Humor vo vzdelávaní ako predpoklad rozvoja humorných žánrov v médiách

Humor in Education as a Prerequisite for Developing Humorous Genres in the Media

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Abstract

The paper deals with the impact of education on the quality of national humor, the state of which is reflected in the media. It uses literature to show that humor promotes mental health and that the ability to understand and create humor is conditioned by a child's early experiences at home and school. The presentation of different forms of humor in the classroom and their implications are explained and evaluated through observation and research findings. The risks and benefits of applying humor during lessons and in didactic materials are discussed.

Keywords: Humor. Education. Ethics. Mass media. Classroom atmosphere. Communication. Theories of humor.

Humor, laughter, and smile - a small amount of theory

Humor can be a valuable tool in the field of education, particularly in the context of mass media communication. It might convey crucial messages or values in a way that is less likely to be perceived as preachy or didactic. Humor can help to make complex or dry material more engaging and accessible to a broader audience, making it more exciting and memorable so that people will pay attention and retain the information.

In mass media communication, humor is used and applied as background in TV shows, ads, and other forms of media to make them more appealing to audiences and make it more likely that people will watch, listen, or read. The use of humor supports attention and increases audience engagement.

It is important to note that using humor in education and mass media communication should be done with care, as it can be culturally or socially sensitive. It is necessary to be aware of potential biases and stereotypes and avoid humor that may be offensive or hurtful to specific groups of people.

Humor, being a spice of life, is very complex, and many theories cover this subject. It can vary from person to person and can include many topics, such as satire, irony, and wordplay. Merriam–Webster dictionary

(2001; p. 564) defines *humor* as "the mental faculty of discovering, expressing or appreciating something that is comical, amusing, or absurdly incongruous." It is helpful to introduce the term "sense of humor," which refers to the ability to find amusement or enjoyment in certain things, often in the form of jokes, comedy, or playfulness. A good sense of humor is often seen as a positive trait as it can help lighten the mood in challenging situations and bring people together.

"The humanities and the literature of the world, from the time of the ancient Greeks to the present, have been concerned with the nature of comedy and laughter." writes Wooten (2015). The definitions, explanations, and interpretations of humor might be found in philosophical, psychological, and anthropological essays, works, literature articles, or social studies. Wooten (2015, p. 240) describes humor from different perspectives: from Plato and Aristotle, who" felt that laughter arose from the enjoyment of the misfortunes of others and comedy was an imitation of people at their worst.", through psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud who noted "Humor has a liberating element, it is the triumph of narcissism." and believed that "civilization has led to repression of many basic impulses, and joking is a socially acceptable way of satisfying these repressed needs.", to psychologist Harvey Mindess who "viewed humor and laughter as the agents of psychological liberation. They free us from the constraints and restrictive forces of daily living and, in doing so, make us joyful".

Bell and Scheel describe three significant theories of humor: the superiority theory, the incongruity, and the release theory. The superiority theory of humor, also known as the "Schadenfreude theory," suggests that people find humor in the misfortune or downfall of others because it makes them feel superior and helps to boost their self-esteem. It was first described by the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle and later developed by Thomas Hobbes and Sigmund Freund.

The incongruity theory posits that humor arises from the perception of a mismatch or discrepancy between two or more elements in a situation. This mismatch can take many forms, such as a violation of expectations, a contrast between different levels of meaning, or a clash between different frames of reference. The theory suggests that when one encounters something incongruous or unexpected, the brain is forced to resolve the discrepancy, and this resolution process may be experienced as humorous.

The third psychological theory of humor, release theory, explains why and how people find things funny. According to the theory, humor releases pent-up psychological tension, such as anxiety, aggression, or frustration. When an individual encounters a humorous situation or joke, the tension is released through laughter, providing relief and well-being. The theory suggests that humor is a coping mechanism that helps individuals deal with difficult situations. It also proposes that the funniness of a joke or situation is directly proportional to the amount of tension it releases.

Humor, laughter, and smiling are linked to various physical and mental health benefits. Studies have shown that laughter can reduce stress hormones, lower blood pressure, and improve immune function. Thus, it helps to improve cardiovascular health and may be beneficial for pain management.

