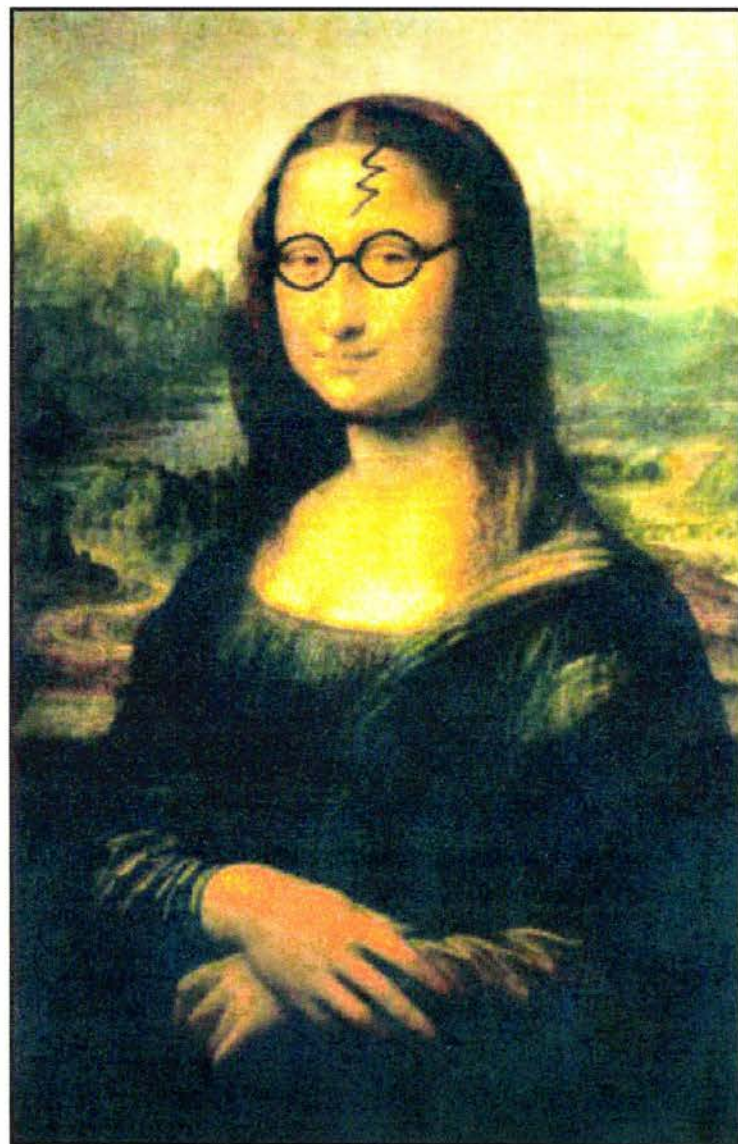# THE SENSE IN HUMOUR:
A Personal Exploration of Humour in the Teaching of Adults.
Some Questions and Tentative Answers.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the

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The Sense in Humour

A Personal Exploration of Humour in the Teaching of Adults.
Some Questions and Tentative Answers.

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis is a personal exploration of the potential applications of humour in the teaching of adults. I have provided some questions and tentative answers about the use of humour in the facilitation of adult learning. Having recognised the value of humour in my own teaching practice, I have examined the ways in which humour, when applied appropriately, can promote creative thinking by enhancing the processes of knowing, perceiving and discovering.

Adult learning has been said to be a means of gaining knowledge and skills, a way to satisfy learner needs and a process of critical self-reflection that may lead to transformation. Adult education can involve challenging periods of transformation and students may require assistance to overcome inhibitions, behaviours and beliefs about themselves their culture and learning. In this thesis I have sought to explore how humour, manifesting itself in verbal, written and visual formats, may be a valuable pedagogical tool to address such issues.

One of the purposes of this thesis is to contribute to knowledge in teaching practice by demonstrating that the systematic and informed introduction of humour into individual teaching strategies may provide a more people-centred climate which addresses individual and group learning needs from the perspective of teacher and student.

Introduction

"The man of greatest humour is he who has the most curious, observant and reflecting mind, who has a mind richly stored with experiences, whose mind is capable of ... alertness of movement, springing from point to point." (Menon, 1931).

This thesis is a personal exploration of the potential applications of humour in the teaching of adults. The central question, which I will address, is what role does humour play in the facilitation of learning in adult education? Having recognised the value of using humour within my own teaching practice, I was curious as to whether it might have an important role to play in methodological approaches to adult education. In particular I was interested in how humour might contribute to the effectiveness of delivery of programmes of study within my field of practice, visual communications. In order to address the central question I have reviewed relevant literature relating to both humour and education and considered theories and research findings in both areas. In exploring the importance of humour in adult education I have focused on four specific questions: what defines humour, is humour useful when learning, how does humour help develop visual literacy and how does culture impact on humour in the classroom?

I have been involved personally in the education of adults as a teacher in the fields of art and visual communications for the last seventeen years in the United Kingdom and New Zealand. Within my practice I have observed a prolific utilisation of humour, not only in my own teaching style but also in the style of many of my colleagues. Whilst undertaking a previous research project for this degree (Watt, 2004), I asked colleagues

about their awareness of their use of humour and its effects on the social and learning dynamics within their classrooms. Very few had given it any conscious thought and fewer still had deliberately written it into their lesson planning; yet the majority agreed that humour had, to varying degrees, played a role in their teaching. This assessment led to the conclusion that there were important questions to be addressed and that awareness needed to be raised concerning the important roles humour may play in teaching and learning. I have always been aware of the generally positive response that my use of humour has had on my own students. I have discovered, through my own experiences and from research undertaken for this work, that a modicum of humour in teaching can have benefits as to how students absorb, retain, process and apply information. I also believe that the use of humour can assist in refreshing and reframing how, what and why I teach, not least for the contribution of humour in making teaching a fun and rewarding experience.

For many people humour is narrowly defined as being synonymous with laughter. However, as this work will uncover, it may also facilitate a unique expression of discovery, knowledge and understanding. Humour can include playing with knowledge, meaning or beliefs. It's experience can be a process that can promote creativity and intellectual freedom, a constant challenge that has the capacity to enhance the life of the imagination. This enquiry will ask how humour plays an important part in how we communicate with one another, in general, as a species and more specifically its effects and influences within the field of adult education. It will also ask how it can assist in the provision of mechanisms with which to cope with the variety of emotional, cognitive and cultural dilemmas with which adult life confronts us. These problems often manifest themselves in our schools and colleges and I will examine

the role that humour can play in providing teachers and their students with a means of dealing with such dilemmas.

