

1989

Types and purposes of teacher humor : honors and on-grade-level English 3 classes

Catherine S. Mock
San Jose State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses

Recommended Citation

Mock, Catherine S., "Types and purposes of teacher humor : honors and on-grade-level English 3 classes" (1989). *Master's Theses*. 3159.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.tryb-6vvv>

https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/etd_theses/3159

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses and Graduate Research at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@sjsu.edu.

INFORMATION TO USERS

The most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this manuscript from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book. These are also available as one exposure on a standard 35mm slide or as a 17" x 23" black and white photographic print for an additional charge.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

U·M·I

University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

Order Number 1338712

**Types and purposes of teacher humor: A study of honors and
on-grade-level English 3 classes**

Mock, Catherine S., M.A.

San Jose State University, 1989

U·M·I
300 N. Zeeb Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

TYPES AND PURPOSES OF TEACHER HUMOR:
A STUDY OF
HONORS AND ON-GRADE-LEVEL ENGLISH 3 CLASSES

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the
School of Education
San Jose State University

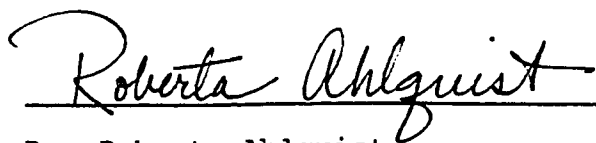
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By

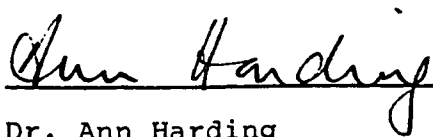
Catherine S. Mock

August, 1989

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Division of Teacher Education



Dr. Roberta Ahlquist

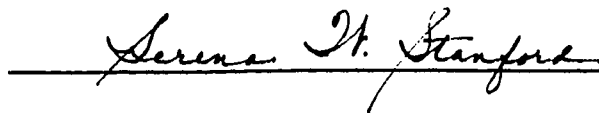


Dr. Ann Harding



Dr. Beverly Jensen

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As researchers we all recognize that we are indebted to those people whose work acts as a foundation for ours. I also owe a debt of gratitude to the many people who helped me complete this study. I thank my committee and particularly my advisor, Dr. Roberta Ahlquist, for being patient and understanding as well as a source of constructive criticism.

My family and friends, too, have supported and encouraged me; I thank them and acknowledge that much of the credit for the completion of this study goes to them. To Dennis Norgord I owe special thanks for developing the database for this study and for guiding me through the pitfalls of word processing. For countless other forms of support, I am deeply grateful to David Mock and Julia Head; and to the teachers I observed my gratitude for their help and for the lessons I have learned from them.

Catherine S. Mock

August, 1989

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	6
Teacher Sample.....	6
District Population.....	7
Problem Statement.....	7
Purpose Statement.....	9
Research Questions.....	10
Operational Definitions.....	11
Assumptions.....	13
Limitations/Delimitations.....	14
Limitations.....	14
Delimitations.....	14
Statement of Significance.....	15
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	18
Introduction.....	18
Humor and Health.....	19
Humor and Development.....	23
Humor and Higher Order Thinking.....	28
Humor and Affect.....	30

	Humor in English Classes.....	32
	Controversies in Classroom Humor.....	34
	Purposes of Humor.....	40
	Humor and School Structure.....	42
	Summary.....	45
III.	RESEARCH DESIGN.....	47
	Introduction.....	47
	Universe and Sample.....	48
	Instruments.....	50
	Data Analysis.....	51
IV.	RESULTS.....	52
	Overview.....	52
	Humor Types.....	53
	Discussion.....	57
	Humor Purposes.....	59
	Discussion.....	62
	Student Characteristics.....	62
	Gender.....	63
	Academic Ability Level.....	65
	Discussion.....	66
	Summary.....	67
V.	CONCLUSIONS.....	69
	Summary.....	69
	The Study.....	70

Results.....71

Evaluation of the Study.....77

Suggestions for Further Research.....79

REFERENCES.....84

APPENDIX A: OBSERVER TALLY SHEET.....89

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1 Humor Types by Word Content (Cerebral), Tone, Gesture, and Facial Expression (Physical).....	53
2 Student Response to Teacher Humor Types.....	54
3 Humor Type by Content.....	56
4 Control Humor Addressed to Specific Groups.....	61
5 Humor Type by Gender Addressed.....	63

TYPES AND PURPOSES OF TEACHER HUMOR:
A STUDY OF HONORS AND ON-GRADE-LEVEL ENGLISH 3 CLASSES

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Since Aristotle's discussion of jest in his Poetics, humor has been a subject of formal study. It has been hailed as "one of the highest psychic functions" (Freud, 1916, p. 370). It has also been condemned: "Good taste and humor are a contradiction in terms, like a chaste whore" (Muggeridge, 1953, p. 102). In recent history, though, humor has generally been regarded as a positive addition to human discourse, an attribute distinct to humankind, and a useful trait for effective teaching.

Physiologists study the effects of laughter on the body, finding that it increases heart rate (Langevin & Day, 1972, p. 139) and stimulates catecholamine, which contributes to alertness (Cornett, 1986, p. 16). Social scientists catalogue the possible physical, social, and psychological reasons for smiling and the multitudinous

combinations of muscles generating those smiles (LeFrance, 1983). Child psychologists study the development of humor appreciation as children mature (McGhee, 1980). In a myriad of fields there are efforts to understand what humor is, why it is, and, sometimes, whether or not it is good.

This interest in humor and its role in human interaction extends to the field of education, as well. With some notable exceptions such as student-directed, hostile sarcasm, humor has long been recognized as a useful, even necessary, element in the classroom. Teachers are expected to have a variety of communication skills, among them a "sense of humor" (Ross, 1984, p. 3). Though "sense of humor" is not specifically defined, it is generally accepted that someone with a sense of humor will generate amusing conversation and will appreciate others' attempts to do the same. Thus, a teacher with a sense of humor will be entertaining as well as instructive.

Research indicates that there is a positive correlation between humor/humorous atmosphere and learning. A humorous atmosphere has been shown to facilitate creativity (Ziv, 1983) and, therefore, encourage critical thinking (Bozik, 1987). Under some circumstances, it assists retention of subject matter (Zillman & Bryant, 1983). Even more obviously, humor in the classroom promotes a more positive

and stimulating environment, which in turn can have a positive effect on student learning (Fine, 1983). There are risks to using humor, too, most notable among them being a loss of classroom control, when the "classroom becomes a playground" (Sudol, 1981, p. 4), or loss of respect for the teacher. Current research indicates that this drawback may be more perceived than real (Gruner, 1984).

Research concerning the functions, or uses, of humor in the schools has focused primarily on elementary school age children and college students. There has been little research conducted at the high school level which focuses on humor and its uses. Additionally, much of the research available today is concerned with student response to humor and student generated humor. The role of the teacher as spontaneous comic has been virtually ignored in educational research, except to say that the teacher should generate humor.

There are also programs and guides to help teachers increase the amount or acceptability of their humor, but they are primarily the product of one or two individuals' experiences in the classroom. They do not refer to the quality of humorous activity currently going on in classrooms; they assume a dearth of humor which must be remedied. Because humor is a major element in quality

teaching at the high school level as well as at the elementary level (McGhee, 1983), examining humor use in secondary schools would be worthwhile. The kinds of humor used by teachers and the purposes which that humor serves merit examination.

In addition, recently there has been concern over possible discrepancies between the quality of schooling in classes of students with differing academic abilities, or "tracked" classes. The most common "tracks" are honors, the most academically gifted students; on-grade-level, those students considered academically "average"; and remedial, or students performing below what is considered an average academic level. The factors which go into "tracking" students are often not clearly defined, and recently there has been concern that students in "lower" tracks have been receiving less enriching, less stimulating, and less useful instruction than students in honors tracks. These discrepancies have been noted in "curricular content, instructional procedures, and elements of the student-teacher relationship" (Goodlad, 1984, p. 152). Jeannie Oakes also analyzes the results of A Study of Schooling in her book Keeping Track (1985). In her discussion of the effects of tracking, she notes that:

School and classroom conditions can either enhance or restrict the chances that students will learn whatever content is presented. . . .The differences [in

classroom conditions] we found were marked--enough so that we believe they provided students in various track levels with greater and lesser learning opportunities. (p. 93)

Since humor is a component of instructional method as well as part of the student-teacher relationship, it would seem reasonable to conjecture that the types, function, or frequency of humorous events present in classes of different "tracks"/academic abilities might also be different. Though Oakes does not specifically address humor as an element of good teaching, she does consider the impact a positive atmosphere can have on student learning, and notes discrepancies in the quality of classroom atmosphere between classes of different "tracks" (p. 117).

Additionally, since humor contributes to the creation of a stimulating environment, it would seem reasonable to assume that if on-grade-level classes are less stimulating than honors classes, one of the reasons might be that there is less humor in on-grade-level classes than in honors classes. It may also be that humor is being used to suppress student activity rather than to stimulate it more in the on-grade-level classes than in honors classes, that humor functions differ between tracks. A third possibility might be that teachers use more cerebral humor, and if students in on-grade-level classes are perceived as being incapable of understanding cerebral humor, teachers will

resort to using more physical humor such as absurd facial expressions or broad physical gestures; the types of humor used may vary between classes of different academic tracks.

Background

There are a number of factors which might influence amount, type, and purpose of teacher humor. In order to acknowledge the possibility that sex and/or ethnic mix in the population might affect data, it would be advantageous to observe teachers with ethnically and sexually mixed classes, and observe teachers of different sexes and ethnic backgrounds. Because the teachers to be observed in this study and the observer are all White, however, observations concerning the influence ethnicity might have on humor use could be limited, and so will be considered only if it is obvious in the teachers' use of humor, i.e. racially derogatory or stereotypical remarks.

Teacher Sample

The two teachers to be observed will be recommended by their San Jose State University foundations of education instructor for their "sense of humor." If the teachers use humor extensively in their classes, it will be possible to view a greater range of humor events, though the amounts of humor generated by each teacher will not be compared. Both

teachers will teach several classes of English 3, so that a comparison of use and type of humor can be made between sections and academic ability levels taught by the same teacher.

District Population

The school district selected has a majority of minority students. Districtwide, the student population is 2% Native American, 8% Black, 20% Asian, 30% White, and 40% Latino/Chicano/Mexican-American and Filipino. English 3 (American literature) classes are a combination of sophomore through senior grade levels, though the honors classes are primarily juniors. Though sexual distribution varies in specific classes, overall there is an equal distribution of female and male students in the English 3 programs. The classes observed in this district can be considered representative of many high school classrooms in California in terms of ethnic diversity and socio-economic range.

Problem Statement

Good teachers are expected to use humor in their teaching; a sense of humor is a given, just as the ability to communicate well and show caring for the students are givens. The type of humor which is currently being used effectively in secondary level classes, however, has been

documented or described minimally at best (Chapman, 1983, p. 148).

