The Use of Humour in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

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Abstract

This study explored the use of humour in teaching and learning in higher education classrooms. Despite the growing body of research on humour in higher education, limited studies have attended to teachers' perspectives. This study focused on understanding humour from both teachers' and students' perspectives. It drew on an interpretivist approach to explore how and why five New Zealand university teachers used humour while teaching, and how their use of humour affected students' learning in the classroom.

Study participants included five university teachers and 10 students. I recruited the teachers from among those identified as humorous in the annual Students' Association Teacher of the Year awards. The student participants were learning in these teachers' classrooms. Data were collected in three stages. First, I observed and video recorded the teachers in university classrooms. Next, I approached the students for one-on-one interviews. Finally, I invited each of the teachers to participate in a stimulated recall interview. To code the data, I drew on superiority, incongruity and relief theories of humour; instructional humour processing theory (IHPT); and emotional intelligence (EI).

The teachers used eight types of humour, either intentionally or spontaneously, while teaching. These included self-deprecating humour, disparaging humour, teacher-student teasing, sarcasm, ad-lib humour, funny comments, riddles and funny photos or quiz questions. The teachers noted that they used humour intentionally to facilitate student learning, attract students' attention, or both. The students indicated that the teachers' use of humour affected them in two ways: by enhancing their learning (for example, by helping them to understand or recall key concepts); and by engaging their attention (for example, by providing a 'tension break' or eliciting laughter). The teachers' and students' interview discussions revealed more similar than different perspectives as to what constitutes appropriate (or inappropriate) and relevant (or irrelevant) humour. They described appropriate humour as humour that is

relevant, timely and used in a suitable manner; as enhancing teachers' credibility; and as requiring careful judgement, and sometimes, planning. They described relevant humour as humour that is related to lecture content and/or to students' daily life experiences.

My study findings extend our understanding of 'instructional' humour. According to IHPT, instructional humour is appropriate and relevant humour that enhances students' learning in the classroom. However, my study findings suggest that humour that is not directly content-related can also perform an instructional function, for example, by re-focusing students or allowing them to feel comfortable and ready to learn. Additionally, my study offers some pedagogical suggestions for teachers who wish to incorporate humour effectively in the classroom. These include considering students' perspectives when using humour, planning the use of humour to illustrate course content and/or foster students' sense of comfort, and checking jokes or funny anecdotes with others prior to using them.

Presentations from this research

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I dedicate this thesis to:

Ibu & Baba

and

the humorous teacher who inspired me to do this topic

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List of Abbreviations

IHPT: Instructional Humour Processing Theory

EI: Emotional Intelligence

SRI: Stimulated Recall Interview

OUSA: Otago University Students' Association

Chapter One

Introduction

> There has only been once when I have been so upset that I have actually decided just not to tell jokes anymore for a couple of lectures and I found it really hard not to tell jokes.

Philip[1], Award-winning teacher

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[1] All names are pseudonyms

1.1 Overview

There is something intriguing and interesting about humour and its use in teaching and learning contexts. Humour is essential in many human interactions (Meyer, 2000) and it can provide a valuable service to learning (Lovorn & Holaway, 2015). Often, humour is described as one of the important teaching characteristics that a teacher should have (Harland, 2012; Kember & McNaught, 2007; Powell & Andresen, 1985) and because of its ubiquity in communication and teaching, it is likely to be instinctive for many teachers to use it in the classroom. However, how it functions, in terms of students' and teachers' experiences, is still not fully understood. In higher education, previous research into humour has focused heavily on students' perspectives, with less attention paid to teachers or the link between how students and teachers experience humour. Further, there is very little research that has explored the impact of the types, functions and effects of humour used by teachers.

In this thesis, I explore the use of humour in teaching and learning in higher education from both the students' and teachers' perspectives. This chapter begins with an explanation of why I am interested in this topic. Then I present the background to the study, and introduce and describe its context. Following this, I outline the aims of the research before providing an explanation to key terms used throughout the thesis. Finally, I offer an overview of each chapter in the thesis.

1.2 My interest in conducting this study

My interest in conducting this study reflects my beliefs about humour, teaching and learning in higher education. Esterberg (2002, p. 9) suggested that three issues needed to be considered before a study is conducted:

1. Where are your own biases and preconceptions?

2. What are your own investments in particular issues and in particular ways of seeing the world?

3. What do you already think you know and how do you know it?

To answer these questions, I assessed my interests (biases and preconceptions) about conducting research in teaching and learning in higher education. My interest in humour in teaching and learning started when I was an undergraduate student at a university in Malaysia. I remember attending lectures with many teachers. However, I enjoyed only a few of these classes. Upon reflection, I realised that the classes I truly enjoyed were led by teachers who incorporated humour in their teaching. I shared this view with my classmates and they confirmed that they also appreciated teachers who made them laugh. At times I wonder, did I enjoy the classes because they were humorous, or did I enjoy them because I learnt more? All I can say is that my motivation to learn in these classes was high and my grades were highest compared to other subjects.

When I started my doctoral study at the University of Otago in New Zealand, I came across a newsletter of the Otago University Students' Association (OUSA) that featured award-winning teachers. These awards are given to the most commonly nominated teachers. Students vote for teachers whose teaching they enjoy and comment on why they enjoy the teachers' classes. Many students used words such as 'humour', 'hilarious' and 'jokes' to describe qualities they admired in a teacher. As a linguist, this sparked my interest to explore

how humour influences teaching and learning and how teaching and learning influences humour.

When I first presented my proposed research at a conference in New Zealand, many teachers who attended my session shared their experiences of using humour in their teaching. The teachers described their perspectives of humour use in the classroom, and their techniques and the preparations they made for incorporating humour in their teaching. Others asked how they could use humour in the classroom and whether being humorous is a skill that can be learnt. I had been largely unaware of the significant interest and effort invested by teachers to include humour in their teaching. This interest among teachers who attended the conference further motivated me to research the use of humour and contribute to theory and practice in teaching and learning in higher education.

My interest in humour is also due to my passion for language and communication. My background in linguistics and communication has provided me with an understanding of how language is used to communicate. Language is used differently depending on the context and the purpose (McCarthy, 1991). Linguists have studied different aspects of language and communication, including interactions and language in teaching (Byram, 2002). Humour is a form of interaction—teachers use humour to communicate with students when teaching. I embarked on this study because I was interested in gathering rich information on how teachers construct humour and how students perceive humour as a learning tool.

1.3 Background of this study

Humour is defined as a way of being funny or making people laugh (Lovorn & Holaway, 2015). Humour is also associated with one being silly and not being serious. However, in teaching and learning contexts, humour not only makes students laugh, it also enhances learning. Some benefits of humour highlighted in the literature include psychological benefits

(relieving tension and stress), social benefits (improving teacher–student relationships in the classroom) and instructional benefits (enhancing students' comprehension and subject recall) (Lei, Cohen, & Russler, 2010).

Although scholars who research humour in teaching and learning recognise that humour is valuable, they also acknowledge that it is difficult to understand how humour influences teaching and learning. This is because humour is subjective. People may see different things as to what constitutes humour; something that is humorous to one person may not be humorous to another. Lovorn and Holaway (2015) pointed out that humour is a challenging phenomenon to study, especially in the education context, for three reasons. First, humour is a subjective phenomenon, therefore it is challenging to study. Second, historically, humour has gained limited academic attention due to its subjective nature. Finally, there is a 'humour paradox' in education in which we may express our appreciation of a sense of humour, but demonstrate some unwillingness, and even feel uneasy, in participating in humorous interactions in the classroom.

Although many studies related to humour in teaching and learning have been undertaken (e.g., Berk, 1996; Garner, 2006; Ziyaeemehr, Kumar, & Abdullah, 2011), the focus of this earlier work was predominantly on students' perspectives of humour. Fewer studies have examined teachers' perspectives of humour. This is problematic since teachers are expected to play a vital role in shaping student learning in the classroom. Within the higher education context, a good sense of humour is one of the characteristics of an effective teacher (Harland, 2012). Teachers are highly recommended to use humour while teaching in the classroom (Kember & Kwan, 2002). However, little pedagogical research identifies how to use humour effectively. Ziyaeemehr et al. (2011) reported that the reason some teachers do not incorporate humour is because teachers are not trained to use humour in teaching. Another reason is because some educators may see teaching and learning, especially in higher

education, as a serious matter; therefore, they may consider teaching as something that should be done seriously (Deiter, 2000; Lei et al., 2010).

Moreover, there is a need to explore both teachers' and students' perspectives of humour in order to understand the humorous classroom interactions involving teachers and students. This study differs from previous research into humour as it explores both teachers' and students' perspectives of humour and the connection between what teachers convey in humorous instruction and what students actually receive. Therefore, this study makes an important contribution to the literature on humour in teaching and learning in higher education by providing insights into theoretical and pedagogical practices of humour.

1.4 Aims of this study

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the use of humour in teaching and learning in higher education classrooms. Specifically, I sought to explore:

- teachers' perspectives: how and why do teachers use humour in teaching in the classroom?
- students' perspectives: what are the effects of teachers' use of humour on students' learning process in the classroom?
- teachers' and students' perspectives: what are the students' and teachers' perceptions of the use of humour in teaching and learning?

I approached this study from an interpretive perspective, which acknowledges that people demonstrate their subjective interpretations of the world around them (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013). In line with this perspective, I sought to understand the 'meaning' and 'use' of humour that award-winning teachers conveyed and practiced, and how their students perceived the teachers' use of humour. This is explained in greater detail in subsequent chapters. Theoretically, I drew on instructional humour processing theory (IHPT) and

emotional intelligence (EI) to understand the connections between humour, teaching and learning in my research data. I also drew on theoretical ideas of humour such as superiority, incongruity and relief, to understand how humour was interpreted at cognitive, emotional and social levels. This theoretical framework is explained in depth in Chapter Two.

To explore the use of humour in teaching and learning, I used thematic analysis, which is explained in greater detail in Chapter Three. In general, this study employed a qualitative approach because there is a paucity of in-depth qualitative research exploring teachers' and students' perspectives of humour within the literature in higher education. Additionally, I aimed to provide a more holistic understanding of humour interactions between teachers and students in higher education classrooms.

The study participants included five award-winning teachers and 10 students from the University of Otago. Specifically, I observed and video-recorded a lecture given by each award-winning teacher to understand how these teachers used humour in their teaching, how students responded and the classroom's atmosphere. Then, I conducted a stimulated recall interview (SRI) to understand humour from the teachers' perspectives. I also explored students' perspectives of humour by interviewing students from the teacher participants' classrooms. I investigated teachers' and students' perceptions of humour alongside each other by examining the similarities and differences in teachers' and students' perceptions on what constitutes appropriate (or inappropriate) and relevant (or irrelevant) humour according to instructional humour processing theory (IHPT). My findings are explained in depth in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

1.5 Definition of terms

Several key terms used throughout this thesis require explanation. As an interpretivist, I acknowledge the difficulty in defining terms that describe a subjective phenomenon. However, it is important to provide an explanation of how I have used the terms 'humour', 'humorous interaction', 'higher education', 'teacher', 'lecture', 'lecture classroom', 'lecture content' and 'learning process in classroom'.

1.5.1 Humour

In this study, humour was defined as an act (communication and/or behaviour) practised by a teacher that makes students laugh during the teaching and learning session in the classroom. Humorous instances were classified as intended or spontaneous and based on my assessment (as the researcher on this study) of verbal and non-verbal cues (Mullany, 2004). The term 'humour' is explained in greater detail in Chapter Two.

1.5.2 Humorous interaction

For the purposes of this study, I adopted a well-known model of communication developed by Shannon and Weaver (1998) to understand humorous interactions between a teacher and students in the classroom. I viewed humorous interactions as a form of communication between a sender and a receiver. In this study, the teacher was the sender who encoded a humorous message and the students received the humorous message or instruction. I consider laughter from the students to be a response to teachers' humorous instruction. Thus, when humorous moments occurred between a teacher and students in the classroom, I considered them as humorous interactions.

1.5.3 Higher education

In this thesis, higher education refers to all universities, colleges and institutions that offer post-secondary education (tertiary education) (Campbell & Carayannis, 2012). This study focused on the use of humour in the university context, specifically in undergraduate teaching and learning. However, the literature reviewed (see Chapter Two) encompasses humour in teaching and learning in higher education, which comprises universities, colleges and other tertiary institutions.

1.5.4 Teacher

Teacher is a term that is used throughout this thesis to refer to a lecturer who is teaching at a university. Lewis (1993) noted that the term 'teacher' is used in the British higher education context and 'professor' is used in the United States higher education context. For the purposes of this study, 'teacher' refers to the professor or lecturer who is teaching at a higher education institution.

1.5.5 Lecture, lecture classroom and lecture content

In this study, I use the term 'lecture' to refer to teaching that presents information about a particular subject to higher education students (Bligh, 1998). The lectures that I observed were held in large "steeply terrace lecture theatre[s] where high-backed chairs are fixed tightly together in rows" (Bligh, 1998, p. 261) and were able to accommodate 100 to 250 students. The lectures lasted for one or two hours. The information presented by the teacher in the lecture is considered as 'lecture content' and was provided in an interactive manner.

1.5.6 Learning process in the classroom

I also consider the 'learning process in the classroom'. Throughout this thesis, I use this term to refer to ways that students actively engage for deeper and richer learning outcomes while learning during the lectures, as suggested by Zepke and Leach (2010).

1.6 Overview of the study

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Following this introductory chapter, in Chapter Two, I review the literature on humour and humour in teaching and learning in higher education contexts. I divided that chapter into two sections. The first section reviews the literature that explores general understanding of humour including definitions of humour, the history of humour and the theoretical ideas about humour that I draw on in this study. The second section explores the importance of considering humour from teachers' and students' perspectives. Following this, I review past studies on humour in higher education classrooms such as the types, functions, and effects of humour including the appropriateness and relevance of humour.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the research methodology. Specifically, I explain how an interpretive perspective shaped my research design and describe my approach to qualitative research. Then, I introduce the research context of my study, and the teacher and student participants. I then explain how I gathered data. Specifically, I collected the data through three stages: classroom observations, one-on-one interviews with students and stimulated recall interviews (SRI) with teachers. I then illustrate how the data were analysed before explaining how I ensured trustworthiness and attended to the ethical considerations inherent in this project.

In Chapters Four, Five and Six, I present the findings of this study. Chapter Four focuses on the 'sender's' perspective, that is, the teachers' perspectives of humour. I argue that a focus on teachers' perspectives is important to understand the teachers' intentions in using humour and their practice of using humour in higher education teaching. I also present key findings from an analysis of classroom observations and SRIs with teachers. These include findings on the types of humour used by the teachers in the classroom, how teachers used humour and why they used humour while teaching.

Chapter Five focuses on the 'receiver's' perspectives, that is, the students' perspectives of humour. This chapter discusses how teachers' use of humour affected students' learning processes in the classroom. I note how teachers' use of humour contributed to student learning and to other aspects of students' classroom experiences. I also identify the effects of humour that emerged from discussions with students and I explain in detail how humour affects students' learning in the classroom.

Chapter Six focuses on both students' and teachers' perspectives of humour. I argue that the similarities and differences in perceptions of humour determined the effectiveness of humour used in the classroom. I emphasise what constitutes appropriate (or inappropriate) humour and relevant (or irrelevant) humour in the classroom, comparing students' and teachers' perceptions in this regard. I explain in detail the similar and different perceptions.

Finally, Chapter Seven includes the discussion and conclusion. First, I provide an overview of this thesis considering how the key findings in Chapters Four, Five and Six answer my research questions. Then, I consider the limitations of this study before discussing the contributions that this study makes to existing literature, theoretically, methodologically and pedagogically. Following that, I suggest possible areas for further research into humour in higher education classrooms. I conclude this chapter with some personal reflections on the process of conducting this research.

1.7 Summary of this chapter

This chapter has introduced this study into the use of humour in teaching and learning in higher education classrooms. I have explained my interest in conducting this research, described the background context, and provided an explanation of why this research is important. Further, I have explained some key terms used throughout this study. Finally, I have provided an overview of how this thesis is organised. The next chapter will discuss in detail the literature of humour in teaching and learning and the overall argument of this thesis.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

If students do not get the joke, then probably either I have told a bad joke or students are not getting the underlying points and they want to know the underlying points. Students want to know why it is funny so they want to learn about the material that is underlying it that caused the joke.

Alejandro, Award-winning teacher

2.1 Introduction

Humour is subjective (Lovorn & Holaway, 2015; Meyer, 2000), which is why it is researched within a context specific discourse. In this study, I aim to understand how humour is incorporated into higher education classrooms. To do this, an overview of the general literature on humour and the use of humour in teaching and learning in higher education is essential. I begin this chapter by providing a historical overview of the term, dictionary definitions of its meaning and scholars' standpoints on humour. I draw on all these perspectives to define humour as used in this study. Then, I present three theories of humour, the superiority, incongruity and relief theories, to explain how humour is interpreted and functions in society. I also discuss literature on other theories relating to humour and its role in the classroom context, such as instructional humour processing theory (IHPT) and emotional intelligence (EI) theory, to further consider how humour is incorporated in the classroom. Following this, I discuss the rationale for this study, that is, the importance of research on teachers' and students' perspectives of humour. Following this, I reviewed past research on humour, including the types of humour, the functions and the effects of humour and its relation to teaching and learning specifically at the university level. I link this literature to my own study on how humour is used in the teaching and learning process, and how teachers and students perceive humour use in the higher education classroom.

Section I: A general understanding of humour

2.2   Origins of humour

Researchers generally agree that humour is the ability to create amusement or provoke laughter (Berk, 2003). The term humour is derived from the Latin word "humorem" or "humor" and refers to fluid, liquid or moisture (Kercher, 2000; Martin, 2010; McGhee, 1979). Physicians and medical practitioners in ancient and medieval times (fourth-second century B.C.) believed that the human body encompassed four fluids (humours): blood, black bile, yellow bile and phlegm (Kercher, 2000). It was thought that a person's moods were controlled by the four fluids present: a proper balance was believed to be good humour and an imbalance of the fluids produced temperaments (Martin, 2010). Martin (2010) further noted that a "humourist" was considered to be a person who had an excess of these fluids, and the cure for changing temperament caused by extreme humour was laughter. The word humour has since evolved to refer to an individual's mood, temperament or characteristic.

The French used the word "humeur" in the sixteenth century (Ruch, 1998). The term is defined as a bizarre or unusual quality possessed by a person. This connotation was perhaps derived from the concept of humour as an individual's mood or characteristics, which then evolved to mean an odd or strange personality. Humour was used to refer to the individual who had a peculiar character or became the subject of laughter (Ruch, 1998). Ultimately, the term shifted from referring to an emotional perspective to referring to a person who creates or provokes laughter (Ruch, 1998).

Both of these historical perspectives of humour help us to understand how the definition of humour has evolved. This raises an important question – how do we define humour in relation to interaction and in the educational setting? It is suggested that how humour is shaped in the mind, and how it is used in social interaction and managed for evoking laughter demand a far more intricate understanding than just simply making people laugh (Polimeni & Reiss, 2006). In the next section the meaning of humour is explained.

2.3   Definitions of humour

There are approximately 500 definitions, conceptions, notions or interpretations of humour and laughter (Berk, 2003). Numerous elements are taken into consideration when defining humour including the things that people use to make others laugh, such as jokes, funny anecdotes, funny comments and puns (Ruch, 1998). Other elements taken into consideration when defining humour include character, trait, individual speciality and the ability to understand and appreciate humour (Ruch, 1998).

Table 1 presents some dictionary definitions of humour.

Definitions of Humour from Online Dictionaries

Dictionary	Definition of humour
Dictionary.com (http://www.dictionary.com/browse/humour?s=t)	• The quality of being funny • It is called a sense of humour - the ability to appreciate or express, that which is humorous • A comic, absurd or incongruous quality causing amusement • The faculty of perceiving what is amusing or comical • An instance of being or attempting to be comical or amusing
Oxford dictionary (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/humour)	• The quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in the literature or in speech • The ability to express humour or amuse other people • A mood or state of mind
Merriam-Webster (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/humor)	• A funny or amusing quality • Jokes, funny stories, etc., of a particular kind • The ability to be funny or amused by things that are funny
Cambridge dictionary (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/humour)	• The ability to find things funny, the way in which people see that some things are funny, or the quality of being funny
Collins dictionary (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/humour)	• The quality of being funny • Having a sense of humour - the ability to appreciate or express that which is humorous • A state of mind, temper or mood

These definitions also utilise words like *funny, amusing* and *jokes* when defining humour. These words suggest a general agreement that humour entails laughter and amusement.

There are some similarities and differences in researchers' definitions of humour. For example, Wanzer, Frymier, Wojtaszczyk, and Smith (2006) define humour as "anything that the teacher and/or students find funny or amusing" (p.182). However, some researchers have defined humour differently. Cook (2000) defines humour as language play, which refers to playing with both language form and meaning to create humorous effects for its recipients. This definition of humour, however, is general and could be used in a non-classroom context. Another definition has been tendered by Lomax and Moosavi (2002) who noted that "humour is a pedagogical method that can be used for engaging students … and for fostering concept development" (p.13). In a similar vein, Crawford (1994) asserts that humour "consists of nonverbal and verbal communications which produce a positive cognitive or affective response from listeners" (p.54).

Humour has also been defined as a form of communication of multiple, incongruous meanings that are amusing (Martin, 2010). Fundamental aspects of humour are that it is non-serious, it incorporates both verbal and non-verbal communication, and that it provokes a positive response in the form of laughter. Other scholars further address another important aspect of this definition, that is, the intention or the purpose of humour. For example, Mullany (2004) encapsulates these conceptions when saying that humour is not only context dependent but also multi-functional. A definition of humour that grasps the notion proposed by Mullany (2004, p.21) is:

> Humour is defined as instances where participant(s) signal amusement to one another, based on the analyst's assessment of paralinguistics, prosodic and discoursal clues. These instances can be classified as either successful or unsuccessful according to addressees' reactions. Humour can be a result of either intentional or unintentional humorous behaviour from participants.

This definition of humour incorporates the general meaning of humour, including the kinds of humour that are unplanned, unsuccessful and hostile (or used to put down people). Moreover, the definition highlights the significance of reactions and responses to humour. In the context of teaching and learning in higher education, I find this definition useful, as it pinpoints that humour is used not only to make people laugh but also suitable to explain the dynamic of humour use in the classroom.

Taking all these definitions into consideration, humour in this study, is used to refer to teacher-initiated incidences that kindle laughter in the classroom. As this study is an exploration of how teachers use humour in the classroom, only teacher-initiated attempts at humour are considered. A key indicator of humour for this study is laughter. Laughter can be achieved by means of jokes, riddles, puns, funny stories, visual humour or even physical humour (Bryant, Comisky, Crane, & Zillmann, 1980). Laughter, either by the teacher or the students, is considered an episode of humour.

In view of what has been said so far, what constitutes humour in the university classroom may be far more complex than might be at first thought. This is because successful humour is not only what and how teachers execute humour, but also what counts as humorous and instructional from students' perspectives. In the next section, I discuss some theories of humour, which allow me to conceptualise humour in relation to teaching and learning.

2.4 Theories of humour – the foundation of humour and laughter: three theories

Three major theories are useful for understanding humour and functions of humour. All three theories address why some interactions are considered humorous and relevant to the teaching and learning environment. These are three seminal theories on humour: superiority, incongruity and relief theories (Meyer, 2000).

2.4.1 The superiority theory

The superiority theory explains humour as an act of making fun and/or laughing at someone's flaws or misfortunes (Zillmann, 1983). From this perspective, jokes typically have a winner (the joke-teller) and a loser (the victim of the joke) (Gruner, 2000). The winner feels some sort of triumph over the victim or superiority to them. The word superiority, in this context, refers to disparaging, belittling or degrading someone in a humorous way. Someone is considered humorous when they make fun of and/or laugh at another's weakness, incompetence and failure. The act of making fun of or laughing at someone's silliness or recklessness happens when we feel that we are well behaved or more intelligent and successful compared to that person. This theory also deals with humour at the social-behavioural level, explaining humour as a means used to ridicule and shame specific inferiors. From a superiority perspective, laughter seems to be a means of expressing power and superiority when it is directed against the shortcomings, failings or inadequacies of other people. It has been suggested that laughing at inappropriate behaviour can reinforce unity among group members as a feeling of superiority over those being ridiculed and can coexist with a feeling of belonging (Duncan, 1982).

Within the teaching and learning environment, superiority theory is relevant due to the hierarchical nature of the classroom setting. The teacher can make fun of the students for a number of reasons (for example, the inability to answer a question or to reprimand behaviour) but it is certainly not appropriate for the student to reciprocate by making fun of the teacher. Wanzer et al. (2006) found that students dislike it when teachers make fun of their appearance, intelligence, personal life, opinion, interests and religion. A denigrating statement made by the teacher about students might be humorous, but most probably will not evoke laughter.

However, superiority theory does not fully explain humour use in general or in the classroom in particular. Not all humour evokes feelings of superiority. For example, playing peekaboo with a child does not evoke a sense of superiority. Someone accidentally walking right into a glass door may evoke laughter but the event certainly does not entail any notion of superiority. In other words, the act of laughing at someone's shortcoming is not always the reason why people laugh (Morreall, 1982). People laugh for other reasons as well. Incongruity theory provides an alternative explanation for humour and humour use.

2.4.2 The incongruity theory

The incongruity theory posits that "people laugh at things that surprise them or at things that violate an accepted pattern of thinking" (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009, p. 352). In other words, people perceive something as humorous if it is considered absurdly out of place or it violates their expectations. Being surprised is the key element of humour in this theory. For example, if a sports athlete stumbles as he/she is receiving a medal, this situation may be perceived as humorous because the stumbling is not something that people predict will happen. This humorous incident violates the normal order of things and the prediction that people would make; thus it evokes laughter. 'Incongruity' describes a mismatch, illogical, contradictory, surprising, different, ridiculous or unpredictable event (Martin, 2010). In other words, an event or communication may be humorous when the mind can detect the presence of incongruity. In terms of the educational setting, this theory can explain humorous incidents as occurring when teachers create incongruous scenarios in the classroom. The element of surprise may gain students' attention and be experienced by them as funny.

However, incongruity theory also has its weakness, as it is not sufficiently comprehensive to cover all types of humour. Although it is clearly delineated that "the humorous may be the incongruous" (Clark, 1970, p. 21), not all incongruous events are humorous. For example, planning to go to bed in order to sleep and finding a snake under the

blanket will not evoke laughter. This situation may invoke surprise and a sense of contradiction between what the mind predicted and what actually happened, but it is very unlikely that it will trigger laughter.

In view of the existence of non-humorous events, incongruity theory has been further developed to include a more refined elaboration of how humour is construed in the mind. This theory is known as incongruity-resolution theory (Shultz, 1976). The incongruity-resolution theory explains how incongruity is perceived as humorous. The basis for this theory is that an event is experienced as humorous when incongruity happens in a cheerful and unthreatening context (Martin, 2010), and incongruity is resolved in the mind. Thus, something is funny when it is both recognised as incongruous and interpreted as humorous.

2.4.3 The relief theory

Laughter is often described as a physical reaction to calm oneself from worries or anxious feelings (Lynch, 2002). The relief theory explains that laughter as having a therapeutic quality, or as providing "a safety valve to release pent-up tensions" (Nesi, 2012, p. 80). In other words, according to relief theory, anxiety, nervousness and stress can be reduced by the act of laughing. When tensions are reduced in an individual, there is a physiological relief. For example, if someone feels fearful by seeing a snake on the bed under the blanket, then upon discovering that the snake is only a fake rubber toy snake, they might break into laughter.

The relief theory provides a different perspective of humour. For example, it explains how a situation or story with suspense at the beginning that ends in a humorous way might make people laugh (Civikly, 1986). In contrast to incongruity theory, which explains humour as occurring in a non-threatening and happy situation, relief theory explains humour and laughter as happening when people feel nervous or scared, but then experience enjoyment

feelings. In the classroom setting, teachers can use humour to defuse tense situations, calm students, reduce anxiety and facilitate interaction. The infusion of humour can create a relaxed environment that is conducive to learning. Garner (2006) found that students are much more relaxed and enjoyed learning a dreaded subject (that they felt daunted to learn at first) when the teacher inserted humour while teaching the dreaded subject.

The superiority, incongruity and relief theories of humour provide a useful understanding of humour and have relevance for the teaching and learning context. A further theory of humour that has a significant link with teaching and learning is the instructional humour processing theory (IHPT) (Wanzer, Frymier, & Irwin, 2010). I turn to this in the following section.

2.5 Theories of humour in teaching and learning

2.5.1 Instructional Humour Processing Theory (IHPT)

IHPT is a theory advanced by Wanzer et al. (2010) by incorporating the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986) and the incongruity theory. IHPT explains how humour used in the classroom can facilitate teaching and enhance students' learning (Banas, Dunbar, Rodriguez, & Liu, 2010). According to IHPT, humour supports instruction if students recognise the presence of humour and interpret it as humour and then process the humour by making the connection between the humour used and the instructional information (Wanzer et al., 2010).

In order to make the connection, students must first perceive the information as humorous and then draw a connection between the humorous information with the lecture content. According to IHPT, students should be able to elaborate the humorous information in order to think more deeply about the information and its connection to the lecture content

(Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986). Wanzer et al. (2010) claimed that students who manage to interpret humour information correctly and make the necessary connections would develop a greater understanding of the lecture content. The successful interpretation is referred to as instructional humour. However, not all humour is perceived in the same way by all students (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2015). Bolkan and Goodboy's study demonstrated that not all students could make the connection between instructional humour and perceived cognitive learning of students at university level.

