

Conclusion

Colleges of Agriculture, faculty and administration, need to give attention to the recruitment of the brightest and best. Ten very bright, able students may be more important to the future well-being of the agriculture industry than twenty average students. Scholarship programs with emphasis on potential, such as the Jonathan Baldwin Turner Program at the University of Illinois perhaps need to be increased. Faculty may well need to give more attention to the image of careers in agriculture they project as they come in contact with potential students, their parents and others who influence them.

The future is bright for graduates of Colleges of Agriculture. It is likely that the demand will be higher than the supply. But if Colleges of Agriculture are going to meet their opportunities of serving society, attention needs to be given to the recruitment and education of students by College of Agriculture.

Uses of Humour In Instruction

Michael E.J. Orme

The use of humour in instruction is as Canadian as Ukrainian summer sausage. The beginnings of Canadian humour, at least in the eyes of others, reside in the simple fact of our existence. Place names such as Medicine Hat, Moose Jaw, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Elbow, Wawa and Eyebrow, have prompted chuckles from jaded sophisticates, the world over. Moving east, locales such as Witless Bay, Funk Island, Ecum-Secum, Pugwash and institutions like the Toronto Maple Leafs (an amusing troupe of pantomimists), have prompted outright laughter.

But humour in Canadian society surely transcends the comedic potential of mere survival. There is a rich tradition of nonsense, wit and irony in our literature. Indeed, I would argue that the use of humour, particularly irony, has become one of the signal themes of Canadian arts and letters. To those who would dismiss this significant insight as unbridled speculation by a prairie kid who never entirely recovered from the sensory deprivation implicit in being raised in Saskatchewan and Alberta, let me tell you buster, my point of view has been semi-sanctified by the authors of the Canadian Encyclopedia. True, the encyclopedia was published in Edmonton, not Toronto. Thus, we can't take it as absolute truth. But at least it's revealed.

Examples of humour in the arts come readily to mind. Whether it be poetry (Earl Burney, Paul Hiebert,

Dennis Lee), drama (David French, David Finnereo, Erika Ritter, Linda Griffiths), the short story (Stephen Leacock, Roche Carrier, Clarke Blaise, Morley Torgov), the novel (Robertson Davies, W.O. Michell, Margaret Atwood), television (S.C.T.V., Seeing Things, David Steinberg, Rich Little), film "Goin' Down the Road," "Paperback Hero," "My American Cousin," "Duddy Kravitz", radio (Royal Canadian Air Farce, Old Rawhide, The Norm), newspapers (Slinger, Gary Lautens, Sondra Gottlieb), music (Nancy White, The Frantics), painting (William Kurelec) or hockey (Eddie Shack), Canadians have used humour to comment on gaps between the apparent and the real. Through humour we have been granted at least temporary relief from the weather, our national character, overheated public buildings and other major problems too fierce to mention.

This overview of the critical role of humour in the Canadian psyche, albeit too brief, is sufficient to indicate that we are standing on ground as firm as the Canadian Shield, when the time comes to analyze humour. Indeed, given our rich heritage, it seems not only Canadian, but almost patriotic to look at the uses of humour in instruction.

There are at least ten different ways in which one can use humour in instruction. These are listed below. Each is then briefly discussed.

- 1) To motivate
- 2) To build learner attention, listening and positive expectations
- 3) To help instructors and learners break free of constraints
- 4) To use intellectual play as a precursor to concept development
- 5) To develop group cohesiveness, confidence and identity
- 6) To effect learning
- 7) To create variations in pace and reinforcement
- 8) To enhance the desire to teach
- 9) To increase instructor credibility
- 10) To control your own folly

(1) To motivate: In order to understand why humour is an important motivational tool in the classroom, it is useful first, to consider the psychological determinants of attention.

