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HOW DO FACULTY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO USE HUMOR IN ONLINE TEACHING

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**HOW DO FACULTY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO
USE HUMOR IN ONLINE TEACHING**

BY

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B.A., History and Government, West Virginia Institute of Technology, 1968
M.A., Computer Resources & Information Management, Webster University, 2000

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Organizational Learning and Instructional Technology

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

DEDICATION

The researcher wishes to dedicate this dissertation to:

Linda, my beloved wife and best friend who believed in me and to the memory of Dr. Deborah K. LaPointe who was my greatest cheerleader and constant encourager.

This is for you.

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The researcher gives gratitude to God for making all things possible. And he deeply appreciates all the many volunteers who helped make this project a reality. Your support and participation helped me capture the essence of humor usage in this institution of higher learning.

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Lastly, the researcher wants to give a big “shout-out” to Leslie Sandoval and Pamela Castaldi: Thank you for putting up with my funny stories, jokes, and puns as we worked together at the Health Science Library.

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ABSTRACT

Humor is a ubiquitous experience that facilitates learning, social coordination and wellbeing. This study examined how the faculty at the University of New Mexico used humor in its online courses. The process involved faculty interviews, a focus group of instructional online designers, questionnaires and documentation to collect data, and then used thematic analysis and code development to arrive at its findings. The study found that the humor pedagogy at the University of New Mexico has fallen into disuse for online courses because of (1) a hesitation (fear) to use humor, (2) fear of what students would think, and (3), hesitation (reluctance) to share or recommend humor usage to fellow faculty members. These findings hopefully will energize the university to reintroduce the humor pedagogy back into its learning sciences curriculum.

Keywords: Humor, education, student learning, communication, online courses.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the third grade on the first day of school the teacher asked me, “Master Jack, why are you smirking?” I replied with a grin, “You look like a penguin, Sister!” Answering that question with a smirk on my face did not go well for me that day. Over the decade of the 1950’s I learned a painful truth about school. If you got into trouble and had an artistic talent, you may be sent to the art room as punishment, but if you had a smirk on your face you were sent to see the principal. I owned at least 2 of the principal’s 4 chairs in elementary school.

In the researcher’s opinion, education should be all about the preparation for life, building intellect and qualities needed to be a success. However, education of the 1950’s either ignored or suppressed a powerful educational quality called humor. Humor is primarily a social phenomenon and everyone has experienced it at some time. A person relates a joke, tells a funny story, articulates an amusing anecdote, or does a Freudian tongue slip and suddenly you are smacked by how hilarious it is. And depending on how amusing you believe the inducement is, it causes you to smile, giggle, or break out laughing copiously.

Because humor is so universal, people think they already understand humor and do not need to study it psychologically or academically. Martin (2007) states that humor serves us humans as a social play function where we have fun and get pleasure out of telling jokes and stories to other people. Yet humor also has a serious side psychologically and contributing to our survival as a species.

For centuries education was seen as a serious and sacred undertaking and humor in any form was frowned upon. The ancient philosophers, including Aristotle and Plato, barely touched on the subject of humor in their writings, and for the most part, did not even think about a theory of humor (Gordon, 2012). Plato thought humor and laughter were emotions that scorned other people and caused one to lose self- control (Plato. & Cornford, 1945). Plato in *The Republic* argued that the teachers are not to engage in humor because it tends to ultimately lead to violence (Jones, 2005).

John Morreall (1983), a humor-theorist stated that until the last half of the 1990s, humor and its partner laughter were considered inconsequential, not worthy of study. Much of the neglect came from the belief that laughter and humor were not a serious academic activity to be investigated (Gordon, 2012). Besides, laughter at humorous events or sayings was not considered uniquely human. Primatologists now believe even chimpanzees and apes laugh (Martin, 2007) and therefore never received any attention or serious investigation like that given to thinking and speaking (Morreall, 1983).

When education and humor were examined by philosophers they tended to overlook and sideline it. Literature reviewed in philosophy of education journals revealed that very few articles or presentations delivered at professional conferences failed to mention humor.

Historically educators looked at humor with contempt, and educational thinkers also viewed it as not incompatible with good educational principles (Gordon, 2012). Clinton Allison (1995), who studied seventeenth through twentieth century American public schools, found that the aims of education during that time were largely conservative, socially controlled, religiously and culturally transmitted to maintain

economic stability. Humor and laughter were not compatible with these boundaries. Allison (1995) also indicated that educators spurned humor and associated themselves with painstaking learning, strict discipline, sensible behavior and a disposition of an learned person. Not until the latter half of the 1980's did philosophers and teachers begin to understand the worth of humor and laughter to humans. Torok et al (2004) observed that based on the insights of Dewey, Freud, and Wittgenstein, educators now understand that humor is consistent with quality education and with sound philosophical discussion.

Background

When humor is used effectively in any teaching scenario, it can assist with one of the biggest challenges facing instructors today: motivation. When humor is successfully used in a learning environment, students become motivated to learn. Garner (2006) reported from his commentary that positive humor has a good effect on student retention. Data research supporting humor usage as a pedagogical tool is not new. As Zemke (1991) states that humor can clearly show it has an effect on learning.

Using humor can generate a positive learning environment. It can make the class room a welcoming place to learn. Students who feel welcomed and secure are more apt to openly communicate when the right type of humor is applied (Berk, 2002). Since communication is a characteristic of instruction, using humor can make the instruction more engaging. Using humor in instruction can also make the instructor more approachable, promoting stronger relationships between instructors and students, fostering student engagement. A final outcome with instructor use of humor is improved student learning (Berk, 2002). Thus, the right type of humor is important.

Through their work, education experts Cotton (2000), Danielson (2006), Hunter (1990), and Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2001) identified climate, communication, engagement and relationships as the main ingredients of effective instruction. These experts strongly recommended the use of humor as a catalyst for promoting sound instruction. The exchange of knowledge and ideas often occurs with the instructor communicating a concept to the students. Humor provides a conduit for effective communication. Shammi and Stuss (1999) posits that humor is the glue that cements society together, providing a solid means of communicating all kinds of ideas and information. Courses are not always of interest to students – some courses are called ‘Dreaded.’ Minchew and Hopper (2008) feels that humor offers the best path to grab the attention of these students in dreaded courses. As noted by Epstein and Joker (2007), humor by its very nature harvests attention and draws in people. Moreover, an instructor using humor seems more approachable by the students” (Minchew & Hopper, 2008).

MacHovec (1991) identified humor as a universal quality and noted that the use of humor generates feelings of pleasure and security that students want to experience. Additionally, Spencer (1995) compares the use of humor in instruction to music that creates a soothing sound giving students feelings of pleasure and security, and a willingness to learn.

Rationale and Problem Statement

My initial interest in humor in the classroom began while serving in the United States Air Force, and as a college student at various colleges and universities in the U. S.



Figure 1-No Sweat

and overseas. While attending military schools I noticed how the instructors relieved stress and increased motivation in the classroom by infusing “No Sweat” cartoons by Jake Schuffert (1968) into the daily lesson plans. These cartoons about life in the Air Force, Army, and Navy were a refreshing start to every class. For instance, Jake Schuffert’s cartoon in Figure 1 (Schuffert, 1968, p. 40) of two men stranded on an island was a reminder to us budding Air Force programmers to

experiment in our programming. The colleges and universities I attended varied from “no humor allowed” to free-wheeling *happy days* classrooms. I finally came to realize that if students were laughing, they were learning. Even in the Japanese universities on Okinawa there was a brand of homeland humor that made ‘foreign’ students feel welcomed and eager to learn.

However, with the advent of online learning through Internet-styled learning management systems, this researcher, along with Garner (2006) and James (2004), feel that humor as an educational pedagogy appears to have disappeared. Is it a communication problem because the instructors and students cannot physically see one another and thus lose the body language present in face-to-face communication? Or,

because online faculty must become more collaborative, contextual and active in the learning process, do they feel that humor, even spontaneous humor, in an online course gets in the way of the quality, quantity and patterns of learning? Similarly, do instructional designers of online courses offer to assist faculty with building a humor pedagogy into a course or is it very low on their list of procedures? And do faculty and instructional designers realize that humor can be taught and applied via the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor (Martin, 2007)?

Many educational books and journals have been recorded by instructors and education professionals proclaiming humor as an effective teaching tool with a broad range of advantages (Tamblyn, 2003). Most of these proclamations of humor are based on instructor's reports from their own experiences in the classroom. Unfortunately, empirical evaluations of education benefits of humor in the classroom are nearly non-existent educationally, and those empirical studies that do exist are at least two decades old and have no references to online classes.

Since 2003, a lot has been written about the positive influence that humor can have in a classroom: Garner (2006) posits that humor helps student retention; Lems (2011) and Shibinski and Martin (2010) maintain humor reduces classroom anxiety; and, Skinner (2010) believes humor has even resulted in higher evaluations for teachers. Lei, Cohen, and Russler (2010) report that in their study they found that humor used in the classroom has positive health benefits and releases student stress.

Until recently, not much has been written about humor as a salient feature of efficient pedagogy for online classes. In promoting humor, James (2004) advises that humor is a key attribute of an excellent instructor, and as such, all instructors should

emulate that attribute by perfecting the craft of humor no matter what the medium (p. 94). Shatz and LoSchiavo (2006) performed a systematic study that took 44 students in a general psychology course and divided the students into standard and a humor-enhanced online sections. Both sections had curriculums that featured learning objectives, lectures, quizzes and discussion boards. However, the humor-enhanced section had humor injected into the course features, such as cartoons in the quizzes, and witty remarks added to online course announcements. Their findings directly support that ‘instructional humor’ enhances online instruction by creating an electronic atmosphere that significantly increases student awareness and willingness to participate in the online psychology course.

Research Statements

Creswell (2003) states that in any qualitative study the core question is a declaration of the query examined in its most general form (p. 105). This central query is usually broad and general. Through continuous examination and reexamination of the central question, the researcher further develops a set of sub-research queries to conduct the study (Clark & Creswell, 2015). These sub-research questions become the central foci to be searched in the raw data process (Creswell, 2003). Using these steps outlined above, the following question is the main inquiry for this study:

Core or central question:

How do online faculty at the University of New Mexico use humor in online teaching?

Keeping a tight rein qualitatively but being open for additional questioning in the process, Creswell (2003) recommends a series of three or more additional sub-questions

to support the core query. These interrogations then become the foci specifically used to search in the methodologies of raw data collected in this research. In an effort to hone the focus of this research, the wide-ranging, main/core question stated above will be further tackled with these sub-questions:

1. What do faculty at the University of New Mexico consider as humor for use in their online courses?
2. How do University of New Mexico faculty members use humor online? Please give examples.
3. How would a UNM faculty member advise or recommend using humor to a fellow faculty member?
4. What are the barriers, if any, to using humor in online environments?

Methodology Overview

This qualitative narrative was accomplished at UNM using techniques employed in qualitative research (Creswell, 2003, 2007; McMillan, 2000). The true-to-life data gathered included thorough portrayals of places, people, dialogs, and products by constant interaction with online faculty and instructional designers at UNM. The investigative researcher functioned as the main mediator in the compilation and scrutiny of focus group raw data and case study raw data collected in the interviews. Thus the researcher became a participating eyewitness who crafted direct interpretations and collaborations (Patton, 1990). The sub-queries were used to compile the raw information while conducting the case study interviews with the participants. The research results contained volunteer quotes from the data to exemplify and authenticate the presentation.

This study examined online faculty and instructional designers' use of the humor pedagogy in online courses. While planning the focus group and case study interviews, the investigator had to get to the participant's core use of humor in online courses. These uses and any significances was reported as accurately as possible.

Delimitation and Limitation of the Study

Creswell (2003) states that delimitation report how research was constricted in scale, while limitations recognize potential drawbacks of a study (p. 150). Additionally, Locke and company (2000) stipulate that the investigative researcher must recognize these boundaries and point out that a thorough consideration of limiting boundaries was considered throughout the study.

Since the scope of case studies are limited and larger population generalizations cannot be generated, this study was restricted to the volunteers who participated in this research project. However, it is hoped that a speculative possibility would be found shedding light on the use of the humor pedagogy at UNM. As such, this study is restricted to the collection of raw data collected from volunteers in the study, but does not include non-volunteers of the study.

One limitation to this study may be the reluctance of faculty and designers to discuss their use of humor in online courses. Additionally, another limitation to this study that may weaken it is the restriction on document collection and humor examples where student academic privacy rights are involved.

Definitions of Terms

These terms and definitions relate for this research:

Humor. The Dictionary (1992) adds “the faculty of perceiving and expressing or appreciating what is amusing or comical” (p. 854).

Types of Humor. Based many resources reviewed, there are three (3) acceptable major categories of humor:

1. Jokes: The Dictionary (1992) defines jokes as “a short humorous anecdote with a punch line” (p. 729). People love to memorize jokes and tell them to others.

2. Spontaneous conversational humor: Martin (2007) defines SCH as humor intentionally created by a person during a social interaction or conversation (verbally or nonverbally) (Martin, 2007, p. 11). There are several types of spontaneous conversational humor:

- a. **Clever replies to serious statements:** Martin (2007) asserts this type of humor is a cunning, absurd, irrational response to serious remarks or queries by another person. These responses are purposely misinterpreted causing the original communication to reply in another sense than what was originally intended.
- b. **Double Entendre:** Webster’s Dictionary (1992) states it’s “a word or expression used so that it can be understood in two ways, esp. when one meaning is risqué” (p. 401).
- c. **Irony:** Webster’s Dictionary (1992) defines irony as using words to express the opposite meaning as opposed to its literal meaning (p. 712).
- d. **Overstatement & Understatement:** Martin (2007) says overstatement and understatement is a humorous process where one person expresses

another person's words with a different emphasis thereby changing the meaning into something funny.

