

## **Integrating Sense of Humor as a Teaching Strategy among Students of LPU-Batangas**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The place of humor as a social phenomenon on teaching cannot be underestimated. Human beings are the only risible creatures, the only species that laughs. Research has revealed that humor plays a significant role in building a harmonious relationship between teachers and students. Humor helps students to be awake and attentive in class especially when the course is very “philosophical”, “scientific” or laden with unfamiliar terms.*

*The research utilized descriptive methods derived the qualitative and documentary research approaches to justify the need to integrate humor as a teaching strategy among Lyceum of Philippines University (LPU) students. More specifically, it described the demographic profile of the subjects of the study in terms of age and grades. Furthermore, it looked at the perceptions of students on the effect of humor on teaching and the relationship between respondent’s profile and perception on sense of humor.*

**Key words:** humor, risible, perception

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

*Humor is the salt of personality. Its presence is an evidence of good nature, of an appreciation of the real values of life, and of the lack of tenseness that characterizes some people. It is important to differentiate between wit and humor; wit is of the mind, humor is of the heart. -Charles Gow*

*Good humor is a tonic for mind and body. It is the best antidote for anxiety and depression. It is a business asset. It attracts and keeps friends. It lightens human burdens. It is the direct route to serenity and contentment. -Grenville Kleiser*

History has shown how the concept of humor evolved from one epoch to the other. Looking at the Renaissance Period, humor was seen as something negative and unreasonable. The term changed during the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century to something amusing. Humor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century till date has become a literary concept and its function was to entertain people on literary, social or cultural occasions (Shiyab, 2009).

Over time and throughout history humor has been used as a way of entertaining people in most academic disciplines, whether such entertainment is on campuses or in schools. At a later stage, humor was recognized as a social propriety and an intellect where wit and travesty can be viewed on stage. Furthermore, attitudes about humor and its effectiveness as a teaching or social device have varied across the academic disciplines.

Research has shown that humor has the ability to influence creative and divergent thinking in students. It also increases connections or neural activity when analyzing and appreciating humor. Experience has also revealed that humor has the ability to help learning and help retain information (Shiyab, 2009).

Prior studies on humor in education have focused on the humor as having the ability to aid learning process, to help students' comprehension of key concepts, points and also freeing students from being bored especially when the topic under discussion is very technical or laden with philosophical concepts. The foregoing is also true based on the experiences of the researcher. The researcher further justified this claim through this study on integrating humor as a teaching strategy among students of LPU-Batangas.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research showcased the need for Integrating Sense of Humor as a Teaching Strategy among Students of LPU-Batangas. More specifically, it described the demographic profile of the subjects of the study in terms of age and grades. Furthermore, it looked at the perceptions of students on the effect of humor on teaching and the relationship between respondent's profile and perception on sense of humor.

## III. THE THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Research has shown that humor is an obvious phenomenon in humanity even though it is difficult to define. People respond to and use humor in day to day activities. Some people are amused by certain issues and find them very humorous. There are many components of humor such as: physiological, behavioral, emotional and cognitive components which sometimes may be present in every sense of humor. Some scholars have

tried to unravel the reason why some things are humorous and why others are not. The vast nature of the theoretical approaches to humor has generated debate among scholars which in turn has led to three main theories: incongruity theory, superiority theory and relief theory.

**Incongruity Theory:** The most famous proponent of this theory is Immanuel Kant. According to this theory, children first find humor in perceptual discrepancies. The above theory states that humor is perceived at the moment of realization of incongruity between a concepts involved in a given situation. This theory posits that something is humorous because the event is incompatible with human expectations and causes a momentary cognitive struggle to resolve the perceived incongruity. Once the incongruity is resolved, the situation is perceived to be humorous (Mulder & Nijholt, 2002).

The main object of this theory is not the incongruity per se, but its realization and resolution (i.e., putting the objects in question into the real relation); it is often called the incongruity-resolution theory (Mulder & Nijholt, 2002). In this theory, something is seen as humorous because the event (joke, body movement, statement, for example) is incompatible with our expectations and causes a momentary cognitive struggle to resolve the perceived incongruity.

