obvious traits of unimaginative, doctrinaire people is their lack of humor" (203).
Rationale

Humor is not only intrinsically enjoyable, it facilitates retention (Bryant-Jennings, 1988). By introducing it into the classroom, the teacher makes learning more interesting and enjoyable. Therefore, if one wishes to teach for critical and creative thinking, instruction using and including the development of humor is both an appropriate goal and a motivating pedagogical strategy.

In addition, researchers have documented that humor is a powerful catalyst in reducing frustration and stress among those who are learning new material (Adams, 1974; Bradford, 1964; Earls, 1972). Children whose sense of humor is cultivated throughout their education will be equipped with an important coping skill which can add to their intellectual, social and emotional development.

Our society is one in which change is rapid and pervasive. Schools need to be more creative in helping students devise adaptive methods so that they can meet the unforeseen challenges of the future. The work of several theorists (Adams, 1986; Koestler, 1964; Ziv, 1984) suggests that humor is one mechanism for cultivating adaptive methods, as well as an integral part of the critical and creative thinking process. Adams (1986) suggests that humor is a powerful facilitator in creative problem solving; he states, "Humor is extremely positive in situations of creativity and change. It allows us to take more risk and accompanies insights and solutions" (128).
Koestler (1964) has characterized the understanding of jokes and riddles as a creative problem-solving process, stating "the task of 'seeing the joke' becomes the task of 'solving the problem'" (91).

Ziv's (1988) research found that humor employs the same thinking processes used by those who demonstrate a high quality of creative thinking; he states "Research on humor has clearly documented a positive relationship with creativity. There is also convincing evidence that increased exposure to humor can enhance the level of one's creativity. Given the growing interest in a balance of emphasis on convergent and divergent thinking among many educators, the importance of improving children's humor skills is evident" (114).

I believe that the problem solving activity, motivated by humor, and found in joking, and in the identification of fresh incongruity, is one tactic for encouraging and sustaining resistance to ideological control. As Koestler (1979) succinctly asserts, "Dictators fear laughter more than bombs" (744).

Content

In Chapter I, I identify the need for humor to human survival and suggest briefly the relationship between humor and critical and creative thinking which will be elaborated on in Chapters III and IV.

In Chapter II, I shall summarize the three historical explanations of the origins of humor: superiority theory, relief theory and incongruity theory.
using the research of Keith-Speigel (1972) and Morreall (1987). I shall examine the psychological and sociological theories of humor using the research of McGhee (1973), La Fave (1976), and Koestler (1964). In the final section of this chapter, using the research of Ziv (1984), I shall discuss the functions of humor and consider the question "what makes us laugh".

Chapter III, deals with the relationship between creativity and humor on a social-psychological and philosophical level. In the first section, I shall define creativity using the research of Wallas (1926) Guilford (1959), Koestler (1964), and Amabile (1983). I shall review the pertinent information gleaned from their research which suggests a relationship between creativity and humor. I shall then elaborate on that relationship drawing on the work of Ziv (1984, 1988).

In Chapter IV, I shall present an overview of the psychological and educational theories associated with the skills of critical thinking and their relation to humor. I shall present an overview of the current research in the critical thinking field using the research of Ennis (1987) and Sternberg (1988). I shall detail the critical thinking in problem solving aspect of humor using the research of Suls (1972).

In Chapter V, I shall present the results of a student survey of the impact of humor on classroom environment, on student attitude toward the teacher, and on student learning and memory. Based on self-report, the results support the positive impact of humor on student learning.
In Chapter VI, I shall describe the ways in which I use humor in my classroom to create a positive climate, to prevent and deal with management problems, and to facilitate learning of subject matter content.
CHAPTER 11
THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF HUMOR

Introduction

A newcomer to the study of humor does not approach the subject totally unprepared; all human beings at some point find something funny to laugh about. This chapter introduces a descriptive and interpretative summary of studies in the field of humor. My intention is to present the essentials of our current knowledge and understanding in the area. To facilitate this, I have divided this chapter into three sections which focus on the theory, definition, and function of humor.

In the first section, I shall detail how present theories of humor have evolved using the philosophical research of Keith-Spiegel (1972) and Morreall (1987). This section summarizes the three traditional theories of humor: superiority theory, which is humor derived from degradation and humiliation of something or someone; relief theory, which is humor that entails the release of tension; and incongruity theory, which is humor that consists of incongruity and its subsequent resolution.

In the second section, I shall review the current definitions of humor and examine how humor is defined by the psychological and sociological disciplines drawing upon the research of Chapman and Foot (1976), McGhee (1973), La Fave (1976) and Koestler (1964).
Section three considers the functions of humor and addresses the question “what makes us laugh?” I shall discuss the functions of humor using the research of Avner Ziv (1984). Ziv feels that humor is so multifaceted it is impossible to interpret it in terms of single aspects.

I shall conclude this chapter using the research of Arthur Koestler (1964) who hypothesizes that humor can be based in superiority, relief and incongruity theory, but ultimately all humor must rely on bisociation, a term he coined to describe the fusing of two opposing contexts, in order to be considered funny. Using Koestler’s bisociation theory, I shall examine the structural properties of incongruity and resolution and the importance of a playful frame of mind when creating or appreciating humor.

Theories of Humor

Overview.

Theories of humor endeavor to answer this question, “what makes us laugh?” Considering there is no one definition of humor, just what do we understand about the antecedents that result in a humorous response? Where definitions of humor deal with the nature or functions of humor, theories of humor deal with the situations under which humor is elicited. In other words, theories are explanations of humor which occur under a particular set of conditions.
Theories of humor fall into three categories: superiority theories, relief theories and incongruity theories. Using the research of Keith-Spiegel (1972), Morreall (1987), Rapp (1951), Porteous (1989), I shall explore the above conceptions in chronological order, and discuss their attributes and limits.

Superiority theory.

Plato and Aristotle were the first to propose and document theories relating to superiority humor. Generally they maintained that humor was base and degenerative to society, but it was justified to target the frail, ugly or disfigured (Morreall, 1987).

Superiority humor can be easily recognized by its aggressive, cruel and biting nature and its lack of empathy toward the targeted victim or group. By derogating a person or a group to others, the initiator of superiority humor enhances his self-esteem or the self-esteem of his group. Comedians Don Rickles and Andrew Dice Clay exemplify this type of superiority humor. Both use aggressive and sardonic humor to tear down women, ethnic groups and the physically handicapped.

The Superiority theories suggest that humor is derived from degradation and humiliation of something or someone. It is humor that is based and developed on aggression. In other words, the cause of our
laughter is someone else’s misfortune which causes us to feel momentarily superior.

Superiority humor, in effect, removes or destroys the barrier of equality between the parties involved. It is humor that is usually accomplished by condescending or derisive means. It may involve commiseration with the victim, however, the end result of superiority humor is one person’s degradation of another.

Anthropological view. How did the superiority type of humor come about? When and why did it become conventional behavior to laugh at the misfortunes of others? Rapp (1951) has speculated on this issue and suggests that superiority humor may lie on a primitive level in evolutionary anthropology, he envisioned “two naked, hairy, subhuman savages, battling ferociously with long agile arms; and the uncontrolled blood-curdling laugh of the winner” (21). Rapp proposes that superiority humor need not always incorporate degradation and humiliation of someone but could also be derived from such factors such as sympathy, empathy, amiable, and affable circumstances which nevertheless are combined and result in the laughter of superiority. As Rapp (1951) notes, “Humor pities what it smiles at; it loves what it taunts. It is amused at weakness, but the amusement is tolerant, affectionate. It smiles at the pretenses and inconsistencies of men; but the smile does not reflect bitterness or aggressiveness or hate. It does not reflect them; but they’re there” (53).
Sharing this anthropological viewpoint, Porteous (1989) hypothesizes that smiling and laughing evolved from the "silent bared teeth" of our primal ancestors, "Smiling and laughing played important roles in enabling and encouraging the maintenance of face-to-face relations among humans, and that this development is associated with the evolution of language, and with the evolution of the earliest "humor" among the earliest human beings" (285).

Problems associated with superiority theory. The problem with the superiority theory interpretation of humor is its inability to cover every type of humor. For example, superiority humor does not explain word play or absurdities. Morreall (1983) points out, "there are many instances of laughter that involve no feelings of superiority. Much merely verbal humor, as in someone's use of a triple rhyme, or excessive alliteration to get a laugh, is not directed at anyone and requires no self-evaluation. Many puns, too, are mere verbal play, and are not designed to evoke feelings of superiority" (11).

Superiority theories then are seen to be limited in scope and, most importantly, leave out incongruity, which is believed by researchers today to be fundamental to all humor (McGhee, 1979; Suls, 1983; Koestler, 1964).
Relief theory.

Relief theories take a physiological approach asserting that, through humor, laughter results which releases accrued stress and tension. Relief theories are based on the belief that finding something funny in a distressful or precarious situation gives us power over it. The relief theory would account for someone laughing at an inappropriate moment or situation. For instance, if someone was laughing at a funeral, we would excuse their undignified behavior and suggest that the individual was "laughing nervously." In the classroom children often respond with laughter if they are caught by the teacher doing something they should not be doing.

Spencer, father of relief theory. Herbert Spencer, 19th-century English philosopher, is considered to be the father of the relief theory of humor (Morreall, 1987). Spencer postulated that laughter was a result of the body’s need to release excess nervous energy through muscular movement. Spencer’s conception was that humor developed primarily in the rapid transition of a thought from a respectable idea to an insignificant idea. Thus the psyche is left with an undisbursed fund of nervous energy that spills over into laughter, which according to Spencer, is a physical release of nervous energy.

Freud's theory of humor. Assimilating Spencer’s theory into his conceptions about humor, Freud (1938) was a major proponent of the relief theory. In "Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious", Freud postulates that
the task of humor was to release, sexual impulses, aggression, and distressing emotions. In other words, Freud maintains that repressed feelings can escape through humor (1938, 797-803).

Freud (1938) proposes a model of humor in which two forms are involved, "wit and comic" (780) which, originally take place in unconscious thought, and when expressed bring relief and, "humor" (797) which originates in the foreconscious it acts as a defense mechanism which brings relief.

Components of Freud's theory.

Wit and comic. Freud suggests that wit and comic are social. He notes that another person must be involved in order for wit to be fully executed. Freud believed that wit and comic expressed underlying thoughts buried in the unconscious. Freud perceived wit as method of succinctly communicating controlled aggressive and sexual id impulses in order to circumvent the conscience or "censor" (superego) in order to "allow the release of repressed psychic energy."

It is the "comic technique" that camouflages, these unconscious underlying thoughts, so they are allowed to surface. The "psychic energy" is then disengaged through laughter. In other words, wit and joking conceal their true intent which is to bring forth feelings and emotions that have been repressed by a person because of a lack of social acceptance.
Humor. Freud (1983) felt that humor was the more ethical of the two divisions he proposed. He considers it to be "the most self-sufficient of the comic forms" (798). Proposing that humor was found in the foreconscious did not involve repression of feelings; consequently humor was the purer of the two forms. Freud (1928) elaborated on this stating that, by means of humor, "one refuses to undergo suffering, asseverates the invincibility of one’s ego against the real world, and victoriously upholds the pleasure principle, yet all without quitting the ground of mental sanity" (217). He explains that humor acts as a defense mechanism because it intercedes or breaks the tension found in the foreconscious without repressing it to the unconscious. Freud believed that wit originated in the subconscious and involved the repression of feelings.

