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Andrews University

School of Education

INTENTIONAL CLASSROOM HUMOR IN NURSING

A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Joan Kay Ulloth

July 1998

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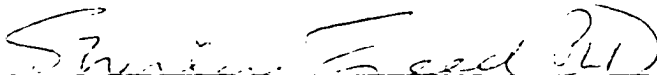
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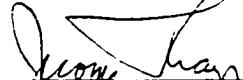
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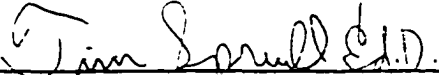
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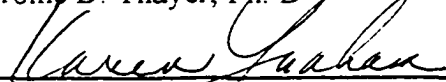
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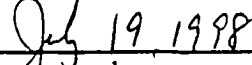

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ABSTRACT

INTENTIONAL CLASSROOM HUMOR IN NURSING
A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

by

Joan Kay Ulloth

Chair: Shirley Freed

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

School of Education

Title: INTENTIONAL CLASSROOM HUMOR IN NURSING: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

Name of researcher: Joan Kay Ulloth

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Date completed: July 1998

Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived connections between the intentional use of humor in the nursing classroom and student learning in the cognitive and affective domains while seeking to understand student and teacher perceptions and responses to humor.

Method

This study used a case study approach and the end result is a multiple case study of three associate degree nursing instructors in the Midwest. The data collection methods included observations, interviews, and surveys. Data from the different sources were

examined within and across cases for commonality or difference of experience.

Connections were made between humor and cognitive and affective learning.

Results

This study portrayed the successful use of intentional humor in three nursing classrooms. Teachers and the students at all stages of their education expressed benefits they believed were received from humor. The students of all three classes observed were remarkably homogeneous and there were no obvious differences among the student responses to classroom humor that could be attributed to demographic factors.

Nursing faculty members incorporated relevant humor to support educational points. All three teachers in the study used cartoons and spontaneous humor, inserting a humorous event about every 10 to 15 minutes. They included other humor forms; each teacher favored certain forms. The teacher in Illinois used song and dance routines, role-playing was preferred by the teacher of freshmen in Ohio, and the Indiana teacher specialized in puns and funny stories.

Conclusions

Humor can be an effective, multi-purpose teaching tool for nursing educators to convey course content, hold students' attention, relieve anxiety, establish rapport with their students, and make learning fun. Guidelines are included to help faculty learn to incorporate humor in their classrooms.

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CHAPTER 1

HUMOR IN NURSING EDUCATION

Introduction

The use of appropriate instructional humor seems to enhance learning. It does not alienate, subvert, or deride the educational experience, as some would have us believe. Classroom laughter may initiate and liberate thinking, reduce academic anxiety, promote the retention of academic material, and increase learner satisfaction. (Shade, 1996, p. 77)

How and what students are taught is a subject that stimulates lively debate.

Teachers, students, parents, and future employers of graduates all have strongly held beliefs concerning the educational process and its results. New developments in the process lead to changes in curriculum design. Among recent developments are the concepts of different learning styles and the classroom environmental influence on students.

Learning is a complex process that includes much more than merely gathering factual information. Students need to organize knowledge gained, use information to make decisions, develop skills, and function within the social environment where the skills and decisions are needed. Because the acquisition of these abilities varies greatly among individuals, the methods used to develop these skills must also vary. Good teaching methods include many different techniques to facilitate this. One strategy is the addition

of humor in the classroom to meet the learning needs of students and develop creative thinking.

But what is humor and how might it influence learning? According to Robinson, humor is “any communication which is perceived by any of the interacting parties as humorous and leads to laughing, smiling and a feeling of amusement” (1991, p. 10). Many authorities (Bergen, 1992; Cornett, 1986; Davies & Apter, 1980; Inman, 1991; Loomans & Kolberg, 1993; Shade, 1996; Spector, 1996; Wandersee, 1982; Welker, 1977; Zillmann, Williams, Bryant, Boynton, & Wolf, 1980) have identified humor as a positive influence in the classroom. But how extensive is the research supporting this trend? Cannella, Missroon, and Opitz (1995), commenting on the use of humor, said:

One measure of research on humor is the number of doctoral dissertations. The DAI [Dissertation Abstracts International] database was reexamined using the key words “humor or wit” as text words. From January 1861 through December 1981, a 121-year period, 622 citations were identified. Over the next 7 years, through December 1987, 549 citations were identified, while 234 citations were identified over the past year and a half, from January 1993 through June 1994. (p. 53)

Until 1981, the average was 5 dissertations per year. Just 6 years later, in 1987, the annual average had risen sharply to about 90 and, by 1994, had grown to more than 150 per year. A search of the on-line DAI database from 1994-1997, with the key words used by Cannella et al., produced 451 citations, 113 per year. Adding the word ‘education’ to the search reduced the number of citations to 108; none included ‘nursing’. This led me to wonder: Are nursing educators using humor in their classrooms? Is this an instructional method that might benefit the nursing profession? Is there an understanding of what humor in nursing education looks like?

Background

As professional education in nursing has evolved over the years it has gained in complexity. In the days of Florence Nightingale, nursing was based on the theory that fresh air and food, cheerfulness, and clean linen would allow the body to heal on its own. Since then, much has been added to the theories of nursing care.

Though there are numerous differences among the theories that have been advanced over the years, a fundamental philosophy has remained. To the nurse, each individual consists of a complex blend of three major components, the body, mind, and spirit. These, more recently, have been called the psychomotor, cognitive, and affective aspects of humanity. Optimal function for each of these areas should be developed, and if total focus is given to any one area, the patient will develop asymmetrically, thereby impeding the overall healing progress.

Nursing education is careful to present the patients' need for balance in these three areas, but it has not consistently practiced what it preaches. Because nursing students are human like their patients, they too need a balanced development. Yet, as nursing schools have followed the traditional path of higher education, focusing on time spent studying textbooks, listening to lectures, and providing physical care, discussion was aimed at the patient's needs whereas the needs of the individual student were not specifically addressed.

Though the nursing profession recognizes the interrelationships among the psychomotor, cognitive, and affective aspects, in teaching students, the three aspects of the person are often treated as distinctly separate domains. The physical body develops

skills in the psychomotor domain. The mind is the cognitive domain containing the thinking, reasoning part of the being. And the spirit, the affective domain, addresses the emotional, spiritual, and relational aspects of the individual.

One nursing theory, Nursing's Human Need Theory, specifically includes the need for humor as part of its theoretical framework. "The need for humor encompasses the perception, the frame of mind to enjoy and express a sense of the clever, the funny, and the comical" (Yura-Petro, 1991). And Ohlinger (1990) suggested a holistic philosophy for educators which seeks more understanding and less knowledge; more being and less doing; more humor and less deadly seriousness.

My Use of Classroom Humor

As a nursing educator, I have regularly incorporated humor into my classes. I first saw the potential impact of humor as a part of teaching when I began teaching Introduction to Pharmacology in 1987. Students came to the class with a preconceived idea that the class was boring and unnecessary. They had been told this by students in previous classes. At the end of the semester, these students expressed surprise that the course had turned out to be fun. Their average scores on national achievement tests were near the 50th percentile, while the average for previous years had been hovering at about the 25th percentile. Over the following 10 years, changes have occurred in the textbook, the syllabus, the scheduled meeting times, and the length of time for class, yet the class averages on the national achievement tests remained consistently at the higher level. The only constant factor was the teacher. This led me to believe that my teaching style had a

strong influence on the outcome of student learning. My humorous perspective was stronger than that of other nursing faculty, so I concluded that humor might be a teaching strategy that helped students learn.

Humor is gaining popularity as a classroom technique, but the body of research is still small especially as it relates to nursing education. Although health care workers recognize the benefits of humor for themselves and their patients, there is no clear understanding of how humor produces these benefits or how to use it. Nursing educators have been slow to develop strategies that incorporate the affective domain into teaching. Instructors don't have models of how to do this using humor. More research is needed regarding the effects of humor on student learning in nursing courses.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to portray the intentional use of humor in the nursing classroom and to examine the perceived connections between humor and student learning in the cognitive and affective domains. Both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used in this multiple case-study research. The data collection methods included observations, interviews, and surveys.

The research questions were examined from three vantage points. Classes taught by three different nursing instructors who use intentional classroom humor at different schools were observed. The teachers were interviewed to understand how they began to use humor, what benefits they perceived from using humor, and why they continued to use humor. Student reactions to the use of humor as an instructional tool were

determined from surveys and in-depth interviews. Data were collected during the fall and winter semesters of 1997-98 from August through February.

Research Questions

1. How do nursing students believe intentional humor in the classroom affects their learning?
2. How do nursing faculty members incorporate humor in the classroom?
3. What, if any, connections do teachers and students perceive between intentional classroom humor and cognitive learning?
4. How does intentional classroom humor resonate with student demographics?

Benefits of Study

The potential benefits from this study are a clear portrayal of what teacher-generated humor looks like in nursing education and a better understanding of how students and teachers perceive it. By seeing how humor is incorporated into the nursing classroom, others may realize the advantages of classroom humor as a teaching tool and better understand how to incorporate it in their classes. This could result in efforts to balance the three domains in student learning by implementing humor based on the guidelines suggested by this study.

Summary

Humor is currently capturing the interest of educators because it has properties believed to enhance cognitive and affective learning. However, very little is known about

how it is implemented in nursing education classrooms. A study of teachers who successfully incorporate humor in their classes will illustrate how they use humor and how students respond. This study portrays the influence of humor on the learning environment and the people within it by examining the use of humor by three associate degree nursing instructors and the perceptions and reactions of their students.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Humor has been a subject of interest for centuries. It has been used in education at least since Hellenistic times. Socrates used irony and Plato was known for his sarcasm. Even Christ used humor in His discourse (Trueblood, 1964). Humor is found in all cultures, social strata, and professional disciplines.

However, only recently have educators begun to see the value of humor in the learning setting. Humor research with children in educational settings burgeoned in the 1970s and has continued to be a topic of interest (McGhee, 1989). Educators have made use of humor's prevalence, but it is interesting to note that there is a decrease in the emphasis placed on the use of humor as a teaching tool from the elementary level, for which considerable literature can be found, to higher education. Less effort has been made at the higher levels to understand its application to education and in general. Humor research directed toward college populations has been focused on those students taking general studies, not professional curricula.

In this chapter, I review the various discourses on learning theory, highlighting the current interest on connections between the cognitive and affective domains. I also share

the current discussion about humor in education and demonstrate the need for studies in nursing education.

Learning

For years, different educational theories have been proposed and implemented. Each theory has tended to focus on one of the three domains of learning. B. F. Skinner's behaviorism focused on responses to various stimuli; Bruner thought the best learning occurred in a social context; and the recent popularity of cognitive theories is seen in the acceptance of Shiffrin and Atkinson's information processing theory. More recently, some of these theories have begun to acknowledge the advantages of a balanced approach to learning. In 1965, Robert Gagne first proposed a theory for instruction that combined the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains of learning (Driscoll, 1994). Gagne further developed his "Conditions for Learning" theory over the ensuing years. His theory contains a taxonomy of five major learning outcomes. The first three outcomes are found in the cognitive domain whereas the last two address the affective and psychomotor domains of learning.

1. Verbal Information outcomes usually direct students to state factual information.
2. Intellectual Skills outcomes include the ability to understand concepts, to differentiate between objects or symbols, and to apply rules.
3. Cognitive Strategies outcomes are observed when individuals use personal patterns to direct learning, actions, and responses.

4. Outcomes for Attitudes are demonstrated by choices individuals make based on inner feelings and thoughts.

5. Outcomes for Motor Skills are measured by physical action.

Through the years, educators have emphasized one or another of these domains in their theories. Another balanced approach to all three domains has been presented in Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences which identifies eight methods of acquiring knowledge: visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, mathematical/logical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, body/ kinesthetic, natural world. Most people will notice ways in which the different intelligences have connections to the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Some, like the musical intelligence, have clear connections to all three domains of learning.

Daniel Goleman (1995) described the workings of the emotional and rational minds as "intertwining their different ways of knowing to guide us through the world" (p. 9). Caine and Caine (1997) identified 12 brain/mind learning principles which make education more effective. Four of the 12 principles are directly applicable to affective learning:

1. The brain is a social brain. "Learning is therefore profoundly influenced by the nature of the social relationships within which people find themselves" (p. 105).

2. Emotions are critical to patterning, the process of developing schematic maps and categories. "The emotional impact of any lesson or life experience may continue to reverberate long after the specific event that triggers it" (p. 105).

3. Learning involves both focused attention and peripheral perception. Since the brain responds to the larger context in which teaching and communication occur, it is important for teachers to create an optimal learning environment.

4. Complex learning is enhanced by challenge and inhibited by threat. Therefore, we must create and maintain an atmosphere of relaxed alertness, involving low threat and high challenge. Signs and symptoms of high threat are feelings of helplessness and fatigue. The final conclusion for Caine and Caine is “that any in-depth understanding of any subject, skill, or domain requires some integration of thought and feeling” (p. 116).

Integrating Affective and Cognitive Domains Through Humor

Understanding humor requires both affective and cognitive responses which can lead to deeper learning. Scholars have begun to examine the effects of humor in education. Long and Graesser (1988) examined theories of how humor is processed. They concluded that humor involves both cognitive and social processing, and an individual who did not understand the social context of the humor would most likely not understand the humor. “Humorous statements must be decoded and comprehended in the context of rules of language, rules of conversation, the speaker’s intentions, and other dimensions of the social situation” (p. 35). Spector (1996) studied elementary students’ understanding of idioms as the first cognitive component of humor appreciation. Language is socially constructed and only attains meaning as people in relationships make sense out of it. To appreciate humor, the individual needs to develop the attitudinal, intellectual, social, emotional, and expressive skills that make up the sense of humor (McGhee, 1997, p. xii).

Shade (1996) presents a strong argument for including humor in teaching:

Humor appreciation involves not only cognitive processes (such as those needed for incongruity resolution), but also affective and emotional processes as well. Humor is a combination of an individual's objective point of view as well as any environmental factors evident, such as the presence of other people. Two distinct and interacting modes of thinking are occurring when humor is evident. One level is cognitive processing, involving the ability to achieve and recognize the incongruity, resolution, and other attributes that are present. The other level is emotional processing, a subjective mode, based on prior experience, environment, and some personal appraisal of joke quality. (p. 26)

In the past 20 years, nursing educators have begun to address the individual needs of their students as an integral part of their development as nurses. The psychomotor development of nurses gives them the skills needed to care for patients. Their cognitive development helps them gain the necessary theoretical knowledge. But the affective development of nursing students has not been consistently addressed. Robinson (1991) introduced this element into nursing education through her seminal study on the use of humor in nursing and the health professions. Ferguson and Campinha-Bacote (1989) championed the study of affective elements of humor, "since nursing views individuals within a holistic framework, it is imperative for nursing to conduct research on the usage of humor in all realms of nursing practice and focus on the cultural and spiritual aspects of the concept" (p. 34).

Yet, in Prosser's (1997) study of more than 250 college professors' beliefs about classroom humor and their use of it, there was a large gap between how they wanted to use humor and how they actually implemented it. Since humor is considered to be so useful, why aren't more teachers adopting it? Berk (1998) suggested three reasons why humor is not frequently used as a teaching tool:

1. Professors are not trained to use humor in their classrooms.
2. Many professors believe that they need the skills of a professional comic.
3. There are strong beliefs that teaching is a serious business and that humor will make it frivolous and undignified. (p. 64)

Humor Defined

The term humor has evolved from its original Latin meaning of “liquid.”

According to the Dictionary of Word Origins (Ayto, 1990), the “term ‘humour’ came to be applied specifically to any of the four bodily fluids (blood, phlegm, choler, and black bile) whose combinations according to medieval theories of physiology determined a person’s general health and temperament” (p. 289). “After becoming a general term for ‘disposition’ or ‘temperament,’ humor came to mean ‘a mood or temporary state of mind’” (Mish, 1991, p. 231). By 1828 when Webster first published his dictionary, humor had become “that quality of the imagination which gives to ideas a wild or fantastic turn, and tends to excite laughter or mirth by ludicrous images, or representations” (Vol. 1, p. 103).

In 1991, Robinson defined humor as “any communication which is perceived by any of the interacting parties as humorous and leads to laughing, smiling and a feeling of amusement” (p. 10). The Israeli researcher, Ziv (1988b), had a more operative definition for humor. He conducted several studies dealing with intentional classroom humor which he defined as “humor created by people in order to be enjoyed by people” (p. 102). He saw humor as a form of communication which transmits a voluntary message to evoke laughter that reflects a cognitive-emotional response. The operational definition of humor used in this study combined Ziv’s definition of humor with Robinson’s since both applied

in their respective ways to intentional classroom humor. So, humor is any communication created by people to be enjoyed by all. It is perceived by any of the interacting parties as humorous and leads to laughing, smiling, and/or a feeling of amusement.

Humor Theories

Modern theories of humor exchanged the physiological concept of body fluids for such psychosocial concepts as coping (Parse, 1992a, 1992b, 1993), adaptation (Ruxton & Hester, 1987), and creativity (Ziv, 1983). The following theories are a sampling of the overlapping but distinct theoretical perspectives of humor developed by such disciplines as medicine, psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

Humor theory has emerged in three phases: pre-theoretical, psychoanalytic, and cognitive (Bellert, 1989, p. 66). Early humor studies were pre-theoretical and included Greek philosophy, Biblical proverbs, and the medieval definition of humor as a body fluids. Beginning in the 1900s, the psychoanalytical phase of humor research was based on Freud's theory of humor as a defense mechanism to allow people to face difficult situations or express forbidden impulses. Channeling undesirable impulses also occurs in the superiority, or disparagement, theory in which one person or group of people "puts down" another person or group as inferior (Lefcourt & Martin, 1986).

The third phase of humor theory development, the cognitive approach, examines why people laugh and identifies what effects humor has on attitude and behavior in stages of intellectual development. The cognitive theories include the incongruity theory, social theory, and Berlyne's view of humor as an expression of pleasure based on levels of arousal. One of several older theories that has been updated, the incongruity theory

espoused by Kant and Schopenhauer compares the relationship between two or more illogical events. The social theory uses humor as a means of developing group cohesion and socialization (Coleman, 1992).

As suggested by the superiority theory, humor can be appropriate or inappropriate. Appropriate humor fits the situation, is emotionally uplifting, offends no one, creates a positive supporting atmosphere, and relates to the discussion topic. Inappropriate humor does not fit the situation, can be hurtful, disparaging, offensive, and use profane or sexual language (Blumenfeld & Alpern, 1994). Tamborini and Zillmann (1981) found that students responded differently to humor based on the gender of the teacher. Students of the same gender as their teacher did not respond positively to the use of sexual humor, but found the teachers' self-disparaging humor more acceptable.

Bryant and Zillmann (1989) reported that teachers used funny stories 39% of the time, more than any other type of humor. Funny comments and jokes were used 18% and 17% of the time, respectively (p. 55). In an earlier study, Bryant, Comisky, and Zillmann (1979) found that college teachers avoided puns and riddles. Why are funny stories more prevalent? Are they more effective at conveying the educational message than other types of humor? Wandersee (1982) said, "Humor is like a stick of dynamite. In an expert's hands it can blast away obstructions between subject matter and student. But in a novice's grasp, it may destroy a lesson just as easily" (p. 212).

Use of appropriate humor can enhance the classroom experience (Berk, 1997; Gruner, 1985). Berk (1998) listed seven forms of appropriate humor that can be added to the classroom with relatively low risk for failure: (1) quotations, (2) cartoons,

(3) multiple-choice items, (4) top ten lists, (5) anecdotes, (6) skits and dramatizations, and (7) ad-libs that aren't (p. 23).

Benefits of Humor

A review of the literature shows that the benefits of humor can be organized into five interconnected categories. I will discuss each category individually and then discuss the interconnections between them.

Humor to Relieve Stress and Anxiety

Stress and anxiety are known to interfere with the ability to learn, educators work to keep them at manageable levels (Cannella et al., 1995; Smeltzer & Bare, 1995). Lefcourt and Martin (1986) conducted a series of studies which indicated that using humor lowered stress levels in college students. White and Lewis (1990) wrote of using humor to promote learning by relieving anxiety.

Within an atmosphere of warmth and trust, participants are more receptive to the program content. Humor often improves the ability to communicate and promotes retention of information because humor often is remembered longer than information presented in a formal didactic manner. (p. 61)

Parse (1993) described how humorous cartoons could lighten a situation and change viewers' perceptions.

McMorris, Urbach, and Connor (1985) administered English tests with humor embedded in some of the questions to eighth-graders. They found no difference in scores for questions with or without humor, but students said the funny items were easier.

Smith, Ascough, Ettinger, and Nelson (1971) found that humorous material on college

tests did not affect most students' scores, but improved test scores for students with high anxiety. Mogavero (1979) conducted a study that showed students believed humor maintained their attention and interest, relieved monotony, and reduced anxiety.

Kuhrik (1996) examined the differences between traditional and nontraditional nursing students' use of humor as a coping mechanism when under stress. She found that traditional students had a greater overall sense of humor, but nontraditional students were more likely to use humor to cope with stress. Discomfort with potentially embarrassing class content can be a stressor for nursing students. Hillman (1995), Nilsen (1994) and Johnson (1990), described humor as a way to ease tensions about uncomfortable topics or situations. Robbins (1994) used humor in a nursing skills lab to reduce anxiety to increase learning. Aggression can be an outward sign of frustration and stress. Ziv (1987) reported humor lowered aggression scores in frustrated students. The stress-reducing benefits of humor can be achieved with as little as 5 minutes of daily laughter (Cornett, 1986).

Tennant (1990) studied the effects of humor on older adults. She found that stress and anxiety were reduced with 30–45 minutes of humor twice a week. Parse (1992a, 1992b) studied older adults and found a greater sense of well-being when events in their routine triggered laughter. Audette (1994) said laughter helped maintain emotional health since “with laughter our self-image, self-esteem, and confidence can grow and make our ability to cope with stress that much stronger” (p. 26).

Rosenberg (1989) summarized the positive impact of humor in nursing education this way:

Nursing educators take the risk of appearing fallible, imperfect, and human if they display their sense of humor. But what a relief to students that they have permission also to be imperfect and human! The learning process is tremendously enhanced when students feel free to admit their mistakes and to learn from them. (p. 5)

Each of the above studies shows in one way or another how humor affected stress and anxiety and therefore ease of learning.

Humor to Focus Attention

In class sessions that cover extended periods of time, students can become bored and lose their concentration. Hapeman (1997) reported the average attention span of an adult is 7 to 20 minutes depending on interest in the topic and environmental variables. McGhee and Goldstein (1983) and Davies and Apter (1980) described concentration as both a cognitive and affective phenomenon which depends on attention and arousal. Vance (1987) studied elementary student responses to material that followed a humorous or non-humorous reading. "According to this study, humor may serve to raise flagging levels of arousal, attention, and interest to levels which support optimal information processing, and therefore enhance learning in terms of immediate memory and retention" (p. 94).