**Superiority Theory:** This theory can be traced back to the time of Plato and Aristotle and Thomas Hobbes' in his Leviathan. Plato (Plato, Philebus 49b ff) in reporting the thoughts of Socrates posited that the ridiculous was characterized by a display of self-ignorance. For Aristotle, we laugh at inferior or ugly individuals because we feel a joy at feeling superior to them (Vandaele, 2002). A closer look at this theory shows that something becomes funny when the viewer is made to feel superior to the person(s) in the event. In this theory, humor is a way of furthering one's ego or sense of self-worth.

**Relief Theory:** This theory holds that humor is a socially acceptable way of releasing tension. It is seen as a homeostatic mechanism by which psychological tension is reduced. Relief theory states that humor is used to overcome sociocultural inhibitions and reveal suppressed desire (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004). The foregoing forms the theoretical framework for the study.

#### IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research has revealed that a person's health and disposition in the Middle Ages, was the result of a balance or imbalance of four fluids in the body, known as "humors," from the Latin word *humor*, meaning "moisture." These fluids were blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. If a person had a cheerful, confident disposition, it was said to be a result of an excess of blood. Such a person was called "sanguine," from the Latin word *sanguis*, meaning "blood." The pronunciation of the initial /h/ is only of recent date, and sometimes omitted (Fowler, 2004). Humor according to Harper (2001) means "moist". It refers to fluids in the body: blood, phlegm, choler (yellow bile) and melancholy (black bile).

The place of humor in any given social context has no boundaries. Among the different essential parts of what it means to be human are humor and laughing. These two categories have been a subject of debate among scholars. All humor is said to be a communicative activity. Humor has been viewed as an effective tool for increasing different thinking and information acquisition if humor is part of the human experience.

Today, humor is viewed as the highest and richest form of comedy, denoting anything witty or anything that makes us laugh (Weaver & Cotrell, 2001). Joshua et. al (2005) point out that humor is used to refer to a stimulus (e.g. comedy film), a mental process (e.g. perception or creation of amusing

incongruities), or a response (such as laughter or exhilaration).

Bruner (2002) similarly asserts that humor is the quality that makes something funny and amusing. He further posited that humor from a learning perspective, has been the subject of investigation, and recently, sprang from the disciplines of psychology, philosophy and medicine.

According to Torok et al. (2004), humor was traditionally perceived as a form of distraction and virtually a waste of time, as it reduces class room morale and efficiency. Nowadays, it has a significant role to play in college or classroom learning. In an article entitled "Is Humor an Appreciated Teaching Tool"? Torok et al. (2004) reported that by today's pedagogical standards, humor is fundamental in classroom teaching; it has a substantial place in classroom lectures and testing Berk (2002) stated that humor can be more effective in large classes than in small classes, simply because it is contagious and communal.

According to Langer (2003), humor has its home in comic drama, whereas laughter springs from its structure. He further posited that humor is not the essence of comedy but one of its most useful and natural elements.

Humor in communication according to Meyer (2002) is a subject that seems difficult to analyze. Nevertheless he posited that the compelling and mysterious power of humor leads scholars to return to it again and again as a focus for study. Meyer believes that humor despite its dividing function, releases tension or relates to a controversial issue and presents new perspectives and viewpoints.

A study by Shiyab (2009), entitled *Pedagogical Effect of Humor on Teaching*, shows that some students were not really familiar with concept of humor. The majority of the students believed that humor has to do with laughing and smiling (85.19 percent). While (3.7 percent) opined that humor means laughing and smiling, being friendly and

creating a sense of humor. Interestingly, the reason why humor has not been associated with being friendly and with creating a sense of humor is basically cultural. The reason being that with the culture of the Middle East, teaching has always been associated with seriousness and rigidity.

For Glenn (2002), humor aids individuals engage in the learning process by creating a positive and social environment where their defenses are lowered and their concentration is better. Glenn further stated that humor can create an environment where teachers and students feel they share a common ground and this in turn creates a psychological bond between the two.

Garner (2004), posited that humor can have physiological effects: it can aid learning through improved respiration and circulation. It also tends to lower pulse and blood pressure. He also posited that humor can provide a cognitive break which allows students to assimilate the information.