Certain characteristics of a stimulus, experience, or teaching technique reliably cause students to pay attention. These characteristics determine selective attention. Their presence or absence in the classroom allows us to understand why students pay attention in one situation and not in another. Once these determinants of attention are known, we can then begin to devise teaching techniques that incorporate them. Events or stimuli that are characterized by **surprise** (the unexpected), **novelty** (short-term change; incongruity), **conflict**, **complexity** or **uncertainty** are arresting. They command attention. Whether or not one continues to pay attention to these kinds of events depends on the duration of the event, its intensity and how often it is repeated.

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Now, let us return to the use of humour in instruction. Clearly, it is a technique which incorporates the qualities of arresting stimuli which were just discussed. It provides moderate changes in stimulation which are perceived as pleasant (reinforcing); which increase attention, and which tend to lead to exploratory behaviour, curiosity and the acquisition of knowledge. Support for this comes from several sources. For example, those who have conducted physiological and biochemical research on humour have found that laughter not only allays anxiety, it stimulates both hemispheres of the brain, coordinating all the senses; producing a unique level of consciousness and a high level mode of brain processing. As Sveback (1975, 1977) notes, under these conditions the brain is essentially at its fullest capacity (see McGee and Goldstein (1983) for a comprehensive review of this research). This has important implications for learning.

(2) To build learner attention, listening and positive expectations: It is well known that people bring attitudes, response tendencies or sets to various instructional environments which may interfere with learning. Quite apart from random sprinklings of skeptics, cynics and the disenchanted who may well feel they have been coerced into attending a particular program or course, we need to consider the dogmatism of experience.

Robert Leeper's (1951) thoughtful consideration of factors which have been shown to help and to hinder inventive thinking (concept formation, problem solving) is of interest here. Leeper discusses the importance of strong and continuing motivation which keeps the problem solver on-task. Stimulus variation fits in neatly here.

The proper mental set may speed the solution to a problem. It is important to recenter materials or ideas so that something that was formerly in the background, becomes an object of central interest. This is more easily said than done. Faulty directions in thinking, the tendency to view things in the same way whether this constitutes a good solution or not, tends to become a powerful habit. Luchins referred to this mechanization of thought or problem solving as the Einstellung effect. Strong mechanization effects were found to occur in competitive atmospheres, when mechanical methods of instruction were used and when unfavourable emotional atmospheres established in regular instruction, developed.

Bergson (1900) said that laughter has the sober and didactic purpose to correct the human tendency to become mechanical in its actions. Laughter reaches out to correct rigidity. Because humour exploits incongruity, uncertainty, novelty and so on, it can be used to upset fixed expectations, to encourage people to suspend usual modes of thought while alternatives are considered.

As far as attention and listening are concerned, it should be clear that when people know or think they know what is going to happen and how the instructor will act, the tendency is for attention levels to drop off somewhat. Relatively fast-paced relevant humour effectively upsets this comfy state of affairs and gets people attending and actively listening. As soon as this happens the instructor can reinforce learners for desirable behaviour. This is a lot more effective, and a lot more fun, than dwelling upon the evil that lurks within.

(3) To help instructors and learners break free of constraints: The preceding discussion has hinted at the direction to be taken here. Mindess (1971) puts it well: We are all beset by constraints such as conformity, inferiority, normality, rationality, naivete, egotism, sloth and so on, that limit freedom and creativity. We adhere to these constraints largely because if we are to remain members of society, we have little or no choice. Humour serves to periodically liberate us from these constraints by rendering them meaningless or absurd. These brief periods of liberation are heady, iconoclastic and stimulating. We are able to snap, with wit and grace, the bonds that bind us if only for a brief time. These times are memorable. We take them with us, and it is no surprise to find out that the use of humour in instruction has been shown to be of greater benefit for long-term retention than for short-term learning.

The key point is that when the instructor interrupts the smooth flow of absolute truth with droll commentary, wit, irony or even a ham-handed attempt at broad humour that does not work very well (you can always lampoon your own corn), the signal goes out that it is possible, even desirable, to stop plodding on the spot, and think about taking off into new territory. Western Canadians learn this early: Stamping sacred cows is a dangerous, dusty, noisy business. But it invigorates one's finer sensibilities even as it offends them.