Furthermore, IHPT highlights two important considerations in relation to instructional humour: relevance and appropriateness (Banas et al., 2010). It suggests that humour can be considered as instructional if it is relevant to the topic or subject that is being taught. For it to be instructional, the humour used has to be linked to the topic, concept, theories, or subject of learning (the lecture content). Similarly, instructional humour must be appropriate when used so that it can contribute positively to the environment of the classroom. If humour is perceived negatively, the humour will not be considered instructional (Banas et al., 2010).

However, only few studies deal with these considerations (relevance and appropriateness) of humour in detail. Specifically on the appropriateness of humour, past studies by Wanzer et al. (2006) and Torok, McMorris, and Lin (2004) conducted surveys to investigate students' perceptions of appropriateness of humour. In their studies, they found that there were types of humour that were classified as inappropriate in the literature (for example, sarcasm) but were perceived as appropriate by students. Wanzer et al. (2006) and Torok et al. (2004) in their studies noted that there are some types of humour that overlap. Their data were limited (because they were collected by a survey) and they could not provide justifications as to why students perceived some inappropriate humour as appropriate.

Although research has been carried out to investigate students' perceptions of the appropriateness of humour, no single study focused on the relevance of humour. There is only

one study by Wanzer et. al (2010) that focused on students' perceptions on both the appropriateness and relevance of humour. In that study, 378 higher education students were asked to complete an online survey and they indicated that they prefer teachers to use humour that is relevant to the learning content. A number of questions still remain: How could some types of inappropriate humour be perceived as appropriate? What are the types of relevant (irrelevant) humour? What do students understand about the concept of 'relevant' and 'appropriate' humour? Do teachers' understandings and perceptions of relevance and appropriateness of humour play an important role?

Notwithstanding the above, results from many studies on the use of humour support the role of relevance and appropriateness in instructional humour. For example, Benjelloun (2009) noted in his study that humour used in teaching and learning has to be appropriate to have a constructive effect on students' learning. Chabeli (2008) and Skinner (2001) pointed out that humour that is not relevant to the classroom might not contribute to student learning. These considerations (relevance and appropriateness) are key elements of IHPT.

Overall, IHPT is useful for understanding the relationship between humour, teaching and learning in the classroom setting. Next, I discuss another theory that relates to the use of humour in teaching and learning, which is emotional intelligence (EI).

2.5.2 Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Past studies have made it clear that instructional humour is associated with students' learning in the classroom such as comprehension and recall (e.g., Banas et al., 2010; Ziyaeemehr et al., 2011). However, because IHPT is new to the literature, it may be useful to explore its predictions with another established theory. In this study, I explore an alternative explanatory mechanism for the effects of humour from the emotional intelligence perspective. Chabeli (2008) asserted that emotional intelligence offers an explanation of the pedagogical aspects of

humour within the teaching and learning process. Carver (2013) noted that emotional intelligence can help us to understand other aspects (rather than comprehension and recall) that humour contributes, such as creating a positive environment in the classroom. Emotional intelligence theory explains an individual's ability to understand his/her emotions, the emotions of others, and the ability to manage these emotions in ways that impact positively on self and others (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999). In the context of the use of humour in the classroom, a teacher's "appropriate use of humour can contribute to the development of emotional intelligence as it creates a relaxed atmosphere where learners feel safe, capable and accepted" (Chabeli, 2008, p. 56).

In my study, emotional intelligence is useful for examining the role of a teacher in using humour as a pedagogical tool for learning in the classroom. According to Saxena and Saxena (2012), the teachers' roles are to:

a. Teach the information or lecture content, and create a positive experience for students by encouraging students to build positive emotions, characteristics and personalities. By incorporating humour in their teaching, teachers can motivate students to come to the class (Deiter, 2000) and help students enjoy learning a course or subject (Garner, 2006).

b. Be role models for students. Teachers have to be aware that their actions and feelings could impact students' perceptions and feelings. The use of positive humour in teaching and learning could positively affect students' perceptions of the teachers and inspire students to have positive emotions and attitudes on the subject they are learning (Huss, 2008; Wrench & Richmond, 2004).

In summary, I argue that teachers' use of humour has the role not only to facilitate student learning in the classroom but also to create positive learning experiences for students by encouraging students to create positive attitudes and emotions towards the teacher and the subject.

Section II: Humour in teaching and learning in higher education

The scholarship of humour in teaching and learning, especially in the higher education setting, has been of interest to many researchers for many years (Powell & Andresen, 1985). Many have acknowledged that it is challenging to carry out focused investigation on humour and its connection with the teaching and learning process in the classroom due to the fact that humour is subjective (Lovorn & Holaway, 2015). One major question that remains is how does humour influence teaching and learning? The answer to this question is multifaceted and context driven. In this section, I discuss past studies conducted on the use of humour in teaching and learning at university level. These studies explored topics such as types of humour, functions of humour and effects of humour pertinent in humour scholarship in teaching and learning. Before I review the analytical and empirical findings related to these topics, it is necessary to discuss the main argument of this chapter in the following section.

2.6 The missing link in the study of humour in teaching and learning

As mentioned earlier in the background of this study in Chapter One, there is a relatively small body of literature on the use of humour in teaching and learning from teachers' perspectives (how teachers view their use of humour in teaching) and the link between

teachers' and students' perspectives. I searched the literature using Google Scholar, Scopus and Science Direct. I used keywords such as "humour", "humour in teaching and learning", "humour in higher education" and "humour and university" while looking for literature in these search engines. I also reviewed empirical research articles and review articles that have been cited by the literature that I found and read. I focused my search on empirical research articles and review articles. I found 45 research articles on the use of humour specifically in higher education classroom context. Nineteen studies were focused on students' perspectives on the use of humour and its contribution towards learning (e.g., Adamson, O'Kane, & Shevlin, 2005; Benjelloun, 2009; Berk, 1996; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2015; Bryant et al., 1980; Chabeli, 2008; Chiarello, 2012; Frymier, Wanzer, & Wojtaszczyk, 2008; Garner, 2006; Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Houser, Cowan, & West, 2007; Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977; Neumann, Hood, & Neumann, 2009; Wanzer et al., 2006; Wanzer et al., 2010; Ziv, 1988; Ziyaeemehr et al., 2011). These studies were mostly focused on the effects of humour on students' learning and their perceptions of their teachers' use of humour. I also found 16 review articles on the use of humour in higher education classroom contexts (Baid & Lambert, 2010; Banas et al., 2010; Bruner, 2002; Civikly, 1986; Deiter, 2000; Kher, Molstad, & Donahue, 1999; Lei et al., 2010; McMorris, Boothroyd, & Pietrangelo, 1997; Mora, Weaver, & Lindo, 2015; Nasiri & Mafakheri, 2015; Powell & Andresen, 1985; Seidman & Brown, 2013; Shibinski & Martin, 2010; Wanzer, 2002; Weaver Ii & Cotrell, 1987). However, I found four research articles that investigated the use of humour from teachers' perspectives or teachers' views on their use of humour in teaching (Downs, Javidi, & Nussbaum, 1988; Lewis, 1993; Menon, Shankar, Kiran, Mathew, & Varghese, 2013; Tait, Lampert, Bahr, & Bennett, 2015). I only found three research articles that explored the use of humour from both teachers' and students' perspectives (Miller, Wilson, Miller, & Enomoto, 2017; Torok et al., 2004; White, 2001). Three research articles focused solely on researchers' interpretation of the use of humour in the classroom (Berge, 2016; Lee, 2006; Nesi, 2012).

This suggests that past studies on humour in teaching and learning in higher education classrooms have been focused mostly on the students' perspectives and are limited in terms of focus on teachers' perspectives and the interaction between teachers and students.

A focus on teachers' perspectives is important in order to understand the complexity of education interactions between teacher and students in higher education classrooms (Pineau, 1994). As noted by Civikly (1986) "as is true of other acts of communication, humour involves many variables: a speaker, an audience, a topic-message, a setting, and feedback" (p. 62). From this, the basic features of humour interaction in the classroom involve a teacher (speaker), students (audience), course or subject (topic), university classroom (setting) and students' evaluation (feedback). To fully understand how humour is incorporated in teaching and learning in higher education, all these features should be taken into account. The literature on the use of humour in teaching and learning has highlighted several pertinent aspects of humour such as the types, functions and effects of humour on students, course or subject, university classroom and students' evaluation. The focus has been heavily skewed to the students' perspectives and has neglected the importance of the teachers and the relationship between teachers' and students' perspectives. For example, in a study by Ziyaeemehr et al. (2011) that investigated the reasons why teachers were reluctant to use humour in their teaching, they considered the students' perspectives, but did not include the teachers' viewpoints. Yet, it was the teachers who were responsible for delivering lectures and they were the ones who decided to use or not to use humour.

Teachers play an important role in enhancing student learning (Johnston, 1996). Some challenges that teachers face are in finding ways to get students' attention and to engage students with the materials while learning in the classroom (Makewa, Role, & Genga, 2011; Tait et al., 2015). The use of humour has been shown to help teachers gain students' attention and engage them with the materials, help them in their learning and create a good classroom environment for them to learn (Banas et al., 2010; Benjelloun, 2009; Garner, 2006; Lei et al.,

2010; Nesi, 2012; Torok et al., 2004). However, using humour in teaching may be difficult since lecture content is not funny information. The information is core to the subject and important to be learnt. Teachers' presentation skills can make the lecture content more interesting for students (Kember & McNaught, 2007). Kember and McNaught (2007) further noted that humour is useful in this regard. However, the outcomes of humour use depend on how teachers deliver humour (Bruner, 2002).

Some research on humour in school and kindergarten contexts has considered teachers' perspectives on their use of humour. For example, a study by Neuliep (1991) asked 388 high school teachers to explain their uses of humour and its effect in the classroom. The findings from that study indicated that the reasons teachers wanted to use humour in their teaching were that humour helps teachers to maintain and increase student interest in the subject, and it makes teachers seem approachable and likeable. Another study by Lovorn and Holaway (2015) investigated kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the use of humour in teaching. Thirty-one teachers were questioned on their perceptions of humour in their teaching, interaction, and management strategies. Although the teachers could describe examples of their use of humour, only a few of them perceived humour as an intended teaching strategy. Further, most of the teachers spontaneously incorporated humour while teaching in the classroom rather than using it in a planned way.

One might assume that a study on humour and pedagogy at the higher education level would draw on the teachers' perspectives or both teachers' and students' perspectives. Higher education research to date has focused largely on students' perspectives of teachers' use of humour. As an example, a study by Berk (1996) explored ten systematic strategies of humour that teachers could include in their teaching. The strategies used for a semester were: a) humorous material on syllabi; b) descriptors, cautions and warning on the cover of handouts; c) opening jokes, d) skits/dramatizations; e) spontaneous humour; f) humorous questions; g) humorous examples; h) humorous problem sets; i) jeopardy!-type reviews and

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exams based on simple humour formulae; and j) humorous material in exams. At the end of the course, students were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of these ten aspects of humour. Although this study managed to generate positive responses from students, Berk overlooked the fact that teachers played an important role in contributing to the effectiveness of the humour. Without the active facilitation by the teacher, some of these strategies would not have been effective. However, the teachers' or the senders' perspectives, were not taken into consideration.

Other studies on pedagogical aspects of humour have centred on the effects of using humour in the classroom, and have outlined general strategies or guidelines for teachers to follow. Studies by Benjelloun (2009), Chabeli (2008), Deiter (2000) and Garner (2006) highlighted the positive and negative effects of humour from students' perspectives. For example, Garner (2006) asserted that humour should be incorporated in the teaching and learning process, especially in "dreaded courses" such as statistics, and strongly encouraged teachers to use humour to enhance student learning. Garner stated, "unfortunately, some educators believe their role or their topic is too serious to engage humour or view humour as merely a disruption" (p. 179). Yet, no attempt has been made to explore the reasons why some teachers avoid using humour.

All the studies mentioned so far present research that focuses on students' perspectives on the use of humour in a higher education context. Two questions that remain unanswered or unclear are how and why teachers use humour from their own perspectives. The teachers' perspectives are important because "the teaching profession does not have enough knowledge about what constitutes effective teaching, and teachers do not have the means of successfully sharing such knowledge with one another" (Stigler & Hiebert, 2009, p. 12). Humour has been recognised to be an effective teaching tool (Civikly, 1986) and yet little research has investigated the teachers' willingness or reluctance to use humour in the classroom.

Some recent research has considered the teachers' perspectives and investigated the use of humour in shaping teaching personas. For example, Tait et al. (2015) conducted a study using a survey followed by an in-depth interview of teachers at university level regarding their use of humour. Tait et al. (2015) reported that humour assists in shaping a contemporary concept of education known as "edutainment" and, subsequently, shaping teaching personas. Edutainment is described as a combination of education and entertainment. Tait et al. (2015) explored whether all teachers can incorporate humour in their teaching effectively. They found that humour could only be successfully executed if teachers chose to use humour to help them shape their teaching persona.

Despite the paucity of research considering the link between students' and teachers' perspectives on humour, some studies demonstrate the importance of combining perceptions from teachers and students. For example, a study by Torok et al. (2004) explored both teachers and students' perceptions of numerous types of humour used in college classrooms. Teachers' and students' perspectives revealed a consensus on the types that were considered appropriate and inappropriate for use in the classroom. (The types of humour are discussed in the following section). Both teachers and students identified similar types of humour as successfully facilitating teaching and learning.

Another study, by White (2001), focused on the functions and effects of humour in higher education classrooms. Data were gathered via two sets of surveys, one mailed to 365 teachers in 14 universities and the other mailed to 200 students from 65 different universities. The survey data revealed some similarities between teachers and students in identifying the functions of humour, such as to relieve stress, gain attention and create a lively classroom environment. One area of disagreement was that students perceived teachers as using humour to handle unpleasant situations, but teachers rated this aspect very low. Most students perceived the reason why teachers used humour was when the teacher was caught up in an unpleasant situation and wanted to mitigate the situation. Teachers, on the other hand, noted

that handling unpleasant situations in the classroom was not the main reason they used humour. From this study, it seemed that there may be discrepancies between teachers' intentions and how they view their use of humour, and what the students actually perceive.

The studies reviewed here seem to suggest that the literature on humour use in higher education has relied heavily on the students' perspective. However, it is important to explore the teachers' and/or both teachers' and students' perspectives on the use of humour in the classroom in order to understand the connections between the teachers use of humour and the student learning, and to identify what teachers can do to increase their effectiveness in teaching at higher education level.

In the next section, I discuss past research on the use of humour in the teaching and learning process. Specifically, I highlight research relating to types of humour and the implications of these for the classroom.

2.7 Types of humour

The types of humour teachers use may determine the perceived appropriateness of their use of humour in a classroom context (Frymier et al., 2008; Wanzer et al., 2006). In this section, I consider the question of what types of humour are considered appropriate and inappropriate in the classroom context.

Research on the types of humour in classrooms classifies humour based on its function and form (Banas et al., 2010). In terms of the function, the simplest functional taxonomy classifies humour as positive or negative (Banas et al., 2010). Humour deemed suitable to be used in the classroom is normally seen as positive and the types that teachers should avoid are the negative humour (Wanzer et al., 2006). In a study that explore the types of humour, Torok et al. (2004) grouped the types of humour they found into positive humour (for example, funny stories, funny comments, jokes, professional humour, puns, cartoons and riddles) and

negative humour (for example, sarcasm, sexual, ethnic and aggressive or hostile uses of humour). Interestingly, the students from Torok et al.'s (2004) study noted that sarcasm is considered appropriate to use in teaching and learning although it is a negative type of humour. Yet, Torok et al.'s (2004) study did not ask students why they perceived sarcasm to be appropriate.

The classification of humour into positive and negative uses is similar to the categorisation into appropriate and inappropriate uses found in a study by Wanzer et al. (2006) on students' opinions regarding the types of humour used by their teachers. Positive humour is generally considered appropriate for use in the classroom and negative types of humour are generally considered inappropriate. Wanzer et al. (2006) used inductive analytic techniques to group types of humour used by teachers into appropriate and inappropriate categories. They categorised 712 examples of humour generated by students into eight broad types (four appropriate and four inappropriate) with 51 subtypes of humour (see Table 2). From the findings, similar to Torok et al.'s (2004) study, Wanzer et al. (2006) identified some overlap between appropriate and inappropriate types of humour. The overlapping was depicted in humour targeted at students where the humour was described as teasing. Teasing was regarded as appropriate, but when teasing focused on student's intelligence, appearance or gender, the students regarded it as highly inappropriate. However, students were not asked to elaborate on their perceptions of appropriateness, that is, why some felt certain types of humour were appropriate and other's not. In depth attention to students' perspectives is needed for teachers to be confident in using humour in the classroom. The types of humour identified by Wanzer et al. (2006) are outlined in Table 2.

Types of Humour by Wanzer et al. (2006)

Appropriate:	Inappropriate:
Humour related to material/lecture content: A teacher uses humorous examples, humorous media or external object (funny experiment), jokes, humorous performance, humorous role play and activities, humorous creative language (puns), and humorous stories that are related to the lecture content. **Humour unrelated to lecture content:** A teacher uses humorous stories, jokes, humorous performance, humorous creative language, humorous media or external objects that are not related to lecture content. **Self-disparaging humour** A teacher's attempts to make fun of himself/herself, make fun of his/her personal characteristics, tell personal embarrassing stories, and/or make fun of his/her own abilities or mistakes. **Unintentional or unplanned humour** Unintentional humour where the teacher spontaneously incorporates humour.	**Offensive humour:** A teacher's use of sexual jokes or comments, vulgar verbal and nonverbal expressions, morbid humour, sarcasm, reference to drugs and illegal activities in humorous ways. **Disparaging humour: student target** • *Students as a group* A teacher's use of humour that is general to all students based on students' intellectual capabilities, gender, or appearance. • *One student singled out* A teacher's use of humour that focuses on one student based on the student's intellectual capabilities, personal life, opinions, interests, appearance, gender, or religion. **Disparaging humour: 'other' target** A teacher's use of humour targeted at individuals or groups other than students. The teacher uses humorous stereotypes in general and not related to lecture content, makes fun of gender, a particular racial or ethnic group, or of other teachers. *Cont'd*

	Self-disparaging humour
	A teacher's use of humour involving criticising, making fun of or belittling himself/herself.

Adapted from Wanzer et al. (2006, pp. 188 and 191)

Another type of humour classification by function is evident in studies by Frymier et al. (2008) and Nesi (2012). These researchers used inductive analytic analysis to classify types of humour by its function. Frymier et al. (2008) expanded Wanzer et al.'s (2006) typology of appropriate and inappropriate humour. Frymier et al. (2008) grouped ten students' response on 41 subtypes of humour in five dimensions or types of humour namely: other-disparaging, related, unrelated, offensive and self-disparaging humour. The students also elaborated on the reasons why some of the types were considered to be both appropriate and inappropriate. The reasons were due to lack of consistency in students' perceptions about the appropriateness of humour, and students' reactions towards the humour used. However, Frymier et al. (2008) reported such inconsistencies based on their own interpretation and not from students' and/or teachers' comments.

Nesi (2012) categorised humour into six broad types: lecturer-student teasing, lecturer error, lecturer self-deprecation, black humour, disparagement of out-group members, and register and wordplay. Although Nesi (2012) classified types of humour by function, she did not take into account the aspect of appropriateness. Types of humour such as black humour and disparagement of out-group members may be inappropriate for the classroom, but Nesi (2012) identified them as performing particular functions, such as maintaining social order, building rapport, and releasing tension. Yet again, the findings were based on the researcher's interpretation as the data were collected from the British Academic Spoken English (BASE) corpus. BASE corpus is a collection of written text, audio- and video-recorded lectures and

seminars at the University of Warwick and University of Reading. The types of humour identified by Frymier et al. (2008) and Nesi (2012) are summarised in Table 3.

Types of Humour Identified by Frymier et al. (2008) and Nesi (2012)

Study by:	Types of humour:
Frymier et al. (2008)	**Other-disparaging** A teacher's act of teasing, telling jokes or making humorous comments that target specific racial, ethnic, religious groups or based on students' intelligence and stereotypes. **Related** A teacher's use of humour that is related to lecture content. Humour used such as jokes, funny story, funny performance or acts, role-play, funny and creative ways of using language with the intention to relate to or illustrate concept or examples. **Unrelated** A teacher's use of humour that is not related to lecture content. Humour used such as stories, jokes, critical, cynical or sarcastic humour about general topics that are not related to the lecture content. **Offensive** A teacher's use of vulgar language or nonverbal behaviour, making references to drinking or getting drunk, and talking about drugs or illegal activities in humorous ways. **Self-disparaging** A teacher's use of humour by making fun of or telling embarrassing

	stories about him/herself.
Nesi (2012)	**Lecturer-student teasing** **Lecturer error** **Lecturer self-deprecation** **Black humour** **Disparagement of out-group members** **Register and word play**

Adapted from Frymier et al. (2008, p. 277) and Nesi (2012, p. 85)

General forms of classification have also been used to categorise the types of humour used in higher education classrooms. Lewis (1993) investigated the teaching style of award-winning teachers and acknowledged that being humorous was a characteristic of each teacher's teaching approach. Among the categories were: a) planned related humour; b) spontaneous related humour; c) planned unrelated humour; and d) spontaneous unrelated humour. According to Lewis (1993), related humour is humour that links to the objective of teaching and learning or the lecture content (for example, cartoons and long jokes). Unrelated humour, on the other hand, is humour that is not related to the course subject but is still used in the classroom (for example, witty remarks based on comments and a messed-up experiment in a chemistry class). Other general forms of humour that teachers used in the classroom were quotes, cartoons, multiple-choice items, top ten lists, current event items, definitions, professor responses, asking simple questions, self-effacing comments and humorous written comments (Deiter, 2000). Lewis's (1993) and Deiter's (2000) studies identified the types of humour used by teachers from the teachers' perspectives; students' perceptions of the effects of these types of humour on their learning were not explored.

In short, there are many ways of classifying types of humour. The various classifications indicate that some types of humour are seen by teachers, students and researchers as being appropriate or inappropriate in higher education teaching and learning context. However, such classifications are not clear-cut, since humour occurs in specific contexts, and each student and teacher may perceive it differently. In the next section, I explain, from existing literature, why teachers use humour and the functions of humour used in higher education classrooms.

2.8   Functions of humour

Humour serves various context-dependent communicative functions beyond amusement and laughter (Berge, 2016; Meyer, 2000). Banas et al. (2010) argue that within the education context, humour assists students to learn by providing a social context and acting as a coping mechanism.

The first function of humour is the social function. Humour helps to build and maintain good relationships between teachers and students – it provides an enjoyable social context (Nesi, 2012). The acts of teacher-student teasing in the classroom and teacher self-deprecating humour help to make students feel that the teacher is approachable and friendly (Nesi, 2012). Nesi noted that rapport between a teacher and students contributes to a positive learning environment in the classroom. However, Nesi's study relied on the researcher's interpretation, rather than close attention to teachers' and students' perspectives in relation to humour use.

Creation of group cohesion through shared laughter is another social function of humour (Greatbatch & Clark, 2003). Shared laughter is important as it indicates that people understand each other because they share the same values and norms in a shared community (Greatbatch & Clark, 2003). In other words, humour creates a sense of belonging and unites people as they share laughter. Specifically in a higher education context, this function of

humour (group cohesion through shared laughter) has been proven effective. A recent study by Berge (2016) explored undergraduate physics students' laughter during group work. Berge found that physics-related humour was used by the students not only to facilitate their social interaction but also to establish and engage in the community of practice. Yet, Berge's study relied on the researchers' interpretation of the functions of humour, rather than exploring students' perceptions.

Humour also helps to maintain a teacher's good reputation (Lee, 2006). In teaching and learning in higher education, there is a need to be critical in voicing opinions or criticising people's work. Humour assists in mitigating negative feelings caused by receiving criticism, especially when teachers use it. In spoken academic discourse, people use some types of humour such as sarcasm, wit, comparison or references to contemporary events to critique (in an acceptable manner) (Lee, 2006). Humorous criticisms may soften the impact of negative perception of the criticism, which is viewed as an inappropriate act in the academic environment and help maintain a teacher's good influence on students. Lee suggested that using humour is an alternative way for teachers to voice their criticism in a harmless manner while maintaining their good reputation as a teacher. But Lee's study was drawn from a collection of transcripts from academic speech events recorded at the University of Michigan namely, the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE). This study did incorporate the teachers' and students' perspectives of the functions of humour.

A second way that humour functions is as a coping mechanism. Humour facilitates students' learning by fostering a positive attitude and emotion towards a subject (Garner, 2006). Often, a tough subject or topic can make students feel daunted and anxious. However, arguably, individuals who view the amusing sides of stress are more adept at coping with stress (Bellert, 1989). Through the use of humour, teachers are able to facilitate teaching and learning by supporting students' comprehension about a topic and enabling students to remember what they have learnt (Lee, 2006; Shibinski & Martin, 2010). At the same time, the

use of humour can be one of the factors that motivate students to attend classes (Deiter, 2000). Students may feel relaxed and less intimidated either by the subject or the teacher. An anxiety-provoking classroom environment can turn out to be fun and enjoyable with the use of humour. The coping-mechanism function of humour contributes positively to a favourable learning environment. This function of humour has been supported by the findings from both teachers' and students' perspectives (e.g., Deiter, 2000; Garner, 2006).

Overall, humour is used beyond amusement and laughter within teaching and learning contexts. It is used to facilitate student learning and can be used for social purposes to build rapport, create group cohesion, and hold students' attention. Humour can also be used as a coping mechanism to mitigate negative feelings associated with criticism, create positive attitudes and emotions amongst students, and motivate students to attend classes. However, the studies reviewed in this section were based mostly on researchers' interpretations of recorded data. Attention to teachers' perspectives on humour use is crucial since they are the ones who use humour to facilitate students' learning. Besides facilitating student learning, humour also affects students' learning outcomes. In the next section, I describe the benefits and drawbacks of humour in the teaching and learning process.

2.9   Effects of humour in the higher education classroom

Alongside types and functions of humour, the scholarship of humour has investigated the effects of humour in teaching and learning. As functions of humour focused why teachers used humour (although it is not necessarily from the teachers' perspectives), effects of humour focus on the impacts of humour on students. Previous studies have confirmed that humour is beneficial when used in the classroom context. However, humour has its dark side too. In the following section, I present past research that examined the effects of humour in

relation to student learning, the classroom environment, teacher credibility and inappropriate use of humour from both the teachers' and students' perspectives.

2.9.1 Student learning

Research has shown that humour helps students in their process of learning, specifically in gaining and retaining students' attention and understanding and recalling lecture content. A positive effect of humour in the classroom is that it assists teachers to gain and retain students' attention and helps students enhance their learning (Benjelloun, 2009; Garner, 2006; Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977; Tait et al., 2015; Ziv, 1988; Ziyaeemehr et al., 2011). In an empirical study which set out to investigate the use of humour in the university classroom, Benjelloun (2009) gave 101 undergraduate accounting and finance students survey questions for the purpose of rating the use of humour by their teachers. Benjelloun (2009) found that the students preferred the teachers to use instructional humour as it helped students to pay attention in the class. Instructional humour is the use of humour that is relevant to the lecture content and appropriate to be used in classroom context. Although the students noted positive effects of humour on the survey, this study did not ask students to justify their survey responses. Hence, it could not explain how humour assisted in gaining and retaining students' attention.

Humour used in the classroom setting also supports students in understanding, recalling lecture content and acquiring information. A study by Ziyaeemehr et al. (2011) explored the benefits of humour in Academic English as a Second Language classrooms. In this study, 195 undergraduate and postgraduate students were given open-response questionnaires and asked to provide their views on the benefits of the humour used by their instructors. The students noted that a teacher's instructional humour improved their comprehension, learning and retention of knowledge. The result from this study is consistent with previous research on

humour in teaching and learning (e.g., Garner, 2006; Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Wanzer et al., 2010).

In another study, Kaplan and Pascoe (1977) conducted an experimental study on the effects of humour on students' understanding and recalling of course content. This study was conducted at a public university where 508 undergraduate students were given a test on comprehension and recall, two times. The first test was given shortly after a class and the second test was given six weeks later. The first test made no significant contribution of instructional humour to student learning (comprehension and recall). However, after the second test, the results indicated that instructional humour did contribute to increased student comprehension and recall. While this study provided empirical evidence to support the claim that humour contributes to student learning on comprehension and recall, the findings are now dated.

The effect of humour on information acquisition has also been investigated empirically. Information acquisition in this context is understood to be an act of mastering information that requires the capability to both comprehend and recall. However, the findings in regards to information acquisition have been inconsistent. Ziv's (1988) study examined two groups of students taught the same subject, but one group was taught using instructional humour, while the other group was not. The group of students taught with instructional humour scored higher in their test than the group of students taught without humour. Interestingly, the teachers who participated in the study were given proper training and specific guidelines on how to utilize humour while teaching. Thus, all humour used was instructional humour with the intention to enhance student learning in the classroom.

However, a more recent study by Houser et al. (2007) reached a different conclusion, finding that humour had no effect on student learning. A section of this study aimed to examine the effect of humour on the learning of 329 undergraduate university students. The

students were given five fill-in-the-blank test questions to measure student recall of learning. The findings indicated that humour did not affect student information acquisition. However, the study focused on mediated instruction via CD-ROM (a compact disc used as a read-only optical device for a computer system) and not on face-to-face instruction in the classroom. The study's findings may suggest that the effect of humour on mediated instruction is not significant where there is no face-to-face interaction between students and teacher (Houser et al., 2007). Additionally, it was not specified if the humour used was instructional humour or not.