He went further to state that while humor should be used carefully, it can be used as a potent medium for communication or social activities. Garner argued that some educators unfortunately believe that their role is too serious to engage humor or they see it as merely a disrupting factor. Garner opined that students believe that the use of humor in teaching has a positive psychological and physiological effect on student's learning and it can further improve the learning milieu and thereby preserving educational materials.

According to Berger (2005), there is a cultural aspect of humor in addition to the fact that it provides exercise to some bodily organs such as: jaws, face etc. It also helps to stimulate the brain and foster creativity. He further argued that members of various subcultures and cultures maintain their identity and cope with problems connected with their marginality and status.

Askildson (2005) postulated that humor pedagogically, serves as a vehicle for classroom illustration and instruction of specific linguistic and cultural phenomena in the Target Language. He also asserts that humor can be used as a way of transmitting cultural clues to students. For Schmitz (2002) cited in Askildson (2005), humor is an interesting way to teach language and culture at all levels of instruction. He argues that classroom exposure to humor helps students understand and react to the cultural and pragmatic knowledge of their language.

#### **IV. MATERIALS AND METHOD**

This section is a presentation of the research design, the participants of the study, data gathering instrument, data gathering procedures, and data analysis (statistical treatment of data).

##### **Research Design**

The descriptive methods based on qualitative and documentary approaches were utilized.

##### **Participants of Study**

Participants were limited to students of Bachelor of Science in Marine Transportation (BSMT) SII-H and students of Bachelor of Science in Marine Transportation (BSMT SII-H) with a total number of 43 students and BSMT SII-I with a total number of 46 students of LPU-Batangas for School Year (SY): 2012-2013 taking Professional Ethics previously handled by the researcher. The researcher also utilized the 2nd Semester SY: 2012-2013 grades of BSMT SII-H and BSMT SII-I students who took Professional Ethics as part of data gathering.

##### **Data Gathering Instrument**

The main data gathering instrument was a self-made questionnaire to gather information on the socio-demographic profile of

respondents, and their perceptions on the effect of humor on teaching and learning.

To ensure its validity for use, the researcher validated the questionnaire through the assistance of a professional statistician. At the same time, the researcher conducted interviews to determine if there is need for further modifications on the questionnaire.

**Data Gathering Procedures**

The researcher personally distributed the questionnaire among selected sections and sought the assistance of the class presidents for the distribution. The researcher personally retrieved the questionnaires. The researcher sought the permission of the Dean and Program Chair to conduct the research. The respondents were assured that all data will be treated with outmost confidentiality.

**Data Analysis**

The gathered data were tallied, tabulated, encoded, and analyzed accordingly using the following statistical methods (tools):

**Frequency Distribution and Percentage** was used to describe the socio-demographic profile of the students in terms of age, sex, course/section and grades.

**Weighted Mean** was be used to determine the average scores of the respondents. Thus, to determine the perceptions and effects of humor on teaching and Likert-scale type with the following assigned values:

Options	Range	Verbal Interpretation
4	3.50 – 4.00	Strongly Agree
3	2.50 – 3.49	Agree
2	1.50 – 2.49	Disagree
1	1.00 – 1.49	Strongly Disagree

1. **Persons-r** was used to determine the magnitude and direction of the association

between two variables that are on an interval or ratio scale.

**V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The succeeding pie charts presents the profile of the respondents grouped according to age, gender, sections and respondents grades. The chart below indicates that most of the respondents are in the age of 15-20 years old with 80 or 90%. It is closely followed by respondents whose ages range from 21 to 30 years old with 8 or 9%. However, only 1 respondent is within 31-40 age bracket.

The above result is not surprising though as most university students in the Philippines fall within 15-20 years old due to the educational system of the Philippines which was patterned both from the educational systems of Spain and the United States.

More so, the former educational system of the Philippines was composed of 6 years of elementary education starting at the age of 6, and 4 years of high school education starting at the age of 12. However, June 4, 2012 signaled the start of the implementation of a new educational system, which is the K-12 educational system (2013 Budget Message of President Aquino". Official Gazette).

