

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

TEACHER-INITIATED HUMOUR; YOU MUST BE JOKING: A  
NATURALISTIC CASE STUDY

by

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**A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

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## Abstract

Avner Ziv (1988) laments that much of educational humour research is done in settings that have little in common with the classroom. It was hoped that this investigation would provide teachers with some practical information, offering teachers a perspective on humour based on a real teacher's experience in a real classroom.

The objective of this study was to explore and examine the effects of teacher-initiated humour in the classroom as experienced by its participants. A review of the literature led to the hypothesis that teacher-initiated humour served a constructive function in the classroom. The investigation took place in an independent Christian high school using two intact grade nine Health classes. The instructor was an individual acknowledged by students to use humour frequently in class.

Since the purpose of this investigation was to explore, it was decided that the perceptions of all the participants would be necessary. These parameters dictated a qualitative approach. Illuminative evaluation methods (in the ethnographic tradition) were used to gather and analyze classroom data. Interviews, fieldnotes, questionnaires, classroom audio-tapes, and journal writings tracked the happenings, interactions and understandings of the participants. This provided a snapshot of the effects of teacher-initiated humour within this particular setting.

The results of this investigation (with respect to various limitations) only partially confirmed the hypothesis offered earlier. The metaphor of humour as dynamite was offered to illustrate the different categories of functions. Constructively, teacher-initiated humour served as: motivator and creator of a relaxed classroom atmosphere. In its detrimental form, humour was seen as: time waster, participation limiter, and relationship dismantler. An unexpected

outcome of this investigation was the use of story as a vehicle for humour and instruction.

Fourteen recommendations were offered for research, practice, and teacher education.

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## Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION TO HUMOUR

Sevareid's Law: The chief cause of problems is solutions.

Humour. Comparatively little has been written about the worth of humour, even though it is a regular part of everyday life. Television consistently has comedy shows as its top-rated programs. A quick glance at the Nielsen ratings for the period September 21 to 27 (see below) shows that of the ten top programs, eight were situation comedies.

### PRIME-TIME TV, U.S.

Nielsen, Sept. 21-27, 1993

1. Murphy Brown	CBS
2. Roseanne	ABC
3. Coach	ABC
4. Cheers	NBC
5. Hearts Afire	CBS
6. Home Improvement	ABC
7. Love and War	CBS
8. Murder, She Wrote	CBS
9. 60 Minutes	CBS
10. Evening Shade	CBS

A salesperson from Coles Bookstore (Polo Park, Winnipeg) commented that during the Christmas season, humour books (Calvin and Hobbes,

The Far Side, For Better or Worse, etc.) are typically their "hottest" sellers. Hardly a day goes by when one does not hear a joke, experience a laughable moment, or see something funny.

And yet for years, even centuries, humour has been an issue of extremely low priority in education. Humour was not considered appropriate, nor productive in the classroom. The image of the instructor being strict, serious, and scholarly was likely a product of the educational institutions of the Middle Ages (Hastings, 1936). Some of the most prestigious learning institutions of that time were "student universities". Since students paid for the majority of the university costs, including wages paid directly to instructors (Munro, 1899), they (the students) had considerable control over many university matters including academic agenda (Bryant et al., 1979). Instructors were "strongly encouraged" to closely follow the text, cover a specified amount of academic material, and explain the more difficult problems presented in the course (Haskins, 1957). Given these restrictions, it is not difficult to see why humour was seldom used in the classroom.

Social norms have changed and so has the perception of the use of humour in teaching (Highet, 1950; Hill, 1988; Wandersee, 1982). Popular television series such as The Wonder Years, Head of the Class, The Cosby Show, and Beverly Hills 90210 frequently combine humour with school settings. In a personal telephone call to John Sullivan, a Winnipeg Free Press editor, he stated that Calvin and Hobbes, The Far Side, and For Better Or Worse were their most

popular cartoon strips. These cartoon strips frequently use humour in classroom situations. Square One Television, 3-2-1 Contact, and Sesame Street are long running PBS children's programs. All three of these children's programs are fast paced, educational, and humorous. A preliminary study (Bryant et al., 1980) indicated that humour may be helpful in keeping children's attention and increasing their retention of material. It is evident that the combination of humour and education are solidly in the public consciousness.

Teachers themselves are very interested in the use of humour. Michael Serra, a high school math teacher in San Francisco, has authored a text called Discovering Geometry (1989). The text teaches geometry using collaborative learning skills richly mixed with humorous problems and questions. According to Monica Grant (August 1992), spokesperson for Key Curriculum Press (publishers of Discovering Geometry), this text is the official primary text of the following states: California, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, and South Carolina.

Teacher interest in using humour as an educational tool was vividly illustrated at the 1989 National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Conference in Orlando, Florida. Several sessions during the conference dealt with humour as a classroom tool. Each of these sessions was filled to capacity (just over two hundred). Many who wanted to attend could not get in. Teachers are professionals, generally working at improving their teaching

abilities and trying to provide what is best for the students. Therefore, if teachers, with their presence and active participation at these sessions, acknowledge the value and importance of humour, further investigation is warranted.

PURPOSE:

As previously mentioned, sessions dealing with teacher humour at the 1989 NCTM conference were very well attended. Generally, all seats at these sessions were filled. On several occasions people had to stand in the back, sit in the aisles, or sit on the floor in front of the stage if they wanted to attend. This would seem to indicate a widespread interest and use of humour by teachers.

Unfortunately, other than national conferences of this nature, where a tremendous variety of sessions can be offered, few institutions, organizations or journals provide guidance for teachers in this area. In Manitoba for example, the universities of Brandon, Winnipeg, or Manitoba do not usually offer any courses that deal with teacher-initiated humour. Professional teacher organizations such as MAMT (Manitoba Association of Mathematics Teachers), STAM (Science Teachers Association of Manitoba), and MSSTA (Manitoba Social Science Teachers Association) seldom, if ever, offer workshops in this area of teaching. Even the journals provided by these organizations and others with a good circulation base among Manitoba teachers (Arithmetic Teacher, Physics Teacher,

and Mathematics Teacher) rarely discuss the use of humour and its implications.

The purpose of this study then is to explore teacher-initiated humour and discover its effects in the classroom, with the intent of giving teachers a better understanding of teacher-initiated humour.

There are three different perspectives to consider when evaluating the effects of teacher humour in the classroom. There is that of the teacher, those of the students, and that of the teacher-researcher. To focus on only one perspective (teacher, student, or teacher-researcher) would give an incomplete picture. Each has some important and relevant information to contribute and therefore this study will look at all three components.

Given these desires and parameters, the following guiding question was developed:

What are the effects of teacher-initiated humour as experienced by the participants (students, teacher, and teacher-researcher) of this study?

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF HUMOUR:

This section begins with a historical perspective of humour and then proceeds to four categories of humour theory. This is followed by an overview of the stages of humour development with particular emphasis on the stages relevant to this study. The



difficult process of defining humour is then discussed. The chapter concludes with a review of the literature on humour and education and the common themes that evolve from it.

Humour is obtained from the latin term "umor", meaning moisture. As late as the Middle Ages people believed that a person's temperament and features were determined by four bodily fluids called humours (Goetz, 1985). The individual with the ideal temperament (i.e. healthy mind, healthy body) had a perfect mix of the four humours; blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. If that proper balance was not kept, an individual's temperament would change accordingly. Too much phlegm and the individual would become phlegmatic (sluggish). An excess of blood resulted in a person being sanguine (cheerful). An overabundance of yellow bile made one choleric (irritable). An ample amount of black bile produced an individual that was melancholic (sad). Both Aristotle and Plato believed that laughter could be used to correct this imbalance (Zinger, 1985). In a way, this belief still exists. Many educators encounter students with various difficulties (test anxiety, relate poorly to instructors, not motivated, poor retention of material, etc.). In other words, an imbalance exists in those particular students. Some individuals (Ziv, 1988; Vance, 1987; Wandersee, 1982; Reavis, 1988; Hranitz, 1989; Terry and Woods, 1975) feel that humour can restore the proper balance, just as both Aristotle and Plato believed that laughter could keep the four humours in balance.

## HUMOUR THEORIES:

This section provides a brief review of some of the major theories of humour. Later in the study these contributions will be examined for the purpose of better understanding the functions of humour in the classroom.

Since ancient Greece a variety of philosophers and thinkers have pondered on the phenomena of humour and laughter, resulting in a variety of different theories. Humour theories are like parts of a jig-saw puzzle; no single piece makes up the entire puzzle. In the same way, no one humour theory encompasses all aspects of humour. But like the puzzle, when the pieces (theories) are put together a good picture results.

Both Lefcourt and Martin (1986) and Keith-Spiegel (1972) have analyzed and categorized the various humour theories. Four categories are presented, the first from Keith-Spiegel and the remaining three from Lefcourt and Martin.

### 1) Biological, Instinct and Evolution Theory

Keith-Spiegel (1972) declares that laughter and humour potentials are "built in" to the nervous mechanism and serve some adaptive function. Laughter is viewed as useful physiologically because it helps enrich the blood supply with oxygen, it restores homeostasis, stabilizes blood pressure, relaxes the system, and tends to make one feel good.

As an educational tool, humour can keep students alert (enriched oxygenated blood) and therefore more attentive (and

hopefully more participatory) to events taking place in the classroom. This particular theory also implies that humour can create a relaxed classroom climate (i.e. students relaxed, homeostasis restored). The result; a more favourable learning environment.

This theory also perceives laughter as an ancient form of communication and as the remaining vestiges of primitive struggles and hostilities.

## 2) Arousal Theory

The arousal theory concentrates on the affective domain. Humour (and laughter) reduce built up tension or energy (Spencer, 1860; Freud, 1958) and brings pleasure related to changes in arousal. Examples of this type of humour would include; the pompous individual that slips on a banana peel, uncontrollable nervous laughter that may occur during a bank robbery, and the changes in arousal and pleasure during joke telling.

The main role of humour is that of a stress reducer. Studies (Lefcourt and Martin, 1986; Singer, 1969; Berlyne, 1972) indicate that humour and laughter create a net decrease in arousal (lower blood pressure, less muscle tension, decreased heart rate and skin conductance). The possible benefits in education are obvious. Humour reduces stress thereby lessening student anxiety and possibly tension between teacher and student (i.e. improved rapport). The arousal theory also suggests using humour simply for enjoyment, making humour a motivational tool.

### 3) Incongruity Theory

The incongruity theory relies on the cognitive elements of humour. Two usually disparate ideas, concepts or situations are brought together in an unexpected or surprising way. For example:

A blue pick-up truck was driving down Henderson Highway one day last summer. The box of the pick-up must have been holding over one hundred penguins. A police officer saw this and quickly pulled the truck over on to the side of the road. The officer walked up to the driver and bellowed, "What do you think you're doing with those penguins?" The truck driver replied timidly, "Nothing, we're just going for a little ride." The officer retorted, "Well, I want you to take those penguins to the zoo right now!!" At this point the police officer thought that everything was taken care of. However, the next day, as he was driving down Henderson Highway, the officer saw the same blue pick-up. The truck still had the penguins, only this time they were wearing sunglasses. The officer pulled the truck over again. Angrily walking up to the truck he growled, "I thought I told you to take those penguins to the zoo!!" "I did," responded the truck driver "today I'm taking them to the beach."

Incongruity is humour of the implausible, the ludicrous; the "bubble bursts". Incongruity (irony) is also the humour of the postmodernist. What may have been viewed from a serious sense is now seen from a totally different perspective. Pleasure and laughter result.

Humour of this variety challenges student creativity and intellect, since things are seen from a different (and are therefore interpreted) point of view.

#### 4) Superiority Theory

The superiority theory has the longest history of the four theories mentioned. Its roots date back to Plato and Aristotle in ancient Greece. It is humour resulting from a sense of superiority obtained from the misfortunes of others or of the former, more naive self. Humour of this kind is aggressive and sardonic and is usually an attempt to increase ones own self esteem. Racist and sexist humour are cornerstones of this type of humour.

This form of humour reveals the potential "dark side" of humour in the classroom. Humour in this form can be used (by teachers) to ridicule and belittle in order to have power and control. This issue is explored further in the literature review.

#### HUMOUR DEVELOPMENT:

When discussing humour and its use in the classroom, it is appropriate to note the stages of humour development among students. In this way the suitability and effectiveness of humour used in any particular study may be properly evaluated. Bryant et al. (1979) and Canzler (1980) found that developmentally, children varied significantly in their humour appreciation. By identifying these differences, Bryant et al. felt that humour could be used effectively in educating children at the different developmental levels. The use of age appropriate humour should enable teachers

to maximize the benefits in areas such as motivation, retention, and rapport.

Tamashiro (1980) identified five stages in humour development. Since the focus of this investigation is on grade nine students, only those stages relevant to this group will be discussed in detail. A very brief description will be given for the other stages.

#### 1) Presocial/Symbiotic

This first stage could just as well be called infant humour. The smile first appears about one to three weeks after birth and progresses to a laugh by the third month. Smiling and laughter is first associated with satiation experienced after feeding, or by the feeling of being in a safe environment. Later, the child will smile at new objects, funny faces, and noises (provided that these events are not presented in a traumatic manner).

#### 2) Impulsive

The impulsive stage is usually associated with the preschool years. Fantasy plays a central role in this stage of humour development. Children from the age of about two to six invent objects or scenes. They are very much amused by inner play, often humming and talking to themselves as they enjoy their game.

### 3) Self-protective

In this stage the child's interest switches from impulsive to concrete self-interests. They begin to protect their territory, hence self-protective stage. Children also understand the concept of blame but often refuse to accept it, preferring to use the excuse, "it's not my fault". Some children are very manipulative and are frequently motivated by the fear of being caught.

### 4) Conformist

At a developmental level, many students taking part in this investigation were be at this phase. A significant change occurs when children begin to identify with a social group. A major shift in the personality development of the child results. Children realize that one is safe and secure as long as they follow the rules. Acceptance in a social group and the ability to get along with others in the group is highly valued, thus the appropriate term conformist stage. During these years children enjoy conventional humour (i.e. unoriginal jokes which include riddles, moron jokes, concrete puns, and knock-knock jokes). The memorization of jokes and riddles is a notable feature of this stage and is particularly popular with children ages seven to eleven:

Q: Why did the moron throw the clock out of the window?

A: Because he wanted to see time fly. (Tamashiro p. 72, 1980)

As children reach junior high (and the onset of puberty), students become more interested in reproduction and their sexual identity. Jokes now begin to take on a more aggressive sexual theme.

The use of racial and ethnic humour is also common at this stage. Making fun of or putting down other groups demonstrates the desire of being in the right group.

#### 5) Conscientious

As students move on to high school and college, many are able to differentiate between their own set of values and those of their social group. Their conscience guides thought more than social desirability does. Individuals at this level enjoy original, good natured humour. Anecdotes taken from real life experiences are common. A strong sense of values may also be a source of humour at this stage:

The feminist who was giving a speech in support of the Equal Rights Amendment was interrupted by the deep voice of a heckler from the crowd: "Don't you wish that you were a man?" "No," she replied "how about you?" (Tamashiro p. 72, 1980)

For this investigation, some of the more mature students were at this level of development. At this point, it may be a useful reminder to state that these various developmental stages are not rigid. It is possible for each stage to include a variety of ages. It should just be noted that children in the early stages do not understand humour found in the later stages. However, individuals



in later stages can appreciate humour that dominates earlier levels.

#### DEFINITION OF HUMOUR:

There is always a well known solution for every problem .... neat, plausible, and wrong.  
(H.L. Mencken as quoted by D. Hill p. 35, 1988)

Rarely does a day go by where one does not experience humour. Be it the boardroom, the classroom, parties, or just watching television, there always seems to be something to joke or laugh about.

Defining humour presents an intriguing problem. Everybody has experienced it, most can give examples of it, but even though it is one of the most fundamental of human experiences, few can define it. Elusive, some authors have bypassed this "little inconvenience" by simply not providing a definition (McMorris et al., 1983; Brown and Itzig, 1976; Tamashiro, 1980; Korobkin, 1988). Others preferred to give examples of humour (Ziv, 1988; Townsend and Mahoney, 1981; Colwell and Wigle, 1984; Whitmer, 1986). A brave few ventured forth definitions. Vance (1987) states that humour:

is an emotional experience resulting from the perception of an incongruity or discrepancy based upon present expectations, and characterized by pleasure and increased cognitive arousal.  
(p. 83)

Wandersee (1982) said humour could be:

defined as a situation that stimulates laughter or amusement upon cerebral evaluation of it. (p. 212)

Peterson (1980) says that humour is:

seeing an idea in two self-consistent but usually incompatible frames of reference. It involves a spontaneous flash of insight that shows a familiar situation in a new light. (p. 646)

Foster expresses the frustration probably felt by many who attempt to come up with the definitive statement of humour:

any one searching for an abiding, precise, definition of humour will probably be disappointed. (Foster as quoted by Zinger p. 14, 1985)

Perhaps the best working definition is the one provided by Webster's Dictionary (1994) which defines humour as:

the quality that makes something funny, amusing, or ludicrous; comicality.

This definition will help guide the construction of a field note sheet used in classroom observations to record humorous events. These observations will later be used to develop interview questions and to help formulate outcomes of teacher-initiated humour.

## OVERVIEW

The succeeding chapters probe further into the effects of teacher-initiated humour. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on this subject and categorizes the effects of teacher-initiated humour as seen by various studies and authors. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology. The setting and the adaptation of **illuminative evaluation** to this particular investigation is discussed. Chapter 4 encounters the analyzation and interpretation of the data. The data is presented and the various effects of teacher-initiated humour, as found in this investigation, are given. Chapter 5 completes this investigation with a brief summary of the study followed by some conclusions with regards to the investigation findings. Recommendations concerning future research and teacher practice and training are also presented. The chapter closes with a discussion of the fit between the hypothesis and the findings of this investigation.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The amount of research related to humour has been small relative to other fields. However, an ERIC search revealed that the last thirty years has witnessed rapid growth in this topic. The effect of humour in classroom settings is still largely unexplored. Of the material and studies that do exist, several common themes on the effects of humour are revealed.

#### 1) Motivation

... fifty five minutes of work plus five minutes laughter are worth twice as much as sixty minutes of unvaried work. (Hight p.53, 1950)

One of the main advantages of humour may be its ability to turn a bored, inattentive learner into one that is more "alert" or "alive". Students are then apt to be more receptive to the presentation and acquisition of learning material (Zillman et al., 1980; Wandersee, 1982; Vance, 1987; W. Kelly, 1983; Colwell and Wagle, 1984). There is physiological support for the view that humour may increase an individual's attentiveness. Laughter triggers the production of catecholamine (Cornett, 1986) in the brain, which in turn increases alertness and likely increases receptiveness to new information.

Based on the increased attentiveness premise, several teachers describe methods and ideas they used to create interest in the subject matter. Spielberg (1981) mentions using Dr. Seuss as a way

of teaching geometric concepts. Witmer (1986) talks of her success in using humorous literature in "avoiding dullness". In a similar manner, Peterson (1980) discusses the use of cartoons to provide enjoyable physics problems. Goor (1989) advocated the use of nonsense words to motivate students and provide relief during long stretches of uninteresting activity. Although the above examples are supported only through the authors personal experiences, the concept of using humorous lesson material to motivate students seems fairly widespread (Colwell and Wigle, 1984; Kennedy, 1985; Rosenthal, 1981; Dodge, 1981; Wandersee, 1982).

William Glasser (1990), in his book *The Quality School: Managing students without coercion*, identifies fun as a basic human need. Through many interviews, students communicated to Glasser that teachers who use humour to inspire, to create interest, to entertain, to make the class fun, become part of the students quality world. When something becomes part of a student's quality world the result is high quality work.

There is also accumulating empirical evidence that students are motivated by and enjoy learning with a teacher who uses humour. In studies (Bedley, 1982; Hranitz, 1989; Reavis, 1988) done of award winning teachers (i.e. teachers described as achieving excellence by students and/or peers) one of the commonalities noted was that most of these teachers injected humour to motivate, inspire, or add enjoyment to the class. In a survey using elementary school teachers, Hranitz (1989) found that of twenty-five positive teaching qualities listed, having a sense of humour

ranked sixth. In a 1982 study (Caruso), secondary students of English and Physical Education were asked to select their most favoured teacher traits. Humour placed fifth out of twenty listed characteristics. Bryant et al. (1980) noted significant positive correlations exist between teachers' use of humour and students' positive evaluation of their teachers.