Teachers are encouraged by other educators, administrators, parents, and students to expand their abilities to be humorous (Tooper, 1988). They are admonished not to use stereotypes in their humor in order to avoid the perception that they think in stereotypes (Vieira, 1981); they are cautioned against the pitfalls of sarcasm (Hamilton, 1986); they are warned that humor must be appropriate to students' developmental stages (Allen, 1985). These recommendations are the product of experimental research and personal experience; what is lacking is in-depth observation of teachers who are using humor in their classes, field confirmation of the research and personal observations.

In order to understand the possible uses of humor and specifically the types of humor which are effectively applied in classrooms, research must be done in the classroom, as well as in the experimental lab, and emphasis must be placed on what the teacher is doing, not solely on how the students are responding. It must be understood that humor is the result of a comic event/statement (whether verbal, physical, or a combination of the two) and an audience response, sometimes with the absent third party,

the "butt" of in-group humor (Chapman, 1983). With so much research focusing on what constitutes humor to students, there has been a dearth of research focusing on teacher generated humor. Research addressing teachers' deliberately generated humor would complement other research concerning humor and its place in education.

Purpose Statement

It will be the purpose of this study to conduct an in-depth, ethnographic observation of two English 3 high school teachers. The purpose of ethnographic observation is researcher immersion in the "culture" of the classroom; it requires that the researcher be present in the classroom over an extended period of time as a "participant-observer," a member of the classroom community as well as a researcher. In this study, the researcher will be focusing specifically on deliberately generated teacher humor, actions or statements deliberately committed by the teacher with the intention of being amusing. If the teacher accidentally steps in the trash can while writing on the board, students and the teacher may find the event amusing, but it does not constitute deliberately generated humor.

The study will determine the types of humor the teachers use, and the purposes for which the humor is

intended. In addition to the primary goal of understanding the dynamics of humor use in these classes, the study will also determine whether there is a relationship between academic ability level of a class and types, frequency, and/or functions of humor in that class when compared to a class of differing ability taught by the same teacher.

Research Questions

1. What types of humor do teachers use in English classes?
 - a. To what extent is humor physical (body movement, facial expressions, tone dependent)?
 - b. To what extent is humor cerebral (word dependent)?
 - c. What categories of humor events are used (sarcasm, teasing, self- or other- derogatory, content-oriented, wordplay, et cetera)?
 - d. What percentage of teacher generated humor is focused on 1) students, 2) self, 3) course content?
2. What purposes are served by each humor event?
 - a. How much humor is used for control of students?
 - b. How much humor is used to achieve a sense of community, consensus?
 - c. How much humor is used for its own sake, purely to entertain?

3. How does the class composition affect teacher generated humor?

a. To what extent is the amount or character of teacher generated humor affected by the academic ability level, the "track" of the class?

b. To what extent is the amount or character of teacher generated humor affected by the sexual distribution of students, or the sex of specific students (when humor is student-directed)?

Operational Definitions

Cerebral humor depends on intellectual recognition of incongruence and encompasses most self-contained "jokes," wordplay, teasing, self-derogatory humor, and other forms of humor which involve language processing.

Components of humor situations: Comic: the humor-generator; in this study, the teacher is the only comic being considered. Audience: the recipients of the humor, the responders; in this study, the class. "Butt": the object of ridicule.

English 3: A tracked American literature course for students who are considered to be 'average' academically, grades 10-12.

English 3 Honors: A tracked American literature course designed for juniors who are considered above average academically and college-bound.

Functions of humor: Sociologists generally agree on three basic functions of humor (Fine, 1983): as a means of achieving consensus/cohesion, as a technique of social control, and as a device for introducing conflict (p. 173).

Humor: An operational definition of humor is "a situation that stimulates laughter or amusement" (Wandersee, 1982, p. 212). For the purposes of this study, teacher generated humor will be defined as a situation which the teacher consciously attempts to stimulate laughter or amusement, though the class may not respond.

Humor event: Also referred to as humorous situation, a humor event is that which is intended to stimulate amusement. Humor events fall into two general categories: physical and cerebral. In the physical category are such behaviors as "clowning around" (full body involvement), gesturing (usually limited to hand and arm), making faces or facial gesturing, and using tone of voice to convey humor.

Self-contained "joke": A form of cerebral humor which is not context-dependent; it stands on its own ("Did you hear the one about. . ."). Self-contained "jokes" are usually used exclusively for entertainment, as they are not

generally linked to the classroom or course content.

Assumptions

1. The two teachers observed, though recognized as good, humorous teachers, are not unique among English teachers in their use of humor.
2. It is sufficient to identify those humor events which are audible to the class as a whole, rather than to include privately directed comments.
3. The researcher will accurately interpret the purpose of the humor events based on context and consultation with the teacher.
4. The teachers involved know when they are trying to use humor and will correct the researcher in the regular interviews if the researcher's observations of humor events do not qualify as deliberate attempts to be amusing.
5. The teachers' awareness of the purpose of the study will not jeopardize the validity of the study because of the regularity of the observation (ethnographic technique).
6. The presence of the researcher in the classes will not significantly alter student response, teacher behavior, or classroom climate because of the regularity of the observation.

Limitations/Delimitations

Limitations:

1. Teacher awareness of the nature of the study could result in the Hawthorne effect.
2. Observation of humor statements is limited to what the researcher can hear/record.
3. Some classes, such as test days, in-class essay days, or days when students work in groups, will contain limited talking from the teacher (and, therefore, possibly less teacher humor).
4. Course content in honors and on-grade-level classes may not be the same, which could affect the amount of humor.
5. Chronological age/maturity or gender of the students could affect degree/type of humor generated by the teacher.
6. Established relationships between the teacher and specific students may alter the types, purposes, or amount of humor.
7. Analysis of ethnic factors affecting humor in the classroom will not be considered, since both teachers to be observed and the researcher are White.

Delimitations:

1. Two teachers will be observed for three weeks each, five days a week in all of their English 3 classes.

2. Comments addressed to specific individuals with the intent of being heard only by those individuals will not be considered in the data; focus will be on group address, or those comments addressed to individuals loudly enough to be considered class-directed.
3. Student generated humor will not be considered, even if the teacher acts as a catalyst for student jokes.

Statement of Significance

Humor is an important element in communication and in learning. Though experts may disagree about the effectiveness of the use of humor in discourse, it is generally presumed that teachers will use humor as an effective aspect of communication in their classes. There has been much research in experimental settings concerning the positive influence humor can have on various aspects of learning: creativity, critical thinking, retention, enthusiasm and interest. What is lacking is research in the classroom, extended analysis of what kind of humor is already there and what purposes it serves.

Results of this study should provide the reader with a picture of some ways in which humor is and can be used in English classes. The study will illustrate the range of humorous events currently being generated in

English classes taught by two teachers known for their "sense of humor," as well as showing the ways they use humor to affect classroom climate and student behavior. It will serve as field research to supplement the experimental lab research of others.

The study may verify recommendations made by educators based on their own experience concerning what kinds of humor are useful in the classroom and why. It may confirm that humor type, use, or amount varies according to class "track"/student academic ability level. If so, the study may lead to specific research concerning the reasons for such discrepancies, and analysis of the ethics of allowing the discrepancies to continue.

A greater understanding of how humor can be used will help educators define teacher expectations in the classroom. Research at this point is contradictory; what types of humor are acceptable and for what purposes are not universally agreed upon. More insight into the real functioning of humor in real classrooms could only help clarify the issue.

For teachers in the classroom, this study might confirm that their use of humor, their perception of its role in the classroom, is shared by other teachers. If the study does not act as confirmation or reassurance to teachers, perhaps it will act as inspiration to them to modify their use of

humor or expand it. Illustration of real classroom successes can be a powerful motivator.

The ultimate benefit of any educational research is improved learning for the students. This study, by encouraging humor use in the classroom, by illustrating what kinds of humor can and are being used there, and by bringing attention to how humor is used in the classroom, will benefit students by improving their classroom environment. With increased use of humor in their classes, students will find themselves in a more stimulating and positive atmosphere, one in which creative thinking and increased retention become side-effects of enthusiasm for learning.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As a process unique to human beings, humor has been the subject of extensive attention. Aristotle discusses the role of humor in his Poetics; Freud dedicates two volumes to humor and wit. Specific research into the effects of humor in social interaction, the development of humor responses, even the physical effects of laughter has been relatively recent, however. In 1972 Jeffrey Goldstein and Paul McGhee collected the bulk of serious research on humor into one volume, The Psychology of Humor. Since then there has been renewed interest in the subject, with research encompassing the physical, developmental, and social effects of humor.

This review of humor research will consider two general aspects of humor as an overview to use of humor in the classroom: the relationship between humor and health and the relationship between humor and development. More specifically, the review will encompass the effects of humor on higher order thinking and the affective domain in order to ascertain the appropriateness of including humor in classroom instruction. Uses of humor in English classes will also be addressed, as well as the relationship between

humor and traditional school structure; and controversies over the types of humor appropriate to the classroom setting will be presented.

Humor and Health

Laughter, as a manifestation of humor appreciation, results in increased respiration and heart rate (Langevin & Day, 1972, p. 135). This state of arousal has been theorized to be central to the humorous response to stimuli. Langevin and Day's 1972 study of sixteen adult students' responses to cartoons indicated that "physiological changes included within the construct of arousal are positively and significantly related to subjective evaluations of humor" (Langevin & Day, 1972, p. 139). In the study, sixteen student child-care workers, eight women and eight men, were asked to rate ten cartoons for level of funniness on a scale ranging from +3 for very humorous to -3 for very unpleasant. These responses were measured against the subjects' heart rates and galvanic skin response amplitude. Results of the study support the hypothesis that arousal and humorous response are correlated, even when there is no external evidence of humorous response such as laughter or smiling (Langevin & Day, 1972, p. 140).

The stimulating effects of humor have been linked to several aspects of student affect as well, most notably stress reduction. Paul McGhee observes that humor is regularly used by adolescents to reduce anxiety: "The early years of adolescence may again see a surge in joking activity as a means of dealing with anxiety and tension associated with increased sexuality" (McGhee, 1983, p. 118). Paul Pattavina, in his discussion of "generative affective competencies," or skills for dealing with disturbed children, recommends the liberal use of humor "to decontaminate stressful situations" (1983, p. 4). Though Pattavina is addressing the difficulties of working with socially and emotionally disturbed students, his recommendations are directed to teachers of all students.

In an effort to measure the effect of humor on stress in a classroom situation, Avner Ziv conducted two related experiments. The first attempted to correlate frustration with aggression. The second attempted to show that humor reduces frustration. Using four classes of 11th and 12th grade students in Tel Aviv, he administered two sections of the Raven IQ test, the hardest section and the easiest section, and then administered the Rosenzweig Picture Frustration Test. Results of this section of the experiment

indicate that frustration does increase aggression (1987, p. 362).