Zillmann et al. (1980) studied the effects of humor on kindergarten and first grade students in educational television programs. They concluded, "The findings support the view that humor in educational programs for children, even if the humorous stimuli are rather arbitrarily interspersed, fosters increased attentiveness and, ultimately, superior information acquisition" (p. 179). Twenty years ago, Welker said:

humor is that unique social mechanism which tends to gain the “interest” of those who are a part of it. In the educational field, student interest is of the utmost importance. Without it, learning (developing desired behavior) does not readily take form. The utilization of humor as an “attention-getter” can work very effectively within the pedagogic environment. (1977, p. 252)

In 1980, Bryant, Comisky, Crane, and Zillmann described claims by college teachers that humor stimulates interest in and attention to educational messages. It appears that when humor stimulates attentiveness and interest, more learning takes place. Eason and Corbett (1991) used humor to ‘grab’ the attention of their adult education students, adding that organization, knowledge of the content, and a dynamic presentation style were also helpful. Inman (1991) said, “Teachers who elect to wisely use humor in their classes will not only make those classes far more enjoyable for both the teacher and the students, but will also enhance the learning that occurs by having more interested learners” (p. 29).

Humor to Make Learning Fun

Classroom activities can be fun and energizing for both students and teachers. Prosser (1997) found that 79% of adult educators reported frequently using spontaneous humor in class to achieve this effect (p. 220). Loomans and Kolberg (1993) recommended a number of organized activities for adding humor to the classroom. Korobkin (1988) said “the most successful uses of instructional humor are those in which the instructor and learners are able to laugh together in order to learn together” (p. 156). Stern (1989) suggested that teachers put the fun back into learning by using creative teaching strategies such as gaming to motivate their students and recharge their own

batteries (p. 95). Students who are engaged in classroom activity are more apt to enjoy learning. This was demonstrated when students in adult education classes participated with increased interest as games, puzzles, and charades were added to the presentation (Everson, 1990; Leidy, 1992; Lewis, Saydak, Mierzwa, & Robinson, 1989). Hanna (1991) and Evans (1989) effectively added simulations and role playing to their classes.

White and Lewis (1990) in discussing the teacher's need to engage the students in the classroom said, "Because the affective domain strongly influences the learner's willingness to apply knowledge and skills in clinical practice, educators strive to use strategies such as role play and games that address the affective domain" (p. 62). In his thesis on the use of humor in continuing nursing education, Gabringer (1993) found that nurses enjoyed mandatory class sessions more when they were taught with humor. Warnock (1989) and Zemke (1991) said that humor increased enjoyment and reduced boredom. Noting that, after a humorous event, students had increased attention to and retention of educational content, Zillmann et al. (1980) reported, "The positive affective reaction to humor appears to generalize to the educational message" (p. 179).

Humor to Aid Learning

Bergen (1992) suggested four major strategies teachers can use to link humor and learning: performance, indirect facilitation, elicitation, and responsiveness. In the performance strategy the teacher models the use of humor. The indirect facilitation strategy has the teacher select learning materials that allow for expression of humor. Elicitation strategy is used when asking a student to share a joke or funny story.

Responsiveness strategy has the teacher exhibiting a positive response, such as laughing or smiling at the student's humor.

Much of the current literature supports the positive effects of humor on knowledge acquisition. Shade (1996) explained how he believes humor helps students learn:

Humor may act as a catalyst and allow for unusual juxtapositions and connections to be made between various items of information. Therefore, it may enhance the storage of information by providing a necessary context into which seemingly unrelated items can be better organized. Humor may also increase the information retrieval process by providing specific easy-to-remember retrieval cues that can be stored along with material learned. Humor also allows separate items of information to be related on different levels. An increased number of cognitive associations can then be made within classroom material. By increasing these associations between material to be learned and material a learner already knows, humor can increase the meaningfulness and integration of new material. (pp. 74-75)

Humor has been connected to creativity by Nilsen (1990), Treadwell (1970), and Ziv (1983). Ziv found that humor increased divergent thinking, and Treadwell connected increased creativity with greater humor appreciation. Duit's (1991) description of benefits realized from analogies and metaphors corresponds with the benefits of humor. He said, "analogies may make new information more concrete and easier to imagine" (p. 652). Muscari (1988) described using metaphor to get students involved in learning. Shade (1996) gave his graduate students a test which consisted of a series of cartoons that covered course material. Students were asked to describe why the cartoons were funny and how they related to the course material. The students generated more answers than the teacher expected. The creativity resulted in divergent thinking rather than the more stilted convergent thinking. "In addition, humor increased the meaningfulness of the

material and enhanced the learning and retention of such material by increasing associations between material to be learned and material students already knew” (p. 47).

Saltman (1995) conducted a study of adult learners in which she examined five analytic categories she considered significant for adult education: climate, stress, information retention, equality between facilitator and learners, and group cohesiveness. Her findings indicated “that positive humor, particularly when relevant to the material, enhanced learning. . . . Negative, derisive or culturally inappropriate humor, on the other hand, had a negative impact on learning” (p. 1321).

Ziv (1988a) conducted a study using college students in a statistics class. The instructor used three to four humorous illustrations per hour in one classroom, but did not use humor in the other section. Students who were taught with humor had significantly higher test scores on the final exam than students in the control group. The study was repeated with a general psychology course at another university with the same results.

For Ziv, the results of the studies clearly showed that the effects of humor on student learning were due to careful preparation and presentation which made relevant connections between the humor and the course content illustrated. An American study by Downs, Javidi, and Nussbaum, also published in 1988, corroborated Ziv’s findings that to be effective, the humor used by college teachers needed to be related to the content.

Kaplan and Pascoe (1977) conducted some of the earlier studies relating humor to learning. They videotaped lectures having content-related humor and other presentations covering the same material, but with nonspecific or mixed humor. College students watched the lecture videos then took a test over the material. Their responses were

analyzed for the effects of humor on learning. Questions related to topics presented with humorous illustrations were answered correctly by more students who observed those presentations than by those watching the similar, non-humorous presentations. Although the increase in scores was not significant, Kaplan and Pascoe suggested that humorous examples may increase retention by developing cues for recall. Davies and Apter (1980) reported the retention of material taught with humor in their study was initially significant, but diminished over time to a level that was not significant. Hunt (1993) reviewed six nursing studies which marginally demonstrated the positive effects of humor on patient learning.

Black (1992) reported that her students found learning easier when she added games to her Pharmacology class. Pease (1991) used cartoons in her classroom to teach nursing students to recognize stereotypes, to reinforce concepts, and to stimulate critical thinking. She found consistently positive student responses to cartoon humor. Humor makes students' learning more enjoyable, thereby improving attention and learning.

Each of the studies given above showed at least one way by which humor can directly enhance learning. It stimulated creative thinking and cognitive development and assisted memory recall with mnemonic and other content-related devices.

Humor to Strengthen Social Relationships

Learning is primarily a social activity and any activity that strengthens social relationships can assist learning. Robinson (1991) found that humor serves three basic functions: communication, social functions, and psychological functions. Social functions

include relationships, social conflict, group cohesion, and social control; psychological functions include controlling anxiety and dealing with stress. Humor is an appropriate outlet for hostility and anger. Individuals using it can cope with the situation through denial until they are ready to face the difficulty (p. 50). Bellert (1989), Buxman (1991), and Simon (1988) all supported the idea that humor can be a coping mechanism for dealing with unpleasant situations. Audette (1994) wrote that “laughter melts away inhibitions and then communication becomes more effective. Good communication promotes healthy relationships” (p. 26).

Social relationships of students in the classroom environment generally consist of interactions with their teachers and their peers. As students learn together, they often develop mutually supportive relationships. The relationships with their teachers are often more distant because the teachers are authority figures. Teachers often use humor to create a more relaxed collegial relationship with their students. When students feel supported and understood by the teacher, they are more likely to ask questions and feel more positive about the learning experience.

Civikly (1986) said college students won't understand the teacher's humor unless they have developed a relationship with the teacher. Since humor is a complex social phenomenon that is not easily defined or measured, can it still be called a productive teaching tool if it is separated from other successful teaching techniques? Gorham and Christophel (1990) found that humor was most effective at assisting learning when coupled with interactive teacher behaviors such as making eye contact with the class and calling students by name. Zajdman's 1993 study of college teachers in Israel found that

the amount of humor in the classroom was influenced by each teacher's attitude. If the attitude was positive, there was more humor and stronger student-teacher relationships. Powell and Andresen (1985) found that humor creates student-teacher rapport. Humor can enhance the general learning environment and interaction between student and teacher. Writing from a patient care perspective, Ruxton and Hester (1987) made a similar point about strengthening relationships: "The use of humor establishes a climate or sets a tone which can be initiated by either person in the relationship. The use of humor also gives permission to deviate from expected behaviors and decreases role differences" (p. 20).

Gruca and Douglas (1994) used a humor strategy in a graduate level epidemiology course, assigning students to personify the "bug of the week." The faculty found it "created an atmosphere of openness and trust among the students" (p. 153). White and Howse (1993) explained how humor increased the rapport of a work group. "If positive humor enhances work-group relationships by increasing group cohesiveness, and cohesive groups decrease work-related stress and reduce strain through their social support, then properly chosen and timed humor could ultimately improve work relations" (p. 84). Brown, Brown, and Ramos (1981) studied college students and found they laughed more at cartoons when in the presence of another student although they were not interacting.

All of the studies cited above address aspects of classroom relationships. Humor can be used to ease social tensions and strengthen relationships between student peers and between students and teachers.

Interrelationship of Humor Benefits

A careful examination of the different benefits of humor makes the interrelationship of the five categories more apparent. Humor reduces anxiety through release of tension by focusing on something other than the mere absorption and retention of facts. It also improves the relationship between students and their teacher as described by Watson and Emerson (1988), "This [humor] reduces the authoritarian position of the teacher, allowing the teacher to be a facilitator of the learning process. Fear and anxiety, only natural in a new and unknown situation, become less of a threat, as a partnership between student and instructor develops" (p. 89).

Stimulating mental processes and controlling fear and anxiety through the use of humor help students retain what they have learned. Also, as anxiety is reduced, the students are more likely to open their minds to learning and enjoy the experience. In short, humor is a legitimate teaching tool "that can be integrated into instruction to facilitate learning" (Berk, 1998, p. 2).

Summary

Learning is a process that involves both cognitive and affective functions. The best results come when students learn in a low-threat, high-challenge, relaxed atmosphere with a rich sensory environment that engages all levels of the mind (Caine and Caine, 1989). Humor can help produce that environment by combining the cognitive and affective functions while reducing anxiety.

The common theme uniting these disparate humor studies is the belief that, if used properly, humor has a positive impact on life. In their review, Powell and Andresen (1985) summarized the main effects of humor in educational settings:

Humor, in both its pictorial and verbal forms is useful as a device for gaining and maintaining attention and interest. It may also reduce tension and assist creative thinking. . . . It should focus attention upon the content of what is being taught . . . [and be] designed around the educational point being made; these [humorous anecdotes] are more readily recalled and thus help the student to access what has been learnt. (p. 85)

Humor's multiple benefits have led many authorities to advocate its use in the learning environment. Many studies of humor in education have examined its effects on elementary students. Studies in higher education have observed students in general courses rather than professional curricula. Some have studied the use of specific humor strategies in nursing classrooms, but I found no studies that portrayed the consistent intentional application of humor to undergraduate nursing education. This study focuses on the application of humor in undergraduate nursing education.

CHAPTER 3

GENERAL METHODOLOGY

Introduction to Qualitative Case Study

The purpose of this study was to portray the intentional use of humor in the nursing classroom and to examine the perceived connections between humor and student learning. I chose a case-study methodology because of its potential to provide insight into the research questions (p. 6) and because of its holistic approach. Munhall (1994) maintains that nursing aligns itself with human sciences because of a belief that each individual is an integrated whole which cannot be understood by examining each part separately. In this study, the affective and cognitive components of learning are intricately interconnected.

Qualitative research is designed to study the process and context of a particular situation, retaining this valuable contextual information. Merriam (1988) described “case study” as a useful design for educational research because “educational processes, problems, and programs can be examined to bring about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps even improve practice. Case study has proven particularly useful for studying educational innovations and evaluating programs” (p. 32). The use of humor is a recent innovation in nursing education, yet how it is used and the rationale for using it are

not clear. Detailed descriptions of successful classroom humor are needed if others are to follow, in the continuing search for teaching strategies that most effectively aid students' learning.

A qualitative study also allows for in-depth exploration of attitudes and perceptions. Since perception changes how we view events around us, reality for one person is not necessarily the same for another. Enabling individual students and teachers to express their beliefs and feelings allows the unique flavor of each view to be examined and woven into a thick picture of contextualized patterns.

I selected a case-study design in which I observed three nursing instructors who intentionally use humor in the classroom. I also interviewed them and many of their students to portray some of the ways humor is being used and perceptions of how it connects with learning.

Data Collection

Self as Instrument

Participant observation is an established method for collecting qualitative data that maximizes the advantages of the human being as the most sophisticated instrument we possess. Merriam (1988) described participant observation as:

a major means of collecting data in case study research. It gives a firsthand account of the situation under study and, when combined with interviewing and document analysis, allows for a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated. It is the technique of choice when behavior can be observed firsthand. (p. 102)

I was the primary data collection instrument for this study. As a nurse educator with 15 years of experience teaching associate degree nursing students, I am intimately acquainted

with the content and process of nursing education. I have taught classes equivalent to each of those I observed using intentional humor as a teaching tool. My familiarity with the classroom setting and content allowed me to move beyond the information and environment, to focus on the humor itself. My background also enabled me to mix comfortably with the students. They accepted me as a member of the classroom and asked me questions they might have asked another student in class. This element of student comfort also influenced the depth to which we were able to discuss feelings and content in the interviews. Without my intimate knowledge of nursing, we would have spent more time reviewing the nursing concepts themselves instead of discussing how the students responded to the classroom humor.

Selection of Participants

Quantitative methods were used to identify teachers who use humor and to provide demographic data used in choosing students to interview. Recognizing that higher education is not generally delivered with intentional humor, I was challenged to find individual instructors who did use it. I called some of the nursing programs from Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio listed in the 26th edition of The College Blue Book asking if there were individuals on the faculty who used intentional humor and fit the criteria:

1. The program had to have at least one teacher who intentionally used classroom humor.
2. The teacher had to be available during the study period.
3. The teacher had to be identified by others as a humorist.

4. The class had to have at least 10 students.

5. The nursing program needed to be located within driving distance of my home.

The replies to my inquiries were varied. I reached faculty from five associate degree programs, three B.S.N. programs, and two master's programs. The director of an associate degree program stated that one of their faculty used spontaneous humor. Individuals contacted at the other four schools with associate degree programs were able to identify someone who intentionally used humor in their classes. Conversations with faculty at the three schools offering B.S.N. degrees were rather startling. The teacher described as using humor in one school immediately excluded her class: "You can't use humor with freshmen because they don't know enough." The director from another college quickly responded with a horrified, "Oh, we don't have anyone who uses humor here." A part-time faculty member at the third B.S.N. school used humor, but she was not teaching during the time I was collecting data. Both teachers in the master's programs recognized the importance of humor, but they primarily used spontaneous humor. Additionally, their classes had fewer than seven students each, so I chose not to use them as subjects.

Classes in three nursing schools, each located in a different state, met my criteria. Humor questionnaires (see Appendix B) and a letter of explanation (see Appendix A) were sent to graduates and senior nursing students to verify the opinion that the instructor used humor. The teachers they identified in the questionnaires were the same ones who fit my criteria. In Illinois, 93% of the recent graduates named Linda (teachers gave permission to use their real names) as the teacher using the most humor in her nursing

school. All of the senior nursing students at the school in Indiana identified Ann. Lois was selected by just 44% of the seniors in Ohio, but only 10 of the 42 students in the senior class had taken a course from Lois.

These selections were corroborated by the results from the questionnaires filled out by the current students in all three classes. Eighty-nine percent of her current students in Illinois agreed that Linda was the most humorous teacher in their nursing program. Eighty percent of Lois's students concurred with her selection, and 94% of the students in Ann's class acknowledged that she used the most humor in their nursing department in Indiana

Humor Questionnaire

The humor questionnaire was developed to accomplish the following:

1. To select teachers who used the most humor in their nursing classes by tabulating graduate and senior responses
2. To support the teachers' selection by using responses of current nursing students
3. To allow graduates, seniors, and current nursing students to rank selected benefits from classroom humor
4. To identify humorous classroom events and how they affected the learning process for graduates, seniors, and current nursing students.

The questionnaire contained five Likert-type questions about using humor in nursing classrooms. An additional open-ended question asked the students to identify the

teacher on the nursing faculty using the most humor in class. A second question asked them to provide an example of classroom humor and how it affected their learning (see Appendix B).

Observations

The information from the humor questionnaire completed by graduates and seniors was used to select the teachers in the study. All three teachers were contacted and agreed to participate providing dates for classes in which they used intentional humor in the classroom. From the available dates, I selected those which best fit my schedule. I arranged to observe each teacher's class two or three times in a 1-week period. All students and teachers gave informed consent for the study (see Appendix A).

While observing the class, I looked for teaching techniques, student responses, and the frequency and types of humor used. I made a videotape of the teacher's presentations for later reference. When I completed the observations, I gave the humor questionnaire to the students in the classes. The student responses indicated that the teachers did not limit humor to the days I observed, describing humorous events other than those I observed.

Interviews

The purpose of an interview is to permit entrance into another person's perspective through their thoughts, feelings, and intentions, providing data which cannot be readily observed (Merriam, 1988, p. 72).

Since it is impossible to interview *everyone*, observe *everything*, and gather *all* the relevant materials in a case, a sample needs to be selected. . . . The most appropriate sampling strategy for a qualitative case study is non-probability sampling. Purposive

sampling . . . [is] a well-known and widely used sampling strategy in qualitative research. (p. 52)

Demographic Survey

A purposive sampling of students for interviews was obtained through a demographic survey. Information requested included age, gender, ethnicity, self-perception of scholastic ability, previous college experience, the number of credit hours each was taking, the amount of time spent studying for nursing classes, the amount of time invested in work or community service, and the current occupation. Each student was also asked to supply an ID number for identification and organizational purposes (see Appendix B). All students returned the demographic survey.

Student Interviews

During my first observation of the class, I explained the study to the students. All were willing to participate in the study and each returned the demographic survey. I selected students who represented the class demographics in age, gender, ethnicity, and self-perception of scholastic ability. Those chosen were asked to participate in audiotaped interviews after the classroom observations and humor questionnaires were completed. Each student was assured anonymity in the study and all names have been changed.

At the first school, I interviewed 11 of 35 students in the class. All 10 of the students who attended the class in the second school spoke with me. Of the 17 students in the nursing class I observed at the third school, I spent time talking with 10.

Interviews were held individually or in groups of two or three as students felt most comfortable. I recorded the interviews to reduce the amount time spent taking notes so that I could focus my attention on the interview itself. I began each interview by explaining why I was performing and recording the session. I obtained their names (names have been changed) and ID codes to help organize the data from each individual for analysis. (For interview protocols, see Appendix B.)

The interview process continued until the information collected became repetitive. The students were encouraged to explain their reactions to the use of classroom humor. The student interviews were transcribed from the tapes and examined for common experiences and perspective similarities or differences.

Teacher Interviews

I also interviewed the teachers about classroom humor. They were asked how they began to use humor in the classroom, what benefits they perceived from using humor, and why they continued to use humor in the classroom. Each teacher gave recommendations for incorporating humor in her class presentations. (For interview protocols, see Appendix B.)

Time Line for Data Collection

Data was collected over approximately a seven month period. During this time the research questions were framed, the pilot study conducted, instructors identified, and observations and interviews conducted. The time line can be found in Table 1.

TABLE 1

TIME LINE OF DATA COLLECTION

COLLECTION METHODS	SCHOOL			
	Pilot	Illinois	Ohio	Indiana
Humor questionnaires				
date	08/25/97	09/25/97	09/30/97	12/16/97
# graduates/seniors	51	70	36	7
date		10/02/97	10/14/97	02/03/98
# students		35	10	16
Demographic surveys				
date		10/02/97	10/14/97	02/03/98
# students		35	10	16
Class observations				
dates		09/25/97 10/1 & 2/97	10/09/97 10/14/97	01/23/98 02/03/98
Interviews				
teachers		10/01/97	10/09/97	02/03/98
students				
date		10/02/97	10/14/97	02/03/98
# on-site		11	10	10
Member check				
		05/18/98	05/20/98	05/21/98

Pilot Study

The purpose of the pilot study was twofold: (1) to test the Likert questions, and (2) to see if the class would identify a teacher who used the most humor in class. I postulated that a teacher (myself) who is a self-proclaimed humorist would be recognized by the students as such. To reduce faculty influence on the students, each questionnaire

was distributed with a cover letter from the Dean of Student Services (see Appendix A). The students took about 5 minutes to complete and return them to the teacher.

The humor questionnaire was developed and tested before it was used in the selected schools. It was first used on the 51 nursing students of the 2-year community college where I teach. The questionnaire was given to each class of nursing students in the program.

Student Responses to Humor Questionnaire

Students responded very positively to the use of humor in the classroom. Fifty-one students completed the humor questionnaires. Eighteen questionnaires were returned from the Nursing I course, 13 from the Nursing II course, and 20 from Nursing III. Twelve students (24%) did not identify any teacher, and 23 students (45%) named me (Joan) as the teacher in the nursing department who used the most humor. Five other teachers were named by fewer than 10% of the students. The response percentages in each category of the humor questionnaire are shown in Table 2 (see Appendix C).

The students unanimously affirmed that humor is a positive influence in the classroom. Their responses to the Likert statements indicated they liked humor in the classroom, it helped them learn, they were more relaxed in classrooms where humor was used, they felt more comfortable with a teacher who used humor, and they wished more teachers would use humor in the classroom. One wrote, "I definitely would like to see more and appreciate its use" (Vol. A, p. 34).

Thirty-six of the students responded to the final open-ended question about classroom humor by describing humor they liked and how it affected them. Eighteen of the students (50%) mentioned funny stories, jokes, or a mnemonic device. Cartoons helped four students. Three wrote about classroom activities, and 13 made general remarks.

Funny stories and jokes

Most of the students described a funny story or joke and the benefits they received from its use. “When the teacher used a funny mnemonic to help us learn steps. When class is fun, you want to be there and be a part of it” (Vol. A, p. 7). Although the psychiatric nursing instructor “used funny stories to help us understand behavior and personality disorders” (Vol. A, p. 46), one student said she did not think the humor in the class was planned, “it just happened, which made it more humorous” (Vol. A, p. 48). Another student said, “She tells funny stories in psych class. I remember her stories and it helps me remember we all make mistakes” (Vol. A, p. 17). The stories about mistakes made in nursing helped a third student to “relax and not be so stressed about messing up, and probably helped me do better” (Vol. A, p. 47). A fourth student remembered “the Mad Slasher story in Pharmacology. I will *never* forget the difference between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems” (Vol. A, p. 57).

Students who mentioned that jokes helped them learn and helped them develop a comfort level with the teacher all named me as the teacher who used the most humor in class. “It wasn’t really a learning situation, but Joan seemed to relate to us after a long

day by joking about the day. I felt more comfortable and at ease” (Vol. A, p. 11). “When Joan jokes around about our long days and our overload, it just keeps me going and encourages me to do well ☺” (Vol. A, p. 21). “There is not one incident, but those little tidbits she throws in” (Vol. A, p. 16). “Joan uses humor in all her lectures, and it’s the little things she puts in that make the class a lot of fun” (Vol. A, p. 12). Two students remembered proper subcutaneous injection location and technique because of a joke the teacher made concerning upper arm fat. “When giving injections, do not twist the *jiggling* arm fat. I’ll always remember to ‘just let it hang’ ☺” (Vol. A, p. 9).