Educators should be aware of conveying values and attitudes that may have an enduring influence on the learner. The findings of this study may be of particular importance in that they may assist in enlightening educators to become more aware of the diverse nature of humour, including its darker side. As well as the potential benefits of humour usage this work will illustrate how an ill-considered use of humour by an educator can result in a student taking offence, adversely affecting the student-teacher relationship, thus inhibiting the learning process.

In this thesis I will attempt to explain how the use of humour in teaching practice has the potential to put students through the same mental gymnastics as the philosopher, in that it helps foster imagination and mental flexibility, encouraging students to approach problems from a fresh perspective. Good humour, like good philosophy, may have the ability to be conceptually liberating; therefore I will ask how this could have benefits in the promotion of creative thinking, particularly for my own area of teaching specialisation which is visual communication and for adult education as a whole.

"Good humour" in the context of this thesis I will define as being well executed in terms of the users knowledge of specific types of humour: humour that is inoffensive and can be widely responded to, appealing to the current interests and beliefs of the addressees. Subtle, intelligent humour that makes students think may in turn help facilitate the development and use of their problem-solving skills. Humour which requires reasoning on the part of the humourist can promote insight or

emotional release, helping to reveal a truth or criticism which may, otherwise be difficult to reveal. Humour may have the ability to assist students find meaningful connections between two events that were thought to be entirely incongruous.

I will examine the consequences of the use of humour within the teaching profession and highlight the benefits and pitfalls for our pedagogies. I will also explore the means by which adult educators can develop teaching strategies and systematically utilise "good" humour in their practice through a more comprehensive understanding of the key theories and definitions which underpin our notions of humour.

This thesis will explore the ways in which visual communicators have used humour to examine and criticise aspects of cultural diversity and the role that humour plays in concept generation in visual communications education. Humour plays a central role in the generation and content of much of the imagery within our visual cultures. One of the important components of my teaching is to use this evidence to provide guidance when developing a sense of cultural awareness, understanding and sensitivity during the process of production.

In Chapter 1 of the thesis I will elucidate some of the key theories that underpin notions of humour, providing the reader with a general description of some of the key theories, classifications and definitions of humour. These theoretical and philosophical frameworks will be referred to throughout this work in order to support the arguments and propositions in each chapter. Within this chapter I will also outline a brief historical contextualisation of how humour has been defined over the ages, focussing mainly on the evolution of the concept of humour in

Western thought to become what it means to us today. The relevance of humour within diverse cultural groups is acknowledged; however in-depth exploration of multiple cultural factors is outside the scope of this work.

What I discovered whilst undertaking research for this work was the multitude and diversity of theories and definitions on the subject of humour. Many theories of humour have been identified; these include general theories about humour or laughter, statements of the circumstances in which humour may occur and characterizations or descriptions. The majority of contemporary scholars agree that these can be sorted into three groups: Relief or Release Theories, Incongruity Theories and Superiority Theories. The first group considers the function of humour, explaining why we laugh and, more importantly, what survival or coping value humour has in relation to teaching. The second group considers the stimuli for humour and the third group reflects upon our responses to humour. At the end of this chapter I have briefly outlined four contemporary theories which have relevance to this work.

In Chapter 2 I will examine how humour can be utilised by teachers in the classroom and will make an initial exploration of how humour can help facilitate learning within adult education. I will examine the potential benefits and drawbacks of humour usage by teachers in their classrooms. The issues raised in this section arise from the premise that the more we know as instructors about the practicalities and the potential uses of humour, the more we can do with it. In addition, this knowledge has the potential to increase awareness of the uses and practical applications, which, in turn, may increase the capacity to assist in instructional development. I will also examine how the applications of humour by

teachers in their classrooms can lead to positive and/or negative outcomes for both teacher and student in relation to the facilitation of learning within the social dynamics of the classroom. This chapter will also examine how, by introducing a healthy sense of humour into our working lives as teachers, dealing with the stresses and strains of the job may be achieved in a more positive and relaxed spirit.

There is a large amount of theoretical postulation on the subject of humour itself but a relative dearth of actual research on humour in adult education. The evidence presented in Chapter 2 will be based upon a literature review of prominent international research on the subject of humour in teaching. This will be complemented with a comparative analysis of exploratory research undertaken by myself from recorded and written data gathered from colleagues from reflective conversations on the subject of humour usage in their classrooms. This research took place in the first year of my masterate.

In the third chapter I will ask what role humour may play in helping to alleviate the cognitive dissonance which can arise as a result of the discomforts experienced when students are confronted by new information during transformational learning experiences. This enquiry will be based upon the theoretical work on Transformative Learning by the American scholar Jack Mezirow (1991). This section will examine the potential uses of humour in adult education to encourage critical reflection of new or challenging information, which can often evoke emotional, intellectual, physical, cultural or spiritual discomfort. I will ask how humour can assist in the development of higher order thinking by helping promote critical self-reflection, helping to create a classroom atmosphere, which is more inclusive, discriminatory and integrative. In

addition, this chapter will examine how the inclusion of humour may help in the promotion of activities central to critical reflection. I will query how the instructor's use of appropriate humour can promote assumption analysis, contextual awareness and imaginative speculation. Assumption analysis refers to thinking in such a way that it challenges our beliefs, values, cultural practices and social structures helping to assess their impact on individual's daily proceedings. Contextual awareness is the realisation that our assumptions are socially and personally created in a historical and cultural context. Imaginative speculation indicates the ability to imagine alternative ways of thinking in order to challenge our ways of knowing and acting.

In Chapter 4 I will ask why and how humour contributes to teaching concept generation in visual communications classrooms. I will explore how students approach a set of visual problems in order to successfully communicate an idea visually through an understanding and use of metaphor, pun, allegory and analogy. This section will draw parallels between the thought processes which occur in the production of visual imagery, particularly when applying the principles of metaphor, and the cognitive processes involved in humour insights, particularly how human beings process incongruity resolution in verbal humour.

In this chapter I examine ways in which humour contributes to the development of creative thinking. These propositions will be based upon the theories of Lateral Thinking and Bisociative Thinking, both of which share a similar belief which states that the creative activities involved in artistic originality, scientific discovery and comic inspiration share a fundamental pattern. This section aims to illustrate how teachers of visual communications can help promote new ideas or insights in their

students by understanding how human beings cognitively process humour, providing deeper understanding of how the brain works as a thinking tool. It will be supplemented with an historical and contemporary contextualisation of the use by visual artists and designers of humour in their work..