In the second section of the experiment, the students were shown two videos. Two groups saw a video of comic skits which had already been tested for laughter inducement; the other two groups watched a nature hike video. After the viewing, all students again took the Rosenzweig Picture Frustration Test, with those students who saw the comic video scoring much lower on the test the second time through. Ziv concludes that since laughter reduced frustration, and frustration leads to increased aggression, laughter should reduce aggression (p. 363).

Humor is also used to increase coping, as Frank Prerost reports concerning his college counselling method.

According to Prerost:

The use of humor for persons experiencing difficulties in adjustments can serve two significant functions. First, the enjoyment of humor can lift the depressed mood state and alleviate anxiety and apprehensions. Second, humor can assist in resolving the threatening aspects of a stressful life situation. (1983, p. 223)

Ziv's research would seem to support Prerost's first statement, that humor can alleviate anxiety. Prerost's assertion that humor can help resolve life problems is a product of his experience with college freshmen who are having difficulty adjusting to college life.

Perhaps one of the most stressful aspects of a

student's life is test taking. Rather than assume that using humor on a test would reduce students' anxiety levels, McMorris, Urbach, and Connor (1985) conducted an experiment on 126 eighth grade students using a 50 question grammar test. Two parallel tests were developed to measure the effects of humor in test questions on student anxiety levels and performance; students' anxiety level and test type preference were determined using a post-test questionnaire based on the Spielberger, Gorsuch, and Lushene anxiety inventory. The results were statistically insignificant. Humor apparently did not affect student performance (positively or negatively), nor did it seem to reduce students' anxiety levels. Nonetheless, students indicated that they preferred the humorous version (p. 151).

Though the McMorris, Urbach, and Connor experiment would seem to indicate that humor does not have the potential for anxiety reduction that the other experiments show, it also does not indicate that humor has a detrimental effect on students' performance. It is possible that at the eighth grade level test humor is not significant, though it may be significant at another developmental level.

Humor and Development

There has been extensive research into the development of humor in children. Paul McGhee notes that "level of cognitive development has been linked to changes in the kinds of humor children can understand" (1983, p. 126). In his study with Sally Lloyd (1982), he also establishes a relationship between social play activities in pre-school children and the development of a sense of humor; additionally, elementary school children use humor as an acceptable means for expressing aggression (p. 257).

In the pre-school study 60 White, middle-class children were observed for 40 minutes each while they played. Humor behaviors such as laughter or clowning were rated on a 1-7 rating scale. Results indicate that sense of humor in pre-school children is closely linked with the amount of time they spend in social activities. They also observed that "the high energy level of children with higher sense of humor scores. . . may have contributed to the increased amount of both aggression and social play" (p. 258).

Consistent with the McGhee and Lloyd results linking development of humor with social activity, the Carson, Skarpness, Schultz, and McGhee study (1986) links communicative competence, or social language skills, and certain aspects of temperament to development of humor. In

the study 158 predominantly White, middle-class nursery school children were ranked by their mothers with the Behavioral Style Questionnaire and by their teacher with the Communication Developmental Age Scale of the Developmental Profile II. The results correlating temperament style and humor development were "extremely limited" (p. 422). Those characteristics of temperament which did show a significant relationship to humor development, however, were "activity level and approachability" (p. 422), "a generally positive quality of mood and the children's frequency of laughter" (p. 423), and "the influence of learned communicative competencies" (p. 423). Those characteristics which made the children more social also increased their humor level.

Attempts have also been made to correlate humor appreciation and developmental stage. Owens and Hogan (1983) designed their study to test the hypothesis that humor comprehension and appreciation are linked to grade and conservation ability. Eighty-seven children in first to third grade, after being given Piagetian conservation tests, were shown two sets of cartoons and jokes. One set had the humorous incongruity intact; the other set had the incongruity removed. The students were asked to explain the incongruity and choose which version was funnier. Results show "although grade and conservation ability were clearly

related to the capacity to understand the elements of the humorous situation, they did not generally affect appreciation" (p. 478). The connection between cognitive ability and ability to appreciate humor is not direct in elementary school children. General stages of humor appreciation, however, can be correlated to physical and social development.

R. T. Tamashiro organizes the levels of physical and cognitive development with humor preference/understanding consistent with Piaget's theory of development and Loevinger's theory of ego development. According to Tamashiro, the most basic level of humor is tickling (Piaget's sensorimotor, Loevinger's presocial/symbiotic); the highest stage is "original, good-natured humor, tongue-in-cheek humor, social satires" (1979, p. 70) corresponding to Piaget's formal operational period and Loevinger's conscientious stage. This is the stage which students may reach during their high school years. Because teacher use of humor has been shown to be most effective when the humor is appropriate to the developmental level of the students (Allen, 1985, p. 44; Wandersee, 1982, p. 214), consideration of age might be appropriate when examining experimental results.

The above studies show that humor development is connected to social and physical development in pre-school and elementary school children. Ann Masten extended these results to older children, ages 10 to 14, in her study of the relationship between humor and competence (1986). She considered three types of humor behavior: humor appreciation, humor comprehension, and creative humor ability, and their relationship to three types of competence: peer reputation, classroom behavioral competence, and academic competence.

In the study of 93 children, 25 percent of whom were minorities, subjects were shown a series of cartoons to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 while being monitored for humor response. They were then asked to explain the "funniness" of the cartoons. In a third section of the study, children were asked to provide funny titles and captions for cartoon pictures, and their creative ability was rated by two judges on a 5 point scale.

Intellectual ability, as determined by the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children; academic achievement, as determined by the Peabody Individual Achievement Test; behavior competence, as assessed by their teachers using the Devereux Elementary School Behavior Rating Scale; and interpersonal competence, as assessed by their peers using

the Revised Class Play were all correlated to the humor responses. Results confirmed that "humor and competence are positively related. Better humor production, comprehension, and greater mirth were associated with academic and social competence" (p. 469). There is some question about whether it is the good sense of humor which results in the teachers' and peers' positive ratings or common foundations which result in both social interaction and humor development (p. 471), but the study indicates that humor and competence, both social and academic, are definitely linked.

McGhee also studied factors in the development of humor appreciation linked with gender and disparagement humor (McGhee & Lloyd, 1981). Basing his hypothesis on the theory that disparagement humor has its foundation in identification with a specific group, McGhee tested the relationship between gender and response to disparagement humor in cartoons combining characters of different genders and ages.

McGhee and Lloyd tested 111 preschoolers and first graders using sets of cartoons in which one character is a victim and the other is not; the children were asked which cartoon they found funnier. The cartoon characters were paired by age (parent figures with cartoon children, and cartoon children with cartoon children) and gender. Results

indicate that children prefer humor in which parent figures are victimized to humor in which children are victimized. Additionally, boys preferred to see girls victimized, though girls showed no particular preference to see boys victimized (p. 928).

If such responses can be extended to high school students, it would seem logical, then, that students would enjoy teacher humor which is self-derogatory, and male students will enjoy disparagement humor more than female students. McGhee is careful to note, however, that "the mere fact that an individual belongs to a particular reference group does not mean that he or she will strongly identify with that group" (McGhee & Duffey, 1983, p. 37). When identification with a particular group does exist, however, the salient factors of that identification can influence humor response, and the development of group identity parallels personal development and social awareness.

Humor and Higher Order Thinking

Ann Masten's study connects humor development with academic and social competence. Avner Ziv's 1983 study of the relationship between humor and divergent thinking supports her findings. In Ziv's two part study he examined

the influence of humorous atmosphere on student performance on the Torrance Creativity Test. In part one of the study, 78 tenth grade students were divided into three groups (one control group); two groups were shown comic films and cartoons for which they were to write captions. Then they took the creativity test. Results indicate that the use of humor before the test did increase creativity scores.

In part two of the study, four classes of students were administered the Torrance Creativity Test. Two groups, after completing one section, were told to do the second section, this time trying to make their answers as humorous as possible. Trained judges scored their responses. Results "clearly indicate that a humorous atmosphere influences students' scores on divergent thinking" (p. 73). Ziv explains this influence in two ways. Humor creates a "special mood" (p. 73). Also, creation of humor calls for awareness of incongruencies, what Ziv calls "humorous logic," which he explains "diverts thinking from the usual linear, logical course" (p. 74). In other words, using humor in the classroom might increase the degree to which students generate original thought.

Mary Bozik extends the application of humor from divergent thinking to critical thinking. Her concern is speech teaching; she sees humor as a technique for

generating "a valuable learning environment" (1987, p. 8) as well as encouraging the original thought necessary to create stimulating speeches. Claudia Cornett also recommends the use of humor as it develops "higher-level critical and creative thinking skills" (1986, p. 10), which she sees as just one of the 13 major benefits of having humor in the classroom. The majority of the rest of the benefits she lists have to do with the effect humor has on student affect and classroom atmosphere.

Humor and Affect

Probably the most commonly acknowledged effect of humor is on atmosphere and social disposition. McGhee & Lloyd (1982) established the critical relationship between social interaction and the development of humor. The importance of that relationship continues into secondary and college classrooms, and is recognized by educators and students alike.

Student recommendations can indicate some qualities desirable in teachers. In a study of what Belgian high school students considered most important in teachers, Bruce and Rosa Lloyd found a "pleasant learning atmosphere" and sense of humor to be two of eight recommendations (1986, p. 267). Stewart Jones (1979) lists sense of humor as one of

the top five responses of college students he surveyed to assess what they perceived as characteristics of teachers who stimulate curiosity (p. 5). In their review of award winning teachers, Brian and Nacline Kelly found that the teachers themselves recommended maintaining a sense of humor, and classroom observation showed "a majority used humor in their presentations" (1982, p. 6). Clearly, from a subjective standpoint, humor is a desirable characteristic according to students at the secondary level and higher.

There is also potential for humor use in classrooms to address specific problems in the future. Eugene Ross, in his analysis of teacher requirements in a technologically-oriented future, recommends "adaptability to new techniques and knowledge; development of creative and inquiring minds; a sense of humor" (1984, p. 3). He feels that maintaining a more personal atmosphere will aid in instruction using complex technology such as computer managed classes and video classes using telecommunications. Maryellen Gleason addresses the problem of larger classes in the future, recommending that humor be a means to "communicate messages of 'humanness'" when that "humanness" is lost in large college classes (1986, p. 23).

Though it appears humor use is generally positive in classes of older students, Zillman and Bryant warn that

being witty is preferable to being funny, with witty being defined as "integrated, related, relevant humor" (1983, p. 187); they see unrelated humor as a detriment to learning (p. 188). In English classes, humor is often content-oriented, integral to the literature content of the course, though not limited to that. Sometimes it is appropriate to teach humor as content, as it is a communication skill.

Humor in English Classes

The possibilities for humor use in English classes are so extensive they are the central subject of a volume of The English Journal (vol. 70 (6), Oct. 1981). Barbi Mitchell-Dwyer's contribution to that issue extols the virtues of humor in Shakespeare, recommending that teachers take advantage of Shakespeare's own wit to liven up the teaching of his plays. She also recommends using humorous approaches to develop projects as part of the Shakespeare units (p. 24). In her words, "the key to humor in the English classroom is to realize that much of what we teach can be boring, and if we teach in a dull way, we lose the students' and our own interest" (p. 25). She advocates teaching humor in the content, and humor as content, a communication skill to be developed.