Considering all the evidence, it is still unclear how humour assists students in their learning. Although past studies have explored the students' perspectives on teachers' use of humour, they have not considered students' view on whether and in what ways humour assists them to learn. Nevertheless, research suggests that humour, or more specifically instructional humour, helps facilitate student learning by gaining and holding students' attention, assisting their understanding and recall, and helping them to acquire information, at least in face-to-face situations. Instructional humour seems to have a beneficial function in the teaching and learning environment compared to non-instructional humour. In the following section, I consider the effects of humour on the classroom environment.

2.9.2 Classroom environment

Apart from enhancing student learning, humour is beneficial in that it contributes to a positive classroom environment for students (Baid & Lambert, 2010; Benjelloun, 2009; Chabeli, 2008; Deiter, 2000; Garner, 2006; Lei et al., 2010; Powell & Andresen, 1985; Shibinski & Martin, 2010; Torok et al., 2004; Ziyaeemehr et al., 2011). It does this by helping students release their tension and anxiety, and helping build rapport between the teacher and students. The effects of humour on students that create a positive emotion, such as relaxing or reducing anxiety and tension, have been proven to contribute to a better classroom environment

(Benjelloun, 2009; Chabeli, 2008; Garner, 2006; Lei et al., 2010). Benjelloun (2009) found that teachers with a good sense of humour would encourage students to attend a class, help them to feel at ease while they were in the class and keep them engaged enough to be in the class. Benjelloun (2009) also highlighted that the humour must be appropriate for use in the classroom context in order to have these positive effects.

Humour also helps students to release anxiety when learning subjects they dread. A study conducted by Garner (2006) determined that instructional humour has effects on student evaluations of the subject and the teacher. The subjects chosen for this study, such as research methods and statistics, were indicated as dreaded by students. Garner (2006) found that students enjoyed the subjects better with humour inserted into the process of teaching and learning. The implication of the study is that teachers should consider humour as one way of teaching difficult or dreaded subjects because students would otherwise be anxious and demotivated to learn the subjects. Thus, it is important for teachers to create an enjoyable classroom environment for students especially when students perceive the subject to be a dreaded subject.

Besides this aspect, humour has been shown to be effective as a means for teachers to build rapport with students. Studies by Chabeli (2008) and Ziyaeemehr et al. (2011) revealed that humour makes teachers appear more approachable. Participants in both these studies saw humour as helping teachers be not only approachable, but also likeable so that students were not afraid to approach the teacher to ask questions or to discuss the lecture content. Students in Chabeli's study also revealed that humour assisted them to be more sociable in the class so that students were more open to interaction with each other. This finding is consistent with Lee's (2006) study on humour that was used in spoken academic discourse. Lee reported that humour was used as an ice-breaker among students in higher education. Therefore, humour not only helps teachers build rapport with students but at the same time it helps students build rapport among themselves.

The evidence presented in this section has demonstrated the positive effects of humour in the classroom environment from the students' perspectives by noting how it helps with relaxing, releasing tension and building rapport. The highlight is the importance of using humour to create a good environment in the classroom setting, and it is suggested that learning is a direct outcome of humour. The following part of the literature discussion moves on to describe the effects of humour on teacher credibility.

2.9.3 Teacher's credibility

The teacher's use of humour may affect students' perceptions of a teacher's credibility. Humour, if it is used appropriately in the classroom, means the students are likely to perceive the teacher as competent in teaching and approachable (Banas et al., 2010). However, if humour is used inappropriately in the classroom, the teacher can be perceived as being incompetent (Banas et al., 2010). Students may perceive the teacher as being silly in front of the class. Moreover, inappropriate humour may negatively affect the teacher's credibility by diminishing the students' sense of the teacher's approachability or friendliness (Wrench & Richmond, 2004). Teachers who use humour that is considered as inappropriate may be labelled by students as insensitive towards student learning and wellbeing.

In a study conducted by Wrench and Richmond (2004), they examined the relationship between humour and a teacher's credibility. A humour assessment test was given to 448 university students and the results indicated that there was a positive relationship between a teacher's use of humour and their perceived credibility. The result of this study indicated that the teachers' use of appropriate humour contributed positively on students' perceptions of the teachers and affected positively on the teacher's credibility as a teacher.

In contrast, a study by Houser et al. (2007) showed that teachers' use of humour did not improve teachers' perceived credibility. It showed a link between a teacher's behaviours such as nonverbal immediacy and teacher credibility but not between teacher use of humour and teacher credibility. However, the investigation explored on mediated instruction via CD-ROM instructor and not face-to-face instruction in the classroom. It is difficult to determine the level of credibility in mediated instruction where there is no face-to-face interaction between the teacher and students. Thus, the study by Houser et al. (2007) may not convincingly show that humour does not affect teacher credibility.

Overall, there seems to be some evidence to support the existence of a relationship between the use of humour and teacher credibility. Humour can positively improve a teacher's perceived credibility by heightening the teacher's perceived competence, trustworthiness and goodwill. Research to date has explored students' perspectives of their teachers. However, not all types of humour assist to enhance teacher credibility. Scholars have suggested that inappropriate humour may contribute negatively to teaching and learning in higher education. In the next section I consider the effect of inappropriate humour on teaching and learning.

2.9.4 Inappropriate use of humour

The effects of humour on teaching and learning are not always positive. In the teaching and learning context, humour can be viewed as having "double-edged effects": some might perceive humour as funny and some might find it offensive (Powell & Andresen, 1985). As noted in the previous sections, humour that is offensive, disparaging of students, sexual, vulgar and comprised of inappropriate jokes is perceived as inappropriate for use in the classroom (Frymier et al., 2008; Wanzer et al., 2006).

The danger of inappropriate humour is that its use will affect the process of teaching and learning in the classroom. For example, in Chabeli's (2008) study on humour as a pedagogical tool to promote learning, students sketched their views on the effects of inappropriate humour. They indicated that inappropriate humour could disrupt students in two ways: by affecting their feelings and self-esteem, and their concentration on the lecture content. When the teacher uses inappropriate humour that is disparaging or humiliating to students, it can damage students' feelings and self-esteem. The students also noted that teachers' overuse of humour may cause students to lose their concentration and eventually the teacher to lose his/her credibility. Overuse of humour in teaching may be perceived as irrelevant humour, which can distract students from the lecture content. Hence, Chabeli (2008) and Skinner (2001) suggested that humour does not contribute positively to the teaching and learning context and may be considered ineffective in the classroom with respect to students' learning experiences.

A limited number of recent studies have investigated the effects of inappropriate humour in teaching and learning in higher education. Intensive studies by Wanzer et al. (2006) and Frymier et al. (2008) explored students' perceptions on inappropriate types of humour used by their teachers. Examples of inappropriate humour from Wanzer et al.'s (2006) and Frymier et al.'s (2008) studies are presented in Table 2 and Table 3 in section 2.7. The results from these studies clearly delineated the types of inappropriate humour from the students' perspectives. However, these studies did not take into account the effects of inappropriate humour use on student learning and students' perceptions of what constitute inappropriate humour. It may be that a bad or offensive humour makes the 'event' memorable? Yet it will still have a negative impact on the receiver (students) and the teacher-student relationship.

2.10 Summary of this chapter

In this chapter, I have presented past studies on humour and the role of humour in teaching and learning in the classroom setting. In the first part of this chapter, I discussed the general understanding of humour such as its history, definitions, and theories concerned with humour use in teaching and learning. In the second part of the chapter, I presented my main argument for this study as I noted that scant studies have been carried out to explore the use of humour from the teachers' perspectives and both the teachers' and students' perspectives. I then discussed three main aspects (types, functions and effects) of humour identified in teaching and learning in higher education.

My review of the literature highlights a lack of attention to teachers' perspectives on humour and the link between the teachers' and students' perspectives of humour in teaching and learning in the higher education classroom. Further, little research has explored in depth students' perspectives on the types, the functions and the effects of humour used by teachers. Nevertheless, the literature has highlighted how humour can be used to support students' learning, if it is considered by students to be relevant and appropriate. In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology used to collect and analyse the data for this study.

Chapter Three

Methodology

> I do not swear. I think that is inappropriate but there are still things I cannot say; that is the real problem with humour though. I have to be very careful. I cannot be sexist; I cannot be racist; I have to be careful that I do not offend; I cannot be offensive.

Liam, Award-winning teacher

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I outline my research methodology. I begin by explaining how my theoretical framework and my research questions influenced my methodological decisions. Following that, I explain the reasons why a qualitative approach was utilised in order to answer my research questions. Then, I describe the research context and explain my recruitment criteria and the reasons for selecting the participants before presenting a profile of the participants involved. In the subsequent sections, I explain the specific process of data collection, which included observation and video-recording lectures, one-on-one interview sessions with the students and stimulated recall interviews (SRI) with the teachers. I then provide an overview of how data in my study were analysed and discuss how I sought to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of my findings, and attended to ethical considerations relating to the research process.

3.2 Research approach

As discussed in the previous chapter (Chapter Two), past research on the use of humour in higher education classrooms has tended to focus more on the students' perspectives rather than on the teachers' perspectives or both students' and teachers' perspectives. Although previous studies have considered students' perspectives of humour, the information or data collected were mostly through surveys or questionnaires, (e.g., Chiarello, 2012; Frymier et al., 2008; Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Wanzer et al., 2006) or, in one case, students illustrating their understandings of humour through sketches (Chabeli, 2008). To date, little research has provided an in-depth understanding of the use of humour in higher education classrooms from both students' and teachers' perspectives.

In this study, my theoretical framework, derived from my literature review, informed my development of the research questions for this study and my methodological approach. My interest in exploring the 'use' and 'meaning' of humour from students' and teachers' perspectives reflects an interpretive paradigm. Through an interpretive lens, humour is viewed as a social phenomenon (Lynch, 2002; Meyer, 2000). Humour is a challenging social phenomenon to research because humour is regarded as subjective (Lovorn & Holaway, 2015). Hence, an interpretive lens is a suitable paradigm to use as it fits the purposes of this study.

The ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning my use of an interpretive paradigm are that different people have different perceptions, experiences and understandings of humour. Daniel and Harland (2018) indicated that in applying an interpretive paradigm, the corresponding ontology is a view that "reality [is] created by individual[s]" and the corresponding epistemology is a view of "knowledge [as] is unique to the individual" (p. 25). Each individual responds according to his/her interpretation of meaning in a specific context – in this case, the use of humour in the classroom. Hence, for the study of humour, there is a need to understand both students' and teachers' interpretations of the subjective meaning of humour in the classroom context (Huss, 2008). In my study, I was interested in exploring students' and teachers' behaviour, communication, and perceptions of humour, as humour can be seen as a social interaction between students and teachers in the classroom.

Due to my interest in subjective interpretations of humour, I utilised a qualitative approach to explore the use of humour in teaching and learning in the higher education classroom. This approach also 'fitted' my research questions (see Table 4). Qualitative research "helps to understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena" (Merriam, 1998, p. 5), facilitating attention to human beings and their "sense-making" in specific contexts. As I was interested to explore why and how teachers use humour in their teaching, how teachers'

use of humour affects student learning, and students' and teachers' perceptions of humour, a qualitative approach was the most appropriate to employ.

The strength of qualitative research is that it allows the researcher to explore a phenomenon through the lens of the subjects who participated in the study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). In other words, this approach allows for an exploration of how people behave, feel and think within a context. In this study, I aimed to gain insights into the intentions and perceptions of teachers who incorporated humour in their teaching. Additionally, I also wanted to explore students' perceptions of the teachers' use of humour.

Another reason why a qualitative approach was chosen for this study is because of its emphasis on discovering, exploring and understanding a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998). In other words, a qualitative study usually allows for descriptive interpretations. If the nature of the research requires deep elaboration using words rather than numbers, a qualitative approach is the most suitable to use (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). In this study, I was not solely interested in the objective use of humour, but in teachers' and students' perceptions of humour. My aim was to gain insights into how humour helped teachers and students to facilitate teaching and learning. Therefore, detailed descriptions and interpretations enabled me to explore the complexities and uniqueness of this phenomenon.

Moreover, a qualitative research approach is utilised in my study because the research questions of this study require exploration. Exploratory qualitative research questions beginning with 'how', 'why' or 'what' help researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon they intend to explore (Patton, 2002). My research questions for this study are listed in Table 4.

Within qualitative research, the researcher is the data collection instrument (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The researcher is directly involved in the process of collecting the data and the researcher's understanding and interpretation also shape the data (Stake, 1995). In the

present study, I collected the data using both observation and interviews with participants (both students and teachers). Through observations, I was able to experience the participants' teaching and learning context. This allowed me to understand the nature of humour used in each setting, and to contextualise the interview data. Through interviews, I was able to explore the participants' understandings of humour used.

Table 4 provides an overview of the research questions and data collection approaches used in this study.

Research Questions and Data Collection Approaches used in this Study

Research questions:	Data collection approaches:
How and why do teachers use humour in teaching in the classroom?	Classroom observation/recording and stimulated recall interview (SRI) with teachers
What are the effects of teachers' use of humour on students' learning process in the classroom?	One-on-one interview with students
What are the students' and teachers' perceptions of the use of humour in teaching and learning?	SRI with teachers and one-on-one interview with students

Next, I introduce the research context to represent the specific context and the participants involved in my study. Then, I describe how I selected participants who could allow me to explore the perspectives of both the 'sender' (teachers) and 'receiver' (students) of humorous communication or interaction in classroom settings.

3.3 Research context

The Otago University Students' Association (OUSA) and the University of Otago, New Zealand give teaching awards to selected teachers based on votes from students at the university (OUSA, 2013). The idea behind the awards is to reward good teachers and recognise good teaching. Every year, students in the university receive an invitation via email to nominate teachers who have helped students to learn better in the classroom. The nominations provide useful insights into students' perspectives of good teaching. Students are given the opportunity to vote and give positive comments on teachers who they think stand out as high quality teachers.

According to OUSA (2013), the awards are part of OUSA's efforts to represent students' voices. Teachers who receive the awards are valued highly for the remarkable work that they have put into their teaching, and for the positive learning experiences they have provided for their students. In their nominations, students note many teaching characteristics that they admire. One of the top characteristics mentioned by students is the ability to make learning fun and interesting for students. Other characteristics that students regularly mention for the awards are friendliness, liveliness in teaching, passion for the subject, and willingness to help students to learn. Interestingly, students often mention that being humorous or funny as a teacher characteristic that they value. Although teachers are not trained to be humorous or to use humour as part of the teaching curriculum (Deiter, 2000), in their nominations for OUSA teaching awards, students suggest that teachers who incorporated humour in their teaching managed to draw students to the subject and make it fun to learn.

Given the prevalence of humour as one of many characteristics of a good teacher that students mentioned in their nominations, I was curious to explore how the award-winning teachers incorporated humour in teaching and learning. I was also interested in how teachers' use of humour shaped students' perceptions and approach to learning.

3.4 Selection of participants

I selected the participants for my study using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is also known as judgment sampling (Patton, 2002). The strength of this sampling approach is that participants "who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience" are selected (Tongco, 2007, p. 147). This sampling approach then contributes directly to the specific aim of the study (Merriam, 1998), that is, in this study, it allowed me to gather insights into the use of humour in relation to teaching and the learning in the classroom.

The aim of my study was threefold: a) to understand the use of humour in teaching from the sender's perspective (teachers), b) to understand the effects of humour on learning from the receiver's perspective (students), and c) to understand both students' and teachers' perceptions of humour in relation to teaching and learning. Hence, two groups of participants were selected using purposeful sampling. The first group comprised the University of Otago teachers who had won The Otago University Students' Association (OUSA) teaching awards during the period 2010 to 2015. Specifically, I recruited the award-winning teachers who were described by students in their award nominations as being humorous while teaching in the classroom. Following ethical approval from the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee, I obtained the lists of award-winning teachers, together with students' comments from the manager of the OUSA Student Support Centre at the University of Otago. Approximately 30 award-winning teachers were cited as being humorous. Out of this number, I selected top 10 award-winning teachers who were cited by more than five students. This was important to ensure that many of the students viewed the teachers as humorous and the teachers used humour regularly in the classroom. I emailed the 10 teachers and invited them to participate in the study. Five teachers agreed to participate, two did not respond, (although

three messages were sent) and three teachers expressed that they were not interested or were on research leave.

The second group of participants comprised undergraduate students studying at the University of Otago, who were current students of at least one of the award-winning teacher participants. Following ethical approval, I recruited students to the study by talking to students at lectures while I was doing the classroom observations. As mentioned in the information sheet (Appendix B), I anticipated interviewing 60 students. However, due to the low number of teacher participants and because students' participation was voluntary, a total of only 15 students from across the classes of the five teachers indicated willingness to participate in the study. The students who agreed were invited to share their thoughts and perceptions towards the teachers' use of humour. When I contacted those students, only 10 scheduled an interview time. I speculated that many students were not interested to discuss their teacher's use of humour because it was a sensitive topic and it would be reported in this study. In addition, the time I invited them for an interview was during their study week, a period they might have wanted to protect to prepare for their final examinations.

3.5 Profile of the teachers and students involved in this study

Five award-winning teachers and 10 students of those teachers participated in this study. Their profiles are outlined below. All names used are pseudonyms.

Liam was a senior lecturer in chemistry at the University of Otago. At the time of data collection, he was teaching first-year students in an introductory chemistry paper. Student participants John (male) and Rossa (female) were first-year students in Liam's course. In the

year previous, they had been high school students. They were New Zealand European, domestic[2] students.

Alejandro was a senior lecturer in law at the university. He was not originally from New Zealand. He was teaching a law subject for second-year students at the time of data collection. His students, Lisa (female) and Phoebe (female), were second-year students at the university. They were New Zealand European, domestic students.

Bryan was a teaching fellow for the anatomy department at the university. He was teaching second-year students an anatomy subject at the time of data collection. His students, Kae (male) and Dhivya (female), were second-year students at the university. Kae was an indigenous (Māori) domestic student and Dhivya was an international[3] student from Fiji.

Karen was a senior lecturer in the psychology department at the university. She was not originally from New Zealand. She was teaching a psychology subject for third-year students at the time of data collection. Her students, Kara (female), Claire (female), and Tess (female), were final-year (third-year) students studying at the university. They were New Zealand European, domestic students.

Philip was a senior lecturer in the biochemistry department at the university. He was teaching a genetics subject for first-year students at the time of data collection. His student, Katy (female), was a first-year student at the university. She was a New Zealand European, domestic student.

The participants in this study represented a variety of ethnicities and gender reflecting the diversity of backgrounds of both teachers and students at the university more generally. Although diverse backgrounds can influence perceptions of humour (Lee, 2006), the

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[2] Domestic students are New Zealand citizens or have Permanent Resident visas
[3] International students are on a study visa.

relationship between ethnicity and understandings of humour was not a specific focus of the study.

In the following sections, I explain how I collected and analysed the data for this study.

3.6 Data collection

Since this was an interpretive qualitative study, observation and interviews were effective data collection approaches. The data in my study were collected in three stages through: a) observations of video-recorded lectures, b) one-on-one interviews with the students, and c) stimulated recall interviews (SRIs) with the award-winning teachers.

3.6.1 Observations of video-recorded lectures

The first stage of the data collection involved observing live lectures (one from each teacher) during the second semester in 2015 and first semester in 2016. These were also video-recorded for later analysis (see explanation below). Following ethical approval, I observed and recorded five lectures by award-winning teachers with their permission. I used an iPad to record the lectures. The video recordings using the iPad were focused solely on the teachers, teaching in front of the class. However, students' laughter was clearly heard in the audio recordings. I used this technique mainly to capture specific instances of humour used by the award-winning teachers. These instances were replayed and discussed in SRI sessions with the teachers.

Notwithstanding the above, there has been a lot of discussion in the literature on the use of video recording as it has a potential to influence the classroom environment such as the students and/or the teacher (Blikstad-Balas, 2017). For each class, I recorded only one of the teachers' lectures so participants did not become accustomed to the camera and the presence of the researcher (Blikstad-Balas, 2017). This was not an issue for this study due to two

reasons: a) I sat at the middle row in the classroom with the students and had my iPad focused only on the teacher, and b) the teachers and students at the University of Otago were used to having their lectures podcasted and streamed online. Therefore, my presence together with the iPad for video-recording purposes would have been unlikely to influence or interrupt the classroom environment.

Besides recording teachers while they were teaching in front of the class, I undertook two types of observations simultaneously: a) observation of what students were doing during the lecture, and b) observation of teachers' teaching in the classroom. Mulhall (2003) noted that one of the strengths of observation is that it captures the whole social context as well as the people's behaviours that are being studied. The observations gave me the opportunity to capture the students' and teachers' behaviours and communication in relation to humour used in the classroom.

During the classroom observation and recording session, I recorded field notes. Specifically, I described my perceptions of the classroom atmosphere, noted what students were doing while the teachers were teaching in front of the class and made notes about specific instances of humour. These observations were noted in the field notes and addressed in the interview sessions with the teachers. In terms of the teachers, I also undertook observations of the video recordings at my own convenience before each teacher interview session. The lecture sessions lasted for one to two hours each. I observed approximately six hours of lectures in total. I transcribed and interpreted all humorous instances that occurred in the video recordings. I defined 'humorous instances' as instances where the students laughed in response to something the teacher said or did.

3.6.2 One-on-one interviews with students

The second stage of the data collection for this study consisted of one-on-one interviews with the students. Interview sessions with participants involve face-to-face discussion between the interviewer and interviewee to discuss the interviewee's interpretations of a specific situation from his/her point of view (Cohen et al., 2013). The interview sessions helped me to gain a deep understanding of the complex meaning of humour from the students' perspectives.

For this study, I recruited the students for the interview session at the time I observed the lecture (in the first stage). I distributed a piece of paper contained a brief explanation of my research and requested the students to write down their names and contact details if they were interested in participating in an interview. A total of 15 students who attended observed lectures provided their names and contact details. I subsequently contacted them individually to set up a time and date for an interview session. From the 15 students contacted, ten scheduled an interview time. I then emailed those students an outline of the research (Appendix C) and a copy of a semi-structured interview questions (Appendix E).

I interviewed one, two or three students who were taught by each of the teachers involved in my study (see section 3.5, the teacher and student profiles). There were two requests from some students, by Lisa and Phoebe (students of Alejandro) and Claire and Tess (Karen's students) to be interviewed in pair, which I allowed to make sure all students feel comfortable during the interview session. All interviews with students were conducted close to the end of the semester because I wanted the students to have had a full semester in the classroom of an award-winning teacher prior to their interview. Interviews were conducted in a private, comfortable room in my department at the university. I also provided hot beverages and cookies for the students to make them feel welcome and at ease.

I prepared semi-structured interview questions as a basis for the student interviews (see Appendix E). I wanted the interview sessions to be flexible so that the students felt free to talk

about their understandings of and views on the teachers' use of humour. However, I did not want to lose track of what I aimed to explore in this study. So, the semi-structured questions helped me to create a sense of direction for the interview session. Moreover, when there were moments where the conversation 'dried-up', these questions were used to generate further discussion. The questions were given to the students before we started the interview.

With the students' permission, I captured the interview discussion using a digital voice recorder and field notes. The rationale for audio-recording the interviews was to capture the entire interview discussion and gather all information that could be pertinent to my study. The interviews ranged from about 25 minutes to 45 minutes in length. The audiotaped data were later transcribed for data analysis. I sent the audiotaped files to an external and confidential transcriber recommended by my department for verbatim transcriptions. I then checked all the completed transcriptions against the audio recordings to make sure that they were accurate. Field notes were used during the interview sessions to capture keywords mentioned by the students during the discussion. I jotted down any interesting information mentioned by the students in the field notes and used these to ask for clarification and/or to provoke further discussion.

3.6.3 Teachers' Stimulated Recall Interviews (SRI)

The final stage of the data collection for my study involved using SRIs with the award-winning teachers. These are reflective interviews that involve self-observation (Dempsey, 2010). In my study, the teachers watched segments of a recorded video of their teaching, and then recalled and reflected on their behaviour or thoughts regarding their actions in the recorded video. The purpose of these interviews were to gain insights into the teaching behaviour and "cognitive strategies" (Lyle, 2003, p. 861) that teachers were consciously or unconsciously using when incorporating humour into their teaching.

The SRI was a useful method in my study as it provided in-depth insights into teachers' reflective practices and successful incorporation of humour. SRIs capture teachers' reflection-in-action in relation to specific moments and specific behaviours. Humour is difficult to utilise in teaching (Lovorn & Holaway, 2015). Through SRI, the award-winning teachers in my study were able to unpack the techniques and strategies that they used to effectively incorporate humour into their teaching.

One main concern with SRI, specifically for this study, was the time gap between the recording and the interview. Dempsey (2010) suggested that recording and interview should not be far apart to ensure that the memory of the event is still fresh. Most of the cognitive strategies and practices involved at that time are stored in the short-term memory (Ericsson & Simon, 1980). Therefore, if the event is not retrieved and explored as soon as possible, it may be forgotten.

I conducted the SRIs with the teachers after I completed the classroom observations, which happened during the semester, and after I completed my interview sessions with the students, which were held at the end of the semester. This may have increased the time gap mentioned earlier. However, the use of the videotape recording in my study was intended to address the time gap concern. Significant moments during the recorded lectures could be played, paused and replayed by the interviewer and interviewee, and then discussed. The use of video recordings in my study meant that the duration between the recorded teaching session and SRI interview with teachers was not a major concern.

The specific methods I used for SRI sessions in my study are as follows. Firstly, in the second semester of 2015, I invited five teachers via email to participate in SRI. After a date and time were arranged, I went to the classroom lectures with my video-recording device to record the teachers teaching, taking field notes to document the classroom atmosphere and students' behaviours. After I observed and analysed the recorded lectures, I edited the

recording so that it was restricted to the humorous instances incorporated by the teachers. There were approximately four to six humorous instances in each of the teachers' video-recorded lectures, a total of 23 humorous instances found. Immediately, I transferred a copy of the edited humorous instances onto a USB drive and gave it to the teachers before the SRI. This allowed the teachers to watch themselves in action, and prompted them to remember how and why they used humour in their teaching.

The one-on-one SRI sessions were conducted in the respective teacher's office. Each interview lasted for an hour. During each of the SRI sessions, I asked the teacher to watch the recorded humorous instances with me. At this time, the teachers were invited to pause the video recording at any stage, and reflect on their use of humour in their teaching. Teachers paused the recordings multiple times during the interviews, whenever they wanted to explain what they were thinking, or what was happening when the humorous instance occurred. When they paused the video clips, and at the end of each video clip, I guided their reflections with exploratory questions such as, "What were you thinking at that time?", "Why did you decide to use humour at that time?", and "Could you tell me more about it?"

As part of the SRI session with each of the teachers, we (the teacher and I) discussed the teacher's understandings and perceptions of humour. Similar to the one-on-one interviews with the students, I prepared semi-structured questions for my discussion with the teachers, based on what their students had told me (see Appendix D). By doing this, I could explore the similarities and differences between teachers' and students' perceptions of humour.

3.7 Data analysis

As mentioned in the previous section, there were two types of data collection techniques involved in the study: observation and interviews (one-on-one interviews with students and SRI with teachers). For observation, I analysed the recorded videos of the lectures, focusing

on the teachers' humorous instances. The humorous instances were identified when there were laughter or giggles heard from the recorded videos. I then scrutinised each of the humorous instances to determine the types of humour used by the teachers according to the guidelines from the literature. For this analysis, I identified the types of humour observed using definitions adapted from Berk (2003), Bryant et al. (1980), Lagerwerf (2007), Lee (2006), Nesi (2012) and Wanzer et al. (2006). Specifically, I coded the humorous instances in relation to the following types of humour:

- Self-deprecating humour, or revealing one's own faults and weakness. This gives the audience a feeling of comfort to see their faults reflected in a person of power, such as their teacher (Berk, 2003).

- Ad-lib humour, or witty responses to some comments or a situation (Berk, 2003).

- Sarcasm, or saying the opposite of what one actually means (Lagerwerf, 2007).

- Jokes, involving a relatively short build-up followed by a punch line (Bryant et al., 1980).

- Riddle, or a message presented in the form of an information question with the answer provided in a humorous punch line (Bryant et al., 1980).

- Teacher-student teasing, where the student who has violated expectations is reprimanded, but because the frame is a joking one, there is no criticism and the student's reputation is unaffected (Nesi, 2012).

- Disparaging others, where humour is targeted at individuals or groups other than students (Wanzer et al., 2006).

This list was used as the guideline to determine the types of humour used by the teachers in my study. I explain each type of humour in more depth in the following chapter (see Chapter Four).

I analysed the students' and teachers' interview transcripts using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). As I aimed to understand the participants' use and/or perceptions of humour, I categorised the students' and teachers' descriptions and interpretations of humour into 'themes'. Themes are known as patterns or recurring features within the participants' perceptions and/or experiences, as evident within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; King & Horrocks, 2010).

For my study, I followed the process of thematic analysis that King and Horrocks (2010) outline. This involves three stages, which I outline in Figure 1:

> ***Stage one: descriptive coding**
> Read through transcript
> Highlight relevant material and attach brief comments
> Define descriptive codes
> Repeat for each transcript
> Refine descriptive codes as progress

> ***Stage two: interpretive coding**
> Cluster descriptive codes
> Interpret meaning of clusters in relation to research question and disciplinary position
> Apply interpretive codes to full data set

> ***Stage three: overarching themes**
> Derive key themes for data set as a whole, by considering interpretive themes from theoretical and/or practical stance of project
> Construct diagram to represent relationships between levels of coding in the analysis

*Quality checks occur at any stage in the process

Figure 1. Stages in the process of thematic analysis (adopted from King & Horrocks, 2010, p.153).