- e. **Puns:** Webster's Dictionary (1992) is a play on words: it is the funny use of a word or words so it emphasizes/suggests a different meaning or using words that are nearly alike in sound but have a different meaning (p. 1094).
- f. **Replies to Rhetorical Questions:** Franzini (2012) avers that a rhetorical question is a form of a question that is uttered to make a point rather than obtain an answer. To get an answer surprises the speaker and the response can be humorous.
- g. **Sarcasm:** Martin (2007) claims that sarcasm is like irony, but is more direct and biting. Another version, sardonic humor, is even more bitter and disdainful.
- h. **Satire:** Martin (2007) indicates that satire involves words or phrases that makes fun of society, institutions, and political figures.
- i. **Self-depreciation:** Webster's Dictionary (1992) states it means "belittling or undervaluing oneself; excessively modest: self-depreciating remarks." (p. 1216). This is a good kind of humor because it does not threaten other people.
- j. **Teasing:** Franzini (2012) posits that teasing is a warmer form of critical humor similar to sarcasm, but often in a playful manner. Teasing is often directed to another person's personal characteristics.

k. **Transformation of Frozen Expressions:** This is the act of taking known sayings, platitudes or sayings and altering them slightly to get a humorous take-off on the original. For instance, we have all heard of the phrase ‘here today, gone tomorrow.’ In many barbershops, you would hear ‘hair today gone tomorrow.’

3. Accidental or Unintentional Humor: Martin (2007) says that unintentional humor occurs when people laugh at something that was designed originally as not being funny. It can occur from misspellings, mispronunciations and speaker tongue twisters (often called malapropism and spoonerisms) (Martin, 2007, p. 14).

Significance of the Study

The results may grow into a significant input to the growth of humor research in education. The main significance lies in the fact that no studies emphasizing faculty use of humor alone has been done in the past 5 years. Comprehension and awareness of the potential use of humor pedagogy in distance education may provide impetus among distance education faculty to apply humor in their online courses.

Adult learners thinking about taking online courses and institutions of higher education offering graduate courses in distance education may see this research as significant. Adapting humor pedagogy into distance education may assist educational institutions in devising online distance education courses and upgrade student help systems that will allow adult learners to stay the course of the educational course or degree in which they are registered.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Chapter Two's objective is to build a backdrop for the research queries defined in the previous chapter. It exhibits a synthesis of relative research literature concerning teacher use of humor in their educational presentations (both in "live classes" and "online classes" via a learning management system).

Chapter 2 is divided into five parts. The first part defines humor and gives insight into its composition. The second part reviews Freud's humor theory and the theories of incongruity, superiority, and relief from which humor appears to operate. The third part deals with the appropriate uses of humor by instructors in their classrooms. The fourth part describes the benefits of using humor in education. And the fifth part reviews humor use in online education.

Humor Defined

There is a plethora of theories that account for the meaning of humor. The definition of humor varies but the basic definition from the Dictionary (1992) is "the faculty of perceiving and expressing or appreciating what is amusing or comical" (Dictionary, 1992, p. 654). Ruch (1998) noted that early psychologists "assigned humor to the sanguine temperament" (p. 3) and further explained that humor involves "processes . . . slower than those of the physical or immediate reaction [and] that it is an attitude of the mind . . ." (p. 6). Ruch also believed that whether humor provides an attitude or is a quality, it does have an effect on class environment and student engagement.

Dixon (1980) and Martin, et al.(1993) have described humor as the faculty of manufacturing a rational-affective shift or a rearrangement of the condition mentally to

make it less threatening, associated with the release of pent-up emotions because of the supposed threat. A few students will disengage with an instructor when cognitive-shifts occur and this could inhibit learning, especially if the humor offends or seems trivial (Spink & Dee, 2007).

Humor has also been defined as a “uniting” mechanism that provides a basis for negotiating and understanding relationships (Meyer, 1997). Verbalizing or using something that might be perceived as funny can set the stage for a bonding between people. Humor used in a classroom also might be considered a motivational factor. Lynch (2002) endorses this explanation, claiming that humor offers a communicative social function and is a response to uncertainty offering reduced stress. In addition Lynch (2002) embraces a psychological approach to humor, weaving it with social motivational features of the human condition. In the end, he corroborates that a teacher’s humorous communication should be supportive, age applicable to engage the students, and support the objectives and goals of the course’s instruction.

In combination with Lynch’s idea, Frymeir, Wanzer and Wojtaszczyk (2008) standardized the use of humor in accordance with their belief that humor must help achieve the instructor’s goal. Instead of defining humor, they give examples of how humor orientations can increase student learning. They concluded that if humor helps students learn course content by generating a positive student-instructor association, and generating an upbeat classroom environment, then humor has achieved its goal.

Thus, there are several ways of defining humor: the individual functional use of humor, or how humor is used in society. From the individual standpoint, the theories of incongruity, relief, and superiority stand out.

Theories

During the last 400 years, more than a hundred different theories of humor have graced our human landscape (Ritchie, 2004). Some of these theories, like the “surprise theory,” have been widely accepted. Others border on the bizarre. For example Feinberg (1978), postulated that us humans are highly amused by their position in life: way beyond the animals, but way beneath God (p. 1). Wilkins and Eisenbaun (2009) and Monro (1988) identified three theories that explained the meanings of humor: the superiority theory, which centers on a sense of supremacy over others; the theory of relief, which centers on biological discharge of stress and tension; and, the theory of incongruity, which centers on discernment of something inconsistent – something that disobeys our expectations and mental patterns of our mind.

Humor as an Expression of Superiority

Lynch (2002) asserts that the superiority theory is associated with people laughing at another person’s inadequacies or misfortunes. Both Aristotle and Plato considered humor a form of mockery or disdain and said it should be avoided by teachers (Janco, 1984). The concept of humor as a superiority expression can be traced back to the writings of Thomas Hobbs [1588-1679]. Martin (2007) posits that Hobbs statement of humor, printed in “*On Nature*” became the cornerstone of the superiority theory of humor when Hobbs wrote that the outburst of laughter is a surge of glory resulting from sudden onset of some high elevation in ourselves compared with the infirmity of others.

Both Ludovici (1933) and Rapp (Rapp, 1951) built on Hobbes’ glory manifestation when another person gets ridiculed. Ludovici stated that self-gratification is the motivation for superiority humor because there is emotional pleasure at having

improved better socially than the derided person. Rapp (1951) is more intense. He suggests that the superiority form of humor relates back to a human's ancient primeval ways, a glorious form of mirth in defeating an opponent (i.e., a modern-day road of triumph). He also postulates that the motivation of superiority humor got its origin in the hostile warrior rejoicing over a defeated opponent; but today's form of superiority humor is more comparable to the wise parental criticism of a teenager as it unsuccessfully attempted to try a grownup activity.

Gruner (1997) posits that all jokes, inoffensive or not, are comprised of a contest, with a winner and a loser. He examined several different kinds of jokes, showing how each kind of joke could be regarded as manifestations of superiority. Gruner(1997) even claimed that all connotations of sex and bathroom humor is based on aggression.

In general, the superiority form of humor is about conflict or control. This facet of the theory is detectable by looking at Woody Allen's short pundit:

"I wouldn't want to join any club that would have me as a member" (Lynch, 2002, p. 425).

Lynch (2002) states that this joke is a conundrum, concurrently using both the restraint and opposition facets of superiority humor (Lynch, 2002, p. 426).

In light of the positive psychology of humor most people adhere to today, the superiority theory has become shunned because of the undesirable way it portrays humor. Martin (2007) posits that while people may acknowledge that humor may sometimes become mean and cruel, most today believe their humor is free of aggression and is, sympathetic, friendly and healthy (Martin, 2007, p. 47).

Humor as an Expression of Relief

Perks (2012) claims that Aristotle and Plato laid the foundation of the relief theory while discussing the positive and negative emotions of the human being to their students. For a long time, the relief theory was often explained that it was like a pressure-relief valve on a steam engine, the more you laugh the less the pressure on the nervous system. Herbert Spencer (1860) gave the first reference to the humor relief theory in 1860 when he advised that laughter was the upshot of the discharge of corporal energy which is developed to dispense with displeasing feelings (H. Spencer, 1860).

Freud (1960) later borrowed from Spencer's relief theory in building his modern analysis of his relief theory. Freud perceived laughter as a reaction to jokes and considered the laughter as the result of the jokes themselves. He argued that jokes were like fantasies because they let the illicit emotions to surface from the unwitting mind. Freud's relief theory had two properties. First, it had a healing feature, letting the build-up tension to be released. Second, humor acted as a hidden aggressor and sanctioned conflict (Freud, 1960).

The basic relief theory held today claims that people use humor to engage in laughter because they know it reduces stress. And there appears to be two versions of the relief theory: First, there is the strong theory that holds that all laughter releases EXCESS emotional energy. Second, a weak version that claims laughter caused by humor causes a release of tension (Perks, 2012; Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009).

Humor also lets people handle topics and events that frightens them by making "jest" of them. In the same way humor gives relief from tension or stress and can be face-saving and trust-building between people (Lynch, 2002). Haig (1988) says that doctors,

nurses and medics have utilized relief humor to reduce physical and emotional stress for years. And Shapiro (2012) adds, “Since you feel better after a good laugh, you should come to the conclusion that humor is beneficial to your health. Indeed, research has affirmed that your personal humor sense promotes your well-being. Over the past 20 years clinical studies have consistently revealed that laughter plays an important healing role” (Shapiro, 2012, p. 1).

Humor as an Expression of Incongruity

The humor incongruity theory places emphasis more on cognizance and pays almost no attentiveness to the emotive and social facets of humor. This theory suggests that the incongruity awareness, or discernment, is the decisive cause that something is amusing: funny things are inconsistent, shocking, odd, and unusual or not what is expected. In other words, the incongruity theory is the acumen of something incompatible – something that disrupts our expectations and mental patterns. Many psychologists and philosophers, like Søren Kierkegaard, James Beattie, Arthur Schopenhauer, Immanuel Kant, adhere to this approach to incongruity (Martin, 2007) and it remains the dominant theory of humor in philosophic and psychological sciences today.

Koestler (1964) further elaborated the incongruity approach to humor by developing the concept of *bisociation* explaining how human beings rational processes are implicated in humor, coupled with creativity in the arts and innovation in science (Martin, 2007, p. 63). *Bisociation* occurs, says Koestler, when an idea or an event, is instantaneously recognized from the standpoint of two self-dependable but ordinarily mismatched or dissimilar reference frames. For example, consider the following joke:

Sergeant Gridley was on trial for bank robbery. The military court returned a verdict of ‘Not Guilty’ for lack of evidence. “Yippee!” cried Sergeant Gridley, “the moolah is mine to keep!”

This jokes’ punch line is mismatched beside the leading situation, because Sergeant Gridley admits his guilt only after just having been found not guilty. The surprise end generates two mismatched judgments: he is guilty and not guilty at the same instance. It is this concurrent galvanization of two mismatched thoughts that is the heart of humor.

Reflections of the Three Humor Theories

Debates continually rage among the humor theorists of the three theories. For example, one theorist touted that the wisdom surrounding the superiority theory as the inspiration of humor provided all the disputes needed to discard relief and incongruity theories as viable motivators. These continual debates have uncovered shortcomings in each of the three theories.

On the one hand, Feinberg (1978) and Morreall (1983) expound on superiority’s dominance as the only theory of humor. On the other hand, Martin (2007) cites James Beattie who said humor and laughter grows only from two unpredictable and unsuitable parts (p. 63) to prove the limitations of incongruity. The relief theory has also been criticized for its limitations (Gruner, 1997; Haig, 1988; Morreall, 1983).

Lynch (Lynch, 2002, p. 430) created a graphic representation (see Figure 2) that illustrates how the three theories integrate

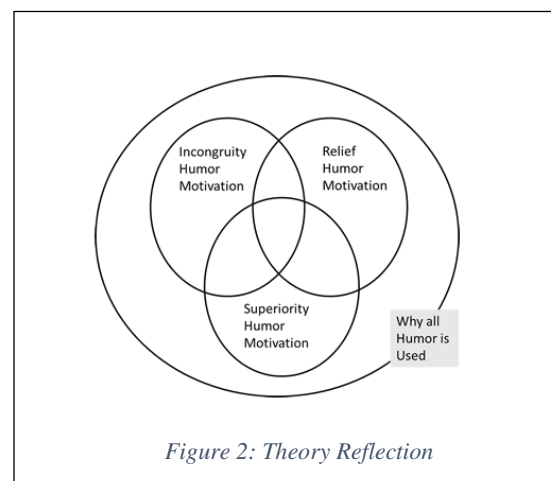


Figure 2: Theory Reflection

with each other, Lynch constructed the graphical integration representation because he felt that none of the humor concepts offered a totally complete explanation of why a humorous episode is funny or what the inspiration was behind the use of humor (Lynch, 2002, p. 429). Lynch openly prescribed that only when all three theories are considered together can one get a clear understanding of why humor is used. Ironically, Lynch does not account for the effects that the Internet/Intranet may have on the understanding of why humor is applied and used.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Humor

Wanzer, Frymier, Wojtaszczyk and Smith (2006) performed an extensive research dealing with the “appropriate” humor usage by instructors and assessed student perceptions of the humor use. This study delved into the ways humor can be utilized in instruction. The contributors in this study were first-year, 18 to 20-year-old university students. The study revealed that there were several types of appropriate humor: humor related to material, media, external objects, jokes and humorous examples. Inappropriate use of humor included scornful or belittling humor, targeting students and insulting humor. At the end of the study, M.B. Wanzer et al. (2006) advised that the study showed instructors should not use humor to target any student or group of students based on appearance, gender, religion or personal interests (M.B. Wanzer et al., 2006, p. 193).

Further findings by Wanzer, Frymier, and Wojtaszczyk (2008) added support to their original work. Students acknowledged and related to positive humor use, such as joking and play-acting. Racial, sexual, and sarcasm humor were considered as harmful and diminished the objective of the lesson. This report also discovered that varying the different types of humor in a course offered the same expected results.

Torok, McMorris and Lin (2004) also looked at student perceptions and different types of humor. This study identified jokes, funny stories, witty comments and professional cartoons as positive. The result of the study show that properly used positive humor has the ability to humanize, demonstrate, resolve, inspire, diminish anxiety, and keep people imagining. Sarcasm was considered negative humor and less effective.

