

Creativity In Mind - Humor In Approach A Proposal For (Language) Pedagogy

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Introduction:

The development of an efficient learning environment is an important concern in academic institutions. An efficient learning environment can increase participation and enhance learnability. It consists of inviting classrooms, interesting contents and fun-filled style of teaching. The use of humour in classrooms has affective as well intellectual implications. This paper looks into both of them. The teaching environment prevalent today may be criticized for various reasons. However, the driving force behind this paper is the fact that educational systems today render little or no fun in learning and an abysmally little scope for creative thinking. The word creativity has various shades of meaning. However, novel synthesis of disparate ideas is a significant component of all its meanings and definitions. It is this aspect of creativity that has been employed in this paper. Most educators in these systems believe that creativity is a special endowment available to a gifted few. They, however, fail to realize their own role in the loss/ gain and nurture of creativity. This paper contemplates on how creativity and humour in pedagogical practices may escalate the academic efficiency. The next two sections discuss the rationale behind the use of humour in classrooms. They discuss why it should be included in educators' tool kit and various forms of humour that promise pedagogical gains. Following that the affective and cognitive aspects of using humour in classrooms is discussed. The section coming next takes into account what can be done, activities that can be planned and executed for creative and enjoyable outcomes. The final sections focus on how humour can be used in a judicious way, the efficacies of including humour into teaching-learning environment etc. From a pedagogical point of view, this paper has a message; classrooms need to be humorous with creative outcomes and creativity with humorous outcomes.

Rationalizing humour in courses and classrooms:

Why humour in pedagogy? Humour in classroom is somewhat a controversial issue. However, numerous research initiatives have confirmed the facilitative role humour plays in learning situations (see Bruner, 2002; Askildson, 2005; Morrison, 2008 & Garner, 2005). A great majority of the scholarship participating in this debate believes that the use of humour as a resource for educational

objectives will have positive outcomes. Still, humour remains an under-explored and much under-utilized resource for teachers and trainers. Humour is an overlooked natural resource that can play a crucial role in creating a healthy learning environment, but there is very little written about using humour to meet the escalating challenges that confront educators (Morrison, 2008). The most significant aspect of engaging humour for pedagogy is the prospective creative output. Humour and creativity are great companions, each a perfect complement for the other in nourishing thinking. Risk taking is the nucleus of creativity and of humour; the freedom to express wild ideas activates spirited conversation and sparks the imagination. The creative process flourishes when accompanied by a sense of humour (ibid:3). He lists the following six benefits of the use of humour in classrooms: (a) Creates optimal learning environment, (b) Supports the change process, (c) Contributes to healthy mind/body balance (d) Facilitates communication (e) Maximizes brain power and (f) Enhances creativity. Not only that, the use of humour in educational settings is promising in the form of various unintended benefits like decrease in stress level and emotional well-being. The use of humour as a pedagogical tool has been shown to reduce classroom anxiety, create a more positive atmosphere, as well as facilitate the learning process (Garner, 2005).

Humour is a cooperative activity which requires wider and varied participation from the surrounding. It has to do with the rapport between the teachers and students and also among the students themselves. If exercised judiciously, humour can be a tool to ensure greater cooperation among the people involved the teaching-learning process. Humour can be nurtured and integrated into the classroom such that it fosters a sense of openness and respect between students and teachers. When students feel safe, they can enjoy the learning process and each other. The thoughtful use of humour by instructors can contribute to teaching effectiveness (Kher et al., 1999). Besides fun and amusement, the use of humour involves creative blend of (im)possible contexts. This is a mental exercise and it can prepare the learners to face unfamiliar and problematic situations in academics as well as life with an increased degree of boldness. Tambllyn (2003) regards humour and creativity as one and the same. He advocates the case for using humour

in teaching has greater implications, say in life itself. According to him:

In this random experiment called Life, we are frequently required to make decisions with insufficient data, get the job done with inadequate tools and accept less than 100 percent success. Humour through creative playfulness prepares you for uncertainty. (Tamblym 2003)

Here, in this paper the author intends to voice for the incorporation of humour for pedagogical gains in general and language learning in particular. Banas et al. (2011) presents a report on four decades of research on humour in educational settings. They report that the use of positive, non-aggressive humour has been associated with a more interesting and relaxed learning environment, higher instructor evaluations, greater perceived motivation to learn and enjoyment of the course. They also report that the use of negative or aggressive humour aimed at students has been associated with many of the opposite outcomes, anxious and uncomfortable learning environment, lower evaluation of instructors, increased student distraction and less enjoyment of class. The researchers in humour as well as pedagogy have both emphasized on the need for more theoretical development regarding humour and its effects on creative thinking, learning, memory etc.