Next, I illustrate how I developed my themes and arrived at my final thematic structure. I use one example of the thematic analysis, drawn from Chapter Five (on students' perceptions of humour). I start with my coding for stage one, illustrating a screen shot of a coding example for stage one in Figure 2.
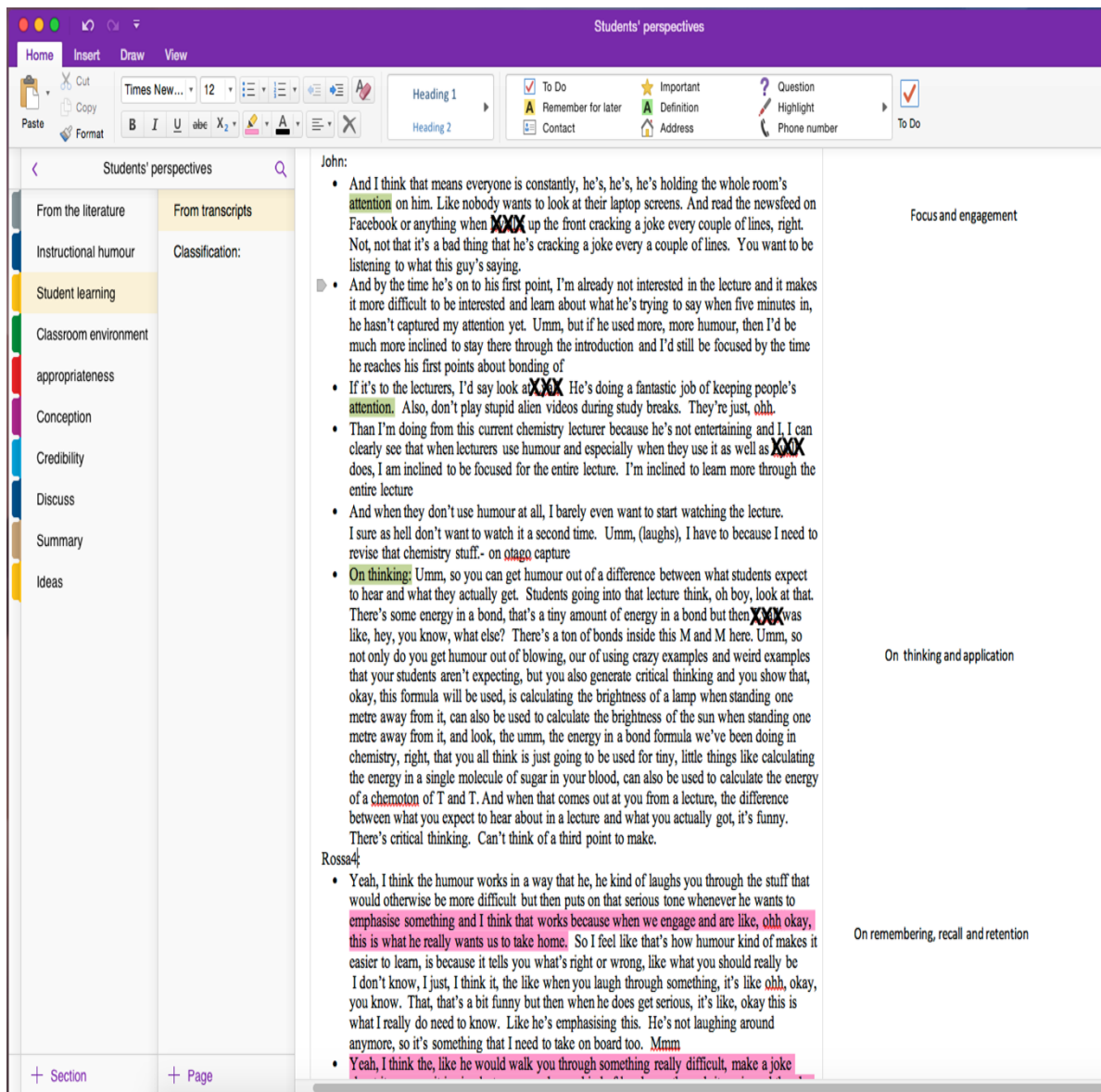
Figure 2. A coding example (stage one).

In order to code my interview data, I used Microsoft OneNote. At this stage, I read through the transcript, copied any relevant materials mentioned by the students from the transcript and pasted it into Microsoft OneNote. I highlighted by colour-coding the relevant materials. Then, I defined the descriptive codes such as 'focus and engagement', 'thinking and application', and 'remembering, recall and retention'. I repeated this process with other participants (students and teachers) in my study. At this stage, my descriptive codes were unrefined but I continued refining my descriptive codes as I progressed.

For stage two, I clustered the relevant materials I could find from the transcript according to the descriptive codes or themes. At the same time, I interpreted the meaning of the clusters and focused on how they could help me to answer my research question, especially, 'how does teachers' use of humour affect students' process of learning?'

Figure 3 provides an example of my stage two coding on cluster one - students' recall and retention.
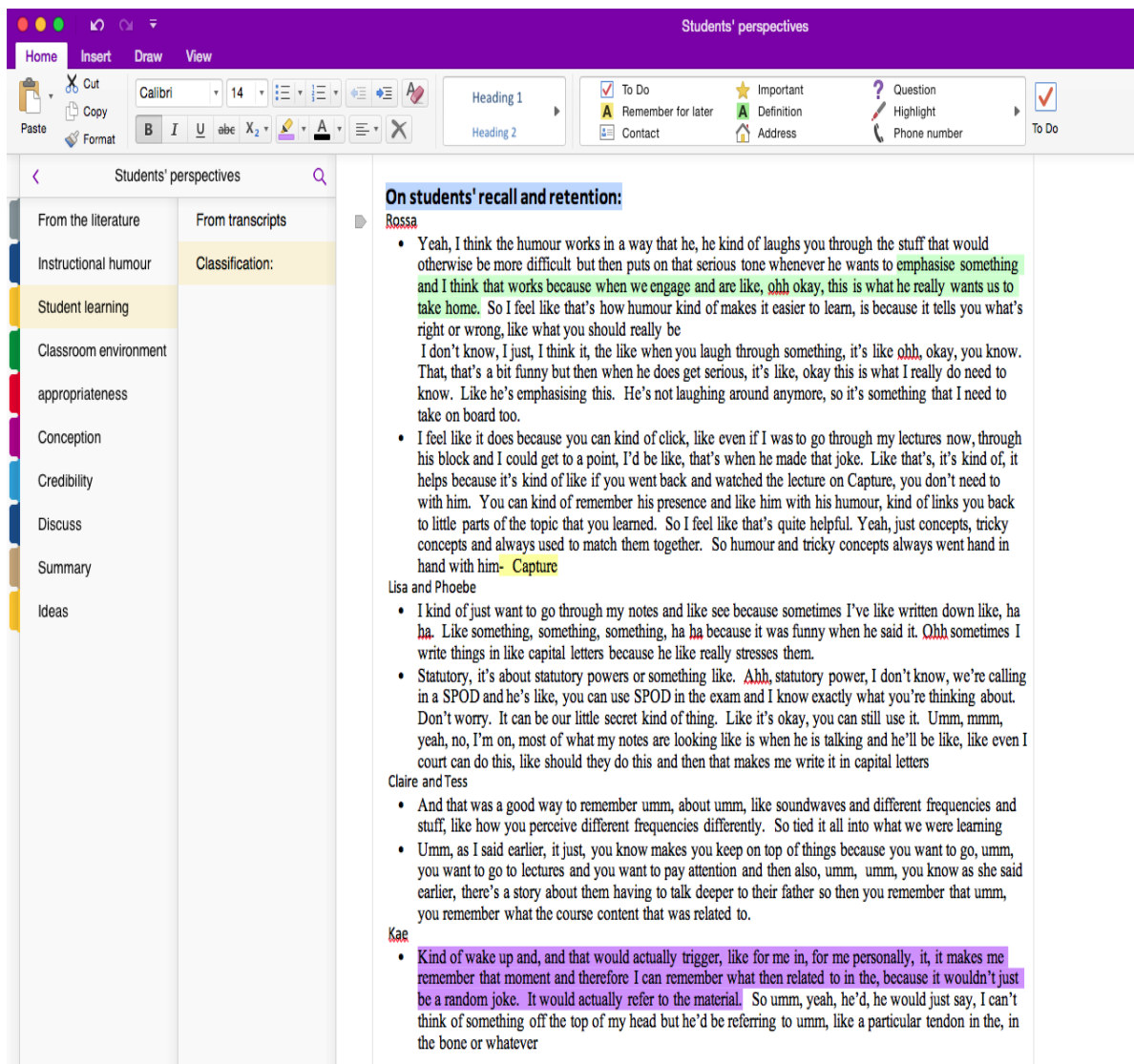
Figure 3. A coding example on students' recall and retention (stage two).

During stage three of my data analysis, I finalised the key themes for my data set as a whole, and interpreted the themes using my theoretical framework and literature review (see

Chapter Two). In the following diagram (Figure 4), I represent the relationship between levels of coding in the analysis.
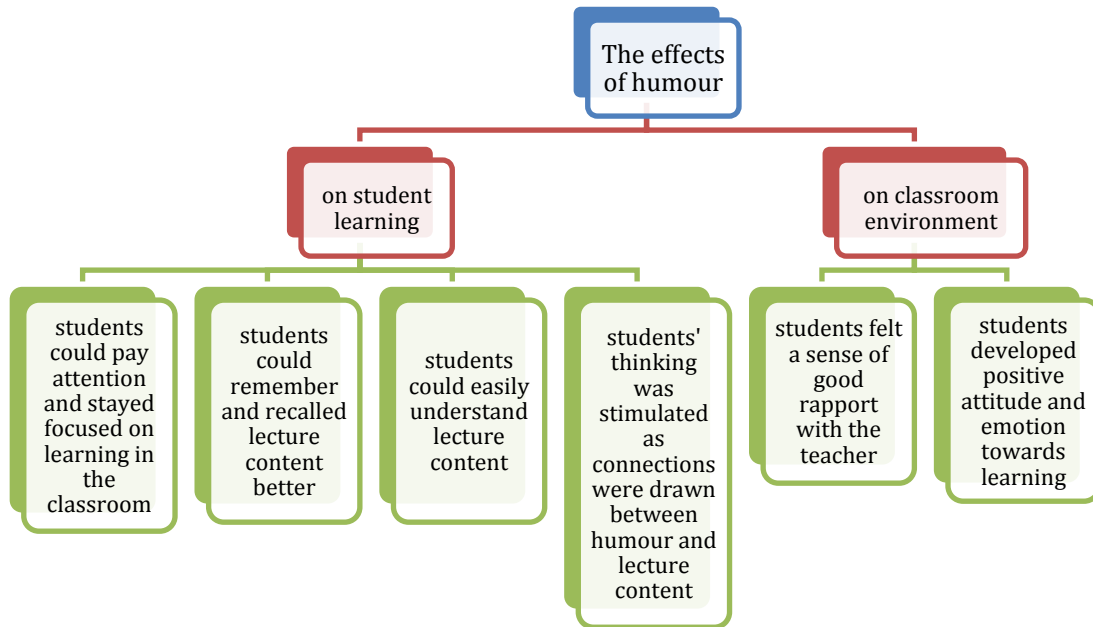
Figure 4. An example of three coding levels in relations to one theme.

Figure 4 illustrates the full coding process in relation to one broad theme: the effects of humour. The second level of the figure described the interpretive codes, which are the collective descriptive codes that I clustered. I labelled the interpretive codes 'on student learning' and 'on classroom environment'. The last level of the figure shows all of the descriptive codes included in the stage one and stage two coding.

In the following chapters (Four, Five and Six), I present my findings (the types of humour and students' and teachers' interview transcripts) that I analysed in the form of extracts and quotations. Not all extracts and quotations were presented in this study; I chose those that particularly clear and used concise language.

In the following sections, I explain how I attended to credibility and trustworthiness in this study and outline the ethical considerations relating to the project.

3.8 Credibility and trustworthiness

In this study, I ensured credibility and trustworthiness in ways proposed by Daniel and Harland (2018) and Patton (2002). Specifically, I focused on triangulation, theory, researcher experience, meaning, and 'generalisations'. First, I ensured that I triangulated my data sources. This is important as Patton (2002) noted that from an interpretive perspective, there are "multiple realities of truths" (p. 575) and there is a need for all perspectives to be presented in an interpretive qualitative study. Moreover, Daniel and Harland (2018) indicated that through triangulation of data sauces, credibility is established when data are interpreted from more than two sources. In this study, I collected my data from classroom observations, one-on-one interview with students and SRIs with teachers. Thus, data interpretations made in my study were a triangulation of data collection and analyses from three different sources.

Second, to establish credibility, "theory use is always a central part of any judgement about the quality of research" (Daniel & Harland, 2018, p. 117). In this study, I connected all my findings to the theoretical perspective used in literature review (see Chapter Two). Specifically, my findings on teachers' perspectives of humour (in Chapter Four) were drawn from the three theories of humour: the incongruity, superiority and relief. My findings on students' perspectives of humour (in Chapter Five) were drawn from Instructional Humour Processing Theory (IHPT) and Emotional Intelligence (EI). My findings on both students' and teachers' perspectives of humour (in Chapter Six) were focused on two considerations of IHPT: appropriateness and relevance of humour. Therefore, I presented all findings connected to the theoretical underpinning and contributed to the theories development of this study.

Third, to established trustworthiness, I practised 'reflexivity'. I acknowledged that my personal experiences as a student and then a teacher might influence how I approached and interpreted the data presented in this study. According to Daniel and Harland (2018), "reflexivity requires a detailed account of experiences, assumptions about the phenomenon

explored, and the process and circumstances that inform the data collection process" (p. 115). Throughout this research, I displayed reflexivity by my effort to be honest to my study, my audience and myself. I did this by describing my research philosophy, assumptions and beliefs. In Chapter One, I explained my interest in conducting this study and in doing so I disclosed some of the assumptions and beliefs I brought to this study from my personal experience. Moreover, I outlined my ontological and epistemological position overarching this research. I also jotted down all my ideas and actions during the data collection period to assist the practice of reflexivity (epistemological assumptions) (Patton, 2002).

Fourth, I ensured the quality of meaning presented and displayed sincerity through the transparency in the method used. Throughout my analysis of the observation and interview data, I read the data in multiple ways by attending to the types, functions, effects and perceptions of humour. I re-read the relevant literature, discussed my interpretations with my supervisors, and talked to colleagues and other lecturers in my department about my data. I also presented my study within the department, and at national and international conferences, seeking comments and feedback to enhance my understanding of the data.

Finally, as an interpretive study focused on subjective meaning, my study findings are not statistically generalisable. I was interested in "extrapolation" (Patton, 2002, p. 584). My intention was to gather rich information that could add to my understanding of the use of humour in teaching and learning and make useful theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical contributions in relation to the study of humour in higher education. In terms of theories and design, although the purpose of this study was not precisely to contribute to developing formal and contemplative knowledge about humour in teaching and learning, I aimed to provide information that could help other studies in terms of the study's frameworks introduced and used as well as the study's design. In terms of description of the content and design, I made sure I provided enough details about the phenomenon (humour) and the context of this study (higher education classrooms). Adequate information is essential to

enable readers and other researchers to make a comparison and decide whether the phenomenon and context of this study is similar and applicable to other studies and situations.

3.9 Ethical considerations

In this study, I addressed ethical considerations in several ways. First, as noted, prior to conducting this study, an ethics application was approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee. I then sent all selected teachers an email to explain the aim of the study and the nature of the research. I asked the teachers for permission to attend one of their lectures to observe and record the lecture for viewing purposes. I invited students who were learning with the selected teachers at the time data were collected to participate in the one-on-one interviews. The students I invited were quite free to decline or withdraw their participation from this study, and many chose not to participate. As a fellow student, I did not have any power of coercion. All participants were also given an information sheet and consent form prior to data collection (see Appendix B).

The recorded videotapes of the lectures were transcribed and the teachers' identities anonymised. All sensitive information from the lectures, such as name, topic and other aspects that could reveal the identity of the teachers, were removed. I also removed any information that the participants in this study requested be removed.

Prior to the SRI sessions with the teachers and one-on-one interviews with the students, I reminded the participants that they could terminate their participation in this study at any time. I provided copies of the transcribed interviews to the participants who wished to receive them, and assured them that all information that could identify them had been removed. At all stages in the research, participants were free to participate or not to participate. Those who chose to participate seemed to enjoy doing so, speaking freely about their teaching or learning experiences and perceptions of humour.

3.10 Summary of this chapter

In this chapter, I have outlined my study methodology. I started by positioning this study within the interpretive paradigm, since it is concerned with teachers' and students' subjective understandings of humour use in higher education. Following that, I explained my qualitative approach to data collection and analysis, and focused on the strengths of this approach and its relevance to my research questions. Then, I explained my selection of the participants for the study, and described the research context and the participants' profiles. Next, I highlighted the stages of data collection, including observations and video recording lectures, one-on-one interviews with the students, and SRIs with the teachers. I explained that observation and video-recording of lectures allowed me to capture humorous instances to discuss in SRIs with the teachers. One-to-one interview sessions with the students provided insights into students' perceptions, while the SRI sessions with the teachers were focused on teachers' interpretations and perceptions of humour. I also discussed how I analysed the data for this study. Data from the observations were analysed according to the definitions of humour obtained from relevant literature. Transcripts from the interview sessions (with both students and teachers) were analysed using thematic analysis. Finally, I explained how I endeavoured to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, and how I addressed the ethical considerations relevant to this study.

In the following chapters, I present the study findings in three chapters related to my research questions. In the next chapter, I focus on the teachers' perspectives of humour in teaching. I discuss the types of humour the teachers used, how they used humour in the classroom and why they used humour at particular moments while teaching.

Chapter Four

Teachers' perspectives:

How and why do teachers use humour in teaching?

All the students are very young and they are all very vibrant and they have got a lots of vitality... I was talking about a topic which is a little bit depressing. But it is something that I had to teach them about. So I tried to lighten the tone maybe a little bit by making it somewhat humorous.

Bryan, Award-wining teacher

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to gain insights as to what kinds of humour teachers used in their teaching, how they incorporated humour into their teaching and the functions the humour served. As discussed in Chapter Two, to date, teachers' perspectives have received little attention in the study of humour in a higher education context. Moreover, incorporating humour in teaching is considered challenging, as lecture content is rarely funny content. However, Kember and McNaught (2007) indicated that it is crucial for teachers to make lecture content as interesting as possible, so they are encouraged to use humour as part of the teaching and learning process in the classroom. Arguably, teachers' perspectives are crucial to understanding their intentions in using humour in teaching, and the practice of humour in teaching and learning in higher education classroom.

In order to explore teachers' use of humour in teaching, in this chapter, I provide an account of five award-winning teachers' use of humour in their classroom lectures. Specifically, I consider how the teachers used humour to evoke students' laughter, and why these teachers used humour at particular moments during their lectures. I start by classifying the types of humour used and drawing on teachers' explanations of the humour used. I classified the types of humour in light of the three theories of humour discussed in Chapter Two: superiority, incongruity, and relief theories. Then, I characterise how humour was used by distinguishing the types of humour the teachers drew on during lectures, whether intended or spontaneous, and related or unrelated to learning content. Finally, I discuss the functions of the humour used based on the teachers' explanations of their use of humour at particular moments during the lectures. In this section, I focus on the teachers' explanations during our stimulated recall interview (SRI) sessions. Throughout, I include my interpretations of the classroom observations along with the teachers' explanations.

As noted in Chapter Three, I observed one lecture from each of five award-winning teachers. During the classroom observations, I focused on the teachers and as I observed, I took field notes. I also used video-recordings to capture the teachers' use of humour during their teaching, and later, I viewed these recordings to further understand their use of humour in the classroom. Students were not video recorded. However, in this chapter, I refer to students' reactions noted in my observations, field notes and/or on the teachers' interpretations when they viewed the video-recordings. I managed to capture students' laughter in the video recordings, which helped me to determine humorous instances.

4.2   How the teachers used humour?

Across the observations, there were approximately four to six humorous instances detected in each one or two-hour lecture. The number of humorous occurrences echo Ziv's (1988) suggestion that three or four humorous instances are ideal to prevent the risk of distracting students' attention on learning content and the risk of damaging teachers' teaching credibility. In my study, the four to six humorous instances of humour used by the teachers were therefore optimal because the humour functioned to enhance student learning and/or to engage students' attention (see section 4.4 in this chapter), affected positively on students (see Chapter Five) and was perceived as appropriate by the students (see Chapter Six).

For the purpose of this study, I determined the types of humour used by focusing on utterances or sentences articulated by these teachers right before laughter was evoked. Students' laughter in this study could be divided into two stages: a) giggles or partial laugh, and b) laughter or acts of full laughter that involved facial and thoracic muscle (Berk, 2003). During the classroom observations, I noticed that some of students' laughter was brief and soft (giggle), and some was longer and loud (laugh). I then verified the differences by viewing the video-recording. I could not ascertain facial/thoracic muscle involvement as the students

were not visible in the recording. Giggles and laughter were the only two forms of laughter that I could listen to in the video recordings and observation sessions. Based on students' responses, I identified eight types of humour in the recording and observation sessions. These types of humour aligned with superiority, incongruity and relief theories of humour discussed in Chapter Two. I outline the types of humour observed in Table 5:

The Types of Humour According to the Theories, Observed in this Study

Superiority (number of instances)	Incongruity (number of instances)	Relief (number of instances)
• Self-deprecating (5) • Disparaging others (1) • Teacher-student teasing (8) • Sarcasm (3)	• Ad-lib humour (1) • Funny comment (2) • Riddle (1)	• Funny photo or quiz question (2)

4.2.1 Teachers' use of humour that aligned with superiority theory

As discussed in Chapter Two, superiority theory of humour postulates that humour can be an act of making fun of and/or laughing at someone's mistakes and weakness (Zillmann, 1983). In my study, the teachers were considered humorous when the teachers made fun of their own, students, or others' weaknesses or mistakes. I identified four types of humour categorised as superiority theory of humour that were used by the teachers in my study namely, self-deprecating humour, disparaging others, teacher-student teasing, and sarcasm.

4.2.1.1 Self-deprecating humour

Self-deprecating humour is described by Berk (2003) as self-disparaging humour. The act of teasing oneself is also considered to be self-deprecating humour because others are not the targets of silliness. It is a type of humour that uncovers one's faults and flaws (Berk, 2003). This type of humour allows teachers to show students that they are personable and humble. In my study, I identified five humorous instances as self-deprecating humour. Some instances of self-deprecating humour:

Extract 1:
> Karen: There is probably a certain liquid …
>
> Students: [Giggle]
>
> Karen: …that you had a bad experience with. Maybe an alcoholic liquid that you have drank lots, perhaps you got really sick afterwards or the next day, or the next two days, you remember that you do not want to drink that liquid anymore. Most people have a particular alcohol or a mixture that they have with the alcohol [pointing at self] vodka and orange juice.
>
> Students: [Laughing]

Extract 2:
Context: During a discussion session after a quiz

> Liam: Who thinks it might be A? No? B? Anyone, B? Ok, we got some Bs, not many B. How about C? Few Cs? How about D? Oh, we got it all over the place aren't we? That is not very good teaching on my part.
>
> Students: [Laughing]

In Extract 1, Karen was trying to relate a situation that commonly happens with students. Instead of making fun of the students, she referred to her own drinking experience and this made the students laugh. Liam in Extract 2, on the other hand, was making fun of his own teaching due to the fact that students could not make up their mind on the answer to a quiz question and eventually this made students laugh.

4.2.1.2 *Disparaging others*

Disparaging others is an act of poking fun at other people or someone other than students (Wanzer et al., 2006). I found that some of the teachers in my study used disparaging others types of humour. An example is shown in Extract 3.

Extract 3:
Context: A PowerPoint slide of a Neanderthal species (a species of archaic humans that became extinct approximately 40,000 years ago) was shown.

> Philip: Ok, so this is how a Neanderthal looks like and I know a guy who looks like that in Spain.
>
> Students: [Giggle]
>
> Philip: Which is, you know there are a lot of Neanderthal that remain in Spain.
>
> Students: [Giggle]
>
> Philip: So yeah, he could be Neanderthal.
>
> Students: [Giggle]
>
> Philip: He will kill me for that.
>
> Students: [Giggle]

In Extract 3, Philip was making fun of the feature of a Neanderthal shown in his PowerPoint slide by relating it to an acquaintance of his in Spain. Perhaps there were some similarities in terms of how these two people looked, and thus he made fun of his acquaintance and by implication, Spanish people generally. Although the students knew that Neanderthals are extinct, they found Philip's statement to be funny.

4.2.1.3   Teacher-student teasing

Teacher-student teasing was perhaps the most common type of humour used by the teachers in this study. Teacher-student teasing happens when a student (or a group of students) who has violated expectations is reprimanded, however because the frame is a joking one, there is no criticism and the student's reputation is unaffected (Nesi, 2012). I identified approximately eight teacher-student teasing instances in the video-recordings and observations. However, Philip and Alejandro used more teacher-student teasing than other teachers: Philip used the approach three times and Alejandro used teacher-student teasing twice in the class that I observed. For instance:

Extract 4:
> Philip: …So we share 75% of our genes with other animals. So we share 75% of our genes with food flies. Alright?! So next time if there is a fly on your window, and you go [squish it] that is 75% of your genes dying right there.
>
> Students: [Laughing]
>
> Philip: Ok.

Extract 5:
> Alejandro: You thought that this is easy. This is all fun, it is zesty according to someone apparently. I got an email saying 'thanks for the zesty lecture'.
>
> Students: [Laughing]
>
> Alejandro: I have never been described as 'zesty'…
>
> Students: [Laughing]
>
> Alejandro: But, hey I take salsa.
>
> Students: [Laughing]

In Extract 4 and 5, both Philip and Alejandro were teasing the students in generally in the classroom. For example, in Extract 4, Philip was teasing students in general where no particular student was singled out. Similar to Alejandro in Extract 5, he just mentioned, "it is zesty according to someone". He did not mention the name of the student who sent him the

email. However, some humorous instances occurred where teachers singled out a particular student, for example:

Extract 6:

> Alejandro: Ok, there is another type of decision that can be judicially reviewed and it does not come from a statute and here is a clue, you have heard about it before, so you know what I am talking about. Jack with the stripes up there, with the cannibal sticker on your laptop.
>
> One student: Yup
>
> Alejandro: Yup
>
> Students: [Laughing]
>
> Alejandro: How is it going, man?
>
> Students: [Laughing]
>
> One student: Good
>
> Students: [Laughing]
>
> Alejandro: Can you think of another type that does not come from statute?

In this example (Extract 6), a student was singled out and teased by Alejandro. That particular student was most probably misbehaving, not paying attention, or distracted. This led Alejandro to question the student. Perhaps he was not listening to Alejandro's question and was shocked when asked to answer the question. Eventually, his reaction caused other students to laugh, and Alejandro, to smile. This type of teacher-student teasing is considered a form of a social control which aligns with superiority theory of humour (Zillmann, 1983). However, the intention of the humour was not necessarily to make fun of the student, but to engage the student for instructional purposes as I discuss in the following section (see section 4.4).

4.2.1.4   Sarcasm

Sarcasm is defined as a comment that has the contrary meaning to what is said (Lagerwerf, 2007). I identified several humorous instances of sarcasm in the observational data, for instance:

Extract 7:
    Alejandro: [reading a long review in one breath]. Easy!

    Students: [Laughing]

    Alejandro: Totally easy!

    Students: [Giggle]

In this extract, Alejandro was clearly making fun of a review by reading it out loud and fast in one breath. The review was apparently long and difficult to understand. Instead of admitting that it was difficult, he said that it was "easy". The students understood Alejandro's sarcasm and their laughter and giggling indicated that they agreed that the review was the opposite of easy.

4.2.2 Teachers' use of humour that aligned with incongruity theory

The incongruity theory of humour, on the other hand, posits that something is considered humorous when it happens unexpectedly (a surprise element is important for this theory) (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009). For example, in an education context, this theory is relevant as teachers can create incongruous scenarios in the classroom. The element of surprise mentioned in this theory may be used to get students' attention in the classroom. In my study, I identified three types of humour the teachers used that can be classified as examples of incongruity theory: ad-lib humour, a funny comment and a riddle.

4.2.2.1 Ad-lib humour

Ad-lib humour is referred to as "involving a witty response to some comments or situations" (Berk, 2003, p. 44). In my study, there was one instance of a teacher using ad-lib humour. Liam used ad-lib humour after he conducted a chemistry experiment in his class. The experiment was conducted on an M&M chocolate where he burnt the chocolate with a Bunsen burner and subsequently created a cloud of smoke:

Extract 8:
> Liam: You saw how much energy there was in that one M&M. Now, oh yeah sorry about that smoke. Those of you from Auckland, you are quite familiar with the smoke from those big diesel four-wheel drives…
>
> Students: [Laughing]
>
> Liam: … they are all spilling out that particular carbon so you will feel quite at home.
>
> Students: [Laughing]
>
> In Extract 8, Liam was wittily responding to a situation, which was a cloud of smoke in

the class. This act of humour was considered spontaneous, as it was a reaction/ response to a situation that happened at a particular time. This type of humour can be classified as incongruity because Liam was able to see a humorous side of the situation and instantly shared it with students. This type of humour could also be classified as teacher-student teasing, especially students who were from Auckland. However, the focus of this humorous instance was not to tease students but to respond to the situation that happened at that time.