Neuliep's (1991) research with high school teacher's humor unearthed that humor could be used to get the teaching space prepared for learning. The particulars of his research include a taxonomy and a humor topology code. Although his list begins with smiling and being lighthearted, it expands to include jokes. Neuliep's results make connections to the benefits of using humor in education. Although this review found literature regarding appropriate or non-appropriate uses of humor in face-to-face classrooms, no mention of the appropriateness of humor in online classrooms was noted during the search process.

Benefits of Humor in Education

Educators initially felt that when it comes to learning, humor was a distraction and had no place in the classroom (Torok et al., 2004). Indeed, students for years stereotyped college professors and instructors as knowledgeable and intelligent, but appropriately tedious and uninteresting (Ziegler, 1998). And Shatz and LoSchiavo (2005) also reported that students inherently believe college professors and instructors are tedious and lackluster, but when they try to be funny, the students admire the attempt to make the class and subject more interesting. Over the past forty years there has been a budding appreciation of the benefits of using humor as an education tool. Most of the benefit claims during this period come from teachers reporting their personal humor

experiences and frequently citing limited empirical studies to support their activity. Based on the foregoing, the following points have been made in the literature:

1. Humor Captures and Retains Student Attention.

According to Astleitner (2005), humor not only engages the learner, but also encourages creative thinking. Astleitner's work centered around 13 principles necessary for effective instruction. The results of the findings confirm and meet the criteria of social empirical research, which considers cognitive characteristics, motivation and emotional aspects. Within the 13 principles, humor is identified under principle 2 as a "multiple supporting of cognitive, motivational and emotional characteristic" (p. 4). The engagement of the student comes with sustained attention. Humor, according to Astleitner, keeps a student's attention and actively involves them in the lesson.

Many instructors and subject authors turn to the use of humor because they feel the subject or curriculum is dry or difficult. For example, Henry (2000) discussing the history course material comments that "perhaps laughter is the key to energizing history in the classroom" (p. 64). Henry continues, writing that we should inject laughter in our history courses for it will bring big dividends. He identified the reason for using humor: to gain and hold student's attention while encouraging student engagement in the lesson.

Other authors recite the all too common warning about the use of lectures in their articles. Sudol (1981) recognized the dangers of bland lectures advising that the biggest problem while lecturing is trying to keep the student's attention. He reported that to keep the students attentive, he would throw in anecdotes or comic ditties to relieve them of their sleepiness. Sudol is very quick to assert that humor should not signal frivolous

behavior by the instructor or the student. Getting and keeping student's attention with humor should be in a teacher's instructional strategy package.

2. Humor Can Expand Student Comprehension.

Researchers working with college students found that a benefit of using humor with effective instruction had a positive influence on student performance and comprehension. Kaplan and Pascoe (1977) conducted a study utilizing 508 undergraduate psychology students registered in a first year course. The aim of the study concerned the effects of tongue-in-cheek lectures and witty examples had on learner's comprehension of the information presented and their attention span. The results of the study showed that "humorous examples served as cues for recalling information" (p. 64). The researchers concluded that the benefits of humor clearly demonstrate memory recall enhancement when humor is used versus when not used in the classroom. Similarly, Hackathorn, et al. (2011) conducted a study theorizing humor usage in the classroom would improve student's knowledge, comprehension, and application of the material to be learned. They expose 51 students to humor in the classroom with the instructor free to choose when and where to apply humor in the course (Hackathorn, et al., 2011, p. 118). Constructs were not preassigned to a humor condition. In conclusion Hackathorn et al. (2011) states that the study establishes that humor usage in coursework is beneficial cognitively in the classroom (p. 121).

3. Humor Can Increase the Opportunity for Memory Retention.

Educators believed for a very long time in the positive effects humor has on memory. Schmidt (1994), in a series of experiments, scrutinized the results of using humor on sentence memory. To control for non-humor related differences between

sentences, humorous and non-humorous sentences of the same sentence were used.

Schmidt found that 1) the positive emotions linked with humor may have an effect on memory; 2) humor may grab a student's attention because of the novelty and surprise of humorous incongruity; 3) witty matter may be learned more than non-humorous matter, thus establishing a recall pattern; and 4), humor may affect retrieval schemes cognitively by favoring the retrieval of humorous material before non-humorous material.

Similarly, Morrison (2012) reported that several brain-based literature researchers “. . . detail strategies for using feedback and reflection as tools for sinking the information into long-term memory and ensuring recall” (p. 70). Humor, then, can be used by teachers to assist in the feedback loop assessment. And Morrison (2012) adds that the more emotional links we add to the brain with humor the better the chance the student will have a successful recall of the information.

4. Humor Helps Build relationships with Students.

Students and instructors make a connection in a classroom in some form or fashion. As the connection grows, many positive reactions can occur. Students may show nervousness and some anxiety on the first day of classes. Using humor helps to alleviate the nervousness and anxiety for the student as well as for the instructor. “Humor helps relieve stress, improve attention, and enhances learning” (M. A. Shatz & LoSchiavo, 2006, p. 1).

White (2001) arrived at the same conclusion as Shatz and LoSchiavo regarding student-teacher relationships. White also endorses the faculty and student belief that humor has been, or absolutely should be, used in a classroom to diminish stress, establish student's attentiveness and generate a vigorous learning setting (White, 2001, p. 337).

Teachers often gain respect and build rapport with students using humor. And White also notes that a controlled use of humor can enable classroom learning processes without compromising the teacher's professional integrity (White, 2001).

Teachers who attempt to strengthen the student-teacher relationship often rely on the use of affective domain. When discussing the connection between humor usage and the affective domain, Askildson (2005) found that humor appears to lower a person's affective filter and activate the positive emotions necessary for good communication (p. 45). Askildson further adds that the resulting secondary effects on the schoolroom setting and other affective states favorable to learning are because of humor usage in the schoolroom (p. 48).

Askildson (2005) also discussed the connections of humor to the affective domain and student-teacher relationships stating that humor's worth in a classroom is largely related to encouraging a sense of immediacy. Immediacy is the classroom communications component that transports the instructor and the students closer relationally together distance-wise (Andersen, 1978).

Chesebro and McCroskey (2001) also pushes the immediacy idea as a crucial factor in the student-teacher relationship building process. They defined instructional immediacy as conduct that fetches the instructor and the students nearer together in perceived space. The oral portion of immediacy is associated with humor, encouraging student input and fostering engagement. The researchers found that the strategic use of humor was a key to building solid teacher-student relationships.

No matter what the education level, humor has a positive influence on students (Neuliep, 1991). Neuliep records in his study that humor ought to be exercised as an

instructor tactic: many instructors in the study reported they use humor as an attention getter and make learning more fun (p. 335). His research dealt with high school teachers and it investigated the humor usage frequency, the kinds of humor, and the reasons for the humor usage. Overall, Neuliep's research conclusions indicated that humor usage has an affirmative outcome for both students and teachers. The positive results include that teachers are seen as more approachable, allowing for positive rapport with students.

5. Humor Can Create a Nurturing Environment for Learning.

A positive climate is one that is "conductive to instruction and learning . . . wherein everyone is considered a teacher and student at the same time" (Hashem, 1994, p. 6). Hashem directly links humor as an instructional strategy to help students feel safe in the classroom. The perception that a teacher is funny or a classroom is a fun place to learn reflects the classroom environment. Humor provides a welcoming environment and lays a foundation for interpersonal relations between students and teacher (Hashem, 1994).

Knowing how to deliver a lesson effectively is essential in generating an environment for learning. Askildson (2005) believes humor usage will always create a more relaxing and encouraging learning environment (p. 54). His study involved 236 students and 11 instructors. The majority of the students indicated they felt safer and less stressed due to the instructor's humor usage.

Sousa (1995) makes practical and positive suggestions for improving the classroom atmosphere. He promotes humor usage to enhance learning within an encouraging environment and "to improve the classroom climate" (p. 80) . It is important to know that Sousa links the humor usage to neuroscience, connecting the science of

teaching to how the brain processes humor. Essentially, Sousa claims that the humor usage is an attribute of motivation in student learning.

6. Humor Can Classroom Management.

Students benefit when the classroom environment is positive because teachers are more relaxed and comfortable. Allen (1986) conducted a field study to investigate classroom management from the perspective of 600 California high school students in grades 9 through 12 grades. Allen's study outcomes indicated that many students sensed that a teacher's humor perception was a constructive factor in the management of the class by fostering a more peaceful and social environment (p. 447).

Humor is a motivational factor that makes the classroom environment more personal. Wandersee (1982), a University of California biology professor, posits that humor makes learning personally enjoyable and establishes a more competent learning environment. Wandersee provides many reasons for humor usage as a teaching tactic and also provides a list of humor sources. And he has another list of acceptable humor forms to use in the classroom.

Ziv (1987) homes in on the reason humor should be considered a viable teaching strategy. Ziv looked at the liberating effects humor has on aggressive students in the schoolroom. Using humor tended to diminish aggressiveness in the schoolroom and increase student engagement. Ziv maintains that with the proper application of humor in instruction, the students become more engaged in the classroom.

Ramsey, R. Knight, M. Knight and Verdon (2011) gave credence to humor usage as a strategic tool for classroom encounters. They conducted a study with 102 teaching faculty from two large Southern and one mid-size Mid-Atlantic universities. They found

that humor usage in classroom encounters was an excellent instructor strategy. “Humor may hold promise as a ‘velvet weapon’ at the disposal of instructors during classroom conflicts” (p. 13).

7. Humor Can Help Students and Teachers Cope.

Humans down through the ages have had to cope with very stressful life experiences. These stressful experiences can produce negative outcomes, such as emotional disturbance and cognitive inefficiency, and adversely affect a student’s mental and physical health (Sanderson, 2004). Most humans are well aware of the inevitability of life’s final process – death – yet most have difficulty in coping with it or even joking about death. Morrison (2012) adds that knowing one’s own humor sense is the faculty of a human being to react to life’s encounter with optimism. It is a potent tool to cope with stress and anxiety (Martin & Lefcourt, 1983). Helping students cope with death and disasters with humor can provide relief from such dreadful situations.

Martin (2007) states that research has shown that humor is a complex process involving an individual’s emotions and almost everything a human does begins with the complex processing system of emotions. Morrison (2012) adds to Martin’s thoughts, writing that emotions control our lives both physically and mentally. Learning goes through the individual’s emotional filter system and our experiences in life and become memories linked to emotions. Using humor to cope with anxiety, fear, or stress is the best medicine for it helps the instructor and students return to normalcy in the classroom and reenergizes the learning process (McGhee, 2010).

8. Humor Enhances the Craft of Teaching and Learning.

Just what effect the high stakes testing is having on our school cultures today is difficult to ascertain. Morrison (2008) affirms that “However, it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to know that stress and burnout among educators is on the rise” (p. 55). Today’s educators are heavily impacted emotionally with the increased culpability, obligations and directives. Using humor with purpose can ease the stress because of these increased demands and the constant state and federal testing of students. Many educators become stressed because they need to spend terrific amount of time preparing students for state and federal testing. They become distraught because there seems to be little time for exuberance or creativeness. Using purposeful humor can help groom a student for that testing.

Even principals can contribute to the release of stress among educators in his or her charge by the use of humor. Hurren (2006) states that a principal’s humor usage with instructors and students lessens the stress in the school environment. Four hundred seventy-one Nevada teachers from 209 elementary schools, 99 middle schools and 157 secondary schools were surveyed. The survey results disclosed that when principals used hilarity with their teachers, schools become better locations to function, instruct and learn (Hurren, 2006).

Humor in Education Summary.

In summary, the benefits of using humor in education are:

- Humor grabs and holds student attention.
- Humor can expand student understanding.
- Humor can increase the chance for memory recollection.

- Humor can help build relationships with students.
- Humor can create a nurturing environment for learning.
- Humor can support classroom management.
- Humor can help students and teachers cope.
- Humor can enhance the craft of teaching and learning.

As more and more colleges move toward educating students in online environments, these eight benefits should be extended and applied there also. Yet no relevant online benefits regarding humor could not be found prior to 2003.

Humor and Communications

Communication is the way people exchange thoughts, ideas and feelings. Durant and Miller (1988) examined humor as a communication factor and concluded that humor is an effective additive to communicating a whole assortment of ideas, emotions, data and opinions (p. 17). Brownell and Gardner (1988)'s definition of humor fits securely into the realm of communication and in the way people express themselves. In like manner Tabares (2009) supports Brownell and Gardner stating that humor is an effective tool for communicating just about anything because humor breaks down barriers of communication. "Humor is one language that everyone can understand" (p. 1).

Wrench and McCroskey's (2001) work focuses on the communication aspects of humor. They discuss exhilaration and give humor pointers. Their pointers relate to communication and how the use of humor "accents" communication. Humorous expressions of thoughts and ideas between students and teachers are a major part of sound instruction (Wrench & McCroskey, 2001).

Irmsher (1996) comments that when it comes to communication skills in schools, the use of humor has been acclaimed by various school leaders to be the “seventh sense necessary for school leadership” (p. 4). Irmsher also reported that Pierson and Bredeson (1993) suggested school leaders should use humor for four main reasons: (1) to improve school climate, (2) to relate to teachers, (3) to break down bureaucratic structures, and (4), to assist in delivering unpleasant news. If researchers are suggesting and supporting the school leader’s use of humor with teachers, it would stand to reason that teachers should be using humor with students even in online environments.

Humor in Online Education

Online synchronous education is a relatively new adventure in education compared to traditional face-to-face classroom education. Numerous educational agencies, such as the Sloan Consortium (<http://www.sloan-c.org>), have provided guidelines and benchmarks for online education. In 2003 the Sloan Consortium awarded the *Award for Excellence in Online Teaching* to Bill Pelz, a professor of Psychology at Herkimer County Community College, for his work entitled “Principles of Effective Online Pedagogy” (Council, 2009)

Pelz (2004) provided educators with three guiding principles for online educators to follow. They are a) Let the students do (most of) the work; b) Interactivity is the core of effective synchronous learning; and c), Strive for presence in social, cognitive and teaching. It is within Pelz’s third principle of presence where the humor pedagogy should reside.