Manifestations of humour:

Traditionally, scholars have divided humour into four categories: (a) Figural: Comic books, cartoons etc. (b) Verbal: Jokes, puns, riddles, irony, wits, anecdotes etc. (c) Visual: Impression, mime, slapsticks, practical jokes etc. (d) Auditory: Noises, sounds, impersonations etc. Khan (2010) condensed the above four categories into the following two broader categories: (a) Visual humour comprising of cartoons, caricature, mime, plays, comics etc., wherein the stimulus comes from physical movements while language may even be absent and (b) Verbal humour comprising of jokes, wit, puns, wordplays, riddles etc., wherein the stimulus comes purely from language use.

The humour used in the classroom situation may belong to any of these categories or may even emanate from a careful blending of the categories. The availability of computers and multi-media has made this sort of cross-fertilization easy to administer and maintain. The author would like to voice for an enhanced use of virtual space like cell phones, tablets, phablets, Internet in classroom situations so as to exploit the pedagogical aspects of graphics and animation.

Affective and cognitive implications:

The behavioural aspect of humour is a much debated phenomena. Educators seem to have both faith as well as

fear in involving humour in the classrooms. The fear they express ranges from change in the classroom environment, lack of seriousness, rise of indiscipline, distraction and subsequent loss of concentration. This in turn has made the use of humour in educational settings is low by any standards. Humour increases the potential for divergent thinking and the ability to solve complex problems. By linking previously unconnected areas of the brain, humour forges new associations involving existing concepts (Morrison, 2008). There is a plenty of intellectual activity taking place when a certain humour succeeds besides 'incongruity' of frames or scheme or meaning. Drawing from Khan (2010) the use of humour in a learning environment has the implications on the following abilities:

- (a) The ability to think abstract and maintain reason in thinking.
- (b) The ability to process literal as well as figurative and hidden meanings.
- (c) The ability to draw logical correlates between events.
- (d) The ability to think creatively through newer meanings.
- (e) The ability to think alternatively about the possible worlds.
- (f) The ability to co relate between what is known and what could be possible.
- (g) The ability to draw inferences, use entailment and presuppositions from given information.
- (h) The ability to identify the interpretations which are not obvious.

Integrating humour with language skills:

According to Morrison (2008), maximizing our capacity to use language through the skilful use of humour will increase the number and speed of the neural connections in the brain. The language use in everyday situations is composed of two inevitable operations, one being language comprehension and the being language production. Both the operations are executed through four basic skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing. Thinking in or about the patterns in the language use and variations therein is a regular phenomenon occurring before, during and after these operations. The language teachers need to use task-based humour or skill-oriented humour.

Verbal humour say joke, pun or riddles are speech acts complete in their own and require an understanding level higher than that of non-contextual rules. Thus, they

naturally qualify as elements within the course content and instructional manuals for the development of language and communication skills. A typical feature of verbal humour like jokes and puns is that it involves language manipulation in such a way that it multiplies the context in an unpredictable way. The regular use of humorous and creative language would ensure a greater level of meta-linguistic awareness. Humorous and playful use of rhyme, alliterations and assonance from the target language adds to an indirect acquisition and observance of phonological rules. Similarly, fun-filled activities involving oxymoron result in greater lexical and semantic awareness among the learners. Thus, humour phonological games, word-sense disambiguation, sentential logic and the like will enhance the language skills. If the learners can crack and comprehend jokes, the instructors can conclude that they have acquired the pragmatic and cultural aspects of the language use. Humour presents itself as a vital tool for engaging learners with contemporary issues. Berk (2000) takes the issue of incorporation of humour in classrooms a step further. Berk's experiments on the viability of humour in tests and exams conclude that humour can greatly reduce the anxiety and improve performance of the test takers. Berk and his followers have advocated the inclusion of humorous distractions in multiple-choice questions.