Freud (1938) interprets humor as "the loftiest of these defense functions. It disdains to withdraw from conscious attention the ideas which are connected with the painful affect, as repression does, and it thus overcomes the defense automatism" (802). Freud theorized that humor was one of the most important defenses, which functioned as a coping mechanism.

Problems associated with relief theories. I believe that, along with the superiority theories, relief theory is also an insufficient explanation of all humor. Is humor just the venting of excess nervous energy as Freud would have us believe? I think not. I do believe, however, that relief theory
accounts for some humorous responses; for example, the humor used in a social situation to defuse a fight by disengaging involved parties from the situation at hand. Another example of behavior consistent of relief theory would be when we laugh at the misfortune of someone slipping on the ice. Our initial reaction is to find out if the person is hurt; if they are not, we may laugh in relief. As I previously noted, in the classroom it is often used by children to relieve tension when challenging the authority of the teacher.

Relief theories of humor concentrate on the person who finds something funny, rather than what makes something funny. Like the superiority theories, they postulate that humor involves some aspect of "triumph over" a situation; they differ in asserting however, that the goal is not so much the triumph as the consequent psychological relief produced by its occurrences.

**Incongruity theory.**

Incongruity theories suggest that humor is found between what was discovered and what was first expected. Incongruity deals with cognition which is our perception, memory, concept formation, problem-solving, and consciousness of something. The central feature of the incongruity theory of humor is the capacity to recognize and to settle a divergence between sensed or anticipated and recognized information. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, it is humor that consists of an incongruity and its
subsequent resolution which results in laughter. When speaking of incongruity Morreall (1987) notes that it is "a relation of conflict between something we perceive, remember, or imagine, on the one hand, and our conceptual patterns with their attendant expectations, on the other" (189).

Arthur Schopenhauer (1819), is considered to be the father of the incongruity theory. Laughter, Schopenhauer postulated is "simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through in some relation, and the laugh itself [to be] just the expression of this incongruity" (cited in Rapp, 1951, 181).

What Schopenhauer suggests is the incongruity behind laughter evolves from the distinct differences between our abstractions and the actual entities that are represented by a concrete example of these abstractions. In other words, we laugh when what we see is different from what we expected to see.

Definitions of Humor

Overview.

Humor is part of the human social experience but how is it defined? To date, those broaching this question have been unable to concur on a specific description that achieves consensus. Initial efforts to define it have noted that humor is influenced by the techniques used to create it, by social
settings, previous memories, anticipation, surprise and even by the attitudes of the people we are with.

Chapman and Foot (1976) consider the theorists dilemma in determining whether humor is a stimulus, response, or disposition; they acknowledge that humor, conceivably, can be all three. The problem, Chapman and Foot note (1976) is that "humor plays a myriad of roles and serves a number of quite different functions" (4). Despite the lack of a concrete theoretical model, researchers from diverse branches have aspired to decipher and compartmentalize humor highlighting the cognitive, emotional, linguistic, psychodynamic, sociological, or anthropological components associated with humor to their fields.

**Psychological approaches to definition.**

**Viewed in context.** Psychologist discuss humor in terms of stimulus, response, and disposition. Humor can be a considered a stimulus in that the material or information presented may motivate laughter; a response, in that a joke that is perceived as funny, oftentimes results in laughter in ourselves and others; and a disposition in that humor engages our intellect and involves a willingness to be entertained.

**McGhee’s definition of humor.** McGhee, (1979) a prominent psychophysiological researcher in the field, suggests a cognitive-perceptual model of humor. McGhee (1976) defines humor in terms of the recognition of
incongruity and suggests that humor is a "mood of disposition characterized by a sensitivity to, or appreciation of ludicrous, absurd, incongruous, or comical events" (6).

In qualifying this statement, McGhee notes, that in order for incongruity to be understood an individual must have in his possession certain cognitive acquisitions or frames of reference. In other words, we find funny those things that we understand or can logically decode.

McGhee explains,

"as new levels of cognitive skill are achieved, they lead to new forms of humor comprehension and appreciation (and presumably, production). Thus, humor begins once events can be stored and recalled in terms of simple images. As language is increasingly used to represent objects and ideas, it begins to be used in humor as well as in more serious interchanges. As the child's thinking becomes conceptual in nature, humor also becomes conceptually based. The acquisition of concrete operational thinking enables the child to keep two ideas in mind at the same time, and this leads to the onset of enjoyment of riddles and other jokes based on double meanings. The impact of formal operational thinking on humor is only beginning to be studied but the new capacities for abstract thinking and formal logic undoubtedly lead to new forms of humor (e.g., satire or irony)." (1986, 28)

McGhee is suggesting that humor evolves from cognitive development, and is based on, our recognition and comprehension of contradictions in our accumulated experiences. In other words McGhee is saying that in order for humor to occur an incongruity has to be made meaningful or relevant. In addition, a cognitive rule has to be found which allows the incongruity to be resolved within the framework of the humor.
One joke I use with students exemplifies this idea, "what does a door knob find beautiful?" The answer is "adore."

**Sociological approaches to definition.**

*Viewed in context.* When dealing with humor, sociologists focus on three functions, conflict humor which is humor derived from superiority over another, control humor which maintains equality among potentially antagonist groups and, consensus humor in which the focal point is unity and friendship between the participants (Ziv, 1984, 26-43).

**La Fave's definition of humor.** Lawrence La Fave, (1976) a noted sociologist in the study of humor, is a proponent of the superiority theory of humor. He notes the "presence of incongruity alone appears neither a necessary nor sufficient condition of an adequate humor theory" (85). He advances the belief that humor is often used to disguise aggression, consequently it cannot be defined in terms of incongruity alone.

La Fave suggests that humor is derived from the awareness of superiority or elevated self-esteem which is derived in part as an aftermath of a "perceived" incongruity. La Fave (1976) suggests that humor or "amusement" is a result of a "sudden happiness increment consequent to a perceived incongruity" (86). "Sudden", La Fave discerns as the information or material which entertains. "Happiness increment" he ascertains is the inclination toward superiority and increased self-esteem felt upon deducing
the perceived incongruity which is used to explain whether or not
information is comprehended or grasped.

**Functions of Humor**

**Overview.**

A body of scientific knowledge suggests a variety of advantages and
reasons to use humor, these include physical health and mental well-being.
The focus of this section is on the use and purpose of humor. In this
section I shall summarize the five functions of humor using the research of

**Ziv's definition of humor.**

In defining humor Avner Ziv (1984), a prominent figure in the field of the
psychology of humor, suggests that it is "the ability to understand and enjoy
messages involving humorous creativity, as well as situations that are
incongruous but not menacing" (xi). However, unlike other definitions of
humor, which consider single aspects of what humor does for us, Ziv's
(1984) theory of humor deals with the unifying effect of all its functions he
states, "humor is created and enjoyed because it allows us to do many
things that we need to do - to express fundamental needs in ways that are
not only pleasurable (because accompanied by laughter or smiling) but also
socially accepted and valued" (1984, 2).
Ziv perceives humor to be a multi-faceted occurrence which cannot be interpreted by a single method. Ziv notes that humor has five functions: aggressive, sexual, social, humor as a defense mechanism, and intellectual. The aggressive function of humor Ziv believes to be primordial, existing from prehistoric times from which it evolved. Ziv notes that aggressive humor is used to monitor and limit the expression of aggression; in that, the enjoyment of this type of humor leads to eliminating the severity of aggressive emotions, which is integral to a civilized society. As previously noted, this primordial view is shared by Rapp (1951) and Porteous (1989).

The sexual functions of humor deal with the socially acceptable ways to express what society might consider taboo. Ziv suggests that sexual humor can indicate enjoyment, anxiety, or disappointment in sex, he states "The lessening of sexual taboos creates some different problems, and humor allows us to tackle them in a pleasurable manner" (1984, 2-3).

Ziv (1984) emphasizes two aspects that characterize the social function of humor: humor within a group, and humor as a social corrective within the society, he states "the social function of humor may be considered to have two aspects. The first is that of the relationships within a group, the social system within which personal acquaintance and interaction between and among group members exist. The second is that of society as a whole or of social phenomena, humor's role being to reform aspects of these" (1984, 26).
One social function of humor suggests it is a way of cultivating social intimacy and cohesiveness with other people. It is a way of establishing proximity with other people, with the sharing of an experience and solidarity by a group. Humor can be used to accept others into one's group, or it can be used to exclude them. Ziv notes "Humor can be used to achieve social acceptance, to gain status, and to reinforce group cohesiveness. It can oil the wheels of face-to-face relations, but it can also pour sand in them" (1984, 3).

As it relates to societal issues, the social function of humor is based upon shaping human affairs for the better, Ziv states "Humor can be a way of improving society. social criticism in the form of satire is one way of trying to change things for the better" (1984, 3).

Satire conveys a concealed message, societal humor, in the form of satire, expresses many of its problems, struggles, and aspirations. The purpose of satire is to educate through the guise of humor.

Humor as a defense mechanism is a means of providing us with a way to deal with our anxieties. Humor which functions as a defense mechanism acts as a form of self-inoculation against what scares us, Ziv states "Laughing at things that frighten us makes them less menacing. "Gallows humor" or "black humor" pokes fun at illness, death and other fear-evoking topics. As a defense mechanism, humor is even used against ourselves:
self-disparagement is considered the "highest" form of humor by some" (1984, 3).

Two characteristic forms of humor as a defense mechanism noted by Ziv are Gallows/black humor, and self-disparagement humor, both assist in protecting an individuals self-image and emotional balance. Black humor, Ziv describes as morbid, cynical humor which is used by a person facing catastrophe, it is the type of humor takes serious matters lightly. He notes that black humor is instrumental in actively helping us to handle threats and horror instead of yielding to it, it can be described as the humor of survival, Ziv states "Turning the frightening reality into fantasy, or the frightening fantasy into the ridiculous is in brief the essence and strength of black humor" (1984, 58).

Self-disparagement humor is described as the ability to laugh at yourself. Ziv suggests that the purpose of self-disparagement humor is to impede aggressive motives, achieve appreciation and sympathy from others who identify with the humorist shortcomings, and it enables a person to actively grapple with his fear and weaknesses.

The intellectual function of humor involves understanding and problem solving, which Ziv suggests is a two dimensional concept involving the appreciation and production of humor, he states "Understanding is a part of the thought process, and the enjoyment of humor calls for an intellectual activity like the kind required in problem solving. The need for intellectual
activity is even more pronounced where creating humor is involved. the originator of humor must present his message in a certain way, and this demands some planning" (1984, 70).

As we can see, this accumulation of roles and functions has created a problem in formulating a succinct definition because each of these researchers and theoretician examining the question believe his conception of humor is accurate and complete. As Keith-Spiegel, (1972) a psychologist in the field of humor, suggests, "The definitions offered are almost as many as the theories themselves, and still we are unsure of the complete dimensions of the concept" (1972, 14).

Koestler's definition of humor

Koestler (1964) proposes that all humor contains aspects of superiority, relief and incongruity theory. Koestler's principal belief is that humor develops when there is instantaneous activity between, or surprising blend of, well-defined perceivable structures. This meshing or instantaneous activity of mental operations Koestler calls "bisociation." Humor as it pertains to bisociation, Koestler believes, is "the perceiving of a situation or idea in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference" (1964, 35).
Koestler's theory of humor.

To date theories in the field of humor have consolidated the phenomenon of humor into one particular approach. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Koestler (1964) proposes that all humor contain aspects of superiority, relief and incongruity theory. Koestler notes the aggressive-defensive element found in humor, which he maintains, "may be manifested in the guise of malice, derision, the veiled cruelty of condescension, or merely an absence of sympathy with the victim of the joke" (1964, 52).