Cartoons

Students who identified cartoons as humorous classroom events also remembered the specific content they were used to illustrate. “In Pharmacology, Joan showed cartoons that depicted drug interactions and their effects. Also in Nursing I cartoons, she used to give memorable examples of Nursing interventions” (Vol. A, p. 32). “She showed cartoons that were making injections humorous” (Vol. A, p. 6). “I remember all the funny comics she used to put up for devotions. It relaxed me more because I am always nervous. I think it helped me do better because I got better marks that semester than any other” (Vol. A, p. 41).

General comments

Students who made general comments explained that humor “helped alleviate stress” (Vol. A, p. 29), “helped relax the class” (Vol. A, p. 49), “made us pay attention” (Vol. A, p. 5), and made the teacher seem “more likely to be a friend and more

approachable” (Vol. A, p. 7). The students who described classroom activities said they could “learn while still having fun” (Vol. A, p. 40). “Joan would arrange group activities that would allow it to be fun and interesting and at the end, the material was easier to learn and understand” (Vol. A, p. 39).

Conclusions from Pilot Study

The pilot project showed that students were able to complete the questionnaire quickly. Their comments agreed with their ratings on the Likert scale. Because students might have been scanning the statements and simply marking ‘Agree’ or ‘Strongly Agree’ for all statements, I reversed the meaning of two of the statements in the questionnaire before it was used outside the pilot study. A negative response would be required if the individual favored that effect of humor. Statement #2 was changed to “Humor interferes with my learning”; statement #5 became “I wish fewer teachers would use humor.”

Data Interpretation

Data from the different sources—questionnaires, observations, and interviews—were examined for similarities or differences. A composite description of the intentional classroom humor experience was used to portray student and teacher perceptions of its effects.

Humor is a very individualistic phenomenon. What one person perceives as humorous will not be seen in the same manner by the next. Some people appreciate a particular style of humor to which others react negatively. These differences make it

difficult to rank reactions to perceived humor. Therefore, I chose to look for patterns and common themes among individual responses.

Each collection method generated data which was stored in a printed form. The demographic surveys and humor questionnaires were entered into a database. Interview tapes were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy as I listened to each tape while reading its transcript. Each transcript was then labeled with the participant's name and the date of the interview. Printed transcripts were consecutively paginated in the accumulated data book for each school.

The search for common themes in the various data forms was done by methods best suited to each data type. Frequencies were tabulated from surveys and questionnaires. The resulting patterns indicated that students preferred humor in the classroom and believed that it helped them learn. They also clearly identified the teachers in the different schools who used humor in the classroom.

Pages of data from interviews were separated into complete statements and coded for reference to the complete document. The various statements for each school were then sorted according to common themes as suggested by key words or phrases.

I initially noticed the three categories of humor benefits identified by Parkin in 1989: humor to assist cognitive learning, humor to increase rapport with the teacher, and humor to reduce anxiety. However, as I sorted the statements from the first school, it became apparent that the students and their teachers saw additional effects of classroom humor, so I expanded the list of categories, rearranging the groupings until all statements fit a category. The complete list now contained the following words or themes:

1. Increased student attention, interest, or arousal
2. Reduced student anxiety, stress, or tension
3. Increased student comfort with the teacher or classmates; comfortable social environment or atmosphere
4. Increased student learning, memory, or recall
5. Increased feelings of fun, pleasure, or enjoyment.

During the interviews, each participant gave recommendations for successful integration of humor into the classroom by other teachers. Following the same procedure used to identify the perceived benefits of humor, recommendations were categorized according to common themes. The categorized suggestions and comments were combined with my observations of the teachers' classroom actions to form a set of basic guidelines for teachers wishing to add humor to their classrooms.

Once patterns emerged for the individual schools, I conducted cross-case analysis among the schools. Merriam (1988) said cross-case analysis differs little from data analysis for a single case and "can build themes, categories, or typologies that conceptualize the data from all the cases; or it can lead to building substantive theory offering an integrated framework covering multiple sites" (p. 156).

It is difficult to interpret the impact humor makes in the classroom is difficult. What the teacher views as humor may not be perceived by students in the same manner. What's more, activities that fit well with one class may not be useful in another class. I addressed this potential problem through a constant comparative method in which I considered my classroom observations, the results from the humor questionnaire, and the

interviews of the teachers and their students. The constant comparative method expanded the list of humor benefits. The initial literature review produced three benefits from humor: reduced anxiety, increased rapport with the teacher, and increased cognitive learning. The data from the teachers and students added two more humor benefits to the list: to increase student attention and to make learning fun. When this became apparent, I returned to the literature and found support for the added benefits.

Credibility of the Study

A research study needs internal validity before it can be generalized to a larger population. Internal validity of a qualitative study is obtained through several basic strategies described by Merriam:

1. Triangulation, a process using multiple sources of data or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings
2. Member checks, in which the data and interpretations are confirmed and considered plausible by the participants
3. Clarifying the researcher's biases, assumptions, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study (p. 172).

Several elements within this study provide credibility. Triangulation was realized when data were collected and analyzed using three different sources: questionnaires, interviews, and observations. I also used a member check to validate the data by asking each teacher to review the chapter relating to her class. Multiple sources of information provided a more consistent and detailed picture of humor in nursing classrooms. Sampling

a cross-section of the class demographics and soliciting volunteers for scheduled interviews provided a fair representation of the students. My bias is in favor of humor. The major assumption behind this study was that humor serves as an effective teaching tool.

Eisner (1991) described the generalization value of qualitative research:

What generalizes is what one learns, and these can be regarded as (1) skills, (2) images, and (3) ideas. . . . Skills generalize as they are applied . . . and require thought and doing. . . . Images also generalize. . . . It is the generalizing capacity of the image that leads us to look for certain qualities of classroom life, features in teaching, or aspects of discussion, rather than others. . . . For qualitative research, this means that the creation of an image—a vivid portrait of excellent teaching, for example—can become a prototype that can be used in the education of teachers. . . . When we conduct research, we hope we can arrive at useful generalizations and have a good theory that provides an explanation of why they work. (p. 199)

This study portrays in an often dramatic fashion, the image of how nursing instructors used humor, and as such can be used as an example for other teachers who want to follow.

Another strength of this study is the use of multiple case study design because “in so doing, one increases the potential for generalizing beyond the particular case. An interpretation based on evidence from several cases can be more compelling to a reader than results based on a single instance” (Merriam, 1988, p. 154).

Summary

Three associate degree nursing instructors and their students were observed in class and interviewed to get a portrayal of the use of humor in nursing classrooms. The methods used in this study were best suited to the questions I was trying to answer

because they provided a thick description of how students and teachers experience intentional humor in the nursing classroom. Triangulation showed internally consistent study results, and cross-case analysis produced inter-case consistency (Merriam, 1988, p. 172). Though the teachers implemented different kinds of humor in different settings, it became apparent that their students responded in a similar manner suggesting that humor can be effectively incorporated in nursing education.

CHAPTER 4

ILLINOIS SCHOOL

The Setting

The School

The first class I observed was in a large single-campus undergraduate 2-year college. In the suburbs of a large city in Illinois, the college enrollment is steady at about 38,000 students. The department of nursing offers an NLN-accredited Associate Degree program which admits 120 students each year. Full-time students can complete the nursing program in six quarters.

The Course

The 10-credit second-year medical-surgical course I observed was taught during the fourth quarter of the nursing program. Students spent 5 hours in the classroom and 15 hours in their clinical rotations per week. Students occasionally switched between the two identical sections, so, though I expected 35 in the morning class session, there were 40 who attended (one of whom was another teacher in the department who wanted to learn to use humor in her own classroom).

The Students

Class Composition

There were 37 women and two men in the class. The students' ages ranged from 20 to 48 years; the average age was 31.6 years. Most of the students were Caucasian, so ethnic variation in the class was small. Of the seven non-Caucasians, one was African-American, three were Asian-Americans, one was a Native American, and two were Hispanics. Two of the Asian-Americans were born in India and Pakistan; one student was born in Greece. Most of the students ranked their scholastic ability as average or above average.

Twenty-four students reported some prior college experience; 10 of them held degrees. Most of them were taking a full course load of between 10 and 13 credit hours.

Students reported that they studied for nursing between 5 and 35 hours each week, with an average of 16.3 hours. Students were also active in the community, working an average of 19.4 hours per week. Jobs held by students varied. Six said they were students. Most of the students (20) reported that they worked in health care as Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA), Registered Care Technicians (RCT), Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT), Critical Care Technicians (CCT), or Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN). Six students stated they were secretarial support staff. Four others identified their occupations as parent. There was also a photographer, an athletic trainer, and a music teacher (see Table 3, Appendix C).

Many in the class are non-traditional students who perform numerous tasks outside of class while still pursuing the degree full-time. When asked about their reaction to the

course, they overwhelmingly stated that it was happening very quickly. The students said the pace had quickened and there was more content presented at a greater depth than during the first year. Sandy, a 28-year-old student with a B.S. in psychology, works as a critical care technician, and voiced the universal concerns of students:

To me there is more pressure. This is second year. I mean, you have to get a 78% to pass and I have heard that the renal is very difficult. I've heard from her past students that everyone failed the first renal test. Just little things and more pressure to do well. (Vol. B, p. 174)

Sally, a Pakistani, and Marian, an East Indian, explained that they were functioning in a survival mode. As they went through class, they were thinking about what questions might appear on a test. Sally explained:

It's just the way the program is set. You have to think that way because, if you don't pass one class, you can't come back until the next year. It is not like we have the class the next quarter or maybe in a couple of semesters, so maybe that is why we are in the survival mode. (Vol. B, p. 136)

Student Selection of Humorous Teacher

The students in the current medical-surgical class and the 1997 nursing graduates all received the humor questionnaire. Responses by students in the class were similar to those by the recent graduates (see Tables 4 and 5, Appendix C). Thirty-two of the 36 (89%) students responding to the humor questionnaire named Linda, the teacher of the course I observed, as the teacher in the nursing department who used the most humor in class. Three students named another instructor and one did not answer the question.

Of the 70 questionnaires mailed to graduates, 44 (63%) were returned. Forty-one (93%) of the 44 respondents named Linda as the teacher in the nursing department who used the most humor in the classroom.

Linda is part of a team that presents the second-year medical-surgical course. A veteran teacher with 15 years of experience in nursing education, Linda has an Ed.D. and writes educational software.

The First Classroom Experience

The Classroom

The class met in the skills lab from 10:00 to 12:30 P.M. As is typical of many skills labs, there were beds in three corners of the room, an IV pole, a privacy curtain, and handouts stacked on the bed nearest the entrance at the back of the room. A door leading to the skills lab office suite was at the front of the room in the corner without a bed. Next to the door stood a table with neatly arranged nursing equipment and a tape recorder playing soft, calming instrumental music. About 35 desks occupied most of the floor space with a white board, projection screen, and overhead projector located in the front of the room.

I set up my video camera in the back of the room. Students did not seem bothered by my presence in their class. Several asked what I was doing before I was officially introduced. When they found that I was a nursing instructor doing a study for my own schooling, they continued as if I were another student in the class. Several comments students made led me to believe they recognized me as a comrade in the world of nursing

and could identify with my student status. Several times during the three days I observed the class, the students seated nearby asked me questions about class material that they would have asked another student.

Class Activity

By 9:30 A.M. students were beginning to enter. They picked up handouts while they discussed the crowded parking situation and how far they had to walk to class. A few students asked what I was doing. I explained that I was there to observe Linda who was circulating among the students, greeting and hugging them, reminding them to pick up the handouts, and asking them to write their names on a piece of paper to be placed in a box. Twelve students brought equipment to record the class. The room became noisy and crowded and more desks were moved from the room next door so class could begin.

Linda gave a brief introduction while she changed the audiocassette tape to the music for the Incontinence Rag. When the song started, she began to lip synch and dance around the room, picking up the items on the table as they were mentioned in the song. At first, the students were startled and laughed. One female student turned around to look at me and asked, "Is she filming this?" (Vol. B, p. 213). When the song finished, Linda held a drawing from the box of names. The first student hesitated because she did not know what to expect. She was pleased, however, when Linda gave her a hand-held massager. The rest of the class 'oohed' and 'aahed' in appreciation.

Then Linda reviewed renal anatomy and physiology, showing her handouts on the overhead projector. She spoke quickly and interspersed cartoons among the handouts.

Though Linda did not read most of the cartoons, snickering would ripple through the class. Linda would often make a joking comment that would connect with information from previous courses and future classes.

Linda held a prize drawing every half hour. Giveaways included magazines, a magnifying glass, a tote bag, another massager, and a laboratory values handbook. Just before the day's final drawing, Linda asked if they wanted another break. One student replied, "We want another present." So Linda held the last drawing.

Her use of humor ranged from the song and dance at the beginning of class to jokes, cartoons, and stories. The students seemed to follow her as she progressed through the lecture outline.

The Second Classroom Experience

The Classroom

The class met for the second session in a room adjacent to the cafeteria because of a classroom scheduling conflict. The room was like a conference center with chairs behind rows of narrow tables. At the front was a projection screen with an overhead projector next to a lectern. The only door was at the rear. Students began arriving early and talked. Linda arrived with her equipment on a cart. She set up the tape player with classical music as she had the first day. She placed the box for handouts and student names on the table near the door.

Class Activity

Linda began class by announcing where the class would meet for the rest of the quarter. Several students came late, and Linda easily handled this interruption by commenting that this room was like Las Vegas—no clocks. Everyone laughed and she continued. When more students arrived late, she said they had “already missed the \$50,000 prize” (Vol. B, p. 218). Thirty-four students attended the morning class section.

The primary humorous event of this second day of renal content was the “Perfect Cheer” in which Linda brought her pom-poms and rattled off a series of verses about the renal system. As she spelled the word “r-e-n-a-l,” Linda represented the letters with her arms and exaggerated the final “L.” The students joined her on the chorus with a lot of kidding and laughter:

“Kidneys, kidneys above the rest.

All the others are second best.

R-E-N-A-L.” (Vol. B, p. 218)

The class content addressed a number of renal disorders, but Linda continued to use cartoons, jokes, prop humor, Top Ten lists, and drawings for prizes. Among the prizes this time were a yo-yo, a paper clip holder, and a massager. The students seemed genuinely interested when, after the first break, Linda explained the rationale for her activities.

The Third Classroom Experience

The last class period observed was a day later. The class reconvened in the skills lab with 39 students attending. This period completed the discussion on renal content. Continuing previous behavior patterns, students began entering the room early while talking and picking up the handouts. Classical music was playing in the background. Because Linda did not have a cheer or song for the day, she placed a box of donut holes at the back of the room next to the handouts. She still made a connection between the donuts and the class material. While describing the length of recovery for patients with glomerulonephritis, she said, “If the patient is stressed, like someone in nursing school without enough sleep, who doesn’t eat right—donuts for breakfast—it will take longer to recover” (Vol. B, p. 221). This brought an appreciative chuckle from the students. Every half an hour there was a drawing for prizes. This was the day with the least amount of overt humor in the presentation. Nevertheless, students stayed attentive, and numerous small jokes and asides kept the class chuckling. At the end of class, Linda handed out the Renal RAP which the class read aloud in unison.

Linda, the Dancer

Teacher Characteristics

Linda is of medium build with dark curly hair, a twinkle in her eye, and a friendly manner and voice tone. She maintained a professional appearance dressed in slacks and a short-sleeved blouse to avoid interfering with her dances, cheers, and other physical activity. She routinely walked about the room and moved toward students while

answering their questions. Linda repeated information when requested and was attentive to student behaviors. She spoke with confidence and was not tied to her notes, returning to them at infrequent intervals. About every 10 to 15 minutes, Linda would insert a joke or some other humorous activity.

Students mentioned a number of teaching techniques Linda used which they found helpful. She was organized, stayed focused on the topic, and gave easy-to-follow lecture outlines that reduced the amount of writing students did in class. Katie, a 45-year-old homemaker, said:

I think Linda is very well organized. I like that and appreciate that. Last year there were a few teachers who were not very organized with their lectures. Their lectures didn't quite work out and because of the vast material that you have to read, you really need a lot of guidance as to what to study. I think that Linda provides that guidance. (Vol. B, p. 160)

Sandy said, "She comes extremely prepared for class. I've never had an instructor be so prepared" (Vol. B, p. 175). Jane said she liked the way Linda used humor to avoid the monotony of instructors who simply read their notes to the class (Vol. B, p. 173). Humor is not a substitute for poor teaching. Karen explained, "The sign of a good teacher is someone who is interested in her subject, interested in her students and is sharing of herself" (Vol. B, p. 189). One graduate agreed: "Linda had us laughing throughout all her lectures but she was also extremely organized and prepared for her lectures—the two must go together in a great teacher!" (Vol. B, p. 14).

Linda has a marvelous capacity to humorously connect most anything to the class content. She used Michael Jordan's size as a way to illustrate the variable length of ureters. The need for sunlight to properly absorb Vitamin D gave an 'excuse' to go to the

beach. She described bladder capacity using a child's insistent request for bathroom breaks during a long drive. Linda even told a story about herself to illustrate the emotional issues associated with bladder control. Early in her marriage, she and her husband had gone to bed as usual. About an hour later, she awoke very wet. Sheepishly she changed pajamas and returned to bed. Since it was a king-size bed, she simply snuggled closer to her husband and went back to sleep. The next night, she was extremely embarrassed when it happened again. The following morning she told her husband about her bladder control problem. He said, "Honey, I think there's a hole in the waterbed." And he was right! There was a small hole right where she had been lying. Her embarrassment with a potential bladder control problem had kept her from thoroughly investigating the problem.

How She Began to Use Humor

Linda's first efforts to use humor began early in her teaching career when she would "just say things in class" (Vol. B, p. 195). She did not know how to use humor. Because she felt nervous, she would say things that she thought were rather funny just to get the students' minds off what she was talking about for a minute. She used humor that was not related to the current topic just to use humor. It did not work well because it distracted from the lecture instead of enhancing it.

Linda said, "When I taught in my early years, when I tried to use humor with freshman students, they didn't get it" (Vol. B, p. 198). The students, however, reacted favorably to her humorous attempts and seemed to enjoy the class more as a result. Linda

also found that incorporating humor in her delivery made teaching more pleasurable. She began to accumulate cartoons that she thought might work in her lectures. Each year she added something new, such as music or dance, and, more recently, drawings for prizes. “The students act like they are winning the lottery” (Vol. B, p.195), she said. Some of this was not intended to be funny, but was used to give the students a break every half hour or so. Students began to bring her material they found. This encouraged her to try new things, most of which seemed to work. The newest addition to her repertoire has been the renal cheer. “This is the first time that I have done that cheer,” she said. “I don’t know if I’ll do cheers any more or not. I am not the cheerleading type” (Vol. B, p. 195).

Observing how students responded to other teachers’ styles also motivated Linda to change her own presentation. She noticed that “when I went into [another teacher’s] classroom, the students would be crying. Sometimes they would be so frustrated they would just walk out. They wouldn’t come back to class” (Vol. B, p. 197). Half the class would attend the first lecture in a series from a teacher. Then, feeling discouraged, they would be absent until a new teacher began a new series of lectures. Linda did not want to have that experience in her classroom, so she began to give copies of the overheads she used during her lectures to the students. There was no humor used at first, yet she received criticism from other members of the faculty who believed the students would not be actively learning in class unless they were taking notes. Linda thought the students would do better if they added just a few notes to what she could give them on handouts. “Everybody has his own style,” she tells her students, “and if you don’t learn from my

style, maybe you'll learn from the next [teacher's style]" (Vol. B, p. 197). She subscribes to John Keller's motivational theories, which state that if you are not motivated when you are in the learning situation, you are not going to learn very much. She believes that creating the learning situation is her responsibility. That is what really encouraged her to use anything that could motivate the student to come to class, to pay attention to what she had to say, and still enjoy it.

It has only been in the last 5 years that Linda has really begun to plan the humor she uses for her classes. Before that, her use of humor was more "hit or miss, a few jokes here, a few funny stories there" (Vol. B, p. 196). Sometimes the humor was not related to the topic at hand. As she thought about its use, she realized that for it to be really useful to the class as a whole, she needed to put more planning into what humor to use and where to use it in her presentations.

How Linda Uses Humor

Students believed Linda used more humor than other instructors, but that it was not overdone. There was enough humor, but not too much. Duncan said, "As far as the quantity, I think she [Linda] is doing it perfect the way it is, every 30 minutes. And then the rest of the lecture is kind of professional. If something comes up where she can make a joke, that is fine. I don't think she is overdoing it" (Vol. B, p. 182).

Instead of scheduling humor every 10 to 15 minutes, Linda may have a period with concentrated humor followed by a longer period with no humor. She intentionally does that because:

otherwise they might just nod off for 10 minutes. You know you want to keep their attention, and that is why you have this variable schedule of reinforcement. If there is part of the lecture in which you need to concentrate, you don't want to break it up, because humor might interfere with the train of thought. Sometimes, the prize drawings done every half hour interrupt the flow, but if you keep them short, and quickly get back on track, the discussion is not greatly disturbed. I think I have received only one evaluation that called the drawings a distraction, and that is not enough to warrant not doing them. (Vol. B, p. 199)

Linda also spoke about how often she includes humor during one period:

You can't use too much humor, because then it gets to be more of a humor thing than the lecture, which has to be the important part of it. Students need to focus on learning the content. That is why I don't have a cartoon on every page. There will be something every three or four pages just to keep their endorphin levels up. I try to do something humorous every 10 or 15 minutes. Sometimes I add a surprise, like the cheer. I don't think they were expecting that. It's like Skinner's variable reinforcement schedule; students don't know when something is going to happen. I hope that makes them come back. They don't know what I am going to do tomorrow. They return on time after break, because I tell them, "the top ten list is going to be. . . ." I try to make it one that they really want to hear. It is often a joke on the teacher, so they usually come back on time because they don't want to miss that. (Vol. B, p. 198)

Sources of Humor

Linda named three additional sources for humor. The Humor Project in Sarasota, New York, has a lot of general types of humor. Stitches, a Canadian journal written for physicians, and The Journal of Nursing Jocularity both have a lot of medical humor.

These two journals also have a lot of advertisements for humorous material that can be purchased. These include audio- and videotapes as well as written works. Linda buys quite a few items that she does not use. A lot of it

just isn't that funny. If I don't laugh at it when I see it or look at it, I don't use it. That is pretty much my guide. I wish there were more music and funny songs related to nursing, such as the Incontinence Rag. That is the only one I have for renal content. (Vol. B, p. 196)

Students often participated actively in her collection of humor by bringing her jokes and cartoons. Linda said:

Sometimes I get some good ideas to use in the future from what the students do. It makes them feel they are part of the classroom. I am the authority figure and I am the one up front who is telling them what they need to know. So I respond to students using humor in return. It makes them feel that they are important enough for me to listen to what they say or do. (Vol. B, p. 200)

Linda believed the students need to feel comfortable sharing themselves. “A lot of it is just about building self-confidence in the students” (Vol. B, p. 200).

Linda described her routine for incorporating humor into her lectures. Whenever she sees something that is related to nursing topics she might teach, she adds it to her collection. One primary source is the comic section of the newspaper. She now has a sizeable collection of cartoons for many different topics from which she selects items for each class. She enjoys creating and performing slapstick routines. She also collects humor-related tapes and videos. It often takes as long to add the humor to the lecture as to put the lecture itself together, so having a collection of humorous material saves her considerable time.