Several authors (Ziv, 1988; Hill, 1988; Kelly and Kelly, 1982) used the analogy of a good teacher as a good actor. Like actors, teachers must make their "performance" lively and interesting in order to gain the attention of their "audience". Humour is seen as one of a variety of useful tools available in order to have a successful "performance".

The benefits of using humour to motivate students is two-fold. First, and perhaps most obvious, is that it makes the learning experience pleasurable. Cornett (1986) calls the use of classroom humour as great, "cheap entertainment". In this situation, enjoyment is seen as an end in itself (and why not!).

Secondly, since humour causes increased attentiveness this should translate into increased achievement, retention or comprehension.

## 2) Retention and Comprehension

In a 1980 study, Zillman et al. exposed elementary students to educational television programs that contained either humorous or nonhumorous segments. The acquisition of new information was recorded after each event. Their findings:

strongly support the view that humour in educational programs for children, even if the humorous stimuli are rather arbitrarily interspersed, fosters increased attentiveness and ultimately, superior information acquisition. The data regarding visual attention leave no doubt about the fact that exposure to humorous stimuli created high levels of attentiveness and that these elevated levels of attentiveness extended into the exposure to educational materials. (p.178)

Vance (1987) examined the effects of three different, incongruity-based humour designs on the recognition and recall of information by elementary school children. Group 1 had the humour experience immediately prior to the presentation of new information. Group 2 received the humour experience several days before the new information was given out. Group 3 had humour integrated within the new information and group 4 acted as the control group. Vance claims that:

the results of this study support the assertion that the presentation of contiguous humour can lead to improved immediate memory and retention of subsequently presented messages. These results are particularly true with regard to recall of new information. It is possible that humour may be especially important where higher levels of learning, such as recall, are desired, and which may be more amenable to retrieval and long term retention. (p. 94)

Whether humour was presented several days before, immediately prior to, or integrated as part of the new information package, Vance

found retention improved significantly. The reasoning is that humour may raise the arousal level of students to an optimal level that would facilitate the processing of information.

Vance (1987) and Zillman et al. (1980) indicated that non-content based humour is effective in improving retention. Not all researchers agree with this conclusion (Kaplan and Pascoe, 1977; Desberg, 1981; Ziv, 1988). Kaplan and Pascoe (1977), using more than five hundred university students, discovered that:

the use of humour significantly increased recall for only those test items based (directly) on humorous examples. (p.65)

Desberg (1981) found that humour directly related to the educational message increased retention. Desberg saw this as particularly useful where rote learning was involved. Using a university statistics class, Ziv (1988) used concept based humour in order to teach those concepts deemed to be the most important taught in the course. The results were highly significant for concept based humour and Ziv advises teachers that:

when planning a course, the main concepts should be delineated and the humour related to these concepts, intending to make them clearer, should be interjected in the appropriate places. (p.13)

Although reaction is mixed to the type of humour that should be used to increase retention (concept based versus non-concept



based), it seems evident that humour may have some practical use in this area. Humour raises the arousal level of students to an optimal level that facilitates the processing of information (Lefcourt and Martin, 1986; Morreal, 1983; Godkewitsch, 1972). The disadvantage of humour in this situation is that humour may raise the arousal level too high for already anxious students. This may hinder the processing of information (Townsend and Mahoney, 1981).

### 3) Test Anxiety and Achievement

The effect of humour on arousal levels may also play an important role in the relationship between anxiety levels and test achievement. Many researchers agree (King et al., 1976 Naveh-Benjamin et al., 1987; Wendell and Tobias, 1983; Rapport, 1984; Harnisch and Ryan, 1983) that students with high test anxiety tend to obtain lower scores than students with low to moderate test anxiety. It is argued that humour lowers high anxiety levels to more moderate ones, allowing students to perform better on tests.

The use of humour to reduce anxiety has been supported in the past by various psychological treatises. Levine (1969), based on a Freudian interpretation, argued that:

humor gives pleasure by permitting momentary gratification of some hidden and forbidden wish, while the anxiety that normally causes the inhibition of the wish is reduced. A joke or cartoon releases tension by making light of the forbidden impulse, treating it as trivial or universal. The sudden release of inhibition comes as a pleasant surprise. (p.7)

Keith-Spiegel (1972) describes humour as:

affording relief from strain or constraint or releasing excess tension. (Goldstein and McGhee eds. p.10, 1972)

Despite the accolades, results concerning the usefulness of humour in test situations are mixed at best. Townsend and Mahoney (1981) illustrated the negative effects of humour in test situations in a study using university students enrolled in a first year psychology course. Based on anxiety test scores, students were divided into low, moderate, and high anxiety groups. Half of each anxiety group was placed in the humour treatment group while the other half of each group was placed in the nonhumour group. The Townsend and Mahoney study challenges the popular idea that humour enhances test performance. They found that students with high anxiety had lower achievement on the humorous test version than high anxious students on the nonhumorous version. Low and moderate anxiety level students had comparable scores on the humorous and nonhumorous test versions.

The Terry and Woods (1975) study employed intact third and fifth grade classes. The testing packages (one humorous, one nonhumorous) contained four problems designed to test mathematical and verbal performance. The results were not conclusive. In grade three, there was no significant difference in verbal performance between the humour and nonhumour groups. However, mathematical performance was significantly better for the nonhumour group as

compared to the humour group. For the fifth grade students, humour did not significantly affect mathematical performance. The results for verbal performance were mixed. For the first verbal problem, the humour group performed significantly better than the nonhumour group. The opposite occurred in the second verbal problem. In the end, Terry and Woods concluded that "humour may have disparate effects on classroom test performance" (p.185).

The results of the Brown and Itzig (1976) study using sixty-three psychology undergraduates presented a contradiction of their earlier hypothesis that humour would reduce test anxiety and thus increase test scores. The high anxious-nonhumour group scored significantly higher than did the high anxious-humour group. In addition to this, low anxious students performed significantly better when given the humorous test version. An interesting point of this study was a survey that showed that both high and low anxious students consistently stated that the humorous questions helped relieve their anxiety (although the results did not always support this belief).

McMorris et al. (1983) discovered no significant test score difference between their humour and nonhumour groups. Since test scores were unaffected and students favoured humour, McMorris et al. concluded that humorous items should be included on tests.

Adair and Siegel (1984) took a more novel approach to humour and test anxiety. The humour experience (taped humorous monologue) was provided prior to, rather than integrated with, the test. Stress was introduced by giving students limited time (seven

seconds) to answer each multiple choice question and students were told that the test was a measure of their ability to learn and use information. The results indicated that humour significantly improves performance under high stress conditions.

Although Hedl, Hedl, and Weaver (1978) did not directly compare academic performance and anxiety level, it does provide some interesting and useful information. The purpose of the Hedl et al. study was to see what effect cartoons would have on student anxiety levels. The researchers discovered that under high stress conditions, humour (in the form of cartoons) lowered anxiety levels to more moderate levels. Although no evidence is provided, the implication is clear; test scores for high anxious students could (should) increase.

Deborah Hill (1988), based on her personal experience as a classroom teacher, writes:

A small amount of humour of the harmless variety should not cause students to lose concentration and may help relieve some of their anxiety during the test. (p. 112)

Meredith Smith (1988) examined the role of humour in guidance counselling. Smith learned that humour enabled students to cope with the more serious side of life and that it created a climate better suited for decision making and problem solving. Based on her experiences, Smith recommends that classroom teachers use humour in their tests. Although research results are mixed on

increased achievement, Smith notes that humour does reduce anxiety. Smith goes on to report that if humour makes students feel positive then it is worth using.

#### 4) Stress

Test anxiety is only one form of stress that is present in the classroom. Of course there are others. Morreal (1983) discusses the link between the reduction of job stress and humour, which has definite implications for teachers:

The person who experiences a lot of frustration and stress on the job, as we all know, shows greater muscle tension, and often suffers from headaches, high blood pressure, and ulcers. Because humor allows us to cope better with stressful situations, it can markedly reduce tension and these other accompaniments of stress ... And the person who has a sense of humor is not just more relaxed in the face of potentially stressful situations, but is more flexible in his approach to any situation. (p. 108)

John Strickland (1969) reveals some of the benefits of humour that may certainly affect both students and teachers:

... humor serves a real and important function of tension or drive reduction.... The drive has now been channelled into an outlet that is now not only socially acceptable but also acceptable to the individual himself..... (p. 89, Levine ed.)

Several researchers advocate the use of humour in the classroom as a stress reducing technique. The ability, for teachers, to laugh at oneself is a positive way of coping with embarrassing situations (Cornett, 1986; Bedley, 1982; Williams et al., 1985; Hughs, 1983; Lefcourt and Martin, 1986). Humour also helps students and teachers to temporarily cope with seemingly insoluble problems (fear of failure, dislike, reduced self-esteem, anxiety over grades, personality conflicts, etc). Humour enables individuals to separate themselves from the problem and see it from a different perspective (Humphreys, 1990; Smith, 1988; Korobkin, 1988).

#### 5) Management

When humour is seen as valuing the ideals of a given group (i.e. classroom), humour may act to solidify the students (Martineau, 1972). In this way, group behaviour can be manipulated to more desired outcomes.

Gene Bedley (1982), a noted business consultant on creating positive organizational climates, suggests twenty different approaches to creating a good working environment. Although developed for businesses, these suggestions are designed for any individual (including teachers) concerned about producing a quality work environment. Bedley recommends using humour as an alternative to authoritarian discipline. Humour can be used to communicate rules or guidelines in a nonharsh, nonconfrontative, enjoyable, and effective way (Bedley, 1982; Pattavina, 1983). Goor (1989) cites

an example where the class needed to clean up a mess they created. Instead of ordering them to tidy everything up, Goor asked his elementary school students what the record was for class clean up. The students replied that it was ten seconds. Goor asked if they thought they could beat that record? After a flurry of activity, Goor lightly teased one student saying, "I tricked you!!". Humorous gestures (a wink, a nod, light teasing) can also help teachers encourage positive and appropriate classroom behaviour from students.

Cornett (1986) noted that humour is a useful tool for teachers for focusing student attention since good listening skills are needed. Humour makes the transition from class disruption to class lesson much smoother.

Humour also harbours a dark side (Ziv, 1988; Lefcourt and Martin, 1986). Hight (1950) reflects:

Some teachers speak of humour as a useful instrument with which to control their classes. This is a dangerous notion. Those who harbour it often make the mistake of using humour as nineteenth-century schoolmasters used the cane, to terrify the refractory and spur the slow. They begin by mocking a particular set of mistakes. They will even feel aggrieved if no boy in their class happens to be a fit subject for satire, and will single out a perfectly innocuous youth simply because they cannot teach without having a butt. (p. 54)

Although humour (as used in mocking or sarcasm) may be used effectively to control students it does so at an unacceptable cost.

Student self esteem and self worth are destroyed. Researchers (Ziv, 1988; Highet, 1950; Lefcourt and Martin, 1986) are clear. Humour, in the form of ridicule, is unethical for classroom management.

#### 6) Rapport

Reavis (1988), in his study of the commonalities of some extraordinary teachers, discovered that humour (tending toward self deprecation) was used in order to build up student self esteem and rapport. Humour, in the form of laughter, creates a bond. Finding the same thing funny is often the first step towards developing a friendship (Holland, 1982; Cornett, 1986; Mulkay, 1988; Martineau, 1972; Levine, 1969). Morreal (1983) agrees wholeheartedly, noting that:

Laughter is not only contagious, but in spreading from person to person, it has a cohesive effect. Laughing together unites people. (p. 115)

Gilbert Highet (1950) echoes this comment, saying:

The real purpose of humor in teaching ... is to link the pupils and the teacher, and to link them through enjoyment ... when people laugh together, they cease to be young and old, master and pupils, workers and driver, jailer and prisoners, they become a single group of human beings enjoying its existence. (p. 55)



Highet continues on this theme, stating:

One of the means of establishing rapport is humor. When a class and its teacher all laugh together, they cease for a time to be separated by individuality, authority, and age. They become a unit, feeling pleasure and enjoying the shared experience. (p. 56)

Humour acts as a social "lubricant" (Martineau, 1972; Mulkay, 1988). It initiates social interaction and keeps it moving smoothly.

laughter and humor are indeed like an invitation, be it an invitation to dinner, or an invitation to start a conversation: it aims at decreasing social distance.  
(Cosner as quoted by Gorham and Christophel p. 47, 1990)

Humour creates dialogue between students and teacher. The more dialogue, the more accepted, appreciated, and respected the teacher becomes. In a case study of a first year teacher, Williams et al. (1985) found that teacher-initiated humour helped gain group (i.e. class) acceptance. Hughs (1983) and Caruso (1982) found that in order to gain the appreciation and respect of students, teachers should not always be serious. Teachers need to laugh at practical jokes and should (must) be willing to participate in the more nontraditional parts of student life (i.e. dunking booths, crazy contests, etc.).

Humour has a way of "connecting" teachers with students. Goor (1989) gives the example of a student who was away from school one morning. Upon the student's return after lunch, the teacher lightly teased, "What a nice surprise!". This let the student know that their absence was noticed and their presence missed. Humour can also remove obstacles to learning. It can be used to talk about things that might be difficult to talk about seriously (eg. sex education). Humour has a way of softening things. Critiquing students, communicating rules, resolving conflicts, and dealing with potentially volatile situations may be dealt with effectively (and in many cases more compassionately) using humour (Bedley, 1982). David Zinger, in a February 29, 1988 Winnipeg Free Press interview with Allison Bray, cites an example:

... when a student pulled a knife on him. Zinger said he was jockeying back and forth with the knife-wielding student for a few minutes trying to keep control of the situation. "I finally said, 'I'm getting really tired of dancing with you' and the student, who found the idea of dancing with another man funny, let out a laugh and relaxed. (p. 3)

One must be cautious though. Humour can be like a stick of dynamite (Wandersee, 1982). Used correctly it can blast away obstacles. Used incorrectly, it can "blow up" any good relationship. It is vital that teachers avoid negative humour (put downs, insults, and sarcasm). Teachers must laugh with, not at students in order to build up rapport (Kelly, 1983). The

appropriate use of humour can reduce conflict and enhance interpersonal relations. Humour can be the vehicle teachers use to convey a message of acceptance, which is a basic need that all students (all people) have (Glasser, 1990). This creates an atmosphere of cooperation where teacher and students work together rather than at loggerheads. The result is a more productive learning environment, with both teacher and students striving toward a common goal.

## CHAPTER 3: QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY - THE ILLUMINATIVE MODEL

## Hypothesis

The results of the literature review have lead to the hypothesis that teacher-initiated humour serves a constructive function in the classroom. Since the purpose of this study is to explore the use teacher-initiated humour, it was deemed inappropriate to provide additional assertions. Additional assertions would give the study a narrower focus that would be improper for an exploration.

## METHODOLOGY

And it is recorded that the students came unto Halcolm, the Wise. "Teach us, Master, the right methods to use when we evaluate." And he said:

"Issues of evaluation methodology are issues of strategy, not of morals. Purity of method is no virtue. That strategy is best which matches research methods to the evaluation questions being asked. The challenge is to decide which methods are most appropriate in a given situation. The science of making methods decisions is no less highly developed than the technology for making other simple decisions, for example, how to choose a spouse, career, city of residence, or which toothpaste to use."

"Blessed are the poor in choices, for they will have no trouble making up their minds."

From Halcolm's Evaluation Beatitudes  
(p. 17 Patton, 1980)

### Justification of a One Person Case Study

The intent of this study is to explore how one teacher uses humour and to discover its effects in the classroom. The trade-off with using a one person case study is one of depth versus breadth (Patton, 1980).

In any study there is limited time and resources are finite. Devoting time to only one teacher (and his classes) provides a broader range and greater depth of experiences for examination. Teacher and students should feel more comfortable with a researcher who spends more time with them. Hopefully, this greater level of "comfort" increases the number (and detail) of responses during the interviews, as well as the number of students that do respond to interview questions. This greater level of "comfort" should also produce a more "natural" classroom environment. If the students and teacher are used to the presence of the researcher, perhaps they might "forget" that he is there.

The one person case study also recognizes the uniqueness of a feature (or innovation) under investigation. The innovation may be something that is not present in many or most other schools. The use of humour as a teaching aid is not actively encouraged by schools or school divisions. In teacher education, few courses (if any) are provided in this area. Therefore if there is a teacher who actively employs humour in his classroom approach, it would be a novel strategy. A one person case study would be one of the few ways to fully document this fairly unique method.

An additional strength of this approach is that should humour

as a teaching aid prove to either be a great success or failure, a one person case study of this kind may spur a larger related study.

The obvious drawback of using a one person case study is that it is limited in breadth. This approach provides only one perspective. It looks at just one person, his humour, and the effect it has in his unique setting. The same teacher placed in a different classroom may have very different reactions to his humour. Comparisons and applications are made much more difficult because of this.

#### 1) Case

##### Teacher

The teacher involved in this study is an experienced teacher (twelve years) who is interested in humour as a teaching tool. Although health was the subject under study, the subject area was not of prime importance in this investigation. The main condition was that it was in a classroom setting. What was important was that the teacher chosen for this study was acknowledged by students as being humorous. The prime purpose of this study was to discover (explore) the effects of humour in the classroom. Since students are basically what we consider to be the classroom, their perceptions were important. The candidate chosen for this study was selected by students, in a 1991-92 yearbook survey, as the most humorous teacher at his school (see Appendix A).

Mr. T teaches Physical Education and Health. He is a big man,

who, at first glance seems quite intimidating. In this case, looks are misleading because he is a very friendly individual. He strikes up conversations with friends and strangers with tremendous ease. Mr. T laughs readily and a lot. This may account for people frequently gathering around Mr. T before class. He seemed to put them at ease with his laid back, yet amusing style.

At one time Mr. T played for the Canadian National Basketball team, although it looks like he could have played a few years with the Winnipeg Blue Bombers. Mr. T still participates in the Senior Mens Basketball league where he still remains a fiery competitor.

Since he taught Phys. Ed., Mr. T dressed casually, wearing basketball shoes and a comfortable looking sweatsuit.

#### Setting

The setting of this study was a junior/senior high school with a population of five hundred students. The two intact classrooms used for the study were from grade nine with a variety of student abilities and interests. The choice of grade was considered carefully. In a combined junior/senior high school, grade seven and twelve were eliminated very quickly as potential choices. Being new to the school, grade seven students tend to be in awe and often intimidated by their new surroundings. Not only do they have new surroundings, but instead of one teacher (as in elementary school) they now have five or six. As well, teachers no longer go to them, they must go to the teachers. Generally, students are used to this arrangement by the time they move on to grade eight.

However, because of these confounding variables, grade seven may not be the best choice.

In grade twelve the opposite seems to occur. Not only are grade twelve students no longer in awe, many believe that they are now the "kings of the castle". Their perception (based on my ten years of personal experience) is that they are now in charge and are going to make their final year a good one. This again brings a different set of attitudes and dynamics that are missing from other classes, and which may affect this study. Grade nine was deemed the most appropriate choice since students have been at the school long enough to feel comfortable with the surroundings and familiar with most of the teachers. At the same time, they still have a few years before they graduate, so some of the attitudes and behaviours associated with graduating students are absent.

#### Students

The two intact grade nine classes consisted of twenty-eight students each. Most students appear to be middle class. Clothing seems to be an important component of school life. *Perry Ellis*, *Hugo Boss*, and *Esprit* outer wear is quite prominent. Those who do not have the "appropriate" attire seem out of place. Marks are a powerful "carrot" for students. For many this may be the case because this is a private school and parents expect their children to get their "money's worth". For others it could be the case that because the competition is quite intense, it may drive students to do well academically. Both classes are loud. They seldom restrain



from "putting in their two cents worth". Although the students may be boisterous, they are very friendly, ready to greet student or teacher alike in a pleasant fashion.

### Classrooms

The Health classes met only once a cycle (instead of the usual four) in rooms used primarily for French. Both classes were organized in a traditional format. Student desks were arranged in rows and the teacher's desk was at the front of the class. The walls of both rooms were filled with a myriad of French posters. There were placards of Paris, the Eiffel Tower, the French country side, and the Seine River. There were even some photographs of some French castles. If a student got bored in class there were a lot of places he could "visit". In the corner of both rooms were Apple GS computers. There was nothing on the walls to suggest that Health was being taught.