John Pfordresher, in the same journal, recommends that humor be taught as a discrete subject, using Freud's distinction between simple wordplay and tendentious joking, or joking directed at a target, the "butt." Pfordresher's rationale for teaching the analysis of humor is practical as well as academic; attempting to discuss humorous material without a framework for analysis often leaves the class "dead, students' faces go flat, and their eyes drift away" (1981, p. 50). He explains that the shift from appreciating humor to discussing it is a "shift from the passive and spontaneous to the active and analytical" (p. 50), unless the students have a framework for analyzing humor. In Pfordresher's classes, that framework helps students understand how authors generate sympathies for specific characters in literature.

Humor analysis can also be used for teaching language awareness. Roland Bartel (1983) explores the use of metaphors in language, dedicating a chapter to humor as metaphor. He cites confusion in metaphors as a likely source of humor. For example, "I've been keeping my ear to the grindstone lately, and I tell you we've got to do something to get a toehold in the public eye" (p. 37). Such attention to language and its potential for humor he feels facilitates understanding of other uses of metaphor which

may not be so immediately appealing to students, such as metaphor in poetry.

Wordplay is an early manifestation of humor awareness, according to Linda Geller (1985, p. 13). She suggests that children can refine their understanding of metalinguistics by examining the wordplay they indulge in, and she establishes a hierarchy for addressing different types of humor, ranging from playing with sound in the earliest years to parody in later years (Geller, 1985, pp. 85-93). She does not address the appropriateness of each type at each level, as does Wandersee (1982); rather, Geller recommends that children study their own humor, thereby ensuring that the ability to understand it is not beyond their developmental level.

Controversies in Classroom Humor

There are two types of humor which have come under frequent attack in the literature. One is the use of stereotypes in joking; the other is the use of sarcasm. Those against the use of stereotypes for humor argue that using stereotypes in humor encourages thinking in stereotypes, a behavior not to be encouraged by responsible teachers:

If a stereotype must be dealt with, it must be pointed out for what it is, an example of poor judgement, or ignorance on the part of the author. We should not

hide or eliminate stereotypes from quality literature. We must, however handle them with care and professionalism. (Vieira, 1981, p. 20)

Vieira also argues that stereotype-dependent humor is "humor at the expense of another. . . at worst, it reinforces prejudice" (p. 18). Apte (1985) in his anthropological analysis of humor notes that:

Ethnic humor, like all other types of humor, is an integral part of expressive culture. It reflects a group's perception and evaluation of other groups' personality traits, customs, behavior patterns, and social institutions by the standards of ingroup culture, with its positive or negative [italics added] attitudes towards others. (p. 121)

It must be remembered that, though commonly negative or derogatory, stereotypes can be positive. Vieira's objections to humor based on stereotypes focuses on negative ethnic stereotypes, which he has expanded to include all stereotypes as "unfair characterization" (p. 18).

William J. Kelly, in response to Vieira's positions, challenges him on that assumption. "But it is wrong to group all uses of stereotypes together and make a generalization about generalization" (1981, p. 19). William Kelly suggests that "it is time for people to take themselves less seriously," and that would include being able to laugh at stereotypes with the understanding that a stereotype is "an inaccurate portrait drawn from a myriad of individuals, and therefore it should not be considered a

threat" (p. 19).

He further suggests that "a stereotype is a tool to educate students" (p. 19) about the inaccuracies inherent in generalizations "if teachers alert their students to the errors in judgement displayed in the [stereotypical] works" (p. 21). Briefly, Vieira argues that any use of stereotypes reinforces stereotypical thinking, and William Kelly suggests that stereotypes are necessary elements in humor which should be used carefully.

William Kelly's position that education about issues concerning stereotypes can be humorous is supported by Stillion and White's study of responses to feminist humor (1987). Subjects in the first part of this three-part study were over 30 years old, 10 women and 10 men, who were shown 20 index cards with feminist slogans (humorous) and cartoons. After viewing the cards, subjects rated their own feminist sympathies on a 1-10 scale. Subjects in the second part of the study were college freshmen, 15 women and 24 men, and they were shown only 12 cards. Subjects in the third study were 62 adolescents, 10 females and 10 males each in sixth and tenth grades; and 10 females and 12 males in eighth grade. The procedure used in the third experiment was similar to the other two, except eight neutral slogans were added to the cards.

Results showed that those subjects willing to identify themselves as feminists also found feminist humor most amusing (p. 230). Stillion and White also note "the relationship between appreciation of humor and agreement with the meaning of humorous stimulus is not at all clear" (p. 231). It is possible, then, that students could be amused by humor conveying stereotypical attitudes without necessarily agreeing with those attitudes.

One of the specific results of the Stillion and White study was confirmation that women tend not to like humor which disparages others (p. 230). Sarcastic humor depends on the disparagement of the one to whom it is addressed. Whether or not use of sarcasm is appropriate in the classroom is another of the hotly argued topics in humor literature.

The arguments against using sarcasm in class emphasize the potential ego harm which can result from sarcasm taken seriously. Sharon Collins asserts "But sarcasm is brutal. Note the etymology: GK sarkasmos, fr. sarkazein to tear flesh. Dagger-sharp words, regardless of their wit, puncture self-esteem" (1982, p. 20). She sees sarcasm as antithetical to respect for students. Marla G. Hamilton agrees:

Sarcasm, however, mocks and humiliates offenders which immediately makes them defensive, and the wall created will prove damaging in the teacher-student relationship

and would lead to more serious discipline problems.
(1986, p. 21)

Jane Allen also maintains that humor must be positive, "teacher oriented [sic] humor must not be hostile, aggressive, humiliating" (1985, p. 44). Both Collins and Hamilton assume that sarcasm, when used in a classroom, will be used for disciplinary purposes. Though they do not specifically state that they perceive a distinction between sarcasm (with malice intended) and irony or parody, teasing rather than ridiculing, their positions are stated in absolute terms, which might indicate an assumption of the distinction.

Even assuming that sarcasm is used exclusively for reprimanding students, there are those who would argue that it is an effective tool. David Sudol maintains that the use of sarcasm can be effective if it is done carefully and with consideration. "I'm often sarcastic to students who don't do their assignments. . . . I carry on in such a mock-bombastic way that everyone, including Jennifer [student being reprimanded], is amused--and get the point across without scolding or yelling at her" (1981, p. 28). He is very careful to note, however, that if there is any malice involved "a student may become justifiably angered, offended, or alienated; I can, and should, be chastised for my lack of professionalism and tact" (p. 28). In effect, Sudol is

drawing the distinction that Hamilton and Collins do not-- the difference between ridicule and tension-diffusing humor, though he uses the term "sarcasm" for both.

There is some possibility, though, that even ridicule might be accepted as an effective tool for disciplining students. 'Muyiwa Igbalajobi conducted a study of 80 secondary students in Nigeria to determine if ridicule might result in increased academic performance. The subjects were assigned to read and answer questions about two passages. One set of students was insulted when they answered; one set was ridiculed (humorous insult); there were two control groups who did not receive comments on their performance. A pre- and post-test method was used to determine academic performance affected by the treatments. Results show that the female students responded better academically to ridicule than the male students, and the male students responded better to insults. Igbalajobi points out that cultural expectation of both women and men in Nairobi might have influenced the results (1986, p. 44). She also questions the ethics of using ridicule in the classroom, regardless of its effectiveness as a disciplinary tool (p. 45).

Perhaps the resolution of whether to use stereotypes or sarcasm has to be a personal one, guided by an awareness of

the pitfalls of using either. As Virginia Tooper notes concerning all types of humor "it can be the most effective tool one might employ or the most devastatingly bad one. There are no rules that if you do A, then B will result" (1988, p. 1). Clearly, then, the purpose for which humor is intended has a bearing on its success.

Purposes of Humor

Humor as a way of assessing in-group and out-group has already been introduced (Apte, 1985). Anthony Chapman (1983) also discusses the socially unifying character of much humor, observing that other-derogatory humor, especially, tends to solidify the in-group and exclude the out-group (p. 150). Gary Fine (1983) identifies this function as cohesion. "One of the first goals of any group is to remain unified in the face of a variety of actual or potential forces that might disrupt or threaten it" (p. 173). This is the unifying purpose of humor, the purpose educators cite when they argue that there should be more humor in the classroom.

A second function of humor is to control. Using sarcasm for discipline is one example of humor for control, as is good natured kidding. "The control function of humor

. . . is aggressive as well. It differs, however, in that it does not divide or separate groups but attempts to make group members accept group norms and disavow defiance, often through ridicule" (Fine, 1983, p. 174). Humor may be used for control by group leaders, such as a teacher, or by peers; control is a group-regulating function.

The third function of humor according to sociologists is for conflict. This type of humor "serves to separate a group from an undesirable, deviant out-group" (Fine, 1983, p. 174). It serves the dual purpose of esteeming the in-group while fostering conflict with the out-group. This function of humor would probably be found in an English class only if the class were divided and the teacher allied with one group against the other, or in academic material, such as satire and parody.

Teacher uses of humor, then, can be expected to fall into one or two categories of purpose: cohesion/unification of the group, and control. Humor for the purpose of entertainment would serve a unifying function, though it may be worth considering independently when evaluating educational uses of humor.

Humor and School Structure

Because the use of humor is generally considered desirable in social interaction, it would seem logical that an essentially social institution such as school would be rife with a wide variety of humorous types and events. Apparently, however, this is not so, and the reasons are embedded in the tradition of schooling, itself. As Virginia Tooper puts it:

A sense of humor is not so much a condition of birth as it is of environmental programming. Small children laugh and play easily until they begin to hear too much of: "Wipe that smile off your face." "Sit up straight and get serious now." "Act your age." "Don't laugh in church." (1988b, p. 57)

Children are discouraged from laughing in church, and they are discouraged from laughing in school, because education is a "serious" matter.

The older children get, the less their humorous response is appreciated or even tolerated in school. Fabrizi and Polio's (1987) naturalistic study of third, seventh, and eleventh grade classes makes this clear:

Teachers react to humor as a kind of disruptive activity and tend to discourage it and discourage the students regularly producing it in the classroom. . . . For most children in the older grades, however, but most especially for those in early adolescence, that is, in the seventh grade, humor is responded to by reprimand and other negative reactions thereby defining it as an unwelcome behavior in the school context. (p. 126-127)

There seems to be a conflict between behavior which is

considered acceptable in the classroom and humorous response. Additionally, though creative thinking is generally considered to be desirable, divergent thinking, which is an element of humor and of creativity, is discouraged in schools (Ziv, 1983, p. 75). In other words, both humor and divergent thinking are valued by educators, but generally are discouraged in the classroom.