4.2.2.2 Funny comment

Another humorous instance was the display of a funny comment. A funny comment is referred as a short statement comprising humorous features (Bryant, Comisky, & Zillmann, 1979). An example identified from my observation is:

Extract 9:
 Bryan: There are couple of things you can do to kind of stay 'evolved', the inevitable fact that your muscle is going to waste over the time. What a depressing lecture, I am sorry about that.

 Students: [Laughing]

In Extract 9, students were laughing in response to Bryan's comment on his lecture content. What made his comment humorous was perhaps the link between the topic and the idea that life will come to an end. This might not have been something that students would usually feel comfortable listening to. Thus, a funny comment about the topic was used to mitigate the feelings of discomfort that the students were having.

4.2.2.3   Riddle

A riddle is information that is given in the form of a question, and the answer of the question is in a form of humorous 'punch line' (Bryant et al., 1979). There was one instance of riddle that I found from my observation of the video recording used by Philip. This is described below:

Extract 10:
 Philip: Why are German vegetarians always so depressed?

 Students: [Discussing]

 Philip: Ahhh…. It is because they feel 'Wurst'.

 Students: [Laughing]

In Extract 10, Philip started his lecture by asking the students a question. None of the students could answer the question so he told them the answer. The students immediately laughed and gave him a round of applause. Perhaps, initially, the students thought that it was a serious question. They could not tell that Philip was joking. Therefore, his cryptic response seemed to elicit a delighted response from the students.

4.2.3 Teachers' use of humour that aligned with relief theory

According to Nesi (2012) relief theory of humour describes that people's feeling of anxiety can be reduced through the act of laughing. In teaching and learning contexts, teachers can use humour to ease a tense atmosphere in the classroom, make students feel relaxed and promote a calm learning environment. In my study, there were two instances of humour used by one teacher that fell under relief theory. Bryan used an edited photo of himself during a quiz session in the class in a way that elicited laughter from the students.

During the observation session in Bryan's class, he set an examination type environment, providing 10 quiz questions for the students to answer. The questions were displayed one by one on projected PowerPoint slides. During this time, the classroom was quiet and it felt like the students were taking an actual examination where everybody was focused on answering the questions. As an observer, I felt tension start to build up and some of the students were anxious about answering the questions correctly. However, when the last question (question 10 in Extract 11) was shown, all the students burst into laughter.

Extract 11:

Context: During a quiz session, questions were shown on slides. Question 10 (last quiz question):

> What is the muscle labelled by X of your <u>favourite</u> lecturer?

Muscle labelled X was on a photo of Bryan's face edited onto a muscular body.

Berk (2003) describes this kind of humour, as "a twist on something familiar where those anticipating a serious ending however are zap[ped] with unexpected punch" (p. 23). Later, during the discussion session of this question, Bryan made fun of the same photo and question, eliciting further laughter from the students.

Extract 12:

    Bryan: Look at the muscularity of the body when you have a physique like that!

    Students: [Laughing]

    In this extract, the humour lies in the edited photo of Bryan's face on a muscular body. Bryan was being sarcastic and used self-deprecating humour to make the students laugh. Interestingly, the combination of the edited photo, question and his later comments made the students laugh again even though they had seen and laughed at the same question when they first encountered it during the quiz session.

    In summary, the types of humour identified in the data, used by the teachers to elicit students' laugher, aligned with superiority, incongruity and relief theories of humour. Teacher-student teasing was the most commonly used type of humour, as identified in the recorded videos of teachers' lectures. Other types of humour appeared less frequently or only once. In the next section, I elaborate on how the teachers used humour in their teaching by classifying humorous instances as involving either intended or spontaneous humour.

4.3 Classification of humour: Intended versus spontaneous humour

In my study, I found that the teachers used humour both purposely, or in a planned way, and spontaneously. Both types of humour were used in ways that could be related to the lecture content or not. Intended humour refers to the types of humour that teachers anticipated using while teaching in the class. Spontaneous humour on the other hand, occurred at any time during the class and it was a reaction to things that happened in the class at a particular moment. The ways in which these teachers used humour is illustrated in Table 6.

Classifications of Humour. Adapted from Lewis (1993, p.154).

	Humour types:	
	Intended	Spontaneous
Related to lecture content	I	II
Not related to lecture content	III	IV

In Table 6, the teachers' use of humour is classified into two dimensions as intended or spontaneous humour and humour that is related or not related to the lecture content. When considered in this way, humour can be categorised into four types:

Type I: intended, related to lecture content

Type II: spontaneous, related to lecture content

Type III: intended, not related to lecture content

Type IV: spontaneous, not related to lecture content

The majority of the humour used by the teachers in my study could be classified as type I (intended and related to lecture content) with seven instances, and type III (intended but not related to the lecture content) also with seven instances. Below are some examples of type I and type III humour.

Type I humour is classified as intended and related to the lecture content. Extract 13 is an example of type I humour.

Extract 13:

> Philip: … and lastly, down the bottom, there is Tribolium Castaneum. Does anyone know Tribolium Castaneum? Anyone? That is odd because you probably ate it for breakfast this morning. Tribolium Castaneum is the red flour beetle. The pests that stored flour and most base of flour contains no less than point zero than about point zero zero one percent (0.001%) insect parts which are tribolium casteneum. Those of you that are vegetarians have a problem.

> Students: [Laughing]

In this extract, Philip was explaining the meaning of *Tribolium Castaneum* and where it comes from. He then related it to the students, specifically vegetarians and subsequently this evoked the students' laughter. In this extract, Philip was trying to make a connection between the lecture content and a real-life example. From my SRI session with Philip, he recalled that he was intending to make the instance humorous.

Extract 14 provides an example of type III humour, which is intended but not related to the lecture content.

Extract 14:

> Liam: It is amazing stuff that people left it here; we have some keys, a pair of glasses.

> Students: [Giggle]

> Liam: …why do people leave these stuff behind? It is like leaving your laptop behind.

> Students: [Giggle]

> Liam: …oh, it fell off my backpack.

> Students: [Laughing]

In this extract, Liam was making fun of things that he found lying in front of the class by mimicking an action of a laptop falling off a backpack. He did this while waiting for the students to answer a quiz question. He intended to make the instance humorous so that he could maintain the students' focus. Although this instance captured the students' attention and made them laugh, the humour used was not related to lecture content. Therefore, this type of humour is classified under type III – intended but not related to lecture content.

There were also some humorous instances which I classified as type II (spontaneous and related to lecture content) with three instances, and type IV (spontaneous and not related to lecture content) with four instances. An example of type II humour can be seen in Extract 1 (see 4.2.1.1). From the SRI interview, Karen recalled trying to give an anecdote to relate to the point that she was making on the topic. But she did not intend to make the anecdote humorous, and she did not realise that making fun of herself would make the students laugh. Therefore, this type of humour can be categorised as type II - spontaneous and related to lecture content.

Another type of humour is type IV - spontaneous and not related to lecture content. An example of this type of humour can be seen in Extract 5 (see 4.2.1.3). The humour in Extract 5 was spontaneous based on the students' reaction in the class. In his SRI, Alejandro remembered that some of his students were distracted and were checking their devices such as smartphones. Quickly, he decided to use humour to refocus students' attention on his teaching. The humour he used was not related to the lecture content but it served another purpose, to refocus the students' attention.

The intended humour used consisted of almost all types of humour categorised in this study: self-deprecating humour, teacher-student teasing, funny comments, sarcasm, disparaging others, funny photos or quiz questions, and riddles. The large scale use of intended humour may suggest that the teachers were aware that they were using humour, planned to incorporate humour into their teaching and/or anticipated that humour could facilitate students' learning or students' engagement in the classroom. However, ad-lib humour was used spontaneously (see 4.2.2.1 in Extract 8). Interestingly, spontaneous teacher-student teasing used by the teachers in this study can be interpreted as mitigating students' negative perception or feeling towards what was said by the teachers. Examples of spontaneous teacher-student teasing are provided in Extract 6 (see 4.2.1.3) and another one is in this extract:

Extract 15:

Karen: You know that social construct has a lot to do with it as well. If you were a 20-year-old guy and it is Friday at 4.30pm and you said to your mates "guys, who wants to go out for some wine and cheesecake and brownies?"

Students: [giggle]

In this extract, Karen was teasing the male students by giving a hypothetical example to relate lecture content to the students' everyday lives. However, during the interview session, she explained:

That one is kind of iffy for me because it is increasingly at the university level, we are being taught more about kind of gender specificity and gender roles and things like that so when I was saying that in lecture, then I was kind of hesitant in my own mind. Maybe I should not be going down this path of male roles, female roles.

The act of giggling by the students is considered an immediate positive response to indicate that they did not perceive what was said by Karen as negative or as hurting their feelings. Similarly, Lee (2006) found that the use of humour could mitigate the negative impact of criticism.

Most of the humour used by these teachers was intended humour. The teachers were aware of, and prepared to use humour, and/or planned for humorous instances to happen during their classes. Spontaneous humour, on the other hand, was focused on mitigating negative perceptions from the students or was used to respond to the students' reactions in the class. Nonetheless, whether the humour used was intended or spontaneous, it evoked the students' collective laughter or giggles in the classroom. All humorous instances used by these teachers were perceived as positive and appropriate by the students in my study (see Chapter Six). Hence, the humour used can be considered effective. In the next section, I expand the classifications of humour and relate it to why teachers use humour.

4.4   Why do the teachers use humour?

In the SRI sessions, I explored with the teachers why they used humour in the ways discussed earlier. In this section, I use the words 'function' and 'reason' interchangeably in reference to the teachers' stated reasons for using humour. Most of the teachers also used the word 'reason' to indicate the function of their use of humour.

As noted in Chapter Two, past research that sought to classify the functions of humour has been limited by data drawing only on students' or researchers' perspectives (for example, Garner, 2006; Lee, 2006; Nesi, 2012). The functions of humour in higher education teaching have not been explored from the teachers' perspectives. Since teachers are the ones who use humour in teaching, this is a considerable oversight. In my study, through the use of SRIs exploring the teachers' use of humour, I captured an insight into the teachers' perspectives of what function humour performs in higher education classrooms.

In this study, the teachers' perspectives on the functions of humour can be understood in relation to the typology of humour illustrated in Table 6. For example, humour that was related to lecture content was generally associated with facilitating student learning. On the other hand, humour that was not related to lecture content was associated with engaging students' attention in the classroom. Thus, the functions of humour can be categorised into two broad functions: i) to facilitate student learning and ii) to engage students' attention in the classroom. Table 7 illustrates these functions.

Functions of humour	
i) To facilitate student learning	ii) To engage students' attention
a) to relate the lecture content to students' lives, explain lecture content or give an example of the lecture content b) to reinforce key ideas of the lecture content c) to provide additional information	a) to capture students' attention b) to refocus students' attention c) to make students feel comfortable or at ease d) to elicit laughter

4.4.1 Humour as a way of facilitating student learning

4.4.1.1   *Using humour to relate the lecture content to students' lives, to explain lecture content or to give an example of the lecture content*

The teachers in my study described using humour that related to lecture content as a way of facilitating learning. The first way in which humour was used to perform this function was when the teachers used it to relate lecture content to the students' lives, to explain the lecture content or to give an example of the lecture content.

All five teachers provided a descriptive explanation as to why they used humour in specific instances. Commonly, the reason was to relate the lecture content to students' lives or to give an example of the lecture content. Karen explained this function in relation to Extract 1 (see 4.2.1.1) discussed earlier:

I was just giving that relatability factor. I mean I was not trying to be more humorous in that example, that usually alcohol is quite a salient thing for university students so that I was trying to draw off of that thing. But just making fun of yourself and showing them that you are a person too.

Clearly, Karen did not intend to be humorous, but students interpreted her comments as humorous. Karen's aim for that instance was to link the lecture content to a relatable real life situation. Perhaps, Karen's comment elicited an amused response because it resonated with the students' own experiences. The students could connect Karen's example with their own or their friends' bad experiences of drinking alcohol. Maybe, the experiences were also often humorous, and this is why the students giggled. Then, Karen illustrated her own bad experience, unintentionally in a humorous way (using self-deprecating humour), and this made the students laugh. In this instance, laughter by the students indicated that they understood and agreed with Karen's point. The students seemed to understand the connection that Karen was trying to make with their own experiences.

Another example of intended humour can be seen in Extract 13 (see 4.3). In his SRI, Philip explained why he used the humour described in Extract 13:

It is about connecting the students with the material that I am teaching. So these people are mainly here because they are interested in human health and I am standing and talking to them about insects, because I think they need a bit of diversity in what they think about. So I am trying to draw their attention to the fact that actually the things that I might be talking about insects but actually they are important insects.

In this example, Philip provided a clear reason as to why he decided to make the scenario in Extract 13 humorous. He tried to relate the lecture content to the students by noting that they probably ingested the insects being discussed. In doing so, Philip attempted to make the lecture content more appealing and interesting for the students to learn. Therefore, he intentionally inserted teacher-student teasing types of humour. Based on the students' response, he also managed to capture the students' attention.

4.4.1.2   Using humour to reinforce key ideas of the lecture content

The teachers also used humour to emphasise key ideas of the lecture content to the students or to repeat and reinforce information. I provide an example in Extract 16 followed by Alejandro's explanation of the humorous instance:

Extract 16:
> Alejandro: Do you still have your legislation up with you? You do not know that you have to bring it with you? But do you have it anyway? It is a great idea to keep this on hand at any time. It is great for cocktail parties, on the bus just reading the legislation supplement, basically the accessories of all time. I love carrying my legislation supplement around, who would not? I said no one would not want it.

> Students: [Giggle]

In the SRI session in this instance (Extract 16), Alejandro explained why he decided to use humour:

> When I refer to legislation and they do not have it with them, it can be a bit frustrating because they do not know what I am referring to, so I just wanted to highlight really, that it is an important document, and that is why I am thinking about it but I do not know if it really helped to explain my point at that point because I do not think they took me very seriously about actually bringing them along to class. But I was attempting to sort of make light of how boring it was and yet how important it is.

The example in Extract 16 along with Alejandro's explanation highlight his intent to use humour to make a point specifically, to reinforce the importance for students of bringing their legislation paper with them to the class. Instead of showing anger to the students, Alejandro used a light-hearted way to remind the students of the importance of coming to class prepared. This approach of using humour aligned with Lee's (2006) study on the use of humour at university level. Lee found that humour was used to mitigate the impact of perceptions on the criticism made. By using humour, Alejandro could also maintain a positive 'tone' or sense of comfort in the classroom.

Another sub-function of humour was to reinforce or emphasise the same information in different ways. An illustration of this example can be seen in Extract 3 (see 4.2.1.2). Philip explained that he decided to use humour at that particular moment because: "This is kind of reinforcing the point… I guess, we want to know what is similar and different between us and Neanderthals and then the joke is really actually, we are not that different". Philip was clearly trying to explain the lecture content. He explained it by using an example and reinforced it in many ways. From my observation of his lecture, Philip seemed to repeat the same information. However, he kept his lecture interesting by delivering the information in ways that elicited the students' enjoyment through humour.

4.4.1.3   Using humour to provide additional information

The teachers in my study also used humour to supplement lecture content. For example, in Extract 8 (see 4.2.2.1), Liam gave information on lecture content in a humorous way by using ad-lib humour. Liam's use of humour in this instance was spontaneous, after he saw a cloud of smoke resulting from the experiment he conducted in the class. When I asked Liam to explain the humorous instance in Extract 8, he commented: "This is just a bit of chemistry information. A particular carbon in the atmosphere, dangerous and it comes from vehicles… I am just trying to explain why I ended up with a cloud of smoke". Although it was not part of the formal lecture content, Liam used humour to give general information that related to Chemistry. By doing it humorously, he made the information more appealing for students. What follows next is another function of humour used by the teachers - to engage students' attention.

4.4.2 Humour as a way of engaging students' attention

The second function of humour that emerged in this study was the use of humour, not related to the lecture content, but to engage students' attention in the classroom. There were four sub-categories of this function of humour such as using humour to capture the students' attention, to refocus the students' attention, to make the students feel comfortable or feel at ease, and to get the students to laugh.

4.4.2.1 Using humour to capture students' attention

In my study, two teachers (Alejandro and Philip) started their lectures with humour. For instance, Alejandro played a song by Shania Twain from a Youtube website at the beginning of his lecture. When the song finished, he then began his lecture by asking students a general question about the song and eventually made a comment that caused the students to laugh.

Extract 17:
> Alejandro: Number one, I can't believe that you remember that, most of you were not even born then, I believe at that point. Number two, Shania? Come on. That's the greatest mistake of all.
>
> Students: [Laughing]

In this extract, Alejandro was asking the students if they had heard the song before. Surprisingly, some of the students said "yes"; Alejandro poked fun at the song. When I asked him about the humorous instance in this extract, Alejandro said: "They (students) are all restless at the start of the lecture, and it takes, often a lot of time for them to sort of settle down and focus, so I want to get their attention". Although Alejandro's reference to the song did not relate to the lecture content, it was intended to capture students' attention thereby engaging the students from the beginning of the lecture.

Philip also used humour at the beginning of his lecture. This can be illustrated in Extract 10 (see 4.2.2.3). Philip used a riddle for the students to answer his question. However, it took a while for the students to come up with an answer. This is when he gave the answer which

was considered humorous and made the students laugh. During the SRI session with Philip, he described the situation in the classroom at that moment and why he decided to use humour: "I kind of worry about that. You have got a whole lot of students who are losing focus and attention at that time and so by telling them a joke, you are filling the space up so that they are engaged".

Both Alejandro and Philip conveyed a view that the students take time to be ready for the class and struggle to be focused at the beginning of the lecture. They both used humour deliberately to capture the students' attention and to help the students focus. Tait et al. (2015) indicated that gaining attention at the beginning of a class could be the most effective way to get students to engage throughout the session.

4.4.2.2   *Using humour to refocus students' attention*

Not all teachers who participated in this study used humour from the beginning of the lecture. However, some of them used humour to refocus the students' attention or to maintain the students' engagement in the class. For example, as seen in Extract 14 (see 4.3), Liam used humour during the quiz session. During the SRI session with him, he said: "They [students] are just answering questions. So the problem is that this is probably an easy question. They have already known the answers. I have given them a minute, so I am just trying to fill in some time and I am just trying to keep them engaged".

From a learning perspective, it is crucial to help students to stay focused or to maintain engagement throughout the lecture (Powell & Andresen, 1985; Tait et al., 2015). Humour is one way of doing this. Although Liam's humour was not related to the lecture content, it seemed to keep the students 'awake' and to ensure that students' attention remained on what the teacher (Liam) was saying or doing.

4.4.2.3 Using humour to make students feel comfortable or at ease

Another sub-function of humour was to make the students feel comfortable or at ease. An example of this is provided in Extract 9 (see 4.2.2.2). In this extract, Bryan described what he thought and felt about his teaching action:

> All the students are very young and they are all very vibrant and they have got a lot of vitality and all that sort of stuff. I was talking about a topic which is a little bit depressing. The idea of ageing and getting old and having your muscles waste away and ultimately dying essentially is a pretty depressing thought. But it is something that I had to teach them about. So I guess I went from maybe talking about things that were very positive in the lecture, to talking about something that is a bit negative. So I tried to lighten the tone maybe a little bit by making it somewhat humorous.

The funny comment Bryan made in Extract 9 contrasted with the nature of the topic that he was discussing. Bruner (2002) noted that lecture content can be serious, tedious and dreary at times. Bryan intended his use of humour to create a classroom atmosphere in which the students could learn. In this case, he used humour to help the students engage with the lecture content that could be perceived as 'dreaded'.

4.4.2.4 Using humour to elicit laughter

Although past research has not highlighted simply eliciting laughter as a function of humour in higher education, some of the teachers in my study described this as their intent when using humour. Bryan explains the example in Extract 11 (see 4.2.3):

> The idea is that they see a bit of sort of silliness towards the end where I am talking about motor pathways and then the end point of a motor pathway is on to a muscle fibre and so I stylise an image to do the same sort of thing. I definitely do that with the intention of getting a few laughs because it is so clearly out of the ballpark. It is kind of funny to me as well.

From this explanation, it is clear that Bryan wanted the students to enjoy learning in his class. He also wanted to make the lecture content more interesting and appealing for the students. Bryan further described what he thought about the function of humour when teaching a potentially dreary topic:

> I think in those situations, getting a bit of an engagement in something that could be maybe a little bit dreary or a little bit boring or there is no incentive for them to do it because there is no grade attached to it or something like that, they might disengage a little bit. So if you can make it sort of funny and engaging, maybe that is a good thing.

Clearly, Bryan's intent in using humour was for the students to enjoy learning a potentially dreary subject he was teaching. Next, I explain both functions - to simultaneously facilitate students' learning and to engage students' attention.

4.4.3 Humour as a way of simultaneously facilitating students' learning and engaging students' attention

Thus far, I have discussed how the teachers in my study used humour either to facilitate students' learning or to engage students' attention in the classroom. In two instances in my study, humour was used for both functions concurrently. The findings in this section are consistent with past studies on the functions of humour in higher education setting (e.g., Banas et al., 2010). However, this study was unique in its focus on teachers' perspectives of their use of humour. One example is illustrated in Extract 6 (see 4.2.1.3). Here, Alejandro explains the intended function of his use of humour at that particular moment:

> The reason I used Shania's song is because she says this word, 'prerogative'. It is a very complicated concept but she is talking about something completely different but it helps them link in to what they are thinking about. I mean that I use my technique of picking people out to sort of answer particular questions. They hate that but at the same point, it is engaging them again, people who are distracted now are living in fear that I am going to pick them and sort of making them laugh, making them feel at home, it still was all in fun to try and get to the point of what is the real point that I am trying to make.

Although Alejandro singled out individuals using teacher-student teasing type of humour, he was also trying to get the students to make a connection between the lecture content he was teaching earlier. Moreover, he teased a student by targeting them with the question so that both that student and other students would refocus their attention. Therefore, Alejandro used humour to simultaneously reinforce the lecture content and to refocus students' attention.

In the section that follows, I review the types, classifications and functions of humour used by the teachers in this study before I summarise my findings in this chapter.

4.5   Summary of this chapter

In summary, the teachers in my study used eight types of humour, intentionally and spontaneously which functioned either to facilitate student learning or to engage students' attention in the classroom. In some cases, the teachers used humour for both functions – to facilitate student learning and to engage students' attention simultaneously.
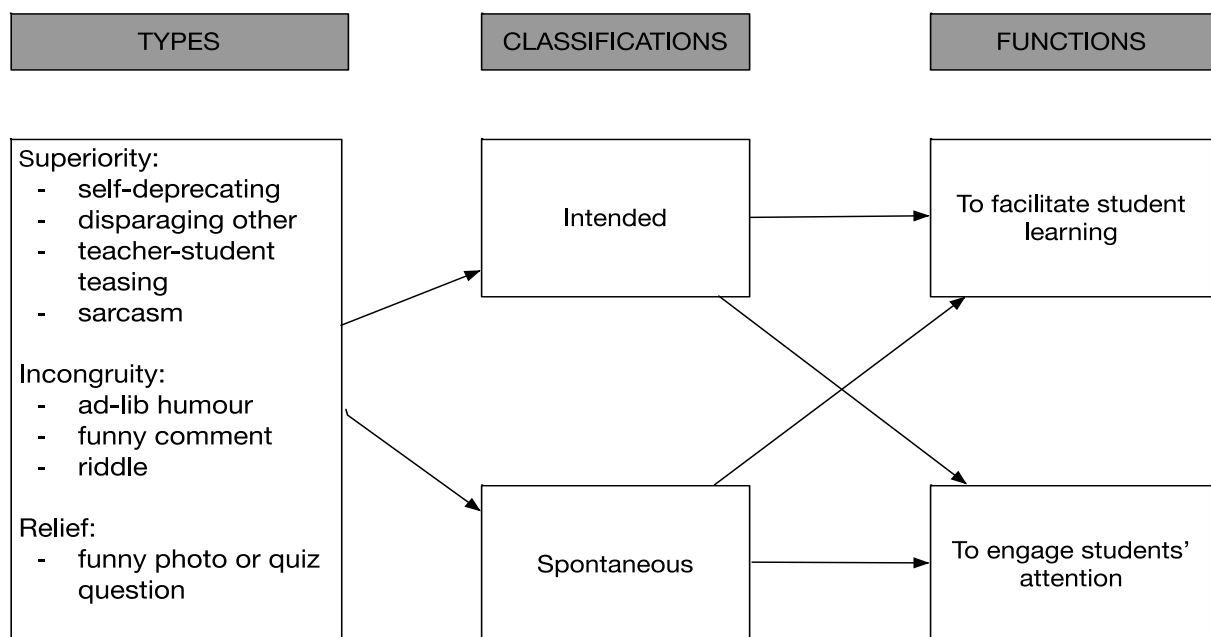
Figure 5. The connection between types, classifications and functions of humour used by the award-winning teachers.

In Figure 5, I summarise the content of this chapter, showing the connection between types, classification and functions of humour used by the award-winning teachers in this study. The types of humour used aligned with three theories of humour: superiority theory, incongruity theory and relief theory. Furthermore, the findings show that humour that the teachers used could be classified into two dimensions as intended or spontaneous humour. Intended humour was humour that was anticipated, prepared and/or planned to be incorporated in teachers' teaching and spontaneous humour was humour that teachers used at any time, in response to what occurred during the class. Both these classifications (intended and spontaneous) of humour functioned to either enhance student learning (usually when it was related to the lecture content) or to engage students' attention (often when it was not related to the lecture content).

In this chapter, I have presented an overview of the use of humour by five award-winning teachers at a New Zealand university. As noted throughout the chapter, the teachers' use of humour was consistent with past studies on the use of humour in teaching and learning. However, these findings are unique as it was drawn on teachers' explanations and perspectives alongside my observations. Previous research has largely overlooked teachers' understanding of humour use, especially in higher education.

In the following chapter, I explore the 'receivers' perspectives or students' perspectives of humour. Specifically, I focus on the effects of humour on students' learning experiences in the classroom.

Chapter Five

Students' perspectives:

The effects of humour on students' learning process

in the classroom

I think that humour helps by keeping me more focused. By laughing it makes me more awake and whatever he was saying after that helps the learning. Other teachers, they are not funny and I am zoned out and I do not remember what they have said for five minutes and when I am focused again, it is gone.

Dhivya, student

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I report on the effects of humour on the process of learning from students'
perspectives. To do so, I draw on instructional humour processing theory (IHPT) (Wanzer et
al., 2010) and emotional intelligence (EI) theory (Maguire, Egan, Hyland, & Maguire, 2017;
Mortiboys, 2005) to understand how humour affects students learning in the classroom. IHPT
has been used to explain how humour affects student learning. However, not all effects of
humour contribute to student learning—some contribute to other elements of the classroom
experience that may indirectly impact on learning. Furthermore, although the effects of
humour on student learning have received thoughtful attention in previous studies (e.g.,
Benjelloun, 2009; Chabeli, 2008; Garner, 2006; Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977; Lei et al., 2010;
Powell & Andresen, 1985; Shibinski & Martin, 2010; Ziv, 1988; Ziyaeemehr et al., 2011),
those studies focused only on identifying the effects of humour. Past studies have not
explored or discussed in depth how or by what process humour affects student learning in the
classroom.

In the discussions I had with the students, they indicated a range of ways that teachers'
use of humour shaped their learning experiences in the classroom. In this chapter, I discuss
how the students described both the effects of humour on student learning, and the effects of
humour on the classroom environment. The students did not mention any negative effects or
drawbacks of humour during the interview sessions. They generally construed humour as a
positive factor and as a benefit to learning in the classroom.

As previously described in Chapter Three, in this study, I interviewed students who
were enrolled in classes taught by the award-winning teachers I observed. The interview
sessions were conducted at the end of the semester, in a semi-structured manner. Unlike the
interview sessions with the teachers, students were not shown any of the humorous instances

from their lecture. This was because I wanted to discover if students could recall humorous instances and if so, in what ways.

5.2 Effects of humour on student learning

Wanzer et al. (2010) and Bolkan and Goodboy (2015), argue that for learning to be enhanced, students must first perceive humour as positive and appropriate, and then it may increase students' focus while learning in the classroom. In this sense, humour can increase students' motivation and ability to process the lecture content, subsequently enhancing their learning (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2015). Relevant, positive and appropriate humour that enhances student learning is considered instructional humour (Banas et al., 2010; Wanzer et al., 2010). The students in my study reported that humour contributed to their learning in the classroom. Across the interviews, the students identified teachers' use of humour as helping them to focus, remember, recall and understand, and as fostering their thinking.

5.2.1 Humour helps students to focus

A sub-theme in the students' descriptions of their experiences of learning with the use of humour is the effect of humour on their focus in the classroom. The interview discussion revealed that humour helped the students to focus by keeping them alert in the classroom and by helping them to avoid distractions. For example, it kept them from using electronic devices for non-lecture related purposes. One of eight students referring to humour's assistance with their focus, Dhivya, had the following to say:

> I think that humour helps by keeping me more focused. By laughing it makes me more awake and whatever he was saying after that helps the learning. Other teachers, they are not funny and I am like zoned out and I do not remember what they have said for five minutes and when I am focused again, it is gone.