When Linda hears or sees something new that is humorous, her experience in nursing education and her knowledge of her students and the nursing content enable her to determine where it should be used. During our interview, I shared a joke with Linda:

Q: How does hypospadias affect the EKG strip?

A: It gives you a shortened P-wave.

Immediately, she realized its potential:

Oh, *that's* funny. I teach Sexually Transmitted Diseases [STD's] next quarter and I will put it in there. That will be after Cardiac II and they will know what a P-wave is. You have got to make sure they have these pre-requisites. It is very hard to get things for topics like STD's. It is hard to find music and humor in the literature and you have to really work hard doing some of those lectures. It takes a while. (Vol. B, p. 201)

If an expected humorous item bombed, Linda discarded it:

When you try something new, it's kinda risky, because you don't know if it is going to work. I have books at home about how to be funnier. Someday I hope to read them. They discuss what to do if something bombs. Some of the lines they suggested include, "Well, I won't use this one again," "Thanks for helping me with this list," "Okay, the ones in the front row thought this was funny", and "This was funnier when I was reading this to my dog; he laughed." Sometimes something can be used to turn a little [joke that] wasn't so funny into 'funny'. (Vol. B, p. 205)

Interest Among Nurse Educators

For several years, Linda has been attending conferences to make presentations about computer-assisted instruction and humor in the classroom. She has found a strong interest in her humor presentation. At a recent conference, she presented her workshop entitled "Add Pizzazz to Your Lectures: Using Humor and Other Nontraditional Strategies to Encourage Student Learning During Traditional Lecture Sessions." Nearly all of the participants attended one of her sessions. The response was so positive that, before asking if she would return, the man in charge of the conference told her that she would be given a larger room the next time the conference convened. She interprets this to mean that there is intense interest in adding humor to classroom presentations. This is supported by the input from another conference sponsored by the National Organization for Associate Degree Nursing (NOADN). From a list of three topics Linda sent them, they requested her "Pizzazz" presentation. She believes teachers are anxious to improve

their classroom techniques and want to learn how to “spice up” their presentations. Linda also believes students really enjoy humor in the classroom. “We may not be able to measure its effect on learning yet, but it must have some influence” (Vol. B, p. 203).

She has had some experience helping other teachers improve their presentations. Recently, a teacher, who will retire in a couple of years, asked, “May I come to your class? I just want my last few years to be fun. May I come and see what you are doing? Maybe I can do a little bit of what you are doing in your class” (Vol. B, p. 199).

Student Perceptions and Responses to Humor

Kinds of Humor Used

Students who responded to the humor questionnaire enthusiastically described four specific humorous strategies that Linda used: Top Ten lists, song and dance routines, cartoons, and drawings.

Top Ten Lists

Fourteen graduates and six students noted Linda’s Letterman-style ‘Top Ten Lists’. Each writer mentioned a personal favorite. One wrote:

Linda always used humor during her lecture sessions, and it would be difficult to give you just one example. To start each of her classes, she gave us a nursing top ten (David Letterman style). The most unforgettable was the top ten foods that are used to describe medical conditions (i.e. chocolate cyst). I guess you had to be there! But it really grabbed my attention. I feel I learned the most from her. Humor really helped break the ice. (Vol. B, p. 10)

Song and Dance

Thirteen graduates and 19 of the current students identified Linda's song and dance routines and rap songs as humorous events that helped them learn. One student enjoyed the "rap song with all the test clues" (Vol. B, p. 104). Another liked "the song and dance because it hit the main points of the lecture" (Vol. B, p. 140). A graduate proudly proclaimed, "There was a RAP done on the renal lectures, and *I still* remember some of the verses. 'Bladders, ureters, and kidneys, too.' It helps tie things together" (Vol. B, p. 6).

Cartoons

Six graduates enjoyed the cartoons that Linda used on overhead transparencies and in their lecture handouts. "Use of cartoons was a good visual reinforcement of dry material (kidneys, eyes, and ears). It made learning this material more fun" (Vol. B, p. 9). "Use of cartoons in course handout materials and overheads injected a note of levity, leading to relaxation, leading to enhanced ability to learn and remember" (Vol. B, p. 15).

Prize Drawings

Two graduates mentioned the drawings that Linda held every half hour for various nursing-related prizes. Both mentioned the same prize, a magnifying glass. "I won a 'meatus finder.' Only in a nursing raffle could this happen. Very funny teacher" (Vol. B, p. 34). Linda's current class also considered the drawings to be a humorous break. Duncan said, "Every half an hour she gives a little break, whether it's a drawing, or something else, I guess it helps a lot" (Vol. B, p. 179).

Benefits of Humor

Students listed several benefits of classroom humor. Marsha said:

It [humor] is not going to hurt us, because it is related to the material we're supposed to be learning. If someone says something, and it's a joke, of course you'll remember it, because everyone likes to repeat jokes and stuff, or humor. So, it is not like we are going to be focused on her jokes and not reading, because they are related to the material. (Vol. B, p. 181)

Students enjoyed humor, but remained content-oriented. Fran voiced the collective opinion:

Linda does her cheers and she hands out little prizes, and I'm glad, though, that it doesn't slow down, because if she was doing all that and not getting through what we'd need to get through, I would be totally frustrated. I'd say, 'Get rid of this garbage; we don't need it. Get to the point.' But she can just buzz through everything then, because she lets us get rid of it [tension] for a while and then come right back to it [subject]. I think it is real effective. (Vol. B, p. 175)

In her second class period, Linda explained to the students some of the benefits they would gain from her use of humor. These included physiological effects of increased oxygenation and blood flow and psychological advantages of attention, positive attitude, and enhanced recall. Additionally, to understand some of the cartoons, the students had to know something about nursing. This would socialize them into the role of being a nurse, making them feel they are a member of the profession. Non-nursing individuals who might see the cartoon could not 'get the joke' because they had not learned the nursing concepts. Linda recognized that the humor, while helping the students learn better, also helped them feel good about themselves and their profession.

Humor to Relieve Stress

Ten of the 11 students interviewed talked about how humor helped them relax. Jane reported, “Some instructors are very dry and they just read the outline. And Linda does put a lot into her lectures and the breaks. It makes things more relaxing and cuts down on some of the stress” (Vol. B, p. 170). Julie said that humor

lightens the class. She does little dances and she has these little poems. I like that. That kind of lightens the day, lightens the material. I think that once it becomes more relaxed, it is easier to take on the information and to really pay attention. Because if you are uptight and you’re dreading, ‘Oh my goodness this is renal.’ and you go into class with that attitude, it kind of blocks the learning experience. (Vol. B, p. 191)

For Jane, age 45, humor is very important in life:

I had heard that laughing produces endorphins. Just from my own experience, I know that laughing is tremendously beneficial. I do think that humor does help a lot in terms of being relaxed and the information comes in. I can say that in any situation where there is anxiety, the brain doesn’t accept information. (Vol. B, p. 171)

Most of the students and graduates who liked the Top Ten lists stated the lists helped them relax and improved their mood. Song and dance also ranked high as tools that relieved stress. “The instructor performed a song and dance before the lecture. This was significant because we never saw her before and this was the first lecture—I became immediately warm to her style and felt comfortable” (Vol. B, p. 65). “Linda and another teacher danced in class with music. It made me feel that **THEY REALLY CARED** about us and our stress levels. They recognized we needed some relief” (Vol. B, p. 30).

Graduates often remembered the specific topic addressed by the humor and how it helped them. “For the Sexually Transmitted Disease lecture (a somewhat embarrassing topic in mixed company!), she started the lecture with a hysterical song-and-dance routine that

broke the ice and made people less tense. I considered Linda to be the best lecturer at the college!” (Vol. B, p. 24). Another graduate wrote:

The topic to be taught was venereal diseases. Linda used a record to voice [lip synch] with a song and used props and a few dance steps. It made us laugh at the antics and yet gave us brief information about the subject. Also the humor rid us of our inhibition about talking about ‘that subject’. It brought it out in the open to be discussed more objectively. (Vol. B, p. 37)

Using humor to break down emotional barriers was mentioned by another graduate: “During the section on Sexually Transmitted Diseases, the instructor had photocopied cartoons (The Far Side, etc.) relating to various sexual topics throughout the outline. Reading these during lecture made many of us laugh, and in this—really ‘lightened’ what was otherwise pretty awful, and scary subject matter” (Vol. B, p. 13). Developing rapport with their teacher and each other helped the students feel more comfortable discussing a touchy subject.

Humor to Feel Comfortable With the Teacher

Linda is concerned that she be a good role model to her students. Though she is in a mentor’s role, she believes the students should be allowed to laugh at the teacher once in a while. When she had finished the cheer, some students laughingly remarked that Linda should have done the splits at the end. When Linda later heard this, she laughed and said:

I wish I could [do the splits]. I wish I could do a cartwheel. Wouldn’t that just really surprise them? But I can’t do them. I wish I could play an instrument or sing. But I don’t have any of that kind of talent. I am not athletic. I am not the cheerleading type. When you do something like that, it really surprises them, because it is so out of what they think is character for you. And it gives them a chance to see that you don’t mind laughing at yourself. It affects them, hopefully, to make them more comfortable. (Vol. B, p. 205)

Ten of the 11 students interviewed believed humor helped them feel more comfortable with Linda. Katie said, “Linda is approachable. I feel I could ask a question easily of her and not feel intimidated” (Vol. B, p. 161). Duncan is an athletic trainer. Several times he mentioned the maturity of the class as a factor in the effectiveness of humor. “I feel comfortable to ask her anything. She kind of humanizes herself just like one of us. . . . I think most of the people in the class are older and more mature. Some of the techniques that are used might be a problem if she were working with maybe 18-year-olds” (Vol. B, p. 181). Marsha felt the use of humor was very important in establishing a comfortable relationship with her teachers:

If your teachers didn't use humor, you were afraid to approach them with a problem. I'll tell you what. When I first saw Linda, I had walked into class a few minutes late, and then she started dancing up there with a bedpan. I thought “What's going on here? Am I in the wrong class?” But then she made me feel comfortable. If I have a question, I will ask her. (Vol. B, p. 181)

Fran had a similar reaction to Linda's first song and dance:

We've had strict lecturers in the past, and you kind of wonder if you can approach them. I would feel real comfortable going up and asking her anything. I didn't know anything about her before at all. A week ago, we had her first lecture. I had heard her name. I heard she had got her doctorate. I heard that she had been teaching forever. I didn't know anything more about her. And then she gets up there and starts swinging that Foley catheter around, and I thought, “Who is this woman?” I just right away felt at ease with her. I thought, “Well, this is somebody who is going to maybe nurture us a little bit instead of just preaching at us.” (Vol. B, p. 176)

Karen said, “I think that if we didn't have quite as much material, the humor would also bring out more ability to communicate between those in the classroom. . . . I feel the class would bond” (Vol. B, p. 186). Ann, who has a degree in accounting, agreed with Karen, and added that humor builds a better rapport:

I have had instructors who put themselves on a high mountain top, and it is like, “What are they yelling down at us now?” I think it makes the teacher more approachable. It gives you the opportunity to work through the material, and you feel comfortable and not stupid about asking questions, like when you are just in a very lectured situation. (Vol. B, p. 186)

Jane spoke of the impact the Incontinence Rag had on the class: “I think people thought that ‘she is pretty cool.’ She is not 100% business all the time. There is a human side to her, and she is very approachable” (Vol. B, p. 172).

Humor to Focus Attention

Student reactions to Linda’s use of humor varied. Twenty-nine-year-old Julie, an African American, was surprised at first:

My initial reaction was surprise, but then I kinda took to it, and I thought it was great. It made me want to listen. It held my attention, because lecture for two and a half hours is not a fun thing to do. I had to battle to stay awake, to try to stay focused and take in the information. And I think that the prizes the teacher gave away and the little gimmicks that she used to keep us awake worked. (Vol. B, p. 190)

An LPN with a B.A. in business, Karen said, “Linda keeps us awake with her antics, her ability to use humor; those are things that you bring back because of the way that she shares information” (Vol. B, p. 185). The renal cheer was new this year, but two students found it helped. “When Linda performed her cheer, she got you thinking about the renal system and focused your attention on what was to come” (Vol. B, p. 77). Katie noticed:

Okay, we are here for two and a half hours, and we covered some pretty intensive material, and everybody was walking out with a smile on their face, and that is nice to see. It is two and a half hours talking about renal stuff, it’s not the nicest subject, so she broke it up with humor, and we left on a nice note. I think that is really important. We didn’t drag out of here totally bored and sleepy and yawning. . . . I was just thinking, as she was explaining the reason why laughter is so important, and about the oxygen. I can remember taking a few major yawns last year in class sitting through three-and-a-half-hour psych lectures, and boy, this is really nice. I wish I could sit in

the back of the class and look how many people yawn. I don't think they are yawning, because they are getting that oxygen to their brain by laughing. That is kind of nice. It makes a lot of sense. I really like her approach. (Vol. B, p. 161)

Humor to Aid Learning

One student said it was important to know why Linda used humor, and that she was not using it because she was a 'wanna-be' comic. Linda recognized that students know they are a captive audience, but they do not want to be used for anything:

Adult students want to come here to learn what needs to be learned to be a good nurse and to pass the test next week. They don't want to feel that they are a captive audience for you. They are not interested in hearing personal stories that are not relevant to the current topic. So when the teacher does things that are a little bit different, the students may think they are being used to stroke the teacher's ego. If they know it is to help them learn, they will get more out of it. It is amazing that after I explained my reasons for using humor to them, some students who never laughed or smiled suddenly were smiling and laughing and enjoying it more. It is as if they were too nervous and tense, saying, "I have so much to do. Don't waste my time." But once they find out that it is helpful to them in learning, retention, and recall, they are more likely to get involved in the humor. And though it helps me get through the 2½ hours better, it is really for the class. It is to help them learn. It would be much easier for me if I did not add humor. It would cut my prep time in half. (Vol. B, p. 203)

Eight of the 11 interviewees reported that humor helped them learn in some way. Some used it as a memory device. Others believed it reduced the stress, clearing their minds to learn and make connections with more familiar concepts. Sally said:

I think it [humor] does really help us. I have noticed even in other classes, when they use humor and make a statement that is related to our study, that it is still kind of funny. It sticks in your head—even times when you laugh—you remember those times. So, when she is teaching, when there is something that makes you laugh, you do remember. You just remember that stuff. (Vol. B, p. 164)

Marsha, 28, is a CNA of Greek origin:

We had other instructors, not in nursing, but in other classes, who would have two hours, and for an hour and forty-five minutes they would talk about themselves. Linda

is not focusing on herself, she's really making jokes about what we are learning anyway, and then we can remember. . . . I have even told my husband and shown him the little jokes and little cartoons. (Vol. B, p. 180)

One graduate who favored the Top Ten lists explained their effects: "Laughter relaxes you, increases oxygen consumption which increases concentration. You remember what you've been taught!" (Vol. B, p. 3). Students also recognized rap songs as memory devices. "Each section we were given a rap sheet. What a joy, not only did you learn the material, you could sing it and remember it" (Vol. B, p. 33).

Humor to Make Learning More Fun

Linda said she continued to use humor in her classroom because it seemed the more she used it, the more the students enjoyed it and the better feedback she got on their evaluations of her class. And students began to expect it of her. If she had nothing humorous planned, students would notice and make comments. At the beginning of the second observed class, while students were still arriving, those present said to her, "You could dance while we are waiting for others to come in" (Vol. B, p. 217). Linda noted that students had come to expect a Top Ten list from her. "That tells me that they must have liked it, that they are asking for it," she said. "So when we don't do it, you know it is a disappointment [to them]" (Vol. B, p. 195). Linda also sees more personal benefits:

When you see somebody laugh at something you say, it just encourages you to enjoy doing what you are doing. I don't think I could teach the same thing quarter after quarter after quarter. I think that would be really boring. I couldn't imagine walking in there for two and a half hours and having to talk and not having any kind of positive feedback from my audience. And that is what happens with a lot of faculty. They go in there without much of a handout. They talk very fast and expect the student to frantically copy everything down from the overheads. The student walks out

frustrated and angry at what is happening. The teachers just don't have the rapport with the students that they should. (Vol. B, p. 197)

For one graduate, the "use of cartoons was a good visual reinforcement of dry material (kidneys, eyes, and ears). It made learning these subjects a lot more fun" (Vol. B, p. 9). The connection between humor and learning was stated clearly by another graduate: "Use of cartoons in course handout materials and overheads injected a note of levity leading to relaxation leading to enhanced ability to learn/remember" (Vol. B, p. 15).

Katie thought it was good that Linda explained the reasons why she used humor:

She just doesn't use it to entertain us; she is using it for sound reasons, and that is to help our learning and our understanding of this material. It makes a lot of sense. I don't think it is negative at all. I think it is great; it makes it [learning] fun. When things are fun, you are going to retain it. If it is serious stuff and depressing, you naturally just want to get rid of the stuff. . . . I think I remember things better if they are made fun. If it is a pleasant experience, I am going to remember it. . . . I can go home, and I remember her cheer. That was funny. I remember her little jokes as we are going along. It helps me learn. I never realized or really thought too much about it. I have had some professors in the past who have used a lot of humor, and made you want to go to class, because they were so much fun. I never really realized how this is really a learning aid. (Vol. B, p. 161)

Other students and graduates did not identify specific humorous examples, but they explained what humor meant to the students in the class. "I cannot recall one specific incident, but overall, humor in the classroom contributed to a more relaxed atmosphere and this helped to make the learning process somewhat easier" (Vol. B, p. 12). "When Linda taught she always used humor from beginning to end of class. It always made the class more enjoyable, less stressful, and I always learned the content well" (Vol. B, p. 23). "Humor keeps me interested in the lecture, keeps me awake, and helps me remember" (Vol. B, p. 92).

Most students felt humor relaxed them, increased their comfort with the teacher, or helped them remember content. There were two mildly dissenting views about using humor in the classroom. Both described the same event, and though they did not feel it helped them, they did not react negatively toward its use. “Linda is the first instructor who has used humor to this degree. She did a song about incontinence. I didn't learn anything from it. It did not reinforce the content” (Vol. B, p. 50).

One graduate recognized the value of humor both in class and in the workplace:

I don't recall a specific incident where humor affected my learning, but I must say, that when humor was used in these classes, my test scores were higher because I felt 'at ease' with the material and was relaxed and confident while taking the exam. I know, now, that humor is greatly valued in the workplace as well. It helps us to survive the craziest and saddest of situations! (Vol. B, p. 17)

Recommendations for Humor

Linda and her students had several suggestions for teachers who wanted to incorporate humor into their classes.

Principles to Use When Adding Humor

Linda's first suggestion to teachers who want to incorporate humor is to observe someone who is using humor. But it is important that the teacher adapt the humor to her own personality. She has to feel comfortable with it and enjoy doing it. She must be constantly looking for things that are funny. She should keep a notebook that describes where the humorous item might be used.

As with most humor, it is important to understand the rhythm of a story and the timing of the punch line. This takes practice and preparation. It may be necessary to

write out the story as it is to be told. One may need to practice in front of a mirror or with a recorder. In Linda's story about the water bed incident, it was important that the students not know that it was a water bed until the end of the story. Not knowing the true cause of the wet bed during the story allowed them to empathize with Linda's personal reaction and to see the humor in the situation when the leak was discovered.

Linda stated that it was best not to use all the available humor at once, that it should be spread throughout the term being taught. The frequency with which humor is used within the class is also important. As Linda and several of her students noted, too much humor detracts from the principal goal of learning. Because the teacher wants to keep the students' attention, she needs to create an air of expectancy that something will happen periodically. It is also good to vary the forms of humorous material used. Occasionally, something radically different can be used. Linda recommends that a humorous break be added no more than about every 10 to 15 minutes.

She emphasized that teachers should relate the cartoons and the humor to what is being taught since non-related humor is non-productive. Thus, if a teacher is discussing pregnancy, it is appropriate to use a cartoon about pregnancy.

It is also important that the humor be related to the concepts the students have already learned. You must relate the humor to the level and character of your audience:

You can't use terms that they haven't learned. Then, instead of being funny, it is an embarrassment to them, because they can't get the joke, and feel alienated. But you can find, I think, nursing humor that you can use with freshman students; you just have to make it appropriate to your audience. Otherwise you lose them. (Vol. B, p. 198)

The cartoon in Figure 1 is an example Linda used that would be appropriate for freshmen students after they have studied about catheters and incontinence.

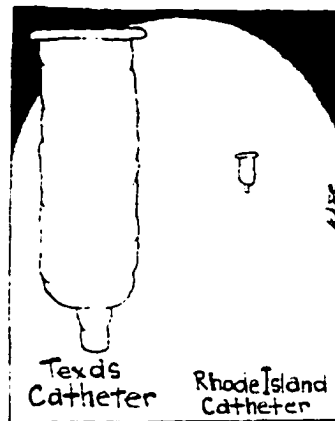


Figure 1. Texas catheter. A Texas catheter is a popular brand name for an external urinary collection device

Note. From: J. Wise. 1991, Journal of Nursing Jocularly, 1(3), p. 33. Copyright 1991 by John Wise. Reprinted with permission.

The students also had recommendations for nursing faculty who wanted to use humor in class. Karen said:

You have to know your audience. If you are able to make fun at yourself, people are more likely to view you as being more humanistic and take you at face value and really listen to you. Then they are more likely to bond to you. (Vol. B, p. 188)

Julie said humor was particularly useful at the beginning of class to break the tensions that students bring from the outside world. Another common recommendation for teachers was to ‘be yourself.’ Karen said:

I think people have a natural presence to themselves. Sometimes you have to be careful, if you are a person who doesn’t have that, if you are a person who is just cut

and dried, sometimes, if you try to use too much of something that is not part of your personality, it will flop. You have to be what your personality is. Here is someone who is real cut and dried. As much as you try to be real humorous, you may come across as being very fake. (Vol. B, p. 189)

Karen also spoke of professionalism, “I think it is compatible to put humor with a profession. Most professions do that. If it wasn’t for humor, you wouldn’t be able to get through a profession, I don’t think” (Vol. B, p. 188).

Principles to Reduce Negative Reactions to Humor

Some of Linda’s funny comments were spontaneous. But though she encouraged spontaneity, she cautioned teachers to avoid comments that are offensive. “You might get away with statements if you are a stand-up comic or at a party, but in the classroom you have to be very conscious of race, sex, gender, and culture” (Vol. B, p. 200).

One sensitive issue in nursing education relates to excretion from the gastrointestinal and urinary systems. Much related humor tends to be off-color with limited classroom application. Linda enjoys teaching the gastrointestinal and renal lectures and believes students could safely laugh at humor related to human waste. However, excrement jokes are not funny to everybody. “Nurses deal with so much of it. Some will enjoy that humor; others will not” (Vol. B, p. 200).