Deborah Hill offers some insight into why humor is discouraged in schools. "Teachers can develop a healthy attitude towards humor in the classroom only when they are able to shun the negative associations that classify humor as mere misbehavior, as wasted time, or as causing the loss of face or credibility" (1988, p. 15). Both concerns are a matter of audience. In the case of wasted time or classroom misbehavior, the concern is with administrative judgement. In the case of "loss of face," student response is at risk.

With so much emphasis from evaluators and national reports on "time-on-task" and classroom management, it is not surprising that teachers suppress humor in their classrooms. David Sudol addresses the management issue:

To escape that procrustean, draconian setting--to lighten it up--I often tell jokes or funny stories. . . . The danger, however, is that such joking can lead to the other extreme; instead of a prison, the classroom becomes a playroom, a circus, or--at worst--a zoo.

(1981, p. 26)

Though complete loss of control, whether teacher control or

student self-control, would be detrimental to learning, some tolerance of humor and the subsequent appearance of loss of control should be acceptable. Recognizing the contradiction between a humor-rich classroom and silent, diligent students might help modify traditional sober expectations of school.

Hill's final reason, loss of respect, is aggravated by the nature of social humor. According to Fine, "the ability to kid demonstrates the equality of the status relationship and also shows intimacy" (1983, p. 165). Teachers trying to maintain a distance from their students in the hopes of being more "professional" will find that humor is the great equalizer. The possibility of losing students' respect by having a sense of humor is more of a teacher perception than a reality, though, according to Charles Gruner (1984).

Gruner's two part study explored the relationship of wittiness and profession-derogatory humor with ethos, which he defines as "character and authoritativeness" (p. 4), and use of humor and self-deprecation with ethos. In both experiments, college students were asked to rate speeches in terms of funniness and authoritativeness. Results of the study indicate that use of humor does not damage the speaker's ethos, though taste and appropriateness of the humor do affect ethos. The solution to maintaining respect in the classroom is not to eliminate humor, but to exercise

good taste.

Summary

Humor serves an important function in schools. It can be a tool for reducing stress and anxiety associated with personal and academic issues. It does not, as some people believe, detract from learning except when it is hostile or inappropriate. Appropriateness of humor is dependent on the audience/students' maturity level and the content of the humor, though there is disagreement about how specifically content-related humor should be.

One of humor's greatest strengths in education is its ability to unify the class and humanize the classroom. Because humor generates familiarity, it is both welcomed by teachers confident of their status with students and shunned by teachers who require distance from their students. Effective use of humor is personal, dependent on the style and purpose comfortable to the "comic," and, to some extent, regulated by the audience response.

There are two functions which humor can fill in the classroom: consensus and control. Humor for consensus involves all unifying humor events, including sheer entertainment. Humor used for control must be used carefully, or students can be alienated; but humor used

effectively for control can defuse potentially explosive situations.

The literature about humor and education is essentially experimental or anecdotal. With the exception of Fabrizi and Polio's naturalistic study of secondary level classrooms, there is little material describing the effective use of humor in high school classes. This study will address that need by collecting data about what kinds of teacher humor are being used in English classes and how they are being used.

CHAPTER III
RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

The research design for this study will be a modified ethnography. It will include collection of data through specific tallies of observed behavior (humor events), coupled with maintenance of a detailed journal and teacher interviews regarding the accuracy of observed events. This design follows ethnographic research procedures prescribed by James P. Spradley in The Ethnographic Interview (1979) and his follow-up volume Participant Observation (1980). Spradley recommends that ethnographers keep detailed field notes replicating as accurately as possible the informant's own language; expanded transcripts with observer notes; and a journal for personal responses, ideas, observations of what appear to be unrelated phenomena, but which may turn out to be important information (1979, p. 170). The value of using an ethnographic approach lies in seeing research as "cultural description. . .the first step in understanding the human species" (1979, p. 16).

The research for this study will not be extensive enough to qualify as a full ethnography, however. The limited time available and the researcher's prior experience

in the classroom as a teacher would make cultural immersion difficult and the data suspect. For these reasons the design will be modified to be more naturalistic, i.e. involving less interaction of the researcher with the classroom community than an ethnography would require, but retaining the characteristics of long-term observation. Williams and Loertscher maintain that teachers are in an excellent position to do research in their schools using naturalistic inquiry, and they will be more likely to act on the results of that research (1986, p. 3).

Universe and Sample

In California, public school classrooms are becoming consistently more ethnically mixed; the school district in which this study will be researched is representative of that ethnic diversity. The sample school district is approximately 2% Native American, 8% Black, 20% Asian, 30% White, and 40% Latino/Chicano/Mexican-American and Filipino. The ethnic compositions in the two schools in which observations will be completed are:

School 1: 3.5% Filipino, 7% Black, 20% White, 22% Asian, 36% Latino/Chicano/Mexican-American

School 2: 5% Filipino, 7% Black, 31% White, 3% Asian, 45% Latino/Chicano/Mexican-American.

Though there is a shift from the Asian population to Latino/Chicano/Mexican-American and White in School 2, both schools are essentially representative of the district in terms of minority population.

The curricula of English 3 in the two sample schools are also similar, and classes being observed will be covering roughly the same period of time in American literature (the American Renaissance/Transcendentalist Period). Age distribution will also be similar, as English 3 is a course designed for sophomores to seniors, with the bulk of the student population juniors and seniors in both schools.

It is not suggested that the sample is representative of all English classes. They are, however, typical classes for this area in terms of ethnic diversity, sexual distribution, grade/age distribution, and curricular expectations. Similarly, it is not suggested that the two teachers being observed are representative of all English teachers. In fact, by virtue of their having been recommended by their San Jose State University foundations of education instructor for having a "good sense of humor," they may be superior among English teachers. They will, nonetheless, provide some practical information about how humor can be used in the classroom.

Instruments

Before developing the tally sheet for registering humor events being observed, the researcher observed six high school English teachers, 10 one hour classes, in two schools of very different ethnic and socio-economic mixes in order to assess what general areas might be observable. None of the teachers or classes used for the preliminary work will be used in the final study.

Observer reliability was double-checked against audio tape recordings of three classes. Results of the tapes of these classes indicated 96% observer reliability, as one humor event in question turned out to be a student remark rather than a teacher remark. It should be noted that this is not an unusual level of accuracy, as the study is limited to remarks audible to the class as a whole, and humor event tallies are confirmed in teacher interviews.

The tally sheet developed as a result of this preliminary work records the text of the humor event, its context, audience addressed, class response, type of humor event (physical, facial, gesture, word meaning dependent), and evident purpose of the humor (see appendix A).

Additional analysis of the contexts of humor events, possible purposes, questions about why the joke was funny or how it was intended to affect the student(s) will also be

included in the journal, which is a personal record for the observer.

Data Analysis

As observations are completed and humor events are confirmed by the teacher being observed, the researcher will attempt to tally the types of humor and their purposes in general categories. Once observation of both teachers has been completed, final categories for types and purposes of humor observed will be established.

Results of these tallies will be reported in mean frequencies and percentages for general humor type (physical, cerebral) and by specific content as part of a descriptive overview. Tables will also show student responses to teacher humor (in percentages), and humor addressed to different groups (males, females, class). Amount of humor per class will be calculated to ascertain class comparisons (also in percentages).

The purpose of this study is to provide a description of how humor is used and why. Its modified ethnographic design is a reflection of this goal, to provide some insight into the culture of public schools. It does not claim to be universally representative, but it may provide confirmation of experimental research concerning humor and education.

CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

The results of ethnographic research are more descriptive in nature than those from experimental research. This chapter, then, will include some of the discussion normally reserved for the concluding chapter.

Overview

One of the research questions addressed by this study is: What types of humor do teachers use in English classes? Table 1 shows the types of humor events generated by each of two teachers observed, as well as the totals for physical and cerebral humor. Calculations are by mean frequency of humor events (per hour of class time) and percentage of all humor events observed. It should be noted that many humor events involved combinations of several general types, so those humor events using only one type of humor are listed separately.

Table 1

Mean Frequency and Percentages of
Humor Types by Word Content (Cerebral), Tone, Gesture, and
Facial Expression (Physical)

<u>Humor type</u>	<u>T1</u>	<u>T2</u>	<u>Total</u>
word	6.38 (79%)	9.29 (90%)	7.78 (85%)
word only	4.42 (55%)	8.3 (81%)	6.3 (69%)
tone	2.92 (33%)	1.29 (13%)	2.02 (22%)
tone only	.96 (12%)	.42 (4%)	.7 (8%)
gesture	1.12 (14%)	.88 (9%)	1.0 (11%)
gesture only	.23 (3%)	.42 (4%)	.32 (4%)
facial expression	.42 (5%)	.13 (1%)	.28 (3%)
facial only	.23 (3%)	.08 (1%)	.16 (2%)

The type of humor most preferred by both teachers is word-dependent humor, though Teacher #1 (T1) relied more heavily on tone and gesture than did Teacher #2 (T2). These results support developmental theories of humor which indicate that with greater maturation there will be a shift from physical forms of humor to more cerebral (Cornett, 1986; Wandersee, 1982; Tamashiro, 1979). If these teachers are addressing the humor levels of their students, then there should be consistency between teacher humor types and students' responses (see Table 2: Student Responses to

Teacher Generated Humor).

Table 2 shows student responses to teacher humor, which is divided into four types: word (meaning) dependent humor, tone dependent humor, gesture dependent humor, and facial expression humor. There are three categories of positive student response: laughter, chuckles, and smiles; and two other categories: no response and negative response.

Table 2

Student Response to Teacher Humor Types*

<u>Response</u>	<u>Word</u>	<u>Tone</u>	<u>Gesture</u>	<u>Facial</u>
laughter	63%	53%	64%	50%
smiles	15%	20%	16%	29%
chuckles	10%	14%	10%	14%
total positive	88%	87%	90%	93%
no response	12%	13%	10%	7%
negative	.2%**	---	---	---

* Percentages are the number of humor events of each type eliciting specified student responses; they are not an indication of what percentage of students responded.

** Only one humor event elicited a negative response, and it was humor for the purpose of control, the probable reason for the negative response (see Humor Purposes, p. 61).

Table 2 shows that student response to all types of humor is proportionately the same, though response to physical humor is slightly higher. The approximately 10

percent "no response" or "negative response" indicates that these two teachers did, for the most part, gear their humor to their students' level of appreciation, maintaining that balance of physical and cerebral humor consistent with their students' development. Teacher 2, who relied more heavily on cerebral humor (see Table 1), had a lower percentage of "no response" to his cerebral jokes than did Teacher 1, for whom 96% of the "no response" jokes were word-dependent. This discrepancy might support the position that students will develop more appreciation for different humor types through exposure (Tooper, 1988b).

The varieties of humor content are represented in Table 3. In some cases, the purpose of the humor event is integral to the content, as in the case of unity jokes, which depend on their purpose (to generate unity among the class) for humor. For example, while introducing the researcher to one class, Teacher 1 identified the class as "The Best One" (#12/2/88-2-2; this and other joke texts are available from the author). The humor is integral to the class' understanding that there is no "best one," and the in-group assertion underscores the unity of the class.