Regardless of which theory of humor is involved, Koestler contends that, not only must two unrelated idea's mesh, they must combine in such a way that a new product is developed, which results in humor. He asserts that the mental operation which accounts for all of these events, is "bisociation." Humor as it pertains to bisociation, Koestler believes, is "the perceiving of a situation or idea in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference" (1964, 35).

Conclusion

The preceding discussion provided a general introduction to current and traditional definitions and theories of humor. I used these theories to generate a questionnaire on student humor preferences, the results of which I will report in Chapter V. It is my belief that we can learn a great deal
about a person by examining what strikes them as humorous. In the next chapter on creativity, I will elaborate on concepts addressed here and suggest that creativity and humor are indeed related.
CHAPTER 11
CREATIVE THINKING AND HUMOR

Introduction

Historically, creativity was thought to be possessed by only unique, gifted individuals with an aptitude in art or science (Koestler, 1964; Amabile, 1983). Today, after extensive research, which was started by Guilford in the late 1950's, creativity is no longer a mystery, or a term used to describe the behavior of only a few people in a few selected disciplines. Now creativity is considered characteristic, in varying degrees, of all people, working in any discipline.

This chapter deals with the relationship between creativity and humor on a social-psychological and philosophical level. In the first section, I shall briefly define creativity using the research of Wallas (1926), Guilford (1959), Koestler (1964), and Amabile (1983). I shall review and synthesize the relevant information gleaned from their research and conclude with a discussion of the relationship between creativity and humor.
Definitions

Creativity.

Often creativity is described as a unique process, a product or flash of insight that is of value to the individual or society. It is the integration of the known, unknown, experiences and frames of reference that culminate in a product or idea that is new to the individual. In order for a solution to be considered creative, the outcome must be novel or original, and must legitimately solve the problem. Creativity is demanding; it requires strong motivation to begin and to carry it through.

The qualities characteristic of creativity are also characteristic of humor. Humor is a unique process that results in a flash of insight which causes laughter. The production of humor is hinged on the development of a person's mental imagery. To appreciate humor requires the understanding that the situations or problems presented, for example, in a joke, are solvable in various ways. Humor appreciation and production both require the widest and best use of the facts, a flexibility of mind also characteristic of creative persons.

Creative Thinking.

The ability to think creatively is present, to some degree, in every human personality. Guilford (1959) states "to accept the belief that everyone is creative to some degree, we have only to realize that all genuine
problem-solving involves creative events at some points and that problem-solving is an activity shared by all" (557). Creative thinking is the type of thinking often described as atypical, subjective, spontaneous or even magical. Creative thinking requires deferred judgement. Creative thinking is divergent thinking which involves the ability to find or see several solutions to a problem. Divergent thinking is in direct opposition to convergent thinking, whose aim is to narrow down the possibilities, to focus on a single solution. Humor requires both divergent and convergent thinking.

**Wallas's definition of creativity.**

Many researchers (Koestler, 1964; Guilford, 1959) studying creativity ascribe to variations of the stages model of the creative process that Wallas first proposed in 1926. Wallas' (1926) model of creativity which had a lasting impact in the field, proposed a four step process: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. Wallas maintained that in the initial "preparation stage" the problem is sensed, the data is collected and logical thinking is used unsuccessfully. After it has been established that the problem cannot be solved logically, a period of incubation follows. During this incubation period, when the problem is being operated on in the unconscious, a flash of insight occurs. This flash of insight establishes the end of incubation and the beginning of the "illumination" that culminates in a solution to the problem. It is this unexpected illumination that Koestler
describes as the "Aha!" feeling. The solution generated is then detailed, tested and evaluated in the verification stage. Should the solution prove problematic, the problem reverts to incubation stage.

**Guilford's definition of creativity.**

Guilford (1959) defines creativity psychologically in terms of the intellectual traits demonstrated by creative people. In "The Nature of Human Intelligence", Guilford (1967) proposes a "structure-of-intellect" model that characterize creativity as a psychological construct based in divergent and convergent thinking that is applicable to all content areas. Guilford (1959) depicts creativity as a special kind of problem-solving.

What basic abilities are necessary to solve problems creatively? From Guilford’s (1975) perspective there are six: sensitivity to problems, fluency, flexibility, elaboration and originality, and redefinition. The first and last of these are highly similar and will be treated together. Sensitivity to problems is the trait now identified with problem finding. It is the ability to sense gaps, missing elements or problems when given an array of objects or ideas. Redefinition is the capacity to reconfigure these same elements over and again.

Fluency, Guilford maintains, is the ability to generate a number of different solutions. Guilford's definition suggests that fluency is the capacity to recover a variety of information quickly and in quantity. Fluency requires...
deferred judgement. It is measured by the number of different solutions produced in trying to solve a particular problem. For example, a long list of ideas or solutions is consistent with a person who demonstrates fluency in their thinking.

Flexibility, can be described as having the capacity to generate different and diverse ideas or methods across categories. It is characterized as the ability to identify different functions or uses for an object or to surpass the confines of a given situation in order to overcome an obstacle.

Elaboration describes the skill used to develop, augment, or embellish an idea. Elaboration is the facility to expand and detail a given object or strategy.

Originality, describes the capacity to generate unique or unusual ideas, concepts or alternatives. It refers to statistical rarity.

**Koestler's definition of creative thinking.**

Arthur Koestler (1964) defines creativity as "the highest manifestation of actualization of surplus potentials" (45) that occurs only under atypical circumstances. Koestler (1964) defines creative originality as having six distinguishing features:

1. Bisociation of independent matrices
2. Guidance by sub-conscious processes normally under restraint
3. Activation of regenerative potentials
4. Super-flexibility
5. Novelty
Bisociation. Koestler's (1964) philosophical theory of creativity suggests that it is a unique way of thinking, of bridging the connected with the unconnected which then brings about something new. He refers to the mental operation which accounts for these events as "bisociation." Koestler describes bisociation as two trains of thought that formerly unrelated suddenly come together (1964, 59). This meshing of thought, or bisociation, causes an illumination of the problem that generates the innovative solution. It is germane to note that the problem is perceived first by the individual and second by the society.

Koestler notes that creative solutions or illuminations come after a period of fervent preparation and groundwork, that only after the problem has been approached from all possible angles, on a conscious and unconscious level, is a creative solution possible. The solution does not come during this preparation period however, it usually comes after a process of incubation.

Koestler notes that this phenomenon is characteristic of creative problem solving in general. These creative insights occur at unexpected times and places after this period of incubation. It is during this period of incubation that unconscious thought has an opportunity to shun erroneous mind sets. As a consequence of incubation, the creative solution has a chance to emerge.
**Trivalent model.** Koestler (1964) introduces a tri-valent model of creativity that suggests all creative activity can be expressed through the domains of humor, discovery, or art. Creativity, he suggests, encompasses these three parallel domains:

a) humor leading to laughter,

b) discovery, whose aim is understanding and
c) art, intended to make us marvel.

Here Koestler (1964) proposes a philosophical theory of creativity which suggests a bond between all creative activity. His focus is primarily on personality variables in which creativity is developed in the preconscious or intuitive mind. Koestler states, "When two independent matrices of perception or reasoning interact with each other the result (as I hope to show) is either a collision ending in laughter, or their fusion in a new intellectual synthesis, or their confrontation in an aesthetic experience. The bisociative patterns found in any domain of creative activity are tri-valent: that is to say, the same pair of matrices can produce comic, tragic, or intellectually challenging effects" (1964, 45).

**Amabile's definition of creative thinking.**

Amabile (1983) proposes a social psychology of creativity. She hypothesizes that creativity depends primarily on intrinsic motivation enhanced by social and environmental factors. It is Amabile's belief that
these components play a major role in influencing creative performance. In defining creativity, Amabile proposes two criteria: it must be novel in that it must be different from what was done before, and it should be appropriate in that it accomplishes a goal, is aesthetically pleasing, or purposeful in some way (1989, 25).

Unlike Guilford who suggests that creativity is a trait or general ability, Amabile (1989) believes creativity is, "a behavior resulting from particular constellations of personal characteristics, cognitive abilities, and social environments" (358). In advancing her belief of the importance of the social and environmental influences on creative behavior, Amabile notes that the procedures used to solve a problem creatively rely on frame of reference, clues, and other diverse indicators that lead to a creative solution. Amabile considers heuristic problem solving an important part of the creative process. In disavowing the algorithmic approach to problem solving that suggests that problems can be solved in a sequential method, Amabile emphasizes the role of the external influences on creative problem solving, such as deadlines and surveillance. Amabile believes that the existing definitions of creativity are incomplete. She asserts that any definition of creativity must include the independent evaluation of the creative product as novel and useful. In doing so, Amabile defines creativity in terms of the reaction it receives from established experts within the area under consideration. She states,
"a product or response is creative to the extent that appropriate
overseers independently agree it is creative. Appropriate
observers are those familiar with the domain in which the
product was created or the response articulated. Thus,
creativity can be regarded as the quality of products or
responses judged to be creative by appropriate observers, and it
can also be regarded as the process by which something so
judged is produced." (Amabile, 1982, 101)

Amabile notes that defining creativity in an individual is ultimately a
question of the "quality of their work." She is suggesting that the numerous
technicalities involved in creative work prohibit characterizing creativity
solely in terms of creative process.

Amabile (1983) notes that the focus upon the traits and personality of
the creative person presents a problem because product evaluation is
inevitable. She explains, "even if we can clearly specify a constellation of
personality traits that characterizes outstandingly creative people, the
identification of people on whom such personality research would be
validated must depend in some way upon the quality of their work" (359).

In considering the diverse external factors affecting creativity, Amabile
believes "a clear and sufficiently detailed articulation of the creative process
is not yet possible" (1983, 359). Amabile proposes a "consensual definition
of creativity" in which creativity is characterized as a heuristic task that
includes novelty, appropriateness, and a subjective assessment of the
creative product. In this "consensual definition of creativity" two essential
elements of creativity are stipulated by Amabile (1983), "it is both a novel
and appropriate, useful, correct or valuable response to the task at hand, and the task is heuristic rather than algorithmic" (33).

Amabile (1989, 35, 43) identifies three elements that account for creative behavior: domain-relevant skills, creativity-relevant skills, and task motivation:

1) domain-relevant skills: these incorporate factual knowledge, technical skill and applicable "talent" in the field;

2) creativity-relevant skills are demonstrated by the response a product or idea receives in comparison to preceding products or idea in the field and;

3) task motivation is defined as the ability to start and maintain the process. (Amabile, 1983, 72)

The first component, domain skills, can be characterized as what we already know, our frame of reference, it describes the background of information we bring in order to solve a problem, Amabile (1989) notes "Domain skills are the raw materials of talent, education, and experience in a particular area" (43).

The second component "creative thinking and working skills" can be learned. But most important to Amabile is the contribution of task motivation which she asserts is intrinsic not extrinsic. Thus, Amabile (1989) describes creativity as "ideas, behaviors, and products that are appropriately novel which are most often the result of the intrinsic motivation of the creator" (32). The three elements Amabile identifies as belonging to the domain of creativity are embraced in our current understanding of humor.
Ziv's definition of creativity.