Planning and executing humour:

The objective or proposal of this paper is not to advocate transformation of teachers into classroom clowns or classrooms into jokers' club. Rather the intent is to explore and exploit the magic of humour of assorted kinds to develop an inviting educational setting and escalate the volume and pace of learning. The role of the educator is as significant as the syllabus designer or the material developers. The educational settings will wear a creative outlook if the educators perceive students as creative learners and employs humour and creativity as materials as well as means. In this regard the following activities are mere suggestive.

Counterfactuals: Putting learners into imaginative frame of mind by asking them to respond to impossible and unforeseen but pleasant situations like fantasies would render a rapport between the educators and learners and between the learners and the course contents. Propositions like 'If you were a' or 'All of a sudden if' are somewhat proven techniques for developing creative thinking among the learners.

Personification: Learners often enjoy seeing their subjects and conceptual terms lying therein, being treated

as humans and animals. This familiarises them with the concepts and reduces the fear associated with them.

Cooking and tuning: The instructors may employ techniques like cooking and dining with the difficult concepts with the objectivity of getting learners acquainted with them and have fun. The instructors may allow and participate with the learners in making songs for praising, cursing, mocking at concepts using familiar tune. Creation of music and fusion of various sound forms coming from sources other than the regular musical instruments may also be encouraged.

Use of funny recall/ reminder cards: Cards with the content map of the lesson or figural summary of it offer great advantage to the learners.

Weaving stories: The instructors may create stories or plays and manipulate them in such a way that the concepts learned recently become the characters of the story or play. The learners may also try to replicate this as an exercise.

Redrawing cartoons: The instructors may ask the learners to observe and retell a joke with modified contexts. The instructors may also present cartoons and ask the learners to redraw them reflecting the concepts taught earlier in a humorous way.

Retelling jokes: Tell some linguistic jokes, puns or riddles. Then ask the learners to create similar expressions. This would enhance their observation about polysemous/homonymous characteristics of the words. This will also increase their ability to use such words in various contexts.

Restructuring and renaming: The various elements of a classroom like the display board, doors, windows, curtains, furniture, walls and ceilings can all be restructured and their appearance can be manipulated in such a way that it contributes to fun and learning. Also, the various activities employed teaching and recall of concepts can be renamed in a such a way that the learners don't fear them and enjoy participating in the same. For instance, the language classrooms can employ 'word war' for word recall and 'Sentence Shooters' for sentence construction. The activities like role-play and caricature facilitate maximal opportunity for expression among the learners.

Humour and creativity have to be formed part of educational policy itself. The syllabus designing, material development, the teaching activities as well as evaluation need to create space for the creative blend of fun and learning. There cannot be a singular way of incorporating humour into the educational setting. Thus, the above activities are non-exhaustive and are only suggestive. The success also depends on how education givers decide the quantity and style of humour.

Quantifying and implementing humour:

Better said than done! The educators encounter the real test when it comes to applying humour in classroom situation. Humour is not a pedagogical panacea, and the mere inclusion of humour will not assure that learning will occur. If humour is used too frequently or inappropriately, the students might perceive topics as trivial and the instructor as less-than-serious (Shatz & LoSchiavo, 2006). Morrison (2008) observes that "Humour is difficult: It is difficult to define and difficult to practice. It is especially difficult to integrate into most school cultures. The training of teachers in employing humour in the classroom is regrettably missing in the teacher training programs (Ziv, 1988). Thus, there is a need to understand what humour to employ, when and how frequently. Simple joke-telling does not possess the attributes that well planned and content specific humour adds to the learning environment. Humour is most effective when it is appropriate to the audience, targeted to the topic and placed in the context of the learning experience (Garner, 2005). Most researchers who advocate humour as a supportive tool in teaching also stress upon the appropriate timings and adequate dose of it. The appropriate use of humour is a powerful tool to build a sense of community, promote creativity and reduce conflict (Kher et al., 1999).

It is important that the classroom humour does not compromise on the learners' self-respect or cause hostility or discrimination to them. Thus, the materials or manner of humour should not arise a feeling of insult or ridicule among the concerned. Another factor dictating the selection of material is the target of humour. The target is often a victim because most humour is the result of ridiculing or attacking the target. The safest target is the instructor, because self-deprecating humour avoids offending or alienating others, and allows students to view the teacher as more human (Shatz & LoSchiavo, 2006). Hellman (2007) identifies seven steps for an appropriate use of humour in classroom; be yourself, pick your spots, be politically correct, know your audience, use oxymoron, alliterations and acronyms, sometimes be quiet and acknowledge others' humour. For these steps were recommended by Stuart Hellman, they are also called *Stu's Seven Simple Steps to Success*. With respect to classroom humour Khan (2012) presents the following dos and don'ts: be precise and comprehensible, customize your humour, use only relevant humour, care for quantity and timings, avoid causing hostility, rephrase comments and maintain a database of applicable humour.