Web synchronous education can be just as discouraging as in face-to-face classrooms. James (2004), in his commentary, links technology education with online

education. He argues that technology education benefits from the use of humor and adds that online learning can also be stressful. James (2004) adds that adding humor to an online course is easy and many say it is quite necessary. James has found that using humor appropriately in online courses creates a learner-friendly online environment. He also points out that integrating humor into online courses requires a lot of time, but showing a sense of humor by the instructor helps keep students fully engaged in the virtual classroom where learning takes place (p. 94).

In the first true online study concerning humor, Shatz and LoSchiavo (2006) provided analytic data on finding or designing online humor and establishing parameters on how to place humor into online documents and quizzes. The researchers recommend using cartoons, funny graphics and photographs, funny jokes, quotes, word plays, different exaggeration forms, and top-ten lists that can be effortlessly merged into online learning management courses.

Shatz and LoSchiavo (2006) additionally present reasons for using humor in online courses. The authors posit that humor can facilitate interactions and raise student interest and participation. They go so far as to identify humor usage in online courses as a “social lubricant that can facilitate interactions” (p. 7), but quickly add that humor is not a substitute for traditional instruction.

Eskey (2010) performed a study about the use of humor at Park University involving six online criminal justice courses with a total of 126 students. Eskey received a very reassuring response from the students: ninety-eight percent agreed that humor can enable student exchanges and let the student view the teacher as more welcoming. Eskey

also reported that today's online students are computer smart and want (actually mandate) more gadgetry, amusement, and humor in the learning management courses.

Regardless the method of instruction or the subject to be learned, some instructors are reluctant or cautious about using humor in online classes. Although Sudol (1981) advocates humor in the classroom, he warns that “one danger in joking lies in setting the proper classroom tone . . . [another] is that such joking can lead to extremes . . . and the classroom becomes a playroom” (p. 26). Lems (2011) also warns that the instructor must be extra careful using humor when international students are present in the course – what may be funny to American students may be baffling, misunderstood, or considered an insult to students of another culture.

Summary

According to the research, modern day psychologists and instructors have discovered that the use of humor can certainly benefit education by grabbing and holding student attention, expanding student understanding, capturing and retaining student attention, increasing student understanding, increasing the chance for memory retention, building teachers-student relationships, creating a nurturing environment for learning, supporting management of the classroom, helping students and teachers cope with stress and anxiety and enhancing the teaching and learning craft. If the humor pedagogy is so useful in the classroom, why is it not applied to online classrooms?

Humor allows for communication to be beneficial and for engagement to occur within the course. When students engage more with their instructor, and other students and with the content of the course the bond between them grows. Humor influences effective instruction by adding value to the course. Yet, there seems to be a reluctance on the part of the instructors to actively plan for and use humor in online classes.

The literature reviewed in this chapter supports the inclusion of humor as an effective instructional method for instructors at all levels of learning (not only for live courses, but also for real-time web courses). Colleges and universities should plan to use instructional humor with their students.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

The objective of this inquiry was to reconnoiter how faculty at the University of New Mexico (UNM) use humor in online courses. The advantages of educational and communicative humor that developed from the literature review became the guidepost for the interviews, material collection and analysis.

This research endeavor was directed using the focus group and case study methodologies used in qualitative research. The true-to-life data gathered included thorough portrayals of places, people, dialogs, and products by constant interaction with online faculty and instructional designers at the University of New Mexico. The investigative researcher functioned as the main mediator in the compilation and scrutiny of the raw material used in this research. This material was amassed by holding a focus group session with up to 12 online instructional designers and using the case study interview process with up to 12 online UNM faculty. In addition, each volunteer was asked to participate in a short questionnaire designed to collect data for comparison purposes. The printed outcomes of the research contain interview quotes from the case study and the focus group to exemplify and substantiate the findings in chapter four of this dissertation.

This study examined the UNM instructional designers (ID) and online faculty's use of humor in online teaching. ID volunteers were included in this study since they support the faculty in the creation, improvement, and preservation of online courses and their knowledge of how faculty used humor was invaluable. While formulating this

research, the research investigator was concerned with the volunteer participant's perspective; that is, the investigator's goal was to comprehend the participants' point of view. Additionally, the researcher strove to ensure the volunteer's point of view and responses were accurately embodied in the study (R. C. Bogdan & Biklen, 1997).

Research Questions

The following research inquiries were the principal models for this investigation:

1. What do faculty at the University of New Mexico consider as humor for use in online courses?
2. How do the University of New Mexico faculty members use humor online? Please provide examples.
3. How would a UNM faculty member advice or recommend using humor to a fellow faculty member?
4. What obstacles or barriers have UNM faculty encountered about the use of humor in online classes?

To assist in answering these main questions, the following additional sub-questions were employed to help expand on the questions above:

1. How do UNM faculty members define humor?
2. How do faculty effectively use humor in an online environment? Please give examples.
3. How would faculty recommend using humor online to other UNM faculty?

Research Design

This study employed three types of data gathering methodologies: focus group, case study, and document analysis from the two groups.

Focus Group: This methodology explores what and how individuals believe, and why they believe the way they do about issues of importance to them without the pressure of making decisions or reaching consensus (Liamputtong, 2011). This qualitative research system was a valuable way of obtaining an understanding of an extensive range of people's views about an explicit issue. Focus groups are normally comprised of a few volunteers having attributes in common with the interview's topic and controlled by a mediator devoted to producing an environment where the volunteers feel relaxed sharing their knowledge (Morgan, 1997). This focus group was composed of 4 instructional designers discussing humor and its possible uses in online teaching from the instructional designer's point of view, since they assist faculty in creating and maintaining online courses.

Patton (1990) additionally noted that another possible advantage of using a focus group was it kept people honest in their answers, eliminating extreme answers and false responses because of 'in-your-face' member checking (p. 336). At the University of New Mexico, instructional designers assist faculty with course documents, learning objectives, and help develop efficient online course content, scenarios, media, and assessments that effectively conforms to the practices of the Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation (ADDIE) model of adult education. Their work with online faculty make them prime candidates for discovering the current trends in humor usage at the University of New Mexico courses and in particular, which online faculty are high users of humor.

Case Study Process: S. Merriam (1998) counsels that a case study process is an exacting, evocative, and experiential explanation of a specific situation. This process

focused on the online faculty using or not using humor in online teaching at the University of New Mexico. The volunteers for the case study were from the University of New Mexico online faculty. A case study is viewed as evocative once the study employs valid descriptive details to explain the occurrence under analysis (Creswell, 2007). The volunteers' beliefs, practices, and sense of worth narratives were assembled through detailed examination of faculty interviews. This case study is considered experiential in that it attempts to scrutinize, encapsulate and determine the current thoughts of using humor in online teaching.

Documents: For this investigation, the term “documents” means any written, visual, or digital information and any other material, including objects, that are applicable to the research (S. B. Merriam, 2009). These items could either be educational files (such as discussion wikis of education issues, federal, state, and private agency reports) or personal documents (any first-person material like diaries, letters, home videos, scrapbooks, etc.) that is voluntarily obtained from the participants or associated resources. S. B. Merriam (2009) opines that the researcher should not overlook personal documents for they are a dependable fountain of information about a person's outlooks, dogmas, and vision of the globe (S. B. Merriam, 2009, p. 143).

Recruiting

1. The University of New Mexico (UNM) with a student populace of nearly 27,889 and a faculty of 4031 (Analytics, 2015), located in Albuquerque, New Mexico was the site for this investigative research.

2. To meet the objective of the research, the University of New Mexico's Extended Learning department assisted in soliciting via e-mail instructional designers (Appendix 4a) and UNM online faculty (Appendix 4b) to be volunteer participants.
3. Volunteer instructional designers for the focus group and UNM faculty for the case study were screened to ensure a campus-wide coverage and selection of "information rich" participants (Borkan, Reis, Hermoni, & Biderman, 1995).
4. Four instructional designers were selected for the focus group and 6 UNM online faculty were selected for the case study.

The Researcher

Background of Researcher: The student investigator for this research is the main person for the accumulation and analysis of the material for this qualitative study. Guba and Lincoln (1982) state that the contextual information about the investigative researcher is key to the creditability of the undertaking in the research. This researcher is not a neutral party, and as Patton (2002) confirms, he brings his own values, ideas, prior knowledge and work experiences to this research. The researcher has more than ten years as a UNM Web Course Tools (WEBCT) trainer, and he has extensive experience as an instructional designer assisting UNM faculty in the art of creating and maintaining online courses. It is the researcher's belief that his experience instructing faculty and assisting students with online course issues provided a good influence and a valuable resource in conducting this research.

Participating Observer: As a student and a part-time undergraduate online instructor at UNM, the researcher, according to Patton (2002) and Yin (2009), is in the perfect position to be a participating observer and a collector of data for analysis. As a

participating observer, the researcher was adept at observing the use of humor from both the instructor (insider) and the investigator/student (outsider). Patton (2002) observed that the researcher must combine participation and observation so he or she can have an efficient understanding of the setting as an insider while relating it to an outsider with understanding.

Bias: Since researcher is a UNM student and an instructor at UNM, the researcher's biases and assumptions may directly or indirectly effect the result of this study and therefore, it must be addressed here. Pannucci and Wilkens (2010) posits that research bias occurs when an outsider looks at the collected raw data and interprets the outcomes differently than the researcher who collected the data. And Locke and company (2000) states that when a researchers' biases and assumptions come to light, the primary investigator must clear up the researchers' biases and assumptions so a positive setting for the study is maintained.

To maximize the creditability of this research, both Creswell (2003) and Patton (2002) highly recommend the researcher clearly define and be highly aware of the biases and predispositions he or she brings to the study. Every effort will be made to hold this researcher's bias at bay and be objective; however, his biases may creep in and change the way he analytically analyzes the material collected for this research. In an effort to correct this imposition, S. Merriam (1998) recommends triangulation of data, which uses more than one source of data to confirm the findings, and perform member checking, a feedback process with participants to certify the correctness of the material collected. These steps will be followed to ensure the validity of the findings.

Data Collection

Maxwell (1996) describes data acquisition as the process of obtaining material needed to satisfy the core inquiry of this study. This section defines the methodologies used to obtain the material, how the collection process was conducted, and why these methodologies were chosen. For this study data was obtained from the case study with the UNM faculty, the questionnaires and the documents collected in the study. The focus group with the instructional designers, although not directly engaged in online teaching, nevertheless offered insight into the generation of online courses and which faculty members are known for the use of humor in online courses.

Focus Group: David Steward and colleagues (2009) contend that focus groups are notably prized for preliminary investigative research. Liamputtong (2011) supports this thought stating that focus groups are remarkably valued for initially exploring the wide-ranging inquiry of the study (p. 90). Upon return of UNM's Extended Learning's solicitation e-mail, the volunteer was sent a focus group consent form (Appendix 1). When the consent form e-mail was returned, consenting to be a participant, the researcher e-mailed a esurvey.unm.edu link to the questionnaire (Appendix 2) to the participant. The questionnaire was completed before the focus group session.

The principle means of collecting data from the focus group was through the use of a digital audio recording, and facilitator's field notes. The focus group delved into the instructional designer's view of humor usage during the production of online courses.

Questions for the focus group were:

- a. What is humorous to you?

b. Have you ever recommended a humorous object (cartoon, etc.) or saying (pun, etc.) to an instructor for his/her online course?

c. Name an instructor at UNM who uses or may use humor in online courses.

The material gathered from this session was used to acquire an insight for the case study, especially any recommendation of a faculty member known to use humor. This data was not mixed with the case study data and document data, but was unitized for faculty comparisons.

Case Study: Besides the focus group session, the researcher conducted case study interviews with a firm selection (B. & M, 1994) of 6 UNM faculty. The volunteers selected for the case study provided responses about humor usage in online courses as well as intuitions and views on the subject matter being studied (Yin, 2009). These quasi-structured interviews were conducted using the following questions as an initial start:

- a. What does the word 'humor' mean to you?
- b. Share with me an example of when you used humor in an online course. Was it spontaneous or planned?
- c. Have you ever encountered barriers to the use of humor in online courses at the University of New Mexico?
- d. How might you recommend the use of humor in online courses to fellow faculty members?

The principle means of collecting information and making observations during the interview was through audio digital recording and interview field notes. Throughout the interview the researcher inquired if the participant had any documents to share.

As with the focus group, each case study participant was e-mailed a solicitation e-mail from UNM's Extended Learning (Appendix 4b). Upon the receipt of a returned e-mail volunteering to participate, the researcher emailed the case study consent form (Appendix 3). After a careful consent form reading, the participant emailed the investigator agreeing to participate. This e-mail was stapled to a consent form copy and construed as agreeing to participate. The volunteer was then e-mailed an Opinion esurvey.unm.edu secured link for the questionnaire. It was requested that the participants complete the questionnaire prior to the face-to-face focus group and case study sessions.

Documents: Throughout all the interviews, the researcher asked for documents voluntarily. These documents ranged from course syllabuses to PowerPoints, from html links leading to other resource-documents to books, magazines, and other periodicals. Each document was examined for its pertinence to the research study. All documents found worthy were retained for data analysis.

Data Analysis

To ensure the best meaning from the information, the researcher ordered and analyzed the material collected (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). As Maxwell (1996) indicated, this is how the researcher makes gist of the material accumulated and is able to relate the finding to decipher the greater meaning of the accumulated material. Creswell (2003) states it is the process of prepping the material for analysis, conducting different types of analytic processes with the material and always scanning deeper into the material to acquire knowledge and accurately interpret and present the greater meaning of the material collected (p. 190).