Ziv (1988) defines creativity in relation to divergent thinking, a concept that was originally introduced by Guilford. Ziv (1988) states:

"The creative process involves cognitive, internal operations, not directly observable. The product is the observable behavioral result of the cognitive process. In order to be considered creative, these products have to be public (i.e., open to judgement by others). By using such criteria as originality, validity, aptness, and "esthetic fit," the products are considered as creative or not." A book, a symphony, a painting, or a theory are examples of such creative products." (1988, 100)

Ziv maintains that to judge a product as creative, it must be based on independent evaluation which demonstrates originality, relevance, appropriateness. Ziv indicates that true creativity is often a result of prior knowledge and is characteristic of mastery in a given domain. Ziv (1988) states, "In addition to certain ways of thinking and producing, creativity also involves special skills which are in general the result of years of learning" (100).
Ziv postulates that humor is a specific area in which creative talent is operative. Its development encourages, stimulates and generates further creativity. Ziv (1984) notes that creative individuals are more open to humor because: "Creative people have the ability to look beyond the obvious, to see relationships in unusual and new ways, and to be open and flexible. They are not prisoners of habitual ways of thinking. They can use novel approaches, and "local logic" is quite acceptable to them in the appropriate frame of reference. Therefore, their intellectual processes are open to humor" (134).

Ziv proposes there are two main dimensions of humor, "humor creativity" which describes the behavior of a person who "intentionally" manufactures a humorous product and, "humor appreciation" that describes the behavior of a person who recognizes and understands humor from a cognitive-emotional position, that results in the behavioral response of laughter. Humor creativity is demonstrated by the person who manufactures a humorous product. Ziv (1984) explains, "Humor creativity is defined as the ability to perceive relationships between people, objects, or ideas in an incongruous way, as well as the ability to communicate this perception to others. This communication can be verbal and elicits in others smiling or laughter" (111).
Humor appreciation refers to the behavior of a person who appreciates something humorous. Ziv (1984) states, "Humor appreciation has been defined as the ability to understand and enjoy messages containing humor creativity, as well as situations that are incongruous but not menacing. To this, I can now add that humor appreciation is a function of the ability to adopt local-logical thinking, and that humor enjoyment can be cognitive and emotional" (111).

Ziv indicates that the majority of existing explanations, which make up our understanding of humor, focus on the appreciation of humor and not on the creative process involved with making humor. For example, earlier studies of humor focused on people's perceptions of what they found funny in cartoons or jokes. Ziv suggests the creative aspects of humor involve the evaluation of a person who intentionally develops dialogue, which sets out to make another person laugh. Humor creation and humor appreciation share operations and can be described as the ability to see or to respond to things presented in a new light. However, the focus of "humor appreciation" is based on operations that involve evaluation and analytic problem solving. While "humor creation" mirrors the above discussed process of creativity posed by Koestler (1964), Amabile (1983) and Ziv (1984).

In fact, as we have seen in the case of Koestler, the process of both humor creativity and appreciation are often seen as the very definition of the
creative act. Ziv's (1984) research offers empirical support for Koestler's assertion. Ziv, having studied individuals from high school through college, found that humor employs the same thinking processes used by those who demonstrate a high quality of creative thinking; he states, "in studies in which the humor variable has been introduced, it has clearly been shown that those high in creativity are (as a group) more open to humor than those low in creativity. Correlations between humor and creativity are positive and statistically significant" (1984, 132).
CHAPTER IV
CRITICAL THINKING AND HUMOR

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the relationship between critical thinking and humor, and suggest that humor requires the use of critical thinking skills. Also, I believe that actively nurturing a student's sense of humor will equip him with an important tool which can help the student cope with complex problems and stimulate new learning.

I shall begin with a selective review of the current research in the field of critical thinking, focusing on the work of Robert Ennis (1962; 1987) and Robert Sternberg (1988). The critical thinking in problem solving aspect of humor will be explored using the model proposed by Jerry Suls (1972).

I believe that critical thinking is the process by which one gets a joke or understands humor. In substantiating this belief, I have chosen to concentrate on the work of three critical thinking experts. After briefly defining these critical thinking skills, I will discuss the role these thinking skills play in comprehending humor.

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section of this chapter, I will define critical thinking drawing upon Ennis' Critical Thinking Model (1987), Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Intelligence (1988) and Suls'
Model of Information Processing. In conclusion, I shall discuss the role humor plays in facilitating critical thinking.

**Definitions of Critical Thinking**

Historically, critical thinking is defined in terms of rational thought processes that comply with the traditional rules of problem solving and fundamental logical principles. Some experts offer subjective definitions of critical thinking that range from descriptions of traditional logic to the ability to skillfully solve complex, ill defined problems.

There is a general agreement that critical thinking is a behavior that demonstrates an aptitude to assess a situation, and the propensity to conceive alternatives. It is proposed that critical thinking is the logical, analytical style of thinking that is accepted by society (Sternberg, 1988; Suls, 1972). Critical thinking is used to refer to systematic, goal-directed thinking that includes evaluation of the assumptions, processes, and outcomes in making a decision, solving a problem or formulating inferences from information given.

**Ennis's definition of critical thinking.**

Today's ideas about critical thinking are strongly influenced by the early work of Robert Ennis in 1962. He defined critical thinking as "reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or
do" (1962, 84; 1987, 10). Ennis (1986) states that critical thinking is "focusing on belief and action, making statements in terms of things that people actually do or should do, including criteria to help us evaluate results, including both disposition and abilities, and being organized in such a way that it can form the basis for thinking" (125). Here he is suggesting that critical thinking is germane in any discipline or subject and is directly applicable in our daily lives.

Assessment, disposition and abilities. As stated previously, Ennis (1962; 1987) believes that critical thinking is an act of evaluation based on the principles of logical reasoning. Ennis indicates that the essence of critical thinking involves the integration of abilities, dispositions and general knowledge. Ennis' model of critical thinking is based on the interdependence of thirteen dispositions and twelve abilities that, he believes, results in critical thinking decisions. Some abilities, he highlights are the ability to focus on a question, analyze arguments, ask and answer questions of clarification. Dispositions, are values and tendencies to act in certain ways. For example, a person's ability to look for alternatives or to seek additional knowledge about a situation would exemplify disposition skill.

The basic areas of critical thinking ability suggested by Ennis are clarity, basis, inference, and interaction (1962). The functions mentioned by Ennis all involve language. Given that the underlying principle of language is
communication, I believe that critical thinking is essential in our ability to communicate and understand effectively. However, my classroom experience suggests, that until student's can understand the different levels of ambiguity in the language, genuine critical thinking, although possible, is impoverished. Humor through joking, puns, riddles and word play is a way to stimulate and broaden a student's understanding of the semantic mechanisms which, not only play a part in humor, but in critical thinking.

**Twelve aspects of critical thinking.** Ennis' notes that the general principles of critical thinking are best demonstrated by the following twelve aspects:

1) Grasping the meaning of a statement.
2) Judging whether there is ambiguity in a line of reasoning.
3) Judging whether certain statements contradict each other.
4) Judging whether a conclusion follows necessarily.
5) Judging whether a statement is specific enough.
6) Judging whether a statement is actually the application of a certain principle.
7) Judging whether an observation statement is reliable.
8) Judging whether an inductive conclusion is warranted.
9) Judging whether the problem has been identified.
10) Judging whether something is an assumption.
11) Judging whether a definition is adequate.
12) Judging whether a statement made by an alleged authority is acceptable. "often spoken of as a skill which has been developed. (1962, 84)

These twelve aspects are applicable to the understanding and production of humor. For example, Items one, two and three are directly related to understanding most puns or jokes. Item eleven, "questioning assumptions" is also used frequently. A student who understands a pun or
joke has demonstrated competence in these areas. Many other aspects apply to different humor situations. I will discuss three examples that I use in my class.

One joke I use with my students is, "There were five people under one umbrella. Why didn’t they get wet?...It wasn’t raining." The understanding and interpretation of this joke, and similar jokes, involves discernible skills; it compels an initial analysis which requires the critical thinker to generate without judgment the various possibilities: how big was the umbrella, how big were the five people, how hard was it raining, etc. The next step might be to compare and contrast these solutions, putting them in a hierarchical order. The problem solving aspect is focused on narrowing these possibilities in order to find the most plausible answer. Another strategy which would allow one to get this joke would be questioning the assumption that it is always raining when one has an open umbrella.

My second example illustrates how Item two in Ennis’ model “judging whether there is ambiguity in a line of reasoning,” is employed. "Where is the best place to find a helping hand?...at the end of your arm." In the first part of this joke, the listener must recognize that ambiguity exists, that all the information needed to solve the joke is not available. Detecting the ambiguity allows the listener to generate several possible solutions, and the implications of the possible answers. To get this joke, the listener must
understand what the word "place" and "helping" really mean in the context of the joke, and the two underlying representations for these words.

My final example illustrates how Item three of Ennis' model, "judging whether certain statements contradict each other" is used in understanding humor. "How can a pants pocket be empty and still have something in it?...It can have a hole in it." The joke initially, does not provide any apparent resolution. On the surface, the listener is subjected to an "if-then" situation; logically, if the pants pocket is empty then it cannot contain anything. The listener recognizes the joke is a problem to solve. The solution to the joke requires the listener to use his frame of reference about a pocket and combine it with the understanding that, what he generates, has to be able to exist in an empty pocket.

In my experience, critical thinking students unquestionably perform better at solving a riddle or pun than those students who wait passively for an answer. Now, I understand the specific reasons why. Competence in understanding words, distinguishing the different possibilities, evaluating the context of a joke require and practice a student's critical thinking and problem solving abilities.

**Sternberg's definition of critical thinking.**

Sternberg (1987) defines critical thinking as the aptitude to examine problems and make deductions and draw conclusions about those problems.

**Components of critical thinking.**

**Metacomponents: Executive Processes.** The executive processes, which Sternberg dubs "metacomponents" deal with formulating, regulating and appraising thinking; these are the processes that maintain and classify the performance and learning processes. Sternberg (1988) notes that the "executive processes are used to plan, monitor, and evaluate problem solving." The executive processes, which Sternberg (1988) perceives as critical to real-world problem solving, are "recognizing the existence of a problem, defining the nature of the problem, generating the set of steps needed to solve the problem, combining these steps into a workable strategy for problem solution, deciding how to represent information about the problem, allocating mental and physical resources to solving the problem, and monitoring the solution to the problem" (79). The role of these processes in understanding a joke is appraisal of various kinds of contradiction, ambiguity, double entendre. The metacomponents alert the joke hearer to reappraise and resolve surface contradictions or problems. In the umbrella joke, for example, it requires one to review and question the assumption that it is always raining when one is under an open umbrella.
**Performance Components.** Sternberg suggests that the nonexecutive performance processes or "performance components," consist of the encoding, inferring, mapping, applying and justifying processes used in the execution of a task. Sternberg states "performance components, or the nonexecutive processes are used to carry out the instructions of the metacomponents." In other words performance components are the procedures used to accomplish a task.

**Knowledge Acquisition Components.** Sternberg proposes "knowledge acquisition components, are the nonexecutive processes used to learn the subskills of how to solve the problem. They are the procedures used to assimilate new information. They are controlled by the metacomponents. Sternberg proposes three: selective encoding, selective combination, and selective comparison. Selective encoding acts as a filter between germane and superfluous new information. This is clearly used in comprehending the jokes analyzed above. Selective combination suggests that certain details are altered into a usable form; they are then synthesized in a precise manner that augments inner links. For example, in the joke noted earlier the meaning of the hole must be altered from nothing to something in this instance. Allow these two examples to suffice to show how the components are used in understanding jokes.
Relevance to humor.