Be precise and comprehensible: The piece of humour should be perfect sized, neither too short nor too long. The language should be easily understandable or else simplified.

Often a joke on the concept learned recently is enjoyed a lot by the learners because the learners can understand the funny aspects as well as the learning therein. If the humour employed is enjoyed by the teachers only or if the educator feels that the use of humour is only for the learners and s/he has no fun to experience from it, the objective is indeed dead. The use of humour in classroom should cause fun to both the educators as well as learners.

Customize your humour: There is no humour which can fit in all contexts and style. An educator who uses humour successfully does a bit of pruning and manipulation here and there in order to make the humour suitable for the learners. The style and medium of delivery should also be carefully chosen one. This will enhance the receptivity of the learners as well as cause increase in their experience of funniness.

Use only related and relevant humour: There is a need for careful consideration of the interests, identity, affiliation and background of the target audience. Use humour that is relevant to the lesson and the learners. Use of humour that is not related to the subject or the classroom situation might cause unwarranted distraction in the students. Thus it should be avoided.

Care for quantity and timings: The humour use in classroom does not call for a fixed number of jokes or even a fixed time for it. Thus, the educators need to observe high caution in deciding about when to use what humour and how frequently. Thus, the educators need to be careful about timings of humour use. It's like a medicine which should be prevented from overdose. Avoid overdose; if the frequency of humour use is very high, the chapter would progress slow and affect the learning negatively. The concerned teacher should carefully place humour and frequent as per the requirements. Ziv (1988) recommends it to be 3-4 instances per hour.

Avoid causing hostility: ethnic humour, sexual humour and derogatory remarks in the guise of humour or humour causing insult should be avoided for best academic results. The use of such kinds of humour might cause distaste and lack of interest in the subject and instructor. Thus, instances of such humour should best be carefully weeded out of the repository of humour to be used in classroom.

Rephrasing comments: The comments made by the instructors are important factors behind the loss and gain of motivation and the consequent creative experimentations. So the instructors need to be very careful while giving feedback and expressing (dis)pleasure over the quality of the work. Similarly, with respect to handling fear of failure and punishment, faith and reward are the best options.

Making Database: A database of things that cause the experience of funniness, laughter and enjoyment among the learners is vital for various reasons. One among them is planned replication of the humorous stimuli. Besides, the preference of humour enjoyed by the learners gives ample clue about the personality traits they are forming. An acknowledgement of learners' contribution to humorous situations will help develop a good rapport between the course instructors and the learners and add to positive feelings among them.

Conclusion:

The increase in efficiency has been a constant challenge faced by the academicians and education givers all over the world. The reasons behind the abysmal avoidance of humour for pedagogical purposes are many. Teachers and trainers resist using humour because they fear the possible negative repercussions. May be they will bomb. May be they will inadvertently make an inappropriate joke. May be their topic is too serious for humour. May be humorous, playful audience will be too hard to control. (Tamblyn, 2003). However, if executed properly, the use of humour in the (language) classrooms will bear positive outcomes. Classroom humour helps in the development of a fine rapport between the instructors and the learners. As an implementable idea, this paper proposed humour with a pedagogical outlook and pedagogy with a humorous outlook. It states that optimal use of humour in classrooms can result in enjoyment of course contents and create lasting bonds between the teachers and the students. The preceding sections presented humour as a tool within pedagogy. This paper discussed various exploitable types of humour and their affective and cognitive implications. This paper emphasized that, in order to reduce the discrepancy between input and intake of learning, the educators need to perceive pupils, especially children, as creative learners not merely as students. As an aid in this direction, this paper has suggested various classroom activities and alternative styles of teaching. There is a need to present humour in an optimum quantity and judicious manner. So that, humour and creativity become the source, medium and goal of the course, efficiency is satisfactorily enhanced and the limit of teachability is positively altered.

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