Laughter and humor also have been discovered to affect mental health positively. Laughing may boost mood, reduce anxiety and depression, and improve overall well-being. It is supposed to increase feelings of social connectedness and improve communication and relationships with others.

Smiling, a nonverbal expression of positive emotions such as happiness and joy, can release endorphins, enhancing overall mood and reducing stress. It is important to note that the effects of humor, laughter, and smiling on health may differ for everyone. Even if further research is needed to understand better the underlying mechanisms and optimal methods for incorporating humor and laughter into a healthy daily lifestyle, humor is a powerful therapeutic tool in different therapy methods, such as cognitive-behavioral and psychoanalytic therapy. Wooten studies humor from different perspectives and presents, among others, therapeutic humor (2015, p. 239-257).

Power of Humor and its Effects in Today's Classroom

Nowadays, we fully understand that using humor in a classroom can be constructive. Laughter and smile, having their rightful place in a school, pair with a good atmosphere, bring open-mindedness and tolerance, release stress, increase imagination, stimulate creativity, and boost motivation. They may successfully accelerate the process of learning.

Nevertheless, it is essential to add that laughter and smile do not necessarily represent expressions of humor and the spirit of play. Inappropriate grimaces, laughter full of sarcasm, signs of irony, hypocrisy, or a glimpse of hate do not connect to a sense of play or ludic. Lethierry (1998, p. 169) suggests that strategy "move from involuntary humor of school to a conscious use, partially mastered, to overcome institutional conflicts and take a step back from one's own "humor," develop (it) with the divergent mind of imagination and its indefinite potentialities." As the general term humor encompasses many concepts, Bouquet and Riffault (2010, p. 13-22) explain the "status of humor in various realities" by defining and clarifying semantic fields which make people laugh. The authors distinguish laugh, comedy, irony, mockery, jokes, satire, caricature, parody, self-mockery, and humor. Assuming that laughter and smile create a pleasant and fruitful atmosphere in a classroom, others, such as mockery and irony, shall cause the opposite effect. They are inherently aggressive and dangerous and should not be contained in the life of the classroom. However, studying and exploring types of discourse or literary/non-literary genres are the exception to the rule. The maturity and age of pupils and students are fundamental when applying irony

and sarcasm in education since adolescents or adults comprehend and tolerate them easier than young learners. The correct and non-violent use of parody, word games, and puns might become creativity tools, unlock taste for divergent thinking and free play and bring playful creativity. Thus, a background in humor can also be beneficial for careers in advertising, public relations, marketing, and the entertainment industry. Decuré (2015, p. 37-54) mentions, "Humor, laugher, pleasure have become essential, even indispensable elements in the life of society in the second half of the 20th century, not only in media, entertainment or spectacle but also in the world of work and education". The professor claims not to use certain unacceptable and inappropriate forms of humor, such as sexist, racist, religious, sexual, or ethnic jokes or jokes aimed at denigrating learners (irony, sarcasm) or "too much" jokes. Indeed, the most important is the education, learning process, and personal development, not using humor at any cost. Stambor (2006) quotes professor Shatz: "' Professors' jobs are to educate, not to entertain. But if humor can make the learning process more enjoyable, then I think everybody benefits as a result". If laughter and smile help create a playful ambiance and thus may lead to distraction and chaos, it is necessary to acknowledge the virtues and limits of laughter in education.

Works of Ziv (1979) embrace the experimental research conducted to assess the pedagogical effects of humor by comparing the reaction of different groups, only some of which received highly humorous education. The first comparison shows learners' age is paramount when appreciating a teacher's humor. The older students are, the more they enjoy humor in their classroom. There is a correlation between students' age and their enjoyment of humor in the classroom. However, individual personality, cultural background, and personal experiences may also play a role in a student's sense of humor and enjoyment in the classroom (Ziv & Diem, 1987).

The pleasant climate in a classroom diminishes the distance between the teacher and students and allows a more positive teacher's role perception. From the student's point of view, it makes learning easier. The experiment shows that humor could promote learning and become a "facilitator" during exams. However, the "humorous" lessons must be consciously and carefully prepared, and there is no place for "just" improvisation. Spontaneous humor is also valuable for teaching. It can help to lighten the atmosphere. Nevertheless, Ziv concludes, it will not necessarily positively impact learning as well-directed, prepared humor does.

