

Laughter Doeth Learning Good Like a Medicine

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Learning Is Enhanced by the Introduction of Laughter in the Classroom

Abstract: *Laughter and its significant benefits lower the affective filter in any learning environment. The release of laughter reduces perceived learning difficulties and lowers learning anxieties which are commonly found in the adult-learner classroom. With the introduction of appropriately-sensitive humor to the classroom, students forge a solid and personal foundation—upon which they can better build the scaffolding for present and future learning experiences. The role of humor and laughter in the adult-learner’s classroom not only enhances the overall learning experience, it also aids in retention of knowledge.*

“Humor is a significant part of our lives, yet it often goes unacknowledged . . . [it] has something to offer each of us [as teachers]. Humor can be one of our most powerful instructional resources” (Cornett). While it is sometimes thought that humor and laughter in the classroom can contribute to discipline and lack of respect issues research has shown rather that humor can prove to be a significant and powerful motivator in learning. Not only is the release of laughter a significant emotional release, it is also a physical one as well.

“Research has found that understanding and interpreting humor takes separate brain processes. The first is to be receptive to the surprise element. The second is to make sense of the situation. This is exercising part of our memory system called *working memory*” (Dye, 1999). Exercising humor in the classroom creates new pathways toward engaging the limbic system and storing information. When new information enters the brain, it goes through the brain stem to the thalamus in the limbic system, the part of our brain that controls our emotions. The limbic structure called the amygdala (in the limbic system) catalogs it for long-term memory (Sprenger, 2003, p. 32).

Laughter reduces stress while it releases neurotransmitters and tools up the immune system (Society for Neuroscience, 2001). “People can also release excess emotions such as anxiety through relaxation and fun . . . A sense of humour can be a powerful influence on learning, and studying can become a form of play. . . Humour can be a way of facing, making light of and communicating to others the stress that is being experienced. Cognitive and affective learning are not separately lived phenomena” (Beard & Wilson, 2002, 2006, p. 204).

Humor creates interest for the learner in the classroom. “Make use of humor whenever it can be appropriately introduced” (Lancelot, 1929, p. 40). Although we usually feel good after engaging in laughter, it is good to acknowledge that too much humor can create additional stress in the classroom. “*There should be more, but it should be appropriate* in the sense that it should grow naturally out of the work” (Lancelot, 1929, p. 39).

References

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