

Strategies + Humor

Laughing and Learning

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The vibrancy and significance of humor are attracting new attention. In the past two decades, the field of humor scholarship has developed impressively. This growth is apparent in publications and development of interdisciplinary organizations such as The International Society for Humor Studies, The Association for the Study of Play, and The American Humor Studies Association. More than thirty international and national humor conferences are held annually (Nilsen, 1993).

This paper will share some ideas on the importance of using humor in work with at-risk and low-achieving students to help them develop effective and efficient use of Learning Strategies as techniques for enhancing learning.

The information presented here includes a definition of humor, the evolution of the meaning of humor, the functions of humor, the benefits of humor in education, and ways to incorporate humor in the teaching of Learning Strategies also. A general bibliography of humor resources is included.

History and Evolution of Humor

The word humor is a Latin word that originally meant "liquid, fluid, or moisture." Humor originally reflected the appropriate combinations of heat and moisture that accounted for a person's disposition. After becoming a general term for "disposition" or "temperament," humor came to mean a mood or temporary state of mind.

From this developed the sense of caprice, whim, or fancy from which are derived the senses of humor relating to persons or things which are comic or amusing.

Further examination of the word humor came to include the four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. These four elements later became known as the four contraries: hot and cold, moist and dry. These were later referred to as the four humors: "choler" from hot/dry, blood from hot/moist, melancholy from dry/cold, and phlegm from cold/moist.

The four contraries then became known as the four temperaments and came to be associated with people. A "choleric" person (from hot/dry) was considered to be fussy, vindictive, hot-tempered, irascible, and quick to anger. A "sanguine" person, in whom blood predominates, was considered generally cheerful, optimistic, and confident. A "melancholy" person from (dry/cold) was considered prone to extreme dejection and protracted anger and liable to nightmares. A "phlegmatic" type person in whom the elements of cold and moist are exhibited, was considered to be stolid, sluggish, and inclined to be very dull (Merriam-Webster, 1991).

The history of the word "humor," along with this brief description of its evolution may suggest ways to classify humor types and also provide understanding for developing values for the constructive use of humor in the instructional process.

Functions of Humor

Some functions of humor as concluded by Nilsen (1993), include:

1. Physiological Functions
 - a. Exhilaration
 - b. Relaxation
 - c. Healing

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"Humor is a serious thing. I like to think of it as one of our greatest and earliest national resources which must be preserved at all costs."

(continued from page 1)

2. Psychological Functions
 - a. Relief
 - b. Ego Defense
 - c. Coping
 - d. Gaining Status
3. Educational Functions
 - a. Alertness
 - b. Arguing
 - c. Teaching Effectively
 - d. Long-term Memory Learning

The Physiological and Psychological Functions of Humor

The physiological and psychological functions of humor are well documented by Norman Cousins. Cousins' extraordinary account of his personal triumph over severe illness was the forerunner of research and evaluation in these areas. His interest in humor as a healing technique was the result of an incident in the hospital during his illness.

"When I was in the hospital I had a 'We' nurse. She began each sentence with: 'How are we today?' or 'We need to have a bath.' This really irritated me so I decided to play a little joke on her.

One day she brought in a specimen cup and requested a sample. After she left, I poured my apple juice into the cup. When she returned for the specimen, she observed it and noted, 'My we're a little cloudy today, aren't we?'

I asked to see the cup, removed the lid, and said, 'Yep, better run it through again.' I then drank it. The look of shock on her face was priceless." (Wooten, 1994)

Apparently this incident caused Cousins to experience a gut-wrenching, eye-watering, belly laugh and he did not require a shot of morphine which he received every few hours.

Reportedly, the laugh played a part in causing the release of endorphins which are natural pain killers. Cousins also found that a good hard belly laugh before bedtime would allow him one to two hours of pain-free sleep. (Cousins, 1989).

