“Did you hear the one about ?”

Important considerations for instructors in applying humor in online courses

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Abstract

- Humor has gained recognition as another tool to help individuals cope and experience therapeutic value; however, the use of humor in online courses by instructors is often contemplated rarely applied. Presenters with extensive experience teaching online will engage participants in interactive questions and guided handouts.

- The pros and cons of humor online will be the focus. Recognizing that the continuum of what is humorous is highly variable is key with essential considerations to language, context, and culture. Appropriate teacher humor and the potential legal and ethical issues will be explored. Incorporating humor into the traditional classroom will also discussed.
Overview

- What is the value of Humor in the human experience?
- Use of Humor in pedagogy (online and traditional settings) & counseling
- Humor: Implications in diverse learning settings
- The online learning context and humor
- Pros to using humor online
- Suggestions for appropriately using humor online
- Legal and ethical considerations in using humor
- Summary/Questions/Thanks
Quotes on Humor

It’s a virtue to make other people laugh-
Thomas Aquinas

Imagination was given to man to compensate him for what he is not; a sense of humor to console him for what he is. ~Francis Bacon

A person without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs - jolted by every pebble in the road. ~Henry Ward Beecher

Humor is emotional chaos remembered in tranquility. ~James Thurber

Many a true word is spoken in jest. ~English Proverb
What is the value of Humor in the human experience?

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Audience Question

How has humor transformed your own experience in life and learning? Do you have a vignette to share?

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Humor has been found to increase group cohesion, reduce stress.

It is seen as a therapeutic opportunity to “share a smile and connect” with one another (Richman, 1995)
Humor creates a type of release evoking psychological, emotional and physiological change. In turn, affording further perception of self and environment towards a more healthy perspective (Maples, Dupey, Torres-Rivera, Phan, Vereen, & Garrett, 2001)
Humor provides a chance to adopt a new view or existential “lense” to find new meaning on a situation. In some ways it reduces a sense of one’s own struggles in isolation but communally.
Araoz et. al (2006) affirmed “humor is the demonstration of a very wise attitude”... to see below the surface...and see more of reality from a different perspective.
Norman Cousins, the editor of *The Saturday Review* for over 30 years, authored *Anatomy of an illness*. When diagnosed with a chronic illness— he read humorous stories and played Marx Brothers movies for him.
In 1989, it was finally acknowledged in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) that laughter therapy could help improve the quality of life for patients with chronic illness and that laughter has an immediate symptom relieving effect.
The use of Humor in pedagogy (online and traditional settings) & counseling

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Humor – where it’s being analyzed, used or created—forces people’s minds into modes of thinking that are investigative, seeking, grasping…

Corey (1996) a key contributor to the field of counseling noted the appropriate use of humor in counseling has a potential strategy for helping clients place events of their lives into manageable perspective.
Mosak (1987) also confirmed that humor can be beneficial to stimulating a more flexible, creative approach to interacting with others—thus helping mediate personal issues.
Livingston (2004) affirmed “Of all the forms of courage, the ability to laugh is the most profoundly therapeutic. He notes laughter is a type of sharing- we are all in this lifeboat together. The sea surrounds us; rescue is uncertain; control is illusory- still we sail on together.”

www.gordonlivingston.com/jokes.html
In a study by Frymier, Wanzer, & Wojtaszczyznyk (2007) researchers examined student perceptions of inappropriate and appropriate teacher humor finding the following:
Student’s perceptions of appropriate use of humor in the online class by teachers is largely influenced by their own communication disposition. For example, those students who communicate well are more sensitive and responsive to others—therefore forecast what might be ill received.
Students did not perceive inappropriate humor (sarcasm) as appropriate even when a categorized funny teacher used the examples in online teaching.
Verbally aggressive students view the borderline and risky types of humor as being more appropriate.

Student personality characteristics seem to affect how appropriate they rate types of teacher humor use.
Overall teachers using certain humor is correlated to the way the teacher acts in the classroom and in turn, how students evaluate their humor usage.
Another study by Garner (2006) affirmed that humor can have an impact on content retention among a sample of college students in online courses.
Through follow up interviews with participants it reinforced the notation that humor used online created the perception of extra effort to make the course enjoyable- allaying some anxiety and improving the learning session (Garner, 2006).
Deconstructing humor’s potential use in an online student’s learning experience: Example 1:
Questions to ask:
- Does it have universality in the course I am teaching?
- Does it need prefacing or further context explanation?
- Will it affirm overcoming difficulties or our imperfection in some way in learning, personal or professional growth?

Deconstructing humor’s potential use in an online student’s learning experience: Example 2:
-I might use this in an early part of the course – students who are new or getting used to online learning
-It is tailored to them as online student in the resonating notation - save your work - back up your files! And it gets this more didactic stance across in a non-threatening way

Deconstructing humor’s potential use in an online student’s learning experience:
Example 3:
A lot of students perceive online learning as easier—when it’s more flexible though can be as rigorous. Remember time management, the flow of assignments?
Learning Brick by Brick sometimes!

Deconstructing humor’s potential use in an online student’s learning experience:

Example 4:

This cartoon might be used in exemplifying aspects of fear of interaction in a multi-generational class. Identifying how we all may have felt this at some time and the value of everyone’s experience that they are bringing to the course.