The material collected from the focus group, the case study interviews, questionnaires, documents, and the researcher's field notes generated a tremendous amount of data. To handle this large amount of data, the focus group session, the individual interviews and field notes were transcribed via a transcription company (<http://www.rev.com>); questionnaires and documents were organized and sorted for analysis. Then the material was reduced into themes by coding and condensing the codes, and finally expressing the material in figures, tables of discussion, graphs, etc.

The accumulated material presented disparate, incompatible, and even apparently contradictory information. Therefore, great attention to data management was of great importance to the researcher. To assist in managing the data QSR's *NVivo* software was used to assist with coding and specific quotations. Additionally, Boyatzis' (1998) thematic and code development methodology was used to aid in the analysis process. Through the use of QSR's *NVivo* and Boyatzis' thematic analysis, the researcher was able to visually embody the frequency of trends and themes and then confirm the data and test emerging conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Data initially retrieved from participants of the study contained identifiable links to the individuals in the consent forms, questionnaires, audio digital recordings and other documents collected in the field. During this data collection process the participant names were replaced with generic names ("fPerson1," "iPerson1," etc.). Phone numbers, department associations, and other identifying information were obliterated.

Data Verification

According to Creswell (2007) data validity in qualitative investigations refers to whether or not the conclusions of a research are true and certifiable. That is "true" in the

essence that the research accurately reflects the findings of the situation and “certifiable” in the essence that the evidence supports the research findings evidence (Creswell, 2007).

The first means of data verification was through data triangulation. Data triangulation involved using a sundry of sources of material to increase the validity of the study (R. Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). For this research project, triangulation occurred through the scrutiny of evidence from all the interviews and volunteer questionnaires, which built a intelligible rationalization for the themes (Creswell, 2003).

The second means of data verification was the employment of a member-checking methodology to verify the findings. A member-check or respondent validation with faculty participants was used to improve accuracy, credibility, and validity of a study (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). Creswell (2003) advises using member-checking to accurately ascertain the final findings worth by dispatching the report to the participants and ask them to ascertain whether or not the report themes are true and accurate (p. 196). And member-checking faculty interviews provided the opportunity to correct errors they perceived as wrong interpretations. In such case the researcher asked for the opportunity to re-interview the volunteer to revalidate the report accuracy.

During the analytic data process, only generic substituted names were used and all data transaction were screened to prevent any identity links to actual participants. When reporting the findings of the analytics in chapter four of this dissertation, it was the responsibility of the principal and student investigators to ensure there are no breaches of participant confidentiality.

During the whole research process all material collected and all analysis reports were treated as “CONFIDENTIAL,” password protected, and stored in the OI&LS Secretary’s Office in a locked cabinet. Access to the data and reports was limited to the principal investigator and the Study’s student investigator, and to the IRB/OIRB upon request, and as state and federal law requires.

Because of the data verification processes, the researcher was assured of the soundness of the research findings.

Summary

Chapter Three (3) conveyed a framework of the tools and methodology used to accumulate and decipher the materials in this qualitative research. The selection of these methodologies was centered on the consideration of the core and sub-core questions, the capability of the investigator and the caliber of the volunteers (Creswell, 2003; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). The overall design of this study was to use a focus group and a case study composition where the investigator was a contributor as well as an onlooker of UNM’s online teaching. My function as the investigator was clearly marked out and any recognition of my possible biases was accounted for when observing and writing about the case (S. Merriam, 1998). The selected volunteers, the raw material, its analysis and verification of the raw material were thoroughly expressed here. The ensuing chapter, Chapter Four, gives the conclusions from the analytic data study.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

Chapter Four's objective was to analyze the accumulated data for this project to resolve the core query of how faculty at the University of New Mexico use humor in online courses. To accomplish this analysis, QSR International's *NVivo* and Boyatzis' (1998) thematic analysis and code development were used. Boyatzis' qualitative procedure was chosen for this study since it permitted the examiner to deeply scan into the material collected. This method began to immediately assist in answering the above question as the raw transcripts were entered into the *NVivo*'s code process. Deciphering these pages of raw data started with organizing and describing volunteer participant's demographics.

Participant Demographics

The volunteers in this study represented an assorted group of University of New Mexico instructional designers and online faculty. Ten volunteers took part in the process: seven (70%) were female and three (30%) were male. Forty-six-years old was the mean age of the volunteers. Of the seven females, one was over 60-years-old, two were amid the ages of 45 and 55, and the remaining four females were amid the ages of 30 and 39. All the female volunteers in this analysis were white American citizens from European stock. Of the three males, one was over 60-years-old, and the remaining two were between the ages of 40 and 49. All the male volunteers in this analysis were white American citizens from European stock. Below are Tables 1 and 2, provide the participant demographics of those who participated in this study.

Table 1 shows the participant demographic breakdown in the focus group. There were four female instructional designers ranging in ages from 30 to 39.

Table 1: Focus Group Demographics			
Focus Group Participant Demographic Data			
Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity
Fperson-1	F	35-40	White
Fperson-2	F	30-35	White
Fperson-3	F	30-35	White
Fperson-4	F	30-35	White

Table 2 depicts the demographic data for the six individual faculty interviews. iPerson-1 was Caucasian female between the ages of 60 and 65 from the Education department. iPerson-2 was a Caucasian female between the ages of 50 and 55 from the School of Management. iPerson-3 was a Caucasian female between the ages of 45 and 49 from the Health Sciences Center’s College of Nursing. iPerson-4 was a Caucasian male between the ages of 65 and 69 from the School of Management. iPerson-5 was a Caucasian male between the ages of 45 and 49 from Arts and Sciences. iPerson-6 was a Caucasian male between the ages of 35 and 39 from Library Sciences.

Table 2: Individual Participant Demographics				
Individual Interview Participant Demographic Data				
Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Department
iPerson-1	F	60-65	White	Education
iPerson-2	F	50-55	White	School of Management
iPerson-3	F	45-49	White	Nursing
iPerson-4	M	65-69	White	School of Management
iPerson-5	M	45-49	White	Arts & Science
iPerson-6	M	35-39	White	Library Science

Transcription of Focus Group and Individual Interviews

Creswell (2007) states that when it comes to qualitative studies, the fact-finding researcher is the principal means for material compilation and analytics. So, the material from the case study and focus group interviews were captured on a Sony Digital Recorder, model ICD-PX312. Several test runs were done to ensure the digital recorder was functioning and all adjustments were set to produce the best recording. After ensuring the digital recorder was functioning properly, it was placed on a desk or table between each participant and the researcher before each interview session began.

The recorded sessions were reviewed by me for listening comprehension and then sent to REV.COM, a world-wide Internet service provider for transcribing digital recordings into Microsoft Word documents. Upon receipt of each transcribed document from REV.COM, the researcher compared the original digital recording to the transcribed documents for accuracy. Accurate transcribed documents were then sent to the volunteers for validation.

Additionally, each completed participant's questionnaire was exported from the University of New Mexico's Opinio (Esurvey.unm.edu) as EXCEL spreadsheets and examined for irregularity and accuracy. And lastly, outside documents (pdf's, graphics, etc.) were prepared for the next step.

Computer Coding Using NVivo

Muhr (1991) highly suggested that for this type of qualitative study with its large amount of text, graphics, etc., a computer software package should be used. Further, Muhr indicated that the software must be capable of handling annotations, cross-referencing activities between data elements and can build relationships for data interpretation. As the responsible investigator for this project study, the researcher required the use of software that assisted in developing categories and themes with the data. For this reason, QSR International's *NVivo* was selected for this study.

The researcher began the coding activity by preparing the accumulated material from the participant transcripts, questionnaires, and other collected documents in to *NVivo*. These documents were used as the main data for *NVivo*'s coding, categorizing, and theme development and memo organization (Saldana, 2013).

a. Step One: Using NVivo. In using *NVivo*, the researcher first created a new project entitled "Humor," which established an integrated system, or a database "container," where all the analysis activities (memos, field-notes, relationship structures, interpretation, and data exploration) occurs (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Loaded into this container were all the interview documents, questionnaires, and other pertinent documents (field-notes, observations, etc.).

Next, the researcher took advantage of *NVivo*'s "word frequency" function, which is a function of the software that compiles the word frequency of all the documents and exports the results into a file report. The researcher was surprised when the first report contained over 1900 word cells across all seven (7) interview documents alone. As the researcher analyzed the first report, he noticed that because the interview documents were transcribed verbatim, words like the, this, oh, nah, hmm, etc., needed to be excluded from *NVivo*'s "word frequency" inquiry. Luckily, *NVivo* has a "Stop-List" function for the frequency query function that prevents unwanted words from being counted. The researcher had to re-run the "word frequency" function many times, adding words to the Stop-List and was eventually left with 207 words. This report was exported into a Microsoft EXCEL spreadsheet.

After reviewing the report in EXCEL, the researcher decided to generate a second "word frequency" report that displayed the words in highest to lowest count frequency for all the interview documents in the *NVivo*'s "Humor" container. The analysis process began at this point combining words with the same root word. This step was tedious and a veritable time cruncher, but the researcher in the end I had 50 words that were directly associated as ideal candidates for coding.

Table 3 is a sample of the *Word Families* list. Figure 3, *Code Candidates*, is a word cloud derived from *NVivo*. Table 3, The *Word Families* table, illustrates in-part a list of 207 words that were used most often, with variations included (i.e., work, worked, working). Figure 3, *Code Candidates*, is a word cloud showing words that are ideal candidate as codes to use in the Humor Project container and can be found in one or

several primary documents. These candidate words are high frequency word counts, because they included base words combined if they had the same connotation.

Table 3: Word Families			
WORDS	COUNT	WORD	COUNT
Humor	142	expect	5
Student	132	follow	5
Invest	120	general	5
Investigate	88	interested	5
Course	79	little	5
Online	50	reason	5
Instructor	39	university	5
Humorous	36	accurately	4
Question	36	appropriate	4
Class	35	background	4
Crosstalk	29	basically	4
Cartoons	28	beginning	4
Document	27	board	4
Funny	26	check	4
Jokes	25	click	4
conversation	24	collar	4
Laugh	24	content	4
Order	23	cracked	4
teach/teaching	22	dehydrated	4
People	21	discussion	4
Learned	20	exercise	4
Designer	19	experience	4
Different	19	fellow	4
Example	19	grade	4
Favorite	19	guidelines	4
Focus	19	happiness	4
Marketing	19	harder	4
Faculty	18	images	4
Looked	18	flight	4
Stress	18	light	4
Asked	17	office	4
Always	16	order	4
Careful	16	participants	4
Semester	16	political	4
working	16	provides	4



Figure 3: Code Candidates

b. Step Two: Computer Coding. *NVivo* has an embedded function that digitally marks any occurrence of a word or phrase in the interview documents of the Humor Project. The researcher utilized this tool to code the 50 words from the “Code Candidate” cloud in all the primary documents. Reading and rereading the transcripts and other documents in the project was vital in making the appropriate choice of words. This process allowed the researcher to match the “candidate code” word with the text phrases within the transcripts, and made possible the next phase of coding.

c. Step Three: Line by Line Coding. Saldana (2013) describes the process of line coding as the marking and assignment codes to phrases and bodies of text in the primary documents. The researcher used *NVivo*’s open coding process; reading through the primary documents electronically, pouncing on text to be coded with “candidate codes” (see Figure 3) and linking them together. Through this process some of the codes became

family (category) groupings based on the research queries of this project, which according to Wengraf (2001) model (see Table 4) helps a researcher concentrate on data explanations within the framework of this study.

Table 4: Research Questions to Code Families		
Research Question 1	What do faculty at UNM consider as humor for use in online classes?	Jokes Puns Satire Humorous Events Cartoons Sarcasm Stories
Research Question 2	How do University of New Mexico faculty members use humor online? Please give examples.	Comic videos Teaching humorous Courses Funny documents Silly characters
Research Question 3	How would a UNM faculty member advise or recommend using humor to a fellow faculty member?	Peer, appropriate, inappropriate, awkward, interaction, faculty
Research Question 4	What obstacles or barriers have UNM faculty encountered about the use of humor in online classes?	People Faculty Students Learning objectives

Applying this step entailed being quite attentive when inspecting the primary documents; making sure to code carefully on every page of the document. Here I investigated the text directly to generate quotes (segments of text) that made sense. These fragments contained individual words, whole paragraph sentences and sentence fragments that were linked to the candidate codes.

The process itself took a long time to accomplish and it soon became apparent that the researcher needed to resist the uneasiness that comes with the most key undertaking of the research project (Boyatzis, 1998). At this point the researcher started using *NVivo*'s coding tools to create codes and assign these codes to families based on the text association. *NVivo*'s memo tool was greatly utilized. Bazeley and Jackson (2013) strongly recommended the use of memoing because it provided the ability for reflection

of findings, methodology, the connections between theory and data, and integrating codes and text in the analysis process. Creating these memos was critically important to the researcher because the researcher was now able to capture key information from notes and interviewee transcribed documents.

The memoing process is where the researcher “inks” notes/memos to himself while in the coding activity. As Klenke(2008) posits, these “inked-memos” play an essential role with the researcher about the emerging theme or trend. Typing these memos gave me an insight to explicit information that needed to be considered during the coding process. Table 5 is an example showing the relationship between text, memo and code from an individual interview document.

Text	Codes
Humor is so personal. ① I don't know if I've ever recommended, ② most of my colleagues don't teach online, with a few exceptions, but humor is so personal how do you recommend something humorous to somebody. I guess one of the things would be to have more statements or sayings that would elicit humor from students on the overviews. ③ There is a thousand different funny statements for teachers and most of the people I teach are teachers....④	Personal – see ① Faculty recommend – see ② Student(s) – see ③ Teach(er) – see ④
	Memos ① Yes, humor has a personal side, but non-personal humor can also be applied. ② Got the feeling interviewee doesn't want to broach the subject of humor to fellow faculty ③ Good point! Students would love a spark of humor. ④ I think I have created a humor monster

Besides using *NVivo*'s software package for qualitative analysis, the researcher deployed Boyatzis' (1998) "hand-coding" methodology for this research project. Boyatzis' steps were very effective with the case study and focus group processes of this investigation. Therefore, as Klenke (2008) also suggested, the researcher segmented the process of how the data was to be reduced and started with inductive code development. After rereading the transcribed documents, and re-listening the recordings on the digital recorder a total of four (4) times, the researcher started the process of coding by hand.