In this thesis, I propose that the metacomponents, performance components, and knowledge acquisition components, all function in an individual's ability to understand jokes or in his sense of humor. I believe that when we find something funny it is because higher level thinking processes, the metacomponents, have played a part in our comprehension. The performance components, working with the metacomponents, allow us to encode or make sense of the information. The knowledge acquisition components take this information one step further and, drawing upon our past experiences, our frame of reference, allows for selective encoding, selective combinations, and selective comparisons.

Suls' definition of humor processes.

Suls' (1972) believes that information processing within the humorous mode is analogous to that of critical thinking and problem solving. He proposes a two stage information processing model which describes humor as the perception of incongruity or expectancy violation and, the resolution of the incongruity. In his information processing model, Suls suggests that "getting a joke" is actually reconciling the incongruous parts and therefore is a problem solving activity.
Suls' model of information processing.

**Stage one.** In the first stage "perception of incongruity or expectancy violation" Suls proposes that a "narrative scheme" is formulated at the beginning using the initial linguistic input from the main part of the joke (1972, 72). In other words, when first hearing a joke the recipient, using his prior frame of reference, sets the stage to the story which he fully anticipates will contradict his presumed expectations.

**Stage two.** In the second stage "resolution of the incongruity", Suls (1972) explains that "the perceiver engages in a form of problem solving to find a cognitive rule which makes the punch line follow from the main part of the joke and reconciles the incongruous parts" (81). Suls' model suggests that understanding a joke results from understanding a sequence of ideas and their relationship.

The familiar frog riddle exemplifies this. "What happened to the frog who parked illegally?...it got toad away." The listener first hears the main part of the joke, ("What happened to the frog who parked illegally"); this exemplifies Stage One of Suls' model. The listener recognizes an incongruity or expectancy violation upon hearing the punch line, ("it got towed away"). This joke is not particularly funny until the listener considers that "towed" is spelled "toad".

Thus, Suls' suggests that "getting a joke" is actually reconciling the incongruous parts, and therefore is a problem solving activity. Suls (1972)
asserts that, "humor derives from experiencing a sudden incongruity which is then made congruous" (83).

Relationship of Critical Thinking and Humor

Although the definitions of critical thinking asserted by Ennis, Sternberg and Suls differ, clearly according to all three models the understanding of humor relies on critical thinking principles. Humor, practices critical thinking skills in a context of positive high interest. Experts agree that such practice will facilitate the continued use of and growth in critical thinking (Costa, 1985). Ennis emphasizes through his list of dispositions the need for the learner to be disposed to use his abilities: the use of humor increases the learner's willingness to attend to the content and to use the relevant skills.

Suls work is most compelling to me. He asserts, "when the perceiver meets with an incongruity (usually in the form of a punch line or a cartoon) and then is motivated to resolve the incongruity either by retrieval of information in the joke or cartoon or from his/her own storehouse of information. According to this account, humor results when the incongruity is resolved; that is, the punch line is seen to make sense at some level with the earlier information in the joke, lacking a resolution the respondent does not "get" the joke, is puzzled, and sometimes even frustrated. The resolution phase is a form of problem solving, an attempt to draw information or inferences that make a link or provide a fit between the initial body of the joke, cartoon, or situation and its ending." (1986, 42)
CHAPTER V
STUDENT VIEWS OF HUMOR

Introduction

How does a teacher affect students' sense of humor? Studies suggest that teachers can develop effective student-oriented humor strategies only if they think carefully about their own role as an audience for their students' humor. Not only does the teacher control the classroom environment and devise the opportunities for students to express humor, but the teacher is also a member of the audience the student addresses.

The use of humor in my classroom has provided a pleasant supportive environment, has facilitated class management, helped to clarify subject content, and has motivated student participation. In light of the theoretical concepts discussed in the previous chapters, I wondered how students in my class perceived humor. So, in attempting to answer this question, I chose to give a group of eighth-grade students a questionnaire of thirty-four items which would give me a real insight into their individual thoughts and feelings on the value humor has to them and to their learning.

In writing this survey, I considered the following questions: do students perceive humor as having a positive or negative effect in their classroom environment? Questions one, seven, eleven, and twelve were used to convey student reaction to these questions: do students perceive
humor as enhancing or impeding learning? How and why do students feel humor is employed? Do students perceive a "funny" teacher as being more or less competent.

**Student Survey**

**Purpose.**

The purpose of this survey was to investigate middle school students' perceptions of the effect of humor in their classroom. The following question was the basis of this survey: do students believe that humor aids them in their learning.

The survey was augmented by an informal open-ended task. The students were asked three weeks before the survey was administered to write a brief essay describing the behavior of their funniest teacher and to explain how that teacher's behavior effected their learning. The results of those essays will be used to illuminate the survey results and selections from those essays will be offered and interpreted in the Discussion Section.

**Subjects.**

The sample group consisted of fifty, eighth grade students enrolled in an public inner city middle school computer class. Students between the ages of thirteen and sixteen years of age participated in the survey; twenty-three students were female and twenty-seven were male.
Instrument.

The questionnaire presented to the students consisted of 34 multiple choice questions regarding their perception of the qualities and attributes that made something funny and constituted effective use of humor in the classroom.

Procedure.

The survey took one class period, approximately, forty minutes to complete. After the survey instrument was distributed, directions were read aloud and a request for questions was made. Students were told that each of the questions would be read aloud by the teacher. Students were requested not to jump ahead but to wait until each question was asked before answering.

Analysis of Student Survey

This section includes the thirty-four questions introduced in the student survey together with student responses and a brief commentary. The survey was given to fifty, eight-grade students, twenty-three students were female, twenty-seven were male. Students were between thirteen and sixteen years of age. Of the thirteen year old students, two were male and four were female. Of the fourteen year old students, thirteen were male and
eleven were female. Of the fifteen year old students, eleven were male and three were female. The sixteen year old students included one male and two female participants.

Students perception of their humor. Forty-nine students responded to the question "are you funny?" Of the twenty-six males responding, sixteen responded "yes" to the question while nine responded "sometimes" and one male student responded "no" to the question. Of the twenty-three female students, three responded "yes", while twenty responded "sometimes" to the question. It was interesting to note that only three female students perceived themselves as funny, whereas the majority of boys perceived themselves funny.

The following Tables summarize the results of the questionnaire. I have included the Tables to give the reader the clearest picture of subtle differences in student opinions.
1. I most like humorists or comedians who . . .

A) fall down, hit others, slip on banana peels.
B) say funny things that don’t hurt anyone, that play on words or use puns to make people laugh.
C) say insulting things to people that make the comedian look "big."

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<tr>
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<th>A</th>
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<tr>
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<td>33</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students indicated a preference for humor which involves incongruity. Only twenty-six percent of those surveyed indicated a preference toward humor involving superiority and the disparagement of others (see Table 1).
2. The TV show I most like is . . .

A) FRESH PRINCE
B) COSBY
C) LIVING COLOR
D) OTHER please name TV show in blank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Forty-eight percent of students surveyed indicated a preference for a program featuring humor which involved superiority. While only two students indicated a preference for a program which featured incongruity humor. Table 1 suggests a strong valuing of incongruity humor; however Table 2 indicates when choosing specific TV programs superiority humor was selected (see Table 1 and Table 2).
3. The humor I most like...

A) circus clowns and physical fooling around.
B) comedians like Cosby whose jokes make you see something in a new way.
C) comedians like Roseanne Barr who rank on people.

TABLE 3

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>C</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students report inconsistently on what type of humor they prefer and the comic shows they prefer. Table 1 and Table 2 show a strong valuing of incongruity humor; however, as Table 2 and Table 3 show when choosing specific programs students are divided almost evenly between incongruity and superiority humor (see Tables 1, 2 and 3).
4. I learn best in a classroom where...

A) the teacher sets the rules and punishes students, without humor, when the rules are broken.
B) when the teacher has clear rules but uses humor to explain them.
C) when the teacher has clear rules and uses humor to enforce them.
D) when students fight and the teacher uses humor to "relax" everybody after.
E) when the teacher uses humor to get our attention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
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<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of students value a teacher's humor to secure and hold the classes attention. Since attention is closely related to learning this would indicate that humor should cause students to learn more (see Table 4).
I like a teacher who . . .

A) never uses sarcasm or "caps" on students.
B) rarely uses sarcasm on students.
C) sometimes uses sarcasm on students who deserve it.
D) frequently uses sarcasm on students who don't deserve it.
E) always uses sarcasm.

### TABLE 5

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<thead>
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<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students indicate that a teacher's sarcasm, toward another student, is acceptable if students perceive it as "deserved" (see Table 5).
6. I like a teacher who . . .

A) always uses word play and puns.
B) frequently uses word play and puns to keep students alert.
C) sometimes uses word play or puns when it is applicable to the lesson.
D) rarely uses word play or puns.
E) never uses word play or puns.

TABLE 6

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<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thirty-four percent of surveyed students value teacher's who use word play or puns provided it is related to the lesson. Whereas, twenty-four percent of students answering this question preferred a teacher who never uses word play or puns (see Table 6).
7. I like a teacher who . . .

A) never acts or looks silly (for example, this teacher doesn’t dress up on Halloween).
B) rarely uses costumes, only on appropriate holidays (for example, on Halloween).
C) sometimes uses costumes and props if they are appropriate to the lesson.
D) frequently uses costumes and props.
E) always uses costumes and props to get ideas across and to keep kids attention.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of students indicate that they preferred a teacher who rarely used costumes. Perhaps a teacher’s use of costumes or props lower the students’ preconceived notion of how a teacher should conduct themselves (see Table 7).
8. I learn best when the teacher . . .
A) never makes or allows jokes.
B) rarely makes a joke or gives a funny example related to the lesson.
C) sometimes makes a joke to give us a break from the lesson.
D) frequently uses funny examples in the lesson everyday.
E) always fools around even if it takes away from the lesson.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twenty-four percent of students surveyed preferred the rare use of funny examples by teachers, while thirty-four percent enjoyed the frequent use of funny examples (see Table 8).
9. I learn best in a classroom climate that...

A) never is relaxed or permits humor related to the classwork.
B) rarely is relaxed or permits humor related to the classwork.
C) sometimes is relaxed and permits humor related to the classwork.
D) frequently is relaxed and permits any kind of humor.
E) always is relaxed and permits any kind of humor.

TABLE 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
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<th>C</th>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Forty percent of students surveyed indicated that a classroom which was sometimes relaxed, permitting humor related to the lesson, facilitated their learning (see Table 9).
10. When the teacher tells a funny story, it helps me remember what I have to learn when the story is . . .

A) never related to the topic we are studying.
B) rarely related to the topic we are studying.
C) sometimes related to the topic we are studying.
D) frequently related to the topic we are studying.
E) always related to the topic we are studying.

TABLE 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students appreciate teacher facilitated humor provided that it is related to the lesson, this is indicated throughout Tables 6, 8, 9, 10. It would seem that students expect school to be a serious place, devoid of humor, however, humor germane to the lesson is considered to be legitimate (see Table 10).
11. When the teacher tells a funny story about what we are learning it ..

A) never distracts me or makes it harder to learn.
B) rarely distracts me or makes it harder to learn.
C) sometimes distracts me and makes it harder to learn.
D) frequently distracts me and makes it harder to learn.
E) always distracts me and makes it harder to learn.

TABLE 11

<table>
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<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sixty-six percent of students surveyed found humor not to be distracting to their learning (see Table 11).
12. Making up a joke and solving a problem are a lot alike because . . .

A) Joking and Problem Solving use the same kind of thinking.