Now, far be it from me to inflame regional passions. But sometimes one has to take risks in the service of truth. Clear-eyed understanding of great paradoxes such as the above is instructive. Sadly, these kinds of insights are not generally available to our Eastern Canadian friends. How can one possibly develop an adequate theory of motivation and humour without first having lived cheek by jowl with boredom? This is one of the immeasurable benefits of a Western Canadian upbringing. You, like I, are quite right to intuitively mistrust baroque Eastern theories. *Quaecumque Vera!*¹

(4) To use intellectual play as a precursor to concept development: Consider the profession of landscape architecture for a moment. Landscape

¹University of Alberta motto: "Whatsoever things are true."

architects attempt to manipulate various elements in environments in ways that will produce functional, aesthetic and ecologically sound harmonies between different and often conflicting sets of values.

Intellectual play and humour are important in helping to maintain an environment where these people, beyond aspiring to technical competence, feel in their bones that a design will never "sing" until creativity and artistic sensibility are brought to it.

When you visit the Landscape Architecture school at Guelph University, the first thing you notice is a grotesquely oversized pink flamingo; built by the students, apparently as a tongue-in-cheek comment on the importance of esthetic discrimination in Landscape Architecture.

One of my graduate students conducted her Ph.D. research at the school. When she brought the videotape machinery to class to begin gathering data for the study, she was greeted by the professor and all of his students, paws neatly tucked in front of them, all wearing large white paper rat ears. They were ready to be "subjects" in a psychological experiment.

Faculty, students and staff join together to create a visually stimulating and interesting environment. Students practically live in the studios. Each person's area is personalized with art, graphics, drafting, cartoons and the like.

This kind of an atmosphere is fun to be in. It conspires against mechanistic approaches to problem solving. Positive expectations are created. Associations tend to flow quickly. Humour is used to allay anxiety and conflict. Its energizing effects are directed into the drive and discipline that lead one from initially playing with an idea to more systematic and rigorous conceptual work.

(5) To develop group cohesiveness, confidence and identity: A repeated theme in the literature is that the humourist is seen by others as moving toward communicating approval for and signaling acceptance of group norms. McGee and Goldstein (1983) state that frequent initiators of humour are not found to be manipulative, but are skilled at behaving in a manner that is effective in helping the group reach important goals.

It should be remembered that humour avoids open hostility, even though it may at times be barbed. Thus it helps to maintain relationships and the functioning of an organization. This is particularly evident in health care settings where it is used as a coping mechanism in difficult situations. The popular television series *M*A*S*H* illustrates this.

(6) To effect learning: Broad generalizations about either positive or negative effects of humour on learning are untenable. Humour occurs in many different forms and with unpredictable frequency in the classroom. When people do research on it there is an

understandable desire to control type, placement and frequency. Thus a good many of the studies in this area insert various forms of humour into films, televised lectures or TV programs. Given these kinds of conditions, it has been found that with adults in educational settings, the use of humour that is unrelated or irrelevant to the educational message has **detrimental** effects on information acquisition. This is not the case for children. Unrelated humour fosters vigilance, attention and superior learning. The effect is lost with the development of attentional discipline and motivation. Finally the initial effect reverses for adults, as the use of irrelevant humour undermines instructor-student rapport (Zillman and Bryant, 1983).

Adults do however respond positively to the use of relevant humour that is well integrated with the content. While it may not yield immediate gains in short-term learning, humour appears to enhance long-term retention, and of course, it tends to make the learning experience more enjoyable. Lastly, it is prudent to remember that humour is only one tool in a broad array of stimulus variation techniques (Orme, 1978). Strategic as opposed to indiscriminate use is considered next.

(7) To create variations in pace and reinforcement: It will hardly have escaped anyone's notice that following an episode of humour in the classroom, students tend to become more responsive. They not infrequently volunteer relevant comments and questions. Humour has served to reinforce participation and involvement.

It might be useful to think about the strategic use of humour over the course of a lesson, in terms of planning for variations in pace.