Also, several content areas may be present in one humor event; for example, several of the other-disparaging jokes are also wordplays. One, in response to a student's account

of the army test the day before, was, "Tanks, but no tanks" (#2/2/89-4-5). It is counted in both the "other-disparaging" category as well as the "wordplay" category.

Table 3

Mean Frequency and Percentage of
Humor Type by Content

<u>Content</u>	<u>T1</u>	<u>T2</u>	<u>Total</u>
Disparaging	4.30 (53%)	5.92 (58%)	5.08 (56%)
student-	2.27 (28%)	2.90 (28%)	2.56 (28%)
self-	1.80 (22%)	2.20 (21%)	1.98 (22%)
other-	.31 (4%)	.88 (9%)	.58 (6%)
Classroom climate	2.00 (25%)	1.71 (17%)	3.16 (35%)
authority	.69 (9%)	.58 (6%)	.64 (7%)
rapport	.39 (5%)	.42 (4%)	.40 (4%)
unity	.15 (2%)	.08 (1%)	.12 (1%)
jokes*	.03 (1%)	.13 (1%)	.08 (1%)
other	.77 (10%)	.63 (6%)	.70 (8%)
Course content	1.50 (19%)	2.00 (19%)	1.74 (19%)
literature	1.0 (12%)	1.23 (12%)	1.10 (12%)
wordplay	.54 (7%)	.92 (9%)	.72 (8%)

* "Jokes" refers to self-contained jokes, which rarely relate to the classroom content.

As shown in Table 3, more than half the humor events

generated by both teachers is disparagement humor, which is fairly evenly divided between student-directed humor and self-directed humor. The remaining humor events are divided between humor used to improve classroom climate and humor addressing course content, with course content as the focus of the least amount of humor among humor types (20%).

Discussion:

The humor events listed under "disparaging" are not necessarily negative. In fact, there are very few student-disparaging remarks which could be construed to be critical. Rather, they are spoken and received as teasing remarks, designed to increase goodwill. When Teacher 2 addressed the following remark to a student who had just received multitudinous candy valentines from his admirers: "Hope you're not a diabetic" (#2/14/89-2-4), the joke called attention to the student's popularity, and its disparaging appearance spared the student embarrassment.

Similarly, self-disparaging remarks are assumed to be inaccurate or overstated, which is essential to their being humorous. Because the classroom is a social environment, it is logical that 50% of the humor focuses on either the students or the teacher. Those humor events which focus on the relationship between the teacher and students fall under "rapport."

Other humor events dealing with classroom climate include those addressing the teacher's authority. Both teachers referred to their position of authority in disparaging tones, creating humor out of the contrast between what the students understood to be their more evenhanded philosophies and tyrannical teacher stereotypes. When Teacher 2 says to her students, "Just do what I say!" (#12/13/88-5-1), in an overemphasized voice, she is depending on the students' understanding that it is not like her to assume such a preemptory tone with them, using the humor of the mutually acknowledged stereotype to mitigate the edge of her need to dictate to them.

Humor events which fell into the "other" category most often dealt with sensitive subjects, such as reproduction. Teacher 2 spent several days in occasional discussion with her students about chickens and eggs, which invariably led to conversation about reproduction. In an effort to ease the tension associated with such a subject, Teacher 1 interjected humor into the discussion.

Self-contained jokes, though comprising little of the total bulk of the humor events observed, are worthy of note for their isolation from the students, the teacher, or the classroom. They serve the exclusive purpose of entertainment (see *Humor Purposes*, p. 61), and their content

is not necessarily related to the course; in the case of the four self-contained jokes told by the teachers observed, none are related to the course.

Jane Allen's research (1985) suggests that the most useful humor in a classroom deals with the course content. The two teachers observed for this study used course content as a foundation for their humor 20% of the time, assuming that wordplay, as a facet of language learning, qualifies as course content in an English class. Teacher 1 used humor to refer to a unit already covered when she warned students under the mistletoe about what happened to Hester and Dimmesdale (The Scarlet Letter) (#12/5/88-5-1). Teacher 2 used Thoreau's name as a pun while students discussed nausea (#2/8/89-5-18). Often the course content-based humor tied together student discussions unrelated to class and the content to be covered that day, allowing the teacher to guide the discussion back to literature without exercising teacher power to dictate the discussion.

Humor Purposes

The second major research question addressed in this study concerns how humor is used in the classroom. Humor content and purpose often overlap. Those categories of humor discussed in the Overview are, for the most part,

consensus humor. The two basic purposes of humor are for exercising teacher control and for achieving unity or consensus within the class as a group. Though those humor events which are designed strictly to entertain are also consensus humor, they are considered separately in this study.

Humor for entertainment alone is one type of humor easily recognized by students, regardless of its delivery (physical or cerebral). Because it does not relate to the class except as entertainment, it is less often missed or misunderstood than other types. Of those humor events observed in this study which were used exclusively for entertainment, only four resulted in "no response" (6% of the entertainment-only total), and these were either facial expression or tone-dependent humor events. Entertainment humor constitutes 14% of the humor generated by the teachers in this study, of which 1% is self-contained jokes.

Control humor, however, constitutes only 9% of the humor observed in this study. Days in which there are higher levels of control humor are also days in which there is a higher incidence of humor overall. Because much of the controversy involved with classroom humor has to do with control humor, it warrants a closer look. Table 4 shows the relationship between the recipient of the humor and

percentage of control humor addressed to each.

Table 4

Mean Frequencies and Percentages of
Control Humor Addressed to Specific Groups

<u>response</u>	<u>addressed to</u> <u>males</u>	<u>addressed to</u> <u>females</u>	<u>addressed to</u> <u>class</u>
laughter	.08 (10%)	.02 (2%)	.26 (31%)
smiles	.16 (19%)	.04 (5%)	.08 (10%)
no response	.04 (5%)	.02 (2%)	.14 (17%)
negative response	.02 (2%)	---	---
total	.30 (36%)	.08 (10%)	.48 (57%)

Because the observed populations contain equal numbers of male and female students ($n = 89$ and 90 respectively), the higher incidence and percentage of control humor events addressed to males than to females would appear significant.

Additionally, six class-addressed humor events were intended to reprimand specific students (four male, two female) though the statements were addressed to the class. As an example of this, during a discussion of Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini's murder contract on Salman Rushdie, Teacher 2 admonished a student for volunteering to murder the writer for the prodigious reward by saying to the class, "Nice to know that Americans are willing to stand up for

freedom of speech" (#12/16/89-4-1). The remark was addressed to the class, but the reprimand was directed to the student. Taking these six humor events into account, Teacher 1 addressed 39% of her control humor to male students and 4% to female students; Teacher 2 addressed 50% of his control humor to male students and 36% to female students (see Table 5 for totals).

Discussion:

Humor was used extensively to generate cohesion in the classroom and improve classroom atmosphere. The 9% use of humor for control most often used the humor to mitigate the discomfort of the reprimand, not for humiliation, as would be the case with sarcasm. The lack of negative response to control humor supports this observation; students laugh along with the joke rather than bristling against it. More control humor was directed to male students, but this may be a result of more need for control from male students; this study did not attempt to ascertain the "legitimacy" of reprimand humor.

Student Characteristics

This study proposed to examine two areas of student population composition in assessing the impact of the class on teacher generated humor: gender and academic ability.

Gender:

It has already been shown that gender seems to affect the amount of control humor directed to individuals. Gender is one of two considerations when assessing the function of audience (class) on teacher generated humor. Table 5 shows the distribution of humor types by gender.

Table 5

Mean Frequency and Percentages of
Humor Type by Gender Addressed

<u>type</u>	<u>addressed to</u> <u>males</u>	<u>addressed to</u> <u>females</u>	<u>addressed to</u> <u>class</u>
disparaging			
self-	.10 (1%)	.16 (2%)	1.72 (19%)
student-	.58 (6%)	.52 (6%)	1.46 (16%)
rapport	.14 (2%)	.02 (0%)	.24 (3%)
entertain	.08 (1%)	.10 (1%)	1.08 (12%)
content	.08 (1%)	.04 (0%)	.98 (11%)
wordplay	.14 (2%)	.06 (1%)	.52 (6%)
total*	1.32 (14%)	1.04 (11%)	6.82 (75%)

* Total includes all humor events, including those with such small percentages as not to be listed in the table.

There is little difference between distribution of humor types by Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 except in four areas.

Control humor has already been discussed. The other three areas are self-disparaging humor addressed to individuals, humor used to ease tension addressed to individuals, and entertainment humor addressed to individuals.

Perhaps the most revealing category is self-disparaging humor. Teacher 1, a woman, addressed twice as many self-disparaging remarks to male students as to female. Teacher 2, a man, addressed six times as many self-disparaging remarks to female students as to male. It would appear that it is more common to be self-disparaging to members of the opposite sex.

Similarly, those remarks used to ease the tension of uncomfortable subjects were exclusively addressed to opposite-gender students by both teachers. The fourth category of discrepancy is entertainment humor. In this category, Teacher 1 addressed all of her entertainment humor to females when addressing individuals (note that 86% of all entertainment humor is addressed to the class). Nevertheless, female students and males students appear to have approximately the same amount of humor addressed to them overall; it is merely the specific types of humor which are addressed more often to one gender than the other.

Academic Ability Level:

A second consideration in class composition is academic ability of the class. One question in this study was whether academic ability of the class, the "track," would affect the number and types of humor events generated by the teacher. A comparison of the mean humor events in Teacher 1's classes, one of which is honors level, indicates some discrepancy. The honors class received 40% of the total humor; the fifth period on-grade-level class received 38% of the total humor; and the sixth period class, also on-grade-level, received 22% of the humor. Because the honors class and the fifth period on-grade-level class are so statistically close, it would appear that something other than academic ability of the class affects humor production.

A comparison of day-by-day humor amounts in each class also shows discrepancies in amounts per class, with the class receiving more teacher humor shifting across all three periods, though the total for each day varies very little (totals of 21 to 28 jokes per day).

Teacher 2's classes received more evenly distributed amounts of humor: 38%, 25%, and 37% in three classes, all on-grade-level, though his day-to-day totals vary more than Teacher 1 (from 19 to 74 jokes per day). The patterns within each day's distribution are similar to Teacher 2's;

the class receiving the larger amount of humor shifts across all periods.

Discussion:

Gender seems to affect types of humor addressed to individual students as part of whole-class address (note: humor addressed to individuals privately was not considered in this study). It does not significantly affect the amount of humor addressed to students overall, except when considering the amount of control humor.

Humor amounts and types do not seem to be affected by academic ability of classes, at least for the two teachers observed. Rather, humor amount seems to be a function of the class disposition ("class chemistry") and the amount of energy already expended on humor that day. Journal observations confirm that on days when either teacher generated large amounts of humor in an early class, later classes would contain less humor, and on days when there was not as much humor expended in earlier classes, there was more in later classes.