TABLE 12A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of students felt that joking and problem solving did not use the same kind of thinking (see Table 12A).
B) Joking and Problem Solving, both come up with something new.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Students indicate in Table 12A that joking and problem solving come up with something new. This was interesting to note given the results of Table 12B. I would speculate here that students are oriented to believe that problem solving is serious business and joking is negligible (see Table 12A and 12B).
C) Joking and Problem Solving require you to use words.

TABLE 12C

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>FEMALE</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Seventy-two percent of students surveyed indicated that joking and problem solving require you to use words (see Table 12C).

D) Joking and Problem Solving benefit people.

TABLE 12D

<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>MALE</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
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<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Forty-four percent of students agreed that joking and problem solving benefit people. Whereas, fifty-six percent of those responding to this question disagreed (see Table 12D).
E) Joking and Problem Solving are enjoyable and make you feel good.

### TABLE 12E

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of students agree that joking and problem solving are enjoyable and make you feel good (see Table 12E).

F) Joking and Problem Solving are NOT enjoyable and don’t make you feel good.

### TABLE 12F

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seventy-four percent of students surveyed agree that joking and problem solving are enjoyable and make you feel good (see Table 12F).
13. Making up a joke is NOT like solving a problem because . . .

A) Problem Solving is a serious activity and Joking is not serious.

TABLE 13A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of students feel that problem solving is a serious activity (see Table 13A).
B) Problem Solving requires thinking, Joking does not.

TABLE 13B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
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<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
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<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students are almost equally divided as to whether joking requires thinking (see Table 13B).
C) Problem Solving will “get you somewhere in life”, Joking won’t.

**TABLE 13C**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students believe that problem solving will get them somewhere in life and joking will not (see Table 13C).

D) Problem Solving requires new ideas, but Joking can use an old idea.

**TABLE 13D**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
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<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
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<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of students indicate that problem solving requires a new idea, but joking can use an old idea (see Table 13D).
E) Problem Solving is not enjoyable, Joking is.

TABLE 13E

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
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<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
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<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students find joking enjoyable. However, problem solving not considered enjoyable (see Table 13E).

F) Problem Solving is enjoyable, Joking is not.

TABLE 13F

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
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<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
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<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overwhelmingly students disagree with the premise that joking is not enjoyable (see Table 13F).

A) in a classroom where the teacher explains the rules and uses humor to enforce them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALWAYS</th>
<th>FREQUENTLY</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>RARELY</th>
<th>NEVER</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of student preferred a classroom where a teacher explained the rules and used humor to enforce them (see Table 14A).

B) in a strict no nonsense classroom, where jokes are never welcome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALWAYS</th>
<th>FREQUENTLY</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>RARELY</th>
<th>NEVER</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of student indicated that their behavior is best in a no nonsense classroom where jokes are never welcomed (see Table 14B).
in a classroom where I’m expected to concentrate but a joke is ok if it is about the lesson.

TABLE 14C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALWAYS</th>
<th>FREQUENTLY</th>
<th>SOMETIME</th>
<th>RARELY</th>
<th>NEVER</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of students indicated that they are on always on their best behavior in a class where concentration is expected but a joke related to the lesson is ok (see Table 14C).

when I’m expected to concentrate and the teacher makes a joke unrelated to lesson.

TABLE 14D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALWAYS</th>
<th>FREQUENTLY</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>RARELY</th>
<th>NEVER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When a teacher makes a joke unrelated to the lesson, thirty-two percent of the students suggested that sometimes they are on their best behavior (see Table 14D).
E) where joking is always ok.

TABLE 14E

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALWAYS</th>
<th>FREQUENTLY</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>RARELY</th>
<th>NEVER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a classroom where joking is always ok, thirty-eight percent of the students responded that they sometimes were on their best behavior. While thirty-two percent responded they were always on their best behavior. (see Table 14E).

F) where joking is always ok, even if it takes away from the lesson.

TABLE 14F

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ALWAYS</th>
<th>FREQUENTLY</th>
<th>SOMETIMES</th>
<th>RARELY</th>
<th>NEVER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MALE</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where joking unrelated to the lesson, is always ok twenty-eight percent of students agreed they were on their best behavior while twenty-four percent of students surveyed disagreed that it effected their behavior positively (see Table 14F).
Questions 15 through 34 summarizes the data from survey questions 1 through 15. The large majority of both males and females believe humor facilitates memory, and makes learning enjoyable and that teachers who use humor are not distracting from learning and are better teachers than serious teachers. Overall, students enjoy humor in themselves and their classmates, but reject teasing. In general students see others of their own gender as funnier than those of the opposite gender (see Table 15).
Summary of Results

Learning.

When asked if "humor helps me to remember better" 80% of the students responded that humor did help. Most students agreed that they learned best in a classroom where the teacher used humor to get class attention.

The majority of students felt that humor, related to the subject they were learning, improved their ability to retain information. In addition, 66% of these students believed that a funny story related to the subject matter never distracted them or made it harder to learn. When asked if "funny teachers are better than serious teachers" 82% of the students agreed. Moreover, 76% of the students surveyed did not find that a teacher who made jokes distracting.

Types of humor.

With regards to the type of comedian they preferred, students were almost divided down the middle, 56% preferred incongruity type humor, such as Bill Cosby "whose jokes make you see something in a new way, while 48% preferred superiority type humor such as Roseanne Barr who "rank on people."

Joke telling. It was interesting to note that 72% of the students stated that some students make too many jokes; 94% indicated liking it
when others told jokes and; 88% of students signified that they enjoyed thinking up new jokes to tell friends. Students were almost equally divided as to whether the ability to be funny increased a student's popularity, 54% students agreed that it was a contributing factor to student popularity, while 46% disagree.

**Teasing.** The majority of students seemed to enjoy superiority type humor, that is humor brought about at the expense of another: 42% indicated they enjoyed teasing friends and; 72% of the students surveyed liked to watch other students tease each other. In regards to teacher/student interaction: 70% of the students surveyed enjoyed watching a student "caping" on a teacher; 70% students like it when the teacher "caped" on a student and 54% students noted that it was alright for a teacher to use sarcasm on students who deserve it. However, 90% students indicated that they did not like it when they were teased. One surprising result was the response to the question "girls are funnier than boys" twenty-six boys agreed, that girls were funnier and only one boy disagreed.

**Summary of Student Responses**

Humor, related to learning, is strongly supported by students. Students who responded positively suggested humor helped them to learn.
that humor made learning fun, was relaxing, and that it makes the learner want to learn more, and that teachers who joke related to students more positively and were perceived to be more effective. Some students said,

"It [humor] makes it [learning] fun."

"When they [the teacher] make you laugh sometimes you think and get the answer."

"While he's [the teacher] teaching, he tells us jokes which makes it easier for us to remember what we talked about when its time for us to take a test."

"Usually right before we start our lesson he brings up some of the strangest things you could ever imagine. Only about five minutes after we find out that it had something to do with our studies."

"[I like it] if a teacher makes jokes while he's teaching because the kids relate to him or her."

"He is the funniest teacher because he teaches in a fun way. He makes me and my friends laugh."

Those students responding negatively reported that humor impeded their learning when it was unconnected to the lesson and noted that school was a serious place and education was serious business:

"It [humor] gets my mind off my work."

"Nobody will learn."

"Because its not time to clown around its time to work."
"It is not nothing educational it is something
that you joke around with not something
that you learn."

"I never get any work done and it pulls my
grade down."

Students indicate that teacher ridicule or sarcasm is acceptable if it is
rarely used or if students perceive it as "deserved" by another student.

"When girls in my class start trouble he [the
teacher] would start to say funny things
about them."

"One day Mr. Z started to teach when Frank
and Gibbs were laughing and Mr. Z started
to cap on them and call them funny names."

"Natalio liked to swear and cheat on his
work that is why Mr. Z swore and capped
on Natalio."

"Mr. Z swore and capped at the bad kids
that interrupted him and were real bad like
Mary Anne."

"He [the teacher] don't kick them out when
they do something wrong, he caps on the
person then they stop."

"She [the teacher] would make fun of people
who look at her in a weird way."

"Sometimes if you tried to cap on him [the
teacher] he would make you feel
embarrassed."

"He [the teacher] likes to cap on kids and
make funny faces at them."

81
However, undeserved ridicule by a teacher was seen by students to be dehumanizing and inviting confrontation.

"She [the teacher] talked about Kory my cousin, she said he looks like gonzo because he had a big nose. He started crying because she embarrassed him in front of his girlfriend."

"She [the teacher] caps on people so much that she used to make them cry, especially girls."

"She [the teacher] told me that I was a good student and she was sorry for what she said to me but, I should not talk like a pimp. I got angry at her and started talking about her and everybody started laughing at her."

"One day this boy went to school with small highwaters pants and she [the teacher] made fun of him. I felt very bad for the dude because if it was me or my brother I wouldn’t like to be made fun of."

"The reason she [the teacher] and most people didn’t get along was because she was always trying to cap on people.

"When he’s [the teacher] teaching he always makes a joke about someone. He really likes to pick on some of his students, and I’m one of them!"

Students liked teachers who used word play or puns provided it related to the lesson or was germane to school behavior.

"Sometimes he would tell jokes according to the class lesson."

"He tells jokes to backup the lesson."
"He [the teacher] would play all kinds of games. Like tongue twister games to see if we have gum."

"Even though we joke around in both classes, we learn a lot. The class clowns always jokes around and disturbs the procedure going on. That disturbs our learning and we can’t get anything accomplished."

"She [the teacher] would start with a humorous metaphor. Which was nothing more than a famous saying twisted around, she had made these with many of her students."

The majority of students indicated that they preferred a teacher who rarely used costumes. However, students essay comments indicated that they were very attentive to the way a teacher dressed or presented themselves,

"Her [the teacher] hair is always in a silly looking style, clothes are always colorful and funny looking."

"He teaches the dirtiest class and still wears a tie to school"

"He’s tall muscular and a little bald in the front of his head. He looks like Ulysses S. Grant."

"He comes to school like he just came from the local bar. When he walks he wobbles and looks like he’s about to fall."

"He checks himself in a little pocket mirror making sure he has no boogers in his nose, he also checks to see if his teeth are clean as he picks at them."
“He [the teacher] had messed up glasses and his clothes was ripped, and it was like he didn’t act like he knew that his suit was ripped. It was very funny, I laughed and laughed.”

“He also walks with his stomach sticking out like he has a big bowl of jello in his shirt.”

“He usually leaves the classroom, and we all know he smokes in the school because when he goes back in the classroom he smells like he got out of a smokey, murky den!”

“He always wearing spotted socks and silky type of pants and a hat that is too big for him.”

The majority of students found that at teacher telling a funny story or joke not to be distracting to their learning. Students remarked,

“He always tells us stories about how he found a frog in his pool or a bat in his chimney.”

“I think he’s the funniest teacher because he tells jokes while teaching.”

“She [the teacher] is very good at everything she does especially jokes.”

“The teacher I’m telling you about jokes and makes learning fun because, when we are reading in our text books its like we are just talking about life the way it is today.”

“He takes people’s jokes as jokes”
In general the surveyed students valued humor in themselves, in their fellow students, and in their teachers. Students valued humor more when the humor was connected to the lesson's content. Student's report inconsistently on what type of comedians they preferred. Most student's indicated a preference for comedians who's humor involved incongruity and did not disparage anyone. However, when choosing a specific television program student's were divided almost evenly between programs involving incongruity and programs involving superiority humor.

The majority of students value a teacher's use of humor to secure and hold the classes attention. Many students suggested that teacher who joked was not as boring as a teacher who did not joke. Since attention is closely related to learning this would indicate that humor should cause students to learn more.