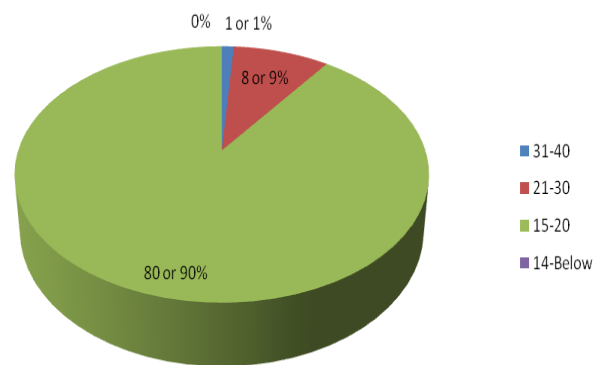


Figure.1. Frequency Distribution of Respondents' age

The chat below shows that the grades of the students were high simply because of the

integration of sense of humor. Furthermore, majority of the students had a grade of 1.75. The chat also revealed that some students had better grades most likely because they are more academically inclined irrespective of the method used in teaching.

Personal experiences and faculty evaluation as shown that students learn more when a professor has a good sense of humor such as: riddles and jokes, facial gestures when trying to explain some topics as a way of driving home his point and ice-breaker among other examples. These helps to keep the students awake especially when the subject seems very philosophical, technical or if the subject happens to be the last for the day (5:30-7pm & 7pm-8:30 pm).

Based on the incongruity, something is seen as humorous because the event (joke, body movement, statement, for example) is incompatible with our expectations and causes a momentary cognitive struggle to resolve the perceived incongruity (Mulder & Nijholt, 2002).

Humor is what makes something funny; a sense of humor is the ability to recognize it. Someone with a well-developed sense of humor has the ability to recognize what's funny in others and can amuse them as well. A good sense of humor is a tool that kids can rely on throughout life. Laughing together is a way to connect, and a good sense of humor also can make kids smarter, healthier, and better able to cope with challenges (kidshealth.org).

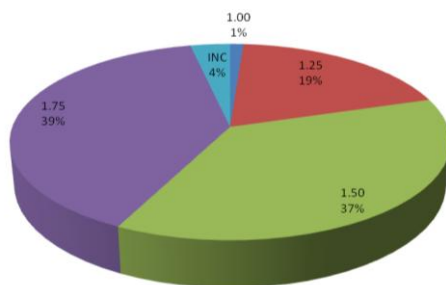


Figure.2. Frequency Distribution of Respondents' grades

The table 1 presents the perceptions of students on the effect of humor on teaching with a composite mean of Agree (3.04). The results further reveals that sense of humor is inevitable in teaching as the table revealed that; humor is all about making the subject matter well understood (3.87), they find teachers with sense of humor very interesting to be with (3.87) and they like teachers with a sense of humor (3.87) ranked the same respectively with a verbal interpretation as strongly agree. Ranked fourth is, if humor is well managed in the classroom, it is a good method of teaching (3.85), while humor is a good learning devise (3.82) ranked fifth.

Items on humor are not needed in the classroom ranked 21.5 with a mean of (1.97), students disrespect teachers with sense of humor ranked 21.5 as well with a mean of (1.97) and verbally interpreted as disagree. They understand the topic better if the teacher delivers the topic by being serious ranked 23 with a mean of (1.90) and verbally interpreted as strongly disagree. While humor is a disturbing teaching method (1.83) obtained the least score which verbally interpreted as disagree.

The result further justifies the researcher's choice of topic on integrating sense of humor as a teaching strategy. More so, is not surprising though as students have often commented during Performance Appraisal for Teaching Personnel of Lycuem of the Philippines University-Batangas of the researcher as provided by the Human Resource Management and Development Office.

Experience has shown that most students get inspired to learn when they like a particular teacher. The bonus is now on the part of the teachers to have good classroom management and emotional balance when dealing with students especially those they perceive do not like them since they are in the process of maturity. Furthermore, teachers must possess numerous skills such as being in control of the class/emotions, not taking students' actions

personally among other qualities. since it is an activity based on “Relationships are at the heart of teaching communication” (MacGrath, 2005).