### Subject

The Health course is a component of Physical Education, comprising twenty-five percent of the Phys. Ed. mark. The health curriculum at this level uses a holistic approach, that is it focuses on the well being of the mind and body. Health covers such diverse topics as drug use, emotional well being, fractures, stress, eating habits, and proper exercise.

The reasons for selecting health as part of this study has to do more with than the instructor and instructional arrangement than with the subject material itself. Firstly, a humorous instructor was essential to this study. The subject that he taught was of secondary interest. Once the instructor was selected and a choice of classes was available for observation, a course having a more traditional classroom setting (i.e. regular classroom, students in desks, instructor at the front of the class, etc.) was chosen. The rationale for this decision was that the traditional setting is a fairly common classroom format at many schools. The desire was to observe the effects of humour in a classroom arrangement that was common, one that more teachers could relate to.

#### Time Period

The proposed study took place over a three month period. The study began in mid-April and was completed at the end of June. The timing of the study was important. At the beginning of the school year, the teacher may be new to students and the use of humour a novelty, which will not be part of the classroom dynamics as the year continues. Starting just prior to Christmas was avoided to bypass the holiday hype. By late January, the usual classroom format with regards to routine, expectations and rapport have been established. Thus, the most frequent mode of classroom operation could then be observed.

## Illuminative Evaluation

In order to gauge the full impact of the use of humour and its resulting outcomes, events must be seen and experienced as they normally occur. The use of humour by the teacher does not occur in a sterile, controlled environment. The delivery of the joke, the character of the instructor, the spontaneity of the moment, the type of humour, the preceding classes, significant events of the day, the cultural backgrounds of the students, the school mood, and the personality of each individual student can each play a part in determining the resulting effect of humour. These parameters dictated a naturalistic approach, one that could take place in a regular classroom setting. A one person case study guided by the Illuminative model was deemed the best approach for this particular investigation.

Illuminative evaluation takes account of the wider contexts in which educational programs function. Its primary concern is with description and interpretation rather than measurement and prediction. It stands unambiguously within the alternative anthropological paradigm. The aims of illuminative evaluation are to study the innovatory program: how it operates; how it is influenced by the various school situations in which it is applied; what those directly concerned regard as its advantages and disadvantages; and how students' intellectual tasks and academic experiences are most affected. It aims to discover and document what it is like to be participating in the scheme, whether as teacher or pupil, and, in addition, to discern and discuss the innovation's most significant features, recurring concomitants, and critical processes. In short, it seeks to address and to illuminate a complex array of questions. (p. 144 Parlett and Hamilton, 1976)

The choice for this model was based on the importance of understanding humour, and the individuals it affects, in context. A naturalistic one person case study will give a more realistic look at the use of humour in a classroom setting. Ziv (1988) laments that much experimental research regarding classroom humour is conducted in an artificial setting seldom resembling an educational situation. The illuminative model is concerned with the instructional system and the learning milieu in which it takes place and therefore commits itself to studying events as they naturally occur. Humour cannot be separated from the learning milieu of which it is a part, since humour is not an enclosed, independent system.

The underlying supposition of this approach is that meaningful knowledge is obtained from an "inductive analysis of open-ended, detailed, descriptive, and quotive data gathered through direct contact with the program and its participants" (Patton, 1986, p. 55). This is not a recommendation for the general acceptance of ideas that seem intuitively correct. Rather, the suggestion here is that the experience of others may provide additional insight on a given topic, which may furnish solutions or opportunities for further study. An example may be helpful here. For centuries grocers have realized that the most efficient way to pack oranges (or any round fruit) in a cube-like container is in layers, with each successive layer of fruit resting in the recesses provided by the previous layer. In this way, the amount of available space used (just over 74 percent) is maximized. Although noted on an

intuitive level by Johannes Kepler as early as 1611, it was not until 1991 that the grocer's arrangement was proven (Freedman, 1992).

## 2) Design and Procedure

### Overview of Design

- a) Initial interview
- b) Three Stages of Illuminative Evaluation
  - i) Observation (Investigators observe)
  - ii) Interviews and Questionnaires (Inquire further)
  - iii) Seek to Explain (data collection, analysis, and interpretation)
- c) Conclusions and Recommendations

### a) Initial Interview

After the selection of a teacher and classes for study and the appropriate consent letters (see Appendix B) approved by the Faculty of Education Research and Ethics Committee, had been sent and acknowledged, separate meetings were arranged with the teacher and students to discuss the framework and general goals of the study. This was an opportunity for all involved to discuss concerns and expectations, and to assure the teacher and students of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the study. The cooperating teacher was informed that all written documents would be available for him to examine (at any time after the classroom

observations portion, in order to avoid any external influence in the classroom) and that all raw data would be destroyed at the end of the study. Students were informed that at the conclusion of the study a meeting would be held, for those interested, in which the findings of the study would be presented and discussed.

b) Three Stages of Illuminative Evaluation

i) Observations/Investigators Observe

The first stage of illuminative evaluation requires that the researcher becomes knowledgeable about the programme. Since illuminative evaluation focuses on examining the innovation (humour) as an essential part of the learning milieu, there is a definite emphasis on observation at the classroom level. The researcher must become acclimated to the daily reality of the setting under investigation. He must:

... observe the activities of people, the physical characteristics of the social situation, and what it feels like to be part of the scene. (p. 33 Spradley, 1980)

No attempt is made to restrict, manipulate, or get rid of situational variables. The researcher must accept the scene and all of its intricacies. His job is to untangle, to delineate cycles of cause and effect, to isolate meaningful features, and to try to understand the relationships between beliefs and practices.

In order to do this, the researcher assembles and organizes records of on going events, exchanges, and casual comments, adding his own interpretative comments throughout this process.

This preliminary approach can often reveal details that may not be evident or forthcoming in a more conventional interview.

Because he sees and hears the people he studies in many situations of the kind that normally occur for them, rather than just in an isolated and formal interview, he builds an ever-growing fund of impressions, many of them at the subliminal level, which give him an extensive base for the interpretation and analytic use of any particular datum. This wealth of information and impression sensitizes him to and forces him to raise continually new and different questions. (p. 32 Becker and Geer, 1970)

One of the problems with humour research (Ziv, 1988) is that the duration of most studies is too short, with total observation periods of less than one hour. For the purposes of this investigation it was considered more than adequate to have five (three for one class, two for the other) classroom observations (40 to 45 minutes each). This would give a total observation time of 3 1/2 to 4 hours, which greatly exceeds that of most humour studies (Ziv, 1988).

As discussed previously, the illuminative approach requires the investigator to become "knowledgeable" about the setting. Classroom observations are a time to see, to discover, and to explore. Structure is needed however to give the study direction and focus. A well structured approach can provide areas for

further probing, new insights, the identification of patterns and cycles, and the categorization of data. From this, meaning can be developed. A field sheet (see Appendix C) was constructed based on Webster's (1994) definition of humour and on a humour study by Gorham and Christophel (1990) in order to give this study the desired structure. The Gorham and Christophel study was similar to this investigation in that both investigated instructor-initiated humour. Thus the categories constructed for the Gorham and Christophel study should be useable and appropriate for this investigation.

The field sheet categorized different types of humour and provided space for the type of humour used, a brief summary of the humorous event and its perceived effect (interpretative comment) by the researcher.

The field notes served several purposes. The first was to verify humour was being used by the instructor (Mr. T). Although previous information had been supplied (Appendix A), it still was important to illustrate in a more concrete way that Mr. T's humour use was an integral part of the classroom setting.

Second, the field notes also provided indications of what to look for in the succeeding observations. Emerging patterns or unexpected outcomes could have appeared early in the observation phase and therefore provided areas for additional study and inquiry as the investigation continued.

Thirdly, the field notes facilitated the thinking and reflection process for the researcher as he began to categorize the



data. Emerging patterns indicated not only areas for further probing but also played a significant role in the formation of categories relating to the constructive and destructive uses of teacher-initiated humour.

Another advantage of these field notes were that they provided descriptive and quotive evidence to illustrate the effect of humour in the classroom. In other words the field notes help provide "proof" of a humour function.

Fifth, the field notes were instrumental in providing interview questions for the succeeding stage of the study. The development of questions based on classroom observations gave a more meaningful understanding of some of the functions of humour. As well, the field notes helped to confirm or dispel possible humour roles.

There is the temptation to use the field notes and the resulting data to tie certain types of humour with specific outcomes or functions. Caution must be used (Parlett and Hamilton, 1976; Trow, 1970; Patton, 1980; Howe and Eisenhart, 1990). This type of "measurement and prediction" approach was not in the scope of this study. Rather, the field notes hopefully gave greater insight into the character and workings of the teacher (Mr. T) and may have provided **some** insight on the effects of some types of humour.

Humour is a complex creature. The interplay between particular types of humour and specific outcomes is often very difficult to reasonably account for. An analogy may be useful

here. Baking powder is a frequent ingredient for baking, although most recipes require only a small amount (usually less than a teaspoon). Flour, sugar, and eggs comprise a much, much larger proportion of the ingredients. However, if there is a little too much or too little baking powder, the baked good falls flat. The same could hold true for humour. Personal anecdotes may dominate the type of humour used but the occasional visual or slapstick humour accompanying it may help account for the outcome.

In this study the setting was not manipulated to isolate and thereby see the effects of certain types of humour. This was not in the range of this investigation, since the rationale was to explore the use of humour in its natural setting. It would have been too simplistic, and probably untrue, to state that certain types of humour produced specific outcomes. This did not mean that the field notes could not or did not provide good data with regards to types of humour and outcomes. This information must be used cautiously, discerningly, and with the realization that this data formed only one portion of the data portrait.

#### Implementation of Field Notes and Audio-taping

In a study investigating the number of humorous events that would maximize the retention of important concepts (in a one hour class), Ziv (1988) came to the conclusion that four humorous events gave the greatest benefit. It was anticipated that there would be few problems in recording the necessary information in the field if there were only four, six, or even ten humorous events per class.

To safeguard against the number of humorous events drastically exceeding this number, two precautions were taken. First, the researcher did a preparatory round using the field sheet during the monologue of a Tonight Show broadcast. It was felt that the amount of humour in the monologue would surpass the number of humorous events in an average class period. Therefore if the researcher could keep up with the monologue, he should be able to keep up with anything that Mr. T did in the classroom.

For the second precaution, a wireless microphone was attached to the instructor, Mr. T. The microphone recorded everything he said as well as most of the student comments. The arrangement worked very well. Conversations and monologues came through very clearly. In addition, Mr. T had complete freedom of movement with the wireless microphone, minimizing the effect on the normal classroom setting.

During the course of the investigation it was discovered that using alkaline batteries for the wireless set-up was much more effective than using regular batteries. The researcher would recommend using alkaline batteries to any future investigators using wireless microphone technology.

In hindsight it was a good idea to supplement the field notes with audio-tapes. The average number of humorous events in Mr. T's class far exceeded that predicted (average of over thirty humorous events per class, see Appendix K). The audio-tapes were used to verify the field notes and to fill in any gaps. These tapes were

later transcribed and once again compared to the field notes to verify the data.

To supplement the field notes and the tapes, the researcher wrote short journal entries after each class. These entries contained impressions, opinions, feelings, and intuitions about the operation of the classroom, instruction, and about the role of humour.

ii) Interviews and Questionnaires/Inquire Further  
Questions

The observation stage allowed the researcher to become knowledgeable about the setting. In the interview stage this knowledge enabled the questioning to be more focused, dialogue to be more relaxed and congruous, and examination and exploration to be more directed, efficient and discerning.

Discovering the beliefs of the participants is essential in evaluating the outcomes of any innovation. Questions concerning the work of the teacher, the work of the students, what the participants think about the innovation, how they feel about it, how it compares with previous experiences, and reflections on the use and value of the innovation need to be asked. In the illuminative approach these questions must be more open-ended and discursive (Parlett and Hamilton, 1976; Patton, 1980; Trow, 1970; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989).

During the interview process, the effort was made to get as varied questions as possible (see Appendices D to H) in order to

gain as many perspectives on the effects of teacher-initiated humour as possible. There are basically six types of questions that can be asked (Patton, 1980; Parlett and Hamilton, 1976; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989; Spradley, 1980). This particular study employed five of the six types of questions. The types of questions, along with a brief description of each type are listed below.

i) Experience - questions geared towards obtaining information regarding observable experiences, behaviors, actions, and activities.

ii) Cognitive - questions designed to reveal to the researcher what people think about a specific program or innovation. These are opinion/value questions aimed at understanding the interpretive processes of the participants.

iii) Affective - questions designed to understand the emotional reactions of participants to their experiences and thoughts. The attempt is made to find how people feel about the innovation.

iv) Information - questions regarding factual information (i.e. knowledge) the participant(s) has with respect to the program.

v) Sensory - questions discussing what is touched, tasted, heard or seen. These questions seek to depict the stimuli to which the participants are exposed to.

vi) Background (not used in this study) - questions discussing the characteristics of the participants of the study.

Most of the interview questions evolved from the classroom observation portion of the study, some were suggested by the committee supervising this study, a few were the result of observations of Mr. T outside the classroom, and several questions came about because of responses to previous interview questions.

### Student Interviews

Students were questioned using the standardized open-ended interview approach (Patton, 1980). In this approach, questions are prepared in advance. This gives a focus to the interview and also ensures that all areas of researcher concern are covered. All participants are asked the same basic questions and in the same order. The advantage of this approach is that it provides continuity between the two classes in this study. Since the participants in each class answer the same question, there is greater comparability between the responses. This in turn assists in the organization and examination of the data. The shortcomings of this approach is that it limits flexibility during the interview. Due to time constraints, it was not always possible to follow a particular line of questioning to its end during the interview process. There were other topics (i.e. questions) that needed to be covered and there was the desire to retain comparability between the two interview groups.

Time constraints did not allow for the interviewing of each individual student (there were fifty-eight in this study). Yet, each student could have some constructive information to

contribute. To try and blend these two concerns together, time limitations and maximum student participation, the decision was made to use focus groups.

A focus group consisted of a group of study participants. For this study, each intact class was a focus group (for a total of two focus groups). The entire group was together throughout the interviewing phase. Thus they (each group) heard the exact same questions and in the exact same order. Again, the advantage to this method was greater comparability between participant responses. A probable drawback was that the responses of some participants may have influenced the responses of others.

Three different interview times were provided for each focus group, giving a total of six interview periods. The interviews were held during the regular school day. Arrangements were made with the Health (Mr. T) and Science (Mr. B) teachers to use class time for the interviews. In order to ensure maximum participation it was considered important to use class time for the interviews. Interviews after regular school hours would be poorly attended because of the increasingly mild spring weather. Lunch hour interviews would also be difficult since many students bought their lunch and a significant portion were also involved in the school intramural program.

At the start of the first interview session, both focus groups were informed that student names and responses would be kept confidential and that they (the students) were not required to give responses to questions. Students were asked however, to provide

their names when responding to interview questions. Students were told that the names were just being used in the sorting and organization of the data. When responses were published, numbers would appear beside student quotes and any information linking names to quotes would be destroyed, thus ensuring the confidentiality of their (the student) responses.

In the first focus group interviews, a question list was prepared (see Appendix D) and each question was read out one at a time, exactly as written. Students who wanted to respond to the question would raise their hands and a student volunteer, carrying a wireless microphone, would approach. The responding student would state her name and then answer the question that was given. Those students that did not wish to participate did not raise their hands.

Neither of the focus groups was pretested. This did present a problem with one of the groups during the first interview. There was a small group (five or six) of students that dominated the interview, preventing some students (either by time limitations or intimidation) from responding. Measures were taken the next two interview periods to give all students an equal chance to respond to interview questions.

For the second round of interviews a question list was once again prepared but different arrangements were made in regards to the collection of student responses. This time when the questions were asked, instead of going to each student with their hand up, the student volunteer (accompanied with the wireless microphone)



went down each row of students, giving **every** student a chance to respond. Those who wished to respond did so and those who did not wish to respond could state "No response" and ask the student volunteer to move on. The number of **different** students that responded during the second round of interviews increased over that of the first round.

The impression remained, however, that not all students who wished to respond were responding. There seemed to be a significant number of students who did not wish to have their answers heard by others. To acquire greater participation from this segment of students, a questionnaire (see Appendix F) was produced for the third (and last) interview period. Using this approach, student answers would be private. Student A would not know the response of Student B, unless he shared it with her. These questionnaires were handed out to each student in the two focus groups. Students were asked to place their name on the questionnaire and to answer the questions as completely and fully as possible. Names were required for the organization and examination of data, otherwise names would be kept confidential. Only the researcher would have the information linking names with specific quotes. The students were also told that names would not appear in any published format and that all information linking names to quotes would be destroyed at the end of the study. Students were informed that they could hand in the questionnaire blank if they did not want to participate.

The response using the questionnaire was positive. Several more students were participating that had not (or at least in a much more limited capacity) before.

### Teacher Interviews

Three meeting periods were arranged with the teacher. The first two were for interviews and the last was for the discussion of study interpretations. The interview guide approach (Patton, 1980) was used during the two interview sessions. The interview guide approach outlines the topics and issues to be dealt with in advance. The interviewer still has the flexibility to use a conversational style, to investigate, and to question spontaneously, as long as the focus remains on the prearranged topics. Using this method, the interviewer is able to cover points he feels are relevant to the study.

A list of questions were prepared in advance for both teacher interviews (see Appendices G and H). If any novel or unexpected information arose, further (i.e. new) probing questions were asked to gain additional details.

In order to make the teacher feel comfortable, familiar locations were selected for the interviews. The intent was to try to reduce any tension or uneasiness that might be felt by the teacher and in so doing, boost his responsiveness. The first interview took place at the teacher's school. The second interview took place at the teacher's home. Using familiar locations seemed to work very well. During the interview process, the teacher

seemed quite relaxed and talked very freely (both interviews lasted longer than half an hour).

As with the student interviews, the teacher interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed as part of the data collection process.

### iii) Seek to Explain

In the third and final stage of illuminative evaluation the task was to supply a thorough understanding of the complex reality (or realities) surrounding the program (Partlet and Hamilton, 1976; Trow, 1970; Stake, 1978). One had to search for guiding principles and patterns of cause and effect. There was probing for unexpected outcomes in an attempt to unravel the program complexities and to separate the meaningful from the mundane (uneventful).

### Data Collection

Data was gathered on three planes. The first was records based on the classroom observations. This involved field notes, researcher's journal, and audiotapes. Relevant portions of the audiotapes were later transcribed or summarized. The next plane of gathering was centered on the teacher interviews. Again audiotapes were transcribed or summarized. The final plane focused on the discussion of student perceptions. The audiotapes of these discussions were transcribed or summarized as well.

Multiple sources of data gathering were used because no single source could provide a comprehensive perspective. **Data triangulation** (Parlett and Hamilton, 1976; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989; Spradley, 1980; Patton, 1980; Verstrate, 1990) is the use of a variety of data sources as a means of cross-checking and validating study findings. By using different data collection techniques in this study, the strengths of each method was built on while the hazards of using a single data collection strategy was avoided. Using only one type of data collection method provides only one perspective. Some valuable information may not have been readily visible while other data may have been given undue importance.

The different data collection techniques in this investigation were used to develop the functions of teacher-initiated humour and to give credibility to these various findings. Finding a particular function of humour in each of the various data sources gave the categorization and interpretation of that data greater credibility. The common threads that ran through the various data collection methods in this study served to tie the realities of the three different groups (students, teacher, and researcher) together.

Over two hundred pages of data was collected during the course of the study. Below is a short breakdown of the data collection distribution.

a) Teacher Data (interviews)	14 pages
b) Student Data (interviews and questionnaires)	137 pages
c) Researcher Data (journal and field notes)	31 pages
d) Classroom Data (transcribed tapes of classroom proceedings)	<u>83 pages</u>

Four copies (in most cases) of each data source was created. The first copy, the original raw data, was put away for safe keeping. In the event that data is lost or raw data needs to be verified, the master copy was secure and available if necessary. One complete copy of the data was used throughout the study as a working and reference copy. The third copy was used to write comments on, beginning the analysis process. The fourth copy was available for cutting and pasting in order to organize and categorize the data.

## Data Analysis

Based on the examination of the data, patterns were identified, categories arranged, interpretations made, and meaning pursued.