Student's found humor not to be distracting to their learning. The majority of students enjoyed teacher's who exercised the opportunity to tell a story or joke. Students indicated that they appreciated teacher facilitated humor provided that it is related to the lesson. It seems that students expected school to be a serious place without humor, however, humor germane to the lesson is considered to be legitimate.
Students indicated throughout the survey and essay assignments that they didn't mind teacher ridicule, as long as it wasn't directed at them or an innocent student. However, when students perceived a teachers' ridicule or sarcasm as being unfair the learning environment suffered.

While reading the essays I was surprised to find the amount of superiority humor used by teachers. I was even more surprised to find that the majority of students enjoyed this type of humor and looked forward to the classes of those teachers who practiced it. In fact, in the majority of essays, student's considered their funniest teacher's to be those teacher's who's techniques exemplified superiority humor. Student essays also indicated that those teachers who used superiority humor have more class control.

In her research on humor and learning, Bryant , et al. (1988) suggest that teachers who use ridicule and sarcasm find it to be a powerful tool in correcting behavioral problems. However, the use of superiority humor is not without consequence as Bryant notes "the long-term consequence of diminished esteem in the eyes of students may make the immediate gains in terms of behavioral correction not worth the costs. And when the moral ramifications of demeaning students who have been entrusted into one's care are also considered, ridicule appears to be a costly corrective" (1988, 71-72).
It is my belief that humor in the classroom should be supportive and free of hostility. I've always felt that the use of superiority type humor creates a confrontational relationship between the teacher and student, which influences a positive classroom environment in addition to the well-being of other student's. In addition, I feel that superiority type humor closes the door to true communication between the teacher and student. Learning is emotional as well as an intellectual activity, a rigid, defensive atmosphere inhibits communication between teacher and student. In summary, the student responses concur with the view of Zillmann and Bryant when they say,

"humor has been found to facilitate students' attention to educational messages, to make learning more enjoyable, to promote students' creativity, and, under some conditions, to improve information acquisition and retention." (75)
CHAPTER VI
HUMOR IN THE CLASSROOM

Introduction
Humor is one tool a teacher can employ to add interest and bring spontaneity, enjoyment, and warmth to the classroom. Humor encourages a positive environment by allowing students to be original and exercise leadership. In addition, humor fosters classroom communication and steers students away from functional fixedness. The appropriate use of humor is an influential device that can help educators constructively effect changes in a children knowledge, attitude, skill, and aspirations in the academic process.

This chapter is divided into two sections: the benefits of humor, which encompass the physiological, psychological and sociological aspects of using humor; and humor in the classroom which explores the connection humor has to the learning process. I shall present the ways in which I use humor, in my classroom, as a means to create a positive, joyful learning environment. I shall draw on my teaching experiences and give examples, strategies and techniques that I have used to implement humor with my students. In addition to exploring the connection of humor to the learning process, this chapter, when applicable, integrates recommended practices.
with the views on critical and creative thinking and humor presented in the previous chapters.

**Benefits of Humor**

**Physical benefits.**

*Viewed in context.* Given our society, children today are under stress. Humor has been documented to reduce stress (Lefcourt and Martin, 1986). Researchers found stress one of the most debilitating factors in limiting top performance, while, humor was found to be one of the fundamental strategies to use in the management of stress. There is an increasing receptivity of contemporary researchers to the idea that humor has more influence on physical health than previously realized. These theorists suggest that the power of humor is not confined merely to psychological interests but subsequently results in physical benefits. They suggest that humor is more than a momentary recognition of incongruity which results in laughter, but that it has a direct influence in the reduction of stress.

**Stress.** Children today are under stress. Stress is an extensively acknowledged outgrowth of our technological society. Humor has been documented to reduce stress (Lefcourt and Martin, 1986). So just what is stress and how does it effect us? Like humor, there is not a specific
definition of stress on which researchers agree. Webster's Family Encyclopedia (1989) defines it as,

Any condition or circumstance that endangers the well being of an individual and upsets his or her psychological equilibrium. Prolonged stress causes initial alarm, followed by attempts at coping; if these are not successful, then physical and mental symptoms appear. These symptoms are also known as stress and they vary from person to person. Stress can lead to anxiety, depression, and psychosomatic disorders and it can trigger an episode of mental illness in vulnerable people." (10)

The body responds to stress with a multitude of messages, among them physical and mental illness. Particularly interesting in our understanding of stress is that many of the most important advances in this research have taken place during the past decade. Studies done by Nevo and Shapira (1988) indicate that humor positively influences the immune functions, reduces pain, improve circulation and respiration, and dissipate physical illness.

Psychological benefits.

Viewed in context. Children are subject to various external conditions to which they must adjust or adapt. Humor reduces frustration and pressure when learning something new, and humor is one mechanism useful to students in cultivating adaptive methods. The role humor plays in emotional development is receiving increasing attention by educators.

Current research suggests a link between emotional well being and using
humor in the classroom (Ziv, 1984; McGhee, 1988; Martin, 1988; Bryant, 1988; Bariaud, 1988).

Coping with adversity. Children whose sense of humor is cultivated throughout their education will be equipped with an important coping skill that can add to their strategies and resources in dealing with hostile situations. In cultivating humor in children, Martin (1988) states "the ability to respond with humor and laughter in the face of adversity represents an important skill in the child's coping repertoire" (136).

What once might have been overpowering is viewed as challenging. Martin (1988) suggests that, "by providing alternative perspectives on the situation, humor allows for a reappraisal of the threatening nature of the problem, permitting one to view it more objectively and potentially engaged in more effective problem solving" (151). He has suggested that coping through humor causes a cognitive shift, the ability to see something in a new way, which changes our perception of the problem.

Social benefits.

Humor also aids in the preservation of dignity and self-esteem for both students and teachers. Humor can aid teachers in generating social contact between students. Many theorists contend that the purpose of humor is to communicate with an audience and to create a pleasurable atmosphere for everybody. As Ziv (1984) notes, "those who can make
others laugh have a certain social power: They can influence the others’ behavior. They create circumstances to which the others have to respond. This response - laughter - is a pleasurable feeling, and the humorists is therefore rewarded by receiving status in the group. Nor does creating humor in a group only bring popularity; it is also related to leadership” (169).

In her research with adolescents on popularity, Goodchilds (1959) notes that “they associate it with the ability to laugh and to make others laugh. Students use humor for various reasons most notably: social acceptance or popularity and leadership in that they can influence other students behavior; status in the group, and as a defense mechanism” (6).

A child who is able to initiate humor, Bariaud (1988) suggests “holds the attention of others (whether peers or adults), establishes positive relationships (it is enjoyable to laugh together), gains accomplices to his underlying intentions, and reverses the usual order of dominance” (34).

**Humor in my Classroom**

**Overview.**

Since all educational techniques, even tried and true methods entail some degree of risk, why would anyone ever depart from standardized procedures? One reason is because we LOVE the results that effective new teaching techniques can achieve. Data presented in this thesis indicate that teachers should use humor in the classroom and that those teachers who
use humor to clarify course content have an enriched curriculum and facilitate memory of curricula.

The use of humor in my classroom has provided a pleasant supportive environment, has facilitated class management, has helped to clarify subject content, and has motivated student participation. I have found that shrewd use of humor in my classroom has contributed to the creation of optimal conditions for learning to occur.

Teacher humor.

Zillmann (1988) suggests that teachers can use premeditated humor constructively to increase their effectiveness and student attention in the classroom. Students are motivated to listen and read something humorous because it makes them laugh. They are often unaware that they are drawing conclusions, making inferences and predictions. Teacher's who understand the basic concepts involved in humor can use it as a tool to enhance the curriculum; and defuse discipline problems.

Zillmann (1980) makes specific reference to the attributes of humor on student attention and states, "In practical terms, the educator who deals with an audience whose attentiveness is below the level necessary for effective communication should indeed benefit from employing humor early on and in frequent short bursts" (178).
The primary goal of this section is to suggest practical ideas that a teacher might use as a stepping stone in bringing about humor to enhance learning. In the classroom it is important to avoid superiority humor or humor that relies on sarcasm. The kind of humor I use is incongruity and relief humor. I often will behave in surprising ways that students consider incongruous (e.g., witches role). I use humor to prevent and defuse tense situations and to provide relief for power struggles or other tensions. Although I have addressed the theoretical principles when applicable, my main purpose is to provide realistic ideas for implementing humor that I, and other teachers with whom I have worked, have used successfully in the classroom.

Student humor.

A strong case can be made for teachers to use humor-oriented teaching strategies that encourage children actively to participate in creating humor. In a study done by Ziv, students, that were considered to be amateur humorists, were found to demonstrate more leadership, creative thinking, popularity, less anxiety, and positive self-image than their less humorous peers (1984, 167-169). Ziv notes the relationship between humor and creativity finding that those students who are able to create humor are more likely to use dissociation and local logic which are basic to thinking. Ziv (1984) found that creative thinking "is the clearest cognitive
trait of amateur humorists" (134). When teachers develop assignment and
strategies that sharpen students' sense of humor, the students learn the
value of humor as a process of communication. Students will better
understand the goal of humor which is to see things in new or different
ways.

Humor helps us to see things in a new way. This ability to see
relationships between seemingly dissimilar entities, equips us to make better
decisions by linking bits of information with other bits of information.
Through humor these higher level thinking skills can be done in a non-
threatening non-punitive manner! Humor challenges intellectual capabilities,
it invites creativity because it presents problems that do not require a
practical conclusion.

One good way I have found to help my students develop a sense of
humor is to publish their jokes, riddles and cartoons. Publishing can take
many forms from a school newsletter to individual or class books. Students
cherish seeing their cartoons displayed on a bulletin board in the classroom
or bound into a book and placed for posterity in the library. Students who
published their cartoons or jokes view other students reactions as important
and supportive. To be able to make one's peers laugh is important in
evaluating the humor as a creative act and in building self-esteem and
interpersonal confidence in middle school.
My classroom: the site.

I teach in a multi-racial, bilingual inner-city middle school. There are six hundred and fifty-four students in grades six through eight. Of these, three hundred and ninety-three are mainstreamed students, one hundred and twelve are bilingual students and one hundred and forty-nine are special educational students. Many of the children I teach have special learning problems, are living in foster homes, have been the victims and/or perpetrators of violence, child abuse and neglect, or have had altercations with the law.

Practical ideas and strategies.

Due to the dismal circumstances of many of my students, it is important to me that my classroom is a happy place. My strategies in bringing about humor have included changing persona, using props, and joke telling. During the first "honeymoon" week of school, I set up many of the props and activities that I use throughout the year. Room banners, desk plaque, and stationary identify me as "Patience Temple." In addition, I introduce myself to the children as Ms. Patience Temple. They are allowed to call me Ms. Patience or Ms. Temple. This initial introduction has brought about some lively student discussions about "Patience" being my "real name." Usually an assertive student will point out that "nobody has the name Patience." This opens the door to my question "Do teachers lie?"
What is a "real name?" "Is it possible to have a name that nobody else has?" "If you had a chance to change your name to a word that wasn't a "real name" what would you call yourself?" "Why?"

I've found that introducing myself this way, before going through the class list, deflects any negative attention from unfamiliar names. As I mentioned previously, my students consist of multi-racial and bilingual students whose names, because of their unfamiliarity, have left them open to the derisive laughter of their peers. Our early discussion of what makes up a "real name" sets up an environment where everyone is accepted.