Students suggested that teachers be spontaneous, but Jane cautioned them not to “be unnatural. I don’t think you can be funny if you don’t have that sense of humor in you, because then it becomes very forced. If you don’t have that talent, don’t try” (Vol. B, p. 173). She suggested that the teacher try spontaneous humor and occasionally add

cartoons. Sandy said, “If you’re not funny, I don’t think you can do funny. You’ll just come across as silly” (Vol. B, p. 177). Fran continued Sandy’s thought:

Find some way that you are talented in and make it better. I think you have to have a talent for this [humor]. Our psych teacher wasn’t funny; she wouldn’t want to be funny. She wanted to be serious, and she was very professional. Linda is using her talent, so she does it well and that comes off as being professional. If she couldn’t do it well, she would look stupid. (Vol. B, p. 177)

Fran said, “Sometimes students can be very hard on a teacher, and if they think someone is trying to be funny, she won’t have their respect” (Vol. B, p. 177). Marsha said, “You have to have a lot of guts to stand up in front of all these people that you really don’t know. She doesn’t really know us. Maybe I would do that, because I am kind of crazy, but there are a lot of private people who wouldn’t do that” (Vol. B, p. 182).

Marsha cautioned, however, “not to do any more, though, and not to go crazy and focus on her humor instead of teaching” (Vol. B, p. 183).

Jane thought humor could be a little distracting if overused. Julie agreed:

I think the fact that she uses [humor] related to what she is teaching, is to help us retain the information. So, if she used any other kind of joke, I think it would sidetrack us, because we will start talking about that event, and then our focus on our teacher is gone off the material, and then we’re going to have to try and revert the attention back to what we are trying to learn. (Vol. B, p. 192)

Marian said:

You have got to watch your humor. I mean, there are different people, different students, different cultures. What may be humorous for me, what I think may be humor, and laugh at it, may not be humor for somebody else. And I don’t think it would be fair to even have something that is really funny up here, and one student would say, “Oh my goodness, look at this [in a shocked voice].” I think that you got to watch that, make sure it is mutual humor for everybody. I think with moderation, maybe one joke an hour. I don’t think anything too excessive. (Vol. B, p. 167)

Sally continued in the same vein, “I agree in moderation, so that people will enjoy the class, but if excessive, some people may think the class is a joke. It shouldn’t be so excessive that you have to rush through the rest of the lecture” (Vol. B, p. 168).

Summary and Conclusions

Linda teaches second-year nursing students in a associate degree program in a large, suburban community college. In her classes on the renal system, she uses sound teaching strategies which her students recognize and appreciate. But more remarkable than her use of traditional teaching tools is Linda’s infusion of humor into the basic class structure. At frequent, but random intervals, that coincide with the average attention span of an adult, the students are presented with a humorous cartoon, prize drawing, song, or joke which initiates a response that infuses the class with new energy. The students not only enjoy the humor for its tension release, mnemonic hooks, and socialization opportunities, they respond to her with increasing use of humor. The events of Linda’s classroom leave a favorable and lasting impression on students after graduation.

CHAPTER 5

OHIO SCHOOL

The Setting

The School

The second class I observed was in a 2-year community college with a 110-year-old history. Spreading across a portion of a light-industrial city in Ohio, its modern buildings and student services have attracted an enrollment of about 20,000 students per quarter. The department of nursing offers an NLN-accredited Associate Degree program which admits a maximum of 500 students each year. Full-time students can complete the nursing program in eight quarters. Since the nursing program is popular and has a waiting list, many students complete part of their general education requirements before entering nursing courses.

The Course

The three-credit first-year fundamentals course I observed was taught during the first quarter of the nursing program. Students spent 2 hours in the classroom and 3 hours in the clinical setting per week. The 80 students admitted to nursing in the fall quarter were divided into eight groups of 10 students. One teacher coordinated all of the clinical

and classroom experiences for each group. All 10 students in the group were present when I observed the class.

The Students

Class Composition

There were nine women and one man in Lois's fundamentals class. The students ranged in age from 19 to 33; the average age was 26 years. One student was African American; one was Native American. The rest of the students were Caucasian. Students were asked to rate their scholastic ability on a 5-point scale. Six of the students reported their ability as above average, three said they were average, and one did not answer the question.

No student held a previously acquired college degree, and only one reported prior college experience. Half of the class were registered as part-time students with 8 or 9 credit hours; the other half were taking a full load of either 12 or 14 credits. The average credit load was 10. Students reported that they studied for nursing classes between 4 and 25 hours each week, averaging 12 hours. Students were at work or performing community service an average of 22 hours each week; the range was from 0 to 40 hours per week. Jobs held by students varied. Two considered themselves full-time students. Six reported jobs in health care as CNAs, RCTs, home health aides, or medical assistants. Two students were cashiers (see Table 6, Appendix C).

Most of the class are non-traditional students who are active outside of class while pursuing their nursing degree. When asked for their reaction to the course, the students

overwhelmingly stated that it was happening fast. At the beginning of their first nursing course, the students said the pace had quickened from the general education courses they had taken in earlier quarters.

Student Selection of Humorous Teacher

A humor questionnaire was distributed to a class of 42 senior nursing students with a letter explaining its purpose (see Appendix A). The same humor questionnaire was given to Lois's current class of freshmen students. Thirty-six of the senior students (85.7%) completed the questionnaires. Sixteen (44.4%) of the seniors and all 10 of Lois's current students identified her as the teacher using the most classroom humor in the nursing department. Seven other instructors were named by, at most, five seniors. Only 10 of the 42 students in the senior class had taken a course from Lois (see Tables 7 and 8, Appendix C).

Lois teaches her group of 10 students by herself. A veteran educator with more than 40 years of experience in nursing education, Lois has a master's degree in nursing and presents workshops on humor.

The First Classroom Experience

The Classroom

There are 13 buildings on campus. The nursing lab, divided into two areas, is situated on the third floor of Building 3. One area, screened for privacy, contained four beds. The other area was a classroom with about 20 student desks, a chalk board, a TV/VCR, an overhead projector, and a bed in the front for demonstration purposes.

Three more neatly made beds, each containing a mannequin, were along the side wall under the windows. A bedside table stood next to each bed. The room was neat, clean, and basically uncluttered. The entrance to the classroom area was in the rear. I set up my video camera in the back of the classroom area.

Class Activity

During the first class period I observed Lois met with her group in the nursing lab from 10:30 to 12:30 after a morning clinical experience. I arrived about 10:30 and began to set up the video equipment. Dressed in white uniforms, the students came into the room grumbling about parking. Several construction projects were going on at the school and parking was scattered. Shuttle busses ran from the more distant parking lots, but service was based on volume and students often had to wait. I participated in that discussion since I had walked half a mile from my parking spot.

Wearing a long white lab coat, Lois rushed into the room exclaiming about the parking situation. She took off her lab coat and coughed loudly. When nothing happened, she coughed again, more loudly. A cry came from the next room, "Help me. I can't breathe." Someone seemed to be in trouble, and everyone rushed to help. I followed them with the camera. Lois had set up a scenario with one of the class members in a skills lab bed. The student pretended to be a patient in respiratory distress. She had blue eye shadow around her lips and on her nail beds to illustrate cyanosis. She was restless and gasping for breath. As the class gathered around her, Lois asked them to perform the necessary assessment skills and tasks to care for this 'patient'. The students became frustrated when the oxygen equipment did not work properly. They also snickered as they

recognized their classmate. The group joked about the 'phlegm' made from egg whites the 'patient' coughed up. They had many questions about how to assess and care for this kind of patient. Some students fervently voiced their need to be familiar with equipment when the next emergency arose. It was a realistic exercise that used incidental humor.

Class continued as Lois made a presentation using overheads, jokes, and stories. She used a student to demonstrate how to feed a patient. In a comical way, Lois showed some of the difficulties that can occur. She also had a humorous TV clip which described how to change the sheets on an occupied bed. The students were involved in the activities, took notes, and asked questions. Lois had told them that I would be coming to observe class, so they exhibited little surprise or curiosity about me.

The Second Classroom Experience

The Classroom

The second class session that I attended was held in a third-floor classroom in Building 10. The room held 20 student desks in five rows. A teacher's desk with a green chalkboard behind it faced them at the front of the room. There was a projection screen in front of the chalkboard and an overhead projector to the side. The entrance was at the side of the room.

Class Activity

I observed Lois's class from 1:00 to 2:50 in the afternoon the week after my initial observation. Two students were in the room when I arrived; the others gradually filtered in after me. Lois entered with a stack of books and papers. She began class by using the

overhead projector to present an overview of nutrition. Numerous nutrition cartoons were shown to illustrate the more serious material. Then each student made a presentation about a food group, a vitamin, or a mineral. After each presentation, Lois added information that the student had not included. Following the presentation about protein, Lois told a story about a former student who had gone on a liquid protein diet that had caused a serious heart condition. All the students gasped audibly. Lois quickly responded to the humor that most of her students, with her permission, had incorporated into their presentations. For example, when one student asked if Wonder Bread® actually contained all the nutrients it claimed, Lois replied, “I wonder” (Vol. C, p. 111).

Lois, the Laughter

Teacher Characteristics

Lois is a fairly tall dark blond who wears glasses. She usually wears tennis shoes with comfortable slacks and a loose-fitting shirt. She regularly breaks into a loud laugh which accentuates her laugh lines. She moves about the room while speaking. A frequent source of spontaneous humor for Lois is her ongoing struggle to work with audio/visual equipment. She jokes about her difficulties when something goes awry, whether it is turning the overhead projector on when she wants slides or putting in the wrong video clip.

Lois quickly finds humor in everyday situations, so it is not difficult for her to connect humorous events to class content. However, her classroom humor is more spontaneous than deliberate. Overheads and some jokes and stories are planned, but the majority of humorous incidents are reactions to statements and questions by students.

How She Began to Use Humor

Because Lois's father was in the military, the family moved frequently during her childhood. As a result, she was a quiet and withdrawn student. Her father was often asked to give lectures, and he would practice the jokes he would use in his speeches on the family. So she grew up with a lot of humor in her home. The family "always had a good time together pulling tricks on each other" (Vol. C, p. 97). She determined to change her personality when she began nurses' training, and became the class clown, doing funny things that made people laugh. She gave an example of her spontaneous humor:

I was in a meeting, and when they introduced the different allied health people, one of them worked in Dental Hygiene. They introduced her and said "This is so-and-so and she practices hygiene" and I said, "Oh, thank God." It just comes out. Sometimes it comes out funny, and sometimes I wish I hadn't said it. (Vol. C, p. 97)

Lois used humor in the classroom from the beginning. Because she had observed instructors create such a stressful learning environment that it was difficult for the students to learn, Lois modeled her teaching style after one of her favorite instructors. Lois said:

She wasn't prudish; she had a lot of good moral principles and things, but she could always be funny and get a laugh out of something. She enjoyed students who could laugh and come up with something funny. And I am sure I patterned myself a lot from her attitude. (Vol. C, p. 98)

How Lois Uses Humor

Though she plans to use humor at frequent intervals, Lois does not use so much humor that students lose their focus on what is to be learned. Lois tries to use a joke or story at least every 15 or 20 minutes as a break. "In fact, it is probably about every 10 minutes that you should break that train of concentration. You take the students away

from the subject, and then bring them back, and they are ready to learn again” (Vol. C, p. 102).

She tries to present things in a comical manner. When teaching about acid-base balance, she has them sing the ditty: “CO₂ causes acidosis” to the tune of a common childhood taunt. Then she explains the chart with the normal blood gases. The students can later use the ditty to remember the cause of respiratory acidosis. This provides a foundation for learning the rest of the acid-base content, which Lois can teach in 20 to 30 minutes. She says that other instructors like having her students in their classes because they are always so well prepared, especially in acid-base balance. Although Lois may begin class with an unrelated joke, she usually tries to connect the humor to the class content. After the students laugh, she regains their focus by saying, “Now this is the serious part of what I just told you. What did we learn from that?” (Vol. C, p. 103).

Lois adapts her humor to the students. For classes that have more serious or introverted students, she has to ‘take it easy’ until they begin to relax and are able to participate. Teachers need to know their audience because they do not want to do anything that would be offensive. Lois does not use humor that is downgrading.

Women may get together and joke about men, but I don’t think it’s fair to put down either sex. I wouldn’t do anything that was laughing *at* somebody. I would laugh *with* somebody, but I wouldn’t do anything that would devastate. I wouldn’t tell jokes to degrade a race, or age, or political party. Once, I had a Polish woman in my class who told Polack jokes just one after another. Only because the student initiated Polack jokes did I consider telling the following joke, which she enjoyed:

Q: Have you ever seen a Polack pacemaker?

A: Count on fingers “One, two, three, four, five.”

Hit self in chest with fist. Repeat as needed. (Vol. C, p. 102)

Lois tries to vary her presentation:

I never do anything twice. I organize in a disorganized way. You can be disorganized, but yet organized in what you're doing. I don't have to teach in a rigid way. And I do it differently because the classes are different. One recent class made life fun. It didn't matter what happened; they could make something humorous out of it. They were an ideal group, because they could do this and weren't afraid. I like to allow students to be humorous, to have fun, and to be silly. (Vol. C, p. 99)

Sources of Humor

Lois keeps a box for the humorous materials she has collected. She said, "People give me things. My students will slide things underneath the door, send me something funny, or say they have a story for the book I want to write about crazy things that student nurses do and say" (Vol. C, p. 101). She uses her experience to decide what material fits into each class topic.

Lois suggested several sources for humorous material. The American Humor Institute offers workshops, The Journal of Nursing Jocularly and John Wise's cartoons contain specific nursing humor, and the Reader's Digest is good for general humor. There are also many cartoon and humor books available. Lois routinely listens to tapes of comedians such as Bill Cosby and Loretta LaRoche for ideas.

Lois uses cartoons and videotapes, and tells funny stories. Sometimes she wears crazy T-shirts or seasonal clothing, such as pumpkin socks at Halloween.

Interest Among Nurse Educators

Because the faculty at the college recognize the value of humor, the nursing department asks Lois to present 1 hour of humor for the students every year. "They usually ask me to do it every year because they just want an hour of plain exhaustion from

laughter” (Vol. C, p. 104). In addition, at the monthly nursing faculty meetings, Lois is expected to do something that is humorous.

Lois made a 1-hour Humor in Education presentation to a visiting group of Russian doctors and nurses who did not understand English. She used an interpreter, but this did not diminish the pleasure; the Russians laughed until they cried. Lois said, “Even in another language, you can still be humorous and laugh together” (Vol. C, p. 104).

For several years, Lois has been presenting workshops about using humor in education or for health and healing. One recent workshop was entitled “Healing with Laughter.” She reports that a growing number of nurses are attending her workshops.

Student Perceptions and Responses to Humor

Kinds of Humor Used

Seniors identified several techniques used by all the teachers they named: cartoons, jokes and funny stories, songs, prop humor, and role playing. Lois also presents unexpected rewards for tests and written work. Alice, a 26-year-old home health aid, observed, “She passes out awards that would be from grade school, like ‘Polly Parrot thinks you’re wonderful. You’ve got an A’.” Margie, who is a full-time phlebotomist added, “We get certificates that Lois said she thought would be nice to put on the refrigerator with our children’s work” (Vol. C, p. 91).

Cartoons

Cartoons were described by three students (8.3%). “The use of cartoon overheads during class breaks the monotony of class lectures and wakes people up.” “A cartoon

strip displayed a nursing student reporting to clinical to find her patient dead. The student states, 'You can't be dead after I worked all night on this care plan.' It helped relieve the stress of a patient's death" (Vol. C, p. 6).

Jokes and Funny Stories

Seven seniors (19.4%) and four of Lois's current students said she told jokes and funny stories. Gary noted, "Lois told about a guy who was unaware of where he was. He thought he was in the war and told her to get down and start shooting" (Vol. C, p. 42).

A 25-year-old African American, Stacey, described one class in which she really laughed. The students were practicing pulses when Lois suddenly screamed. After everyone had jumped she told the students to quickly check their pulses which were racing from the sudden fright. Paula followed that with a story Lois had told about a freshman student who did not understand the term 'pedal pulse' and had attempted to take the pulse in the patient's penis. Laughingly, Paula said she will "never ever have to study the term pedal pulse" (Vol. C, p. 88). Margie and Alice mentioned the pedal pulse story and also shared another in which Lois described how a new student tried to locate an apical pulse. She had been told to listen for the apical pulse just under the left nipple. Lois entered the room to find the student listening intently to the patient's lower abdomen. Examining the situation more closely, Lois discovered that the patient was an elderly woman with pendulous breasts that hung to her waist. The student was doing just what she had been told to do and was listening for the heart just below her nipple. Both Margie and Alice laughed as they remembered the story, and said they would never forget the proper location of an apical pulse.

Songs

Two seniors and several of Lois's current students mentioned the same song that Lois taught, "We learned Acid-Base Balance by singing a song 'CO₂ cau-ses a-ci-do-sis!' Everyday she had jokes to tell ☺" (Vol. C, p. 31).

Role Playing

One of two 19-year-old students in the class, Michelle remembered, "She throws up these scenarios and runs to another room and someone is screaming for help. We'll never forget oxygen administration after that" (Vol. C, p. 80). Stacey and Paula both laughed when they recalled the scene in which their classmate was set up as a patient with respiratory distress. Stacey specifically mentioned the eye shadow on the 'patient's' lips. "Knowing they had planned it was the funny thing" (Vol. C, p. 87).

Prop Humor

Four seniors (11%) mentioned the use of prop humor. One described learning about IV's in a clinical situation. Another senior described when "infection control was being taught and she [Lois] brought a wind-up hand that moved across the table to represent a germ-laden hand." Two students mentioned the same incident in which the "Peds instructor, lecturing on fractures and cast care, walked over to the bed, pulled down the blanket and picked up a casted-leg off of the doll and walked up front with it. We were all surprised the leg was not attached" (Vol. C, p. 13).

Benefits of Humor

Five seniors explained the benefits they saw from classroom humor. “Several different teachers have used humor in the classroom. Each time it helped me to remember” (Vol. C, p. 30). Gary, the only male in Lois’s freshman class, described humor as his perspective on life:

I use humor every day. There is no sense in worrying in life, or getting too stressed out. . . . You can run across people that worry about every little thing. You don’t see too much humor in their life, it’s more sadness and despair, so I think humor helps keep you mentally happy, in a sense. (Vol. C, p. 72)

Paula said that some teachers

don’t care about you, and they don’t know where you are going and they don’t care where you’re going, they don’t know where you’ve been. They just do a job. You can just tell by their attitude, by their actions. I think it [humor] is great because she [Lois] loves it. She loves teaching; she loves nursing and that in itself is probably the biggest asset to her being a teacher. And I think that humor just adds to the pie—the sugar coating. (Vol. C, p. 89)

Humor to Relieve Stress

Students bring personal problems from home or work with them when they come to class. Lois wants her classroom to be a comfortable location where students can release some of their pent-up energy and feelings. Through humor, students can relax and learn. Lois said:

Humor teaches them to share, because anyone can laugh together. You laugh in any language the same, and even though what might be funny to one person may not seem as funny to another, when you’re laughing, it is contagious. I have a Candid Camera movie where a lady in a diner starts laughing. The whole diner eventually joins her, without ever learning why she is laughing. You can’t laugh and be angry or afraid. Humor opens the mind so the student is not as stressed and worried about grasping a point. (Vol. C, p. 98)

One senior explained that after a teacher described a previous student's fears, she felt "it was good to know that we can live through life with a sense of humor. No matter how stressed out we are, we are all human" (Vol. C, p. 27). Another student could not "think of one incident, but for teaching one of the most stressful courses in the program, she was quick to laugh and make us laugh resulting in reducing our stress" (Vol. C, p. 7). Margie really enjoyed class from Lois because she liked "the way she incorporated a lot of humor in her teaching tactics. That loosens up the class and makes it easier to learn" (Vol. C, p. 90). Noteworthy stress-reduction techniques for two students were "role playing and games. When you are relaxed you allow yourself [to be] open to new ideas and promotes a better environment for learning" (Vol. C, p. 32). Another senior was equally emphatic about the teacher she identified, "Overall, she made a very stressful quarter easier due to her humor. There are some very anal instructors here. She was a breath of fresh air" (Vol. C, p. 17). One of Lois's current students made general comments about humor, "I really don't have one specific incident. I really enjoy humor in the classroom. It relaxes me, and keeps me from feeling stressed out" (Vol. C, p. 63).

Humor to Feel Comfortable With the Teacher

Humor breaks down the barriers between students and their teacher. Lois used a squirt gun to keep one tired student awake in class, then presented it to him at his graduation. Lois said her students begin to use humor when they learn that she will not become angry. Once, after a clinical session at the VA hospital, her students hurried out of the building and hid behind a dumpster to bombard her with their stockpiled snowballs. Another group gave Lois a picture in which they displayed external urinary devices

(EUDs) on their noses to commemorate the large quantity they had applied to patients.

Two seniors described how humor helped them feel more comfortable with the teacher. “I can’t think of one specific example but when a teacher uses humor, they make you feel comfortable so you feel free to be honest and ask questions” (Vol. C, p. 22). “Humor helps the student feel relaxed with the teacher. This aids in learning without pressure” (Vol. C, p. 15).

All of her current students said Lois was very ‘laid back’ and, therefore, more approachable than the teachers who just lecture. Both Stacey and Paula said Lois helped them feel comfortable enough to ask her questions they thought might be stupid. They added that Lois’s use of humor also helped them become comfortable with their classmates much more rapidly than they might have otherwise. Michelle and Cheryl agreed that using humor made the class atmosphere more relaxed. This, in turn, had a positive impact on their relationship with Lois. Cheryl, an expectant first-time mother at age 19, said:

Nobody is afraid to make a mistake. You can ask a question or anything. I’m usually pretty shy around people I don’t know. But in this class, I have been able to open up and I can talk to the teacher like one of us. I don’t get all tongue-tied, and confused when I try to ask a question, and we laugh and have fun while we are learning. (Vol. C, p. 81)

Humor to Focus Attention

“It’s hard to pinpoint a specific event but I feel humor grabs and keeps my attention, therefore increasing my learning” (Vol. C, p. 33). “The use of cartoon overheads during class breaks up the monotony of class lectures and wakes people up” (Vol. C, p. 19). One of Lois’s current students, Gary, said:

If I get a good laugh in the morning it just peps me up. If I had to sit there and listen to somebody talk on and on without breaking the ice, it gets boring. You can get old if somebody just sits there and gives you a bunch of facts. . . . But when you [the teacher] start making jokes about it, it makes you want to listen more, because you want to see what she is going to say next. (Vol. C, p. 68)

Paula described Lois in action:

Say a certain word or mention a certain object, and you can see the light bulb come on in her eyes. She'll tell us a joke. Even if it relates or not to what we are talking about, it still helps you retain where you're at because you're really paying attention and not off in zombi land. (Vol. C, p. 87)

Humor to Aid Learning

Lois continues to use humor because it can get through to the students to help them learn. Content that is presented in a bizarre, funny, or unusual manner, will be retained more easily than if it is presented in a dry, boring manner. One senior said, "I strongly believe that humor is a good tool in teaching. It helps me learn and also retrieve information when presented in a humorous way" (Vol. C, p. 25). Two of her current students said Lois's humorous memory devices helped them to learn. "The type of humor that helps me to learn was for Lois to make up funny acronyms that help you to remember steps in a process" (Vol. C, p. 48). "Lois always uses catchy sayings and words to help processes and important topics covered in class stick in my mind" (Vol. C, p. 66). Cheryl said, "When I am studying at night, looking through my notes, I'll just start laughing because I am thinking of what she was talking about and the jokes. . . . The jokes are really helpful. I remember what the context was around them" (Vol. C, p. 82).

Another student said there were many times when she connected Lois's stories to the concepts she taught. "It's not just one day, 'a-ha'! It is on a test day when I can relate a question to a story or situation Lois described" (Vol. C, p. 57).