When all the raw data was collected, the material was read over several times in order for the researcher to familiarize himself with **all** the data. These initial readings began the categorization process. By reading over the data several times, similarities between the various data sources and within the same sources began to become apparent. Patterns began to emerge. In the margins of one of the data copies, researcher impressions were written, the possible outcomes of humour delineated.

Key (similar) terms (and concepts) in teacher and student responses during the interviews, classroom events supporting student and teacher statements, openness to the unexpected, looking for phenomenon that both proved and disproved the hypothesis, and the literature review (both consciously and unconsciously) all played important roles in the development of the various categories.

One concern was whether the initial categories were separate from each other or if there were substantial links between them. The guiding rule in determining if a category was redundant was the degree of overlap that existed. If two (or more) categories were basically using the same data to illustrate a particular position, these categories were often merged into one distinct category.

This culminated in the categories found in the results section of this study.

Once the categories were identified, the relevant data was coded. Each code contained information identifying the data collection source, the date of occurrence, and the name of the participant(s) (see Appendix I for the various codes and their denotation). For example, MotM31Q9kJP identified that particular data source as being part of the motivation category (Mot), M31 represents the date of the data source (May 31), Q is the method of data collection (questionnaire from class 9k), while the last two letters represent the initials of the participant(s) responding or involved in the event.

Once all the applicable data was coded, small manilla envelopes were labelled using the study categories. The data was then taken and cut. Each paper strip contained relevant study data and coded information. The data strips were then placed in the appropriate envelope. After all the data had been distributed in the envelopes, the contents of each envelope was read twice in order to ensure that the data strips were in the appropriate category.

Once the categories had been identified, a more indepth examination began. Patterns were distinguished, themes illuminated, and interpretations of the themes and patterns made.

As a final check, several students and the cooperating teacher were asked to react to the accuracy of the study findings (Appendix J). This **participant triangulation** (Verstrate, 1990, Patton, 1980;

Parlett and Hamilton, 1976; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989; Spradley, 1980) was the ultimate test of the validity and credibility of this report.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

To undertake a qualitative, one person case study is to study a unique learning milieu, a unique set of participants, and a unique innovation (humour). Conclusions cannot be generalized since the innovation and its meaning changes as the setting changes.

What becomes useful understanding is a full and thorough knowledge of the particular, recognizing it also in new and foreign contexts.  
(p. 6 Stake, 1978)

Guidelines, suggestions, and recommendations regarding the use of teacher-initiated humour were developed with the hope that teachers would be able to see a part of themselves in this study and could mold the information to their unique needs and environments.

### LIMITATIONS

As with all investigations, but probably particularly so in qualitative evaluations (rightly or wrongly), there is the concern of researcher bias. The processes of data and participant triangulation were used in order to minimize this effect and



present an accurate as possible portrait of the effects of teacher-initiated humour.

The focus group approach presented some difficulties. The drawback of students possibly influencing each other must be weighed against the benefits of time and greater comparability of the student data.

In doing a naturalistic, one person, case study there is the understanding that every teacher's position and milieu is unique. Therefore the intent of the interpretations of this study was not generalizing the results to a larger population, but rather presenting a case that is particularizable. Instructors are given a working hypothesis. One in which the knowledge is based on a distinctive case but that has recognizable features and information that individuals may be able to modify and use for their particular needs.

Students were informed of the purpose of this study and so it may have been difficult to avoid the Hawthorne effect. Anyone who reads this study will have to keep in mind that this was a part of the context of the classroom.

## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS/INTERPRETATION

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS: The Functions of Humour

Of the many threads or themes that emerged repeatedly during the data collection and analysis phase, two broad categories of the constructive functions of humour were identified.

The first category is concerned with the use of humour as a motivational tool. Humour as an implement of enjoyment, mainly for its own sake was a noteworthy feature of this category. The second area deals with a relaxed classroom atmosphere. Of interest here was the "dynamite" (Wandersee, 1983) effect.

Through the analysis of classroom observations, student interviews, teacher interviews, researcher's journal, and student questionnaires, these two issues are explored in greater detail in an effort to discover the impact of humour among the study participants.

Although viewed favourably as a teacher trait, humour is by no means the most important teacher characteristic. In the literature review, Hranitz (1989) and Caruso (1982) noted that humour placed fifth (or slightly lower) on surveys dealing with important teacher characteristics, ranking lower than subject knowledge, caring, participating, and encouraging. Many students replied in a similar manner when asked:

Imagine that you are one of six people, one from each grade, that are on a student committee that deals with educational issues at this school. You have been asked to compile a list of characteristics a good

teacher should have. Where would you place humour on this list and give me your reasons?:

Student 1: I think it should be like, not in the middle, maybe just like a little higher than the middle because, I don't know, it should definitely, I don't think, should be first. Because I've had some really good teachers that haven't been like, incredibly funny but, I don't know, I think, I think its food for learning but it's not totally necessary.

Student 2: I would place it at about 4 because the teacher should be able to get along with the students and, but it shouldn't be the main priority.

Student 3: I would probably base it five out of ten.

Student 4: Um...probably within 4...yes...4 out of 10.

Student 5: I know a lot of good teachers who aren't very funny. But..and are good. So I wouldn't put it too high...I don't know, like, last. It's not that important.

Student 6: I would put humour somewhere near the beginning, like second or third because it's very important, because it makes you pay attention more and you'd learn more if you paid more attention.

Student 7: I think that humour should be, I think second, not first, because I think the first thing should be like sensitivity, like if you're going to put humour first then it could be like, very crude humour, like, it could be humour like that's racial humour, or yeah, you could be nasty to people. So one should be kindness and sensitivity, and number two should be humour because, um...you just can't explain it in words, but you know, when you're laughing, you're laughing, you're having a good time, you say hey, this guy's cool, you know, like we can...value, you value what...you actually listen. Like you value this person as a person 'cause they actually can connect with you, connect with students, and you just learn more.

Student 8: I agree with student 7 that is just, it isn't the first, like top of the line, humour should be, but it should be just closer to the...it should be in the middle, because you need humour to learn more and it's just more interesting you need to know more than that.

Student 9: I would place it on number 4.

Student 10: Like, I can't think of what kind of characteristics a teacher should have. I'm sure there's probably quite a few. But I would say it should be, like kind of around the middle, 'cause like, if you're going to have it first or second, like the teacher might be funny but if half the class doesn't understand, like they don't know how to explain stuff. And, like, I think there's...I can't really think of them right now...but I think there's probably a few characteristics that are more important than humour. But, it's good to have humour.

Student 11: I think that humour should be maybe number two or three or something so it might be a class you want to go to and wouldn't want to skip or anything like that, like math...no specifics, but math maybe, or something like that.

Student 12: I think humour, I think humour's good in the classroom to a certain extent. I think humour is not. I don't think humour should be rated that highly, but if there is humour that's fine, but if there isn't it's no big deal.

Student 13: It's important but it's not the most important thing. It's kind of, you know in the intermediate sort of area.

Student 15: I think that humour needs to be in all classes. Not necessarily Mr. T's kind of humour, but just to make the subject more interesting and not so boring.

Student 16: I think humour needs to be in every class.

It was interesting to see many students use a ten point scale to rate the importance of humour, even though they were not asked to. Students indicated that humour was "middle of the road" with regards to important teacher traits. Even Mr. T, who used a prolific amount of humour (average over thirty per class) does not immediately identify humour as a top teacher characteristic either.

When asked: "What do you think are the top five characteristics a teacher should have?", Mr. T responds:

Mr. T: I think knowing your course material is also important. And so, of course, preparation, and researching, if you don't know something, looking it up. Being prepared, I think is important. Because that will give, that'll give you the confidence as well. And I think, it's pretty tough fooling the kids, they basically know if you're faking it or if you're true, so, and that would probably lead to another point, is that be as honest as you can, I guess. I think this happens quite often. Somebody will have a question for me and I just don't know. And I think it's important as a teacher just to say, "I don't know, I have no idea, but I'll find out". And I think that's good for them because there will be many times that they're not going to have a clue about what the answer might be, but whole attitude of I don't know but I'll go find out. What was the question?

There were several teacher characteristics that were deemed more important than humour. Knowledge, sensitivity, persistence, caring, and well preparedness were just some of the qualities referred to by students. However, as we are about to see, humour adds something to the classroom situation. Humour is like spice. Spices usually comprise the smallest portion (relative to other ingredients) in any meal preparation. By themselves, spices provide little nutritional benefit and they do not really satisfy hunger. Yet, add spices to your food and a bland, boring meal becomes tantalizing...mouth-watering... exciting. Even good meals become better with the addition of the right kind of spices. Humour is much the same way. In and of itself, humour provides little educational benefit. Yet, add a pinch to a lesson that is

flat, tasteless, and you have a class that whets the students' appetites. Even good lessons are made more savory with a dash of humour.

#### 1) Motivation

William Glasser (1990) identified fun as a basic human need. In many ways it is as much a necessity as food, clothing, shelter, and companionship. Glasser laments that we often overlook this need and the value it (fun) can have in learning. In making observations of Mr. T's class, the "entertainment" or fun value was prominent. In the April 6, 1993 entry of the researcher's journal it was noted that:

The class is arranged in rows. Mr. T generally places himself at the front of the class. He is the center of attraction, the star of the show. Mr. T is the consummate entertainer, playing his audience to the hilt. In many ways its like watching a TV sitcom, like "Head of the Class" or "Hangin with Mr. Cooper". Mr. T is always ready with a quick retort, comment, or story, and the students seem to love it.

Mr. T was always ready with a one liner, humorous story, or joke to relieve any perceived boredom. When reading a rather monotonous dialogue for some time in Health class, Mr. T responded in the following manner:

Mr. T: Okay. The last one (skit). End of the Line is what the title is. Shh. I want silence. Thank you. Officer, Donna, a fourteen year old addict, Beatrice, and a drug abuse worker. A metal door being opened: Officer: Someone here to see you Small.

Oh, speaking of that, my brother-in-law works for...he locks people up at that new jail, and we were helping my father-in-law move two weeks ago and there was this guy moving and he goes "see that guy there, locked him up". And this has happened before, like we'll be at a game and he'll say "see those three guys there, locked them up". Amazing. I go, I don't want to be with you. They're going to recognize you and beat the snot out of you. Get me out of here. I say, you getting your head kicked in? 'bye, sayonara (Mr. T makes a quick motion to exit and bangs into a desk). Ohh!!! That'll teach me for running. Oh, I need some ice. How'd you get hurt? Aw, health class. Okay, let's see. Let me wipe the tears. Oh, that hurt.

Mr. T continued:

Officer: Someone here to see you, Small, follow me. Small, that's what it says, Small, capital S, so that must be the guy's name, Small.

The door closes, footsteps in hallway anteroom, anteroom door being opened, whatever that is.

Beatrice: Donna Small?

Donna: Who are you, another cop?

Beatrice: No, my name is Beatrice Carleton, and I sell milk. No. I work for...get it, Beatrice, milk? Guess you had to be there. Work with a drug rehabilitation group called Next Step.

It seems that Mr. T tries as much as he can to inject humour in boring spots to "liven up" the class.

Mr. T: (reading a skit, and glaring at two students carrying on a conversation at the back of the room) Excuse me, we're right in the middle of a telephone call here.

Cindy: Finally, (telephone keeps ringing) hurry up, please answer.

Ron, who's calmly on the other end: Drug hot line. This is Ron speaking.

Cindy (not hearing): Hello, hello, is anybody there?

Ron: You have reached the drug hot line. This is Ron. Can you hear me?

Cindy, recovering a little: Yes, I can hear you...tails off into whimpering.

Ron: Are you okay?

Cindy, with great effort: No. I need help. I'm thirteen years old. I'm home alone..Ahhhh! Get it? Home Alone...

(students imitate MacCauley Culkin's call)

During periods of monotony, Mr. T strives constantly to keep student's "awake" and interested.

Mr. T: (during a lesson on drugs) No, no more stories. Hashish (repeated as a sneeze). Get it? I guess you had to be there. Did I finish, did I finish reading the story? I know I haven't given you notes.

And on a lengthy lesson on jet lag, Mr. T injects some personal humour.

Okay. Now, that's important because if you eat totally different things, it's going to totally mess up your body, which totally affects your performance. And this is another reason why a lot of our athletes (Mr. T is a former player for the national basketball team) now that are travelling to other countries, this is why they are taking our own water, their own water, our water, they're taking their own toilet paper, because these things all affect performance.

Student: Their own toilet paper?

Mr. T: When you go to some of these other countries, it's like using sandpaper. Like honestly. Like, like after three days you're...well, I don't know about you, for a basketball player it's pretty tough running up and down the court when you're like this (runs bow-legged across the room)...okay? You need to be flexible. You need to be able to move those hips and smack that guy out of the way.



Even when reading some dialogue word for word, Mr. T finds ways to maintain interest by injecting some fun into what would otherwise be a tedious monologue.

Mr. T: The sound is the frantic and irregular dialling of a telephone, repeated attempts.  
Cindy (talking to self): Keep cool, Cindy, keep cool (Mr. T states using a high pitched voice). You can't lose it now. Keep trying, you've got to be in control. The dialling is finally successful, then a busy signal. Cindy's getting frantic (Mr. T's voice pitch becomes higher and more hysterical). Busy, busy, what am I going to do? What am I going to do? What am I going to do? (Mr. T pretends to pull out his hair) She's gaining control now. Slow down Cindy, relax, try again (Mr. T holds out both hands in a stopping motion).

Students appreciate the use of humour to energize the lesson. Many students expressed their appreciation for the use of humour using phrases like "getting our attention", "interesting", "things are not boring", "class is more enjoyable", and "the class goes by so fast", among many others. In essence, students were declaring that using humour to increase the enjoyment level of a course was a suitable goal in itself. This came through clearly when students responded to the question: "What would you say are the strengths of Mr. T's use of humour?":

Student 1: And I think that his humour is good because it makes you want to go to health class, whereas like, for social studies, it's a really boring class for me and I really don't want to go to social...you know, because I just don't find it so interesting, but with health it is, so I don't mind.

Student 2: I agree with Student 1 in that if he's on a roll, and he's getting you know, everyone's attention and

we're all like laughing and stuff, you leave health feeling good about yourself, like happy and sore, too. Like, I mean, you leave feeling good about yourself, sort of. I mean, you don't leave feeling oh, that was an awful class you didn't get anything done, you know, this is so boring, and you know that's really good for a teacher to accomplish. If he can accomplish this I think that's really good, and I think you take any teacher, and like there's only some people who can have the right sense of humour for the classroom, because you take some people who really don't have the knack, and you try and get them to be funny and it just doesn't work. I think it just, it fits in with his personality and I think he does a really good job of it.

Student 3: I think it's (the use of humour in the class by Mr. T) good because then it holds your attention instead of just like just let your mind go wander and think about different things but if they're telling jokes and stuff then you want to hear them so you listen.

Student 4: People pay more attention if humour's involved.

Student 5: Okay, well it (humour) kind of breaks the ice and all...well, yes it's...like it makes learning more fun. Yes.

Student 6: It makes the class funner.

Student 7: Health is just kind of...like if you just take the notes and stuff that we learn in health, it's kind of boring. Like about amphetamines, and that kind of stuff, it's pretty boring. And just his little jokes and in between you might learn a little bit, and also its a lot more interesting, like it's kind of not so boring. Because all that class is writing notes. And so I think that his jokes are, are usually like, pretty funny, and you just have to look at it, like, I mean you can't be funny all the time, so....

Student 8: His jokes kind of catch your attention if you're not really paying attention and then it keeps your attention for a while, or the whole class, or something.

Student 1: Yeah. It (Health class) helps us learn about the real world, sort of. I think as for his humour, it can, some of it's bad, some of it's good, but also without it I think it would possibly be really dead, and I think it's better that he has his humour than if

he didn't, because then we wouldn't learn anything and we'd seriously fall asleep. Because can you imagine learning about quaaludes and stuff without it. I wouldn't know what they are. I wouldn't know anything. Just because, you know, I'd be asleep.

Student 10: I guess, Mr. T the way I can describe him is he's the best out of the whole school, I think for a teacher for Health. I think, I think he would be the best one for Health because, I don't know, he's just funny and no one else would be able to handle it the way he does.

Student 1: I mean everything that everyone's been saying about the ego is kind of true, but I mean, I also think about the fact that if anyone else was teaching this health, like, say Mr. X, then no one would enjoy it and no one would learn anything. I mean, we would be so dead in that class. And so I kind of do appreciate the fact that he's like that, but, no I don't really think anyone else could teach health like that, and that's all.

Student 12: I agree with what student 1 said totally, because I just think that we do learn more in his class than I think we would if somebody else was teaching, of course, because he's really good.

Student 13: I think Mr. T's jokes make us want to come to class so we actually learn something in class.

In a questionnaire given on May 31, 1993, many students confirmed the motivational value of humour when asked: "In what classroom situations do you find humour helpful?" and "How does Mr. T's contribute (if at all) to this?":

Student 14: Health is normally a boring class where you learn how to brush your teeth or something dumb, but I look forward to Mr. T's classes because he isn't boring.

Student 15: Mr. T has a really good sense of humour. He always keeps my attention.

Student 16: He is the funniest teacher and makes classes fun.

Student 17: It (his humour) keeps our attention.

Student 18: When we are doing stuff like quaaludes, marijuana, etc. that is so boring, it means nothing. He has exciting stories to tell, makes the class exciting by drifting (alot!) from just lesson, lesson, lesson. Some teachers just write notes, notes, again and again and have no excitement in their voice or actions. Skits ---> dialogues ---> changes voice.

Student 16: I know I'll laugh a lot in class and not be bored.

Student 19: When we have written a lot of notes and are done writing them. It helps us enjoy being there rather than just being bored writing notes.

Student 20: It is helpful in almost all situations. It helps to get and keep the attention of students. It also makes them more eager to learn. Mr. T is the first teacher to ever make a class fun by jokes or funny stories. And I think it is great.

Student 10: It makes me want to come to Health more than other classes.

Student 21: When the class is boring, students listen to the teacher if he uses humour more. He (Mr. T) makes the class more fun to be in.

Student 22: Mr. T is funny so he keeps your attention with his jokes.

Student 23: When the teacher does not have our full attention. Or when it is a boring topic. It makes us want to listen and pay attention. He (Mr. T) helps by saying something stupid or humorous to grab our attention.

On the same questionnaire, students were given the following question:

This question is aimed at getting your perspective. You have Health the period just before lunch. Fellow students are

beginning to file in. Take me to your classroom and describe to me what happens and what you feel during those first fifteen minutes.

What came through was that students looked forward to the class; the notion that it was fun to be in class.

Student 24: When we walk in, everybody's happy and pumped. I look forward to health on day 3 because it's a fun, relaxed class. People are relaxed. When Mr. T starts, we're all listening intently till the bell rings.

Student 25: When people first arrive they generally talk about something else besides health. Some kids talk to Mr. T, some talk about him, others talk about how dumb or stupid this class is but it's usually very few. After class is when kids talk about what Mr. T said, usually a funny story or situation he was in. I like his stories and think most teachers should do this kind of a thing.

Student 21: I always look forward to his class because I always wonder if he's in a good mood and if he has any interesting stories to tell us.

Student 26: The first thought that would go through my mind is that this would be an exciting class, not like boring.

When students were asked, in the same questionnaire, "How would you describe Mr. T to a new student to your health class?", the responses were strikingly similar to those given previously:

Student 6: He's a good teacher and the class is fun. It's not like math or something like that. He tells stories and stuff like that.

Student 25: (He's) a funny guy with a great class. You can actually learn something. Mr. T uses big long words that sound stupid and people tend to remember them.

Student 27: Mr. T is a large, mean looking guy, but is really quite nice. His class goes by so fast because he adds humour into his teaching.

Student 28: A very funny person who likes to tell jokes and stuff. He kills alot of the boring part of class.

Student 21: He has a great sense of humour and is a very good teacher. As well, he gets you to enjoy each class with telling us all those stories that he has, which alot are quite humorous, and makes you feel you fit in the class.

Student 18: He's very good, exciting to listen to. Makes class fun. Nice guy!....Tons of stories!! Best class! Doesn't want our experience of health to be bad! Wants us to be happy when we speak about it.

Student 16: Funny. Always tells stories. Makes class fun.