As regards the connection between humor and creativity, according to the author, incorporating humor in teaching improves students' creative writing performance. The study confirms that the influence of humor is durable. The groups studying with humor stayed significantly more creative (even after three months) and scored higher on the final exams. An environment of fun indicates a culture of trust. When students feel comfortable and safe expressing themselves and sharing ideas, it can lead to a more open

and creative atmosphere. Additionally, when students can make jokes and be light-hearted with one another, it can help build stronger relationships and a sense of camaraderie. Students can share their concerns and mistakes non-judgmentally, and where they can learn from them. The students stay motivated, creative, and disciplined.

However, Ziv (1979) explains that a comedian's influence depends on the task's objectives and nature. If a comedian is an excellent motivator to start and finish the task, she or he can be perceived more as a "brake" in the middle. In such situations, when more comedians are in the class, they can be divided into more groups.

Hugues Lethierry summarizes that humor keeps conflicts at a distance by taking a step back; it becomes an excellent peacemaker and supports creativity by inventing tricks, surprises, and even seduction.

"Humor is a multi-purpose tool. In the form of pedagogical matter, stimulation seduces boredom and tension, relaxes (this is the effect of laughter), and motivates," claims Decuré (2015). Summarizing the results of several types of research, Bogatti (2021) presents the effect of humor in a classroom from four different perspectives: socio-cultural perspective (increases mental flexibility, improves working relationships, demystifies the image of the teacher, reduces the distance among individuals), psychological perspective (creates a pleasant climate which develops group cohesion in a class, has an impact on motivation and persuasion), physiological perspective (promotes the production of endorphins and such reduces anxiety, inhibits pain, stimulate the memorization process fostering learning) and cognitive perspective (stimulates the cerebral activity, encourage learning).

While humor can be a very effective and refreshing tool in a classroom, too much may lead to several negative consequences. Stambor (2006, p. 64) mentions that "Humor can be overdone to the point that students are so busy awaiting the next gag that they miss the teacher's message." Using too much humor in a classroom may harm the learning environment. When humor is overused, it can cause a distraction and make it harder for students to focus on the material being taught. In pari materia, Faure (2000) explains, "Humor must be a subject of an exact dosage. Too much humor can turn a teacher into a clown and a classroom into a circus, going diametrically opposed to pedagogical and educational requirements." It all can lead to a decrease in a student's ability to retain information and a lack of engagement with the material. It can make it difficult for students to take the teacher or the class seriously and cause a lack of respect for the teacher and the material.

Furthermore, the use of inappropriate humor or the form of it to mock or belittle students creates a hostile classroom environment and harms the relationship between teacher and student.

Demirkan and Zeytinkaya (2015, p. 58-64) try to answer the problem of irony and cynicism in the modern educational process regarding language teaching. According to Socrates, the authors claim that irony is an art of

questioning, and "Maieutic is an interrogative method that literally consists of giving birth to spirit. It is for this reason that should be used to trigger the creativity of students." As "irony and cynicism are capable of causing scars and harmful consequences," the teachers must be careful, find "well-proportioned balance and know where the limits of the use of humor and irony are, and be aware of these difficulties." From this point of view, "Irony is not an empty concept that must be used indiscriminately to express the spirit of mockery, criticism, and jokes. It is an art of questioning, of making people think, and a technique of communication and thought. The philosophical, pragmatic, and pedagogical approach to irony teaches us the many uses of this Socratic art of nowadays teaching."

Nonetheless, a toxic classroom environment makes it impossible for students to feel safe, respected, and valued. Schadenfreude-based humor can also perpetuate negative stereotypes and perpetuate a culture of bullying. Mainly, humor directed at a specific student or group causes them to feel marginalized, targeted, or disrespected. Teachers must be aware of their humor's potential effects and ensure that it is appropriate, respectful, and supportive of the learning process. It is vital for teachers to use humor in moderation and to use it in a way that is appropriate and respectful and supports the learning process.