In the final chapter I will ask what role humour has to play in our increasingly multicultural classrooms and examine the role humour may have in the creation of a more egalitarian teaching environment from an anthropological perspective. This chapter will ask how aware and sensitive we are as teachers to the impact humour can have in a culturally diverse classroom. This will be examined from the perspective of humour being a universal human emotion, something that we all share and have in common as a species but which reflects diversity of experience. I will ask how humour can assist teachers and students to consider and reappraise the multitude of cultural issues, which can arise in their classroom and in societies as a whole. I will enquire as to how humour can help broaden and develop socio-cultural tolerance and understanding across a wide range of issues including gender, age, politics, spirituality/religion and ethnicity. This will be balanced by examining how the flip-side of humour can encourage and perpetuate many myths, stereotypes and prejudices within these cultural frameworks which can often belittle or discriminate against groups of people with diverse cultural beliefs.

The objective of this thesis is to argue how the use of appropriate humour may help provide adult educators with a means of understanding learners attitudes, past experiences, habits, opinions and cultures and encourage learner involvement. Since undertaking my master's degree I have

become aware of the relative lack of in-depth research into the uses of humour in adult education when compared to other sectors in our societies. Countless high-level businesses are hiring humour specialists to help develop creative thinking, mental flexibility and the ability to cope with change (Morreall, 2004). Considerable research has been undertaken examining the role of humour in making our lives less stressful; for example, humour has been included in the development of strategies to help ease anxiety in health care settings (Cornett, 1986). By providing educators with a deeper understanding of the nature and functions of humour this thesis aims to contribute to the development of adult educational teaching practice by contributing to and enhancing the current body of humour research.

Chapter 1

What is Humour?

"Humour appears to be a whole composite of different behaviors rather than a single one and any explanation that attempts to explain them equally would appear to be doomed to do so by explaining them marginally." (Davis and Farina, 1970)

In this chapter I will ask what the key theories are which underpin notions of humour? This question is being addressed in order to obtain a clearer understanding of the historical and contemporary theories and classifications behind the phenomenon of humour. Whilst researching the many definitions and classifications of humour, it has become evident to me how problematic it has been to reach a definitive global anthropological theory of humour. Theorists and academics in fields of research such as psychology, philosophy, linguistics, sociology and literature have grappled with ways of defining humour. Some have concluded that humour cannot be defined, others that it can be defined. What is generally accepted amongst contemporary theorists is that within such a diverse and multi-faceted subject area there can be no literal or single definition of humour. Virtually all-current definitions can be considered in terms of metaphors, models or perspectives.

A myriad of theories relating to humour have been identified, but it is widely agreed upon by the majority of theorists that these can be sorted into three groups. I will focus on these three categorisations of humour namely: incongruity theories, release/relief theories and superiority

theories. The vast majority of humour theorists have been captivated by a single model (paradigm or metaphor) viewing a definition from the perspective of one of these three classifications. Variant models and perspectives of these theories, which will have relevance to this work, will be outlined in this chapter. Cognitive, conative, affective and instinct categories of sociological theories will be examined.

Can Humour be Defined?

"Of all the phenomenon which come under the investigation of empirical and philosophical psychology, humour is easily one of the least understood." (Morreall, 1987).

To begin to understand humour I will start by examining the nature of definition. In an empirical sense all terms can be defined. In the early dialogues of Plato he opined that there is no single descriptive definition for a term. There are stipulative definitions, but they are neither universal nor absolute. What is the definition of humour? This is a many-question fallacy, assuming that there is a single definition applying it at all times, places and contexts. If I examine humour as an emotion, and view emotions as a series of assessments that cause bodily feeling and action, humour can be viewed as statements, which cause feeling and action in a certain context. Humour would therefore be the product of diverse and varied statements, feelings and situations. Due to extensive cultural ramifications in the diverse and varied nature of human emotions, I will provide a more in-depth analysis of humour as an emotion in chapter five.

Humour according to the Oxford English Dictionary is *'facetiousness, comicality, faculty of perceiving this; jacose imagination'*. According to Giles and Oxford (2007), there are seven categories of humour and laughter: social, anxious, derisive, apologetic, humorous, ignorant and tickled. Some of these categories will be explored later in reference to the differentials between humour and laughter. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines humour as *a 'type of stimulation that tends to elicit the laughter reflex.'* Webster's Encyclopedia of the English Language describes humour as *'the facility of perceiving what is amusing and comical and the faculty of expressing the amusing and comical'* Simply put, I perceive humour as the stimulus, and laughter as the response. Warren Shibles (2005), eminent humour theorist, points to humour being distinguished from other emotions by the huge variable of feelings and contexts involved; laughter, as it just involves bodily feeling and action is, in his view, not the criterion of humour. He states: *"Humour is produced by the appraisal that there is a mistake, but one which is not bad or harmful. This then, produces laughter and good bodily feelings."* *(p.84)*. Humour is directly related to laughter; however humour researchers have to be careful, since it has been established that the presence of laughter does not necessarily imply the presence of humour. The absence of any reaction to humour may imply either support of the speakers humorous intent, since no interruptions occur, or understanding but not appreciating the humour in certain cases (Hay, 2000).

What arises from an examination of humour is that no one theory is correct. They are problematic in nature.

"Philosophical literature on humour is both minimal and entrenched in a logical space and language inadequate to the scope and complexities of the subject." (Rucki, 1993).

One of the most common faults of theories is the assumption that any one theory is correct, particularly in the realm of humour, and that the other theories are false. It has made little sense to seek one theory that will explain it all. Research for this section revealed that many writers' specific theories on humour are based on his or hers more general beliefs. A Freudian gives a Freudian view of humour, a Gestaltist gives a Gestaltist theory; a linguist gives a discourse analysis, speech act or script-theory and so on.

The theories explored in this section will be based upon the idea that humour manifests itself as the result of many kinds of statements, feelings and situations. Since adult educators are dealing with a wide range of subject matters and student differentials, they may find that one or more of the theories described in this chapter have relevance to their teaching styles and philosophies.