Three freshmen identified the physical humor Lois applied to bed-making and patient transfer techniques as helpful learning devices. "The video Changing An Occupied Bed gave logical cues of what not to do when changing a bed with a patient in it" (Vol. C, p. 51). Each student explained how the physical humor helped them to recall the techniques. "When we were practicing lifting patients and Lois taught us a funny way of lifting people that really worked. It cut back on stress levels and nervousness and really stuck in my mind" (Vol. C, p. 39).

One senior student compared Lois with other faculty. She noted that Lois "taught a course for 1 credit hour 'Humor in Medicine'. Most of the teachers I've had have been too '%&#!' serious!" (Vol. C, p. 21).

Angela is a student with native-American ancestry. She described Lois's story of an elderly patient whose student nurse put her dentures in upside down. As a result, the patient's speech was quite garbled. As Lois imitated the patient's predicament, the students howled with laughter. "That made me think, if I ever put in someone's dentures, hey, I am going to make sure that I don't put them in upside down" (Vol. C, p. 76).

Five seniors explained the benefits they saw from classroom humor: "Several different teachers have used humor in the classroom. Each time it helped me to remember" (Vol. C, p. 30). Students feel relaxed with the teacher who uses humor. This helps them learn without pressure.

Humor to Make Learning More Fun

Illness has twice brought Lois near death, and, as a result, she views the world differently, maintaining a humorous perspective. Humor in the classroom helps Lois enjoy teaching:

If I couldn't have fun teaching, I'd quit tomorrow. I have to be able to have fun in what I am doing or I won't do it. We need humor. We have such a stressful world; we are working with life and death of patients, and we are under a lot of stress, and if you don't let go you are going to crack up. (Vol. C, p. 99)

Stacey said, "Every issue we talk about, she has a joke for it. So it [class] is real fun" (Vol. C, p. 85). Three seniors named the instructor of medical-surgical nursing as using the most humor in the nursing classroom. One student described her humor, "She did not necessarily plan jokes and funny stories. However, her personality enabled her to be light-hearted and pleasant. This made it fun and easy to recall the enormous amount of information" (Vol. C, p. 8). For 20-year-old Renee, humor "makes you enjoy coming to class, you don't dread it" (Vol. C, p. 76).

Recommendations for Humor

Principles to Use When Adding Humor

Lois's first recommendation for any teacher adding humor to class was:

Try it in front of the mirror first. It is a risk to make fun of yourself and to appear 'unprofessional' as some people may see it. Humor is not joke-telling. Only two percent of the population can tell jokes, so jokes are only a minute part of being humorous. (Vol. C, p. 102)

Lois added that positive thinking is a necessary partner to humor. Use of cynical humor can be such a hurtful, negative experience that it blocks learning. But using positive and uplifting humor can create a pleasantly enhanced learning environment.

The types of humor used should be consistent with your personality. Lois noted that “there are going to be some who will be scared to use humor because they are afraid they will lose control. You can bring their [students’] attention back, but there are some people who would be scared to take that risk” (Vol. C, p. 102).

Students suggested that humor be used in moderation, that it be appropriate, and that it include activities which involve the students. “People who don’t know what they are doing can be funny. You can make light of it and make sure they know it is OK [to make a mistake], and to get the point across not to do it again” (Vol. C, p. 88). Michelle recommended that teachers loosen up. “You can’t be funny if you have been standing in front of your class and lectured for five weeks and then decide you’re going to throw some humor in, because everyone is going to roll their eyes” (Vol. C, p. 83). Renee’s advice was to avoid having such a rigid class structure that there is no time for humor, just “be flexible and let it happen” (Vol. C, p. 78).

Students recommended that the teacher keep the humor relevant to the content taught because it helps them learn better. Margie said, “I think it should be a conducive learning atmosphere with humor incorporated—not all the time, but when appropriate” (Vol. C, p. 94). Janet, who is 28, advised teachers to keep their focus on the content of the class, and not to “tell so many jokes that they’re not covering the material that students really need to know” (Vol. C, p. 73).

Students also recommended that humor be used tactfully in the classroom context. Cheryl stated, “Lois doesn’t make fun about people. . . . She always does it [responding to a mistake] tactfully and uses it like a joke” (Vol. C, p. 82). Paula suggested that the

teacher involve the students because “usually something funny just falls out of people who don’t know what they’re doing and it *is* funny.” But she specified, “I don’t know if too many people would take to being belittled, ‘Ha-ha, Oh look at her, she didn’t do that right’. That’s not what I am speaking about” (Vol. C, p. 88). Alice illustrated the point that humor should not be used to put people down by relating an incident in which a classmate “messed up on the math, and was really upset about it” (Vol. C, p. 91). Lois had been encouraging and supportive rather than belittling.

Principles to Reduce Negative Reactions to Humor

Most students reacted negatively to disparaging humor. They did not consider it appropriate or funny to put down individuals, gender, or race. Lois’s comments paralleled the students’. She said it helped to know your audience, and to avoid political humor.

Students frequently contrasted Lois with the pharmacology instructor. They said he tried to be funny, but tended to use biting sarcasm which they felt was belittling. They recommended that a teacher incorporating humor in the classroom should avoid this. Cheryl said she was uncomfortable approaching the pharmacology teacher and would “never, never show up at his office and ask a question” (Vol. C, p. 81). Michelle added, “or even raise a hand in class because he will call you an idiot. He will basically say that ‘you’re an airhead’ or ‘you’re not working on me’ [in the hospital] and some people think that’s funny and some people don’t, but that’s the way it is” (Vol. C, p. 81).

Another common recommendation was to avoid foul language. Stacey said Lois was funny because “you’re used to everybody else referring to it [excrement] a certain way and she comes up with a different way [e.g., ‘poop’]. It’s just funny” (Vol. C, p. 89).

Michelle was definite about the effects of negative humor, “Nobody can be feeling funny when they feel inferior to their teacher” (Vol. C, p. 83).

Summary and Conclusions

Lois teaches first-year nursing students in a associate degree program at a large, inner-city community college. In her Foundations classes, she uses teaching strategies which her students recognize and appreciate. But she has gained notoriety in the nursing department for her use of humor in the classroom. At frequent, but random intervals, the students are presented with a humorous cartoon, song, role playing situation, prop humor, joke, or funny story which momentarily changes their perspective regarding the topic of discussion. The students not only enjoy the humor for its stress-reduction, memory devices, and socialization opportunities, they enjoy it enough to respond with increasing use of humor themselves. They leave her class with greater confidence in their abilities as a nurse, and a light-hearted perspective on life.

CHAPTER 6

INDIANA SCHOOL

The Setting

The School

The third class I observed was in the heart of a large city in Indiana. The college, which offers a wide range of undergraduate degrees, is a multi-campus complex spread across the state. An associate degree in nursing has been offered at this small hospital-based campus since 1993. All nursing students attend their first nursing course on a larger campus six blocks away from the hospital campus with its more spacious skills lab facility. A class of 50 students is admitted to the first-year class on the main campus. Those freshmen completing the first semester move to the smaller hospital campus. In the second year, the class is augmented by adding as many as 20 advanced-placement LPNs, bringing the hospital campus population up to about 85 students. Full-time students can complete the nursing program in four semesters.

The Course

The 10-credit second-year medical-surgical course I observed was taught during the fourth semester of the nursing program. Each week, the students spent 5 hours in the classroom and 16 hours in their clinical rotations. The classroom day was 6 hours long

with a lunch break. Seventeen of the 24 students in the last semester of nursing were taking the medical-surgical course; the other 7 were taking the psychiatric nursing course. All 17 students were present the first day I observed the class. One student became ill before the class met the next time and did not participate in the study.

The Students

Class Composition

Sixteen students, 14 women and two men, attended each class session. Their ages ranged from 22 to 35 years; the average age was 28.1 years. One student was African Iranian; the rest were Caucasian. One of the students reported her scholastic ability as “poor but improving” (Vol. D, p. 20); the rest rated their scholastic abilities as average or above average. Of nine students who reported previous college experience, two held degrees. All but one of the students were taking 12 credit hours. Students averaged 12.3 hours of study for nursing per week, and community involvement in work or service averaged 17.5 hours per week. Most of the students (12) reported that they worked in health care as Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN), Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA), or student nurse externs (whose functions are similar to CNAs with added nursing skills). One student was an exercise physiologist, two others said they were mothers, and two were not working (see Table 9, Appendix C).

Many in the class were non-traditional students who were active outside of class while pursuing the degree full-time. All were excited about the class and what they were learning. The big picture of nursing was coming into focus for them. They were eager to

graduate, but looked forward to their licensure exams and entry into nursing with a mixture of fear and excitement.

Student Selection of Humorous Teacher

The students in the current medical-surgical class and those who immediately preceded them received the humor questionnaire. Both groups responded similarly. They overwhelmingly approved of using humor in class. The responses by the current and previous students are shown in Tables 10 and 11 (see Appendix C). All 24 students identified Ann, who taught the course I observed, as the teacher who used the most humor in class.

Ann began her career as a staff nurse, then earned a master's degree in nursing and spent the next 10 years teaching hospital staff development classes before beginning her role as a nursing instructor five years ago. She continues to present in-service workshops in which she incorporates humor.

The First Classroom Experience

The Classroom

The nursing department consists of offices and three classrooms on the second floor of an outbuilding on the hospital campus. The classroom was wide but short, with a door behind three rows of tables with chairs. Because the room was short, the front table served as a writing surface for students and as a place for the teacher to put her overhead projector and notes. There were 5 student desks to the left of the tables. A white board on the front wall served as a screen for the overhead projector. When the sun shone

through a window on the right wall, the drapes had to be closed to remove the glare which made it difficult to see the projected overheads. The curtains waved in the breeze coming through the window that had been opened to cool the room.

Posters proclaiming slogans were displayed on the walls of the room: “A smile happens quickly, but the memory of it lasts a long time”; “Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference”; “No act of kindness, no matter how small is ever wasted”; and “TEAM: Together Everyone Achieves More.” A gum-ball machine stood in the front left corner of the room.

Class Activity

The students began the first class hour with a test on the respiratory system. I waited for them to complete the test, then, during their break, set up my video camera at the left side of the room behind the student desks.

The students chatted as they filtered back into the room at 10:30 A.M. After making some announcements about graduation, Ann acknowledged one student’s birthday by standing her on a chair, and leading the class in a chorus of “Happy Birthday.” There was a short delay in class while everyone thought of a way to keep the window open with the curtains closed. Ann and the students joked that the student sitting nearest to the window should artfully “poof” the curtains to let air circulate without them flapping in the breeze. They decided to keep the window open and simply catch the curtains if the flapping became too strong.

Students had an outline of Ann’s lecture notes, so were able to follow her without having to frantically write everything she said. One student made audiotapes of the class.

Ann used cartoons on overheads to illustrate cardiac content, describing them with a high squeaky voice or fake accents. The class was strongly interactive. Students would ask questions as Ann brought up a topic. When she came to the end of a section, Ann would have a question-and-answer period to review what had just been covered. Incorrect answers were corrected in ways that did not belittle the students. Many of Ann's humorous illustrations were analogies that were funny because they were taken out of context. At one point, she used the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears to illustrate cardiac pre-load, after-load, and compensation. With much hilarity, the students explored the comparison to the story of the Three Little Pigs, but Ann gently refocused the class on the cardiac topic.

At one point, the road noise coming through the open window became a loud, prolonged honking. Ann made a funny remark about it being "road rage." Ann had told the students I was coming, so they did not seem disturbed by my presence. While they were discussing cardiac index, one student near me asked me about the process as she might have asked another student in the class.

The Second Classroom Experience

The second time I observed Ann's class was 1 week later. The class met in the same room, which was still too warm. A brief January thaw added to the effects of the furnace. Ann distributed test results from the previous week, giving lung-shaped pens to students who received A's. She announced that a specially shaped pen would be awarded after each test. The cardiac test reward would be heart-shaped, the trauma test pen

would be either a crutch or a broken bone, and the pen for the neurological test would be a wheelchair. Students were excited about the pens and the possibility of earning others.

The initial topic for this class period was pacemakers, which Ann introduced by talking about budget cuts and the development of a new, low-cost, low-tech pacemaker. Then she told Lois's "Polack pacemaker" joke I had shared with her (see p. 85). For a moment, the class believed her, then broke into loud laughter and animated talking. Ann gave a break, then returned wearing a long-sleeved T-shirt from the American Heart Association. The back read "Turn over to resuscitate" while the front said "This side up." Also marked on the front were "airway" at the throat, "defib" marked as two red spots at the location where the paddles should be placed, and a place for CPR compressions over the sternum. There was a blood pressure cuff girdling the left sleeve, and the right sleeve had an arrow labeled "IV insertion point." The students admired her shirt then began learning to interpret and treat electrocardiogram abnormalities.

Ann, the Punster

Teacher Characteristics

Ann is of medium height and build with short, dark curly hair and glasses. She dressed in slacks with a sweater or jacket and low-heeled shoes. She spoke clearly with a lilt in her voice. Ann used well-developed interactive skills and routinely sought feedback from her students to determine if they understood what she was saying. I met Ann in her office, and accompanied her across the parking lot to the hospital cafeteria for coffee. She joked with the service personnel and several students who had spread their notes over a table to cram for the respiratory test scheduled for the first class hour.

Students said that, until they actually took her class, they were intimidated by reports of Ann's tough-but-fair reputation. They found that her up-front approach in stating expectations, then helping students meet them was a strong motivation to live up to her high standards. Rachel described Ann's way of "pulling things out of you. She tells you, 'You already know this, I'm just helping you get there' and it's true, she just gives you little hints that make you think a little bit more to help you reach the goal" (Vol. D, p. 79). Lynn expressed how the students view Ann's way of teaching, "She's really good about focusing in on your weaknesses and trying to make those [become] strong points" (Vol. D, p. 61). Rachel said, "She always uses positive re-enforcement: 'good job'. She is really good about telling you 'You did a good job', and 'good effort' on something" (Vol. D, p. 80).

Ann glanced at her notes only occasionally during class, making good eye contact with students and addressing them by name. Ann used cartoons, jokes, prop humor, voice variations, and humorous metaphors to bring humor regularly into her classroom and was quick to pick up on student comments and continue a joke they might start.

How She Began to Use Humor

Ann did not begin life as the class clown. She described herself as a very quiet, model student who did whatever the instructor told her to do without complaining or asking questions. All of that changed for Ann in the early 1990s when she was teaching a staff development course on a very boring topic to a small group of people. "Suddenly puns started to come out because I was relaxed with the topic matter. I can't even tell

you what it was, but it was just funny” (Vol. D, p. 89). The responses were so favorable that Ann began to think about regularly using humor in her classes.

Ann began to add humor to her staff development classes by using Laffy Taffy—small pieces of taffy with a goofy joke or pun inside the wrapper—as rewards. This infusion of humor was so appreciated by the staff that they bought her a gum-ball machine so she could continue the rewards. The gum-ball machine remains a steady partner in Ann’s classroom.

How Ann Uses Humor

Ann said she always keeps two purposes in mind while preparing for class. The first is to present the content clearly so students understand it. Her second objective is to make the classroom experience as fun as possible, “so long as the fun does not overtake the purpose where you’re getting into laugh after laugh after laugh and then losing the content” (Vol. D, p. 96).

Ann teaches a long class period which she breaks into blocks of 1 to 1½ hours at a time. Within each block, she plans to use humor two to three times just to relax the mind for a few minutes, quickly returning to the topic each time. She does not plan the presentation by the minute, but tries to present things in a funny manner. Barbara described how Ann’s eye contact enhances her humorous delivery when she tells a story (Vol. D, p. 58).

Ann said that a humorous item can sometimes backfire and the class does not laugh. When a humorous item fails, Ann tries to salvage it by saying, “You know, you’re a hard group to please” (Vol. D, p. 96).

Sources of Humor

Ann enjoys using Gary Larson's Far Side cartoons in class because "he has such crazy off-the-wall concepts" (Vol. D, p. 91). She also uses The Journal of Nursing Jocularity and the comics from the newspaper. Some of her best sources are people who know she uses humor. They excitedly bring her funny jokes and cartoons, and enjoy seeing her use them in her classes or in-service presentations. Ann keeps a file for cartoons and jokes and periodically reviews it so she can change the humor she uses.

When Ann sees or hears something new that is humorous, her experience in nursing education and her knowledge of her students and the nursing content enable her to determine where it should be used. During my interview with Ann, I shared the same joke I had told Linda:

Q: How does hypospadias affect the EKG strip?

A: It gives you a shortened P-wave.

Immediately, she recognized its potential, "That's good. That's cute. A good P-wave one. It would be best with the intro to P waves, but I can also use it with junctional rhythms since you have shortened or no P waves whatsoever, so that would be workable" (Vol. D, p. 95). I also shared Lois' joke about the Polack pacemaker. Ann laughed, "Oh I love that: one, two, three, four, five. I *do* like that one. That is pretty doggone funny. I'll use that one next week, if you don't mind" (Vol. D, p. 95).

Interest Among Nurse Educators

Ann continues to work as a Registered Nurse in an intensive care unit and occasionally teaches in-service classes. She receives regular requests to teach in-service

classes on specified topics, with the added injunction to “make it fun for us” (Vol. D, p. 97). Ann has also taught one class about using humor.

Student Perceptions and Responses to Humor

Kinds of Humor Used

All the seniors in psychiatric nursing and in Ann’s medical-surgical course described the humor Ann uses. They identified cartoons, jokes, funny stories, gaming, and funny voices with accents.

Cartoons

Cartoons were described by two students (12.5%) on the humor questionnaire. “The use of comics makes it easier to remember the material” (Vol. D, p. 52). Susan said she always remembered the comic strips Ann used because they were all medically related.

Jokes

Jokes were the most frequently mentioned humor device on the questionnaire, with 44% of the seniors and current students describing their personal favorites from Ann’s class. Seniors mentioned a coined phrase that was used as a momentary break (Vol. D, p. 2). Judy described a spontaneous joke that Ann used when she was carrying a pocket tape-recorder. Ann said, “note to self” then added a funny comment about the student she was talking to at the time (Vol. D, p. 87).

The manual pacemaker joke was new for this class, so the other seniors could not comment on it, but three of Ann’s current students (19%) thought it was worth mentioning. “The manual pacemaker incident in class made it more relaxed. When humor

is used I'm able to remember things more easily based on a situation and remembering material in that manner" (Vol. D, p. 10).

Funny Stories and Analogies

Several students mentioned Ann's funny stories or analogies during my interviews with them. Jeff recalled an analogy, "Ann used funny little analogies. Have you ever heard of the potassium-insulin car that has insulin wheels, and it has bicarb to grease the wheels and it shoves the potassium into the cell? It's that funny little analogy that makes you remember things" (Vol. D, p. 73).

All but one of the students described the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. They knew it illustrated pre-load, after-load, and contractility, and had greatly enjoyed the momentary digression to the Three Little Pigs by a student. The other story frequently mentioned was about a person standing on a highway watching a semi-truck rapidly approaching in order to illustrate electrical conductivity.

Voices with Accents

During interviews, students chuckled over Ann's use of funny voices and fake 'Russian' accents. Barbara said, "She changes her voice. I belong to Toastmasters, which is a speaking club, that's [voice changes] something that has always caught my attention. She'll do little voices, or do Goldilocks and the Three Bears and put a nursing slant on it" (Vol. D, p. 57). Keith liked the voices too. "Last time when we were talking about respiratory, when we were talking about saying 99, she made the little voices of what it would sound like inside the body and in the lungs if you're auscultating it" (Vol. D, p. 81).

Benefits of Humor

On questionnaires and in interviews, Ann and her students consistently identified the same benefits they derived from humor. It relieved stress, helped develop a comfortable student-teacher relationship, focused attention, aided learning, and made learning fun.

Humor to Relieve Stress

Ann summarized the reasons she deliberately uses humor in her classes:

The type of content I teach is very threatening to the students sometimes, and if I am really serious about it, they become more intimidated. So I use it [humor] as a break to lower the stress level a little bit, to make it kind of fun, and hopefully make associations for them that will make the material less threatening, more palatable and more memorable. (Vol. D, p. 90)

A senior recalled that “Ann uses humor in every lecture, and it helps increase the comfort level and reduce stressful learning” (Vol. D, p. 6). Humor was a confidence booster for another student when “humor was used to lessen the embarrassment of not knowing answers or being wrong” (Vol. D, p. 46). Students routinely commented that humor helped them to relax. Keith expressed this collective thought when he said:

You know we talked about being intimidated when we went in there. Ann’s real smart and she knows everything—that’s the way it comes across—then she’s got this humor thing going on and we all can relax. It brings us all to the same plane, that we’re all there having a good time. She’s still the instructor and we’re still learning, but we’ve come together and we’re working together like colleagues. (Vol. D, p. 82)

Humor to Feel Comfortable With the Teacher

Ann said that using humor has helped her work relationships become closer so that she feels free to use humor in faculty meetings. Ann also mentioned that humor helps her

relationships with her students. Sometimes students are hesitant to talk to a teacher, so she works to make herself more approachable by using humor to remove the barrier between herself and her students.

Humor in the classroom helped students feel more comfortable with Ann. Barbara said “It’s much more personal, personable. I feel like she has a specific interest in me, Barbara, doing well. Because of the humor, I relate to her much better. Then I am thinking of an instructor that I had previously, who was not funny or fun, and I don’t feel like I learned as much with that person” (Vol. D, p. 58). Three seniors mentioned a recurring phrase that was used to lighten heavy situations. “It helped to bond our classmates—we knew our teacher cared about us and encouraged us for improving ourselves” (Vol. D, p. 4). Lynn added that humor made the teacher more accessible:

If you’re struggling with something and you want to approach that Professor to ask them questions, when the classroom as a whole is a lot lighter atmosphere and the Professor is more open, it makes me feel that person is much more approachable. If I am having difficulties then I can go to them and say, “Hey I don’t completely understand this, would you mind explaining it to me?” (Vol. D, p. 65)

Humor to Focus Attention

Ann said that humor eases the boredom that comes from repeatedly teaching the same course and content, and, at the same time, helps her enjoy teaching more. Since attention levels can fluctuate during long class periods, students said that humor helped to keep them focused. Barbara said, “If you can use humor and relate it somehow, it makes people more interested and they pay more attention. I think I listen better” (Vol. D, p. 58). Tosha said, “It keeps you interested. I was getting tired. It’s afternoon, it’s hot,

and I had information overload. I started getting tired and then the joke came in and I was right back. It kept my attention so I wouldn't nod off" (Vol. D, p. 68).

Humor to Aid Learning

Students found that a variety of humor techniques helped them learn. Brianna explained it this way, "When you are stiff and closed up and you don't understand something you get frustrated. But if you're open and comfortable then it makes you want to learn because she is interesting and funny" (Vol. D, p. 64). For Keith, it was the connection between humor and difficult content. "In general, little jokes and puns were used to explain difficult material. It helped to get a better understanding of the concepts" (Vol. D, p. 55). Barbara said Ann's use of mnemonic devices definitely helped her to remember material she had learned. Tosha, Jeff, and Susan echoed that thought, and Tosha gave an example of something on the respiratory test that she had answered correctly because she remembered one of Ann's jokes. Carol wrote on her humor questionnaire:

It is difficult to isolate one incident where humor was used in the classroom. One that comes to mind is a correlation made between an impulse traveling through the conduction pathway of the heart and a pedestrian standing in the path of a truck on the freeway. The effect this "humor" had on my learning was a permanent imprint on my memory. (Vol. D, p. 19)

Humor to Make Learning More Fun

For Ann, learning does not have to be drudgery, and the fun can help students learn the sometimes macabre humor that nurses use to cope with stressful events. Ann said that her perspective on life has changed since her initial experience of using puns in

her class. Now she creates funny answering machine messages and sometimes makes “blue mashed potatoes or green macaroni and cheese just to break out of a paradigm” (Vol. D, p. 98).