This is particularly evident in Teacher 1's classes, as the overall amount of humor she generated daily remained fairly consistent. On days when she joked less with her early class, she joked far more in her afternoon class, and the reverse was also true. For example, on one occasion she

generated 15 humor events in her second period class, 12 in her fifth period class, and 1 in her sixth period class. Another day she generated 5 humor events in her second period class, 6 in her fifth period class, and 10 in her sixth period class. The shift seems to be affected less by the class, itself, and more by the amount of humor already generated that day. The same appears to be true of Teacher 2, though it is less obvious because the daily amount of humor he generated varied much more.

Overall, class composition does seem to play a part in how much and what kinds of humor will be generated, but not along obvious gender, ethnic, or academic ability level lines. Humor, as a product of a teacher's personality interacting with students' personalities, is more complex, at least in classes taught by the two teachers observed.

Summary

The two teachers observed produced similar types of humor and "joked" with approximately the same frequency. Though Teacher 1 was an experienced teacher and female and Teacher 2 was a first-year teacher and male they were both consistent in terms of the varieties of humor they used and the purposes to which they put them.

Humor was used primarily for achieving consensus and entertaining; 10% of the humor was used for control, but the humor was used to soften the reprimands rather than humiliate the students. The majority of the humor was cerebral, dependent on word-meaning, although both teachers did use some physical humor. Teacher 2 used more physical humor than Teacher 1, perhaps because of her background in drama. Students responded positively or not at all to teacher generated humor, except in one instance of control humor, indicating that humor type is appropriate to student developmental level.

Class composition did not seem to have a major effect on humor addressed to students or student response, but further studies, particularly dealing with ethnicity, need to be done. Academic ability alone does not seem to affect type or amount of humor, though energy level does appear to affect humor amount.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

Summary

Humor is an important communication tool. Because of its potential use to improve classroom atmosphere and increase student interest in learning, it has been expected by educators that teachers will have good senses of humor, will generate humor in their classes, and will use humor appropriately and fairly. Numerous experiments and personal accounts have been produced to illustrate the need for humor and its appropriateness in the classroom situation, with debates raging about the acceptability of sarcasm or stereotypes in humor, concerns about sexism and racism, disagreements about the effectiveness of classroom humor used solely for improving student affect. Little has been done until recent years to document what is actually occurring in the classroom regarding teacher uses of humor and factors affecting that use.

Because of the need for descriptive research concerning humor and its application in the schools, this study was undertaken. It used a modified ethnographic design in order to focus on the culture of humor in the classroom. The conclusions are general and confirm much of what was

expected concerning positive uses of humor in the classroom.

The Study:

Two teachers, both White, one female and one male, were observed teaching three classes of English 3 (American Literature) to junior level high school students for three weeks each (a total of 50 hours of observation). Their humor was noted by text, context, type, purpose, address, and student response. Information was checked with the teachers being observed, particularly in the event of any confusion, and regular discussions were held with each teacher regarding events in the class and relationships to the humor being generated.

These data were then organized using a database specifically designed for this study in order to isolate patterns and trends in the numbers. These results were checked against observations in a field journal also maintained during the observation period.

Results of the study cover three areas: the types of humor used (word dependent, tone dependent, gesture, and facial expression); the purposes served by the humor (control and consensus); and how class composition affected the humor generated and to whom it was addressed. The class composition analysis considered gender and academic ability level.

Results:

Research question #1: What types of humor do teachers use in English classes?

a. To what extent is humor physical (body movement, facial expressions, tone dependent)? Thirty-one percent of teacher generated humor was exclusively physical. Twenty-two percent of both teachers' humor used tone to convey humor; 11% used gesture; 3% used facial expression, often in combination with cerebral humor.

b. To what extent is humor cerebral (word dependent)? Eighty-five percent of all teacher humor included word meaning as part of humorous content. Sixty-nine percent of the teacher humor observed in this study was exclusively word dependent, including no physical components in the humor.

c. What categories of humor events are used? Teacher generated humor observed in this study was primarily (56%) disparaging (self-disparaging and teasing). Thirty-five percent of the humor was concerned with classroom atmosphere. Nineteen percent of the humor was related to course content, with 8% wordplay. One percent was self-contained jokes. Categories of humor events sometimes overlapped, so self-disparaging humor might also be derogatory of authority, in general.

d. What percentage of teacher generated humor is focused on 1) students, 2) self, 3) course content? In this study 28% of the humor was focused on students; 22% was focused on self; 19% was focused on course content.

Both high school teachers used primarily cerebral humor in their classes, with approximately one fifth of the humor using content as its foundation. The teacher with a background in drama used more facial expressions and gestures than the other, confirming that a person's sense of humor is, at least in part, a product of exposure and personal preference. Both teachers used inflection and tone of voice to augment other forms of humor and in isolation as the sole indication that humor was intended.

Research question #2: What purposes are served by each humor event?

a. How much humor is used for control of students? Control humor constitutes 9% of the humor used by both teachers. Of the control humor, 10% was addressed to individual female students; 36% was addressed to individual male students; and 57% was addressed to the class as a whole.

b. How much humor is used to achieve a sense of community, consensus? Ninety-one percent of the humor was

used to generate consensus, a positive classroom atmosphere.

c. How much humor is used for its own sake, purely to entertain? Of the 91% consensus/cohesion humor, 14% was humor purely for entertainment. One percent of all humor was self-contained jokes.

The two teachers observed were also similar in their application of humor events, using 91% of their humor to create class cohesion and to entertain. Nineteen percent of all humor was used for entertainment. Nine percent of the humor was used for purposes of control, though the humor was used to mitigate castigation rather than to humiliate the students in order to punish them.

Research question #3: How does the class composition affect teacher generated humor?

a. To what extent is the amount or character of teacher generated humor affected by the academic ability level, the "track" of the class? Humor amount and character varied daily, but academic "track" does not appear to be a major factor in determining humor amount or type. The honors class observed contained 40% of all humor; one on-grade-level class contained 38%.

b. To what extent is the amount or character of teacher generated humor affected by the sexual distribution

of students, or the sex of specific students (when humor is student directed)? Gender does appear to be a factor in distribution of control humor, with male students receiving 36% of control humor, and female students receiving 10%. Gender also seems to be a factor in disparagement humor, as Teacher 1, a female, addressed twice as much self-disparaging humor to male students as to female, and Teacher 2, a male, addressed six times as much self-disparagement humor to females as to males. Humorous remarks used to ease the tension of uncomfortable discussions were addressed exclusively to opposite-gender students by both teachers, and Teacher 1 addressed all of her individually-addressed entertainment humor to females. Totals addressed to males and females are similar (11% of all humor to males and 14% of all humor to females).

Though class composition did affect teacher generated humor, gender and academic ability level of the students do not seem to be major influencing factors. With the exception of some specific types of humor, such as self-derogatory remarks, gender appears to be a factor primarily in control humor. It may be that teachers are more inclined to use humor when reprimanding male students, or it may be that male students are less traditionally controlled than female students at the high school level. Journal

observations would support the latter conclusion.

Academic ability and amount or type of humor, too, do not seem to be related in this study. Though there are marked differences in the amount of humor generated in honors classes as opposed to on-grade-level classes, there are also marked differences in humor amount between classes of the same academic ability. In fact, the honors class exceeded one on-grade-level class by only 3 humor events out of over 200 total.

Ethnic background does not seem to influence type or purpose of teacher generated humor, but this study does not adequately cover ethnic variables. Both subjects observed and the researcher are White, thereby seriously increasing the possibility of cultural bias. It is entirely possible that the concept of minority voice can be extended to include minority humor, in which case this study would not be valid grounds for making any claims about ethnicity and humor. To the degree that the researcher could observe, however, ethnic bias seemed to be lacking.

Two factors do seem to affect the amount of humor in any given class, both noted repeatedly in the field journal, but not a specific part of the original design. One consistently evident factor is energy level. Generating and maintaining a humorous atmosphere takes energy. On days

when either teacher generated a great deal of humor in early classes, there was less humor in later classes. Additionally, when there was less humor in early classes, there was more in the afternoon classes. Teacher 1 had very little change in the total number of jokes she told in any given day, including test days and days when students presented work to the class; there was just greater concentration of the humor when she was talking. Still, there is great fluctuation in the number of jokes told in any given class. The same is true for Teacher 2, but to a lesser degree, as he varied more in the amount of humor told on any given day. The difference seems to be a product of energy level.

The second factor also appears to affect humor distribution, explaining why there is more humor in one class than another, since the class receiving greater amounts of humor changes daily. This factor is student self-control. On some days some students exercise more self-discipline than others, and humor releases control. As humor for control constitutes only 9% of total humor, the increase in control humor would not offset the reduction in consensus humor resulting from the teacher's attempting to calm the class. Generally speaking, the greater the teacher's need to control the class, the less humor he/she

will generate.

The choice for a teacher to generate humor or refrain from generating humor in any given class on any given day seems to be, at least in part, a result of student self-control. Teachers trying to maintain order in their classes will need to restrict the degree to which their students participate in humor. It could be argued that maintaining control, particularly at the expense of a humorous and energetic atmosphere, is a stifling of the classroom, but as long as teachers are expected, and expect themselves, to keep students "on task" and orderly, humor use will be restricted.

Evaluation of the Study

The principal difficulty with this study is its scope. Attempting to determine types, purposes, content, persons addressed, and responses to teacher generated humor in order to illustrate humor in the classroom would require much more time, preferably several studies, to cover the material adequately. As it is, the study is an overview, and suffers from the weakness of overviews: it is not specific enough in any one area to be conclusive. As an overview, however, it is successful, indicating some patterns in humor use in the classroom which may generate further studies.

Perhaps as a result of the broad scope of the study, perhaps in part due to the nature of humor, in this study definitions of humor types are ambiguous. Humor content overlaps with mode of delivery (such as sarcasm, witticism, wordplay) and with humor purpose (such as for rapport, to ease tension). The most clearly defined aspects of analysis are humor purpose when it is restricted to control, consensus, and entertainment. The study would be more clearly focused, and therefore improved, by focusing on these purposes exclusively, and, perhaps, not attempting to address the issue of humor "types" at all.

Additionally, assessment of what constitutes humor is subjective. Though notes were confirmed in teacher interviews, those humor events which might have been missed would not have come up in discussion. Accurately determining what is deliberately generated humor might require improved data gathering devices. Videotaping all classes would improve the reliability of the tallies, and might provide greater insight into the humor being generated in the classroom.

As an assessment of humor in "tracked" classes, too, the study is lacking a low-ability component. The study addresses humor type, amount, and purpose in on-grade-level and honors classes, but does not address humor use in

remedial English classes. Though addressing low-ability classes would increase the scope of the study rather than reduce it, low-ability classes must be considered, perhaps in another study.

Suggestions for Further Research

There are three areas which could be researched concerning humor in the classroom as suggested by this study. Probably most significant would be research into the influence of ethnicity on humor, considering minority voice and humor as an aspect of minority voice. Information concerning ethnic background of students would have to be more complete than that available from observation of the students and roll sheets, and ethnicity of teachers observed as well as the researcher would have to be considered. It may be that minority groups are being denied the ability to participate in humor in the classroom because of culturally biased definitions of humor.

