EFFECTIVE TEACHING WITH HUMOR

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Abstract-Humor has not been used widely in our classrooms as a teaching tool. Humor can play an important role in today’s college classrooms as it has a humanizing effect on the image of the teacher. It has physiological, psychological, social and cognitive (educational) benefits. Some of these physiological benefits include muscle relaxation, stimulated circulation, improved respiration, and exercise of lung and chest muscles, increased production of body’s natural pain killers called endorphins, as well as lowered pulse rate and blood pressure. It is to be noted that in college classrooms, language and social science teachers are using humor more often than science teachers. Teachers can use funny stories related to the topic to improve students’ overall attitudes. This paper tries to explain the effective use of humor in classroom teaching.

Keywords: Humor, Teaching tool, Classrooms, Benefits, Attitudes.

I. INTRODUCTION

Humor has not been used widely in our classrooms as a teaching tool. Unfortunately, opportunities for classroom humor may be overlooked by educators, who see it as an inappropriate distraction from the standard curriculum. This is because they are not trained in the use of humor as it is not part of any curriculum and they consider that teaching is a serious business and they are not supposed to be entertainers.

It is to be noted that in Indian college classrooms, language and social science teachers are using humor more often than science teachers. However, humor can be used as a powerful teaching tool in all subject areas and a touch of relevant humor can perk up even the dullest topics. College teachers have more subject matter for humor as they are teaching mostly adult audience. In western countries, much research has been already done in this area and the results point to an increasing need to use humor to achieve effectiveness in the classroom. The two major objectives of college teaching i.e. to build teacher-student connection and to engage in the learning process can be realized by the apt use of humor in teaching (Berk, 2002). Humor can do much to enhance the classroom climate, reduce stress, capture and retain student attention, expand student comprehension, build relationships with students and colleagues, support classroom management, enhance joyful craft of teaching and learning and even promote long-term recall.

No longer, the teacher can control the students by following behaviouristic approach and it is high time that we look for other humanistic approaches, where the classrooms are more lively, interactive, enjoyable and interesting. Most effective teachers are those who engage their students in creative and interesting ways. One way to engage students is to incorporate humor in teaching and hence teachers should consider incorporating little laughter into their lecturers.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF USING HUMOR

Humor can play an important role in today’s college classrooms as it has a humanizing effect on the image of the teacher. It has physiological, psychological, social and cognitive (educational) benefits. Some of these physiological benefits include muscle relaxation, stimulated circulation, improved respiration, and exercise of lung and chest muscles, increased production of body’s natural pain killers called endorphins, as well as lowered pulse rate and blood pressure (Berk, 1998). The course designed in a college is stressful for most of the students as they have to complete lot of theoretical as well as practical work are to be completed within the stipulated time. Students undergo a great amount of pressure in and out of college, and stress can lead to mental disorders such as anxiety and depression and it has an adverse impact on learning. Humor is a major psychological tool that can help students cope with fear and stress, enhance their sense of well-being, boost self-image, self-esteem, self-confidence, as well as alleviate anxiety and depression (Check, 1997). It is an appreciated teaching tool for college teachers, and is an integral component for student learning if instructors are using it appropriately, judiciously, constructively, and in moderation. Humor can be an excellent way to capture the attention of students and help them to remember key concepts and structures. Student classroom performance is strongly influenced by relationship with teacher and humor is one method by which teacher can build good rapport with them. In such classrooms, students will be less intimidated and less inhibited about asking questions or making comments. If a teacher encourages students to be humorous, they usually produce answers that are more interesting and productive (Dinesh, 2009). The appropriate use of humor is a powerful tool to build a sense of community, promote creativity, and reduce conflict. Teachers can encourage laughing at humorous circumstances to build a feeling of unity in the classroom. Judicious use of humor by the teacher sets students at ease and reduces the inherent inequality of the status relationship and the situation.
with the students (Korobkin, 1988). A teacher who effectively prepares and uses humor in the classroom will find that teaching is more fun and enjoyable. Students tend to value and appreciate teachers who can effectively use humor in their teaching. It has been found that when people have more fun on their job, they perform better. Humor can increase the student perception of teacher credibility if it enhances learning. Further, humor can keep the students awake, energized and excited.