Pace refers to the general rate of progress of a lesson. Two quite different types of pace should be considered.

a) **teaching pace:** This is defined as the rate at which the teacher uses stimulus variation techniques such as movement, humour, gesture, rapid shifts in focus, shifting sensory channels, variation in voice tone and speed, and redirection of interaction from one student to another. Decisions about varying teaching pace should be based on the kind of feedback the teacher gets about student interest, involvement and attention.

b) **conceptual pace:** This is defined as the rate at which lesson content is covered, particularly those concepts which require students to engage in higher-order thinking. The types of feedback the teacher needs to make decisions about conceptual pace are: evidence of student thinking; verbal evidence that students understand basic ideas, that they are able to relate one idea to another, identify assumptions, analyze and synthesize lesson content. Probing techniques are particularly useful in helping the teacher effectively control conceptual pace.

c) **relation between teaching pace and conceptual pace:** Clearly, the two types of pace interact. It seems to make sense to use humour and other forms of variation early on in the lesson to build up attention and motivation. Once learners are involved, bring up the conceptual pace, cover core content and reinforce them for effort and thought. After they have worked hard for a time, reinforce them by bringing up the teaching pace again for a brief period. At these cross-over points humour seems apt because it reinforces what went before, and it has energizing properties which are needed for what is to come. The teacher and class can summarize and confirm learning to establish a platform for the next block of learning.

(8) To enhance the desire to teach: Thus far we have been thinking largely about the effects of humour on learners. Its potential for creating an atmosphere in which the teacher really wants to teach may be even more important. A trenchant discussion of the physiological boost that laughter provides for circulation, respiration and mental powers would probably be appropriate now. Instead, let us turn to personal experiences.

What kinds of images come to mind when you think about your best teaching and the circumstances that help to bring it about? For me there is the realization that I am learning. There are quick impressions of energy, almost daring control over content and self, speed, spontaneity, risk and amusement. Good God, how embarrassing. It sounds like a bug-eyed kid slamming a '52 Merc' into first, and taking off in a spray of dirt and gravel that shoots clear back to the municipal line.

"Hey!"

"Who was that guy?"

"I dunno. He was going off to teach."

Humour can be used by the instructor to help him get himself up to speed.

(9) To increase instructor credibility: Laughter helps to break down barriers. Charney (1983) indicates that it constitutes a choice to avoid interrupting the flow of energy. When this happens, I think the instructor and learners gain time which can be used to establish a bond so that they can discover common ground from which problems of significance can be tackled together.

While my homebase is essentially academic, I have enjoyed opportunities to work with people in businesses, trades and professions far removed from the university, with a view to helping them improve the quality of their instruction. Not surprisingly, my background, if not suspect, initially tends to set up barriers, distance, formalism, skepticism and uncertainty — Is this character (who invited him anyway?) going to be: ivory tower? too theoretical? stuffed with jargon? arrogant? a put-down artist? just an entertainer? a snake oil salesman with a phony cure?

These are reasonable questions. The full frontal frankness with which they are put can be a bit surprising, but easily tempered with humour. It is useful to "cut them off at the pass" (but not at the gizzard as you may want to, if you have left it too late). Address these questions with some wit and grace before they are asked.

The use of humour in these situations is not a panacea. It does not obviate the need for solid content preparation. It does however, require the instructor to develop a lively appreciation for what others' perceptions of the situation are likely to be, what it is that they really do in their work, what constraints they work under and how their situations differ from those that the research, literature and one's own experience have prepared one for. One of the side benefits of this approach is that it tends to teach you a healthy respect for your own ignorance. This, in turn, provides useful raw material for humour.

Benefits for the participants appear to be that humour allows them to forestall negative judgments long enough to relax and attend to the content of the session; to gauge its relevance, to begin to consider ways in which it can be used in their situations. However, before this happens, it seems that they need an opportunity to begin to come to terms with the instructor as a person. One has to begin breaking down initial barriers while at the same time getting on with content. People want to know "where you are coming from," what you do and how you regard yourself and your content. These kinds of questions can be handled effectively and quickly with a light touch.