Ronald A. Berk highlights that incorporating humor or comedy can significantly enhance teaching material while maintaining its essence. The emphasis should prioritize the student's needs rather than thinking like a professor. He stresses the importance of catering to their multiple intelligence needs and cultural backgrounds to help them understand the concepts better in a way that resonates with them. The focus should not be on the professor but on the students and their learning experience.

Teaching with the use of humor as background in mass media communication

Teaching with humor and understanding humor during the educational process can serve well as a background for mass media communication. When teaching students about the different types of humor, such as satire and parody, and the potential effects of humor on audiences, students might gain a deeper understanding of how humor can be used in mass media. When using contextual humor in the classroom, teachers awaken a creative way of thinking, help students to become open-minded, establish information, and easier understand the role and use of humor in different forms of media, too.

Furthermore, students can learn and obtain practical knowledge on using humor to support the message they want to express and use it to attract and retain audiences.

Also, teaching humor certainly lends a hand to students apprehending the importance of considering the audience and context when using humor in

mass media, learning about the ethical considerations of using humor in mass media, and how to use humor to impact society positively. Not to mention understanding the potential adverse effects of humor, how it can perpetuate stereotypes and marginalize certain groups, and how to use humor appropriately and respectfully. Teaching with humor, understanding humor, and humor in education can all serve as a background for mass media communication by providing students with the knowledge and skills needed to understand and effectively use humor in different forms of media.

According to Ermida and Chovanec (2012, p. 3), humor and the media have always been closely connected. They are "intertwined phenomena that it may be hard to tackle one without resorting to the other." Humor in mass media communication positively impacts audience engagement and receptivity. The messages are more memorable and entertaining and can help build trust and credibility with the audience. Various cartoons and comic strips, humorous adverbs and Internet gaps, hilarious videos, favorite solo performances such as one-person shows and sitcoms, as well as funny remarks in editorials and opinion articles – everything contains this spice of life. Thinking of a perfect and unique marketing strategy or brilliant distraction to "attack indirectly and voice the unspeakable" (Ermida, Chovanec, 2012), humor has its proper and robust place in everyday mass media communication and indeed becomes a "sociolinguistic phenomenon".

Ethical aspects of dark humor and Schadenfreude

Dark (or black humor/comedy) is a form of humor that focuses on taboo or controversial topics, often accompanied by dark and inappropriate wit. It is characterized by its ability to allude to sensitive topics such as death, illness, violence, racism, sexual themes, etc., in order to provoke laughter or an ironic reaction. It is important to note that black humor can be very subjective, and some people may feel uncomfortable or offended by it because these topics may be painful or personal to them. It is important to express black humor appropriately and in situations where it is appropriate and acceptable to all present. It is rarely appropriate to use black humor in public or formal situations as its nature can be controversial and offensive. The moral view of dark humor is a position that may vary from person to person. Some people find dark humor perfectly acceptable and enjoyable, while others may find it offensive or immoral.

Proponents of dark humor believe that the hypocrisy and absurdity of certain situations can be the subject of laughter and humor. They believe that dark humor can act as a way of dealing with unpleasant or sensitive issues, allowing people to temporarily disconnect from the seriousness of the situation. From this perspective, dark humor can function as an expressive form that allows for the release of tension or anxiety. However, other people

may find dark humor unacceptable or unethical. There may be a concern that dark humor may cause pain or offend people who have experienced traumatic experiences. Also, some may consider that the unintended consequences of dark humor may undermine social solidarity and reinforce negative stereotypes or discrimination. Overall, the ethical view of dark humor is subjective and depends on the personal values, beliefs, and experiences of each individual. It is important to respect other people's opinions and sensitivities and to treat dark humor with care and understanding of the potential impact it may have. This type of humor is not kind in a school setting. It is not recommended to use it. It is unacceptable if it ridicules people of a particular religion, belief, age, or race.