According to Boyatzis (1998), there are three methods a researcher can use for developing thematic codes:

- 1) Theory: In this method the researcher has a theory in hand of what takes place and then devises the indicators of proof to support the theory (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 33).
- 2) Prior material/prior research: the researcher uses this method when codes and findings by other researchers give the best help in developing new codes and themes (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 37).
- 3) Inductive/data driven (i.e., from the collected material): This permits the investigator to scan for words or phrases in the collected material and interpret its meaning after acquiring the outcomes to construct a theory (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 30).

The researcher chose to inductively code since it let me look for frequent and substantial themes. Not only did inductive coding help me reduce the data in the *NVivo*'s Humor Container, it also helped me create research links between goals and the succinct outcomes arisen from the raw material.

d) Step Four: Reducing Raw Information. For all its worth, coding by hand is the same as *NVivo*'s automatic coding, but now the researcher uses pencils, pens, markers,

scribbling notes, and assembles the results manually (Saldana, 2013). The researcher spent many hours rereading each interview transcript while working to reduce the data. Several times during this process the researcher had to get away from the data, sometimes for days, so that intimacy would not sneak in and ravage my responsibility of being open to recognizing other alternative findings (Boyatzis, 1998; Saldana, 2013).

Conversational text that arose because of the queries during the interviews were paraphrased, logging differences and similarities in the responses. Any conversations not linked in any manner (i.e., weather, sports, etc.) were removed from consideration.

e) Step Five: Identifying Themes. In hunting for themes and deciding what was good, outlandish, and what were bad themes enabled the investigator to begin the analysis of the final codes. At this point a researcher has a possible theme list and begins to place emphasis on the wider samples of data, merging coded data with projected themes (Saldana, 2013).

Codes are different than themes. Themes contain catchphrases, watchwords or complete decrees that categorize data meanings. They explain an outcome of analyzing code through reflection. Themes contain notions and narratives within an investigative body that hopefully explains events, statements, and moralities derived from participant interviews and stories (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After considerable manipulation of the data, both from within *NVivo* and on the dining room table, theme patterns began to appear. In testing these themes, the researcher also noted responses that were completely opposite from one another. These differences became sub-samples that are worthy of further investigation.

f) Step Six: Comparing Themes with Sub-samples. Here Boyatzis (1998) warns researchers to narrow the field of investigation to look only for patterns that are linked to the research questions. Any attempt to fit a sub-sample not fully linkable to the research questions may result in untimely intellectualization (p. 47). The researcher used *NVivo*'s coding and node memoing to record any of my thoughts while doing my analysis. Every individual coding symbolized a category or theme. Because this was very time consuming, I made myself take breaks from analysis so as maintain consistency in the method.

g) Step Seven: Creating Theme/Code. In this step, the themes and codes derived from Step Six, were reviewed and edited for accuracy. Boyatzis (1998) states that this is a complex stage where codes, themes and descriptions run together and the researcher should organized his/her themes (p. 32). Hence, the researcher organized the thematic tables following Boyatzis' example:

- a) "Label or Name of theme
- b) Description or its Characteristics
- c) Indicators or pointers – theme flagging
- d) Examples: positive or negative – helps stop possible confusion
- e) Exclusions: or special editions
- f) Associative codes of value" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 49).

Table 6 through 8 below represents the derived themes for this study.

Table 6: Theme 1.	
Label (What will I call it):	Hesitate to use humor
Description/Definition:	Instructor and designer does not feel competent to use humor in a planned way in online courses. S/he does not believe s/he is humorous, thus shy away from its use.
Indicators or Flags	Course design is bland & conservative with no puns, jokes, cartoons or stories, etc.
Examples (positive or negative)	Discussion boards are bland...
Exclusions	Do not include face-to-face comments.
Associative Codes	Communication, humor, interaction, teaching, conversation, social, cartoons, jokes, puns, funny stories.

Theme 1: Hesitate to use humor. Both the UNM instructional designers and the UNM faculty did not feel competent to use humor in a planned way in the online courses they were building or teaching.

- fPerson_1: “Actually had situation where I had to take humor out of a course.”
- fPerson_3: “In using humorous cartoons we have to be really careful with Copyrights and citations.... avoid using.”
- iPerson_1: “It’s really hard to use humor in online courses because you don’t have always a direct connection with the students.”
- iPerson_4: “I am aware that there are perfectly gentle words that nobody bothers with in English, but are unsuitable to foreign students... avoid humorous puns in those cases.”
- iPerson_5: “Be safe and don’t use humor. Be clear what the message you are trying to communicate – humor and clarity are two different things and don’t mix well.”
- iPerson_6: “Using humor in face-to-face classes is different than using humor in online classes.”

Table 7: Theme 2.	
Label (What will I call it):	Afraid of what students' think
Description/Definition:	Instructor afraid that students will consider him/her as not knowledgeable in the subject matter; or student's culture, religion and internationality will cause misunderstanding resulting in complaints to administration.
Indicators or Flags	Students asking for meaning of the joke or story; administration/department notifying instructor about problems with communication in the course. Students' feelings hurt or feel insulted.
Examples (positive or negative)	
Exclusions	No exclusions. Applies to both live and real-time courses.
Associative Codes	Students, interaction, voice, appropriate, information, humor, communication, awkward, embarrassed.

Theme 2: Afraid of what students will think. Instructor afraid that students will consider him/her as not knowledgeable in the subject matter; or student's culture, religion and nationality will cause misunderstanding resulting in complaints to administration.

- fPerson_1: "I took a humorous picture out of a course – students in course complained that the picture and description was too sarcastic."
- fPerson_4: "Be leery of any cultural jokes – foreign students might get insulted."
- iPerson_2: "I guess online it's hard to try to use it (humor). Students sometimes don't understand the joke and I have to explain it."
- iPerson_4: "Generally only time I use humor in online courses is when a student asks a question and I am able to respond with humor to make a point. I am pretty sensitive about gender in my classes."
- iPerson_5: "I may be an outlier, but I avoid humor in online courses at all costs. I don't want to make an assumption about students just to get a chuckle out of them."

Table 8 Theme 3.	
Label (What will I call it):	Hesitate sharing with other faculty
Description/Definition:	Not sure what fellow faculty members will think of him or her. Unprofessional? Would shy away from humor usage recommendation even if peer asks about it.
Indicators or Flags	“Not really thought about telling someone about using humor in online courses.”
Examples (positive or negative)	Interviewees relayed feelings of awkwardness and demurred when asked about recommending using humor.
Exclusions	None. Applies to face-to-face and online courses equally.
Associative Codes	Humorous, management, faculty, communication, teaching, awkward, embarrassed

Theme 3: Hesitate Sharing with other faculty. Not sure what fellow faculty members will think of him or her. Unprofessional? Would shy away from humor usage recommendation even if peer asks about it.

fPerson_1: “I thought I had a good relationship with an instructor and recommended a humorous object. It was a big mistake – almost ruined the relationship.”

fPerson_2: “No. We do not share/recommend humor – our goal is not to impact context – it’s to allow faculty to supply content for courses.”

iPerson_1: “Humor is so personal. I don’t know if I have ever recommended to a fellow faculty person. Most of my colleagues don’t teach online.”

iPerson_2: “I think no. Teaching online is much different than face-to-face and I would not recommend humor to a faculty person.”

iPerson_3: “Some people just don’t have a sense of humor and they are not open to humor in any sense.”

iPerson_4: “If they ask, I would tell them how I use humor – at least how it works.”

iPerson_5: “I would say don’t use humor in your courses – the safe use of Humor is just not using it.”

iPerson_6: “Be careful when using humor – make sure the humor fits into the lesson being taught.”

Questionnaires

Before the actual focus group session and the individual interviews occurred, each participant completed the Humor Belief Questionnaires (see Appendix 2). This questionnaire contained twenty (20), Five-Likert-scaled, questions for the participants to answer. The Five-Likert-Scale for the questionnaire was arranged in the following manner: Disagree = 1, Somewhat Disagree = 2, Neither Agree or Disagree = 3, Somewhat Agree = 4, and, Agree = 5.

Each participant went online to UNM's Opinio survey system (<http://esurvey.unm.edu>) and took the questionnaire – one for instructional designers and one for faculty. The results from the questionnaires were exported from Opinio to Microsoft EXCEL spreadsheets. After calculating the mean and the standard deviation for each question using a home-generated Microsoft Visual Basic Program, the results were imported into this study as Figure 4 (UNM instructional designers) and Figure 5 (UNM online faculty).

Instructional Designers' Questionnaire							
Humor Belief Questionnaire	1	2	3	4	5	ME	SD
Humor is a skill that I use with intent and purpose.	0	0	3	1	0	3.25	0.50
I have a good sense of humor.	0	0	1	2	1	4.00	0.82
I intentionally use humor to build a relationship with students and educators.	0	1	1	2	0	3.25	0.96
I intentionally use humor to optimize learning.	0	1	1	2	0	3.25	0.96
I know and understand my humor style.	0	1	0	3	0	3.50	1.00
I believe humor is inherited.	1	1	1	1	0	2.50	1.30
If a classroom of students is laughing and joking, an observer will assume the class is not learning.	2	1	1	0	0	1.75	0.96
Humor can be an effective tool for students with serious behavior challenges.	0	0	1	1	2	4.25	0.96
Humor relieves stress.	0	0	0	0	4	5.00	0.00
Humor promotes healing.	0	0	0	1	3	4.75	0.50
Humor increases productivity.	0	0	1	2	1	4.00	0.82
Humor requires a culture of trust.	0	0	1	2	1	4.00	0.82
The ability to laugh at yourself can be used to gain the trust of others.	0	0	0	3	1	4.25	0.50
The "class clown" is usually perceived in our school environment as being a disruption of learning.	0	0	1	1	2	4.25	0.96
Humor is the #1 characteristic students desire in a teacher.	1	1	2	0	0	2.25	0.96
Humor is not a measurable characteristic and therefore has a questionable role in education.	1	1	1	1	0	2.25	1.29
If there is a perception that I am a fun seeker, I will not be considered professional.	0	1	1	2	0	3.25	0.96
While humor is important, learning requires a serious work environment with little time for fun, humor and play.	2	2	0	0	0	1.50	0.58
I am not comfortable initiating fun, play, and humor in my current school culture.	0	1	2	1	0	3.00	0.82
Playing and having fun in a classroom is a waste of precious learning time.	2	2	0	0	0	1.50	0.58

Note: Figure 4: From *Using Humor to Maximize Living: Connecting with Humor* (p. 217), b M. K. Morrison, 2012, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education. Copyright 2012 by Mary Kay Morrison. Adapted with permission.

Figure 4 Instructional Designer Questionnaire

UNM Faculty Questionnaire							
Humor Belief Questionnaire	1	2	3	4	5	ME	SD
Humor is a skill that I use with intent and purpose.	0	2	0	4	1	3.57	1.13
I have a good sense of humor.	0	0	0	4	3	4.42	0.53
I intentionally use humor to build a relationship with students and educators.	0	1	2	2	2	3.71	1.11
I intentionally use humor to optimize learning.	0	2	1	2	2	3.57	1.27
I know and understand my humor style.	0	0	3	1	3	4.00	1.00
I believe humor is inherited.	3	2	0	1	1	2.86	1.60
If a classroom of students is laughing and joking, an observer will assume the class is not learning.	4	2	1	0	0	1.57	0.79
Humor can be an effective tool for students with serious behavior challenges.	0	1	2	2	2	3.71	1.11
Humor relieves stress.	0	1	0	1	5	4.42	1.13
Humor promotes healing.	0	1	0	2	4	4.28	1.11
Humor increases productivity.	0	1	0	2	4	4.28	1.11
Humor requires a culture of trust.	0	2	0	2	3	3.86	1.35
The ability to laugh at yourself can be used to gain the trust of others.	0	0	2	2	3	4.14	0.90
The "class clown" is usually perceived in our school environment as being a disruption of learning.	1	0	3	2	1	3.29	1.25
Humor is the #1 characteristic students desire in a teacher.	1	3	2	1	0	2.43	0.98
Humor is not a measurable characteristic and therefore has a questionable role in education.	3	2	2	0	0	1.86	0.90
If there is a perception that I am a fun seeker, I will not be considered professional.	2	2	2	1	0	2.29	1.11
While humor is important, learning requires a serious work environment with little time for fun, humor and play.	2	4	1	0	0	1.86	0.69
I am not comfortable initiating fun, play, and humor in my current school culture.	5	1	1	0	0	1.43	0.79
Playing and having fun in a classroom is a waste of precious learning time.	5	1	1	0	0	1.43	0.79

Note: Figure 5. From *Using Humor to Maximize Living: Connecting with Humor* (p. 217), by M. K. Morrison, 2012, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education. Copyright 2012 by Mary Kay Morrison. Adapted with permission.

Figure 5: UNM Faculty Questionnaire

In analyzing the two questionnaires from a qualitative perspective, both UNM designers and UNM faculty state they have a great sense of humor. Both intentionally say they use humor to build relationships, but both barely agree about using humor to optimize learning. This correlates with Theme 1 (Hesitate to use humor). Kaplan and Pascoe (1977) found that humorous examples served as cues for recalling information

and Hackathorn et al. (2011) found humor usage in schoolroom settings boost learning in Bloom's Taxonomy's first three levels of learning. So why not in online learning?

When it comes to stress, productivity, and healing concerning students, both designers and faculty agree that using humor is a good relief remedy. And both agree that humor can raise the culture of trust between student and instructor.

However, both designer and faculty believe that humor is not the number one characteristic students want in an instructor. This correlates to Theme 2 (Afraid of what students think). Neuliep (1991) argued that humor should be used as an attention getter and make learning more fun. And Hashem (1994) agrees with Neuliep and adds humor provides a welcoming environment that students appreciate and lays the foundation for better relations between students and teacher.