Humor: Implications in diverse learning settings

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It’s essential to examine humor through the lenses of a multicultural context.

Parameters and basic guidelines of using humor with individuals of different ethnic backgrounds.
Example that might not have universality due to various cultural contexts, differences in parenting roles, social norms, and other socio-economic variations.

Humor is interpreted, perceived defined, and valued different by various cultures.

Important that online teachers and counselors consider the individual cultural values of the student(s) they are working with online.
Considerations online:

- Degree of traditionalism of individuals in the course towards culture-organizational or personal.
- Degree of acculturation to the mainstream or dominant culture
- What is the purpose for using humor in online teaching or counseling? Is it related to a key construct in the course that will lead towards further attainment of the learning objectives and critical thinking?
More Considerations online:

- Have you as an instructor developed trust and respect in the online environment?

- Consider the timing- or even query if the students are interested in a humorous story or cartoon to elaborate the point (ask permission).
Finally,

- Think about times when humor was used in your own life and its application?

- Perhaps, a job interview- to make you feel comfortable; a doctor’s visit to reassure your nerves; or a cartoon or humorous story shared to show an example that can help one’s efficacy in starting a new task or learning
The online learning context and humor

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The Online Learning Context and Humor

- Why Use Humor
- Humor Brings Life to Online Learning
- Humor Modifies the Student – Instructor Interface
- Humor Promotes Course Objectives

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Pros to Using Humor Online

• Humor Can be an Effective Catalysts for Learning
• Humor Can Pique to Students’ Interest Outside the Classroom
• Humor Builds Relationships and Enhances Communication
• Humor Acts as a Stress-Reducing Tool
• Humor Makes a Course More Interesting
• Humor Enhances Recall of Information

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Applying Humor Online

Sooo ..... A Rabbi Walks into a bar And sits down between A Classical Criminologist And a Positive Criminologist ......
Suggestions for Appropriately Using Humor Online

• Assess the Class Makeup
• Assure that Jokes and Humor are appropriate and Politically Correct
• Have an Educational or Instructional objective

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Legal and Ethical Issues Pertaining to the Use of Humor

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Agenda

- Legal Issues
- Ethical Issues
- Summary
- References
- Thanks
- List of Helpful Websites
Caveat

- This presentation is for educational use only and is not intended to provide legal advice to the audience or to create an attorney/client relationship.
Legal Issues

• Libel

• Copyright/plagiarism

• Avoiding jokes that offend.
Libel

• Avoid making false statements about others as you could be sued personally for libel.

• Resources:
  – http://www.nolo.com/definition.cfm/Term/7613C25C-8E5D-47A5-9E0D93B952DE16E7/alpha/L/
Copyright law and fair use

• Are you hesitant to use copyrighted material? Good news!! Using copyrighted material in your online class is allowed as long as you follow the “fair use” guidelines discussed by The Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for Media Literacy Education.
Fair use resources

- [http://centerforsocialmedia.org/medi aliteracy](http://centerforsocialmedia.org/medi aliteracy)
- [http://Mediaeducationlab.com](http://Mediaeducationlab.com)
• Don’t copy jokes or portions of humorous articles on current events from the internet without indicating the source.
Avoiding offensive jokes

• What should I avoid?
  – Jokes about race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, or bodily functions such as bowel movements
Ethical Issues:

- Off limits: What subjects should we avoid making fun of?
  - Multi-cultural concerns
  - Multi-generational concerns
  - The university or the administration
  - Students (avoid sarcasm)
  - Your own profession
A multi-cultural environment

• Humor in the online classroom must span cultures and locations and avoid offending students as much as possible.
Mid-east military deployments
Multi-generational concerns

• Online classes often include several generations of students: Baby boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y.

• Tip: Keep humor current. Humorous references to events that occurred in 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, etc. may fall flat as your students may not understand your jokes. (Exception: History classes.)
Tips for Using Humor

• Use funny quotes and cartoons.
  – Calvin and Hobbes for philosophy and ethics
  – The Far Side for biology
  – Dilbert for business
  – Peanuts for religion

Great quote resource: http://www.quotationspage.com/
Tips, continued.

• Use free animations or cute graphics from http://www.gifanimations.com/index.jsp.
• Make fun of yourself.
• Use balance: Limit humor to 1/3 of content.
Audience poll

Agree or disagree:

Making fun of your profession (i.e. telling lawyer jokes) is appropriate in class.
Summary/Take Away Points

• Remember benefits to using humor but pose questions to yourself as an instructor about sensitivity, diversity, and readiness.
• Assure there is relevance and furthers learning objectives.
• Caveat: Inappropriate jokes you post online can be easily printed or copied and sent to the administration.
• Many of these tips can also be used in the traditional classroom.
References


Questions?

• Please feel free to ask questions…
Thanks!

- Thanks to MERLOT
- Thanks to Cathy Swift, MERLOT Director of Academic Partner Services
- Thanks to Jane Moore, MIC09 Conference Chair
Helpful Websites

- http://www.gifanimations.com/index.jsp
- http://www.quotationspage.com/
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- http://www.ecollege.com/Newsletter/EducatorsVoice/EducatorsVoice-