**Table 1**  
**Perception of the Students on Effect of Humor on Teaching**

Sense of Humor	WM	VI	Rank
1.Humor is all about making the subject matter well understood	3.87	Strongly Agree	2
2. If humor is well managed in the Classroom, it is a good method of teaching	3.85	Strongly Agree	4
3.Humor can have a psychological positive effect	3.80	Strongly Agree	7
4.Humor increases my understanding in class	3.79	Strongly Agree	8
5 Humor in the classroom is mentally disturbing	2.99	Agree	14
6. Humor is a good learning device	3.82	Strongly Agree	5
7.Humor is a waste of time	2.01	Disagree	19.5
8. Humor is a disturbing teaching method	1.83	Disagree	24
9. Humor in teaching makes learning difficult	2.10	Disagree	18
10.Humor in the classroom help me connect with the teacher	3.73	Strongly Agree	12
11. Humor in the class breaks my ability to concentrate	2.17	Disagree	17
12. Humor is not needed in the classroom	1.97	Disagree	21.5
13.Humor is needed all the time In the classroom	2.01	Disagree	19.5
14.I find teachers with sense of humor very interesting to be with	3.87	Strongly Agree	2
15.I like teachers with sense of humor	3.87	Strongly Agree	2
16. I like teachers who are very serious	2.54	Agree	15
17. I understand the topic better if the teacher has a sense of humor	3.75	Strongly Agree	9.5
18. I understand the topic better If the teacher tells joke all the time	2.22	Disagree	16
19. I understand the topic better if the teacher delivers the topic by being serious	1.90	Disagree	23
20. I feel comfortable when the teacher has a sense of humor	3.75	Strongly Agree	9.5
21. Taking a course with a teacher with a sense of humor encourages me to express myself	3.74	Strongly Agree	11
22. Taking a course with a teacher that lacks sense of humor discourages me	3.53	Strongly Agree	13
23. Based on my experience, students love teachers with a sense of humor	3.81	Strongly Agree	6
24. Based on my experience, students disrespect teachers with sense of humor	1.97	Disagree	21.5
Composite Mean	3.04	Agree	

TABLE 2  
Relationship between Respondents' Profile and Perceptions on Sense of Humor

	r-value	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Age	0.477	0.000	Reject	Significant
Grades	0.196	0.359	Failed to Reject	Not Significant

It can be seen from Table 2 that most of the respondents profile significantly affects the perceptions on the effects of sense of humor on teaching. Since the computed p-value of each profile is less than 0.05, thus the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between the profile variable and the perceptions on the effects of sense of humor on teaching is rejected.

Grades ( $r=0.196$ ) has low correlation with the perception of the students and has no significant relationship on the sense of humor of teachers. More so, age has a significant relationship to humor as most of them are young and fresh from high school.

Based on the incongruity, something is seen as humorous because the event (joke, body movement, statement, for example) is incompatible with our expectations and causes a momentary cognitive struggle to resolve the perceived incongruity (Mulder & Nijholt, 2002). This is also true of the study as shown in the above table. More so, based on the researcher's observation, students find teaching humorous when the professor tries to relate the topic by citing examples body movement and joke.

Today, humor is viewed as the highest and richest form of comedy, denoting anything witty or anything that makes us laugh (Weaver & Cotrell, 2001). Joshua et. al (2005) point out that humor is used to refer to a stimulus (e.g. comedy film), a mental process (e.g. perception or creation of amusing incongruities), or a response (such as laughter or exhilaration). This is also true of the study as results revealed that students see humor as having a psychological positive effect.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Majority of the students are male, between 15-20 years old with majority having 1.75 grades. Humor is all about making the subject matter well understood, students find teachers with sense of humor interesting to be with and students like teachers with sense of humor. Humor creates an environment where students and teachers mutually share a common feeling which in turn creates a psychological bond between both. Faculty Members with good sense of humor, build a good relationship with their students considering the fact that they are still very young and the different exciting activities of high school life is still fresh in their minds. There is a significant relationship between profiles of respondents in terms of age.

It is important to check the personality types of Faculty Members so as to ascertain his/her capacity to teach and being able to integrate humor in teaching. Questions may be formulated during interview to test the sense of humor of intending faculty members.

Team building activities on different senses of humor may be organized to help faculty members who may not be exposed to being humorous even though man by nature is a risible animal. Since humor is a good teaching strategy, it should be used appropriately if not all the times. Seminars may be organized to help Faculty Members and students be aware of their affective domain or more specifically with their social and emotional behaviors.

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