Another prop I begin the school year with is a witch's hat and broom. As new students walk into the classroom, they are surprised to see these items hanging by the door. Students from previous years know what these items represent. New students, however, are caught off guard and smile. Some of my younger students have even gone over and touched "the hat" before sitting, as if to check it out for magical powers. If I'm asked about it, I casually suggest that it's "transportation" or "a jello mold." Or I might give a wide eyed look, and say "you really don't want to know, do you?" I've found that this is a wonderful opportunity to introduce students to an environment in which play and ambiguity are tolerated. Once students acclimate themselves to the unfettered nature of my classroom, they are more willing to take risks and explore different ideas within the subject matter.
In addition, the witch's hat and broom comes in handy with recalcitrant students attempting to escape from an after school invitation. As older students have come to know, school closing time coincides exactly with the time I turn into a witch. One student, I told to stay after school, informed me, in front of his class, that he "never stayed after school for anyone!" That afternoon, wearing "the hat", I was sitting there on the bus, when he got on. Upon seeing me, he smiled, and good naturedly admitted to being "bagged." For the remainder of the school year, I did not have a problem with this child. In this situation humor helped to alleviate a potential power struggle. Had I not worn "the hat" I could still have made him stay after school, but it would have been done under great emotional strain for the both of us.

New students who see me for the first time coming down the hall, wearing my witch's hat, burst out laughing. Older students always smile and point me in the direction of the student I am looking for. Before I adopted this method, students would run interference between me and the culpable individual; now they assist me.

One word of caution, this activity may have your colleagues looking at you strangely. One teacher told me that a student matter-of-factly explained to her that "its just Ms. Temple, she doesn't get paid after 2:30, so she turns into a witch if she has to keep somebody after school."
After school I also run the "Merry Maid Club." The mission of club members is to clean, straighten up desks and do boring tasks that the teacher does not want to do. Membership is by teacher invitation and is automatically granted after three warnings for classroom misbehavior. The first warning consists of the "knock it off" eyeball. For the second warning I unobtrusively whisper a reprimand into the ear of an unyielding student. The third warning I sing out, to the tune of "you know at 2:30...I know where you’ll be...right here in detention and cleaning for me." Any misconduct usually stops after I have called the class' attention to it (and made the promise to stop singing). However, if the student does not cooperate and continues to misbehave I will place their name on the "Merry Maid Club" board which notes that the meeting for listed members begins at 2:30 p.m. The Merry Maids is not a popular club with students. In fact, classroom behavior dramatically improves to the extent that by October it is next to impossible to find members.

Since instituting the Merry Maid Club, I have come to find out at parents meetings or just chatting with kids that several mothers have opened their own "Merry Maid" chapters at home. One student, who was cleaning after school said "until my mother met you, I never had to clean! Now when my mother finds out I had stay after school, I have to clean when I get home too!"
I've found that humorous poetry also works well in avoiding negative confrontation with students. For instance, two young women opened a "beauty parlor" during class time. This gave me the opportunity to recite a wonderful poem put out by the National Perticular Society, "Share a toy, Share a ride, Share the feelings deep inside, But never share a hat or comb...or lice may make your head their home." The girls put their beauty tools away and went back to school work.

Personas, costumes and t-shirts with humorous messages play an important role in my classroom humor. This past Halloween I went to class as a giant smiley button. I made costume out of recycled yellow vinyl and used a metal coat hanger to fashion a giant pin that I attached to the back. After the holiday I decorated my classroom wall with it.

When I taught a unit on the Oregon Trail, I dressed up in western ware. For the greek myths, I made a band of plastic ferns. When we were using "Carmen Sandiego" (Carmen Sandiego is a computer simulation which requires students as "private eyes" to "track" Carmen and her gang around the U.S.), I wore a fake police badge and referred to myself as the chief.

Another technique I have used to get everybody involved is the Corn Box. It often gets clamorous toward the end of class, and it's especially hard to get this age group to cleanup after themselves. I will warn the class that they "will be punished." These are the three key words I use to put the
class on notice that if they finish before the bell, I will take out the "corn box."

The original "corn box" was a giant corn flake box. The corn box is a box that I made and covered with popcorn that I sprayed with varnish. In it I keep jokes and riddles that are age appropriate for the group. My criteria for student submission is that the joke must be "corny." I pick students randomly, and over the course of the year, everyone gets several turns "on stage." Children who never raise a hand, or who are frightened to give an oral report in class, clamor to tell the group a joke! After a while, I have noticed that "quiet" voices are replaced by forceful, extroverted tones.

One useful distinction I make in my class is the difference between humor - which is constructive and facilitates learning - and what I call merrymaking which is neither of these. I give students oral examples of six or eight behaviors which they categorize as humor or merrymaking. This clarifies the distinction for all, prevents confusion, and practices a critical thinking skill.

A Final Comment

As I have argued, humor, in addition to being valuable by itself, has many benefits in the classroom. It has a positive effect on teacher and student physical and psychological well-being. It fosters a positive learning environment, prevents or defuses classroom conflict. Relief and incongruity humor help to foster positive student/teacher relationships, and when
connected to subject matter content, humor facilitates learning and retention. For me personally, humor has helped to make teaching in a demanding setting a more effective and joyful enterprise.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX

Student Questionnaire

DIRECTIONS: There are no right or wrong answers, so answer according to your own opinion. Answer the following questions by circling the 1 letter which most accurately describes your feelings.

GRADE: 6 7 8  AGE: 10 11 12 13 14 15 16
GENDER: Female  Male  ARE YOU FUNNY?  Yes  No  Sometimes

1. I most like humorists or comedians who . . .
   A) fall down, hit others, slip on banana peels.
   B) say funny things that don’t hurt anyone, that play on words or use puns to make people laugh.
   C) say insulting things to people that make the comedian look “big”.

2. The TV show I most like is . . .
   A) Fresh Prince
   B) Cosby
   C) Living Color
   D) Other please name TV show in blank ________________

3. The humor I most like . . .
   A) Circus clowns and physical fooling around.
   B) Comedians like Cosby whose jokes make you see something in a new way.
   C) Comedians like Roseanne Barr who rank on people.

4. I learn best in a classroom where . . .
   A) the teacher sets the rules and punishes students, without humor, when the rules are broken.
   B) when the teacher has clear rules but uses humor to explain them.
C) when the teacher has clear rules and uses humor to enforce them.

D) when students fight and the teacher uses humor to “relax” everybody after.

E) when the teacher uses humor to get our attention.

5. I like a teacher who . . .

A) never uses sarcasm or “caps” on students.

B) rarely uses sarcasm on students.

C) sometimes uses sarcasm on students who deserve it.

D) frequently uses sarcasm on students who don’t deserve it.

E) always uses sarcasm.

6. I like a teacher who . . .

A) always uses word play and puns.

B) frequently uses word play and puns to keep students alert.

C) sometimes uses word play or puns when it is applicable to the lesson.

D) rarely uses word play or puns.

E) never uses word play or puns.

7. I like a teacher who . . .

A) never acts or looks silly (for example, this teacher doesn’t dress up on Halloween.)

B) rarely uses costumes, only on appropriate holidays (for example, on Halloween).

C) sometimes uses costumes and props if they are appropriate to the lesson.

D) frequently uses costumes and props.

E) always uses costumes and props to get ideas across and to keep kids attention.
8. I learn best when the teacher . . .
   A) never makes or allows jokes.
   B) rarely makes a joke or gives a funny example related to the lesson.
   C) sometimes makes a joke to give us a break from the lesson.
   D) frequently uses funny examples in the lesson everyday.
   E) always fools around even if it takes away from the lesson.

9. I learn best in a classroom climate that . . .
   A) never is relaxed or permits humor related to the classwork.
   B) rarely is relaxed or permits humor related to the classwork.
   C) sometimes is relaxed and permits humor related to the classwork.
   D) frequently is relaxed and permits any kind of .
   E) always is relaxed and permits any kind of humor.

10. When the teacher tells a funny story, it helps me remember what I have to learn when the story is . . .
    A) never related to the topic we are studying
    B) rarely related to the topic we are studying
    C) sometimes related to the topic we are studying
    D) frequently related to the topic we are studying
    E) always related to the topic we are studying

11. When the teacher tells a funny story about what we are learning it . . .
    A) never distracts me or makes it harder to learn.
    B) rarely distracts me or makes it harder to learn.
    C) sometimes distracts me and makes it harder to learn.
    D) frequently distracts me and makes it harder to learn.
    E) always distracts me and makes it harder to learn.
DIRECTIONS: There are no right or wrong answers, so answer according to your own opinion. Read each of the statements below and then rate them as follows, circling the appropriate answer.

12. Making up a joke and solving a problem are a lot alike because
   A) Joking and Problem Solving use the same kind of thinking.  
      AGREE   DISAGREE
   B) Joking and Problem Solving, both come up with something new.  
      AGREE   DISAGREE
   C) Joking and Problem Solving require you to use words.  
      AGREE   DISAGREE
   D) Joking and Problem Solving benefit people.  
      AGREE   DISAGREE
   E) Joking and Problem Solving are enjoyable and make you feel good.  
      AGREE   DISAGREE
   F) Joking and Problem Solving are NOT enjoyable and don’t make you feel good.  
      AGREE   DISAGREE

13. Making up a joke is NOT like solving a problem because . . .
   A) Problem Solving is a serious activity and Joking is not serious.  
      AGREE   DISAGREE
   B) Problem Solving requires thinking, Joking doesn’t.  
      AGREE   DISAGREE
   C) Problem Solving will "get you somewhere in life", Joking won’t.  
      AGREE   DISAGREE
   D) Problem Solving requires new ideas, but Joking can use an old idea.  
      AGREE   DISAGREE
E) Problem Solving is not enjoyable, Joking is.

AGREE   DISAGREE

F) Problem Solving is enjoyable, Joking is not.

AGREE   DISAGREE


A) in a classroom where the teacher explains the rules and uses humor to enforce them.

ALWAYS  FREQUENTLY  SOMETIMES  RARELY  NEVER

B) in a strict no nonsense classroom, where jokes are never welcome.

ALWAYS  FREQUENTLY  SOMETIMES  RARELY  NEVER

C) in a classroom where I’m expected to concentrate but a joke is ok if it is about the lesson.

ALWAYS  FREQUENTLY  SOMETIMES  RARELY  NEVER

D) when I’m expected to concentrate and the teacher makes a joke unrelated to lesson.

ALWAYS  FREQUENTLY  SOMETIMES  RARELY  NEVER

E) where joking is always ok.

ALWAYS  FREQUENTLY  SOMETIMES  RARELY  NEVER

F) where joking is always ok, even if it takes away from the lesson.

ALWAYS  FREQUENTLY  SOMETIMES  RARELY  NEVER
DIRECTIONS: There are no right or wrong answers, so answer according to your own opinion. Answer the following questions by circling YES or NO.

15. Humor helps me to remember better: Yes No
16. I like to clown around (act silly or funny): Yes No
17. I like it when others tell jokes: Yes No
18. Some students make too many jokes: Yes No
19. I like it when my friends tease me: Yes No
20. Boys are funnier than Girls: Yes No
21. I like it when other kids clown around: Yes No
22. I like to tease my friends: Yes No
23. Teachers who make jokes are distracting: Yes No
24. I like it when the teacher tells a joke: Yes No
25. I like to watch other kids tease each other: Yes No
26. School is not the place to joke around: Yes No
27. I like to be the one who tells the jokes: Yes No
28. Girls are funnier than boys: Yes No
29. I like it when the teacher clowns around: Yes No
30. I like to think up new jokes to tell my friends: Yes No
31. Kids who are funny are more popular: Yes No
32. Funny teacher better than serious teachers: Yes No