The humourist mobilizes association, imagery and verbal brilliance to sketch out complex messages with economy. In doing so he or she demonstrates control, energy, fluency and timing. These factors can be seen to contribute to credibility.

(10) To control your own folly: There have been hints along the way that while humour may not confer an objective view of the self, it may help to point up discrepancies between the apparent and the real. In *Leviathan* Hobbes claimed that, "men laugh at the follies of themselves past" (if not those present). If he was right, it should be possible to look back upon aspects of our former and formal selves with some objective remove and with an eye to incongruities then and now. It seems to me that humour helps us to alert ourselves to some of the dangers of complacency, mechanization, self-absorption and arrogance, and thereby leavens excess. Still, it seems a lot easier to see humorous aspects of others' follies than it does one's own.

CBC's *Air Farce* in a recent send-up of the National News, informed us in plummy tones that a very large Russian satellite malfunctioned, fell out of orbit and crashed to earth in Canada. Concurrently an American cruise missile on a test run up North ran out

of control and crashed into the fallen satellite... Both sides are claiming victory.

John Grierson (1986), the father of the National Film Board, is probably right, "Clowns are the true realists, super-realists, tragedians in disguise, because for them the essence of life is unexpected, the banana peel."

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The Changing Scene In Adult Education

Mark Waldron

"The Changing Scene in Adult Education" is an interesting and challenging topic — interesting in that adult education is caught up in the whirlpool of change that is so characteristic of North American society in 1986 and — challenging because it makes one stop and reflect on what is actually happening in this field.

This presentation is a personal viewpoint, not based on empirical data and with no long list of references. Instead, it is an observational paper based on what I see and hear from a University campus that is located at an urban-rural interface — with a large megalopolis of more than 4 million to the east and south and a traditional farm-based rural economy to the west and north. An hour's drive east takes me to the

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financial canyons of Bay Street, Toronto; an hour's drive west takes me to the isolated shores of Lake Huron. In between, we find those people who are striving to make a living, raise families, volunteer in their communities, and take time to learn new things and new ways of thinking about social issues. These people are the adults of the community, the major ingredient of the adult/continuing/extension program mix about which we are concerned. These people are representative of North American society and, in fact, are probably not much different from people on other continents.

My challenge, then, is to encapsulate the changing scene in specific areas. I have chosen ten aspects of adult education as a means of focusing on some of these changes. I realize that you are representing Faculties and Colleges of Agriculture; I realize that many of you are experiencing enrollment declines; I realize that agriculture is having a very difficult time coping with the challenge of abundance; I realize that many rural communities are going through very severe economic times, but I also believe that we will survive these current experiences and learn from them.

Scene #1 — The actual number of adults participating in continuing education programs is increasing; 20% of Canadian adults participate in at least one organized adult education activity each year. The participation rate of older adults is also increasing; these older adults are becoming more demanding and more vocal in terms of what they want to learn. Historically, more females than males participated — this is changing with the participation rates between males and females becoming more equal.

Scene #2 — In terms of the types of programs, there is significantly more demand for career, job-related types of programs. There is less "learning for learning's sake" and more learning for career enhancement and mobility. Learners are more results oriented and more product oriented, and as a result, programs become more market-oriented. In fact, the big words in education have become marketing and money — and not necessarily in that order. I see this change as I review course and program topics — there is less of the general group dynamics/transactional analysis type of course and more of the personal management/computer skills types of courses.

Scene #3 — Associated with scene two, there is an increasing demand for short, intensive training sessions leading to certificates and diplomas, rather than more degrees or no recognition at all. Learners are requesting this recognition for learning since certificates, diplomas and continuing education units (C.E.U.'s) have taken on value in the employment market place. Learners want conspicuous reward for their efforts and are willing to make significant sacrifices in order to complete a certificate program.

This scene is coloured by the emphasis that governments are placing on skills development, job