One senior described a Jeopardy-style game Ann used as a final review. “It was fun, competitive, and fast-paced, but we retained what we learned” (Vol. D, p. 3). Ann’s gift for spontaneous humor produced uproarious laughter while illustrating a point about heart valves. She asked the student nearest the door to close it. As Barbara described it:

She [the student] did so, nervously, and her knuckles hit the door prior to the slam. Ann was demonstrating that heart valves make their sounds when they close, but it was funny because there was a ‘murmur’. It made me listen harder because I knew what came next might be funny and enjoyable ☺.” (Vol. D, p. 40)

Jeff said, ‘If all teachers used humor, class would be more fun and you would learn more’ (Vol. D, p. 72).

Recommendations

Principles to Use When Adding Humor

Teachers seeking to change their classroom presentations by adding humor should know their personal strengths and limits. Ann recommended that teachers should be comfortable with their content before adding humor. Students believed that the teacher should not force humor, but relax and let it happen naturally.

Humorous material should be relevant to the topic. Ann strongly recommended that teachers should find material that fits the topic. Corroborating Ann’s remarks, all of the students considered it essential to relate the humor to the content to be illustrated. Jeff said, “It [humor] should be geared toward the subject that you’re teaching at the time. If

it's not geared toward the subject, it's kind of pointless, and it makes the students more confused" (Vol. D, p. 72). Using content-specific cartoons is a good way to start. In the same vein, humorous analogies that connect content to everyday examples, like the stories of Goldilocks or the approaching truck, were popular student suggestions. Keith suggested that teachers tell stories of their personal experiences to help develop rapport with students.

Principles to Reduce Negative Reactions to Humor

Humor should never overwhelm the class content. Ann said, "Your second objective [for adding humor to class] is to make that [learning] as fun as possible, and I think that as long as people keep that in mind, then the humor doesn't overtake the presentation, and you end up having a presentation that is all glitz with no content" (Vol. D, p. 96).

Ann stated that successful preparation includes knowing the audience. If you know the audience's background and sensitive areas, you can avoid causing offense and can make a joke more palatable. For a joke that might offend some in her class (e.g., Polack jokes), Ann suggested developing a bridge device. For example, you might say, "You know how we always pick on Kentuckians or Polish, well, here we go again" (Vol. D, p. 92).

All of Ann's students said there was a fine line between professional and unprofessional use of humor. They believed the wrong kind of humor, including offensive humor, hurtful or belittling humor, nasty jokes, or humor inappropriate to the context, would not be professional and should be avoided.

Summary and Conclusions

Ann teaches second-year nursing students in an associate degree program at a small campus of a large, inner-city college. She uses a variety of teaching methods in her cardiac nursing classes which are recognized and appreciated by her students. What sets Ann apart from her colleagues is how she augments traditional teaching methods by including humorous illustrations for her class content. Ann often illustrates a point with a humorous joke, funny story or analogy, or different voices and accents. The students actively contribute their own brand of humor to the class and extol the benefits of humor as a social equalizer, stress reducer, and memory enhancer. The events of Ann's classroom are becoming legendary as students tell the stories to the next class.

CHAPTER 7

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter I analyze the teachers and classrooms described in chapters 4 through 6 showing similarities and some intriguing differences. I connect these results to the current discourses and show ways in which my study corroborates and/or extends the knowledge base.

The Setting

Although each class was part of an Associate Degree nursing program in a community college setting, the class size, school size, and location varied (see Table 12, Appendix C). Student populations varied slightly among classes, but were predominantly Caucasian females with an average age of 28; males comprised 10 to 15% of each class. Linda's class was the most ethnically diverse with 20% of the students coming from a cultural heritage other than Caucasian. Minority students made up 10% of Lois's and Ann's classes. Linda's class also had the only foreign-born students. Most of the students in each class worked at least part time, many of them in health care.

The Teachers

Teacher Characteristics

Linda, Lois, and Ann all are veteran teachers with at least 15 years of experience. They all are of average height or slightly taller. Each teacher tends to wear low-heeled shoes and comfortable clothing for unrestricted movement. Each is very knowledgeable in and comfortable with her respective subject area.

All three teachers demonstrated their commitment to students' learning through their similar use of multiple, effective teaching techniques. Each addresses students by name, interacts with students in a personal way, and maintains availability outside of class. This interactive approach helps put students at ease. Students in Lois's and Ann's classes specifically stated they could call their teacher at any time without fear of reprisal. As experienced teachers, all three use a variety of effective classroom techniques. They move around the room during class, promptly return papers, answer students' questions in an unambiguous manner, and use their notes as a guide rather than a script for class. As Gorham and Christophel noted in 1990, the use of such interactive behaviors enhances learning. Each teacher operated from a broad base of effective teaching strategies with a liberal application of humor to ensure that their students' cognitive and affective learning needs were met.

How They Began Using Humor

The three teachers first approached classroom humor from different perspectives. Lois came from a home environment that included a lot of jokes and humor. She was the class clown in her own nursing program, and continued using humor as a teacher,

modeling herself after a mentor. Linda's family and friends were not particularly humorous and she was a serious nursing student. She started her teaching career in the conventional way, creating serious presentations with no planned humor. Linda began to rethink her totally serious approach to nursing education as she observed how students responded to certain teachers. As a result, she incorporated humor into her classes. Ann was also a quiet student and did not grow up with a resident humorist as Lois did. She had been teaching continuing education courses for several years when one pivotal class session erupted with spontaneous puns and laughter. The overwhelmingly positive reaction from her class caused Ann to begin adding humor intentionally.

Once they began to use humor, all of the teachers realized its benefits and began to develop their humor skills. Lack of training has led many professors to believe they need the skills of a professional comic, yet these three nursing teachers developed their abilities without any special training or experience showing that humor is a learned behavior.

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1

Research question 1 asked, *How do nursing students believe intentional humor in the classroom affects their learning?*

The anecdotal evidence strongly indicates that the students and teachers enjoyed humor in the classroom. They described several benefits gained from the use of humor. Linda was the most scientific in her explanation of humor's benefits. She described the physiological effects of increased oxygenation, blood flow, the release of endorphins, and

the psychological effects of positive attitude, increased attention, and greater recall. Lois used humor as a means to help students relax, feel comfortable, and learn. Humor is a way of life for Lois, who views the world through humor-colored glasses. The benefits Ann's students derived from classroom humor included reducing stress, developing a collegial relationship with students, and making learning fun by removing the drudgery.

Humor to Relieve Stress

Many of the students expressed concern about learning content they had heard was difficult. Others said school complicated their lives and added stress. All three teachers acknowledged these stress factors and used classroom humor to relieve it.

Students tended to label their stress as either anxiety or tension. Based on their individual perceptions, they evaluated humor for its anxiety relief or relaxation effects. The net result, however, was a reduction in the overall stress level. On the Humor questionnaire, 96% of the 148 graduates and students agreed that humor helped them relax in nursing classes. With less stress, students reported increased concentration on and understanding of the educational material.

Humor to Feel Comfortable With the Teacher

All the teachers acknowledged that their roles in the classroom could create distance between themselves and their students. Each teacher made it a point to be available, learn student names, and circulate through the class to help dissipate student discomfort. Additionally, each teacher used humor to promote personal contact with her students. Linda danced to the Incontinence Rag for its humanizing effect at the beginning

of her class section covering renal function. Lois used humor to break down the barriers between the students and herself. Ann described humor as a bridge to establish rapport with the students.

Linda described the social impact of humor as increasing student comfort with the teacher and socializing students into the nursing role. On the Humor questionnaire, 95% of the graduates and students agreed that humor helped them feel more comfortable with their teachers and each other. Each class reported developing group cohesion more quickly than in any of their other courses.

Humor to Focus Attention

Students and teachers agreed that humor helped everyone stay focused. It was not necessary to plan a humorous event simply to keep students' attention; any humor, even if unrelated to the current subject, would pique students' interest. Lois and Ann used spontaneous jokes to focus students' attention, whereas Linda used spontaneous humor and prize drawings every half hour.

Humor to Aid Learning

Students in all three classes reported that content presented with humor was easier to remember. On the Humor questionnaire, 96% of the graduates and students disagreed with the statement: "Humor interferes with my learning." Each student had a favorite kind of humor, but its effects were believed to be the same—recall improved when they laughed about the content. All three teachers believed that content-related humor improved student learning.

Humor to Make Learning More Fun

On the Humor questionnaire, 99% of the graduates and students said they appreciated their teachers' use of humor in the classroom. All three teachers thought that one of the most important personal reasons for using humor in the classroom is to have more fun. Learning does not have to be boring. When class is fun, students pay better attention and say they learn more. When the teachers enjoyed teaching, the students recognized that and also enjoyed class.

One difference I noticed between the classes was the amount of laughter. The students in Lois's class did not seem to laugh as much as did the students in the other classes. Linda's and Ann's classes laughed more, but they also had more cartoons and one-liners that seemed to keep the level of humor higher. Lois told stories and laughed at her own jokes. Class size may be responsible for this phenomenon. Linda suggested:

The students feed off each other. When there are fewer than 10 students, it seems that they are a bit more intimidated and afraid of laughing too loudly. In a bigger group, even if one person doesn't think a joke is funny, if someone else laughs, he may laugh anyway. (Vol. B, p. 204)

Class sizes varied greatly in this study with 35 students in Linda's class and 10 in Lois's class.

In summary, the above responses correspond closely to the literature. Bryant and Zillmann (1989) concluded their study of classroom humor this way:

Many of the claims by teachers for direct benefits from using humor in the classroom have been evaluated in the crucible of empirical evidence. Clear evidence supporting several of these claims has been discovered. For example, the judicious use of humor has been found to facilitate students' attention to educational messages, to make learning more enjoyable, to promote students' creativity, and under some conditions, to improve information acquisition and retention. (p. 74)

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked, *How do nursing faculty members incorporate humor in the classroom?*

The three nursing instructors observed used a mixture of planned and spontaneous humor in their classes. Each intentionally used humor to emphasize specific points in the class content, and each took advantage of class events to add spontaneous humor.

Each teacher follows similar principles for adding humor to class material. First, humor is not the primary focus of their presentations but a tool used to deliver the class material. Second, each teacher plans the humor for irregular intervals, about 10 to 15 minutes apart, to coincide with the average attention span of an adult. Third, the humor is connected to the content in some way. Fourth, they all avoid humor that could be embarrassing or degrading in some way. All three teachers are quick to take advantage of events that precipitate spontaneous humor, responding positively to student-initiated humor. An experienced teacher who knows the content well is relaxed and more open to the possibility of using humor.

Sources of Humor

Linda, Lois, and Ann all use a variety of humor resources. Among these are humorous health-care journals, humor organizations and catalogs, and their own nursing students. Non-medical sources of humor include the newspaper, Reader's Digest, and popular comedians such as Bill Cosby, David Letterman, and Loretta LaRoche. All three teachers said their ever-expanding humor collections were kept in easily accessible files or boxes. None of the teachers was satisfied using the same material repeatedly, but

constantly sought new humorous ways to present nursing content. Linda even wrote her own very popular rap songs for her unit reviews. A humorous perspective keeps them open to the incongruities of daily life. Anyone can develop this perspective and cultivate an attitude promoting a sense of humor.

Kinds of Humor Used

All three teachers used cartoons on overhead transparencies or in course outlines and made witty remarks as situations happened in class. Each teacher utilized a personal interest in choosing the type of humor to use most often. Linda employed Top Ten lists, songs, dances, and cartoons. The flair with which Linda performed the song and dance routines produced great enjoyment among her students and lingered in the memories of recent graduates. Linda also used excellent timing, announcing the title of the next Top Ten list just before dismissing the students for a break. The students returned promptly to see the list.

Each teacher recognized the importance of the context in which they used humor. Lois had overheads with "Tell joke" written in the corner, but would omit the joke if she sensed the class climate was not right for it. If her students reminded her to tell the joke, she simply said she would tell it later to anyone who wanted to hear it. Linda used context to her advantage with humor that juxtaposed incongruous events. Her prize drawings were a unique example of this. By themselves, they might not be classified as humor, but when coupled with spontaneously added comments, the complete experience was very humorous. For example, as she gave a magnifying glass to one student, she called it a "meatus finder."

Lois specialized in jokes and funny stories with occasional role playing. She drew from a vast fund of humorous material, and almost anything the students said or did could trigger a joke or story. Lois's loud infectious laugh would ring out after she told a joke or story, enticing the students to join her. She also set up situations that could be funny as students fumbled with equipment, or as she would deliberately perform a skill inappropriately. Students were eager to jump into the situations themselves.

Ann used jokes and funny stories, but her tour de force was analogy. When combined with funny voices and fake accents, Ann could have the students roaring with laughter while learning complicated content. Her students were passionate about her analogies. The incongruity of teaching cardiac content with semi-trucks and a fairy tale became an effective communication tool when the students realized how the analogy fit.

The three teachers selected many different types of humor to illustrate their points. From simple cartoons projected on a screen, to jokes and stories, and to song and dance routines, they avoided predictability by varying their humor presentation style and frequency. All three of the instructors engaged in a continuous search for new material to further expand their repertoire. The teachers were careful not to overuse humor, but added enough humor to sustain student attention. Bryant and Zillmann (1989) described the elements necessary to successfully incorporate humor:

It would appear that success in teaching with humor . . . depends on employing the right type of humor, under the proper conditions, at the right time, and with properly motivated and receptive students. An important facilitating or limiting factor is the teacher. Obviously all sorts of humor use are not for every teacher. But for the teacher who is interested in using humor and who feels comfortable with humor in the classroom, we hope that the evidence we have reviewed, the conclusions we have drawn, and the guidelines we have suggested make teaching with humor more successful and enjoyable. (p. 74)

Recommendations for Humor

The following guidelines were compiled from the recommendations given by students and teachers for anyone wishing to add humor to the classroom.

Develop your sense of humor

Teachers wanting to add humor to their classroom presentations first need to develop or strengthen a personal sense of humor, which McGhee defined as a set of attitudinal, intellectual, social, emotional, and expressive skills (1997, p. xii).

1. *Surround yourself with humor you enjoy.* Include such things as funny films, tapes, or cartoons, then analyze what you like about particular kinds of humor. Lois listens to humorous audiotapes while driving and Linda reads humor books.

2. *Laugh more often and begin telling jokes and funny stories.* First learn the joke or story, then practice it on a few friends. As you gain confidence, add one or two jokes at a time until you have built up your repertoire. Lois suggested telling a new joke in front of a mirror first.

3. *Play with language.* Create puns and other verbal humor. Look for double meanings in words and incongruities in everyday situations. For example, one might see the newspaper headline “man shoots alligator in pajamas” and imagine an dead alligator wearing night clothes. Ann had an affinity for puns; Lois and Linda were also quick with word play. Linda developed her own cheer and rap songs.

4. *Find humor in everyday life.* Improving your sense of humor requires active participation. Develop a humorous perspective as you experience daily events. Ask yourself what is funny about a routine task. Look for the unusual, incongruous, bizarre,

absurd, or unexpected. Then share the humor you observe with others. Gross (1994) shared his observations about an affliction he called “overheaditis.” In the article he wrote, he described individuals attending a conference being victimized by speakers with stacks of overheads. All three teachers were able to find humor in routine events and could determine how best to incorporate it in the class presentations. Ann and Linda were quick to add a joke I told them.

5. Take yourself lightly; laugh at yourself. Share your blunders and embarrassing experiences. You can still take your work seriously while poking fun at yourself. Linda’s water bed story, Lois’s jokes about her difficulties with audio/visual equipment, and Ann’s stories about her clinical experiences illustrate how all three teachers laughed at themselves.

Develop your presentation style

After developing a sense of humor, a teacher should develop a presentation style. Effective delivery of humor is enhanced by applying the following recommendations.

1. Memorize your material. If you are buried in your notes, or stumble over the punch line, you may lose your audience’s attention. Linda’s first presentation of the renal cheer was not as successful as she hoped. She acknowledged that it was not totally memorized and that she had to stop in the middle of it to check her notes. In the future, Linda will have the cheer memorized.

2. Practice your timing. Pauses allow the audience to picture the events and possible results of your joke or story before the punch line is delivered. Lois effectively used a long pause in this joke:

I was late today because there was a terrible accident. There was a bank robbery and the get-away vehicle was an old van with a broken antenna sticking out the side. As they went racing around a corner it hit a pedestrian and sliced off his head. (Long pause) He died of van-aerial disease. (Vol. C, p. 102)

3. *Involve your audience.* Active participation increases student attention. Linda had her students sing a rap song *with* her. Lois drew her students into role playing situations, and Ann conducted a *Jeopardy!* style test review. Each group of students enjoyed being involved and highly recommended that teachers increase student participation.

4. *Speak clearly, varying your voice modulation, tone, and speed.* Students dread presentations by teachers who mumble or monotonously read their notes to the class. Volume and tone can add emphasis to your humor. Even a fantastic joke can lose effect if people can't hear or understand it. All three teachers I observed spoke clearly and could be easily heard from the back of the room.

5. *Use your body to supplement your words.* Facial expressions, gestures, and walking around the room can emphasize your point and keep students' attention. Move away from the podium and into the audience if the room arrangement permits. This is contingent on knowing your content. If you are rooted to your notes, it will be difficult to leave the podium. All three teachers moved comfortably around the room and interacted with the students.

6. *Use audiovisual aids.* Overheads, slides, audiotapes, and other props are effective in presentations. Linda, Lois, and Ann used the overhead projector to present their material. Linda and Lois also used audio tapes effectively.

7. *Make eye contact.* Make eye contact with a student as you begin a humorous event. Hold it for a few seconds, then move to another student. Your humor becomes more personal, and students are more attentive. Ann made eye contact and addressed students by name, enabling her students to remain focused throughout a 6-hour class day.

8. *Critique your presentation style.* Analyze your presentation for what worked, what didn't, and how you can improve it. Linda critiqued the renal cheer and determined that the problem was in the delivery, not in the cheer itself.

9. *Recover from a bomb gracefully.* Some humor will fall flat. When it happens, a humorous quip such as, "I told it to my dog and he laughed," or "I guess I won't use *that* one again" can still produce a laugh, break the tension, and ease the embarrassment your students feel for you. All three teachers I observed had a few choice phrases ready for a possible bomb.

Rules to remember

1. *Be yourself.* The most common suggestion was to find a talent and type of humor that comfortably fit your personality and develop them. Let your sense of humor operate, but don't force the humor. The students said they recognized forced humor in teachers and did not respect them because they appeared "fake."

2. *Use humor regularly.* Insert humor into class presentations routinely, but not at consistent, preset intervals, or your students will only wake up for the jokes. All three teachers suggested 3 to 4 times per hour, based on the average attention span of adults.

3. Avoid using humor that is disparaging, stereotypical, sarcastic, or demeaning.

Negative humor can offend your students and make your educational message less effective. Students from each school described one other teacher whose use of disparaging humor was offensive to them.

4. Be sensitive to emotionally charged subjects. Linda's graduates described how she effectively use humor to deal with touchy topics such as AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. The negative effects of insensitivity are similar to other forms of offensive humor. Students may tune you out or harbor resentment, losing the educational message in the process.

5. Be spontaneous. Encourage your students to engage in humor, too. Ann, Lois, and Linda all found that students responded to teacher-generated humor by creating their own. You can stimulate more interest and involvement through playful use of spontaneous humor.

6. Remember that humor is a tool to convey information, not the primary purpose of the class. Develop your course outline and main concepts first, then add humor to bring it to life. All three teachers reported that class preparation took longer as they sought humor to fit the class content. Nonetheless, they believed the extra time was well spent because it strengthened the points they were making.

7. Use relevant humor to emphasize the educational point. Students are very focused on what they need to learn from class. If the humorous material is not related to course content, they can become impatient to return to the class topic. Linda, Lois, and

Ann illustrated how to connect many kinds of humor to the content they were teaching. Each is a strong advocate of relevant humor.

8. *Add humorous material to course syllabi, tests, and handouts.* Imagine the impact of a syllabus or test that reads “WARNING: DO NOT use if safety seal is broken.” Linda used the most humor on her handouts and specialized in cartoons while Lois and Ann used less humor on printed course material.

9. *Remember to enjoy yourself!* From the sparkle in their eyes to the enthusiastic engagement in classroom interactions, all three teachers demonstrated their enjoyment in classroom activities.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 asked, *What, if any, connections do teachers and students perceive between intentional classroom humor and cognitive learning?*

The strongest responses I received from the interviews with the students and teachers were their expressed beliefs that humor helped students learn. Their perceptions corresponded with the five benefits of humor described in the literature review. Many times during the interviews, students stated that humor helped them remember content by association. This was supported by their responses to the humor questionnaire. Seventy-five percent of the participants who explained how humor affected their learning said humor was a mnemonic device that helped them remember the associated material. The remaining 25% expressed views that were quite evenly spread among the other four benefits of humor. Though each teacher cited all five of the humor benefits as reasons for

using humor in her class she, like her students, believed the primary reason was to help students remember the content.

While study participants enthusiastically endorsed the use of humor as a teaching tool, it should be remembered that humor was not the only factor influencing learning in the three nursing classrooms I observed. Other factors included previous student knowledge, the primary learning domain of the content, and the level of student learning. First of all, previous knowledge can provide a “hook” on which to hang the new material and students will learn it more easily regardless of the instructional method used. Secondly, learning that occurs in the psychomotor domain focuses on processes and skills which students often recall more easily than cognitive content. Finally, content complexity increases as students progress from the freshman year through graduation.

How is humor perceived to enhance cognitive learning? Could it be that humorous activities serve as mnemonic devices to help the students remember the appropriate content? Perhaps the atmosphere created by humor produces a positive learning environment aside from any connection to the content. After all, the benefits of humor are interconnected in the cognitive and affective learning domains. Humor can break down the barriers between students and their teachers to permit personal communication and the development of collegial relationships. The subsequent stress reduction and rapport strengthen successful mentoring and facilitate the student’s socialization into professional nursing. Learning is enhanced when the student finds it pleasurable. Humor can make learning fun, spark more interest, and generate a deeper understanding of the content. The affective results of reduced anxiety, increased rapport with the teacher, and enjoyment of

learning may augment the cognitive benefits from increased attention to the topic with more understanding and better recall.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 asked, *How does intentional classroom humor resonate with student demographics?*

Since the students from all three classes were remarkably homogeneous, there was only a small amount of demographic variation which could be used to examine differences. The most obvious, albeit small, difference was in the students' cultural background. The two foreign-born students from India and Pakistan were not as enthusiastic about humor as were their American-born counterparts of African, Asian, Caucasian, or Native American descent, but stated they benefitted from the use of classroom humor. This lack of enthusiasm for teacher-generated humor could easily be a result of different cultural expectations regarding education and humor. There were no obvious gender differences between the descriptions men and women gave of their enjoyment of classroom humor.