A Brief Historical Perspective

The word humour derives from a Latin term meaning *"liquid"*, *"fluid"*, or *"moisture"*. It was originally postulated by the Greeks that there were various combinations of key bodily fluids or *'humours'* and when the balance of these fluids shifted this affected people's 'complexions' and 'temperaments', meaning their physical and mental qualities. The ancient Greeks believed temperaments were affected and controlled by four humours. When in proper balance, an individual was in a good humour,

so to speak. It was believed that an excess of one of the fluids produced a change in mood or affect: irritable if yellow bile was disproportionate, gloomy or melancholic if black bile predominated, sluggish if phlegm was too abundant, and sanguine if an individual had an oversupply of blood. A person possessing an excess of one of these fluids came to be called a "humourist" or an individual subject to "humours". The diagnosis for controlling excessive "humours" was laughter. If the unfortunate soul could not just laugh it off, he would then become the object of others laughter. There is a direct link here with superiority theories on humour, to be discussed later in this chapter, in that if we laugh at others for their faults it can often be through fear of not recognising similar traits within ourselves.

Aristotle wrote and theorised extensively on humour. One of the best known of Aristotle's theories is encapsulated in the following quotation: *"Comedy is an imitation of man worse than the average; worse ... [in the sense of] the ridiculous, which is a species of the ugly. The ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others."* (Cooper 1922). "Imitation" in this sense refers to what is created. Aristotle asserts that ridicule, being open to censure, is not humour and that humour is not abuse but only gives unpressured and harmless innuendo.

In Europe during the medieval period the pursuit of learning occurred within a religious framework. Within literature humour found sanction because it allowed the manipulation of multiple meanings; however, its use was more to illuminate the seriousness of the metaphors of the scriptures. Although vernacular literature was not recorded for many centuries, merry speeches and witty tales were passed on by a strong oral

tradition. With the birth of the Italian Renaissance learning in languages, literature, history and philosophy was pursued for its own end in a secular structure. The breakaway from more strictly devotional subjects allowed increased freedom of expression as revealed in the paintings of Breughel, Bosch and Archimboldo. Writers such as Shakespeare and Cervantes used humour to help illustrate the complexity of thought processes and used their literary wit to criticise and comment on the socio-politics of the day.

Despite the intellectual climate which allowed the arts to flourish during the Renaissance period humour was often held in low esteem and perceived as an unbalanced mental condition, fixed folly or vice and it was continued to be viewed as an abnormality until the mid 18th century. Around this time humour was alternatively looked upon as a whimsical oddity or foible, amusing and innocent and humour had come to include everything from wit to buffoonery (Cornett, 1986). It was not until the 19th century that humour began to be more widely recognised as the highest form of comedy/entertainment and considered a general term to denote anything comic, something that makes us laugh, much as the word is used today. The important point here is that a new conscience emerged in the Renaissance. An adult awareness developed of perceiving humour as a victory over fear, for the human being began to laugh at fear and at themselves. The relations between the individual and the universal, between the soul of man and god tended increasingly to be replaced by the relations between man and man. This experience produced significant changes that currently characterise humour and human communication.

From the widest perspective there was a change from a monological to a dialogical interaction. In monologue the individual is concerned only for

themselves, in their view, others exist to service and confirm them. Dialogue, in contrast to monologue encourages people's hopes, expectations and possibilities. Dialogue and humour can have the power to change the established hierarchical relation imposed by the monologue. Humour is a magical synthesis of laughter as it implies that our serious beliefs encounter a contradiction or a contrast. This may, therefore imply that humour makes the human being a trespasser in the world of the monologue. Through humour there is a thoughtful amusement that makes people aware of things, potentially, from another perspective. I believe dialogical humour an important means by which adult educators may improve the ways in which information is transmitted to their students and is central to this enquiry.

Key Theories on Humour

I will now analyse a variety of definitions and descriptions of what are generally regarded as the three dominant theories which underpin the majority of theoretical research on humour, namely; incongruity theory, relief theory and superiority theory. I will also describe selected theoretical offshoots of these three theories, which will have relevance to this thesis.

These three classifications of humour were proposed by Professor Victor Raskin, Professor of English and Linguistics at Purdue University and Professor John Morreal, Professor of Religion at the College of William and Mary in the early 1980's. These three categories have also been re-contextualised in psychological terms. Incongruity Theory uses a cognitive-perceptual contextualisation, referring to the disparity between the expected and the actual situation or behaviour. Relief Theory has a

psychoanalytical focus and states that humour can arise from stress and that its use can result in the alleviation of anxiety. Superiority Theory involves socio-behavioural aspects, relating to the disparagement of others. Subsequent chapters will deal with how these theories and categorisations have relevance and may play an influential role in how adult educators utilise humour in their classrooms.

1. Incongruity Theory

Incongruity theory has had the most influence on the study of humour in recent years. Put simply incongruity is the surprising, illogical or unexpected juxtaposition of ideas and/or situations. The philosopher Immanuel Kant is credited with having made the first full conceptualisation of incongruity in the 18th century. Kant (1790) asserted that humour and laughter are located in incongruity, following from something absurd and *"is an affection arising from sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing"* (p.176). He continues *"the jest must contain something that is capable of deceiving for a moment"*.

Kant's use of the phrase "sudden transformation" is interesting, due to the nature of incongruity presenting a seemingly irrelevant idea, this may create confusion or disparity, but if suitable explanation of the joke is supplied to the audience an entirely new trend of thought may be exposed. In an educational context this may provide a new way of approaching a problem or set of problems. Monro (1963) argued that all humour involves a mixing of different universes of discourse. One thing is regarded as another. This incongruity can provide us with the ability to delight in the new and an escape, similar to metaphor. This has been

described as context deviation humour, or the combining of things from two incompatible contexts. This idea is related to the Configuration or Gestalt theory, stating that a context deviation may create a shift from embarrassment to relieved understanding (Bateson, 1953). The previously unrelated part unexpectedly falls into place in a whole, almost like a crossword puzzle experience.

In more recent research, Morreall (1987), recognising that laughter is not the same as humour, states: *"Humour always involves the enjoyment of a perceptual or imagined incongruity" (p.3).* It is based on surprise or incongruity and may be an affective shift. For Morreall, incongruity is seen to be uniquely human and sets human beings apart from other animals, who process incongruities as potential threats. Morreall claims (1987) that because humans have been able to view their world in non-practical ways they have been able to develop not only science but art. Leacock (1938) stressed the need for a positive assessment for incongruity to work; humour is regarded in this context as the essence of human kindness described by Leacock as *"the kindly contemplation of the incongruities of life and the artistic expression thereof." (p.48).*

Schopenhauer (1966), an exponent of Incongruity Theory, made the observation that *"the cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through in some relation, and the laugh itself is just an expression of this incongruity"(p.89).*

Looking at incongruous humour from this perspective may enable people to develop and progress so as to refine their character. This theory is supported by Simon Critchley in his book 'On Humour' (2002). He

defends a two-fold claim that humour both reveals a situation and indicates how that situation might be changed, inviting us to become philosophical spectators on our lives, indicating how our lives might be transformed or perfected. This is derived from a belief that incongruous humour possesses certain redemptive or messianic qualities.