The opinions and feelings shared by the students were not by accident, they were by design. Mr. T professes the goal of motivation in his first interview. When asked: "What is the purpose of your stories?", he responded:

Okay. I think the purpose of my (humorous) stories is for motivation,... My intent is to make the class exciting. I want them to be interested in how to stop bleeding, and, and, and that kind of stuff. And that's very important to me.

Mr. T made a conscious effort to make his classes fun and exciting. In that same interview, Mr. T shared some of his methods or "tricks of the trade". When asked: "What kind of (humour) approach do you like to use?", Mr. T replied:

Umm, well I like to be witty, although sometimes I'm not that witty. It depends, sometimes I get on a roll and then I can be very witty. I don't know, I just think what I really like to do is I like to bring a lot of enthusiasm to the class, I think that's probably the biggest thing. And just things, like, like, like acting stupid sometimes, or, or, umm, I, I'm writing something on the board, and then I'll make sure that one word is spelled incorrectly so that they're correcting me, so that I know they're actually paying attention. And, and I'll make fun of my spelling and kind of cut myself apart, cut myself apart at times as well. I think they really appreciate that kind of stuff. Or, or for instance, I, I'll be speaking about something, and then all of a sudden, I'll write something on the board and I'll just shout something out and those people who were sleeping at the back are now awake, and just little things like that, kind of adds to the flavour of the class.

Perhaps Mr. T's personal philosophy can be best illustrated by a comment he made while talking to his health class (June 2) about reducing stress:

Okay, don't just be a couch potato. Surround yourself with healthy positive people. Put some laughs in your life. The worst thing in the world is, and especially in junior high, when I look at my junior high buddies that I had, okay, they were weird, but we just had a blast. We had a lot of fun. I mean we did a lot of work, and we also did some really good things, but we also had a lot of fun, and also, I think what's important also, is to, is to hook up with people that are positive. You don't want these people who are Grrr... Why would you want to be with people that are grumpy? Why would you want to do that? Okay, then you become miserable as well. Hook up with people that you can have fun with.

Academic rigor, taking good notes, listening, achieving high marks, working hard, being obedient, and appropriate student

conduct seem to be behaviors that are stressed in many classrooms (Glasser, 1990; Egan, 1986). Having fun is a feature that seldom seems to be encouraged. But why should it not? Fun in itself can be a worthy goal. In their free time, their quality time, people do things that they consider to be fun (Glasser, 1990). Individuals tend to do their best work (Glasser, 1990) when they are doing things that they enjoy.

Through his use of humour, Mr. T is attempting to enter this quality world. Unlike many other classes, Health has features that students can utilize in their daily lives. One of the goals that Mr. T has for his health course is for students to use (or at least consider) the information presented in class. Mr. T believes that one of the few ways to do this (and by their responses students seem to concur) is by having students enjoy (through the use of humour) the classroom experience.

## 2) Relaxed Classroom Atmosphere

Humour also serves to create a relaxed and open classroom atmosphere. As part of the classroom framework, Mr. T tried early in the period to establish a comfortable setting. When asked (questionnaire, May 31, 1993): "This question is aimed at getting your perspective. You have Health the period just before lunch. Fellow students are beginning to file in. Take me to your classroom and describe to me what happens and what you feel during those first fifteen minutes.", students responded:



Student 22: When you get in class, he starts taking attendance and making jokes. We start doing some work and then he tells us a story about the topic he is usually talking about.

Student 11: 11:00 - While walking in everyone is laughing.  
11:05 - Take attendance  
11:10 - Begin working  
11:12 - Tell a story  
11:20 - Start working again

Student 28: I'm usually talking with a friend about something that I did previously. Once Mr. T starts talking, he would always capture my attention and I would pay close attention to the notes and stories.

Student 29: When we first get to class, everyone is talking and stuff and then when the bell rings, Mr. T makes us do work right away, unless he has a story about basketball (or any other sport). But we usually get told a story or joke, etc. at the beginning of class.

Student 30: Since we are a noisy class we would first talk to everyone, then Mr. T would finally get our attention and tell a few jokes.

Student 6: First I go into the classroom and everyone sits somewhere. Mr. T counts the people to make sure that everyone is there. Mr. T begins the class by telling us that we're behind the other classes and we are going to do notes the whole class. He writes around one sentence before he starts telling us a story.

Student 31: When you walk in we all talk. When the class begins it's quiet and it is for a while but it's not for long before he starts talking and joking around.

Student 32: Everyone walks in talking! It's fun when the teacher starts off with a story. When teachers start off with an assignment that puts a downer on the class.

Student 27: Students would be sitting down in seats they usually sit in, usually saying things like, "this is such a good class". I really enjoy his class, or at least most parts. Mr. T usually gets right down to work, but usually about ten minutes into class, he's telling a story.

Student 33: You get in, sit down, and get ready for a fun class. I look forward for it every day three (on the

school cycle). Mr. T always starts off with something funny.

Student 8: We all walk in and talk and find a place to sit (preferably in the back). Open your books and Mr. T counts us to see if anyone is missing. He reads us the story about the drug or thing we're studying (I'm feeling hungry 'cause its almost lunch, so are the others). Then we start writing the notes and he usually ends up telling us a story from one of his many key words.

Student 36: They (the students) would be laughing, talking, smiling, getting a seat, and getting their books ready and say "Hi" to Mr. T.

Student 18: As we come in we all say "Hi" to Mr. T and ask him how he is. We're loud, talk lots, and don't sit down. Then eventually we pick a seat and wait for him (Mr. T) to ask us where we left off (everytime). (We) just are friendly, loud, and feel free to talk but once he starts, it's time to listen.

Student 12: Everyone files in, gets into a relaxed mode, a little silly sometimes. People find a seat (fight for seats) write notes, run to get a drink or go to the washroom (get the important stuff done first) and basically wait for Mr. T (who's usually late). I usually feel relaxed and sit back and wait (not strained like math or anything).

Student 37: 1 - Smiling.  
2 - People talking.  
3 - Mr. T tells us a story.  
4 - We tell him stuff.  
5 - We communicate more easier to him than to other teachers.

It is evident, based on the student responses, that Mr. T's humour did make students feel comfortable and put them at ease.

Mr. T is very intentional about using humour at the beginning of the class. It has a specific purpose. When asked (in a July 1 interview) to elaborate, "What are some of the specific reasons you

would do a lot (of humour) then (in the beginning of class)?", he remarked:

I'd say the first thing is that I...especially health, which is what you've been taping and stuff like that...what has happened is, is that it has been added to the Phys. Ed. Program, and it's only worth 25% of the total Phys. Ed. mark. Our school is very academically inclined and I guess what I really wanted to make this class, this 25%, I didn't want to make it like another, another, you know, take notes that's all we're going to...you know, tests and assignments, I guess what I wanted us to do is, is to work on some really practical things, things that we can, yeah, everyone bleeds, let's talk about how we stop bleeding. Everybody's bled in their life. Um, and, and then, obviously because we're doing that kind of stuff, because everybody has experienced it. I mean, quite often the jokes are..I mean it doesn't take much to get stories and jokes going, and before you know it, they're involved in it as well. So I guess what I'm trying to do right off the bat is, is put them at ease, open things up so they're not afraid to share their, their responses, like I want them to share things. I, I guess I give them an opportunity to, to contribute to the class a lot more I guess in the beginning and in the end.

The concept of trying to create a relaxed, open atmosphere in the classroom within the first few minutes is repeated as Mr. T responded to the question: "You're getting ready. You walk to your class. What are your feelings as you walk to your class?":

I always get a little nervous, because..I think this is one of the attributes that I have, that I read the class, I think, pretty well. I can tell their mood right off the bat. Oh, and also, you're, sometimes as I'm sharing some of the stories, or cracking a joke, sometimes they're on the floor almost, laughing, and sometimes you can crack exactly the same joke and

nobody will laugh. So you can really detect a mood right off the bat. I guess what I try to do is to just try to put people at ease, umm I really want people to enjoy the class. Because if you enjoy something, then you're going to learn. For an example, when you go to meetings and you never have a say in any of the meetings or anything like that, chances are you're probably not going to pay attention. And so, I think I just want to set the atmosphere of having a very, umm..open atmosphere. We're going to do some work, but we want to have some fun, and somebody's got something funny to say, or a good story, let's talk about it. You know, I want people to feel at ease in my class.

Throughout the class, Mr. T used his humour to put students at ease. In direct dialogue with students or in giving some of his personal stories, Mr. T shared of himself.

Mr. T: Oh, yeah. I've got a funny story.

Student: What?

Mr. T: As, as most of you know, I, I've talked about it, my brother's deaf, right? And so, when you're deaf, other senses are very strong. For instance, there's sense of touch, there's sense of smell, there's vision, that kind of stuff they have to rely on. It's just like a person that's blind, of course, like they hear everything, okay. It means a lot more to them. Well, my brother was getting mad at my Mom or Dad, I can't remember who, because during the night one of them had gone to the bathroom and woken him up. He said they were just too noisy. So, he can't hear, but it woke him up. He sensed that somebody was going to the bathroom.

Students: (loud laughter)

Mr. T: Like, that's incredible. Think about that, and also, my Mom and Dad were going out somewhere and he goes, "oh, great, finally I get some peace and quiet" he says. But, see, his peace and quiet is a lot different from our peace and quiet. For him, motion, vibration, that kind of stuff, which he is very sensitive to right? He doesn't have to worry about that because my parents won't be there. He won't, he won't feel somebody walking across the floor. I never really thought of it that way.

In a May 2 class, the students and Mr. T get on one of his favourite topics, food.

Mr. T: No, I'd live at McDonalds, because, well, they recycle.

Student: What?

Mr. T: They recycle their food. They go into the garbage bins and go "Oh, we can use. We can use this again. Student 9 won't know, he loves this trash". There was this...speaking of McDonalds, one of my favourite restaurants..Actually, you know what? If you haven't had McDonalds for a long time it tastes good. If you go like, once a week, oh, man, you go how do I eat this garbage? But if you haven't gone for a couple of months and you go to McDonalds and have, like, one of those quarter pounders with lots of grease..mmm..mmm...slides down nice. You know it gives you bad breath for about three weeks. You know, it's good, it's good. Well, this one time, I was in Grade 10, and I was playing on the varsity boys' basketball team and there was this guy on our team named L. He played for the Winnipeg Blue Bombers for, I think six years, and then for the Hamilton Tiger Cats for another four. And he tells this story all the time, yeah, he was a basketball player also. Yeah, he was good at everything. This guy is irritating. He was a straight A student, he was six foot four, he played football, he was one of the top three speedskaters in Canada, he was the fastest guy at Daniel Mac. He was good looking, he played basketball, he played volleyball, he was a good hockey...he was good at everything. Okay?

Student: Was he rich?

Mr. T: Hmm, what do you mean by rich? Oh, materially?

Student: Yeah.

Mr. T: Oh, that. No. Average.

Student: Oh.

Mr. T: So, so we go to McDonald's, and I'm in Grade 10 and he's in Grade 12, and all these guys have been together for a number of years, so I'm trying to fit in, you know, peer group pressure and all that. So we go to McDonalds and I have a Big Mac, fries, drink. So, I'm saying to myself as I'm finishing off, "oh, I betcha I could eat five more of these Big Macs" and they go "okay, if you can eat five more Big Macs, we'll pay for them. You have forty five minutes. If.."

Student: I could easily eat that.

Mr. T: You're an oinker. So hold it.. So forty five minutes, I already had a Big Mac, fries, and a drink, okay. So I say I bet you I can eat five more. And they say but if you can't finish them in forty five minutes and you can't toss them, you can't go to the bathroom and toss them.

You got to sit right in front of us - five Big Macs more. Did you know, it was like forty three minutes, I had like two minutes to go and I had one bite to go, and I couldn't do it. I'd have thrown up all over the table. I should have done that just to pay those guys back, shouldn't I? Blaaah..It's like that movie we saw Problem Child II on the way home from skiing where that guy goes on the surger thing and all of a sudden this kid starts puking and it just pours out, eh? Splatting everybody in the...it's beautiful.

During a lesson on drugs (sedatives) on April 12, Mr. T engaged in a little nonsense conversation with some of his students.

Mr. T: L. Take off your hat. M, take off your hat. Take off your hood. Boys in the Hood (Mr. T laughs). What is a sedative?

Students: (no comment)

Mr. T: (writing notes on the board) Sedative, sedative. Sedate, when you sedate something, right, it means to slow your body down. You sedate. It slows your body down. You sedate. It helps you calm down. Like as opposed to some of the other drugs that we were talking about that put you on high. Where you're psycho, caffeine, right? Dr. Pepper. Oh, I forgot, Dr. Pepper doesn't have that.

Student: No..Dr. Pepper...

Mr. T: No, no, no, no. Dr. Pepper, anything you say about soft drinks, you can't include Dr. Pepper, because Dr. Pepper is THE drink.

Student: (in the background) That is the most disgusting drink ever.

Mr. T: My favourite..(writes on the board again) can cause the user..this is not user friendly...to develop a dependence...oh, I, I am sure most of you, I hope you did, attended church services, and yesterday our choir put on...it was fantastic...our choir put on this, about an hour musical performance called A Higher Place. It was really good, eh. N was sitting in front of me, like when he wasn't talking.

Students: (chuckling)

Mr. T: (He was) in his Michigan jacket, sitting beside V's brother, but I wasn't keeping an eye on them (Mr. T

raises his eyebrows and rolls his eyes, students laugh). So, so my sister, my sister's a pretty good singer. She's almost as good as I am. She doesn't need a microphone. I'm sure there were people in the front row that were wearing glasses. I'm sure they were shattered (does imitation of shattering glass). She sang like this one solo...

Student: Your sister?

Mr. T: Yeah. I thought, like "Oh my goodness", it sent shivers down my spine, like holy cow, wow.

Student: Was it loud or what?

Mr. T: Well, it was so high, and loud and, like, wow, she can really sing. It was, it was quite amazing. I taught her that (Mr. T puffs out his chest in mock pride).

Student: What does that have to do with dependence?

Mr. T: Nothing, I just thought I'd share that.

Mr. T's stories were quite personal. He not only shared humorous stories of himself but of his family as well. For Mr. T, using humour involved taking risks, making himself vulnerable. Several students commented (May 25) that personal humour, humour that involved individual experiences was some of the humour they liked best and helped put them at ease.

Student 24: I like jokes at other people's expenses and I know that sounds cold and everything but you know, they're really funny. If they're, it they're nice enough. You don't like when he..when they're in good taste. I mean when you tease someone else and they know it's a joke too. I don't know, they're just kind of funny.

Student 10: I like jokes that are experiences that happen to you but they're funny. Like, real life jokes.

Student 2: I like it when he (Mr. T) tells the kind of jokes, like when he tells stories, things that happened to himself a long time ago, or recently. Funny stories, yeah, like things that happened to him and that are true, you know. He makes it funny just by his actions, and his, kind of words. I don't know...

Student 14: I like how Mr. T does it, like he takes real life stories and makes them really funny. I like them because, I don't know, because they're good.

One of the rewards of developing a relaxed classroom atmosphere was that students begin to open up, to take risks and ask questions themselves, share answers, or give their story. Many students agreed that Mr. T's jokes and stories had an anxiety reducing effect throughout the class period. The result; students felt comfortable in taking part in the classroom. When invited to discuss: "In what classroom situations do you find humour helpful?", students responded:

Student 28: Mr. T holds my attention and really gets me going. It really helps me to learn and encourages me to participate in class.

Student 3: He (Mr. T) makes us feel relaxed, calm and after letting my mind wander and after laughing I no longer feel tense.

Students replied in a like manner when queried as to: "How would you describe Mr. T to a new student to your health class?":

Student 35: Mr. T is a teacher whom you can usually relate to in some way. He's respectful to you if you respect him. He's humorous and easy to talk to.

Student 15: Mr. T is funny, knows how to make you feel comfortable in class.

With the use of humour, Mr. T broadcasted the news that students can be unafraid. That there was no threat or need to



worry. It demonstrated his humanness and created an open and powerful learning climate. When students feel comfortable they are much more willing to share, to interact, and to listen. By making students feel at ease Mr. T was saying that they are important; that they deserved to be heard. This in turn created conditions in which students were more open to learning.

### Detrimental Functions

Humour is like a stick of dynamite (Wandersee, 1982). Used correctly, it can blast away barriers between teacher and pupils. Used incorrectly it can just as easily blow up in the instructor's face. Humour has both constructive and destructive functions (Zinger, 1985) in teaching. Constructively we have seen it serve motivationally, as an attention getter and a way to have fun. In addition, it can be used to establish a relaxed classroom atmosphere. In its destructive form, humour will be examined as time waster, participation limiter, and relationship dismantler.

How much humour is too much? Few studies mentioned this subject. Ziv (1988) provided a suggestion as to the number of humorous events (four) that would maximize student learning. Other than this one, rather narrowly focused study, no other studies concentrating on the frequency of humour and its effects were found. In an April 12, 1993 journal entry, the researcher reflected:

The health class only runs once a (6 day) cycle and has only been in operation for two years. The curriculum does not seem to be rigid in nature i.e. a set amount of material needs to be covered or else. In this way Mr. T seems to have a lot of freedom to bring other topics into the lesson, which he often does. Mr. T seldom gets a lot written on the board when I'm in but he tries to use a variety of personal experiences and knowledge to teach about health related topics. For example, when doing notes on drugs Mr. T touches on shin splints, caffeine and alertness properties, drugs and pseudogout, and the mixing of drugs.

All of the above teaching is done in a humorous vein and it seems to be spontaneous. Much of Mr. T's humour seems to be there to motivate, to excite, to create interest. The purpose seems to be to light a spark, to get kids to like health and want to learn.

The possible danger that could result is that one spends too much time using humour and not enough time on the lesson. It is easy to become distracted. In the first half hour of class, Mr. T has written only one paragraph of notes. This situation causes me to ask how often is it appropriate or effective to use humour?

#### 1) Time Waster

Although most students enjoyed the use of humour by Mr. T, there was a group that was concerned about how the quantity of humour affected the amount of subject material covered during the class. Students responded as follows, when asked: "What do you think are some of the weaknesses of Mr. T's humour or his use of humour?":

Student 37: Okay, I think that sometimes his stories take away from us. Like, his stories, like, are fine and everything, but I think sometimes it takes away from us learning, 'cause last class we had like, a test tomorrow. We only had half an hour to write it, and last class he didn't even give us, like, I don't know, but he just told stories the whole time...which is nice, like we took a break and stuff, but now, I don't know, a lot of people aren't ready for the test because a lot of people don't know exactly what's on it, you know.

Student 38: ...I think it's good to have humour in the class, but when you think about how much like actual stuff we've learned, like, it's like I've written it on five or six pages. And, like, we haven't really learned a lot. I'm not saying "Oh, I want to learn tons and be a bookworm". But, like, like, I just, we don't really learn that much but the stuff that we do learn, we learn pretty good.

Student 18: I really think that Mr. T is a very good teacher, and I really enjoy that he tries to put humour into a class, as there are teachers who are so boring it's sick, and ..but sometimes I think that there is too much joking going on, or whatever, and it always seems like it's a big show or something, and that, but, sometimes, like, it really does to help to get your attention and for you to have fun learning and stuff, and when he does talk about other stuff than what you're learning, it really helps because you just feel that you're having a good time not going to class, you know and just, sometimes it's just, I feel that he thinks he's getting caught up in himself in his jokes. But other than that, he's fine.

Student 39: A little less jokes so we could get something done.

In a May 31, 1993 questionnaire, students were asked: "In what classroom situations do you think humour is not helpful? How does Mr. T contribute (if at all) to this?":

Student 30: Mr. T can be very funny, which makes the class pay attention (more interesting). However, he uses it a bit too much sometimes.

Student 14: When it (humour) takes the students mind off of any work at all, so when the teacher starts to work or gives an assignment nobody wants to do it. (Mr. T contributes to this) by going on and on all class and only writing a sentence.

Student 29: (Humour is not helpful) when we go off topic and we go off topic alot.

When asked: "This question is aimed at getting your perspective. You have Health the period just before lunch. Fellow students are beginning to file in. Take me to your classroom and describe to me what happens and what you feel during those first fifteen minutes.", some students replied:

Student 40: Those first 15 minutes would be full of stories and we would get our notebooks open but by the end of the day we would get 10 minutes worth of notes done.

Student 23: You usually hope he's (Mr. T) in a good and funny mood. You kinda look forward to the class because you know that you aren't going to do too much.