In her account, Dhivya emphasised the importance of focusing on the lecture content in order to learn in the classroom. With the presence of humour, she was able to focus more effectively on the lecture content. Korobkin (1988) pointed out that humour can help the students learn by giving them a cognitive break that enables them to digest and grasp the information. Therefore, humour helps to keep students focused on the lecture content throughout the lecture because they do not feel bored or tired due to an unbroken stream of information being delivered by their teacher.

Moreover, the students can easily become distracted while learning in the classroom, particularly from 'daydreaming', or when the students permit their focus to wander (Tait et al., 2015). In my study, the students said that with the presence of humour, they did not want to feel left out in the class; if they were not focused when the teacher used humour and other students were laughing, they felt lost. As the students engaged, they indirectly remained attentive to the lecture content. Katy described this in the following way: "It helped me to stay on task, because if I missed a joke, and everyone was laughing and I feel like . . . ohhh . . . that was crap! I should have paid attention".

Furthermore, technology can be a distraction in the classroom when it is used for activities other than note-taking or lecture-related reading. In a study involving 137 students at a university in the United States, Fried (2008) found that most of the students had their laptops on and smartphones fully operating during lecture sessions. Students easily became distracted with the technology and lost their focus on what the teacher was teaching. Conversely, and like Katy, John said that when the teacher used humour he was more likely to focus on the teacher (Liam) and not his electronic devices:

> He is holding the whole room's attention on him. Nobody wants to examine their laptop screens and read the newsfeed on Facebook or anything when Liam is up the front cracking a joke every couple of lines. Not that it is a bad thing that he is cracking a joke every a couple of lines. I want to be listening to what this guy is saying.

In my study, teachers' use of humour kept the students interested and focused on the lecture rather than letting their attention wander to their electronic devices. My finding on the effect of humour on students' focus is in line with previous studies by Benjelloun (2009), Korobkin (1988), Lei et al. (2010), Powell and Andresen (1985) and Ziyaeemehr et al. (2011). Their studies found that humour helped students to focus and pay attention to the teacher and/or what the teacher was delivering while learning in the classroom. Next, I discuss the effects of humour on students' ability to remember and recall lecture content.

5.2.2 Humour helps students to remember and recall lecture content

All students in my study noted that humour helped them to remember and recall the content of the lecture. This finding agrees with previous studies by Benjelloun (2009), Garner (2006), Kaplan and Pascoe (1977), Lee (2006), Schmidt (1994), and Ziyaeemehr et al. (2011). When I asked, "Do you remember any of the humorous instances used by your teacher?", most students were able to describe at least one humorous instance and explain its relation to the lecture content they were learning. Some of the humorous instances described were from the lectures I observed and recorded, and some were not. However, the students could explain in detail the humorous instances that they remembered.

The students also reflected on how humour contributed to recall. Some of the students explained that humour helped them to remember the teacher's presence and how the teacher made them feel. According to Rossa:

> I feel it kind of 'click', even if I was to go through my lectures now, through his block and I could get to a point, I would be 'that is when he made that joke'. It helps because if you went back and watched the lecture on Capture[4], you do not need to be with him. I can remember his presence and him with his humour, it kind of links me back to little parts of the topic that I have learned. So I feel like that is quite helpful.

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[4] Capture is a lecture recording system.

Another example was given by Lisa:

> When I go through my notes and I have written down 'ha ha'. Like 'something, something, something, ha ha' because it was funny when he said it. Sometimes I write things in capital letters because he really stresses them.

In Lisa's case, she jotted down laughter expressions on her notes. This helped her to remember the humorous instances and eventually remember the lecture content. Lisa suggested that humour helped her to remember the specific moments when there were humorous instances in the classroom, and therefore, remember the content related to the humour.

5.2.3 Humour helps students to understand lecture content

Seven students also stated that humour helped them to understand the lecture content. This finding resonates with studies by Benjelloun (2009), Englert (2010), Kaplan and Pascoe (1977), Lei et al. (2010), Powell and Andresen (1985), and Suls (1983). In my study, the students reported that teachers' use of humour helped them to understand through funny illustrations of content and witty examples related closely to their everyday experiences.

One way in which humour was considered helpful in assisting the students to understand the lecture content was through funny illustrations crafted by their teachers. Lisa and Phoebe illustrated and explained how their teacher (Alejandro) made difficult lecture content easy for students to understand with a funny illustration (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Lisa's recreation of an illustration of a sheep drawing used by her teacher (Alejandro) while explaining cases in a law lecture.

Lisa explained:

> He draws some sheep and it just looks like this [see Figure 6] and it has got two eyes and four legs. It helps me. I think it is funny because I look at the little sheep and I go, 'He really simplifies the crux of the case on one piece of paper'.

Phoebe added a further explanation as to how the funny illustration of sheep helped them to understand:

> He wrote the sheep out and then he had a sheep and he says, 'This was Parliament'. He said, 'I write the law,' and then another sheep was, 'I implement the law', and then the judiciary was here saying, 'I make sure you, the executive, exercises its power lawfully', for the third sheep.

Both Lisa and Phoebe felt that they understood the lecture content better when their teacher exemplified the information in funny illustrations. They not only understood it, but they also were able to remember and explain it well during the interview session. This finding supports Berk's (1996) suggestion that university teachers can use humour to support students' understanding and Kaplan and Pascoe's (1977) finding that students could easily understand and recall humorous examples more easily than serious ones.

In my study, another way humour helped the students to understand the lecture content was by relating information to students' daily life experiences. Rossa described the use of humour by Liam, her teacher:

> He was going through enzyme and substrates complexes and then he would start to talk about things in real life that are funny but simulate the same thing, such as when a substrate binds to an enzyme complex and what goes through with that and he would kind of dance and this is when a girl goes into the club and she is kind of shy and starts getting a lot of energy, so he made it relatable to our age and what we see around.

In this example, Rossa explained how the teacher linked the lecture content with humorous anecdotes. Clearly, Rossa remembered the instance and was able to articulate what she understood about the lecture content. She was also able to make connections between the lecture content and humour used by her teacher. Rossa continued to explain:

> He can bring something from another part of our lives that we maybe did not have with us when we came to the university and then apply it to our experience here. So this is something I have picked up along the way and now I can apply it to my chemistry understanding; it is pretty good.

The relatable example mentioned by Rossa suggests that the teacher used humour for instructional purposes, and that the students were able to make the connection between the teacher's humorous examples and the lecture content (Wanzer et al., 2010). Students in this study described how humour that connected the lecture content to their own life experiences functioned as instructional humour. The following section describes how humour fostered students' thinking by drawing a connection between humour and the lecture content.

5.2.4 Humour fosters students' thinking by helping them to connect with the lecture content

Two students mentioned that humour affected how they thought about the lecture content. John and Lisa stated that the humour provoked them to think about the content the teacher taught in the classroom. John explained one humorous instance in Extract 8 (see 4.2.2.1):

> There is some energy in a bond, that is a tiny amount of energy in a bond but then Liam was like 'Hey, you know, what else? There is a ton of bonds inside this M&M here.' So not only do you get humour out of using crazy examples and weird examples that the students are not expecting, but also generate thinking and he showed that. This formula will be used in calculating the brightness of a lamp when standing one metre away from it can also be used to calculate the brightness of the sun when standing one metre away from it. The energy in a bond formula we have been doing in chemistry that students think is just going to be used for tiny, little things like calculating the energy in a single molecule of sugar in the blood, can also be used to calculate the energy of a chemoton of T and T. And when that comes out from a lecture, the difference between what you expect to hear about in a lecture and what you actually got—it is funny.

> From the explanation given, it seems that John could apply the information from the humorous experiment to other examples and draws a link between the teacher's use of humour and the lecture content. Chabeli (2008) indicated that humour fosters students' ability to "think and rethink their understanding of the content and examine their reasoning so that new knowledge can be constructed" (p. 56). My interview with other students confirmed this, as the students considered the humour used in relation to the lecture content. For example, Lisa explained:

> Humour really just makes me think about what he (Alejandro) is saying and kind of processing it, which I hopefully learn because of that. I know I am processing everything he is saying, not just a little bit here and then getting bored because he is constantly coming out with things. It forces my brain to process everything he says.

According to John and Lisa, the teachers' use of humour fostered their thinking by challenging them to participate in problem-solving activities and added justifications as well as alternatives to their understanding of the lecture content. This finding aligns with IHPT, which posits that the humour used should be appropriate and related to the lecture content if it is to increase student learning in the classroom (Wanzer et al., 2010). It was evident from the students' explanations in my study that teachers' use of humour or quirky comments helped them to learn and were considered as instructional humour, because it fostered students thinking, and allowed them to challenge their understanding on lecture content. The teacher's use of humour was considered as fostering students' thinking as it encouraged students "to critically analyse, interpret, and evaluate assumptions, beliefs, thoughts and actions" (Chabeli, 2008, p. 55).

Students' accounts in this section show that the teachers in my study used humour that can be classified as instructional humour. This is because it enhanced student learning by helping the students to focus, remember, recall and understand, and by fostering their thinking and allowing them to draw connections between the humour and the lecture content. The students from this study not only highlighted the positive effects of teacher humour, when used appropriately and in ways that relate to the lecture content, but they also described how humour contributed to their learning in the classroom. The students also discussed other positive effects of humour besides those related to student learning, including how humour affected the classroom environment.

5.3 Effects of humour on the classroom environment

In my study, the students indicated that humour helped them feel comfortable learning with the teacher and made the classroom environment conducive for learning. In this regard, I draw on emotional intelligence (EI) theory to explore the effect of the teachers' use of humour on students' feelings and perceptions regarding the classroom environment. In this context, EI refers to aspects of emotionality that humour could affect, rather than the cognitive functions (for example, focus, recall, understanding and thought).

In my study, the students revealed that the teachers' use of humour affected the classroom environment in two ways: humour helped to build rapport between the teacher and students, and humour assisted the students to develop a positive attitude and emotion towards the subjects they were learning. These findings agree with previous studies by Bellert (1989), Benjelloun (2009), Lee (2006), Lei et al. (2010), Nesi (2012), Powell and Andresen (1985) and Ziyaeemehr et al. (2011), which found that humour contributes to students' social wellbeing while learning in the classroom.

5.3.1 Humour helps to build teacher–student rapport in the classroom

Maguire et al. (2017) postulate that people with high/positive EI can facilitate interactions and enhance relationships. In my study, eight students perceived that through humour, the teachers were able to build rapport with students. This is because humour can be used as a communication strategy to create an atmosphere of closeness and equality between the teacher and students (Bellert, 1989). Most of the students expressed a sense that teachers who used humour were approachable. One student, Tess, said: "I feel like I want to listen because she just comes across as like a nicer person". Nesi (2012) indicated that teachers who like to use humour, such as teasing or self-deprecating humour, make students feel comfortable working with them and consequently contribute to a positive classroom environment. One

student in my study, Kara described the self-deprecating humour of Karen, her teacher, as follows:

> I really enjoy it because it is the type of humour that I think everyone can understand and I mean psychology as a subject also, attracts people from so many different parts of life or ethnicities or cultures and it is a really applicable humour to so many people and that is why I think it is quite funny because it is just like making you feel like she is down to earth or she is just one of us.

Similarly, Lisa stated that Alejandro's (her teacher) use of humour made her feel he was an approachable person. In her own words, "He could come to our level and communicate with us". Both teachers used humour that was relatable to students' daily experiences. As a result, the students felt that their teachers could understand them. Hence, the teachers seemed approachable and friendly because their uses of humour 'closed the gap' between teachers and students. My findings aligned with Carver (2013) who argues that humour makes the teacher appear less authoritarian and that students like this. Next, I discuss how, in my study, humour fostered students' positive attitudes and emotions towards the subject that they were learning.

5.3.2 Humour helps to develop positive attitudes and emotions towards the subject

Chabeli (2008) draws on EI theory, positing that it is important for teachers to encourage students to have positive attitudes and emotions towards the subject in order to foster students' learning in the classroom. Six students in my study confirmed that the teachers' use of humour encouraged them to feel positive towards the subject the teacher was teaching. The students talked about how humour made the subject interesting to learn and made them feel at ease learning the subject. Kae said, "It is not like he [the teacher] is trying to be funny. It is just his way of trying to keep the students interested in the subject".

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Rossa also described her reflection on how humour helped her to be interested in learning the subject. She said, "It is quite a daunting subject but he really made it quite something that I could latch on to and really want to study more, so it was really good. He did with the humour aspect". In Rossa's case, learning chemistry could be demotivating. However, she indicated that, with the presence of humour, she was more likely to be interested and to enjoy the class. Garner (2006) indicated that humour is beneficial in classrooms, especially when teaching subjects that students dread. He further stated that if the subject is a dreaded subject and humour is not incorporated into the teaching and learning process, students are likely to feel anxious and demotivated.

John spoke about how humour helped him emotionally to learn the subject. He noted, "The point of the jokes is to slowly calm us and keep our attention on him through the lecture while still making sure that the focus of the lecture is on chemistry". The teacher's use of humour reduced John's sense of tension and anxiety in relation to learning chemistry. He concentrated better on learning the subject, as the humour used by his teacher helped him feel that the subject was less complicated. Subsequently, his concentration improved.

In line with EI theory, in my study, the humour used by teachers helped the students to feel mentally and emotionally positive towards both the teacher and the subject they were studying. Based on the students' perspectives, the teachers' use of humour had a positive effect on both the students and their learning. From an EI perspective, the teachers' use of humour stimulated students' emotional and intellectual growth. However, what is interesting from my study findings is that students did not only identify the effects of humour, but they also described how these effects of humour contributed to the positive learning environment. In the following section, I summarise students' perspectives on how humour affected both their learning and the classroom environment.

5.4 Summary of this chapter

In this section, I summarise the findings of this chapter on the effects of humour on students'
learning experiences in the classroom. From the discussions I had with the students, I
identified two broad effects of humour from the students' perspectives: on the student
learning and classroom environment (see Figure 7). In my study these effects were positive,
contributing to students' learning and sense of comfort in the classroom. Figure 7 illustrates
the effects of humour and the different ways in which humour affected the students while they
were learning in the classroom.
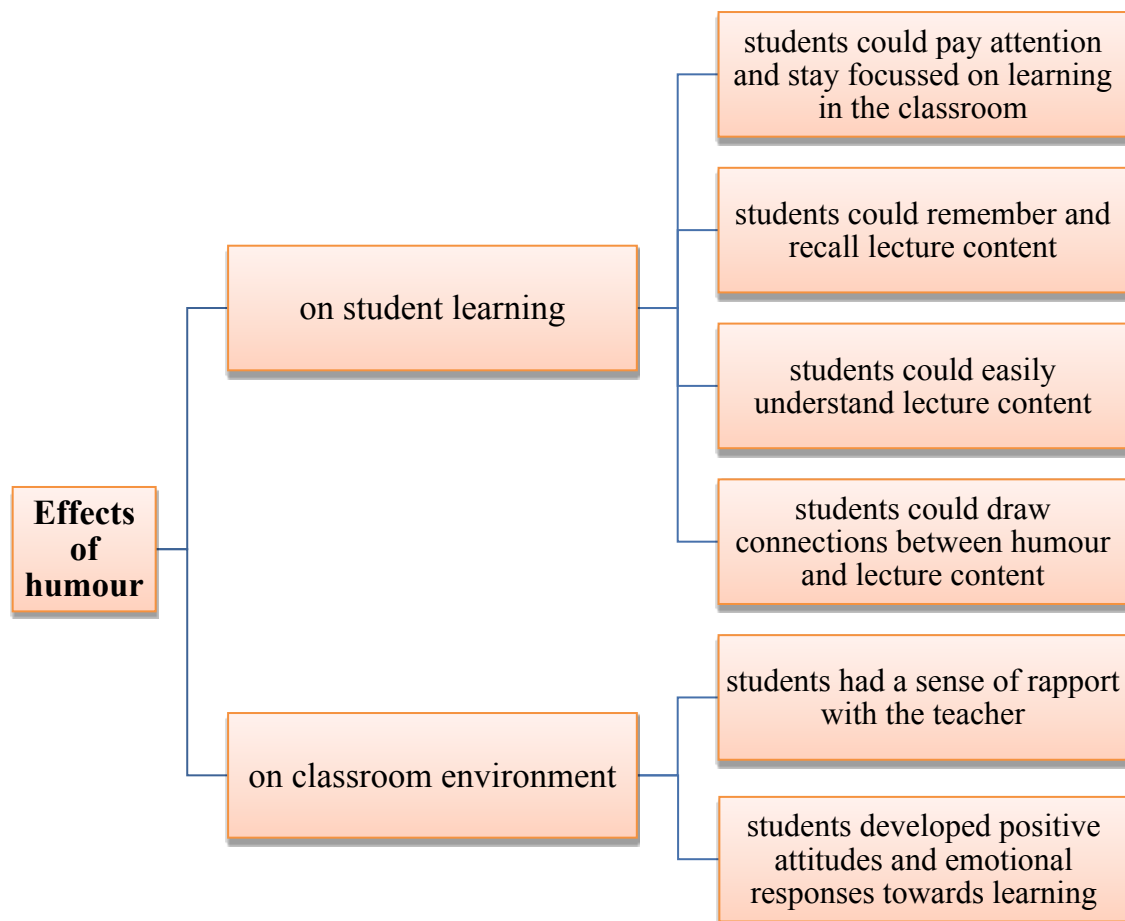
Figure 7. Students' perspectives on the effects of teachers' use of humour.

In this chapter, I have considered the effects of humour on students' learning processes in the classroom. From my discussions with the students in the interview sessions, I found that the students were positively affected by the teachers' use of humour. Students noted that humour affected them in two ways: a) by shaping their learning, and b) by shaping the classroom environment which, in turn, shaped their learning. As indicated throughout the chapter, it is evident that the effects of humour discussed by the students in this study were consistent with other studies on of the effects of humour.

Of particular note was the wide variation in the ways that humour affected students' learning processes, as articulated by the students, who indicated that humour helped them to stay focused in class by avoiding distractions, and helped them follow the teachers' pace in delivering the information. The students explained that they were more interested in listening to the teacher and what they were teaching when humour was involved. Students did not want to miss interesting information that the teachers were explaining. Neither did they want to miss humorous comments made by the teacher. Students linked the teachers' use of humour with their own capacity to learn more effectively in the classroom. Students revealed that humour helped them to remember and recall the lecture content when they were revising. The students discussed recall and revision as both cognitive and affective process, noting that through recalling humorous instances, they would visualise the teachers' presence, the humour used and the lecture content taught by the teachers. The students also described how the teachers' use of humour helped them to understand and make connections with the lecture content. Further, students noted that they understood better, and thought more deeply about, the lecture content, as the teacher exemplified the information through humorous illustrations. In line with IHPT, the students' descriptions of the effects of teachers' use of humour highlighted its instructional value for learning.

However, there were other positive effects of humour noted by the students, which IHPT could not explain adequately. Students in this study also described how humour contributed to a better classroom environment by enhancing the teacher–student relationship. When the teachers incorporated humour in the classroom, the students perceived the teachers as approachable, down to earth and 'nice'. The students also stated that the teachers' use of humour encouraged them to have positive attitudes and emotions towards the subject. Through the use of humour, the teachers made the students feel relaxed, motivated and able to enjoy learning the subject, even if it was a dreaded subject. Currently, IHPT does not recognise the role of emotion in instruction and humour use. My data suggest that humour has an instructional function not only when it is content-related, but also when it creates the emotional conditions that allow students to learn.

In this regard, EI provides an additional means for understanding the effects of humour in classroom environments from students' perspectives. My findings on the effects of humour support EI in which the teachers' use of humour helped to create rapport between teacher and students, and fostered in students positive attitudes and emotions towards both the teacher and the subject they were learning. Therefore, the students' perspectives aligned with my findings in the previous chapter (see Chapter Four), which focused on the teachers' intent in using humour. The students found humour engaging and the teachers were using humour deliberately to engage the students in learning.

In summary, in my study, the students indicated that teachers' use of humour both enhanced student learning and created an environment in which the students felt able to learn in the classroom. Notably, these effects were intertwined in my data. The students referred to both effects interchangeably in most cases. In the next chapter, I present the students' and teachers' perceptions of humour. I discuss the students' and teachers' perceptions and understandings on the use of humour in teaching and learning.

Chapter Six

Students' and teachers' perceptions of the use of humour in teaching and learning

I think humour that is relatable to a large audience is important because if you are just talking about scientific jokes or speaking in scientific terms that no one understands, then even though it is humorous, no one is going to get it.

Kara, student

In higher education, it is very material driven and there is so much material to be learnt and if you just have to memorise it, sheer rote memorisation, it is boring and you have to learn how to apply that material. So humour and humorous stories are some ways to kind of teach what you are learning is actually relevant to your life and let's talk about that.

Karen, Award-winning teacher

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore students' and teachers' perceptions of the use of humour in teaching and learning. According to the instructional humour processing theory (IHPT), the use of appropriate and relevant humour by teachers is an effective way to enhance student learning (Banas et al., 2010; Wanzer et al., 2010). However, arguably, students' and teachers' perceptions of what constitutes appropriate and relevant humour may differ, meaning that the effectiveness of teachers' humour use may vary, depending on the context in which it is used. With this in mind, it is important to consider teachers' and students' ideas about humour alongside each other.

As noted in Chapter Two, scant attention has been given to students' and teachers' perceptions of humour in studies on teaching and learning, especially in higher education contexts. To date, I could only find three studies that incorporated both students' and teachers' perceptions of humour (Miller et al., 2017; Torok et al., 2004; White, 2001). However, these studies only focused on general aspects or perceptions and not on the teachers' and students' views of the same and specific use of humour. Without this it is difficult to see how IHPT functions. Further, research utilising the IHPT has tended to concentrate only on students' perceptions of humour, perhaps because students are the receivers of humorous interaction (e.g., Bolkan & Goodboy, 2015; Wanzer et al., 2010). However, teachers' perceptions are also important when both teachers and students are engaged in interactions involving humour (Civikly, 1986). Therefore, this chapter aims to understand how teachers view their use of humour and what students actually perceive when teachers use humour.

In particular, in this chapter, I pay attention to the similarities and differences that emerged between the students' and teachers' perceptions of humour. The chapter begins by discussing the varying perceptions of students and teachers on the first principle of IHPT, which is the appropriateness of humour in the classroom. Then, I discuss the students' and teachers' perceptions on the second principle, the relevance of humour. Specifically, I focus on the similarities and differences between students' and teachers' perceptions of what is appropriate (or inappropriate) and relevant (or irrelevant) humour.

6.2 Students' and teachers' perceptions of what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate humour in the classroom

In the IHPT, Banas et al. (2010) outline two principles of instructional humour that are pertinent to this study: a) appropriateness and b) relevance. This section focuses on the first principle, which is the appropriateness of humour. According to IHPT, humour should be appropriate to be suitable for use in the classroom. Appropriate humour creates a positive effect, whereas inappropriate humour creates a negative effect in the classroom (Banas et al., 2010; Wanzer et al., 2010). The students and the teachers interviewed in this study expressed a range of perceptions in relation to what constitutes appropriate or inappropriate humour.

Most of the students in my study were interested in talking during their interviews about their perceptions of humour in general. At times during the interview sessions, the students made comparisons between the teachers involved in this study and other teachers who did not use humour while teaching in the classroom. The comparisons were made to clarify the students' understanding of humour and to show how much they appreciated the teachers in this study, who did use humour.

Significantly, during the discussions with the teachers on the appropriateness and relevance of humour, the teachers not only spoke about their perceptions of humour, but also about their experiences related to the use of inappropriate or irrelevant humour while teaching in the classroom. All the teachers appeared to be aware of the importance of appropriateness and relevance when using humour in their teaching. However, some of the teachers had difficulties articulating their perceptions of what kinds of humour are appropriate and relevant.

In the remainder of this section, I consider my findings regarding appropriate and inappropriate humour in relation to the following five subthemes: a) appropriate humour is relevant humour, b) appropriate humour happens at a suitable time and in a suitable manner, c) appropriate humour enhances teachers' credibility, d) appropriate humour requires careful judgement and planning, and e) inappropriate humour is disrespectful humour.

6.2.1 Appropriate humour is relevant humour

6.2.1.1 Students' perceptions

I started by asking the students about their perceptions of the appropriateness of humour. When students were asked, "Does the humour that your teacher uses tend to be appropriate?", the most common response was "yes". The students' responses also revealed what they understood to be appropriate humour. Some of the explanations given by the students were:

Yes, it is pretty appropriate to the context	(Claire)
It is to do with the content	(Tess)
Because it is an everyday kind of personal experience humour	(Kara)

These comments revealed the students' view of appropriate humour as humour that is relevant to the lecture content and to students' daily experiences in life. This aligned with Wanzer et al.'s (2006) study on students' perceptions of appropriate humour. Wanzer et al. found that students perceived humour to be appropriate if it was relevant to the lecture

content. Wanzer et al. discovered other types of humour that were considered appropriate for teachers, including self-disparaging humour and spontaneous humour (see Chapter Four). However, in contrast to Wanzer et al.'s study, the students in my study did not refer to self-disparaging and spontaneous humour when discussing humour that they considered to be appropriate.

6.2.1.2 Teachers' perceptions

In line with students' perceptions of appropriate humour, one teacher, Karen, considered appropriate humour to be relevant humour. She stated, "I think it is an important way to make yourself relatable but I think humour has to be natural. You should not force that in your lectures because it seems fake and it seems inappropriate". Clearly, this teacher and the students in this study had the same understanding of appropriate humour—humour was considered appropriate because it was relevant to the teaching and learning context.

6.2.2 Appropriate humour happens at a suitable time and in a suitable manner

6.2.2.1 Students' perceptions

Some of the students interviewed in this study perceived humour as appropriate because it occurred at suitable times and in a suitable manner during lectures. For example, Rossa commented that:

> Liam completely embodies it [humour]. I think it was funny at appropriate times because if he comes in, guns blazing with all of this laughter, then I do not want to learn. I just want to laugh around but I feel like he made in a sense that it was in pit stop … We can have a little bit of a giggle and we could get straight back into learning and so I feel like that is good.
>
> Kae had a similar perception regarding his teacher, Bryan:

The way that Bryan works is that he will be giving information and it would not be joke after joke after joke. It would not be like that. Obviously, he is teaching and going at really good pace but I think what he does is, when he notices that people are drawing back, he will have it spread out in a way that it is actually going to jolt people again.

Another explanation of what constitutes appropriate humour was provided by Kara:

I think definitely there are some parts of the topics, which would be useful using humour. It is those parts which are helpful to have little references where I can say 'oh yes, that situation'; I can look back on that but then when there are things like the scientific functions or the stages of the process, it is not really effective to use humour there. It is not really helpful because I actually need the specific details to the point.

Based on the explanations above, it is clear that the amount and timeliness of humour used by the teachers influenced the students' perceptions of humour as appropriate. This finding is consistent with Benjelloun's (2009) findings that students were not interested in extreme forms of humour, such as teachers acting like clowns. Moreover, Huss (2008) stated that if the instances of humour exceeded the lecture content, students would perceive that the teacher as not being serious about teaching. Evidently, the students interviewed for my study did not favour extreme uses of humour by teachers and the teachers did not overuse humour.

6.2.2.2 Teachers' perceptions

The teachers interviewed for this study also perceived appropriate humour to be humour that is appropriately timed. For example, one teacher, Karen, considered that the use of humour in the classroom should be 'timely'. Karen explained:

I think if you are really funny in your lectures all the time and it is just a one-hour comedy show kind of, then you are not really doing your job as a professional instructor. So I do think it is a balance. If you like to be funny sometimes, then integrate it sometimes into the lecture. But do not force it and do not do it all the time throughout the lecture. So it is a fine balance.

Thus, Karen's comments indicated that a view of 'clown-like' or 'stand-up comedy' types of humour as inappropriate in the classroom. This is important because the use of too many humorous instances could lead to ineffective learning processes (Chabeli, 2008;

Skinner, 2001). Humour may not serve an instructional function if the teacher and students spend most of their time laughing, leaving little time for teaching and learning. Ziv (1988) suggested that the optimum use of humour by teachers is three or four humorous instances during a lecture, to avoid clown-like behaviour or stand-up comedy. The teachers interviewed for my study used approximately four to six humorous instances in a one- or two-hour lecture. Although this exceeded Ziv's (1988) limit, the students considered that their teachers' use of humour fostered learning because the instances happened at a suitable times and in a suitable manner.

6.2.3 Appropriate humour enhances teachers' credibility

6.2.3.1 Students' perceptions

Studies have reported that humour has an influence on how students and teachers perceive a teacher's credibility. The appropriate use of humour by a teacher enhances students' perceptions of the teacher's credibility (Banas et al., 2010). The inappropriate use of humour, in contrast, can diminish the teacher's credibility (Gorham & Christophel, 1990). Some students interviewed for my study considered that humour was indicative of, or led students to appreciate, the teacher's positive teaching characteristics. One of the positive characteristics was enthusiasm. Kara explained that her teacher's use of humour made the teacher appear enthusiastic:

> Because a humorous lecturer is not just humorous. The way she talks and the way she presents the lecture slides, it is so much more enthusiastic. Whereas someone who is not humorous, they are quite dry and just talk about the slides in monotone and obviously, that is very stereotypical but that is what you associate with it. If someone is telling jokes, it is not like they are just talking about it in a monotone. They are enthusiastic because they want to make people laugh. They do not want to just say a joke and then no one laugh. So they have to put effort into it.

Kara's perception was that, by using appropriate humour, her teacher (Karen) appeared more enthusiastic in her teaching. Kember and McNaught (2007) indicated that enthusiasm is one of the characteristics that teachers need to portray to motivate students to learn in the classroom. To the students interviewed for my study, the use of appropriate humour indicated not only that their teachers were enthusiastic but also that they were making an effort to teach in the classroom. Therefore, the students perceived the use of appropriate humour, by Karen and other teachers as enhancing their credibility as a teacher, and making them appear more enthusiastic when teaching.