The Educational Functions of Humor

For humor to be effective, the classroom environment should be conducive to students being proactive in the use of humor in learning. The teacher can recognize and participate in this effort so that positive energy

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P

Pick A Formula



E

Explore Words to fit the Formula



N

Note The Words



S

Search for the Verbs and Subjects



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generated in these situations flows many ways. By so doing, the humor is shared and becomes a complete experience for all.

There are many reasons why humor and laughter should be a part of every classroom. Deborah Korbkin (1984) listed several reasons for teachers to use humor. The use of humor increases student-teacher rapport, student attentiveness and interest, and both individual and group task productivity. It also aids creativity and helps in the generation of ideas and divergent thinking. Additional reasons are cited by Thurston and Landberg (1992) as follows.

Humor motivates and energizes. When a teacher creates a learning environment where humor is welcome and even encouraged, students try harder. There is a positive feeling in such a classroom. There is an energy that is both stimulating and infectious. Humor promotes a positive attitude on the part of the teacher and the student. Expectations for learning, feeling, and behaving in a playful manner can have the positive effects of a self-fulfilling prophesy and be powerful antecedents to achievement. Humor builds commonality into the learning environment. When students and teachers laugh together, all feel that they are experiencing a situation or idea in the same way. By introducing humor into otherwise passive or sedentary situations, students are offered an opportunity to become more actively involved in learning.

Humor gives students a "hook" on which to trigger recall. When we learn, we link new information with old information in order to make "sense" of it. Remembering new information or ideas is often easier and relaxing if we associate them with an amusing story, visual image or anecdote.

Humor helps students accept

new ideas. New ideas are often threatening to us. They disturb our world, forcing us to question our views. Humor can make new ideas less threatening.

Humor provokes thought.

Sometimes humor makes us work. When others are laughing and we don't "get" the joke, we are forced to think and to look at the subject from different angles. In the classroom, a joke or humorous situation can



force students to make connections they might otherwise miss.

Some Cautions

Dolf Zillman and Jennings Bryant (1983) warn that when using humor in the classroom teachers must laugh **with** students rather than laughing **at** them. They provide a checklist to determine whether the humor is or is not confrontational. Nonconfrontational humor is based on caring and empathy, while confrontational humor is based on

contempt and insecurity.

Nonconfrontational humor builds confidence, while confrontational humor destroys confidence through "put downs." Nonconfrontational humor includes people in a sharing way, while confrontational humor excludes people. In nonconfrontational humor the person telling the joke often makes himself the butt of the joke, but in confrontational humor there is always some other target. Nonconfrontational humor is supportive, while confrontational humor tends to be sarcastic. In summary, nonconfrontational humor draws people closer together, while confrontational humor forces them apart.

The Strategies Intervention Model and Humor

Combining the Strategies Intervention Model with the use of humor as a vehicle for generating interest and motivation has definite possibilities. An idea for using humor in strategies acquisition might be to include humorous materials during Controlled Practice and diminish their use as students proceed through the Advanced Practice stage and into generalization.

A specific idea would be to have students use *LINCS*, *PAIRS*, or *LISTS* combined with humor.

In cooperative groups, students might generate stories using humorous words or absurd, exaggerated, and out of proportion images coupled with information to be remembered. Be sure to suggest that the visual images have "animation" included because "action-oriented" images have greater potential for being remembered. An incongruous humorous event or something you don't expect to see, coupled with the pragmatic language of the situation may enhance learning and memory. Physical humor, exaggeration, euphemisms and

(continued on page 8)

Get Cookin'

Debbie Newman, A SIM Trainer and Inclusion teacher at Atlantic High School in Delray Beach, Florida has created The Good Strategies Cookbook with several teachers in her school. Each page (called a recipe) describes one idea for "spicing up" instruction. At the bottom of the page are the names of the teachers who contributed the idea. All of the recipes are written in a generic form and can be adapted for any subject matter. Debbie has sprinkled many "SIM" principles and ideas throughout the cookbook. This product is not only a great model for a project that involves a whole staff of teachers in thinking about instruction while working together, but it is also a great resource for instruction. It could be just the gift for yourself or for the teacher on your gift list. Below are a couple of examples from Debbie's Cookbook.