While designers agree that if you are perceived as a fun seeker you are considered unprofessional, faculty disagree. Yet both are comfortable initiating humor and do not consider having fun as bad. This flies in the face of Theme 3 (Hesitate sharing humor with other faculty) for faculty, who during the interviews felt uncomfortable sharing humor usage with other faculty.

Documentation

The last leg of analysis deals with documentation collected at UNM regarding humor usage in courses online. During the focus group session, every effort was made to obtain humor related materials from online UNM courses from the instructional designers. However, the designers felt that it was not their place to provide humor usage evidence since the courses are the instructor's domain. This was consistent with UNM's policy to protect the academic rights of the faculty and students.

Of the six faculty interviews performed, only two responded with some bits of humor while the remaining four had no humor evidence to share (or did not want to share) because of student interaction, which they considered private between instructor and student.

Figure 6, “Pie Chart,” came from the education department’s statistical representation module. It is quite a unique way to start a module about how to represent statistical data to a class, an organization, or even the beginning of a book chapter.



Figure 6: Pie Chart from Education

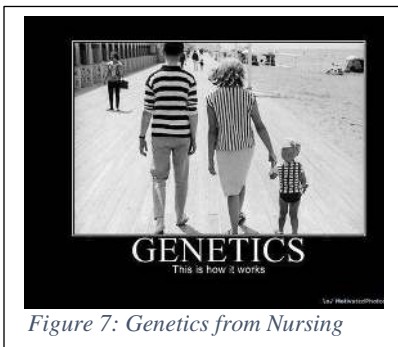


Figure 7: Genetics from Nursing

Figures 7 and 8 came from the College of Nursing Courses. Figure 7 came from a course to teach students about genetics. Notice the horizontal stripes of the father and the vertical stripes of the mother become the checkered (vertical and horizontal) in the child.



Figure 8: Sunburn from Nursing

Figure 8 came from a course to teach students about the effects of sunburns on human skins. This introduction clip would catch the attention of nurses interested in dermatology.

Summary

The material analysis clearly indicates the use of the humor pedagogy has almost disappeared from UNM online courses. Chapter 5 of this research study will discuss the findings in detail and make suggestions for additional inquiry.

Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusion

Introduction

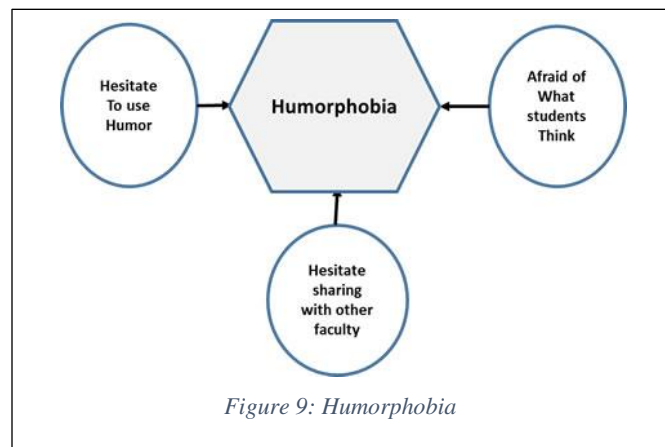
Chapter Five's objective was to scrutinize faculty's humor usage in online courses at the University of New Mexico. It is a descriptive, qualitative study using tools typical of qualitative research work to gather pertinent data. For this study observations, interviews, a focus group, questionnaires, and audio recordings was used. Results were presented in various forms, including descriptive writings and tables.

Summary of Findings

In this chapter the researcher summarizes the initial pronouncements that have already been reported in Chapter 4. Returning to the original inquiry question provides a framework for this summary.

Main Question: How do faculty at the University of New Mexico use humor in online teaching? Has this question been answered? Yes. Humor usage in online classes at the University of New Mexico has fallen into disuse; in some cases, it has disappeared altogether. Increased demands on educators at UNM has more than likely led to the disuse of the humor pedagogy. For instance, more courses being taught by one educator instead of hiring more instructors. And educators across UNM appear to have a hesitation (or fear) of using humor in online classes, and are reluctant to even recommend humor to other faculty members because they do not want to look unprofessional. Some even fear what the students will think of them if they used humor in online classes. Mary Kay Morrison (2008) defined this hesitation (or fear) in regards to using humor in education classes as "humorphobia."

Humorphobia (See Figure 9) exists at the University of New Mexico as an invisible thread intertwined into the framework of the UNM’s system of education. It is a vestige left over from the last two centuries where humor in the classroom was considered detrimental to a good education. In the interviews conducted in this study the researcher could readily see the passion and dedication the educators and designers had for their online courses, yet they are hampered by an unspoken belief that humor has no place in our education classes.



This hesitancy (or fear) of using humor in online classes is well founded since the American education system has been under the heavy-duty public microscope for the past 20 years. Morrison (2008) posits “political and economic forces have demanded accountability for tax dollars spent in education; the focus on teacher assessment and quality is mandated and the implementation of these laws drain our energy and resources” (p. 72). No wonder instructors are hesitant.

Question 1: What do faculty at the University of New Mexico consider as humor for use in their courses? Both the designer and faculty participants in this study had various answers to this question. All participants reported that spontaneous humor

occurred in their online courses at UNM. When asked to be more specific, the participants came up with six (6) different categories of humor: jokes, funny stories, puns, riddles, humorous comments and cartoons/funny posters. The designers were asked if they ever put any of the six categories mentioned above into online courses, and they responded with a “no” or “maybe.” The designers declared that they only upload content received from faculty and that the content may or may not have humorous objects in the upload. Two faculty (see previous chapter) stated they used cartoons or funny PowerPoint poster slides in their online module introduction, but the other humor categories only occurred as a result of a spontaneous response from a student quip during online interactive teaching sessions. The remaining faculty easily identified some of the same categories noted above, but stated they don’t use them in online classes.

Question 2: How do University of New Mexico faculty use humor online? Two interviewees used humor in the introduction to their online modules in the form of cartoons that matched the goals and the objectives to be taught. The remaining faculty and instructional designers do not use humor, except when it occurs spontaneously in their live online web conferencing and discussion boards. One went even far enough to say that obvious humor elements are hunted down in his course and eliminated; he was too afraid of offending students and not wanting the students to think he was unprofessional. It was an indication that each online course was the domain of the assigned instructor and no one else should be making recommendations about the course.

Question 3: How would a UNM faculty member advise or recommend using humor to a fellow faculty member? From the interviews with faculty volunteers the researcher got a solid impression that the faculty never entertained the idea of

recommending humor to another faculty member. When this question was proposed to the faculty, one replied that it never occurred her to do so, while the rest of the faculty thought it was inappropriate or “unprofessional” to do so.

Question 4.: What kind of barriers are there, if any, to using humor in online environments? For several years educators have been writing about the use of humor, encouraging teachers at all levels to use humor in their courses (Martin, 2007). Berk (1996) and Powers (2008) both have shown that humor can be integrated into course teaching in an array of ways: in the classroom, on quizzes and exams, in the syllabus, and in course modules. So why isn’t humor being used in online classes? Are there barriers at UNM being used to prevent humor usage? When asked about the possibility of these barriers coming from section leaders, department chairs or school/college administrators, I received a resounding NO! from all the participants. If this is the case that there are no outside barriers to the use of humor, then it is safe to conclude that the barrier comes from within the educator, who is afraid to use humor and afraid to share it with others out of fear of being declared unprofessional.

Discussion

As more college courses are offered in an online delivery format, many educators are concerned with the best methods of conducting online courses. Unfortunately, many educators have failed to use the humor pedagogy or even think about humor in online classes. This researcher believes that humor integrated into online courses can create a welcoming, more supportive learning environment, retain knowledge, create a sense of community and reduce stress. It can contribute cognitively during the introduction of factual, conceptual and theoretical knowledge.

Granted, most faculty are not stand-up comedians nor trained wits, but that should not inhibit them from including humor in their online teachings. At first it will take a conscious effort to generating an online off-the-cuff atmosphere, and assuming a pleasant attitude, and providing humor resources for the students.

To be humor effective in online course, faculty will need to assign themselves some tasks. First, scan for humor resources in books, journals, short films, and even in the local newspapers (but don't forget to cite the source of what you collect). Create a resource kit based on each course taught as a readily available resource.

Next, tap into the Internet. Somewhere out in the world-wide-web there is a web site with humor that will pertain to the subject you are teaching. So keep an online file on your computer, external devices or clouds so they will be readily available when you need them. Be aware, though, not all web sites are public and copyright laws equally apply and some sites assign a dollar values to their graphics and pictures.

Also be cognizant of everyday events in life that will work with your online course. Remember, just about everything a human does has a built in irony wedged in it. And Morrison (2008) adds that Will Rogers noted, "Everything is changing. People are taking their comedians seriously and the politicians as a joke" (p. 16).

The most foremost form of humor today by instructors are funny stories, with humorous remarks and jokes arising next in second and third place. Near the end of the twentieth century, Berk (1996) ascertained seven types of humor that can be integrated into academic courses: cartoons, quotations, top ten (10) lists, anecdotes, planned ad-libs, skits, dramatization and multiple-choice items (yes, even multiple choice quizzes can be

humorous!). Even humorous games and simulations can provide opportunities for learning (Borja, 2006).

To effectively use humor in online courses competently requires a good teaching strategy; it must help achieve the course goals and objectives. First, think about the instructional unit or process in which you wish to include a humorous element. Then:

- a. Evaluate the subject matter that needs development with some kind of humor.
- b. Analyze the online session and/or presentation where emphasis is wanted.
- c. Open your humor resource kit for the course and devise a plan to obtain a desired outcome: alertness, anxiety respite, affective improvement, etc.
- d. Apply humor presentation with resources developed from your course humor resource kit (humor grab bag and self-discovery resources).
- e. Evaluate the effectiveness of your plan:
 1. Did the students understand?
 2. Did a positive learning atmosphere occur where humor generated concentration, recollection and creativity needed in the course?
 - i. Keep the plan if yes!
 - ii. If no, reassess the plan and make revisions – including removal.

Figure 10 below is a pictorial view of the above written steps.

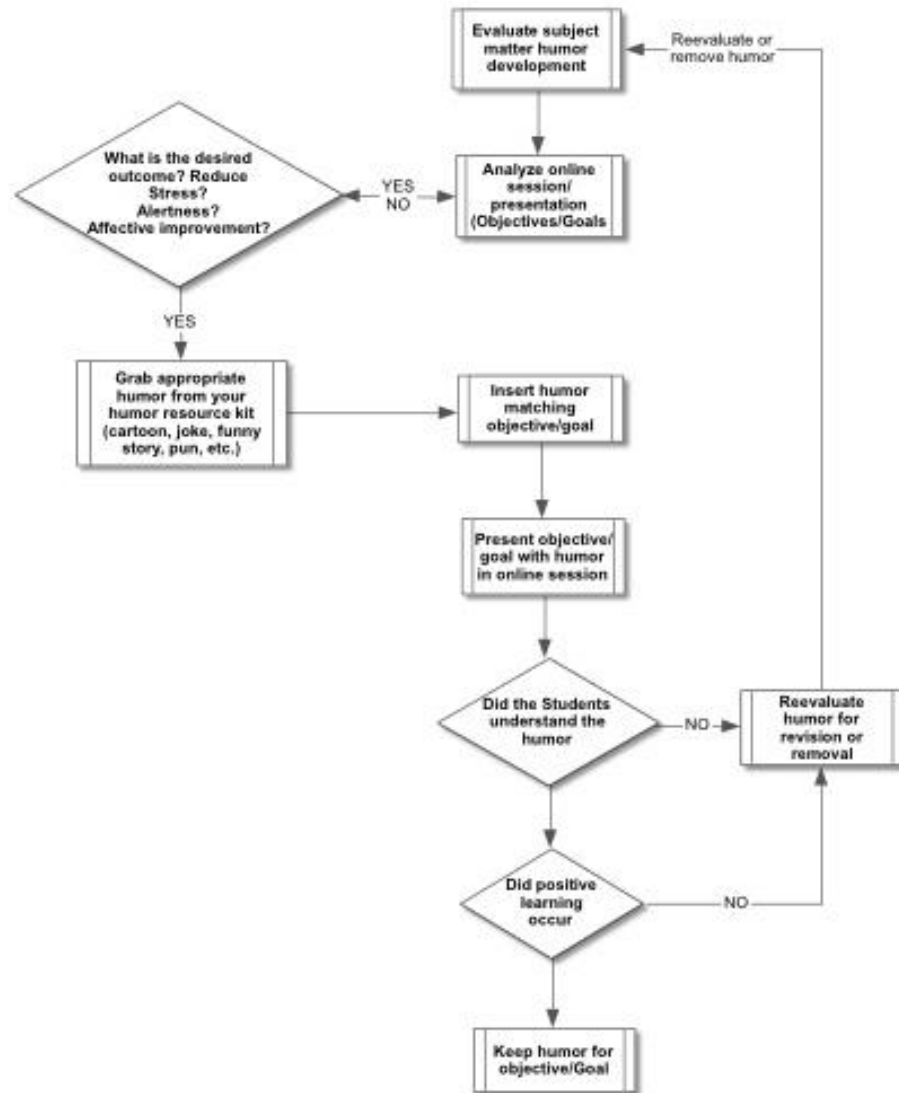


Figure 10: Instructional Humor Flowchart

Humor is a great tool to add to the teacher’s resource bag of tricks, but take care to use it carefully. Although considered universal, the receiver of the humor may not construe the communication correctly. If it’s inappropriate humor offending personal feelings, culturally or religiously, a broken student-teacher relationship will occur, leaving a feeling of distrust by the student.

The above may be the unsaid reason why humor is avoided at UNM because humor is so subjective. However, if you avoid humiliating, condescending, sexist, sarcastic stereotyping or culturally ugly humor and use it wisely, online and even face-to-face courses will have enhanced teacher-student learning environments.