A second study which would shed some light on observations in this study would attempt to correlate energy expenditure and humor generation. More teachers would have to be observed; it is possible that the two teachers in this study were more conscientious about spreading out their humor than other teachers. Too, it may be that a well-

rested teacher is more tolerant of student activity in the class in general, including response to humor and student generation of humor. A related study might compare the total amount of teacher talk and teacher humor to student participation, both academic and humorous. Teachers concerned with student participation might restrict their own humor as part of overall restriction of their role in the class.

The third study would consider the relationship between traditional expectations of ordered, "on-task" classrooms and humor in the classroom. Factors to be considered would include the amount of teacher generated humor versus the amount of student generated humor, as the latter is outside teacher control. There seems to be a direct correlation between humor level and noise level in a class. If this relationship were confirmed, it would illustrate the need to resolve some of education's contradictory expectations of teachers, that they have good senses of humor and maintain an orderly, quiet classroom. A second part of this study could also consider the amount of humor in a classroom and the speed at which content is "covered." Humor takes time, too.

It may be possible that a sense of humor, a tolerance for noise, an acceptance of equality with ones students is

more a matter of personality than something one can learn. If so, then perhaps awareness of the positive effects of humor on classroom affect and learning can help foster greater use of it in the classroom. Observation of teachers recognized for their strengths can help illustrate what is possible, even within the practical limitations of the public school classroom.

Both teachers observed for this study expend much energy and consideration generating humor for and with their students. They were recommended for this study by their San Jose State University foundations of education instructor, but they are also recognized by their students. Teacher 1 received the Teacher of the Month award for the second year in a row while she was being observed and in June, 1989 was awarded the Teacher of the Year Award. These awards are for student recognition of excellence; the comments students wrote on the ballots reflected respect and admiration, appreciation for her acceptance of them as individuals. Maintaining humor in the classroom is part of her strength as a teacher.

Teacher 2, a first year teacher, already has the loyalty of his students. Because of overcrowded classes, administrators asked that students volunteer to transfer to another teacher's class. None volunteered, explaining that

he was more fun and understanding than other teachers in the school. Teacher 2 was also nominated for Teacher of the Year, one of four top teachers in his school. Maintaining humor in the classroom is also part of his strength as a teacher.

Whether to improve classroom atmosphere, to ease the tensions inherent in compulsory schooling, or to increase student interest and retention, humor has its place in the school. It is already there; it can be recognized, and should be.

It must also be recognized, however, that a "sense of humor" is a subjective personality trait. Like other personality traits, what one person will find delightful, another may find incomprehensible or even offensive. It would be dangerous to dictate that all teachers have a lively sense of humor and generate humor in their classes because uses of and evaluation of humor is so subjective.

Encouraging teachers to develop their sense of humor, however, would have markedly positive effects on teaching. Though using humor in the classroom may not be vital to good teaching, it can improve student learning, improve the classroom environment, make teaching and learning more positive, energetic endeavors. Humor contributes to creative thinking and divergent thinking; in some cases it

has been shown to assist retention. It reduces stress and anxiety, and it diffuses the tensions resulting from frustration. Humor can help form the bond between teachers and students which will allow open, trusting, and enthusiastic exploration of issues within the classroom and beyond it.

References

- Allen, Jane (1985). Humor, praise, and criticism: Considerations for the middle school classroom teacher. Exit project. Indiana University, South Bend, IN. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 279 619)
- Apte, Mahadev L. (1985). Humor and laughter: An anthropological approach. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Bartel, Roland (1983). Metaphors and symbols: Forays into language. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 232 202)
- Bozik, Mary (1987). Critical thinking through creative thinking. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Boston. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 290 173)
- Carson, David K., Skarpness, Lorie R., Schultz, Ned W., McGhee, Paul E. (1986). Temperament and communicative competence as predictors of young children's humor. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 32, 415-426.
- Chapman, Anthony (1983). Humor and laughter in social interaction. In Paul McGhee & Jeffrey Goldstein (Eds.), Handbook of humor research: Vol. I. Basic issues, (pp. 135-158). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Collins, Sharon M., (1986). Facets. English Journal, 75(4), p. 20.
- Cornett, Claudia (1986). Learning through laughter: Humor in the classroom (Fastback 241). Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 276 028)
- Fabrizi, Michael S., & Pollio, Howard R. (1987). A naturalistic study of humor activity in a third, seventh, and eleventh grade classroom. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 33, 107-128.
- Fine, Gary (1983). Sociological approaches to the study of humor. In Paul McGhee & Jeffrey Goldstein (Eds.), Handbook of humor research: Vol. I. Basic issues, (pp. 159-182). New York: Springer-Verlag.

- Freud, Sigmund (1916). Wit and its relation to the unconscious (A. A. Brill, Trans.). New York: Moffat, Yard, and Company.
- Geller, Linda Gibson (1985). Wordplay and language learning for children. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 261 393)
- Gleason, Maryellen (1986). Better communication in large courses. College Teaching, 34, 20-24.
- Goodlad, John (1984). A place called school. San Francisco: McGraw-Hill.
- Gruner, Charles R. (1984). Speaker ethos, self-deprecating wit/humor, and audience reaction: Another look. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Speech Communication Association, Baton Rouge, LA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 243 156)
- Hamilton, Marla (1986). Facets. English Journal, 75(1), 21.
- Hill, Deborah J. (1988). Humor in the classroom. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
- Igbalajobi, 'Muyiwa (1986). The effect of ridicule on the academic performance of secondary school students. Negro Educational Review, 37, 39-45.
- Jones, R., Stewart (1979). College teachers who stimulate curiosity. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 223 156)
- Kelly, Nacline, & Kelly, Brian (1982). Backgrounds, education, and teaching styles of teaching award winning professors. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Rocky Mountain Education Research Association, Albuquerque, NM. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 230 080)
- Kelly, William J. (1981). Con [response to Vieira]. English Journal, 70(6), 19, 21.
- Langevin, Ronald, & Day, H. I. (1972). Physiological correlates of humor. In Jeffrey Goldstein & Paul McGhee (Eds.), The psychology of humor (pp 129-141). New York: Academic Press.

- LeFrance, Marianne (1983). Felt v.s. feigned funniness: Issues in coding smiling and in laughing. In Paul McGhee & Jeffrey Goldstein (Eds.), Handbook of humor research: Vol. I. Basic issues (pp. 1-12). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Lloyd, Bruce A., & Lloyd, Rosa C. (1986). Teaching/learning: The student viewpoint. Reading Horizons, 26, 266-269.
- Masten, Ann S. (1986). Humor and competence in school-aged children. Child Development, 57, 461-473.
- McGhee, Paul E. (1980). Children's humour. Chichester, England: Wiley.
- McGhee, Paul E. (1983). Humor development: Toward a lifespan approach. In Paul McGhee & Jeffrey Goldstein (Eds.), Handbook of humor research: Vol. I. Basic issues (pp. 113-133). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- McGhee, Paul E., & Duffey, Nelda S. (1983). Children's appreciation of humor victimizing different racial-ethnic groups: Racial-ethnic differences. Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 14, 29-40.
- McGhee, Paul E., & Lloyd, Sally (1981). A developmental test of the disposition theory of humor. Child Development, 52, 925-931.
- McGhee, Paul E., & Lloyd, Sally (1982). Behavioral characteristics associated with the development of humor in young children. Journal of Genetic Psychology, 141, 253-259.
- McMorris, Robert T., Urbach, Sandra L., & Connor, Michael C. (1985). Effects of incorporating humor in test items. Journal of Educational Measurement, 22, 147-155.
- Mitchell-Dwyer, Barbi (1981). "Are we gonna do anything fun?" English Journal, 70(6), 24-25.
- Muggeridge, Malcolm (1953, Sept. 14). [Interview]. Time, pp. 102-103.
- Oakes, Jeannie (1985). Keeping track: How schools structure inequality. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Owens, Henry M., & Hogan, John D. (1983). Development of humor in children: Roles of incongruity, resolution, and operational thinking. Psychological Reports, 53, 477-478.
- Pattavina, Paul (1983). Generic affective competencies: A model for teaching socially and emotionally disturbed adolescents. Washington, D.C.: Department of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 248 640)
- Pfordresher, John (1981). An approach to analyzing jokes. English Journal, 70(6), 50-54.
- Prerost, Frank J. (1983). Promoting student adjustment to college: A counseling technique utilizing humor. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 62, 223-225.
- Ross, Eugene (1984). Teaching, technology, and the future. Paper presented to the Regional Conference on University Teaching, Las Crusas, NM. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 254 148)
- Spradley, James P. (1979). The ethnographic interview. San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart, Winston.
- Spradley, James P. (1980). Participant observation. San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart, Winston.
- Stillion, Judith M., & White, Hedy (1987). Feminist humor: Who appreciates it and why? Psychology of Women Quarterly, 11, 219-232.
- Sudol, David (1981). Dangers of classroom humor. English Journal, 70(6), 26-28.
- Tamashiro, R. T. (1979). Children's humor: A developmental view. Elementary School Journal, 80, 69-75.
- Tooper, Virginia O. (1988a). Some guidelines for developing and using humor. Unpublished data.
- Tooper, Virginia O. (1988b, November). Workplace humor can make your day. Office Systems 88, Georgetown, CT: Springhouse Corporation, pp. 55-60.
- Vieira, Michael (1981). Laughing at stereotypes is no joke. English Journal, 70(6), 18,20.

- Wandersee, James (1982). Humor as a teaching strategy. American Biology Teacher, 44, 212-218.
- Williams, David, & Loertscher, Kyleen (1986). Teachers as naturalistic inquirers--a case study. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 269 447)
- Zillman, Dolf & Bryant, Jennings (1983). Uses and effects of humor in educational ventures. In Paul McGhee & Jeffrey Goldstein (Eds.), Handbook of humor research: Vol. II. Applied studies (pp. 173-193). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Ziv, Avner (1983). Influences of humorous atmosphere on divergent thinking. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 8, 68-75.
- Ziv, Avner (1987). Effects of humor aggression catharsis in the classroom. Journal of Psychology, 121, 359-364.

APPENDIX A
OBSERVER TALLY SHEET

SCHOOL _____ TEACHER _____
 DATE _____ COURSE _____ PD _____
 ST: _____ F _____ M _____ LESSON _____

ETHNIC: _____

CONTEXT: _____ [response] type [to]
 _____ [L NR] WRD F [CLS]
 _____ [S NEG] TNE G [M F]
 PURPOSE: _____

CONTEXT: _____ [response] type [to]
 _____ [L NR] WRD F [CLS]
 _____ [S NEG] TNE G [M F]
 PURPOSE: _____

ABBREVIATIONS:

- Responses:
 L: Laughter NR: No response S: Smiles NEG: Negative
 Types:
 WRD: Word F: Facial expression TNE: Tone G: Gesture
 To:
 CLS: Class M: Individual male F: Individual female