In addition, the teachers' use of appropriate humour made them appear more energetic and passionate in teaching. As Kae commented, "if they show passion and they really show they have a passion with the students, I think that humour definitely gives an added edge. It definitely works for me when that happens". Lisa also described how these characteristics (energy and passion) were displayed by her teacher, Alejandro, through the use of appropriate humour:

> I think that he is a really high-energy lecturer. So he will be moving around. He will be always exclaiming something, he uses his voice, he [has] got a lot of passion for his subject. I think when he uses jokes and things, it is not just the humour. I mean if he was really low energy and just stood there but cracked a few jokes, it would not really be as interesting or be the same as what he is doing now. It is just the high energy goes with the humour which makes us engaged to listen to what he wants to say.

As described by Lisa, Alejandro's use of appropriate humour made him seem energetic in teaching. As the function of humour is to make the students laugh, the teacher's use of humour requires effort and positive energy to ensure this response (laughter). Moreover, Lisa indicated that Alejandro's positive energy in teaching motivated her to listen to Alejandro in the classroom and, ultimately, shaped her positive perception of Alejandro.

Positive energy has been reported as one characteristic required to be a good higher education teacher (Harland, 2012). Rossa provided another example of the effect of the positive energy displayed by her teacher, Liam, who used humour:

> I guess sometimes it would be nice for every lecturer to make you feel as if they were happy to be there because I feel some lecturers just want to come in, dump their information and leave. I feel Liam was completely different. He really wanted to excite you to learn and he was excited to pass on what he knew. He would just come in really fresh. It could be raining outside, it could be the most beautiful day outside and he would just be happy with the simple fact that he is there to teach us, he is there to teach us chemistry and then we should be excited about that fact too.

For Kae, Lisa and Rossa, the use of appropriate humour made their teachers appear energetic and passionate in teaching and this enhanced the teachers' credibility. This finding supports previous research into humour and teachers' credibility, which found that teachers' appropriate use of humour influences students' positive perceptions of the teachers (e.g., Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Wrench & Richmond, 2004).

Interestingly, the students interviewed for this thesis not only expressed their perceptions of their teachers' appropriate use of humour and its influence on their credibility, but also compared their teachers with others who did not use humour, or who used inappropriate humour, and commented that this negatively affected their perceptions of these teachers' credibility.

6.2.3.2 Teachers' perceptions

Similarly to the students, the teachers interviewed in my study associated appropriate humour with enthusiasm, which was also recognised as enhancing teachers' credibility. The students' perceptions of humour as showing enthusiasm aligned with the way in which the teachers described their use of humour. For example, Liam, draws a connection between appropriate humour and enthusiasm in teaching:

So I learnt very early on that if you are enthusiastic about what you teach, and then you can be like me, I am manic [humorous] for the most part about what I teach. So I just play it up. I just take it up to that next level, my enthusiasm for my subject. I make it the most exciting thing that I can possibly ever imagine and I try to explain that to them [students] while I am doing that and I will use any tricks, that will keep them focused on what I am trying to say.

Another teacher, Philip, shared the same perception of humour, associating it with enthusiasm in his teaching. He explained:

I think enthusiasm is the most important thing to get across to the students because I think if I am not telling them how interesting the thing I am teaching them is, then they are not going to engage with it. So I think the humour comes out because of that. I am really enthusiastic about this and so let's have a fun conversation.

Both of these teachers recognised that it is important to appear enthusiastic in teaching. Liam and Philip used humour with a particular intention—to make the lecture content interesting for students. Another teacher, Bryan, expressed similar ideas and described his perception of the use of humour:

I like the idea that if I am seen to be not this person that is stuffy and boring and only comes in and speaks to them and tells them facts for 50 minutes and then walks out of the room again, I think it is quite nice for them to know that I have a sense of humour and that I am a normal person and that I can have a joke and a bit of a laugh at the same time.

Thus, the teachers perceived humour as a tool that allowed them to demonstrate other characteristics of a good teacher. Evidently, based on both the students' and the teachers' reflections, the teachers' use of appropriate humour allowed them to demonstrate enthusiasm and, ultimately, enhanced the students' positive perceptions of the teachers' credibility. However, the students interviewed in my study seemed to perceive even more positive characteristics as a result of the teachers' appropriate use of humour than those perceived or intended by the teachers.

6.2.4 Appropriate humour requires careful judgement and planning

6.2.4.1 Teachers' perceptions

The teachers interviewed in this study spoke about their fear of using inappropriate humour, and their deliberate steps to avoid using humour inappropriately. The students interviewed did not comment on inappropriate uses of humour, perceiving all uses of humour by their teachers as appropriate. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the teachers were aware that humour could be used inappropriately and that they were careful to ensure that the students perceived their use of humour as appropriate.

Teachers such as Alejandro and Liam spoke about the consequences of inappropriate humour and how they aimed to avoid such humour. Alejandro explained:

> That is the danger. There are obviously lines that are important not to cross and I am very worried about crossing them. I can take it too far and at that point, the students only remember where I went too far rather than the point I was making. I have got to sort of dial it back sometimes. But sometimes I get involved and I just say something that pops into my head and I get into a bit of trouble that way. But I try not to do that.

Similarly, Liam described his perception of the need to avoid inappropriate humour:

> I do not want to upset anybody in the class, so I am very conscious of that. I try to use my inner critic to not use inappropriate humour. Every now and then I will muck up. I will say something my students often would say to me, specifically my research students will say in a monologue, 'Liam, keep that in your head. Do not tell people that'. So sometimes I will get a crazy idea. I will say something and I think, 'ooh, perhaps I should not have said that'.

Both Alejandro and Liam admitted that they feared using inappropriate humour because they were aware of its consequences in relation to the students' perceptions of the teachers. For example, Chabeli (2008) found that inappropriate humour can harm students' feelings and self-esteem. Thus, to avoid using inappropriate humour, Alejandro and Liam noted that they evaluated the humour that they planned to use in the classroom to ensure appropriateness. In this regard, both teachers showed willingness to reflect on their teaching. Along with

enthusiasm (see earlier section) reflection is a characteristic associated with good higher education teaching (Harland, 2012).

Another teacher, Bryan, took an alternative approach, stating that he asked other people to help him determine the appropriateness of the humour that he planned to use in the classroom. In Bryan's words:

> I always run it past my wife and say, 'if you were a student in the second or first year, what would you say to this [humour]?' She is always a very good gauge of saying 'no, that is not good' and I will pull it back a little bit.

Three of the five teachers in this study, Alejandro, Liam and Bryan, carefully considered the appropriateness of the humour that they intended to use in the classroom. They planned and evaluated it to ensure that the students perceived their humour as appropriate because they did not wish to negatively influence the students' perceptions of them or to harm the students' feelings while learning in their classes. However, Liam also admitted that sometimes humour 'popped out' unplanned. His comments suggest that it might be easier to be appropriate if one plans the humour to use in the classroom because it is difficult to ensure appropriateness if using humour spontaneously.

6.2.5 Inappropriate humour is disrespectful humour

6.2.5.1 Students' perceptions

The students acknowledged some inappropriate types of humour by drawing contrast between inappropriate humour use and the humour used by their award-winning teachers. The forms of inappropriate humour, which the students highlighted, aligned with past studies of humour. For instance, the students made the following comments regarding their teachers' use of humour:

It is not offensive.   (Tess)
It is not being rude to anyone or completely outrageous or
just kind of silly jokes.   (Kara)

Tess and Kara used the words 'offensive', 'rude', 'outrageous' and 'silly jokes' to specify types of humour that they perceived as inappropriate humour. In doing so, the comments above echoed the literature on the types of humour that are considered inappropriate (e.g., Frymier et al., 2008; Wanzer et al., 2006). While the students interviewed for this study did not describe any of the teachers' humour as disrespectful, they nevertheless differentiated between appropriate and inappropriate uses of humour in the classroom when explaining the humour that their award-winning teachers used appropriately.

6.2.5.2   Teachers' perceptions

The teachers had slightly different perceptions of what forms of humour were likely to be disrespectful. One teacher, Liam gave a straightforward answer regarding his views on what forms of humour would be disrespectful and therefore inappropriate:

> I do not swear. I think that is inappropriate but there are still things I cannot say, that is the real problem with humour though. I have to be very careful, I cannot be sexist, I cannot be racist, I have to be careful that I do not offend, I cannot be offensive.

Liam listed some specific types of humour that he deemed to be as inappropriate. His list aligned with the findings of Wanzer et al. (2006) regarding students' perceptions of inappropriate humour. In Wanzer et al.'s (2006) list, they indicated that students found sexual jokes or comments, vulgar verbal and nonverbal expressions such as swearing, and disparaging humour focused on students' race and beliefs were inappropriate. This suggests that Liam was aware of the types of humour that are generally agreed to be inappropriate within classroom contexts.

However, Philip highlighted the fact that different people take offence at different things, so that what one person considers to be inappropriate humour may be appropriate to

another. In contrast to Liam's experience, Philip described how he had learnt to understand about inappropriate humour through his teaching experience:

> The first-year class of 250 people, I get complaints all the time. About 10 per cent of the students complain. Often they are couched in terms of 'Philip said inappropriate things'. They said, 'he should not have been joking in a lecture about human disease kind of thing'. I used to be really upset by those comments. That used to really bug me until my colleagues said to me 'there are 250 people in the class, of course you are going to upset some of them'. It is all about fundamental concept in biology. But if students say, 'Philip made a load of jokes and I was not happy about the subject material' then people in the department will sit up and take notice. It used to really worry me. There has only been once when I have been so upset by it that I have actually decided just not to tell jokes anymore for a couple of lectures and I found it really hard.

Based on Philip's description, it could be argued that he used inappropriate humour, which offended some students. The remarks from his students (not those interviewed for this study) included "Philip said inappropriate things" and "Philip should not be joking about human disease". However, Philip's colleagues highlighted how inappropriate and appropriate humour are shifting notions. Wanzer et al. (2006) found that morbid humour, when the "teacher attempts involved discussions about death or another related morbid topic" (p. 189) is considered inappropriate. Perhaps, some first year students felt that it was inappropriate for Philip to be humorous about a morbid or serious topic such as human disease.

However, as Philip explained, only a few students perceived some of his humour as inappropriate. The majority of his students seemed to perceive his humour as appropriate. The different responses could result from the students' humour orientations, which refers to the students' level of appreciation of humour or sense of humour (Frymier et al., 2008). Frymier et al. (2008) asserted that students with a high-humour orientation tend to perceive some types of inappropriate humour as appropriate. Perhaps the students who complained about Philip's use of humour were students with a low-humour orientation and this shaped Philip's perception of inappropriate humour. In the next section, I discuss the students' and teachers' perceptions of the relevance of humour.

6.3 Students' and teachers' perceptions of what constitutes relevant and irrelevant humour in the classroom

In this section, I focus on the second IHPT principle, the relevance of humour. According to the IHPT, humour that is relevant to the lecture content can serve an instructional purpose (Wanzer et al., 2010). Relevant humour does not divert students' attention away from the lecture content (Banas et al., 2010). In other words, relevant humour should enhance student learning in the classroom. Both the students and the teachers interviewed for this thesis spoke about their perceptions regarding the relevance of humour. There were some similarities and some differences between the perceptions of the teachers and those of the students regarding the relevance of humour. I discuss the relevance of humour in relation to the following three subthemes: a) relevant humour is related to the lecture content, b) relevant humour is related to daily experiences in life, and c) irrelevant humour is humour that students do not understand.

6.3.1 Relevant humour is humour related to the lecture content

6.3.1.1 Students' perceptions

Some students in my study expressed their views on the relevance of humour, reflecting on their experiences learning with the teachers in this study. Some of the examples given by the students were as follows:

> I think it was relatable humour because all of it was in a chemistry context anyway or you could not really be offended by it. (Rossa)

> His [Liam's] sentences are somehow funny while still fitting in perfectly with what he is trying to talk about. (John)

> Related. Everything is related. He [Alejandro] is not just   (Lisa)
> going to crack a joke because it is a joke and it is funny.

The students described their teachers' use of humour as relevant when the humour related to the lecture content. Rossa and Lisa specifically used the word "related" and John used the term "fitting in" to indicate that they made a connection between the humour their teachers used and the content of the lecture material. This finding regarding the students' perceptions aligned with IHPT, which suggests that instructional humour is humour which is related to lecture content.

6.3.1.2 Teachers' perceptions

The teachers in my study perceived relevant humour slightly differently to the students' perceptions. One example where the teachers' views aligned with the students' view was given by teacher Alejandro, who noted that the use of humour should be related to the lecture content:

> Absolutely! I think if students are laughing, they are learning. If students are laughing, it means they are listening to what is being said. It means students are getting the joke. If students are getting the joke, they understand why it is funny and if students understand why it is funny, then they probably understand the point that I am making. If students do not get the joke, then probably either I have told a bad joke or students are not getting the underlying points and they want to know the underlying points. Students want to know why it is funny so they want to learn about the material that is underlying it that caused the joke.

Alejandro's perception here was similar to the students' perceptions; he suggested that instructional humour should be humour that is related to the lecture content when teaching. However, Alejandro also suggested that appropriate humour is not always related to the lecture content. For example, Alejandro went on to say:

> Sometimes the joke might not be related to the point I am making but it will capture their attention and I have got their attention for the maybe half a minute. If I have got it for 30 seconds, then I can make my serious point within that 30 seconds.

It is clear from Alejandro's statement that he preferred to use humour that was related to the lecture content but he also admitted that, occasionally, he used humour that was not related for the purpose of capturing students' attention. Karen and Philip also acknowledged this. For instance, Karen stated:

> Some anecdotes are just meant to be stories, like showing this relation. Some of them are meant to be funny or just to break up that monotony of a two-hour lecture and to get people thinking about it in a funny way.

Like Karen, Philip also noted how he used humour to 'break up' the lecture, not just to illustrate or relate content:

> I know that sometimes I wander off on a tangent and told some jokes or talked in a funny way about things, which are less relevant. If I am going to use humour, I would like it to be mainly focused on the lecture content but occasionally, particularly when I have got a very technical lecture, then kind of halfway through, I think I can end up telling a story about something else.

Alejandro, Karen and Philip agreed that, ideally, the use of humour should be related to the lecture content. However, they noted that humour that was not related to the lecture content could also be relevant because it served other teaching and learning functions. These explanations resonate with the findings presented in Chapter Four on teachers' use of humour. Clearly, the teachers in my study perceived relevant humour as supporting students' learning, but not necessarily as being related to the lecture content.

6.3.2 Relevant humour is humour related to daily experiences in life

6.3.2.1 Students' perceptions

Several students noted that they perceived their teachers' use of humour as relevant because it was related to their daily experiences in life. This finding links with the findings presented in Chapter Five, where the students explained how their teachers' use of humour related to daily experiences in life, thereby fostering the students' understanding of the lecture content. One student, Kara, described her perceptions in this regard:

I think humour which is relatable to a large audience is important because if you are just talking about really scientific jokes or speaking in really scientific terms that no one understands, then even though it is humorous, no one is going to get it. So, I think it is really important for teachers to be humorous and make a lecture fun because then people remember it and they enjoy going to the class but it definitely is a certain element of it has to be understandable and has to be relatable to your audience.

Based on Kara's statement, it appears that using humour that relates to the lecture content but not to daily life experiences is insufficient. When teachers applied humour to both situations, the students interviewed in my study perceived the teachers' use of humour as more instructional because they could apply the humorous information not only to the lecture content, but also to real life situations. However, this aspect of humour—humour that relates to daily life experiences—is not included in existing literature that explores IHPT principles regarding the relevance of humour (e.g., Banas et al., 2010; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2015; Wanzer et al., 2010).

6.3.2.2 Teachers' perceptions

Similar to the students' perceptions of relevant humour, Kara's teacher, Karen, considered that relevant humour as, ideally, relating to both the lecture content and to students' daily experiences in life. Karen explained:

In higher education, it is very material driven and there is so much material to be learnt and if you just have to memorise it, sheer rote memorisation, it is boring and you have to learn how to apply that material. So humour and humorous stories are some ways to kind of teach what you are learning is actually relevant to your life and let's talk about that.

Clearly, Karen's description indicates that she perceived relevant humorous anecdotes as both helpful, enabling her to use humour related to the lecture content and applicable to the students' daily life experiences. This finding supports the conclusions of the previous section (see Section 6.3.1.2), which noted that humour could be relevant which did not directly relate to lecture content. Instead, such humour may relate to the teachers' and/or the students' daily life experiences.

6.3.3 Irrelevant humour is humour that students do not understand

6.3.3.1 Students' perceptions

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the students interviewed in my study could not recall experiencing inappropriate humour in their lectures. However, they did mention the teachers using humour that they did not understand, which could be considered as referring to irrelevant humour. Students like Kae, John, Rossa and Phoebe experienced some situations in which they could not understand the humour used by their teachers. For instance, Rossa stated:

> I have experienced it once. He [Liam] made a joke and I think he expected people to laugh but no one did because they did not get it and so then he made a joke about the fact that none of us got it because we were undergrads, we did not understand half the intelligent stuff he was saying.

Another example given by Phoebe was that "sometimes he [Alejandro] makes jokes that he will laugh at but no one else laughs at. I think that is just because he says them too quickly". From the examples given by Rossa and Phoebe, it seemed that they were describing irrelevant humour, or teachers' failed attempts at humour. Both students noted that the teachers had intended to use humour but that the students did not understand or perceive it as humorous and, hence, laughter was not evoked (Wanzer et al., 2010). It could be argued that the teachers' failed attempts at humour may have been examples of instances of irrelevant rather than inappropriate humour. Inappropriate humour offends students' feelings, whereas, in these instances, the humour could be regarded as irrelevant because it caused the students to feel confused or disconnected rather than engaged with the lecture content (Lee, 2006).

Although this aspect of the relevance of humour was significant from the students' perspectives, none of the teachers in this study reflected on humour, which was 'lost' on their students. This may be because the teachers were unaware that their failed attempts at humour

were perceived as irrelevant, and that they had made the students feel a sense of disconnection.

6.4   Summary of this chapter

In this chapter, I have discussed students' and teachers' perceptions of how humour should be used in the classroom. To the best of my knowledge, this part of my work is unique as no previous studies have examined the use of humour and humorous interactions between students and teachers through IHPT lens. Throughout this chapter, I framed my discussion of the students' and teachers' perceptions in relation to two IHPT principles of instructional humour: a) appropriateness, and b) relevance. Although the IHPT principles focused on the students' perceptions of humour (e.g., Bolkan & Goodboy, 2015; Wanzer et al., 2010), in this study, both students' and teachers' perceptions were considered to provide an understanding of both the 'source' and the 'receiver' perceptions of humour.

Regarding appropriateness of humour, students and teachers agreed on four out of five perceptions of what constitutes appropriate (or inappropriate) humour. These were that: a) appropriate humour is relevant humour, b) appropriate humour happens at a suitable time and in a suitable manner, c) appropriate humour enhances teachers' credibility, and d) inappropriate humour is disrespectful humour. Arguably, these similar perceptions of what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate humour explain why the students in this study perceived all their teachers' use of humour (especially on the types of humour) as appropriate, regardless of the discussions in the literature. That is, all the teachers in this study were perceived to have used appropriate and effective humour because the students and the teachers had similar perceptions of what kinds of humour are appropriate. This finding is in accord with Frymier et al.'s (2008) study indicating that a teacher who has a high humour orientation is best paired with students who also have high humour orientations.

My study suggests a new way of thinking about 'relevance' in relation to instructional humour. Literature that draws on IHPT to discuss what constitutes relevant humour positions humour as relevant only when it is connected to lecture content. However, the students and teachers in my study both considered as relevant humour, humour that it is related to the lecture content *and* that makes content relatable to students. For example, the teachers noted that they used humour that was not directly related to the lecture content to 'break up' the lecture, or to capture students' attention. This apparently unrelated humour was still perceived by students to be relevant because it made the lecture content applicable and engaging to them.

A further finding of my study related to the students' perception of irrelevant humour as humour that they did not understand. Notably, some forms of humour did not seem to promote teachers' teaching and learning goals; and the teachers were apparently unaware of instances when humour was 'lost' on students.

The findings discussed in this chapter suggest that both students' and teachers' perceptions are crucial to understanding the 'subjectivity' of humour and to determining the effectiveness of humour used in the classroom. If both the students and teachers have similar perceptions of what constitutes appropriate and relevant humour, the probability of the humour being used effectively is high. However, if the students and teachers have different perceptions of what is relevant or appropriate humour, there is a low probability that teachers' use of humour will be effective. Therefore, both students' and teachers' perceptions of humour should be investigated side by side to gain insights into the effectiveness of humour used in the classroom.

In the following chapter, I bring my research into the use of humour in teaching and learning to a conclusion. I summarise each chapter and revisit the research questions and my key findings in this study. Then, I outline the contributions this study makes to humour in

teaching and learning literature. Specifically, I explain how my study contributes to theoretical, methodological and pedagogical implications. I then suggest some areas for future research possibilities before I underline concluding remarks for this study. Finally, I conclude this chapter with my personal reflections in conducting this study.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion and Implications

Sometimes the joke might not be related to the point I am making but it will capture their attention and I have got their attention for the maybe half a minute. If I have got it for 30 seconds, then I can make my serious point within that 30 seconds.

Alejandro, Award-winning teacher

7.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes my thesis exploring the use of humour in teaching and learning. In this chapter, I revisit the thesis as a whole, highlighting my research questions and key findings. I then acknowledge the limitations of this study and outline the study's contributions to literature on humour in teaching and learning. Specifically, I explain the theoretical, pedagogical and methodological contributions of the study. I suggest some areas for future research, before concluding this thesis with some personal reflections on conducting the study.

7.2 Thesis overview

This thesis outlines my research exploring the use of humour in university teaching and learning. The primary aim of the study was to explore the use of humour in higher education classrooms from teachers' and students' perspectives. Overall, my findings extend our knowledge about the different ways teachers and students understand humour. Here, I review each chapter in this thesis and highlight important findings about teachers' and students' perspectives of humour.

In Chapter One, I introduced my research and provided an overview of the study. Specifically, I explained in detail my interest in conducting this research, which is on the use of humour in higher education teaching and learning. I then provided a background of the study, where I introduced and described the study context. I also outlined specific aims of the study.

In Chapter Two, I reviewed the existing literature on the use of humour, focusing on the literature on humour in general and the use of humour in teaching and learning in higher education contexts. Specifically, in my review of the literature, I highlighted two main topics relating to humour: the question of what humour is and how it is used in higher education teaching and learning contexts. I noted that teachers' perspectives and the link between the teachers' and students' perspectives on the use of humour in higher education have been largely neglected in existing literature. Instead, most previous studies have focused solely on students' perspectives. Therefore, the complexity of humorous interactions between teachers and students in higher education classrooms have not been fully investigated and understood.

In Chapter Two, I also outlined three theories of humour that were pertinent to this study: superiority, incongruity and relief theories. Further, I discussed instructional humour processing theory (IHPT) as a theory that is specifically relevant to my study's focus on humour use in university classrooms. I also outlined emotional intelligence (EI) as an additional explanatory framework for the effects of humour on learning.

In Chapter Three, I explained the research methodology. I introduced the participants and the research context and described how data were collected from classrooms, students and teachers. I outlined how I analysed data based on methodological and theoretical literature to determine the types of humour used by the teachers. I also explained my use of thematic analysis to interpret the students' and teachers' interview transcripts.

In the next three chapters, I described my study findings. I revisit these now in relation to my three research questions. The first research question was: how and why do teachers use humour in teaching in the classroom? To answer this research question, I focused on classroom observations, recorded videos and interview discussions with the five award-winning teachers regarding their use of humour (see Chapter Four). I drew on the three theories of humour (superiority, incongruity and relief theory) to categorise the types of

humour used by the teachers. Eight types of humour emerged in the data. Four aligned with superiority theory: self-deprecating humour, disparaging others, teacher–student teasing and sarcasm. Three related to incongruity theory: ad-lib humour, funny comments and riddles. Only two types of humour, the use of a funny photo or quiz question, fit with relief theory. In general, the teachers' humour use aligned most closely with superiority theory. Although the teachers used humour mostly as a way of making fun of students, students appreciated all teachers' use of humour. Thus, superiority theory does not provide an adequate explanation of how the students experienced the teachers' humour. Moreover, teachers in my study incorporated humour into their teaching both intentionally and spontaneously. The teachers described their humour use as performing two key functions: as facilitating students' learning and/or engaging students' attention in the classroom. In short, although the teachers in my study used humour spontaneously, they were both deliberate and strategic in their use of humour when teaching in the classroom.

The second research question was: what are the effects of teachers' use of humour on students' learning process in the classroom? To answer this question, I focused on the data from my interview sessions with the students (see Chapter Five). I drew on IHPT and EI to explain how teachers' use of humour affected students' learning. The findings in Chapter Five indicated that teachers' use of humour positively affected students' classroom learning in two ways: by helping them to connect with content, and by making the classroom environment conducive to learning. For example, teachers' use of humour helped students pay attention and stay focused on their learning, remember and recall lecture content effectively, and understand the lecture content; and it stimulated students' thinking by helping them to draw connections between the humour and lecture content. In terms of the classroom environment, teachers' use of humour allowed them to build rapport with students, and fostered students' development of positive attitudes and emotions towards learning in the classroom.

My student participants also described the process by which teachers' use of humour helped them to learn in the classroom. For example, students indicated that teachers' use of humour helped them to avoid distractions and follow the teachers' delivery of information. The students explained that they were more interested in listening to the teacher and the lectures when humour was involved. Students listened because they found that the lecture content was more interesting, and they did not want to miss teachers' humorous comments. Students linked teachers' use of humour with their own capacity to learn more effectively, noting that teachers' humour helped them remember and recall the lecture content when they were revising. When students revised the lecture content that was delivered with humour, they could visualise the teacher's presence, the humour that they used and the lecture content taught. The students also described how teachers' use of humour helped them understand and connect with the lecture content. Further, students noted that they understood lecture content better when the teacher delivered the information humorously. Therefore, the students in my study described their teachers' use of humour as positive and beneficial.

My last research question was: what are the students' and teachers' perceptions of the use of humour in teaching and learning? Specifically, I sought to explore the similarities and differences between students' and teachers' perceptions of humour. To answer this research question, I drew on the two principles of humour use outlined in IHPT, that instructional humour is appropriate and relevant (see Chapter Six). I focused on the similarities and differences between students' and teachers' perceptions of appropriate (or inappropriate) and relevant (or irrelevant) humour. Students and teachers in my study shared similar perceptions. They perceived appropriate humour as humour that is relevant to the topic or context in which it is used, used at a suitable time and in a suitable manner, and as enhancing teachers' credibility. They suggested that inappropriate humour was disrespectful humour. The teachers noted that for humour to be appropriate requires the teacher to exercise careful judgement and sometimes, planning their use of humour. The students and teachers also shared similar

perceptions of what constitutes relevant humour. They indicated that it must be related to the lecture content and to students' daily life experiences. The students perceived humour that they did not understand as irrelevant humour. However, teachers were unaware of instances when humour was 'lost' on students. In summary, the students and teachers in my study shared more similarities than differences in their perceptions of appropriate and relevant humour. This is perhaps not surprising given that the students had nominated their teachers for teaching awards (I discuss this further below). The next section outlines some limitations of this study.

7.3 Limitations of this study

Although this study provided rich insights into teachers' and students' perspectives of humour in relation to university teaching and learning, like all research, it had some limitations. These included the small number of participants, the effectiveness of award-winning teachers, the limited cultural diversity of participants, the limitations caused by ethical considerations when collecting data, the type of interviews conducted with students, and my line of questioning during interview sessions.

First, the most obvious limitation in this research was its small number of participants. Although I identified 30 award-winning teachers at the start of the study, only five agreed to participate, along with 10 of their students. The number of participants was small, but the findings nevertheless provide insights that add to the higher education literature, particularly in relation to teachers' perspectives of humour.

Secondly, the teachers in my study were award-winning teachers, whose students nominated them as 'effective' teachers. Therefore, it is not surprising that students saw their humorous communications as effective. Although this might be regarded as a limitation of the study, it can also be seen as a strength. A focus on award-winning teachers offers rich insights

into the effective use of humour in university teaching, which might inform other teachers' work.

Third, my study participants came from a limited range of ethnic backgrounds and gender. Lee (2006) suggests that cultural differences may contribute to different understandings and perceptions of humour. In my study, eight student participants were New Zealand European, one was indigenous Māori, and one was an international student. Three teachers were New Zealand European and two had come to New Zealand from elsewhere. Moreover, most of the teachers in my study were male teachers (with one female teacher), and most of the students were female students (with two male students). A larger participant cohort would have allowed for greater ethnic and gender diversity and may have led to more nuanced findings.

Fourth, this study was limited by ethical considerations regarding data collection. Following ethical approval, I was able to record the teachers conducting lectures during the observation session. However, I could not video record the students due to the complexity associated with obtaining consent from full university classes. This limited my capacity to determine when humorous instances occurred in the classroom. Berk (2003) suggested that there are 15 stages of laughter, starting from smirking and smiling. However, in my study, I could only use giggles and laughter to determine when students' responses to teachers' humour or funny comments. It is possible that I missed some instances of humour, as I could not observe students' facial expressions during each class.