Student 20: We probably talk about last health class. How it was very funny. Then for the first 15 minutes we probably wouldn't do anything except him start a few words on the board and then tell stories for the rest of the class.

Part of the student perception regarding lack of material covered, may in part be due to the school milieu and Mr. T's philosophy in teaching health. In an interview, Mr. T stated that he often liked to cover health topics as they were brought up in class. These health topics were usually done in a discussion format as opposed to more traditional methods of teaching i.e. lecture, worksheets, lots of notes, frequent testing, etc. Mr. T also indicated that this approach was something that he did not make explicit to the students. Without this framework to go on, many students probably evaluated the courseload based on experiences from other subjects.

Part of the milieu for students in the school in which they are enrolled, is that it is a private, Christian high school geared to the university entrance student. The school tends to be conservative from a theological standpoint as well as from an academic one. Many instructors in the school use lecture and note taking as the primary mode for the transfer of information. Over the years that students are in the school, they begin to associate note taking with learning. While elaborating on the question: "What are some of the specific reasons you would do a lot (of humour) then (in the beginning of class)?", Mr. T discussed his nontraditional approach:

Mr. T: I have certain goals, there are certain things that I always want to cover in class, and sometimes, most of the time we do cover that even though, you know, they think they've got me going on a different tangent when in fact we're supposed to be covering that in the curriculum anyway, two months later we're going to be covering that. I can deal with it right off the bat in, with, with, with humour. So they think that they're getting me, when in fact you know, at the end of the year we've got a, you know, a book full of notes, and we've covered all the material and they think they've had just a great time.

There is the danger that too much time can be spent joking and too little time spent on the curriculum. The field notes (see appendix K) revealed that Mr. T averaged over thirty humorous events during the five class observation period. This was an incredible amount. To plan humour is difficult, since much of it tends to be spontaneous. However, as an individual teaches, he must reflect on the use and the amount of humour being used or risk

the loss of the academic integrity of the course. Humour can become a distraction. This was not generally the case in Mr. T's class. Only a few students expressed concern over the amount of the material taught. However, these few students cannot be ignored and the potential for this to escalate is certainly possible.

## 2) Participation Limiter

One of the paradoxes of Mr. T's humour, was that although his style invited student comment and participation, at times, the frequency of his humour limited it. In the researcher journal, the following was recorded based on an April 15, 1993 classroom observation:

It was interesting to note that although Mr. T's humour appears to put students at ease and want to share, at times Mr. T interrupts with his own humorous stories when students try to share.

Some of these same frustrations were expressed when several students responded to the question: "If you had the power to change things, what would you make different with regards to humour in your health class?":

Student 38: ...Some of the times people are telling a story, like, he'll, he'll go on twenty minutes, half and hour about the story, some people are telling stories about it, and then it's like, "Oh, okay, one more" and then you're like half done your story..."Okay, let's keep going"...and like maybe there's a good point to say, but he just, like he realizes how much time he's wasted, and then he has to quickly write some notes. And then, five minutes later he's telling another story.

Student 23: I think that he should maybe try and get the people in the classroom more involved. Like he lets us ask questions and stuff, but we read a lot of stories and we never really get a chance to read them because he's the one that's always reading them. And I think that he should just get the people more involved, 'cause it would make it a little bit more fun.

Student 42: One other thing I find kind of annoying is that when he's really into his story and everything and then you think of a story you would really like to tell, and then you put up your hand he'll say, "I don't have time for you". He'll say, "no, I'm talking". And then by the time the, the class is over you don't have time to tell your story, when, when you thought, well, it goes perfectly with it, but he won't let you tell it, or anything.

Student 36: I like the way he's handling, like, telling us all the stories, but I think he could give us a little bit more chances for us to tell him stories.

When asked: "This question is aimed at getting your perspective. You have Health the period just before lunch. Fellow students are beginning to file in. Take me to your classroom and describe to me what happens and what you feel during those first fifteen minutes.", one student responded:

Student 43: People laughing and some being upset because Mr. T won't ask them for their response.

A similar theme comes across as a couple of students respond to the question: "How would you describe Mr. T to a new student in your health class?":

Student 20: He is a nice, friendly, funny guy. He knows how to earn respect and get his point across. However, he doesn't listen to other people when they have their hand

up. He says he doesn't have time to listen. To me that's selfish.

Student 43: He can be funny sometimes and he has good stories. He can cut you off sometimes when you talk. He is a nice guy.

The frequency of humour needs to be monitored by the teacher. Although humour invited participation, too much of it could muffle students. The result was less involvement, less interaction, less sharing of ideas, possibly fewer opportunities to learn from others, and it certainly did cause some resentment.

### 3) Relationship Dismantler

Humour can be a relationship builder (Reavis, 1988; Holland, 1982; Cornett, 1986; Hight, 1950; Levine, 1969; Martinieau, 1972, Mulkay, 1988; Morreal, 1983), breaking down barriers between teacher and student (putting all individuals at the same level), demonstrating that a teacher cares for a student, and building student self-esteem. But like the other side of the two edged sword (Zinger, 1985), humour may also disassemble a good relationship. The instructor may be perceived as the class clown and students may lose respect for, or be annoyed at the teacher.

The issue of humorous putdowns and its effect on students will not be visited. Although Mr. T liked to tease students, there were no observed instances of putdowns. Only two or three students (out of fifty-six) made remarks in this regard. This segment of the study will concentrate on the effect that the topic and frequency of humour have on students.



Using humour is risk-taking, especially when a teacher shares about himself. Mr. T made reference to this in an interview, when asked: "Why do you use personal stories?":

I, I just think I know myself better and that's why I kind of use my stories. The only, the only risk now that you take is when you do that then some people think that you're bragging. Like you say okay, I went to Cuba, then "Aw here he goes again about Cuba". Well, and that's the chance that you take, and, and so at the beginning of the year I always say I would like to share some of these stories with you, but if you believe that I'm just doing this for my own glory and self love then I'm going to have to cut it out. And, and I don't want to do that because I think there are some very exciting stories that I have, you know, which would enhance the class.

Although he was aware of the dangers, this still did not aid Mr. T in avoiding some of the very problems he mentioned. Although the number of students with negative comments was small, it was still significant enough to note.

The use of very personally based humour provided another interesting incongruity. Personally based humour was used very effectively by Mr. T in putting students at ease, however if too much was used, students viewed humour as ego building. This sentiment came through clearly as students responded to the question: "Describe Mr. T.":

Student 41: I don't know. I like him, like he's really funny and everything, but a lot of, a lot of his stories and stuff, they seem to be used, like just to bring his own self-esteem up and to make people go "Oh, he's so great" and just think more of him.

Student 37: Okay, I think a lot of his, a lot of his jokes are...a lot of the class..is to build himself...he tries to build himself a lot. Like, he has a really low self-esteem in some ways. And he uses some of his basketball experiences and stuff to build himself up.

Student 40: I think he's, he brags too much and it gets really annoying, 'cause everything is just for himself and I think, I think we don't learn enough in Health, like we don't learn anything because we don't do anything.

Student 44: I respect Mr. T but I think he has a big ego. He, he always talks about himself and says how none of us will be world class, world class athletes like him, but he says he's the best.

When asked: "How would you describe Mr. T to a new student in your health class?", several students replied in a comparable fashion:

Student 14: He's hilarious and interesting, not boring. But he sometimes gets caught up in himself and doesn't care about us.

Student 21: The new student would like him and he's funny but sometimes talks about himself too much.

Student 10: He's very funny, but he repeats his stories too much and he brags about himself alot.

Student 13: He's funny and he makes class interesting but he is very conceited, likes to brag, and he thinks that his opinion is always right.

Student 31: Funny.  
Very nice.  
Conceited at times.

For some students, using humour too often and dwelling on the personal could lead to a loss of respect. Continuing with responses to the question: "Describe Mr. T.", students stated:

Student 30: Sometimes Mr. T says too many jokes and he has lost a lot of respect from some students, which is a shame because I think he is a really good teacher. He just gets carried away sometimes.

Student 13: Most of the time Mr. T is funny but I think he overdoes it sometimes to the point where we find it dumb and get annoyed with him.

Student 19: He is usually in a bad mood but cheers up in the end. He can be quite conceited but after a while you get used to it. He is funny and tells lots of stories that are interesting but usually tells them over again and then they get annoying.

Student 42: I, okay, personally, I don't really think that that much humour, like Mr. T always tells jokes and that kind of wrecks because he..we lose our respect for him because he, we're thinking he's a kid, and we're thinking he'll take everything a kid would take. But then, then he'll change right away, and become an adult, and we kind of get confused in a way...I think that too much humour in the classroom kind of wrecks it and ruins our respect for him, and so, like humour in the classroom does help, though. To cool things down. But to a certain extent, like when the joke is like the whole class is one big joke, then you're not going to have any respect for the teacher.

For some students, loss of respect means paying less attention, acting out, being disrespectful. Even for those who still hold a good deal of respect for Mr. T, the frequency of humour may blur the line between what is and what is not acceptable in the classroom. There were no observable management problems. Mr. T's classes always seemed under control and students generally respectful. However, Mr. T was not unaware that humour could cause

some problems. In a July 1, 1993 interview, when asked to respond to the question: "What kind of roles does humour play for you in the classroom?", Mr. T replied:

Mr. T: I, I think for me humour is everything, in that, in that, I, I think if you demonstrate how excited you are about things and that, it doesn't matter what we're covering. If you approach it with a positive attitude, and, and there's, there's something humorous about everything. I mean, you can, you can make light of everything. I, I think that they'll follow suit, like I really think that they respond positively to my humour. Now I know that some, and with that one class I did mention that sometimes when I did use humour it was hard to get them back. Like, all of a sudden they didn't want to work anymore. I have found, though, that over the years that that's an exception to the rule. Like, normally I can get away with that. I, I, a lot of humour in the classroom, it works very well for me in terms of them reacting positively, them being excited about the course, just, they feel good about being in class. I think they really enjoy classes like that. When I think about some of the speakers that I have at basketball clinics, and, and SAG conferences and things like that, I think if you get someone up there with, uh, you know, this is what I want aaahhh really boring, I mean you tend to turn off very quickly. And I'm always impressed with the person that has tremendous, uh, I don't know, great, excited about what they're doing, you know.

In the same interview Mr. T elaborated more on the situation in which one of his health classes was not responding well to humour:

Interviewer: Now I'm going to try and bring you back a couple of months.

Mr. T: Okay.

Interviewer: This happened several months ago. I'll try and set up the situation for you. I think you had just finished playing intramural basketball, went downstairs to lunch, and...all hot and sweaty, sitting in the corner. Then you turned to somebody, I forget who it

was, H, or something like that, and you made the comment basically to the effect that you were not going to tell any more jokes in your 9K class.

Mr. T: (nodding his head) Yes.

Interviewer: I don't know if you remember that at all. You were just going to go in there and you were going to teach and that's it. Can we talk a bit about that?

Mr. T: (nodding again) Sure.

Interviewer: Because that happened long before, long before the study and I kept it in the back of my mind. I was wondering if you could tell me about it?

Mr. T: I do remember that quite well. As I said before, there's a fine line between joking around and what you can get away with in the class, and also having good classroom management, and I found that by joking around with the 9K class, with other classes I could always get them back on tap, with the 9K class, the minute you let things open like that, a whole bunch of people would take advantage of that situation. I couldn't get them back under control at all. And they would say things, that were totally uncalled for, and, and would cut each other apart, and..I guess what had happened was there was a group of about five or six people that kind of spoiled it for the group and that I finally just said to them, listen. And there were also some incidents where, where some of the kids were kind of saying some things about me as well. And I know that's the chance that you take when you kind of share some of your personal you know, life story and, you know, playing basketball, that kind of stuff, and some of the stories I go on, and I, I get pretty personal about some of those things, and I know that's the chance that you take. And I guess some kids were stepping over that line as to what, what I'm very sensitive about. Number one, my weight, which some of them didn't know, which I had to share with them. Like, with my weight for myself, not to cut someone else apart because they look ugly, or they wear funny clothes, or whatever, and so don't make fun of my weight. And I guess some of them didn't understand that. Plus, I just couldn't get them back on tap. They were noisy, spoke out of turn, they didn't listen to other people's responses, and if they did, they cut them apart. So I just felt I gave them tons of warning about what I expected of them, how they should answer, like raise a hand, and to listen to what everybody has to say, and they just couldn't do that.

Interviewer: What was your approach?

Mr. T: Okay, my approach was that I was basically going to teach them a lesson, okay. That was the number one thing. And I guess the big thing for me was I wanted to get my point across, whether it took one class or ten classes. I was willing to pay that price. And so the

very next class that I walked in, I, and I also wanted to follow through on the threat that I given them that if they didn't cooperate that I would not share any more personal stories, that we would just take the notes, and there would be no funny things happening any more. I wanted to make, wanted to make the point across that, okay, if you want me to teach this way we're not going to have much fun, but we'll cover the material. I would sooner do it the other way, but that was not my decision. They had made that decision for me. So the class that I walked in, that first class, basically what I did was I just started writing on the board, I didn't say hi, I didn't say anything. I just started writing on the board, copied things down. In fact there was one time I went to tell a story and went "oops" no caught myself and they went "oh, he's going to tell us.." and I just went "no, sorry, you blew it". So after doing a class of that a bunch of the ...well there were a few girls that felt it was a part of their fault that this and happened and they didn't want the class to be punished and they sent me a big letter of apology for their friends. I felt good about that, because I wanted to make the point that yes, we want to have fun, but there's a certain amount of material that we have to cover and I get paid the same, whether I'm jovial in class or whether I'm not jovial in class. I'd sooner be jovial, but they are the ones that make that decision.

Interviewer: So once you got the letter?

Mr. T: I think the response was they were very upset at me when I did that to the class, but they also realized that they had pushed me that far. And it took a while to kind of build that back up, that rapport that I had with the other two grade 9 classes. I had lost that rapport for a few classes. And it took a while to build that back up. And I think by the end of the year, things weren't too bad, okay. It was manageable, okay. They weren't as good as 9X or 9W, but it was manageable.

To put things into context, it was certainly the minority of students who responded negatively to the (frequent) use of humour. Those who did respond negatively, tended to express this on several different occasions and dominated the group conversations. Mr. T mentioned that there was a group of about five or six students that tended to react negatively in the 9K class. This was something

that was noted during the classroom observations and entered into the researcher's journal (April 16, 1993):

There is a dominant negative group in this class consisting of J, R, U, C, and N. It almost seems they have a personal vendetta against Mr. T. Not paying attention, making snide remarks are frequent but inconspicuous enough not to catch the attention of the instructor.

This certainly does not explain away some of the difficulties with regards to the destructive parts of humour. They could have and probably still would have occurred, just to a lesser degree.

It was an interesting contradiction that humour may build rapport between student and teacher and at the same time, dismantle it. Balance was the key. Too frequent or inappropriate humour could lead to loss of respect for the instructor or, for many students, it clouded the behavior that was appropriate for the classroom. The risk in either case, was greater difficulties in classroom management, less incentive for students to work, and less positive and educational interaction between students.

#### Stories: The Unexpected Outcome

One of the duties of a qualitative researcher is to be open to unexpected outcomes. The use of stories as the vehicle for humour was an unexpected outcome of this investigation. During the student interviews the word, story, was mentioned over forty (42) times. Appendix K reveals that almost 30% of Mr. T's humour is of

the personal anecdote or "story" variety. Personally based humour was the form most frequently used by Mr. T.

The use of stories to teach is an idea that dates back thousands of years. Christ's parables, Aesop's fables, and many classic tales (Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, etc.) are cases of stories that have been used in the past to "teach" (Egan, 1986). Christ's parable of the prodigal son teaches of forgiveness and God's love. The story of the tortoise and the hare illustrates the value of perseverance. Snow White examines issues of love, hate, jealousy, friendship, and justice.

Good stories and jokes are very similar to each other. In both, only the necessary information is provided, each has a definite beginning and end, and both set up an expectation that is pursued mercilessly to the end. A rhythm of expectation and satisfaction is established. Thus Mr. T's "marriage" of humour and story is a natural.

Most good story tellers are able to harness people's imaginations. The story teller is able to create mental images of events that have never been experienced and gives individuals the opportunity to interpret life forces beyond their immediate, concrete experience (Egan, 1986; Baker and Greene, 1977).

Mr. T's stories are personal and revealing. He makes an effort to take many of the health topics and use his real life narrative to explain and expand on the topic.



In my class I tried to make the topics as real as possible, using experiences from my life to help explain or teach the health curriculum.  
(Mr. T, June 16, 1994; response to study findings)

Mr. T uses examples from his family, his life at university, his time with the national basketball team, his teaching career, or from any experience he's had. No part of his life seems to be off limits.

Mr. T is very demonstrative when giving his story. His arms are waving, his eyes open wide, his voice changes, he paces, he stands on the desk. You begin to "see" his story happen. At that point, you are in Cuba, you're the one beside the woman who just had the car accident, you have the friend who has had one too many beers. Students are no longer observers, they become the story, the lesson. Mr. T cites this as one of his goals as he responded to the question: "What is the purpose of your stories?":

... I've been all over the world, and, and experienced some tremendous things. And I just, I feel like I have something to offer them in terms of life situations. And, and instead of just giving them the notes, I want them to experience the notes.....

There is an emotional involvement (Egan, 1986; Baker and Greene, 1977) for the students. Egan (1986) emphasizes the importance of focusing on the affective.

To present knowledge cut off from human emotions is to reduce its meaning and worth. Affective meaning provides access to knowledge and engages us in knowledge. (p. 30 Egan, 1986)

Later, students talk about these stories at lunch, at basketball practice, or at home. The story is passed on, the lesson remembered.

Through his stories, Mr. T also fixes meaning (Egan, 1986; Baker and Greene, 1977) or "begreifen" for the students. Begreifen is the German word for understand. Mr. T is one of the individuals for students that sets the direction on how they should understand or "begreif" life. Mr. T's stories are frequently value laden, which is not unusual considering that he works in a Christian-sponsored high school. His stories instruct students how to view life events, how to feel about them, and how to react to them. Mr. T's stories supplies a rationale, an understanding, "begreifen" to why and how events happen. His stories provide order to the students world.

The use of stories is a relative novelty for most students (Egan, 1977). As one reads through this document, many students stated how the use of stories was rather unique to the health class. The students liked stories and responded to stories because it was something different. It would be analogous to having roast beef for supper everyday for a month. Then one supper, for some unexplained reason, the meat dish is chicken. Most people would devour the chicken because its a rare opportunity to eat something

different. Students respond positively to stories because it is a rare occurrence in most classrooms.

One of the ironies of Mr. T's storytelling, is although a great many of the students enjoyed it, many felt that little learning was taking place. Relatively few notes taken during health class was the main reason many of these students felt that they did not learn enough. As mentioned earlier, students in this high school associated learning with a lot of notes and homework. So although much information, advice, meaning, and instruction was provided, in the form of stories, students were unaware that they were being "taught".

Due to the time constraints the issue of storytelling and teaching could not be probed in greater detail. However, a different investigation or thesis focusing on storytelling, its use and functions, would be a worthwhile investigation to do.

### Summary

This chapter examined the productive and detrimental functions of humour in the classroom. Motivation and classroom atmosphere were influenced in a positive manner in the classroom. Personally based humour, blended with enthusiasm were key factors in contributing to the success of humour in these categories.

Used inappropriately, humour could waste time, limit student participation, and dismantle teacher-student relationships affecting classroom behavior in a negative way. The underlying factor, in each case, was the overuse of humour.

The use of story telling as a vehicle for humour was an unexpected outcome of this investigation. The power of story telling comes from its ability to involve students on an emotional level, to have students experience events that they have yet to experience, and to gain a sense of "begreifen" or meaning.

## CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Summary

Humour. Complex, difficult to define, filled with paradoxes, yet having a tangible effect that cannot be overlooked. This investigation of a single person case study attempted to explore the use and effect of teacher-initiated humour in the classroom.

This study began with a historical overview of humour and proceeded to four humour categories, to illustrate the variety that exists in humour theories. From here, the development of humour in children and its relevance to this study were discussed. The chapter concluded with a brief discussion on the difficulties of defining humour. Webster's (1994) definition that humour is; "the quality that makes something seem funny, amusing or ludicrous", was the one settled on.