To the philosopher Hegel, comedy and incongruous humour were viewed as the triumph over one's contradictions. Hegel's philosophical model is the combination of thesis and antithesis, by triumphing over contradiction and ruined purpose the contradictory contrasts are given an opportunity to be mastered and resolved. Linda Barnes (1978) works from a similar dialectic theory that humorous assertion is initially viewed as a thesis, then in terms of antithesis (or contradiction, as in the literal falsity of metaphor) and then resolved into a synthesis.

A logical absurdist theory of humour has been suggested by Lippitt in 'Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought', when he writes of *"humour that depends upon incongruity operating in the same way as metaphor."* (Lippitt, 2000. p.112).

Metaphor as a way of describing something as something else has an important role to play in the illustrative/creative process as an effective means of giving an image a second layer of meaning which may increase the viewer's level of enquiry. Visually, an illustrator can provide the viewer with a set of incongruities, which require resolution or interpretation. With humour, the deviation often ends with the impossible, the unresolved contradiction, creating a complete block to reason and understanding. With metaphor, a new level or understanding is very often connoted. The use and communication of humour through

metaphor, and allegory as a type of expanded metaphor, is a common phenomenon. Humour may be created by the expansion of a far-fetched metaphor, or by expanding a familiar metaphor which is not usually expanded. For example, Freud's views that rooms are regarded as wombs could be regarded as far-fetched conceits, but because of its familiarity and acceptance by psychiatrists, it is taken as authoritative knowledge. Models and metaphors can shift with confirming and disconfirming evidence. In earlier times the term "people are machines" would be laughed at as nonsense but today it is accepted as a fundamental root metaphor. In a classroom setting an understanding or resolution of incongruity-based humour would be required to facilitate learning.

Thomas R. Schultz (1976) claims two stages of incongruity: perception and resolution. These stages constitute a traditional view of incongruity, for it is only after the incongruity is perceived by an observer that it can be resolved, and it is in the resolution that the receiver finds the humour.

Linguistic script theories offer an explanation based largely on incongruity and opposition. This theory often uses the term "shift". This is used to describe a moment between actual – non-actual, impossible – possible, good – bad, life – death and similar concepts. During a humorous aside a switch is often triggered to move one incongruous script to another, or a sudden shift of two incongruous frames. To illustrate this in terms of visual metaphor, to juxtapose a kettle with a pair of lips on the spout would initially evoke an incongruity, but when linked with the words 'whistling-kettle' an association, or resolution is achieved. Victor Raskin (1985) proposed that ordinary language cannot be reduced to logic and that truth is not even essential to meaning; he viewed this as advancement over logicians by opposing the reduction of statements to

mere truth values. An oft quoted description of this theory is *"laughter arises from the view of two or more inconsistent unsuitable or incongruous parts of circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage, or as acquiring a sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner from which the mind takes notice of them."* (Beattie, 1976, p.78).

Incongruity theory may be summed up as finding humour in pleasant or unpleasant incongruous shifts of one sort or another. People often laugh at the novel and amusing juxtaposition of sensations, perceptions or concepts. Essentially, incongruity- based theories and the researchers and theorists that espouse them locate the humour in the incongruity itself and then leave it to the "audience" to identify, perceive and resolve the incongruity and find, as a result, the humour inherent in the incongruity. For many proponents of incongruity-based theories, humour exists, irrespective of an audience and their failure to find the humour. But, it must be argued that, certainly within a multi-cultural classroom setting, this may be due to a number of variables, for example, concerning male to female ratios, age, ethnic differences or learning difficulties due to mental or physical disability. In my own experience, if an individual or group misinterprets or is confused by a humorous incongruity an explanation based on an understanding of its cultural and educational context will be required in order to facilitate learning.

In reference to John Morreall (1983), the more sophisticated our conceptual systems become in adulthood the more opportunity there is for incongruity to develop between its components and truly adult humour. Ultimately, the development of a refined sense of humour involves the capacity to detect very subtle conceptual incongruities and to hopefully

experience the accompanying psychological shift as pleasant and perhaps, even on a cognitive level, revelatory.

2. The Relief/ Release Theory:

Before the 18th century wit and humour had been identified by Western society as a predominantly malicious weapon invariably directed at the presumed inferiority of others. The offensive and hurtful use of derogatory humour is still very much with us today directed towards ethnic, gender or sexual minorities. This often diminished as negative evaluation of humour was partly by-passed by the 'hydraulic', or relief theory proposed in the 19th century by Herbert Spencer and further elaborated on by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Relief theory focuses on the effects of humour perception on human emotional life and its interaction with Freud's theory of psychological architecture and not on the structure of human perception.

The relief theory is of a physiological or psycho-physiological nature and as represented by Shaftsbury, Freud and Spencer, who perceived the mixture of humour and laughter as the result of the release of unnatural nervous energy. In 'Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious' (1905) Freud pointed to a fundamental conflict between the demands of social life and our instinctual urges. Jokes and slips of the tongue may often bear traces of repressed desires, which are often forbidden or taboo subjects in polite society, which through humorous interchange can be shared as if they are not serious. Humour may then be viewed as a way of rebelling against the demands of social order. As Freud wrote, *"humour is not resigned, it is rebellious"* (Freud, 1927).

Freud, therefore, provides us with a 'release' type theory. Laughter through humour acts as a kind of release valve, which permits the expression of otherwise forbidden impulses. Freud finds many similarities between the techniques of humour and the ways in which our waking thoughts are distorted in dreams. This enabled him to make a connection between this theory of humour with his theory of dream interpretation in which he asserted that dreams are also a means of eluding the censor.

Freud's view, put concisely, is that humour is pain changed to pleasure. Supposedly, in childhood there are very few blocks or restrictions that inhibit expression of pleasure. These blocks are painfully developed as we grow older and must be overcome to achieve such pleasure. Part of the pleasure we derive from humour stems from the tapping of deep, repressed forces which may ultimately be traced back to the id (subconscious) instincts of life and death. A joke re-directs the psychological inhibitions, which we all possess to some degree, and brings us pleasure, which Freud equated with the 'liberation of psychic energy'.