Fifth, my analysis of the students' perspectives of humour was based on a single interview with each participant. Initially, I wanted to conduct a focus group discussion with the students, which I could explore students' different understandings and perceptions. For example, students could discuss their different understandings and perceptions of their teacher's use of humour. Further, through a focus group interview, I could have encouraged

conversation among students that could potentially have generated richer information about the teachers' use of humour. However, due to students' time constraints, I only conducted one-on-one interviews with the students.

Finally, the interview questions posed to teachers and students were limited by my own reading and understanding of humour. This may have restricted the teachers' and students' responses. Throughout the research, I developed more knowledge about humour. This knowledge, if obtained prior to the study, could have improved my line of questioning during the interviews. For example, I could have asked more explicitly about appropriate and inappropriate, and relevant and irrelevant humour, especially during the teacher interviews. This may have revealed additional insights into both students' and teachers' perceptions of humour.

Like all qualitative research, the study was shaped by interpretations and choice of what to emphasise and what to treat as peripheral data. In Chapter Three, I outlined the steps taken to ensure that the conclusions derived from the data were as credible as possible, despite my situated perspective.

In the next section, I highlight the key contributions of this study on humour in higher education teaching and learning.

7.4 Contributions of this study

Despite its limitations, this study extends our knowledge of humour in higher education teaching and learning in several ways. In this section, I discuss the study's contributions in relation to its theoretical, pedagogical and methodological implications.

7.4.1 Reconceptualising Instructional Humour

This research extends our understanding of instructional humour and provides new ways of thinking in regards to instructional humour processing theory (IHPT). In this section, I explain the implications of students' and teachers' perceptions of humour, as well as my observation of the teachers' use of humour in the classroom in relation to IHPT.

7.4.1.1 When humour is instructional

In this study, I used IHPT to explore how teachers' use of humour affected students' processes of learning in the classroom (Banas et al., 2010; Wanzer et al., 2010). Currently, IHPT defines instructional humour in a narrow manner. Wanzer et al. (2010) argued that in order for humour to serve an instructional function, humour must enhance student learning. However, students do not respond to all humour in the same way. Therefore, not all humour enhances student learning (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2015).

Reflecting on my observations of teachers' use of humour in the classroom and discussion with teachers, the teachers used various types of humour whether related or unrelated to the lecture content, for two reasons: to facilitate student learning and/or to engage students' attention. Students indicated that the teachers' use of humour enhanced students' learning and/or created a positive classroom environment in which they were ready to learn. Figure 8 illustrates the connection between teachers' and students' perspectives of the teachers' use of humour.
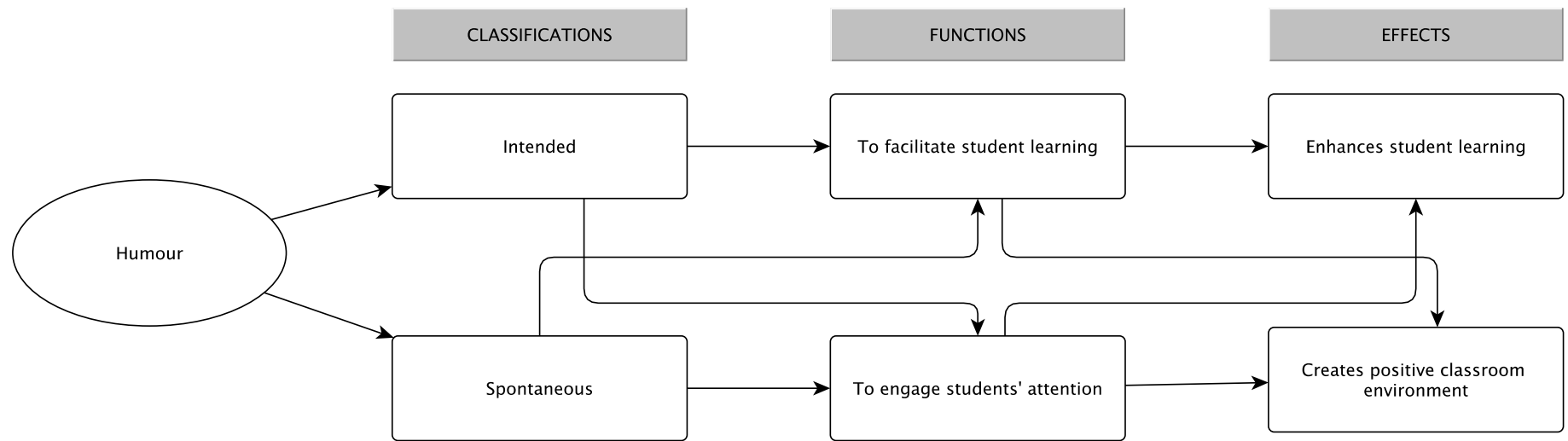
Figure 8. The link between teachers' and students' perspectives of humorous interaction in the classroom.

Figure 8 synthesises the link between teachers' perspectives of humour in Chapter Four and students' perspectives of humour in Chapter Five. Although some of the teachers' use of humour did not directly affect students' learning (cognitively), it affected students, emotionally. In Chapter Five, I drew on emotional intelligence (EI) to explain how teachers' use of humour affected students' emotional wellbeing in the classroom. Attention to EI suggests that teachers should not only teach students the information from the lecture content, but also encourage and inspire students to build positive emotion while learning (Saxena & Saxena, 2012). Students in my study noted that the teachers' use of humour had inspired them to enjoy learning the subjects with the teachers, because they did not feel anxious or intimidated. My study findings indicated that humour, which built students' positive emotion, also served an instructional purpose, thus it should be considered as instructional humour.

Notably, Figure 8 shows a connection between the teachers' and students' perspectives of humour in this study; the humorous communication between the teachers and the students was effective and successful. This is because what the teachers sought to convey in the humorous instructions were what students received.

7.4.1.2 *When humour is relevant (or irrelevant)*

According to IHPT, teachers' use of humour should be relevant or related to the lecture content for it to be meaningful and instructional to students (Banas et al., 2010; Wanzer et al., 2010). However, students and teachers in my study suggested that relevant humour is not only humour that is related to the lecture content, but also, humour that is related to students' daily life experiences. Students and teachers in my study noted that humour that is related to lecture content and applicable to daily life experiences is more meaningful as it helps students to understand and remember lecture content, and to apply their understanding to everyday life.

Moreover, the students in my study noted that some of the humour used by the teachers, such as teachers' failed attempts at humour, were considered irrelevant because they made students feel disconnected from the lecture content. Students' comments suggested that relevant humour is humour that is both meaningful (connected to lecture content and/or everyday life) and understood. In other words, if students do not 'get' a teacher's attempts at humour, the humour is not likely to be seen as relevant to the teaching/learning context, and it is not likely to enhance students' learning. Teachers can ensure their use of humour is meaningful to students by thinking through its 'fit' with the lecture content and its purpose in terms of students' learning. If the purpose of using humour is to capture or refocus students' engagement, teachers should focus on using humour that is easy for students to understand or, when they do not understand, explain the meaning to students so that a sense of connection to both the context and learning content is maintained. Next, I focus on my study's contributions in regards to pedagogical implications.

7.4.2 Lessons from award-winning teachers' use of humour

In this section, I focus on insights from the award-winning teachers' various pedagogical strategies for using humour in the classroom. Specifically, I foreground some pedagogical approaches that the award-winning teachers used to incorporate humour into their teaching. These include considering students' perspectives when using humour, considering timing in relation to their use of humour, and considering the appropriateness of humour in higher education teaching and learning.

All the teachers in my study carefully considered students' perspectives when using humour. As noted in Chapter Four, the teachers used humour with the intention to illustrate lecture content and/or foster students' sense of comfort. Students' perspectives indicated that the teachers' use of humour served an instructional purpose. The students in my study found

the teachers' humour use to be appropriate and relevant, and helpful in relation to their learning. However, for teachers, considering students' perspectives when using humour is not an easy task. In Chapter Six I noted that the students also alluded to teachers' humour use that 'failed'. The students associated 'failed' humour with not understanding what the teachers were trying to convey through their humorous messages.

My study findings suggest some ways to avoid using humour in ways that disconnect students from the lecture content. For instance, teachers should focus on students' response to the humour used. If students laugh at the humorous instance, it is likely that they understand the humorous message. Teachers could also try planning their use of humour, for example, 'testing' jokes or humorous resources with a colleague or 'critical friend', and asking them if they think students are likely to respond as intended. While it may be impossible to predict how all students will respond to a teacher's use of humour, the range of possible responses may be better anticipated by 'testing' one's use of humour with a range of people. The risk of spontaneous humour being inappropriate and irrelevant is high compared to when teachers plan their use of humour (Berk, 2003). Also, teachers could endeavour to use humour that is easily related to students' daily experiences at university or in life. Students would then be more likely to draw connections between the humorous message and the lecture content. Given that university classes in many countries are increasingly diverse, teachers may have difficulty anticipating students' responses to their use of humour. Some of the teachers in my study spoke explicitly about inviting feedback on their use of humour, and teaching more broadly – both from colleagues and from students themselves. This is another 'check' teachers can use to ensure their humour use is both appropriate and relevant to the students in their classrooms.

All the teachers in my study also carefully considered timing in relation to their use of humour. In particular, the teachers described using humour at a start of a lecture, using humorous teaching materials throughout the lecture, and using humour to illustrate or simplify difficult concepts. Berk (1996) indicated that starting a lecture with humour serves three purposes: it encourages students to be punctual to class, releases students' anxiety, and sets a good classroom atmosphere. By deliberately starting a lecture with a humorous instance, the teachers helped students to 'warm up' or 'tune in' to the lecture.

Some teachers in my study also focused on incorporating humorous teaching materials into their lectures. For instance, one teacher edited a photograph of his face, pasted it on a muscular body photograph and used it in the Powerpoint slide. Miller et al. (2017) indicated that humorous materials could encourage students to engage in learning more effectively than 'dry' or 'boring' materials. The use of humorous teaching materials may be a way for teachers who are not generally comfortable using humour to use it in a planned way. However, teachers need to be careful in selecting humorous materials to present in the classroom, ensuring that they are likely to be seen by students as appropriate and relevant to their learning.

Besides incorporating humorous materials into their teaching, some of the teachers in my study used funny illustrations to simplify lecture content. Although this method has been acknowledged as effective in previous studies (e.g., Berk, 1996; Korobkin, 1988), Huss (2008) argues that simplifying lecture content with funny illustrations could lead students to perceive lecture content as unimportant or trivial. From my classroom observations, the teachers used humour *after* they explained the lecture content in detail to students. Students found the teachers' humour use helpful, because it 'eased tension' when they could be feeling stressed about difficult content, it helped them to understand the content, and it made the content memorable. My study suggests that the use of humorous illustrations used after an

explanation of content, can be effective in helping students learn, without trivialising the content.

However, my study also suggests that although these humorous strategies may be effective from a learning perspective, the over-use of humour could be also ineffective. The students in my study indicated that too many humorous instances per lecture would likely distract them from learning the lecture content. Chabeli (2008) and Skinner (2001) argue that teachers should not focus too much on making students laugh, but focus on making learning enjoyable for students. In other words, teachers need to be intentional about the purpose of using humour. Some teachers may find it helpful to monitor the number of humorous instances in a classroom (for example, to plan their use of humour so that they stay learning rather than entertainment focused). The teachers in my study used humour effectively, and based on my analysis, each used humour about four to six times across a one to two hour lecture.

All the teachers in my study were concerned about the appropriateness of the humour that they used. The teachers noted that they feared the possibility that their humour use could upset students, elicit negative perceptions from students, and/or damage their own credibility as teachers. Although the teachers were aware of the possible consequences of using inappropriate humour, each demonstrated different understandings of what constitutes appropriate (or inappropriate) humour. The teachers' perceptions of what constitutes appropriate humour seemed to have been shaped by years of teaching experiences, rather than any formal teaching guidelines. Ziyaeemehr et al. (2011) noted that teachers are not trained to use humour in higher education. My study suggests that university teachers would likely value opportunities to receive guidance in this area, particularly on understanding the appropriateness and relevance of humour in teaching and learning. This is because, at times, humour is instinctive. Teachers may consciously or unconsciously incorporate humour while

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teaching in a classroom. A clear guideline on this aspect of humour would help teachers to be more confident to use humour in for teaching and learning purposes.

Some teachers in my study highlighted specific precautions they had taken to ensure their use of humour was appropriate. For example (and as noted above), some teachers planned their use of humour, deliberately reflecting on whether their intended use of humour could possibly offend anyone. Some teachers also checked their use of humour with other people such as colleagues or 'critical friends' in order to check how others might perceive the humour or joke. Teachers also described their deliberate avoidance of extreme forms of humour such as 'clown-like' humour or 'stand-up' comedy. Future research could explore the role of academic developers in helping teachers to plan and evaluate their humour use as a means of enhancing students' learning and readiness to learn. Next, I discuss the methodological implication of this study.

7.4.3 Stimulated recall interview as a new way to study subjective phenomenon such as humour in teaching and learning

Past studies on humour in the teaching and learning context examine data collected mostly through observations, surveys or questionnaires (for example, Benjelloun, 2009; Berk, 1996; Chabeli, 2008; Chiarello, 2012; Nesi, 2012; Wanzer & Frymier, 1999; Wanzer et al., 2006; Ziv, 1988; Ziyaeemehr et al., 2011). However, this study is methodologically innovative as I drew on data from stimulated recall interview (SRI) sessions with the teachers. Specifically, the SRI sessions with the teachers provided new insights into the use of humour from teachers' perspectives.

The effective use of humour for teaching and learning purposes in higher education can be quite a difficult 'skill' to demonstrate (Powell & Andresen, 1985). However, through SRI with the use of video footage, the teachers in my study could explain and show how and why

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they used humour as well as discuss their strategies more effectively. The use of SRI allowed the teachers to share their humorous teaching strategies in regards to appropriateness of humorous teaching materials to use, body movement or gesture, timing and voice control.

Also, SRIs allowed the teachers to identify and reflect on both their intentional and unintentional (spontaneous and/or unconscious) use of humour in teaching. My study suggests that SRIs could be a useful approach for academic developers to use when working with staff, for example, if they have received complaints about their use of humour, or if they are trying to use humour in their teaching as a new approach. Next, I provide some suggestions for further research into humour in higher education.

7.5 Suggestions for further research

The findings of this study extend our knowledge of humour in teaching and learning in higher education classrooms. Specifically, attention to both teachers' and students' perspectives of humour use in the classroom increases our understanding of what, how and why teachers use humour in teaching, how students are affected by teachers' use of humour, and the similarities and differences between teachers' and students' perceptions of humour.

Future research could include participants from more culturally diverse backgrounds to explore how culture influences teachers' and students' perceptions of humour and affects the dynamic of humour interaction between teachers and students in the classroom. Incorporating culture as an aspect of humour in teaching and learning would be a fruitful area for further research. Attention to more diverse classes may generate other insights into teachers' humour use and its effects, as well as what is considered appropriate or relevant humour.

This study has highlighted a connection between teachers' and students' perspectives of humour interaction in the classroom (see Figure 8). The questions could be asked: Would a

similar connection be obtained if this study were replicated with teachers and students from different higher education institutions? Would a similar connection be found in a study involving teachers who had not been nominated by students to win awards? Further research could explore the link between teachers' and students' perspectives of humour across institutions and levels of higher education, and with teachers who are not award-winning or considered to be 'popular' teachers.

Other areas of worthy of research are teachers' ways of using humour and students' ways of learning with teachers' use of humour. This study has identified how teachers used humour and how this affected students' learning in the classroom. Further exploration of these aspects could inform the development of comprehensive guidelines for teachers who are interested in using humour for instructional purposes.

Further, this study used interviews to gain insights into both teachers' and students' subjective perceptions of humour. Further research is needed that explores humour using face-to-face interviews rather than surveys. This is because interviews with teachers and students usefully capture people's complex and subjective understandings and perceptions of humour.

Last, although the focus of this study was on understanding teacher-initiated humour, it would be useful to also investigate student-initiated humour in the classroom. An exploration of student-initiated humour alongside teacher-initiated humour may further inform our understanding of the complexity of humour use in higher education classrooms. It would also allow for further insights into how humorous interactions might be framed.

7.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study aimed to explore the use of humour in teaching and learning in a higher education context. Specifically, I explored teachers' perspectives of humour. I focused on what, how and why teachers use humour in their teaching. I also explored students' perspectives of humour and how humour affected students' learning approaches in the classroom. Additionally, I explored students' and teachers' perceptions on the appropriateness and relevance of humour in teaching and learning.

Key contributions of this study are theoretical, pedagogical and methodological. Theoretically, my findings contribute new insights in relation to IHPT and how instructional humour is conceptualised. Pedagogically, my study highlights key ways of using humour effectively in the classroom and these include considering students' perspectives when using humour, considering timing in relation to their use of humour, and considering the appropriateness of humour in higher education teaching and learning. Methodologically, the use of SRIs with teachers provided valuable insights into their use of humour in higher education teaching. This approach could be used for further research, and to support teachers who wish to hone their use of humour in teaching.

7.7 My reflections in conducting this study

As this chapter sums up my doctoral journey, I would like to revisit and reflect on my initial interest in conducting this research on humour in teaching and learning (see Chapter One). As mentioned in section 1.2, I was curious how my teachers' use of humour impacted my own undergraduate study. I questioned, how teachers' use of humour helped me in my learning? Additionally, the questions that teachers who attended my conference presentations raised

with regards to how humour could be incorporated effectively also spurred my interest in this topic.

As I invested the years in doing this research, I realised that it is challenging to outline explicit pedagogical suggestions on how teachers could incorporate humour in higher education classrooms. Some suggestions that I have outlined might work for some teachers, in certain lecture classrooms, and with students in different levels (first year, second year or final year students). In other words, one size does not fit all. This is due to the fact that humour is subjective and different people perceive it differently. Notwithstanding this, the suggestions that I have outlined could help teachers to have a basic understanding on how, why and what to consider when incorporating humour into their teaching.

What seems apparent from my observations and analysis is that the award-winning teachers in my study practised using humour in all classes and in every semester. The teachers noted that they had encountered few incidences in which students complained about their inappropriate or irrelevant humour. They learnt to understand what considered as appropriate (or inappropriate) and relevant (or irrelevant) humour from students' feedback, years of teaching experience and assistance from other colleagues. This has eventually shaped their perceptions about humour use in teaching and learning, and ultimately helped them to use humour effectively. Now I believe that practice is important and key to successful use of humour.

Although the focus of my study was on the use of humour, my observations and interview sessions with the teachers in this study have helped me understand how award-winning teachers teach in a higher education classroom. This has encouraged me to revisit my own teaching practices and provided me with a wealth of pedagogical ideas from which I can shape my own teaching. It was an honour to have the opportunity to learn from the best.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Extracts from video recorded classroom observation

Extract 1:

> Karen: There is probably a certain liquid …
> Students: [Giggle]
> Karen: …that you had a bad experience with. Maybe an alcoholic liquid that you have drank lots, perhaps you got really sick afterwards or the next day, or the next two days, you remember that you do not want to drink that liquid anymore. Most people have a particular alcohol or a mixture that they have with the alcohol [pointing at self] vodka and orange juice.
> Students: [Laughing]

Extract 2:

Context: During a discussion session after a quiz

> Liam: Who thinks it might be A? No? B? Anyone, B? Ok, we got some Bs, not many B. How about C? Few Cs? How about D? Oh, we got it all over the place aren't we? That's not very good teaching on my part.
> Students: [Laughing]

Extract 3:

Context: A slide of a Neanderthal species (a species of archaic humans that extinct approximately 40,000 years ago) was shown.

> Philip: Ok, so this is how a Neanderthal looks like and I know a guy who looks like that in Spain.
> Students: [Giggle]
> Philip: Which is, you know there are a lot of Neanderthal that remain in Spain.
> Students: [Giggle]
> Philip: So yeah, he could be Neanderthal.
> Students: [Giggle]
> Philip: He will kill me for that.

Extract 4:

> Philip: …So we share 75% of our genes with other animals. So we share 75% of our genes with food flies. Alright?! So next time if there is a fly on your window, and you go [squish it] that is 75% of your genes dying right there.
> Students: [Laughing]

Philip: Ok.

Extract 5:

Alejandro: You thought that this is easy. This is all fun, it's zesty according to someone apparently. I got an email saying 'thanks for the zesty lecture'.
Students: [Laughing]
Alejandro: I have never been described as 'zesty'.
Students: [Laughing]
Alejandro: But, hey I take salsa.
Students: [Laughing]

Extract 6:

Alejandro: Ok, there is another type of decision that can be judicially reviewed and it doesn't come from a statue and here is a clue, you have heard about it before, so you know what I'm talking about. Jack with the strips up there, with the cannibal sticker on your laptop.
One student: Yup
Alejandro: Yup
Students: [Laughing]
Alejandro: How is it going, man?
Students: [Laughing]
One student: Good
Students: [Laughing]
Alejandro: Can you think of another type that doesn't come from statue?

Extract 7:

Alejandro: [reading a long review in one breath]. Easy!
Students: [Laughing]
Alejandro: Totally easy!
Students: [Giggle]

Extract 8:

Liam: You saw how much energy there was in that one MNM. Now, oh yeah sorry about that smoke. Those of you from Auckland, you're quite familiar with all for those big diesel four-wheel drives…
Students: [Laughing]
Liam: … they are all spilling out that particular carbon so you'll feel quite at home.
Students: [Laughing]

Extract 9:

Bryan: There are couple of things you can do to kind of stay 'evolved', the inevitable fact that your muscle is going to waste over the time. What a depressing lecture, I'm sorry about that.

Students: [Laughing]

Extract 10:

    Philip: Why are German vegetarians always so depressed?
    Students: [Discussing]
    Philip: Ahhh…. It's because they feel 'Wurst'.
    Students: [Laughing]

Extract 11:

Context: In Bryan's class.

    During a quiz time, questions were shown on slides.

    Question 10 (last quiz question):

What is the muscle labelled by X of your favourite lecturer?

    Muscle labelled by X was pointed on a photo of Bryan's face edited on a muscular body.

Extract 12:

    Bryan: Look at the muscularity of the body when you have a physic like that
    Students: [Laughing]

Extract 13:

    Philip: … and lastly, down the bottom, there is Tribolium Castaneum. Does anyone know Tribolium Castaneum? Anyone? That's odd because you probably ate it for breakfast this morning. Tribolium Castaneum is the red flour beetle. The pests that stored flour and most base of flour contains no less than point zero than about point zero zero one percent (0.001%) insect parts which are tribolium casteneum. Those of you that are vegetarians have a problem with.
    Students: [Laughing]

Extract 14:

    Liam: It is amazing stuff that people left it here; we have some keys, a pair of glasses
    Students: [Giggle]
    Liam: …why do people leave these stuff behind? It is like leaving your laptop behind
    Students: [Giggle]
    Liam: …oh, it fell off my backpack.
    Students: [Laughing]

Extract 15:

Karen: You know that social construct has a lot to do with it as well. If you were a 20-year-old guy and it is Friday at 430pm and you said to your mates "guys, who wants to go out for some wine and cheesecake and brownies?"

Students: [giggle]

Extract 16:

Alejandro: Do you still have your legislation up with you? You don't know that you have to bring it with you? But do you have it anyway? It's a great idea to keep this on hand at any time. It's great for cocktail parties, on the bus just reading the legislation supplement, basically the accessories of all time. I love carrying my legislation supplement around, who wouldn't? I said no one would not want it.

Students: [Giggle]

Extract 17:

Alejandro: Number one, I can't believe that you remember that, most of you were not even born then, I believe at that point. Number two, Shania? Come on. That's the greatest mistake of all.

Students: [Laughing]

Appendix B: Information Sheet

INSTRUCTIONAL VALUE OF HUMOUR IN TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the Aim of the Project?

This research project explores the instructional value of humour used in the context of teaching and learning in higher education.

The aim of this research project is to investigate how lecturers use humour in their teaching, what lecturers understand by humour in teaching, what lecturers think the purposes of humour in teaching are and what are students' perceptions of humour.

What Types of Participants are being sought?

Lecturers and students are invited to participate in this study. Approximately ten lecturers and sixty students will be involved in this research project. The result of this research project will supplied to you upon request.

What will Participants be asked to do?

Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to:

Lecturers will allow the investigator to have access to his/her video recorded lecture uploaded in Otago Capture for observation purposes. Lecturers also will be asked to participate in Interpersonal Process Recall (IPR) interview.

Students will be asked to participate in a focus group interview which may last for about an hour.

Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the project without any disadvantage to yourself.

What Data or Information will be collected and what use will be made of it?

Data collection for this project includes: 1) video recordings lectures from Otago Capture to identify humorous lecturers 2) Interpersonal Process Recall interviews with lecturers 3) focus group interviews with students

The video recording of lectures is intended to identify humour incidences in the formal teaching and learning context. This will prepare the researcher to have an understanding on the occurrence, types and nature of humour. The IPR interview with lecturers will aid in a deeper understanding of the use of humour from the lecturers' perspective. Lecturer's feelings and thoughts of using humour in teaching will be explored during the IPR interview. The focus group interview with students will give insights on how humour impacts on students' process of learning. The insights from the IPR interview will be explored with students in the focus group interview. This research project will include both questions which have been predetermined and those which cannot be anticipated by the researchers as these may depend on the way in which the focus groups/interviews develop. In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s).

The focus groups and interviews of lecturers and student participants will be audio-recorded. The observation of lecturer's recorded lecture will be held with the permission of the lecturer per-se. Recorded data will be managed, transcribed and studied only by the researchers whose names are shown below. Participants' confidentiality will be protected. Personal information will not be collected. Any information that may identify the participants will not be disclosed. Pseudonyms or coded numbers will be used.

The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned below will be able to gain access to it. Data obtained as a result of the research will be retained for **at least 5 years** in secure storage. Any personal information held on the participants may be destroyed at the completion of the research even though the data derived from the research will, in most cases, be kept for much longer or possibly indefinitely.

This research will contribute to research outcomes which may include publications and presentations both in New Zealand and overseas. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve your anonymity.

On the Consent Form you will be given options regarding your anonymity. Please be aware that should you wish we will make every attempt to preserve your anonymity. However, with your consent, there are some cases where it would be preferable to attribute contributions made to individual participants. It is absolutely up to you which of these options you prefer.

Email correspondence for administrative purposes is anticipated. Reasonable precautions will be taken to protect and/or destroy information gathered by email.

However, the security of electronically transmitted information cannot be guaranteed. Caution is advised regarding electronic transmission of sensitive material.

Can Participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time without any disadvantage to yourself.

What if Participants have any Questions?

If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either: -

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This study has been approved by the Department stated above. However, if you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research you may contact the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee through the Human Ethics Committee Administrator (ph 03 479-8256). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix C: Consent Form

**INSTRUCTIONAL VALUE OF HUMOUR IN TEACHING AND
LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

CONSENT FORM
FOR
PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. The audio-taped data will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for at least five years;
4. This project will include both questions which have been predetermined and those which cannot be anticipated by the researchers as these may depend on the way in which the interview develops. In the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind;
5. There is unlikely to be any hazards, inconvenience, or danger involved in this project;
6. No payment will be made for my participation;
7. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the University of Otago Library (Dunedin, New Zealand) but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity;
8. I **wish/do not wish** (please delete as appropriate) to use my real name and/or disclose any other information that may reveal my identity when the results of this study is published.

I agree to take part in this project.

....
         (Signature of participant)   (Date)

Appendix D: Semi-structured questions for teachers

INSTRUCTIONAL VALUE OF HUMOUR IN TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

SRI Interview questions with teachers

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The purpose of this interview is to understand the use of humour from the teaching perspective. With your permission, this interview will be tape-recorded and used for research purposes. This recorded conversation will be destroyed after the project is completed. Your identification will not be disclosed.

There are 11 questions for this interview. Depending on our discussion, you may be asked questions which are not listed below. Please feel free to ask me to repeat or clarify at any time during this interview. If you need a break, please also let me know.

<u>Please answers the following questions based on your opinion:</u>

1. Why do you use humour in your teaching?
2. What message are you trying to convey by using the humour?
3. What do you think when you deliver humour?
4. What do you feel when you convey humour?
5. What do you think your students' reactions are ?
6. What are you trying to achieve by using that humour?
7. Do you think that the humour is helpful in your teaching?
8. Are you happy with the humour that you use? Would you like to make any changes?
9. Do you think that the students learn better with the presence of humour?
10. Do you think that you teach better with the presence of humour?
11. What is you philosophical stance/belief in using humour in teaching?

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix E: Semi-structured questions for students

INSTRUCTIONAL VALUE OF HUMOUR IN TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

One-to-one interview questions with students

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The purpose of this interview is to understand how you perceive the humour used by the lecturer who is teaching you in the class. With your permission, this interview will be tape-recorded and used for research purposes. This recorded conversation will be destroyed after the project is completed. Your identification will not be disclosed.

There are 11 questions for this interview. Depending on our discussion, you may be asked questions which are not listed below. Please feel free to ask me to repeat or clarify at any time during this interview. If you need a break, please also let me know.

Please answers the following questions based on your opinion:

1. What do you think about the use of humour by your teacher?
2. What do you feel about the humour used?
3. Do you enjoy the humour?
4. Is there any of the humour perceived differently? Why?
5. Do you remember any of the humour used? Describe one.
6. Do you understand the humour used?
7. Does the humour help you to understand concept, theories or topic? Can you give an example.
8. Does the humour help in your process of learning in the class?
9. Do you encourage the lecturer to use humour in the class? Why?
10. What do you think about the lecturer who use humour in the class?
11. Do you have any comments or suggestion?

Thank you for your participation.