The literature review revealed that motivation, retention and comprehension, test anxiety and achievement, stress, classroom management, and rapport were areas in the classroom that were influenced by the use of humour. Based on the readings in the literature review, a general hypothesis was formulated that teacher-initiated humour had a positive impact in the classroom setting. Given that the purpose of this study was to explore the effects of teacher-initiated humour in its natural setting, a qualitative approach was judged most suitable. The framework of the study was delineated with the direction and approach guided by the illuminative model.

The guiding question formulated in chapter 1:

What are the effects of teacher-initiated humour as experienced by the participants (students, teacher, and teacher-researcher) of this study?

was answered in chapter 4 of this investigation. In the analysis of the data it was revealed that humour had both beneficial and detrimental qualities. Many students stated that humour made them look forward to coming to class. That it was fun. Students also described how humour put them at ease, made them feel comfortable, and how it helped to create a setting in which they (the students) felt free to contribute orally. On the downside, a small, but significant group of students reported that humour often wasted valuable class time. That work was not being done. Several students also commented on how humour adversely influenced their relationship with Mr. T. Comments from students ranged from his (Mr. T's) humour bordered on ego building to claims that it limited student contributions.

Mr. T shared that he thought the benefits of his humour far outweighed any negative effects. Mr. T explained how he used humour to motivate, to excite, and to build enthusiasm. Mr. T said that he wanted to use humour as a way of making the classroom experience a fun experience. He also communicated what he felt was one of the few drawbacks of his use of humour. Mr. T related how his humour, which was often personal, made him vulnerable and how some students could take advantage of this or may incorrectly view it as ego building.

The teacher-researcher saw humour, in its constructive form, as a way of getting the attention of students in a pleasant, nonconfrontational way. Students became more active listeners. In addition to this, the researcher viewed humour as a method of creating a classroom atmosphere more conducive to student participation. Students seemed more relaxed and willing to discuss the topics presented in class. Humour also created some difficulties (as experienced by the teacher-researcher). Too much humour limited the time that could be spent on the lesson. Humour also created the paradox that, on the one hand there was a classroom atmosphere where students felt free to contribute, but on the other hand, the frequent use of humour prevented many from doing so.

A totally unexpected outcome of this investigation was the use of story as a vehicle for humour. The stories themselves seemed to serve as a powerful teaching tool, even though students were slow to recognize this. The ability of stories to involve students on an emotional level and experience events outside of their own, contributed to the popularity and power of stories. Storytelling was a way for Mr. T to share his experiences. It was interesting and almost ironic that students felt that this wasted class time. The students at this school are so used to the lecture/note taking method of instruction that alternative modes of instruction missed or rejected. Time constraints limited the depth to which this topic could be covered. Certainly this area needs further investigation.

## Conclusions

The conclusion section is guided by three questions:

- a) What has this study contributed?
- b) How has this investigation helped to resolve the original hypothesis?
- c) What are the implications of the conclusions?

### 1) Motivation

Many students responded that Mr. T's humour "caught their attention", "made learning fun", and "kept class from getting boring". Both the students and Mr. T expressed that classes needed to be enjoyable. That fun was an appropriate goal. A great deal found in this category agrees with much of the material in the literature review. Goor (1989), Witmer (1986), Colwell and Wigle (1984), Kennedy (1985), Wandersee (1982), and particularly Glasser (1990) discussed the importance of using humour to avoid monotony and to make the learning experience pleasurable. The literature review also revealed several researchers (Vance, 1987; W. Kelly, 1983; Zillman et al, 1980; Cornett, 1986) who had difficulty with humour (or any teaching aid) playing this role i.e. making class fun just for the sake of having fun. These researchers stated that since students are having fun and are more attentive, this should increase student alertness and thereby increase receptiveness to new information. This may be the case, but Mr. T's class illustrated that this does not always have to be so.



What this investigation offers, as a supplement to the literature, is that humour as a tool of enjoyment is worthwhile in and of itself. There may be other companion outcomes associated with fun that may also be beneficial, but fun itself is an appropriate goal.

## 2) Relaxed Classroom Atmosphere

Students related how comfortable they felt in health class. Students felt "free to talk", to "tell him (Mr. T) stuff", and when entering Mr. T's class usually got "into a relaxed mode". Many students revealed that their favourite type of humour was real life humour. Funny things that actually happened. Mr. T's humorous stories were personal, often about family, friends, and his life. This openness about his life illustrated Mr. T's willingness to be vulnerable in his effort to demonstrate to students that he feels comfortable sharing with them. This approach was an invitation for students to do likewise, that is to share and participate and not feel that they would be ridiculed. This approach seemed to work effectively as students commented that Mr. T was a "teacher you could relate to", that he was "easy to talk to", Mr. T's approach "made us (students) feel calm" and "encouraged us (students) to participate in class".

In the literature, Martineau (1972) and Mulkay (1988) discussed how humour acted as a social lubricant. It initiates the social interaction (Holland, 1982; Cornett, 1986; Levine, 1969; Morreal, 1983) between students and teacher. The better the

rapport or social interaction between students and teacher, the greater the dialogue. The consequence of increased dialogue is greater student participation.

Morreal (1983) went on to explain how humour reduced stress. This helps to create a comfortable classroom environment, one in which students feel more relaxed and less inhibited. Once again the result is greater student participation.

Thus the findings of this investigation indicate support for the results of the literature review that humour helps to create a comfortable and secure environment that encourages students to interact, share, and participate.

Although humour generally had a positive impact in the classroom, there were some potential negative consequences if humour was used incorrectly. The common link between all of the detrimental functions was the frequency of humour use.

### 3) Time Waster

Humour as time waster was a surprising find. There was a small but significant group of students that complained that Mr. T's stories interfered with covering the health material. Appendix K illustrates that Mr. T used humour an average of thirty-two times a fifty-five minute class. This is a phenomenal amount. The literature (Gorham and Christophel, 1990; Ziv, 1988) indicated that between zero and ten humorous events a fifty-five minute class would be typical. Complaints like "we would (only) get 10 minutes worth of notes done" or the notes for the term have been "written

on five or six pages", or in the first fifteen minutes of class the students "wouldn't probably do anything except him (Mr. T) start a few words on the board and then tell stories for the rest of the class" were given by students.

The available literature provides little insight into this area. Ziv (1988) is the only researcher that comes close to broaching this particular topic. Even so, his parameters are much narrower than those of this investigation. Ziv analyzes the number of humorous events that maximizes retention of subject material (Ziv concluded four humorous events per class was sufficient). However, this study took a much more holistic view as to maximizing the benefits of humour and the frequency of its use.

There is some irony in the student complaints. Much of the health lessons were contained within Mr. T's humorous stories. Students were so conditioned to having instruction in the form of notes, lectures, and worksheets, that any other form of instruction seemed foreign. Still, the humour as time waster was a valid charge as frequent humour use could very possibly take away from the intended lesson.

#### 4) Participation Limiter

The utilization of humour led to another paradox. Students said that humour made them feel comfortable in the classroom; that it encouraged them to be more open and responsive. Yet, frequent humour use also limited the amount that they could participate.

The literature tended to focus on how humour builds rapport

between students and teacher, which in turn increases student participation (Martineau, 1972; Mulkay, 1988; Holland, 1982; Cornett, 1986). That humour limits participation provides a new and reverse direction from that suggested in the literature review.

Humour is like medicine. Taken in its correct dosage it can "cure" the illness but if too little is taken the illness remains and if too much is used the medicine may become toxic to the body.

#### 5) Relationship Dismantler

Most of the literature indicates that humour is very useful in building personal relationships or developing rapport (Reavis, 1988; Levine, 1969; Morreal, 1983; Hight, 1950). The only darkside of humour with relation to rapport is the use of sarcasm and its effect on student self esteem (Hight, 1950; Ziv, 1988; Lefcourt and Martin, 1986).

The use of personally based humour by Mr. T did not always improve teacher-student rapport. Although most students commented on how much they enjoyed this type of humour, a significant number of students viewed the overuse of personally based humour as ego building. Its continual use caused annoyance and/or loss of respect for the instructor. This resulted in some classroom management problems.

As with participation limiter the findings of this study provides a new and different direction for humour as a rapport builder. Although students stated that they enjoyed personally

based or real life humour, it seems you can get too much of a good thing. Frequent humour use (in this study) was seen as an ego builder (by some), resulting in poorer rapport between the teacher (Mr. T) and some of the students.

#### 6) Storytelling

The use of personal storytelling as the vehicle for humour was an unexpected outcome. At one time storytelling was the way in which teaching was done but, for the most part, seems to be a lost art in formal teaching (Egan, 1986; Baker and Greene, 1977). Mr. T's stories involved students to a degree that traditional methods do not seem to do. Students got the opportunity to "experience" what Mr. T had experienced and get involved on an emotional level.

The literature agrees with the findings of this investigation. Both Egan (1986) and Baker and Greene (1977) explain how storytelling engages students affectively and how stories give students the opportunity to interpret life forces which are beyond their immediate experience.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations based on this study have been divided into three categories. First is research, where topics have been proposed for future study to further illuminate the role and effect of humour in educational settings. The second category, practice, discusses ways in which teachers may use humour more effectively.

Lastly, training addresses the schooling of student-teachers and teachers and ways in which they may develop and integrate humour in the classroom.

### Research

1) This humour investigation was a one person case study. Although a one person case study allows a researcher to investigate with greater depth, it does provide a narrower perspective. Further study is needed in order to gain a more holistic view as to the uses of teacher-initiated humour. The recommendation is to have many more single person case studies using the same format as this investigation. Collectively this should provide useful and comprehensive information regarding many of the effects of teacher-initiated humour.

2) The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of teacher-initiated humour. For this reason, an investigation on the effects of student initiated humour in the classroom was not pursued. Based on my experience though, it undoubtedly plays a vital role. Perhaps an example may be useful. When presenting some "important" material, the instructor stated that the students should be giving him twenty-five dollars for this valuable and useful information. A student replied, "OK, just take it out of the \$2500 tuition we pay to come to this school!". At this point the entire class burst into laughter. Was this form of humour an acceptable form of student protest? Was this a way of relieving some tension in a

class that had been particularly busy? Undeniably, this matter needs further investigation. An exploration of this issue using a qualitative approach similar to that in this study would be useful in revealing the effects of student humour.

3) More studies are needed comparing traditional classrooms to those using humour. This would give additional insight as to the effectiveness of using humour as a teaching tool. It could be done as part of a qualitative study comparing two teachers teaching the same course. One teacher would have to be acknowledged by students as an active user of humour whereas the other teacher must be recognized as an individual who does not use humour as a teaching tool. Of course, in making comparisons in this way, there are a tremendous number of confounding variables that come into play. However, this type of study may provide some interesting and useful insights.

4) Most humour studies (Adair and Seigel, 1984; Brown and Itzig, 1976; Bryant et al., 1979; Bryant et al., 1980; Gorham and Christophel, 1990; Jones, 1979; Korobkin, 1988; Ziv, 1988) use undergraduates at universities. More information is required on the effects of humour on students in grades one to twelve. Therefore, perhaps as an extension to recommendation number one, more studies are needed that examine the effect of humour on students at the primary and secondary school level. Case studies, similar to the one done in this investigation would be useful.

Quantitative studies similar to Ziv (1988), Gorham and Christophel (1990), and Adair and Seigel (1984) could also provide important information. The number of studies dealing with teacher-initiated humour at a primary or secondary level seem so few that studies using either methodology would be helpful.

5) Although there was not enough data drawn to warrant further discussion, several of the students in this study considered to be "at risk" (those students in danger of dropping school), gave some of the most positive feedback. It would be interesting to examine the connections (if any) between teacher-initiated humour and its effect on "at risk" students. This investigation could be identical to this study. The only differences would be that the student interviews would only include those students identified as "at risk" and classroom observations would also focus on the "at risk" students.

6) The whole issue of teacher-initiated humour on student-teacher rapport needs to be explored further. Much of the data gathering took place within formal classroom situations. Yet a considerable amount of student-teacher contact takes place outside of the classroom; during lunch, after school, at intramurals, at concerts, at interschool games, etc. During one of his interviews, Mr. T acknowledged that his activities outside the classroom had a tremendous effect on rapport and thus what happened inside the classroom. The framework of this study prevented data gathering on



this plane. However, it certainly seems that humour can play an integral role in developing rapport. For this reason it is suggested that, as part of an extension to this investigation, that a researcher spend some time (collecting data) with the cooperative teacher during his nonclassroom contact time with students. This should be done in order to better understand the role humour has with student-teacher rapport inside the classroom.

7) The results of this investigation seem to leave little doubt that the frequency of humour use by the instructor does have a tremendous influence on classroom dynamics. Certainly more information regarding the frequency of humour use and its effects needs to be explored further.

When dealing with the frequency of humour the temptation may be to do a quantitative investigation since this type of study would tend to deal with more concrete numbers (i.e. frequency of humour). Ziv's 1988 study focusing on the relationship between frequency of instructor initiated humour and retention is one of the few studies looking into this area. Certainly more studies dealing with teacher humour and its effects on preselected categories would provide some worthwhile information.

Part of the rationale for doing this particular investigation was to explore the effect of teacher-initiated humour in its natural setting. Perhaps a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodology may provide some useful data. The researcher would do a one person case study utilizing an instructor

that has three sections of the same subject. Through discussion with the researcher and with set parameters, the instructor would use high, moderate, and low amounts of humour respectively in the three different classes. The researcher could then use a qualitative approach to explore the effects of the differing amounts of humour.

Certainly, there would be some problems in using this approach. Comparability between the classes may be difficult because of the many confounding variables. Secondly, for a study that uses qualitative methodology it may be difficult rationalizing the use of some quantitative techniques. Third, the classroom experience is not "natural" if the amount of humour has to be manipulated.

These concerns are all very real and valid. In defence of this approach though, whenever a researcher walks into a room for observation, whenever he discusses a study with the participants, the researcher effects and therefore manipulates the setting. The advantage of this approach over a "purely" quantitative approach is that results are not confined to a (usually) single, preselected category. For example, Ziv (1988) was only concerned with retention when examining the issue of the frequency of instructor humour. Unfortunately there may have been other important outcomes as the result of humour and its frequency. A study of this type would be open to other, perhaps unexpected outcomes. Although there would still be problems with this type of investigation, it could still provide valuable information.

8) The whole issue of storytelling as teaching needs to be examined. Storytelling was an unexpected outcome of this particular study and time constraints limited the depth to which this topic could be explored. However, Mr. T and his use of humour and storytelling provided some valuable glimpses into the role of storytelling in the classroom. Storytelling as a part of teaching needs to be explored further in order to more fully understand its role, function and effects.

The investigation could be identical to this study except that instead of teacher-initiated humour the innovation under examination would be storytelling.

#### Practice

1) Teachers need to raise consciousness of the fact that humour is a valuable teaching tool. Just because humour is not serious does not mean it cannot be treated seriously. There seems to be a stigma attached to the use of humour as a teaching tool. More articles, written by teachers, are needed in teacher journals and periodicals promoting the judicious use of humour. In this way, humour may become an integral component of any teaching approach.

2) Not only must teachers reflect on what others say (i.e. literature) but teachers must reflect on their own use of humour in the classroom. This self-reflection on personal practice provides the opportunity for self growth. Teachers need to take the time to look at their humour usage and analyze the effect they see it

having. Direct feedback from students in the form of periodic evaluations can help this process and provide instructors with the opportunity to cross-examine their conclusions.

### Teacher Education

Four recommendations, with regard to teacher training, have been furnished. The first three deal with the education of student teachers and how the University can help with the effective implementation of humour in the classroom. The final suggestion is directed toward currently practising teachers.

1) Universities need to have courses that emphasize the self-reflection on personal practice with particular emphasis on teacher behavior (of which humour is a component). Students are often asked to reflect on the curriculum but rarely on how their own personal behaviors effect the classroom. Undergraduates need to be made more aware of the tremendous influence teacher behavior can have on the students.

2) Numerous presentations are made by education students while enrolled in the Faculty of Education. Instructors need to encourage students to use appropriate humour during these presentations. Not only should it maintain class interest but it also gives students some practice before facing an actual classroom full of elementary or secondary students. The first stint in front of the classroom can be an anxiety producing experience for most

student teachers. The more practice they have had using humour, the more comfortable they should feel. These presentations should also provide student teachers with some feedback from fellow students about the appropriateness and effectiveness of the humour used.

3) A course should be developed for undergraduates that allows study in areas of interest related to education. Students should be allowed to pick topics that interest them and after a period of research (literature review and/or a brief study) provide a presentation. This type of course would expose the students and the instructor to new or alternative approaches to educational issues and would provide the presenter with feedback from the participants on both the content and style of the presentation. It would also provide those students interested in using humour as a teaching tool with a vehicle to practice, to increase exposure on this topic, and, for both presenter and participants of this course, to self-reflect on the practical use of humour and their own humour use.

4) Workshops on developing and integrating humour in the classroom are needed. Ongoing teacher education is an important component of the educational system. If teachers are going to develop, grow, and keep current, they need to be inserviced. Workshops would provide teachers with a vehicle to receive current information as well as giving information regarding the functions of humour and

the elements that assist in its beneficial use. National educational committees, like the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) or the National Science Teacher's Association (NSTA), often have humour workshops related to their subject at the national meetings. However, few are offered at regional or local levels. In Manitoba, the Special Area Groups (SAG) seldom (if ever) offer sessions on the use of humour as a teaching tool. Sessions at SAG or one day workshops would be helpful in promoting the appropriate use of humour. These workshops could be instructor led, to obtain current information, followed by group participation so that teachers could share their experiences.

#### Closing Remarks

In this exploration, it was found that humour affected classroom dynamics in several different ways. Some of it was beneficial (motivation, relaxed classroom atmosphere), while other effects proved detrimental (time waster, participation limiter, and relationship dismantler). Thus the hypothesis that teacher-initiated humour served a constructive function in the classroom, was found to be only partially true. However, in this particular study, the use of humour probably did not hurt anyone.

The surprise of the investigation was the use of storytelling as a vehicle for humour and as a method of teaching. It did not pertain directly to the hypothesis but it contained many interesting components and generally seemed to serve a constructive

function in the classroom. Further investigation of this rather unique approach is definitely warranted.

I would like to conclude by offering those readers who are contemplating, or are in the process of writing a document like this one, an old Norwegian proverb:

He who laughs, lasts!

Appendix A

February 4, 1993

During the 1991-92 school year the MBCI Yearbook Committee conducted a survey to determine student attitudes towards a variety of issues. One of the questions in the survey required the students to identify which teachers told the funniest jokes in class. The responses indicated that Ken Opalko and Ralph Wagner were considered the best "joke tellers" or the "funniest" teacher.

Brian Plett  
Staff Co-ordinator for the Yearbook Committee

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian Plett". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name and title.



## Appendix B

### Letter to Parents of Student Participants

Dear Parent(s)

As part of my Masters in education thesis I would like to do a case study on the use of humour in education. The purpose of the study is to identify the effects of humour, used by the teacher, on the classroom. Hopefully this study will provide teachers with some guidance in the effective use of humour in the classroom.

I am interested in having Mr. T and his two grade nine Health classes participate in this study. I would like your permission to have your child be a part of this study. The study would require five (in total) classroom observations, three teacher interviews (approximately 45 minutes each), four (two for each Health class) entire class interviews (approximately 40 minutes each), and up to a maximum five individual student interviews per class (ranging from a few minutes to 30 minutes).

All information and data collected from Mr. T or the students will be held in the strictest confidence. All audiotapes used in this study will be transcribed and coded so that all identifying features are deleted. The tapes will then be destroyed. Should your child wish to withdraw from the study, he/she may do so at any time without penalty.

At the conclusion and approval of this study, a meeting will be arranged with interested individuals to discuss the major findings of the study. This study would be conducted by Ralph Wagner, supervised by Hal Grunau, and administered through the

University of Manitoba. If you would like any additional information please contact Ralph Wagner at 667-8210 (school) or 663-0675 (home). Thank-you for your consideration and I look forward to your prompt reply. Please respond within a week of receiving this letter. Your reply can be delivered to Ralph Wagner at school.