Freud postulated that humour works by means of two principle mechanisms: 'condensation' and 'displacement'. Condensation he described as a technique which implies an economy in thought and expression thereby conserving psychic energy. This can be described as a process by which a number of meaningful associations (as in metaphor) can be attached to a single word, in dreams, or indeed a visual image. An example could be the word "bank" which can be condensed into a number of meanings; "a financial institution" or the "edge of a river" which can be drawn upon in context to lead the mind in a variety of

directions at once. Displacement refers to a form of defense mechanism, which refers to the effects arising from the transference of psychic energy which Freud ascertained arising from conflict or incongruity in response to a humorous anecdote thus bringing relief. Menon's (1931) ambivalence theory is an expansion of Freud's model. He maintains that laughter is a release of surplus energy such as experienced after a fight. It is a conflict of two impulses and an attitude change and consequently is a release of energy.

Avril Ziv, the Israeli born psychologist who has written extensively on humour, views humour as being aggressive and primarily a defense mechanism and proposed a theory based upon an incongruity-relief principle. It has supplied us with a schema of his views on the function of humour which indicates that key functions of humour can be aggressive, sexual, social, defensive or intellectual (Ziv, 1984). Aggressive functions of humour include disparaging remarks and sarcasm, which can be used to hurt others and establish superiority. Humour can be used in a sexual manner, for example, the use of visual imagery or verbal comments can have the purpose of establishing power, allowing the expression of repressed desires or enhancing bonding. In social contexts the use of humour can influence communications and atmospheres. It may serve the purpose of a defense mechanism, for example, the use of self-deprecation can act as a pre-emptive strike and remove the need for others to attack, or it can sublimate less acceptable thoughts and feelings. The intellectual use of humour includes wit or cerebral jokes which can aid understanding or remembrance of concepts and enhance creativity.

Schopenhauer's (1996) opinions on humour also have leanings towards escape or release theory based on the belief that humour results from the escape from oppressive reason. There is often a vital, sudden elation, which can be derived from release from the constraints of reason. Humour when approached from the perspective of release can therefore be perceived as a function or escape from conformity, morality, inhibitions, reason, language, naivete or seriousness

In my own experience in my Illustration class I have found humour and laughter a way of defusing the discomfort and anxiety in students sometimes felt when confronting images and artworks that may be embarrassing. Part of the development of a mature visual literate is to promote the release or relief of prejudice allowing students to look objectively at an image they may not otherwise confront, making it easier to return to it and look again. I will often use a joke or silly mime at the start of a lesson to "break the ice" and release the tensions and anxieties often felt on the first day. Indeed, some of the presumed health benefits of humour (some of which will be examined in this work) may be coincidental consequences of what I believe to be one of its primary goals of bringing people together.

3. Superiority Theory

Simply put the superiority theory proposes that we laugh about the misfortunes of others thus reflecting our own superiority. A number of writers including Plato, Aristotle and Hobbes have pointed at humour deriving from others' weakness, deformity or failures because they may find themselves at a disadvantage in some way or because they suffer some small misfortune.

Thomas Hobbes, who is regarded as the originator of this theory wrote that laughter is: *"nothing else but sudden glory arising from a sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly."* (Hobbes, 1840, p.73). Hobbes further explains that humans are in a constant state of competition with each other and thus are often looking for the shortcomings of other persons and considers laughter as an expression of a sudden realisation that we are better than others, an expression of 'sudden glory'. Modern thinkers on humour believe this concept of 'sudden glory' to be untrue; it would appear to be the case that superiority alone does not reproduce humour and may in fact produce conceit (Dziemidok, 1993).

Alexander Bain (1859) has written that all humour involves the degradation of 'something'. Bain expanded Hobbes' theory in dual directions stating that we need not be directly conscious of our own superiority we may even laugh sympathetically with another who scores off an adversary. Bain also points out that it need not be a person that is derided, it may well be an idea or political institution. In such cases humour can actually be used as a form of criticism.

The presence of a target in humour does imply that humour can be considered as the expression of an aggressive intention. Raskin (1985) maintains that laughter results from a comparison between ourselves and others or between our former self and our present self. Bergson (1998) claims that laughter connected to humour has social meaning: it aims at correcting our way of behaving, whenever this deviates from what is socially expected or approved. In a social setting such as a classroom,

humour and the target of humour in particular, may highlight what is considered "inappropriate" behaviour for the members of the group. Therefore, their common beliefs and norms, which constitute basic aspects of their social identity, come to the surface and humour can reinforce the already existing bonds among group members.

Freud also wrote that humour is basically an expression of hostility. One of the foremost theorists siding with Hobbes and Freud is Charles R Gruner (1976) who pointed to Freud's proposition that there were two kinds of wit (humour), "tendency wit" and "harmless wit", the first being humour that is making fun of someone or some institution, and harmless wit which is described as humour directed at no one or thing, relying for its laughter-evoking on its verbal form. Gruner argued that in our ancient (and modern) struggles for survival humans experienced a tension/win/tension-release behavior, thus laughing became the natural reaction to winning, especially if that win came suddenly after a mighty struggle (Gruner, 1976).

In a contemporary context we do cheer and hurrah after a game of rugby or soccer but these activities are viewed as fun. I suspect that for most of us laughter was not the response to the quickly ended battles of modern times. Gruner (1976) identifies the aggression or hostility as the 'necessary' ingredient to humour, if not the sufficient one. Gruner's expansions on Hobbesian superiority theory sum this category up rather well. He states that for every humorous situation, there is a winner and a loser. Finding the winner in a humorous situation and what that winner wins is often not easy. Finding the loser and what that loser loses is often less easy. Gruner asserts, therefore, that a humorous situation can best be understood by knowing who wins and who loses what:

"What is won or lost, or the suddenness with which it is won or lost, removes the essential elements of the situation and renders it humourless." (Gruner, 1978,88).

When referring to superiority theory the writer Johann Huizinga (1970) remarks that we must couch our aggression or apprehension within a kind of play-frame. Whoever we laugh at is in a sense a victim, but managed carefully within the realms of humour and play, no harm is implied. Huizinga (1970) says, *"the genuine seeker after truth sets little store by triumphing over a rival."*

Superiority theory may partially explain the beneficial effects of humour on health, both physical and psychological. Laughing at a problem, in context to this theory, signifies an ability to rise above it. If we can laugh at a problem, it can often appear somewhat smaller and less intimidating. This may be beneficial for students who face a particularly difficult task.