Roll Call

Instead of the usual roll call, have your students answer a simple question instead of saying "here."
Here's how:

Pick a question(s) of the day. Keep the questions simple so the students don't need to think too much about the answer. The simpler the question, the more quickly things will move.

Here are some examples:

Name one bone in your head.

Name an artist from the Renaissance period.

How do you say "newspaper" in French?

Who wrote Moby Dick?

Get the Idea?

Tell the students what the "question of the day" is. When you call the students names for attendance, each student lets you know he/she is "here" by answering the question. Make this a daily ritual in your class.

To be fair to the students, you may want to start your roll call at a different spot each day.

Gotch Ya

Credits to Dawn Bireley

Need a way to get your students more excited about oral reading? Here's one way to do it!

The teacher begins by reading or stating a sentence about or from a reading assignment (for example, "Ernest Hemingway is..."). The teacher selects a student to finish the sentence. That student will continue stating sentences and will stop for someone else to finish. Students may stop mid-word (for example, "Hem...") and the other student must begin with the rest of the word (for example, "...ingway.."). The students may select other students to finish their thoughts or the teacher's thoughts. Each student must say at least two complete sentences before choosing someone else. If a student gets stumped and cannot continue, everyone yells "Gotch ya" and that person is out of the game. Whoever is left at the end gets extra credit points added to the test score. If no students get out, they all earn extra credit.

You may order a copy of the Good Strategies Cookbook by sending your name, address, and \$15 (\$10 cost plus \$5 postage and handling) to Debbie Newman, Atlantic High School, 2501 Seacrest Blvd., Delray Beach, Florida, 33444.

Sentence Writing Strips

Janette De Felice recently submitted several supplemental activities that she uses as a special education teacher in the Baltimore County Public Schools in Baltimore, Maryland. While attending graduate school at John Hopkins School of Continuing Studies, Janette developed these activities to accompany the Learning Strategies Curriculum. Look for other ideas from Janette future issues of Strategram.

Thanks for sharing, Janette!

Objective: Given ten examples of simple sentences on sentence strips and a “pinch card” with the four simple sentence formulas, the student will pinch the corresponding formula on the pinch card with 100% accuracy on two consecutive occasions.

Materials:

Simple Sentence Strips

What are “simple sentence strips”?

Sentences read by students to determine simple sentence formulas.

How are “simple sentence strips” made?

Front: Write one simple sentence on each of ten sentence strips. (Vary the structure to correspond to the simple sentence formulas.)

Back: Write the corresponding simple sentence formula

Laminate each sentence strip.

Simple Sentence Formula “Pinch Cards” (For example see page 7)

What is a “simple sentence formula pinch card”?

A simple sentence formula “pinch card” is a folded paper with SV,SVV,SSV,and SSVV written vertically on both sides so the student choosing the formula can see the symbols as can the student checking for accuracy.

How are “simple sentence formula “pinch cards” used?

One simple sentence formula “pinch card” is needed per pair of students. One student holds the pinch card up so that he/she can see one side, and the partner can see the other side. As the student determines the simple sentence formula of each sentence, he/she using the thumb and index finger, pinches the corresponding formula. The partner checking the student's response will able to see the chosen formula.

Individual Progress Log

What is an “individual progress log”?

An “individual progress log” is a graph that shows how many simple sentence formulas

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were correctly identified out of a trial of 10 sentences across several trials (Each trial covers 10 sentences).

How is an "individual progress log" made? (See sample page 7.)

The enclosed sample graph may be used, or one can be created using a spread sheet on the computer or by hand on a piece of graph paper.

Individual Simple Sentence Formula Response Chart (See sample on page 7.)

What is an "individual simple sentence formula response chart"?

An "individual simple sentence formula response chart" is a small chart on which students check off each sentence correctly identified by their partners per class session.

How is an "individual simple sentence formula response chart" used?