Each of the five benefits from humor was named by students of all ages, but there were very small differences in the benefits preferred by different age groups. The older students in Linda's class leaned toward the memory-enhancing and stress-reducing effects of humor, whereas the younger students mentioned humor's ability to help them focus their attention and more effectively relate to the material. This was evident only in Linda's class which had an age range of 28 years between the oldest and youngest students—a range large enough to include more than one generation in the class. The students in

Lois's and Ann's classes were essentially from the same generation, with only 14 and 13 years, respectively, separating the oldest from the youngest student. Their students gave very similar responses about the benefits they gained from humor. No response pattern based on age emerged from this study.

Recommendations for Further Study

Questions to be addressed in future studies emerge from the results of this investigation. Immediately after attending humorous class sessions, students said that humor helped them to remember content. What evidence would there be to support that assertion if student recall of content were examined several months after the classroom events? Factors such as prior knowledge, interim experiences, type of humor, student response, and type of question would need to be somehow controlled before definitive connections between classroom humor and content retention could be made.

In this study, students sometimes generated their own humor in response to their teachers' humor. If the classroom humor were student generated, but still content related, would they be able to remember more of the material than when the teacher generated the humor?

The subjects in this study were remarkably homogeneous. How would the results differ if the study were repeated with students and teachers who were more diverse in their gender, ethnicity, and age?

What long-term residual effect would humor leave as the students graduated and entered nursing practice? A corollary to this question is one that Yura-Petro suggested in 1991: What impact does humor have on student comprehension of the material taught?

The teachers observed were identified by colleagues, graduates, and current students as the one faculty member in their respective nursing departments who used intentional classroom humor. Some nursing schools had no such faculty person and were, in fact, horrified by the possibility, which suggests the underutilization of humor as a teaching tool. Prosser's 1997 study showed a large gap between the importance adult educators placed on classroom humor and its implementation. Investigating educators' reluctance to use humor could stimulate a change in professional educational methods.

Summary

The students and teachers I observed were located in different states and different school systems, yet they were quite homogeneous in group characteristics and perceptions. There was strong agreement about why humor is used, how it should be used, and how often it should be used in the classroom.

Humor appeared to make a difference in the learning experience. The teachers enjoyed their classes and said they thought learning should be fun, thus indicating they embrace learning theories that include both the cognitive and affective domains. Teachers who know their material well can move beyond the limitations of content into the realm of whole brain thinking by the inclusion of humor. Humor helps students develop a positive perspective on learning, thereby casting a rosy glow on the rest of the experience. The

data I have gathered from questionnaires, direct observations, and interviews with students and teachers demonstrate the perceived value of intentional humor in nursing classrooms.

In this study, humor was used as a legitimate classroom teaching tool. The teachers enjoyed their work and developed bonds with the students in the class. Students found class to be a safe, stimulating place in which they learned new skills and developed trusting relationships.

APPENDIX A

LETTERS

Cover Letter Which Accompanied The Pilot Study Questionnaire

Dean of Student Services
Kettering College of Medical Arts
Kettering, OH 45429

August 24, 1997

Dear student,

Kettering College of Medical Arts seeks to provide the best educational experiences possible. The nursing faculty are examining strategies to refine the instructional program. Your response to the following short questionnaire is appreciated.

Would you please take a few moments to fill out and return the questionnaire to my office in the enclosed, stamped envelope? You may also drop it by the student services office. It would be most helpful if you could return the questionnaire by September 8, 1997. Your feedback is important to us as we adapt to the continuously changing world of health care education.

Thank you for your help and best wishes for a successful school year.

Sincerely,

Dean of Student Services

Cover Letter Which Accompanied the Questionnaires Sent to the Nursing Schools

September 9, 1997

Dear student,

I am writing a doctoral dissertation that examines teaching strategies in nursing classrooms. Student views are an important part of the project. Your response to the following short questionnaire is appreciated.

Would you please take a few moments to fill out and return the questionnaire? Your feedback is important to future students as faculty adapt to the continuously changing world of health care education.

Thank you for your help and best wishes for a successful school year.

Sincerely,

Joan Ulloth, R.N., M.S.N.
Andrews University student

**Cover Letter which Accompanied the Humor Questionnaire to Nursing Graduates
from Illinois School**

September 25, 1997

Dear graduate,

Congratulations on your entry into the profession of nursing!

As a nursing educator, I take pride in the success of all nursing graduates. To help me increase the potential of future students, I am writing a doctoral dissertation which examines humor as a teaching strategy in nursing classrooms. Teachers can use the information from this study to improve their teaching.

Student views are an important part of the project. Your response to the following short survey is appreciated. The nursing faculty at the College of DuPage have supported this study by releasing the list of their most recent graduates.

Would you please take a few moments to fill out and return the questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope? Your feedback is important to future students as nursing faculty adapt to the continuously changing world of health care education.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Joan Ulloth, R.N., M.S.N.
3205 Waltham Avenue
Kettering, OH 45429-3527

Consent Form for Students

Andrews University
School of Education
Leadership Program
Joan Ulloth R.N., M.S.N., doctoral student
Intentional Classroom Humor in Nursing

This study explores the intentional use of humor in the nursing classroom as part of the dissertation for the doctoral degree in the Leadership Program of the School of Education. It includes the observation and reaction of students and teachers as they participate in nursing classes taught using intentional humor.

Short surveys and personal interviews help describe the context in which students experience humor in the classroom. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with these procedures.

Though you may not directly benefit from participating in this project, you will help us understand better what teaching strategies are most helpful in students' learning.

All information collected will be held in strictest confidence. While this information may be published, at no time will your name be used. Additionally, you are free to terminate this consent at any time and withdraw from the project without prejudice. If you have any questions concerning this project or this consent, please call Joan Ulloth at 937-296-7219, or Shirley Freed at 616-471-6163.

I, _____, hereby give my consent to participate in the project described above. I have read and understand this statement and I have had all my questions answered.

Date: _____ Signature: _____

Witness: _____

Consent Form for Teachers

Andrews University
School of Education
Leadership Program
Joan Ulloth R.N., M.S.N., doctoral student
Intentional Classroom Humor in Nursing

This study explores the intentional use of humor in the nursing classroom as part of the dissertation for the doctoral degree in the Leadership Program of the School of Education. It includes the observation and reaction of students and teachers as they participate in nursing classes taught using intentional humor.

Short surveys and personal interviews help describe the context in which students experience humor in the classroom. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with these procedures.

Though you may not directly benefit from participating in this project, you will help us understand better what teaching strategies are most helpful in students' learning.

All information collected will be held in strictest confidence. While this information may be published, at no time will your name be used without your consent. You may select a pseudonym for this study if you prefer that your name not be used. Additionally, you are free to terminate this consent at any time and withdraw from the project without prejudice. If you have any questions concerning this project or this consent, please call Joan Ulloth at 937-296-7219, or Shirley Freed at 616-471-6163.

I, _____, hereby give my consent to participate in the project described above. I have read and understand this statement and I have had all my questions answered.

The name I would like used in this study is _____

Date: _____ Signature: _____

Witness: _____

Letter of Permission to Print Cartoon in Figure 1

Date: Sun, 17 May 1998 13:06:34 -0400
From: Fran London <FranLondon@compuserve.com>
Subject: John Wise Cartoon
Sender: Fran London <FranLondon@compuserve.com>
To: Joan Ulloth <ulloth@erinet.com>
Content-Disposition: inline
X-MIME-Autoconverted: from quoted-printable to 8bit by erinet.com id NAA02100
X-UIDL: 561048cb1e66359c93b94ca48d68279c

As Editor of the Journal of Nursing Jocularly, you have my permission to use John Wise's cartoon "Texas Cath" in your dissertation.

If you plan to use the cartoon in presentations or other publications, ask John. John Wise's e-mail address is: Wisecart@aol.com

If your dissertation is e-mailable as a binary text file (without illustrations), I'd love to read it.

Good luck!

Fran London, MS, RN
Editor, Journal of Nursing Jocularly

APPENDIX B

**QUESTIONNAIRES
AND INTERVIEWS**

Student Survey
 for participation in a study of student reactions
 to intentional classroom humor
 by Joan Ulloth, R.N., M.S.N.

Directions: Please fill out this questionnaire and return it to the teacher.

First Name _____

Student ID number (for reference purposes only) _____

Phone number: _____

Year you were born _____

Gender M F

Ethnicity ___ White ___ African American ___ Asian American

___ Hispanic ___ Native American _____ Other (please specify)

Previous college degrees (specify field) A.S. ___ B.S. ___ M.S. ___ Field _____

Other college experience _____

Current occupation _____

How do you characterize your scholastic abilities?

Excellent Above average Average Below average Poor

How many credit hours are you currently taking? _____ semester/ quarter

How many hours per week (average) do you spend studying for this nursing class? _____

How many hours per week (average) do you spend at work or in community activity? _____

Thank you for your participation.

Humor Questionnaire

Please circle the response that indicates your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the following statements.

Student ID number _____

	S t r o n g l y A g r e e	A g r e e	N e u t r a l</br>	D i s a g r e e	S t r o n g l y D i s a g r e e</br>
1. I appreciate my teachers' use of humor in the nursing classroom.	SA	A	N	D	SD
2. Humor interferes with my learning.	SA	A	N	D	SD
3. Humor makes me more relaxed in my nursing classes.	SA	A	N	D	SD
4. I feel more comfortable with the teachers who use humor in the nursing classroom.	SA	A	N	D	SD
5. I wish fewer teachers would use humor.	SA	A	N	D	SD
6. The teacher on the nursing faculty who uses the most humor in her/his classroom is _____					
course taught _____					
7. Briefly describe one incident where humor was used in the classroom. In what way did this use of humor affect your learning of class content?					

Student Interview Questions

1. How is your study of nursing going?
2. Do any courses stand out in your mind?
Give an example of any part you remember vividly.
3. What do you think about the course taught by _____ (teacher who uses humor)?
4. How is this course taught differently from others you have taken?
5. What does _____ (teacher) do that helps or hinders your learning?
6. Describe ways in which _____ (teacher) uses humor in the class.
Is it intentional?
7. How does the use of humor affect the class atmosphere?
8. How does the use of humor in class affect your relationship with the teacher during class?
9. How does the use of humor in class affect your ability to learn the content?
10. Give an example of how humor was used in the classroom.
11. What suggestions do you have for a teacher who wants to add humor to their class?

Teacher Interview Questions

1. When did you become aware of your sense of humor?
2. What factors influenced the development of your sense of humor?
Family, school?
3. When did you first begin to use humor in the classroom?
4. What influenced or motivated you to use humor in the classroom?
5. Why do you continue to use humor in the classroom?
6. What benefits do you believe result from using humor in the classroom?
To students? To the teacher?
7. What kinds of humor do you use in the classroom?
8. How do you select humorous material to use in the classroom?
9. How do you determine where to incorporate humor in the class session?
10. What advice would you offer to a nursing instructor wishing to add humor to the classroom?

APPENDIX C

TABLES

TABLE 2
 PERCENTAGE OF NURSING STUDENT RESPONSES ON HUMOR
 QUESTIONNAIRE FROM PILOT SCHOOL

	S t r o n g l y A g r e e	A g r e e	N e u t r a l	D i s a g r e e	S t r o n g l y D i s a g r e e
1. I appreciate my teachers' use of humor in the nursing classroom.	65	35	0	0	0
2. Humor helps me learn.	67	29	4	0	0
3. Humor makes me more relaxed in my nursing classes.	80	20	0	0	0
4. I feel more comfortable with the teachers use humor in the nursing classroom.	69	31	0	0	0
5. I wish more teachers would use humor.	65	35	0	0	0

TABLE 3

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FOR NURSING STUDENTS FROM ILLINOIS SCHOOL

DEMOGRAPHICS	%	DEMOGRAPHICS	%
Ethnicity of Students		Work and Service Hours	
African American	2.6	40-45	10.3
Asian American	7.7	29-35	15.4
Caucasian	82.1	15-25	46.2
Hispanic	5.1	10-0	28.2
Native American	2.6		
Scholastic ability		Occupation	
Excellent	10.3	Health care provider	51.3
Above Average	33.3	Secretarial positions	15.4
Average	46.1	Student	15.4
No answer	10.3	Parent	10.2
		Other	7.7
Prior College Degrees			
none	74.4		
A.S.	7.7		
B.S.	17.9		
Prior College Experience			
yes	61.5		
no	38.5		
Weekly Nursing Study Hours			
28-35	18.0		
23-25	28.3		
15-20	30.8		
11-13	10.3		
5-10	30.8		
Current Credit Hours			
15-18	7.7		
12-13	51.0		
10-11	36.0		
5-8	5.2		

TABLE 4
 PERCENTAGE OF NURSING STUDENT RESPONSES
 ON THE HUMOR QUESTIONNAIRE FROM ILLINOIS SCHOOL

	S t r o n g l y A g r e	A g r e	N e u t r a l	D i s a g r e	S t r o n g l y D i s a g r e
1. I appreciate my teachers' use of humor in the nursing classroom.	72	0	3	0	0
2. Humor interferes with my learning.	0	0	9	35	56
3. Humor makes me more relaxed in my nursing classes.	71	26	0	3	0
4. I feel more comfortable with the teachers who use humor in the nursing classroom.	63	20	17	0	0
5. I wish fewer teachers would use humor.	3	3	9	31	54

TABLE 5
 PERCENTAGE OF NURSING GRADUATE RESPONSES
 ON THE HUMOR QUESTIONNAIRE FROM ILLINOIS SCHOOL

	S t r o n g l y A g r e e	A g r e e	N e u t r a l	D i s a g r e e	S t r o n g l y D i s a g r e e
1. I appreciate my teachers' use of humor in the nursing classroom.	95	5	0	0	0
2. Humor interferes with my learning.	0	0	0	36	64
3. Humor makes me more relaxed in my nursing classes.	77	23	0	3	0
4. I feel more comfortable with the teachers who use humor in the nursing classroom.	75	23	2	0	0
5. I wish fewer teachers would use humor.	0	0	0	32	68

TABLE 6

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FOR NURSING STUDENTS FROM OHIO SCHOOL

DEMOGRAPHICS	%	DEMOGRAPHICS	%
Ethnicity of Students		Work and Service Hours	
African American	10	35-40	30
Asian American	0	20	50
Caucasian	80	0-5	20
Hispanic	0		
Native American	10		
Reported Scholastic Ability		Occupation	
Excellent	0	Health care provider	60
Above Average	60	Cashier	20
Average	30	Student	20
No answer	10		
Prior College Degrees			
none	100		
A.S.	0		
B.S.	0		
Prior College Experience			
yes	10		
no	90		
Weekly Nursing Study Hours			
18-25	20		
12-15	30		
5-10	40		
0-4	10		
Current Credit Hours			
12-14	50		
8-9	50		

TABLE 7
 PERCENTAGE OF NURSING STUDENT RESPONSES
 ON THE HUMOR QUESTIONNAIRE FROM OHIO SCHOOL

	S t r o n g l y A g r e	A g r e	N e u t r a l	D i s a g r e	S t r o n g l y D i s a g r e
1. I appreciate my teachers' use of humor in the nursing classroom.	100	0	0	0	0
2. Humor interferes with my learning.	10	0	0	0	90
3. Humor makes me more relaxed in my nursing classes.	100	0	0	0	0
4. I feel more comfortable with teachers who use humor in the nursing classroom.	90	10	0	0	0
5. I wish fewer teachers would use humor.	0	10	0	10	80

TABLE 8
 PERCENTAGE OF SENIOR NURSING STUDENT RESPONSES
 ON THE HUMOR QUESTIONNAIRE FROM OHIO SCHOOL

	S t r o n g l y A g r e e	A g r e e	N e u t r a l	D i s a g r e e	S t r o n g l y D i s a g r e e
1. I appreciate my teachers' use of humor in the nursing classroom.	89	1	0	0	0
2. Humor interferes with my learning.	0	0	3	30	67
3. Humor makes me more relaxed in my nursing classes.	75	17	8	0	0
4. I feel more comfortable with teachers who use humor in the nursing classroom.	72	25	3	0	0
5. I wish fewer teachers would use humor.*	3	0	3	14	78

* one was left blank

TABLE 9

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FOR NURSING STUDENTS FROM INDIANA SCHOOL

DEMOGRAPHICS	%	DEMOGRAPHICS	%
Ethnicity of Students		Work and Service Hours	
African American	6	30-45	18.5
Asian American	0	15-25	44
Caucasian	94	8-12	12.5
Hispanic	0	0-5	25
Native American	0		
Reported Scholastic Ability		Occupation	
Excellent	0	Health care provider	75
Above Average	38	Parent	12.5
Average	50	Unemployed	12.5
Poor	6		
No Answer	6		
Prior College Degrees			
none	87.5		
A.S.	0		
B.S.	12.5		
Prior College Experience			
yes	56		
no	44		
Weekly Nursing Study Hours			
20-25	31		
14-16	19		
6-10	25		
2-5	25		
Current Credit Hours			
15	6		
12	94		

TABLE 10
 PERCENTAGE OF NURSING STUDENT RESPONSES
 ON THE HUMOR QUESTIONNAIRE FROM INDIANA SCHOOL

	S t r o n g l y A g r e e	A g r e e	N e u t r a l	D i s a g r e e	S t r o n g l y D i s a g r e e
1. I appreciate my teachers' use of humor in the nursing classroom.	100	0	0	0	0
2. Humor interferes with my learning.	0	0	0	25	75
3. Humor makes me more relaxed in my nursing classes.	88	12	0	0	0
4. I feel more comfortable with teachers who use humor in the nursing classroom.	100	0	0	0	0
5. I wish fewer teachers would use humor.	0	0	0	19	81

TABLE 11
 PERCENTAGE OF SENIOR NURSING STUDENT RESPONSES
 ON THE HUMOR QUESTIONNAIRE FROM INDIANA SCHOOL

	S t r o n g l y A g r e e	A g r e e	N e u t r 	D i s a g r e e	S t r o n
1. I appreciate my teachers' use of humor in the nursing classroom.	100	0	0	0	0
2. Humor interferes with my learning.	0	0	0	29	57
3. Humor makes me more relaxed in my nursing classes.	100	0	0	0	0
4. I feel more comfortable with teachers who use humor in the nursing classroom.	100	0	0	0	0
5. I wish fewer teachers would use humor.	14	0	0	29	57

TABLE 12
COMPARISON OF ALL THREE SCHOOLS

CHARACTERISTICS	SCHOOL		
	Illinois	Ohio	Indiana
Campus Size	large	large	small
Location	suburbs	medium city	large city
# of Students	35	10	17
Age Range	20-48	19-33	22-35
Average Age	31.6	26	28
Teacher	Linda	Lois	Ann

REFERENCE LIST

REFERENCE LIST

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EXPERIENCE

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8/83-8/85	<u>Nursing Instructor</u> , Kettering College of Medical Arts, Kettering, Ohio
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LICENSURE, CERTIFICATIONS

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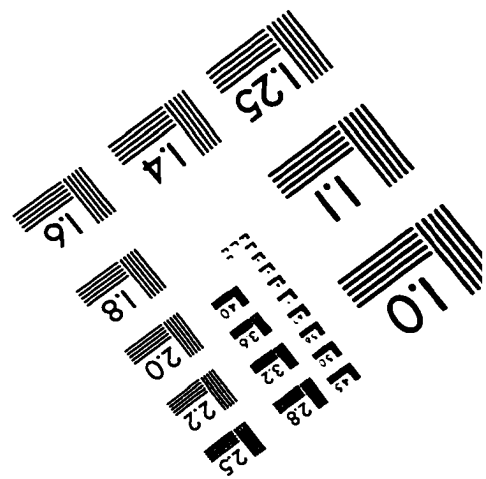
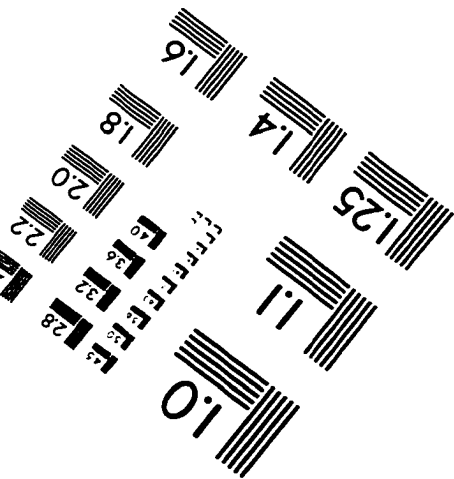
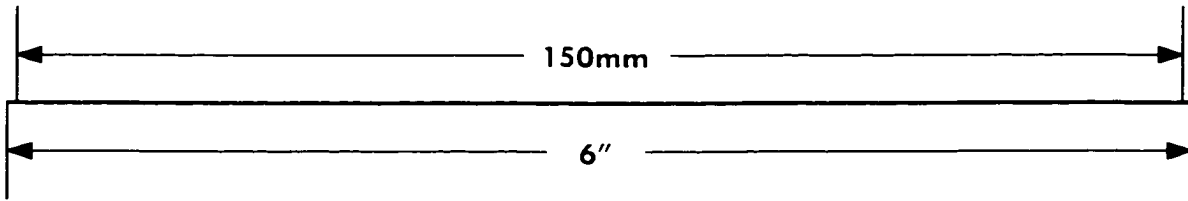
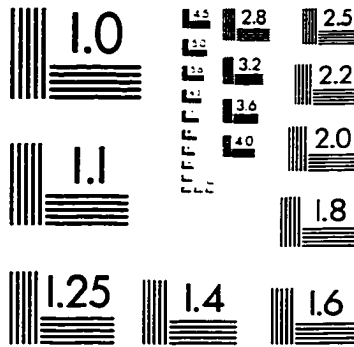
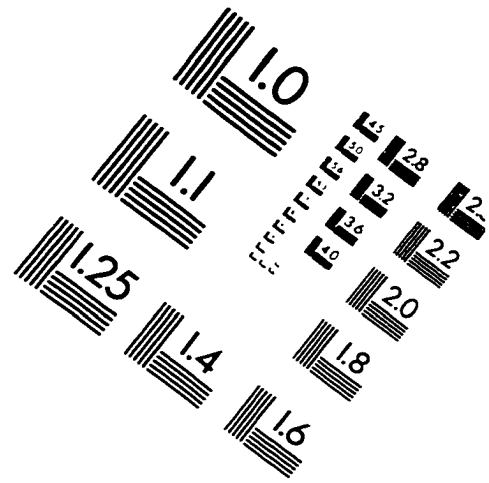
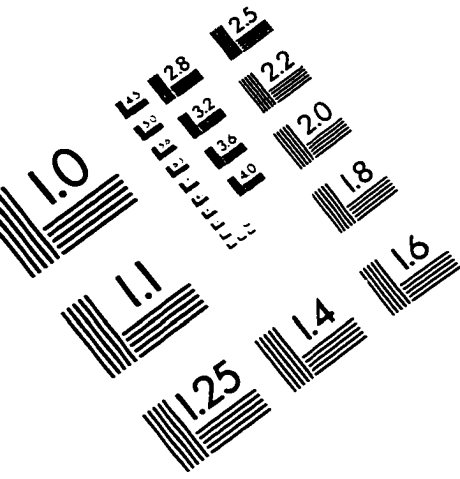
PUBLICATIONS

1998	Rhetoric in Pharmacology: Friend or Foe with V. McGuire, submitted to <u>Journal of Nursing Education</u> in February 1998.
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