Schadenfreude in German and English refers to the pleasure or satisfaction that someone may derive from the misfortune or suffering of others. Schadenfreude is a German expression meaning "unhealthy joy" or "malignant joy" that we experience when we observe the misfortune of others. It is a malicious joy - a complex emotion that reflects a certain level of envy, resentment, or rivalry towards the person experiencing the misfortune. While it is a common human emotion, it is generally considered negative and unkind to take pleasure in the suffering of others. It is a complex phenomenon that has both ethical and psychological aspects. Considering the ethical aspects of Schadenfreude, it is necessary to pay attention to those phenomena that are present during such performance:

a) Lack of empathy: Schadenfreude can indicate that a person has a lack of empathy for others. Instead of feeling compassion or support, someone takes pleasure in the suffering of others. This raises ethical questions about the moral responsibility to care for the welfare of others.

b) Unfairness and justice: Schadenfreude can occur when someone believes that the other person has received a just punishment for their wrongdoing. This can raise ethical questions about the principle of fairness and justice. Is it ethical to feel schadenfreude when it arises because of a perceived just punishment?

c) Social dynamics: Schadenfreude can also occur in social interactions, especially in situations of competition or rivalry. If we feel schadenfreude when a competitor fails, this can be seen as ethically problematic as it can affect relationships and cohesion within a community.

d) Respect and dignity: Schadenfreude can lead people to view others as objects of ridicule or laughter. This can lead to a violation of the respect and dignity that all people should have. It is important to be aware of how our actions and feelings can affect the human dignity of others.

e) Personal integrity: Schadenfreude can also call into question a person's personal integrity. If someone takes pleasure in the suffering of others, this could indicate that he/she has negative qualities or envy themselves. It is important to reflect on one's own motivations and moral values to ensure behavior with ethical integrity.

It should be noted that ethical evaluations of schadenfreude may depend on cultural and contextual differences. In some situations, schadenfreude may be considered harmless, while in others it may be considered morally inappropriate or even reprehensible. It is important to consider individual and cultural norms in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the ethical aspects of schadenfreude.

Conclusion

An educator with a sense of humor knows education and learning don't have to be time boring and serious. He or she can use humor and jokes to make learning more exciting and memorable. For example, instead of a regular lecture, it is possible to give a "comedy class" where jokes and anecdotes are used and related to the topic of study to make it more accessible and engaging for students. The art of teaching is also to use funny examples and situations to illustrate complex concepts or theories.

Of course, it is essential to balance humor and seriousness to not distract students from learning. However, using humor can help to reduce tension, affective filter and create a positive classroom environment, which can contribute to more productive learning. In addition, it creates funny moments to connect with students and create a friendly atmosphere. This can help reduce the barriers and fears often accompanying learning, especially in a new or challenging area of knowledge. Overall, being an educator with a sense of humor means introducing an element of play and joy into learning, which can contribute to a more positive and practical learning experience.

A teacher with a sense of humor can influence the generation he or she has raised not only by making former students in the profession have a positive mindset and attitude when dealing with everyday problems, but also by working with humor in the artistic sphere to ensure their high social prestige and recognition through the media. Humor is part of the culture of a nation, and humorists who have worked on the stage or in the media in their lifetime find their way into school textbooks and inspire students to work with elements of humor. An interaction occurs: the teacher educates his pupils (students) on a humorous view of the world, and the humorists, through the teachers, provide the didactic material. Two Slovak teachers, Milan Markovič and Stanislav Štepka, have significantly influenced Slovak culture and mapped out folk humor, which they have reinforced by presenting authentic dialect from the area around Piešt'any (Radosina naive theatre – Radošínske naivné divadlo). Július Satinský (* 20.12.1941, Bratislava - † 29.12.2002, Bratislava) was a Slovak actor, comedian, playwright, novelist, publicist, and writer, who is known (also personally) by today's generation and even a relatively large monument in the center of the Slovak capital (Dunajská Streda, Bratislava). We should also note that comedians are disappearing, and "artists" who present their attitudes through stand-up shows are increasing.

What is the difference? The comedian is a professional entertainer, actor, and writer who performs various comic acts, and the standup gagman is a professional performer who tells jokes and his or her artistic performance is limited. For a society to have more comedians than standup gagmen, it needs not only intelligence and experience but also education in this area. Reading books with humorous content and inspiration in a school setting replaces experience and provides inspiration for a kind and artistic portrayal of humor.

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