III. HUMOR AS A TEACHING TOOL

Though humor is not an essential teaching tool in college classrooms, it has been found that teachers with high multiple intelligences usually use humor as a teaching tool. Humor coupled with the use of analogy and metaphor provides students with added positive associations and they are more likely to remember the information (Hill, 1988). Humor can be used as a powerful tool to put students at ease and make the overall learning process more enjoyable. This can be achieved when teachers integrate humor with content and use both planned and spontaneous humor. Humor can be planned and executed to rivet the students’ attention and sustain a level of enjoyment that can facilitate learning. Learning is a serious business, but a sense of humor can go a long way toward making learning easier by decreasing tense classroom situations. Having a sense of humor is an indication that the teacher is human and can share with the group (Hill, 1988). A sense of humor helps the teacher to become successful in his/her career and can relieve tense classrooms situations before they become disruptions.

Use of humor is highly effective especially in dread courses (Kher et. al.1999). A dread course is one that students sometimes avoid due to a lack of self-confidence, perceived difficulty of the material, or a previous negative experience in a content area such as mathematics or statistics. By reducing anxiety, humor improves student receptiveness to alarming or difficult material, and ultimately has a positive effect on test performance (Bryant, Comisky, Crane, & Zillmann, 1980).

Humor may be injected in various phases of the teaching process. It can be used as an ‘ice breaker’ or to reduce stress and facilitate creativity. Humorous examples, test items or test instructions can reduce anxiety on intellectually demanding tasks. Starting each class with humor helps students relax and creates a positive atmosphere. Humorous breaks during a lesson promote learning by allowing the brain a ‘breather’ to process and integrate lesson material. Short, simple jokes are most appropriate for the introduction and transitions while longer pieces are best at the end of the lesson. Ideas for using humor may be taken from a variety of sources. Studies show that humor becomes most effective when it is appropriate to the situation, especially when the jokes or anecdotes used directly related to the class at hand. Humor in the classroom can take many forms like jokes, puzzles, puns, funny stories, humorous comments and other humorous items like magical tricks. Magical tricks as well as puzzles can be effectively used at all levels of teaching from schools to college.

V. STRATEGY TO USE HUMOR IN CLASSROOMS

Using humor in teaching is a great way to keep students’ attention, but maintaining authority and keeping jokes age-appropriate is very important. Recognition of the audience is the most important principle of humor usage and hence teachers should target humor to the specific interests and background...
of the students. The use of humor is a double edged sword. It can also have negative impact on learning. At times a powerful humor can overshadow an instructional objective. If a teacher uses a very funny story to illustrate a concept, students are likely to remember the humor and forget the principle. Trying to introduce copious amounts of humor into a dysfunctional classroom environment with a high level of mistrust may even backfire, if not done carefully. Inappropriate humor that is unrelated can be a distraction and prevent student learning. Students perceive humor differently depending upon their own learning styles, personalities, and backgrounds. Hence the teachers should be careful when bringing humor to the classroom as there is no style of humor or type of joke that will meet universal approval. A joke at the expense of a group or individual may result in a variety of negative consequences in the classroom and can even turn students away from the entire field of study. The use of humor which pokes fun at a student can often be successfully used when the student knows the teacher care about him. Otherwise, such words and actions can be misinterpreted and viewed as put-down. To avoid a sense of threat, the safest target for humor is something or someone other than the student. Humor is at its safest when the teacher pokes fun at his/ her own imperfections and errors. Teacher can encourage humor among his/her students also.

CONCLUSION

Humor has to get a solid place in college classroom lectures due to its many proven psychological, social and cognitive (educational) benefits towards teaching-learning process. Humor can be used in two ways: as a teaching tool as well as to provide a ‘break’ or ‘breather to the brain’ during a lecture. No doubt, humor is a powerful and effective teaching tool in classrooms. To conclude, the author would like to remind teachers that the thoughtful use of humor in the classroom can contribute to the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Further research in this area is required for better understanding of how humor affects teaching and learning.

REFERENCES