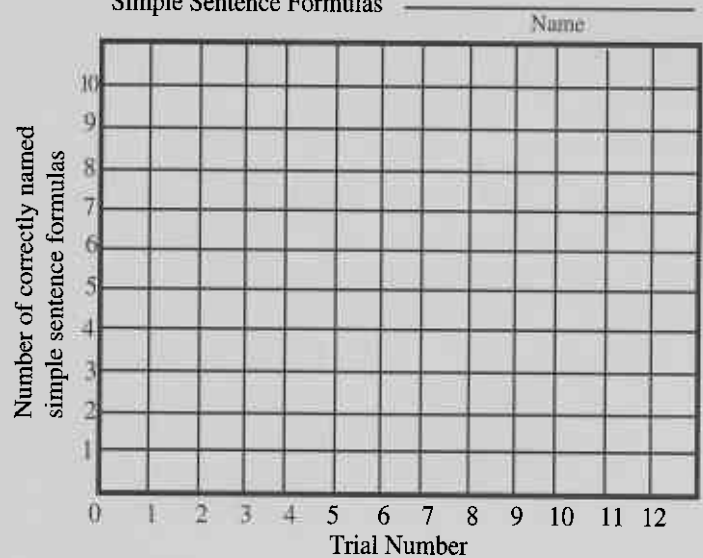
One chart is used for **each student**. As students correctly or incorrectly identify simple sentence formulas, the partners record the responses on this chart using a "-", for an incorrect response, and a "+" for a correct response. (The partner will know each answer since it is written on the back of each "simple sentence strip.")

Procedure:

1. Pair students for daily drills.
2. Each pair of students uses a simple sentence formula folder, which contains the following
 - * Twenty "simple sentence strips"
 - * One "simple sentence formula pinch card"
 - * Two "individual simple sentence formula response charts"
 - * Two "individual progress logs"
3. The students divide the sentence strips into two equal piles of ten (one set for each student).
4. Partner A writes Partner B's name on an "individual sentence formula response chart." Partner A then shows one sentence at a time to his/her partner.
5. Partner B will read the sentence and show the corresponding simple sentence formula by pinching the formula on the "pinch card."
6. For each correct response of Partner B, Partner A records a "+" on the "individual simple sentence formula response chart." For each incorrect response, Partner A records a "-."
7. When Partner B has completed all ten sentences, the activity is repeated for Partner A.
8. Each student records the total number of correct responses on his/her "Individual Progress Log." This allows students to graph their progress over a period of time. ■

| Simple Sentence Formula Response Chart | |
|--|------------|
| Name _____ Date _____ | |
| Sentence Number | Correct ?? |
| 1 | |
| 2 | |
| 3 | |
| 4 | |
| 5 | |
| 6 | |
| 7 | |
| 8 | |
| 9 | |
| 10 | |
| Total Number Correct _____ | |

Student Progress Log For
Simple Sentence Formulas



SIMPLE SENTENCE FORMULA "PINCH CARD"

Simple Sentences

SV

SSV

SVV

SSVV

SV

SSV

SVV

SSVV

Directions: 1. Copy pinch card. 2. Laminate. 3. Fold pinch card in the center. 4. Cut off excess paper on edges.

(continued from page 3)

combining figurative and literal interpretations of words are also rich sources for developing "action" oriented images.

Descriptions or illustrations of postures, voices, and settings are elements that could be altered to inject humor into instruction. For example, an impression of a celebrity using a well-known "saying" or term. Humorous collages (words, smiles, faces, and cartoons) could be a means of presenting information. Instruction in using analogies, similes, and metaphors could be added as students become more sophisticated.

I will continue to work combining humor and learning with the Strategies Intervention Model. I welcome any suggestions, ideas, and collaboration. If you are interested in working together and having a few laughs, please contact me at: Larry Bemish, 234 Rackham, Dept of Sp Ed, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197. Phone 313-487-0026; 313-487-7152 (fax) or E-Mail: larry.bemish@emich.edu AOL: owlacres. ■

Strategram is also interested in publishing ideas combining humor with strategic instruction. Please submit your ideas to the editor.

Strategram

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