Disparagement humour, meaning to dismiss, ridicule, deride, mock or scorn, characterizes the attitudes between the joke teller (and the jokes persona) and the target of the joke text, which may or may not be the audience. One theory argues that disparagement humour fosters a sense of belonging to a group, or group identity. Not all theorists who expound superiority/disparagement as part of humour believe that laughter is always contentious or scornful. Sympathy, congeniality, empathy and geniality may be combined with the laughter of superiority (Bain, 1859; Carpenter, 1922; Rapp, 1949). In this context, theorists, scholars and researchers who support theories based on superiority/disparagement may regard humour as a means to temper the aggression or aggressive

behavior that they examine. Nonetheless, the superiority, aggression and malice still remain.

Sociology Theories of Humour

Because of the broad scope of humour research it is impossible to highlight all current research. The theories I have chosen to describe in this section have relevance and will be referred to in the following chapters. These theories have been developed in recent decades and broadly fall into the category of sociology theory; they are cognitive, conative, affective and instinct theories.

Central to this thesis is the effect humour has, in instructional delivery, on the social and cultural dynamics of the classroom and the consequences this may have for adult learning. Humour research in the sociology field is not centred around the question why we laugh but focuses on the social and cultural context of a humorous event. They do not try to understand why a joke causes laughter or why people find a certain situation humorous but focus on the way a joke is contextually interpreted.

Cognitive theories of humour are based on cognitive psychology and are related to the study of mental events such as memory, thinking and problem-solving. These theories examine humour from the 'response side' of how we react to humour stimuli, as opposed to the analysis of the humour stimuli themselves. For Apte (1985) the cognitive is shaped by culture and humour is culturally appropriate incongruity, in other words humour which enables smooth social action. Cognitive theories often view laughter as the result of either high arousal beyond our normal tolerances or a brief arousal followed by a sudden 'jag' when the arousal

turns out to have been unnecessary (Berlyne, 1969). These theories map well onto incongruity-resolution theories respectively, seeming to describe our response to those stimuli. Cognitive theories will be referred to with particular reference to 'reframing' which involves students looking at a set of problems in different ways, a form of cognitive re-appraisal with affective elements. With particular reference to visual communications, cognitive theories also harness divergent and lateral thinking and associated creative problem-solving strategies; these elements will be explored in chapter four.

In conative theory the stress is upon humour as a motivating force. Motivational effects of humour have been well-documented in this work and are self-evident from the vast body of commercial applications based on humors motivational potential, particularly in entertainment, print media and the advertising industries. Research in adult education (Gorham and Christophel, 1990) has provided evidence, which shows that the increase in motivation from humour need not necessarily aid learning. A shift from content to medium of delivery may result in teaching, which is simultaneously more entertaining and less effective in fulfilling its educational aims. Care should therefore be taken to avoid confusing entertainment with directional motivation.

Affective theories focus on the emotional components of humour. This is an area heavily researched by sociological theorists. Their research is focused on the social and cultural context (Minsky, 1981; Rutter, 1997) similar to cognitive theorists, of a humorous event. Their interests lie in the social impact of joking and humour in our everyday life. Rutter (1997) discerns three groups which perfectly illustrate these theories: maintenance theories, negotiation theories and frame theories.

Maintenance theory suggests that humorous events maintain established social roles and divisions within a society, strengthening roles within the family and working environment. Negotiation theories examine the role of humour as a means of interaction, pastime and an event where more than one person is involved. A participant in a humorous event will find it funny, or not, depending on the social and cultural context of the event and its environment. Studies of humour can offer insight into a culture revealing aspects of a culture that could otherwise not be observed, for example with a taboo subject of a religious or sexual nature. Frame theories view humorous events as a break from the more serious aspects of life. The joker makes a 'shift' from the serious frame to the humorous frame and is permitted to present criticism without fear of retribution. From this humorous frame people can pass comments, even breach taboos without causing offence, of course only when all parties involved agree that it is funny.

Instinct theorists (McDougall, 1923; Eastman 1926; Koestler 1964) believe that we laugh because we were born that way. To say that we laugh out of instinct is to say only that we laugh because we laugh. Instinct may mean unlearned, unalterable, hereditary or unconscious behaviour. These are highly complex and contentious areas. Even if humour were instinctive, the crucial thing is that cultures can radically change and develop it. Instinct theorists contend that humour as instinct is an unalterable behaviour. But our ability to laugh at and create our own humour is certainly learned, and differs from individual to individual. Abilities to appreciate and produce humour differ. If humour is to be used as a tool, which may help facilitate adult learning, instructors could be trained to improve their humour abilities, as people are trained in music, art or any other subject.

Conclusion

Humour theorists have shown that our utilisation of humour involves thought, action, feelings and context. The adult instructor who wishes to utilise humour in their teaching strategies need not think that one theory or definition will explain all aspects of humour. Humour can be usefully regarded as a subjective assessment, its definition fluctuating through historical, social and cultural influence. By possessing a basic understanding and awareness of humour theory, care and consideration can be applied in avoiding humour which may be taken as being harmful. The following chapters will regularly refer to the three main categories used in humour theory namely, incongruity, release/relief and superiority theories and refer to and expand upon, cognitive, conative and affective theories in relation to adult education.

Theoretical interest in humour is growing, so too have the practical values and applications of such research in the workplace. Morreall (1991) cites the fact that there are dozens of humour consultants working with corporations, government agencies and hospitals. The following chapter will ask what role humour may play in the teaching of adults.

Chapter 2

Is Humour Useful in the Teaching of Adults?

"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. If that community can be prolonged or re-established, and applied to the job of thinking, the teacher will have succeeded." (Highet, 1956, p.56).

In this chapter I will examine the characteristics of adult learners and the factors that contribute to effective teaching with this group. I will focus on why and how the use of humour may be an important component in the teaching of adults and examine the evidence relating to its direct and indirect effects, benefits and possible disadvantages and impact on learning outcomes.