It takes deliberation and determination to use instructional humor in a classroom. Suppose you are an instructor in the Public Administration department charged with teaching human relations management. One of the modules in the course concerns hiring practices in the public sector. Shown here are two examples of humor you might add to your humor

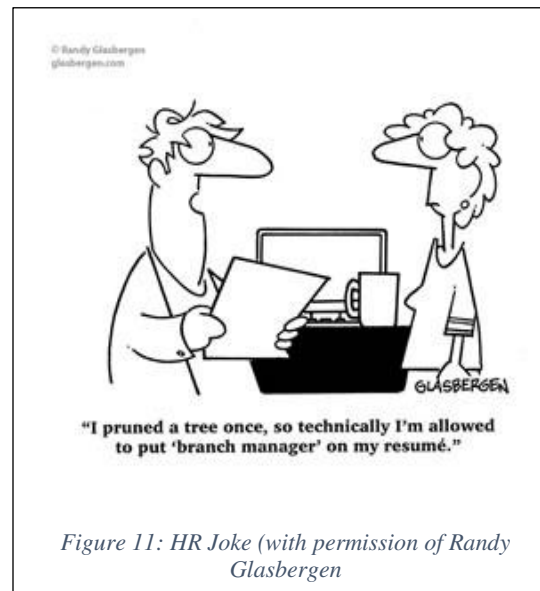


Figure 11: HR Joke (with permission of Randy Glasbergen)

toolkit for present and future use. Figure 8 could be used when discussing analysis of an employee resumé.

The second is a funny, but very true story that could be used in medicine to introduce the ways to detect dementia. It is true because this researcher was in the back seat as a 12-year-old when it happened:

Grandma Tess was stopped by the NJ State Police for speeding on the Interstate. "What was I doing wrong Officer?" asked Grandma Tess.

"Ma'am, you were going 80 MPH in a 60 MPH speed zone," replied the State Policeman.

"But when I got on the highway the sign said 80!" countered Grandma Tess.

"Ma'am, this is Interstate 80 and the speed limit is 60," the astonished trooper replied.

The cop gave Grandma Tess a speeding ticket. As he walked back to his patrol car I heard him say over the radio to his buddy, "I sure as hell would hate to see what Granny would do on Route 206!"

Conclusion

Humor is not a new strategic educational tool, but it is woefully underutilized in online courses at the University of New Mexico. The methodology employed in this research shined a light on some basic reasons for non-use of humor at UNM; namely the hesitation (fear) to use humor, the fear of what students think about them if they use humor, and the hesitation (reluctance) to recommend or share the humor pedagogy with fellow faculty. Mary Kay Morrison (2008) called it “humorphobia.”

Two recommendations come to mind regarding the use of the humor pedagogy at UNM. First, since one of the study’s findings concerns the fear of what students think about the use of humor in online courses, I believe a second study that polls the students at UNM – across all departments – should be conducted via an anonymous questionnaire. Once completed the result should be published by UNM for faculty and staff to see. Maybe then this fear of what students will think about the use of humor will be resolved.

Second, the University of New Mexico should consider creating a course called “instructional humor” either through Learning Sciences or the Department of Education. Although incongruity, superiority and relief theories may be the essentials of humor, they do not enlighten educators on how to apply humor in an instructional manner for learning. Wanzer, Frymier, & Irwin (2010) proposed a theory that incorporates the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion and the incongruity theory to describes how learning might be achieved by the use of instructional humor: students identify the humor incongruity and relate it to the objective to be learned thus increasing the chances of retention. So why can’t we teach this application here at UNM, New Mexico’s leading university?

Appendix 1

The University of New Mexico Consent to Participate in a Focus Group

Introduction

Patricia Boverie, PhD, who is the principal investigator (PI) and student investigator John T. Granato from the Department of Organization, Information, and Library Sciences (OI&LS) are conducting a research study. The study is entitled, “The Use of Humor in Online Teaching at UNM: An Exploratory Study.” You are receiving this consent form because you are an Instructional Designer (ID) who supports faculty in the development of online courses at the University of New Mexico (UNM) and have responded to an e-mail requesting your assistance in this study.

The purpose of this study is to examine how faculty at UNM use humor in online teaching. As an ID you are in a perfect position to recommend or not recommend the use of humor to faculty teaching online courses. Please note that this dissertation study is not funded by any organization outside of OI&LS. If you are willing to participate in this case study, the following actions will occur:

1. Send an e-mail to jtgranat@unm.edu entitled “Humor Focus Group” with your name, phone number, and department.
2. Upon receipt of the e-mail, John t. Granato will e-mail you this consent form. Please read it carefully.
3. If you consent to be a participant, forward the e-mail sent to you with the attached consent form back to John T. Granato (jtgranat@unm.edu) stating you give consent. The consent form and the e-mail will be stapled together and be construed as giving consent.
4. Upon receipt of the forwarded e-mail, the student investigator will forward to you the Opinio link for the questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Please complete the questionnaire before the individual interview session.

How Long will I be in the Focus Group?

Your participation in the interview process will take approximately one to one and a half hours of your time, and unless there are some unforeseeable problems, you will not have any other sessions, except for verification of the interview transcripts to ensure validity and accuracy of the study.

What are the risks or side effects of being in the Focus Group?

With the exception of possible stress, emotional distress, and inconvenience, your participation risk for the focus group session is almost non-existent.

What are the benefits of being in this focus group?

There are no real benefits to you from participating in this focus group. However, it is hoped that information gained from the whole study (focus group and case study) will instill you and the faculty you support with valid reasons to use the positive psychology of humor in online courses at UNM.

How will the information be kept confidential?

The signed consent forms, the questionnaires, the digital voice and video recordings, and the signed transcripts will be treated as “confidential.” The above items will be password protected and kept in the OI&LS Secretary’s Office. The information contained in your documents and recordings will be used by the principle investigator and the student researcher to generate the study’s findings. The UNM Institutional Review Board (IRB), that oversees all studies at UNM, may be permitted to access your records. There also may be times when the principle investigator and student researcher are required by law to share your information. However, for the generation of the study’s findings, your name or any identifying information will not be used in any published reports.

What is the cost of taking part in this focus group?

There are no monetary costs associated with the participation of this focus group.

Will I be paid for taking part in this focus group?

No. No payment of any kind will be made for taking part in this focus group.

How will I know if you learn something new that may change my mind about participating in the focus group?

You will be informed of any significant new findings that become available during the course of the whole study, such as changes in risks or benefits from participating in the focus group.

Can I stop being in the focus group once I begin?

Yes. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate at any time or point in the focus group.

Whom can I call with questions about my rights as a research participant?

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can call the UNM Office of the Institutional Review Board (OIRB) at 505-277-2644. The OIRB is a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving human participants. For more information, you may also access the OIRB at <http://research.unm.edu/irb>.

CONSENT

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in this focus group. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided. By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research participant.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this consent form, I agree to participate in the focus group of this study. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

Appendix 2

HUMOR BELIEF INVENTORY

Please answer by selecting the most appropriate score: 1 = seldom/never or disagree to 5 = often/all of the time

Assessment	1	2	3	4	5
1. Humor is a skill that I use with intent and purpose.					
2. I have a good sense of humor.					
3. I intentionally use humor to build a relationship with students and educators.					
4. I intentionally use humor to optimize learning.					
5. I know and understand my humor style.					
6. I believe humor is inherited.					
7. If a classroom of students is laughing and joking, an observer will assume the class is not learning					
8. Humor can be an effective tool for students with serious behavior challenges.					
9. Humor relieves stress.					
10. Humor promotes healing.					
11. Humor increases productivity.					
12. Humor requires a culture of trust.					
13. The ability to laugh at yourself can be used to gain the trust of others.					
14. The "class clown" is usually perceived in our school environment as being a disruption to learning.					
15. Humor is the #1 characteristic students desire in a teacher.					
16. Humor is not a measurable characteristic and therefore has a questionable role in education.					
17. If there is a perception that I am a fun seeker, I will not be considered professional.					
18. While humor is important, learning requires a serious work environment with little time for fun, humor and play.					
19. I am not comfortable initiating fun, play, and humor in my current school culture.					
20. Playing and having fun in the classroom is a waste of precious learning time.					

Note: From *Using Humor to Maximize Living: Connecting with Humor* (p. 217), by M. K. Morrison, 2012, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education. Copyright 2012 by Mary Kay Morrison. Reprinted with permission.

Appendix 3

The University of New Mexico Consent to Participate in a Research Case Study October 19, 2015

Introduction

Patricia Boverie, PhD, who is the principal investigator (PI) and student investigator John T. Granato from the Department of Organization, Information, and Library Sciences (OI&LS) are conducting a research study. The study is entitled, “The Use of Humor in Online Teaching at UNM: An Exploratory Study.” You are receiving this consent form because you are an instructor who has taught online courses at the University of New Mexico (UNM) and have responded to an e-mail requesting your assistance in this study.

The purpose of this study is to examine how faculty at UNM use humor in online teaching. As a faculty member you are in a perfect position to offer valuable insight into the use of humor in online courses at UNM. Please note that this dissertation study is not funded by any organization outside of OI&LS. If you are willing to participate in this case study, the following actions will occur:

5. Send an e-mail to jtgranat@unm.edu entitled “Humor Case Study” with your name, phone number, and department.
6. Upon receipt of the e-mail, John t. Granato will e-mail you this consent form. Please read it carefully.
7. If you consent to be a participant, forward the e-mail sent to you with the attached consent form back to John T. Granato (jtgranat@unm.edu) stating you give consent. The consent form and the e-mail will be stapled together and be construed as giving consent.
8. Upon receipt of the forwarded e-mail, the student investigator will forward to you the Opinio link for the questionnaire. The questionnaire will take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Please complete the questionnaire before the individual interview session.

How Long will I be in the Case Study?

Your participation in the interview process will take approximately one to one and a half hours of your time, and unless there are some unforeseeable problems, you will not have any other sessions, except for verification of the interview transcripts to ensure validity and accuracy of the study.

What are the risks or side effects of being in the case study?

With the exception of possible stress, emotional distress, and inconvenience, your participation risk for the case study interview is almost non-existent.

What are the benefits of being in this case study?

There are no real benefits to you from participating in this case study. However, it is hoped that information gained from the whole study (focus group and case study) will instill in the faculty valid reasons to use the positive psychology of humor in online courses at UNM.

How will the information be kept confidential?

The signed consent forms, the questionnaires, the digital voice recordings, and the signed transcripts will be treated as “confidential.” The above items will be password protected and kept in the OI&LS Secretary’s Office. The information contained in your documents and recordings will be used by the principle investigator and the student researcher to generate the study’s findings. The UNM Institutional Review Board (IRB), that oversees all studies at UNM, may be permitted to access your records. There also may be times when the principle investigator and student researcher are required by law to share your information. However, for the generation of the study’s findings, your name or any identifying information will not be used in any published reports.

What is the cost of taking part in this case study?

There are no monetary costs associated with the participation of this study.

Will I be paid for taking part in this focus group?

No. No payment of any kind will be made for taking part in this study.

How will I know if you learn something new that may change my mind about participating in the case study?

You will be informed of any significant new findings that become available during the course of the whole study, such as changes in risks or benefits from participating in the case study.

Can I stop being in the focus group once I begin?

Yes. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate at any time or point in the focus group.

Whom can I call with questions about my rights as a research participant?

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can call the UNM Office of the Institutional Review Board (OIRB) at 505-277-2644. The OIRB is a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving human participants. For more information, you may also access the OIRB at <http://research.unm.edu/irb>.

CONSENT

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in this research case study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided. By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research participant.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions and all questions have been answered to my satisfaction. By signing this consent form, I agree to participate in the case study. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

Appendix 4a

The University of New Mexico E-Mail Solicitation: Instructional Designers

Dear Instructional Designers at UNM,

Dr. Patricia Boverie, Ph.D., the principal investigator, and John T. Granato, the student investigator, are conducting a research study entitled: “The Use of Humor in Online Teaching at UNM: An Exploratory Study.”

The researchers are soliciting your help as a volunteer participant for a Focus Group of up to 12 instructional designers.

If you agree to volunteer as a participant in this study, please forward this email to the student investigator (jtgranat@unm.edu). He will email you a consent form with more information.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Appendix 4b

The University of New Mexico E-Mail Solicitation: UNM Faculty

Dear UNM Faculty,

Dr. Patricia Boverie, Ph.D., the principal investigator, and John T. Granato, the student investigator, are conducting a research study entitled: “The Use of Humor in Online Teaching at UNM: An Exploratory Study.”

The researchers are soliciting your help as a volunteer participant for this study. They are seeking up to 12 UNM faculty members for a case study interview.

If you agree to volunteer as a participant in this study, please forward this email to the student investigator (jtgranat@unm.edu). He will email you a consent form with more information.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Appendix 5

The University of New Mexico Informed Consent for Surveys Questionnaire on the Use of Humor in Online Teaching

John T. Granato, from the Department of Organization, Information and Learning Sciences, is conducting a research study. This research is studying faculty perceptions of using humor in online courses at the University of New Mexico. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are currently teaching or have taught an academic course using online methodology.

Your participation will involve answering multiple choice question stored in the University of New Mexico's eSurvey System (Opinio). The survey should take approximately 5 minutes or less to complete. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate. There are no names or identifying information associated with this survey. The survey includes questions such as "Have you ever used humor in your online courses?" You can refuse to answer any of the questions at any time. There are no known risks in this study, but some individuals may experience discomfort when answering questions. All reported data will be kept for two years in a locked file in OI&LS Office and then destroyed by shredding.

The findings from this project will provide information on faculty perceptions of humor usage in online courses at the University of New Mexico. If published, results will be presented in summary form only.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact John T. Granato at 505-459-6778. If you have questions regarding your legal rights as a research subject, you may call the University of New Mexico Office of the IRB (OIRB) at (505) 277-2644.

By checking the "Continue" circle and clicking the "Continue" button you will be agreeing to participate in the above described research study. By checking the "Exit" circle and then clicking the "Continue" button you are not agreeing to participate in the above described research study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Patricia Boverie, Ph.D.
Professor, OI&LS

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