Sincerely,

Ralph Wagner

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\_\_\_\_ Yes, I am willing to allow my child, \_\_\_\_\_, to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_ No, I am not willing to allow my child, \_\_\_\_\_, to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

Appendix B (cont'd)

Letter to Mr. T, Cooperating Teacher

Dear Mr. T

As part of my Masters in education thesis I would like to do a case study on the use of humour in education. The purpose of the study is to identify the effects of humour, used by the teacher, on the classroom. Hopefully this study will provide teachers with some guidance in the effective use of humour in the classroom.

I would like permission to have you and your two grade nine Health classes participate in this study. The study would require five (in total) classroom observations, three teacher interviews (approximately 45 minutes each), four (two for each Health class) entire class interviews (approximately 40 minutes each), and up to a maximum five individual student interviews per class (ranging from a few minutes to 30 minutes).

All information and data collected from you or the students will be held in the strictest confidence. All audiotapes used in this study will be transcribed and coded so that all identifying features are deleted. The tapes will then be destroyed. Should you wish to withdraw from the study, you may do so at any time without penalty.

At the conclusion and approval of this study, a meeting will be arranged with you to discuss the major findings of the study.

This study would be conducted by Ralph Wagner, supervised by Hal Grunau, and administered through the University of Manitoba. If you would like any additional information please contact Ralph

Wagner at 667-8210 (school) or 663-0675 (home). Thank-you for your consideration and I look forward to your prompt reply. Please respond within a week of receiving this letter. Your reply can be delivered to me at school.

Sincerely,

Ralph Wagner

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\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I am willing to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ No, I am not willing to participate in this study.

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(Signature)

Appendix B (cont'd)

Letter to Mr. D, School Principal

Dear Mr. D

As part of my Masters in education thesis I would like to do a case study on the use of humour in education. The purpose of the study is to identify the effects of humour, used by the teacher, on the classroom. Hopefully this study will provide teachers with some guidance in the effective use of humour in the classroom.

I would like permission to have Mr. T and his two grade nine Health classes participate in this study. The study would require five (in total) classroom observations, three teacher interviews (approximately 45 minutes each), four (two for each Health class) entire class interviews (approximately 40 minutes each), and up to a maximum five individual student interviews per class (ranging from a few minutes to 30 minutes).

All information and data collected from Mr. T or the students will be held in the strictest confidence. All audiotapes used in this study will be transcribed and coded so that all identifying features are deleted. The tapes will then be destroyed. Should anyone wish to withdraw from the study, they may do so at any time without penalty.

At the conclusion and approval of this study, a meeting will be arranged with interested individuals to discuss the major findings of the study. This study would be conducted by Ralph Wagner, supervised by Hal Grunau, and administered through the University of Manitoba. If you would like any additional

information please contact Ralph Wagner at 667-8210 (school) or 663-0675 (home). Thank-you for your consideration and I look forward to your prompt reply. Please respond within a week of receiving this letter. Your reply can be delivered to Ralph Wagner at school.

Sincerely,

Ralph Wagner

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\_\_\_ Yes, I am willing to allow this study to proceed.

\_\_\_ No, I am not willing to allow this study to proceed.

\_\_\_\_\_

(Signature)

Appendix B (cont'd)

Letter to Mrs. N, Chairperson of the School Executive Board

Dear Mrs. N

As part of my Masters in education thesis I would like to do a case study on the use of humour in education. The purpose of the study is to identify the effects of humour, used by the teacher, on the classroom. Hopefully this study will provide teachers with some guidance in the effective use of humour in the classroom.

I would like permission to have Mr. T and his two grade nine Health classes participate in this study. The study would require five (in total) classroom observations, three teacher interviews (approximately 45 minutes each), four (two for each Health class) entire class interviews (approximately 40 minutes each), and up to a maximum five individual student interviews per class (ranging from a few minutes to 30 minutes).

All information and data collected from Mr. T or the students will be held in the strictest confidence. All audiotapes used in this study will be transcribed and coded so that all identifying features are deleted. The tapes will then be destroyed. Should anyone wish to withdraw from the study, they may do so at any time without penalty.

At the conclusion and approval of this study, a meeting will be arranged with interested individuals to discuss the major findings of the study. This study would be conducted by Ralph Wagner, supervised by Hal Grunau, and administered through the University of Manitoba. If you would like any additional

information please contact Ralph Wagner at 667-8210 (school) or 663-0675 (home). Thank-you for your consideration and I look forward to your prompt reply. Please respond within a week of receiving this letter. Your reply can be delivered to Ralph Wagner at school.

Sincerely,

Ralph Wagner

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\_\_\_ Yes, I am willing to allow this study to proceed.

\_\_\_ No, I am not willing to allow this study to proceed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)



# Field Notes Sheet

Date:

Class:

**Humour Category**

**Explanation/Description**

**Perceived Effect**

## Humour Categories

1. Brief tendentious comment directed at an individual student.
2. Brief tendentious comment directed at the class as a whole.
3. Brief tendentious comment directed at the school, school staff, or school community.
4. Brief tendentious comment directed at national or world events or personalities or at popular culture.
5. Brief tendentious comment directed at the topic, subject, or class procedures.
6. Brief tendentious (self-deprecating) comment directed at self.
7. Personal anecdote related to the subject/topic.
8. Personal anecdote not related to the subject/topic.
9. General anecdote or story related to the subject/topic.
10. General anecdote or story not related to the subject/topic.
11. Joke.
12. Physical or vocal comedy.
13. Other\*.

## Additional Coding

For tendentious humour the additional codes are available:

- a: aggressive humour
- b: sexual humour
- c: aggressive and sexual humour

For both tendentious and non-sense humour, if the humour is judged to be spontaneous then the additional code "s" is available.

The "Other" category is used to code comments which are not sufficiently described to assign them to another category.

# Field Notes Sheet

Date:

Class:

**Humour Category**

**Explanation/Description**

**Perceived Effect**

## Appendix D

### Interview Questions

#### Student Interview #1

1. What kind of jokes do you like?
2. What kind of jokes do you not like?
3. You can respond to this question in any way that makes sense to you. Describe Mr. T.
4. Based on your experience in health class, what would you say are the strengths of Mr. T's use of humour?
5. Based on your experience in health class, what would you say are the weaknesses of Mr. T's use of humour?

## Appendix E

### Interview Questions

#### Student Interview #2

1. Imagine that you are one of six people, one from each grade, that are on a student committee that deals with educational issues at this school. You have been asked to compile a list of characteristics a good teacher should have. Where would you place humour on this list (and give me your reasons)?

2. If you had the power to change things, what would you make different with regards to humour in your classroom?

## Appendix F

### Interview Questions

### Student Questionnaire

1. In what classroom situations do you find humour helpful?
  - b) How does Mr. T contribute (if at all) to this?
  
2. In what classroom situations do you think humour is not helpful?
  - b) How does Mr. T contribute (if at all) to this?
  
3. How would you describe Mr. O to new student to your health class?
  
  
4. This question is aimed at getting your perspective. You have Health the period just before lunch. Fellow students are beginning to file in. Take me to your classroom and describe to me what happens and what you feel during those first fifteen minutes.

## Appendix G

### Interview Questions

#### Teacher Interview #1

1. What kind of (humour) approach do you like to use?
2. What kind of humour do you try to avoid using in the classroom?
3. I'm going to bring you back a couple of months. I'll try to set up the situation for you. I think you had just finished playing intramural basketball, (you) went downstairs to lunch, all hot and sweaty, sitting in the corner. Then you turned to somebody, I forget who, H or something like that, and you made the comment, basically to the effect, that you were not going to tell any more jokes in your 9K class. I was wondering if you could tell me about it?
4. What is the purpose of your stories?
5. Why do you use personal stories?
6. You're getting ready. You walk to your class. What are your feelings as you walk to your class?
7. For the first fifteen minutes, what do you try and do in class?

## Appendix H

### Interview Questions

#### Teacher Interview #2

1. What do you think are the top five characteristics a teacher should have?
2. What kind of things do you do, either inside or outside of the class, to be a more effective teacher?
3. Think back and reflect what you felt was your most effective class. Tell me why you thought it was so effective?
4. Let's look at the flip side. Think back to what you feel was probably your least effective class. Why do you think it wasn't as effective as it could have been?
5. Elaborate as to what you see as the positive benefits of your use of humour in the classroom?
6. What kind of roles does humour play for you in the classroom?
7. a) How often do you like to use humour in class?  
b) What do you think is a good number?
8. What kind of patterns are there throughout a class period in terms of humour?

Appendix H (cont'd)

9. What are some specific reasons you would do a lot (of humour) then (in the beginning)?

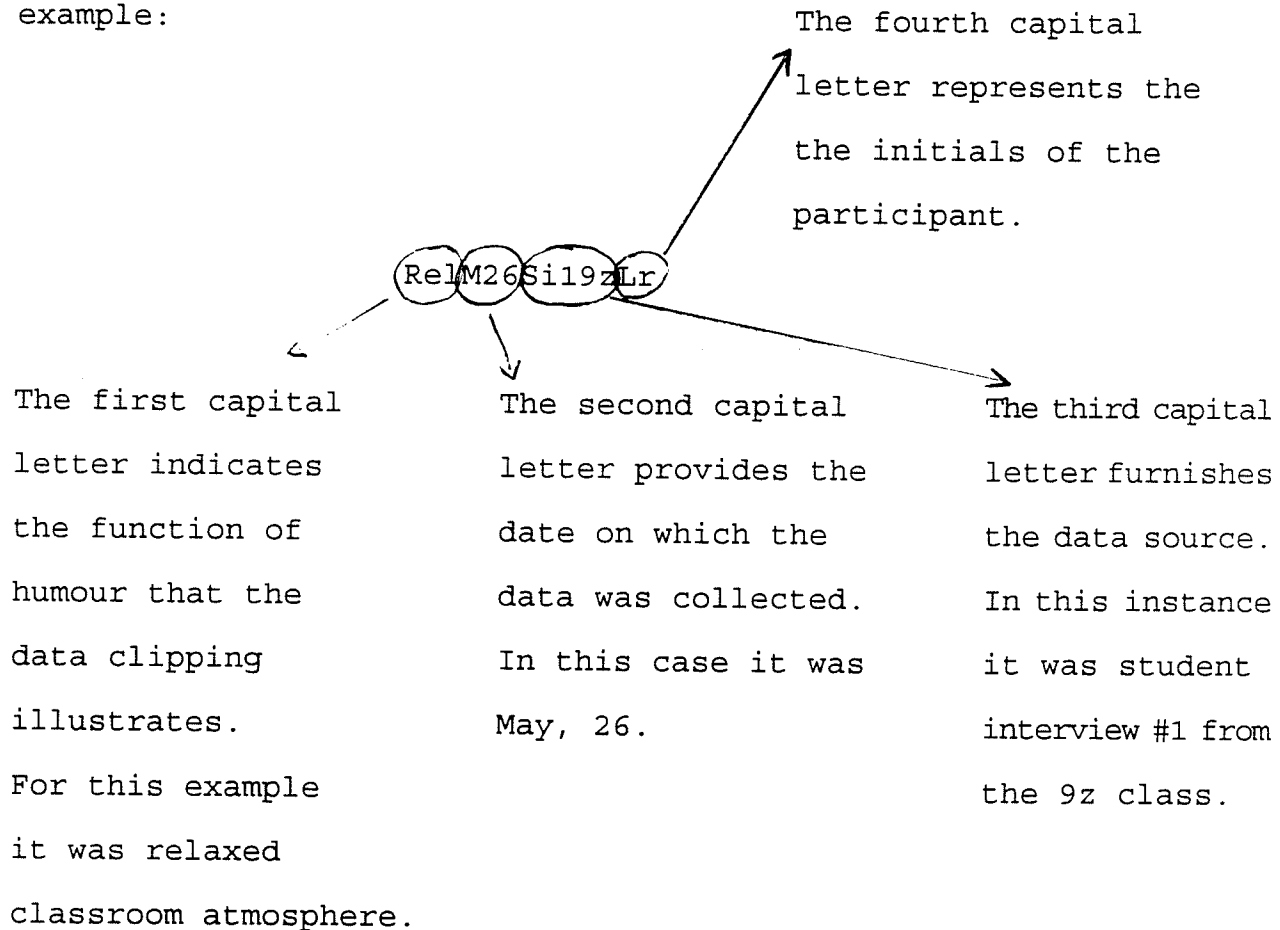
10. What would be the purpose of using humour towards the end of class?



# Appendix I

## Data Coding

For the coding of the investigative data, each capital letter represented the introduction of a portion of information identifying some aspect of the origin and purpose of the data. For example:



Appendix I (cont'd)

Data Codes:

<u>Function Code</u>	<u>Date Code</u>	<u>Source Code</u>	<u>Participant Code</u>
Mot - Motivation	A - April	Co1 - Classroom	The first and last initial of the study participant
Rel - Relaxed classroom atmosphere	M - May	observation #1	
Par - Participation limiter	J - June	↓	
Tim - Time waster	J1 - July	Co5 - Classroom observation #5	
Dis - Relationship dismantler		Si1 - Student interview #1	
St - storytelling		Si2 - Student interview #2	
		Q - Questionnaire	
		Ti1 - Teacher interview #1	
		Ti2 - Teacher interview #2	
		Rj - Researcher journal	
		Fn1 - Field notes #1	
		↓	
		Fn5 - Field notes #5	
		If the data was obtained from a student, the class code (9k or 9z) would be inserted as well.	

## Appendix J

### Participant Triangulation

#### Teacher and Student Responses to the Study

The cooperating teacher and 15 students were each given a copy of this document. Each was asked to do the same task. "Discuss the accuracy of this report (categories, results, conclusions). Explain how it did, or how it did not, reliably reflect the events and outcomes (of teacher humour) in your health class." Below are the comments of Mr. T and those students that responded.

Student 30: This report seems very accurate. It was good that you brought up the bad points, but that you didn't dwell on it because most of it was positive. I thought it was well put together.

Student 38: I feel that this report is indeed quite accurate. It expresses Mr. T's true feelings, emotions and goals for the class. Although the amount of humour used in Mr. T's health class was generally beneficial, I feel that the benefits are unique to his class. If a more "serious" class were to be taught in this manner, the amount of information studied would probably be nowhere close to curriculum requirements. The enjoyment of health class was probably the biggest benefit of Mr. T's humour. Your categories are accurate and well organized.

Student 41: It (the report) is done very well. The things that were said in this report were pretty well the way I remember them.... very accurate while reading student comments, they sounded close to the same things I would say. The only topic which didn't come up in this report but I thought did come up in class was using humour on serious topics.

Appendix J (cont'd)

Student 11: Your paper is well put together...you showed both the good side and the bad side. The categories are very well organized and I agree with what they stated. Yes, I can see humour doing good things for the classroom. A teacher however must realize limits and set boundaries and stick by them. Mr. T obviously had a good sense of humour and he used it well in class but he had a problem setting limits.

Student 40: I think that your topics are good. Maybe though instead of participation limiter you should have something else. Maybe, conflict with participation or something under that line.

Student 19: Overall, I thought this report was very accurate. It included many different factors - both positive and negative. The points were also clearly made. I could identify very well with the results of the study. I have always felt that most people liked Mr. T and respected him. Then there has also always been that handful that don't like him and thinks he is just conceited and a time-waster. I think, however, that everyone could believe that Mr. T is, indeed, a bit conceited - at least it sounds like it. He is constantly sharing stories about himself and sometimes they just sound like he thinks he is the greatest of all. Part of this could be just to add humour though. He might not actually think of himself like that. I also think that the humour he does use is, on the most part, positive. Sure, he can get off topic sometimes, but who can't? We did cover all of the material too, so we couldn't have wasted too much time telling stories. It probably just felt like we were wasting a lot of time because we were actually having fun while we were learning, which isn't the case in most, if not all, classes. Humour also did relax the class. Everyone is smiling and laughing in Health. I could remember leaving the class with my sides hurting as well, which should be a good sign. I think we should be privileged to have a teacher like Mr. T. Not many people get teachers like him. He could even be one of a kind. Well, I don't know about that. But, there sure aren't many teachers like him. All the headings or categories, information, and results are great. Everything is clear and accurate.

Appendix J (cont'd)

Student 45: I viewed that the categories in the report were all properly acknowledged and the results were very accurate. I view this because this is what I saw now that I've already had Mr. T as our health teacher. Even though now I think that humour shouldn't be ranked so high. I can see why it is significant for a teacher to have these qualities and many more. Mr. T, was to me, like the student that was asked by the teacher to take care of the class and continue the lesson while he/she was gone. And in this case (it was) for the whole year. He turned what would probably be a boring waste of time into interesting class that was filled with stories. The stories that he told us were interesting and most of the time funny. But as in the report, I saw that we were not getting much work done per class like some other classes, but I liked it that way. Our class once from the beginning to ten minutes till the end was stories that were told by Mr. T, until he had realized what time it was and wrote notes. In the report there were some people that thought Mr. T was conceited and likes to brag a lot. I heard some people say this but most of them were people that previously got in trouble with Mr. T. These sort of people didn't show respect as revealed in the report because I know of one person in my class who did this for one class. I think a lot of what was brought out of the report is true and the categories were properly presented. Everything told about Mr. T was almost exact and I think that his humour is positive for the course and helps it a lot from being boring.

Student 31: I would have to say your report is very accurate. I agree with almost everyones comments. The way you have set your categories up is very well done. The way you have your report set up makes it very easy to read.

Mr. T: When I was asked by Ralph Wagner to be part of a study for his masters, I was excited and very honoured. I wasn't sure how much I could offer the study but was willing to give it my best shot. I was a little apprehensive about having another teacher recording my every word, but Ralph put me at ease right away. The first class was a bit awkward but after that, I hardly noticed that he was in the room. It was business as usual.

I tried to be myself, which was definitely accomplished in my opinion. Health class has become one of my favourite subjects to teach for a number of reasons. In our school, academics is taken very

Appendix J (cont'd)

seriously, as it should be. Health is part of phys. ed. One of our main goals in phys. ed. is to have fun because we believe we can get more accomplished that way. So in health class I wanted to make it different from their other classes. Don't get me wrong, we still cover all the material and more, but we do it in a more relaxed and pleasant setting.

I think it is important to be honest with your students. I don't believe you can fool jr. high students too often. In my class I tried to make the topics as real as possible, using experiences from my life to help explain or teach the health curriculum. This is where humour kicks in for me. The only negative aspect of using humour and life experiences is that you become vulnerable. The positive aspects of humour far outweigh the negative aspects, so I am willing to take that chance.

Humour isn't the only characteristic that I feel a teacher should have, but for me it is an important tool to get the material across to the students.

Now that I have explained my rationale for using humour in the classroom I will now react to Ralph Wagner's thesis.

When I first read the thesis I was absolutely overwhelmed by the detail and precision of his work. Everything under the sun had been analyzed, things that I wouldn't even have thought of. I was also very impressed with the accuracy of his recording. In my discussions with Ralph, I tried to get a certain theme across as to why I use humour in the classroom. His perception was absolutely right on. The chapter where Ralph examined "The productive and detrimental functions of humour in the classroom", was very well done in my opinion. His comments were very precise and insightful. This is no surprise to me because I know how much research he has put into this study.

This paper, in my opinion, is very accurate and has helped me to consider possible changes in certain aspects of my teaching. Every teacher, perhaps everyone, should have the opportunity to have someone analyze the way they do things. I found this paper very helpful in that I am always striving to be a better teacher and this paper affirmed the things that I am trying to accomplish but also showed me where I can improve. I found this to be a great learning experience for myself and know that other people will feel the same way when they read this case study.

## Appendix K

### Humour Frequency Chart

#### Observation Periods

Humour

Categories

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Avg.</u>
1	2	6	4	3	0	15	3.0
2	2	3	3	0	6	14	2.8
3	4	0	1	1	0	6	1.2
4	3	4	2	1	0	10	2.0
5	2	0	2	0	0	4	0.8
6	3	6	2	1	0	13	2.6
7	0	6	2	1	0	12	2.4
8	8	5	3	10	7	33	6.6
9	1	2	0	0	1	4	0.8
10	3	0	0	2	0	5	1.0
11	3	1	2	0	0	6	1.2
12	12	9	4	10	5	40	8.0
13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
Totals	43	42	25	29	22	161	32.2

Key:

The Humour Categories (1-13) are defined in Appendix C.

The Observation Periods (1-5) represent the five classroom observations, with #1 representing the first class that was observed and #5 representing the last class that was observed. The

chart illustrates the frequency (and total) of humour in each class period as well as the frequency (and total) of each type of humour.



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