Humour as a means of developing levels of intellectual and emotional bonding between students and teachers, I believe to be an important factor in encouraging student involvement in the learning process. In this chapter I will examine theories and research findings relating to the role of humour in improving of student/teacher rapport. I will examine how instructors can utilise humour to assist in developing and enhancing specific aspects within a lesson and provide fresh perspectives on old knowledge. This is important not only from the viewpoint of how students perceive information in invigorating and original ways but may be an important contributor to refreshing the methods of delivery of the

educator, which may become perilously close to nervous exhaustion through repetitive or unoriginal systems of delivery. *"One of the greatest sins in teaching is to be boring"* (Baughman, 1979,p.10). I will examine how humour may be a factor in the alleviation of stress in the teaching profession and how it may also play a role in enhancing continuing professional development. This chapter will also include consideration of what may be deemed appropriate or inappropriate use of humour in the teaching of adults.

Powell and Anderson, in an article entitled 'Humour and Teaching in Higher Education' (1985) reviewed their own studies exploring the connections between humour and learning. They concluded that the use of humour may promote comprehension and retention; create a positive classroom environment; encourage student involvement; hold student attention; foster cognitive development; help in the management of undesirable behavior; build students' self-confidence; enhance the quality of students and teachers lives and generally reduce anxiety.

As an educator I have found that humour, when applied wisely, positively and appropriately, can achieve increased levels of many of the aspects highlighted by Powell and Anderson (1985). The theories and propositions explored in this chapter have taken into account some of the key principles of adult education, an extensive literature review on humour in teaching and the workplace in general and the major theories on humour which were reviewed in Chapter 1.

Approaches to Teaching in Adult Education

A key purpose of this chapter is to explore how the systematic and considered introduction of humour into adult teaching strategies and styles can help students to overcome concerns and anxieties and build on their strengths. People become involved in adult education for a multitude of reasons, including mental stimulation, personal growth, acquirement of new knowledge and skills, self-confidence or social interaction. Learners may have special concerns about the learning process, for example, they may doubt their ability to learn simply because they have been away from a formal classroom setting for some time or they may have exaggerated ideas about teachers' abilities and expectations. Therefore it is important to provide a supportive, people-centered climate appropriate for adults in order to address individual learning needs.

Adult education usually involves a high degree of communication between teacher and student, not only in the classroom but also in distance learning situations. In order to facilitate the learning process instructional designers must be aware of the specific characteristics of adults as learners. Ference and Vockell (1994) highlighted characteristic notions particular to adult learners: skill-seeking, problem-centred, task-centred, life-centred, solution-driven, externally motivated, internally motivated, active learners, experienced-based, independent and self-directing. Adult learners often have a need to be directly involved in planning and directing their learning activities.

"Well-structured and effective learning only occurs when a connection is made between the learners needs and the subject under study." (Wilson, 1997, p.64).

This principle has much to do with recognising and understanding the learners' motivations and using this knowledge to promote a deeper interest in the subject being studied. Knowles (1980) described the model of androgogy, initially defined as *"the art and science of helping adults learn"(p.22)*. The androgogic model asserts that five issues be addressed in formal learning. They include letting learners know what is important to learn, and relating the topic to the learner's experience. In addition people will not learn until they are motivated to learn. Often this requires helping them to overcome inhibitions, behaviours and beliefs about learning. Other important factors are to utilise multiple senses, such as visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile, in order to arouse learners' curiosity and to use relevant real-life examples. Poorly structured learning that ignores the background and knowledge of the learning group can eventually lead to frustration and poor overall results. Students should be given ample opportunities to practice working on the problems connected with their work and everyday lives, since the acquisition of new skills will be used to address issues in their workplaces or for personal use.

My own experiences of teaching adults have shown that students are more likely to understand the content of a lesson if I interact with them in ways, including humour, that encourage involvement, commitment and interest. Young and Shaw (1999) asked both students and instructors at an American University to identify factors that contribute most to effective teaching. Both factions agreed that the most important items, one of which was humour-orientations in teachers, included not only traditional emphasis on motivating students (conative strategies) and communicating clearly but also an ability to empathise with student needs. Their research

also revealed awareness amongst instructors that there can be pitfalls in setting out to win students' approval as well as ignoring them.

Introducing humour into the adult learning environment at the start of a new session can put students at ease and be likened to an invitation to delve into the subject of study by decreasing tensions and social distance. Bargler (1956) suggested that humour serves the dual purposes of reducing conflict and enhancing human relations. However, for everything there is an opposite and later in this chapter I will explore how too much humour or self-disclosure can be disruptive even destructive and may disrupt a teacher's abilities to relate to students.

The Social Dynamic of Humour in the Classroom.

As a social activity, humour has been examined by a number of theorists. Raskin's view as a linguist, believes that *"the scope and degree of mutual understanding in humour varies directly with the degree to which the participants share their social backgrounds"* (1985). Apte's views (1985) from an anthropological perspective are much more interactional, emphasising that *"joking relationships can mark group identity and signal the inclusion or exclusion of a new individual"* and, consequently that *"joking relationships manifest a consciousness of group identity or solidarity"* (p.23). Apte appears to acknowledge the importance of the relationship between the storyteller and the audience and the potentially common ground between them. Viktoroff (1953) states that *"laughter is always the laughter of a particular social group"(p.48).* Viktoroff's assertion of humour, as a communal, social event underscores the notion that humour is a social activity. Within a multicultural and socially

diverse classroom setting, humour may act as a unifying force to improve the social dynamic.

Educators have often excluded humour from their curriculum because they consider their profession too serious for humour, fearful of appearing irreverent, offensive, inappropriate or unprofessional. A lack of awareness of the benefits of humour may also be relevant. One of the most revealing outcomes arising from my own research with colleagues was that little in the way of prior consideration had been given to how humour can affect the ways in which they taught and its influence on students' learning (Watt, 2004). Although humour was used within professional practice it appeared to occur on a subconscious and spontaneous level and was rarely considered when implementing their teaching strategies.

Much of the research done on classroom humour has focused on the teacher as entertainer as opposed to the use of humour to enhance curriculum content. An important factor in studies on humour in the effective delivery of curriculum content was humour variables between male and female instructors. This is an area that will be explored in more detail from a cultural perspective in Chapter 5. In a study by Bryant, Comiskey and Zillmann (1979) which examined the use of humour in the college classroom, 80% of all educators surveyed used some form of humour in their practice; it also revealed that 48% of humour used by college teachers was hostile or sexual. The study showed that male teachers tended to use more humour than females. It was also revealed that compared with male instructors, female instructors were less likely to be humorous under any situations, seldomly using humour to cope with daily stresses. Gorham and Christophel (1990) interviewed 206 students

on their teacher's use of humour and found that women who adopted the type of aggressive humour often exhibited by their male counterparts were not favorably perceived by students.

Humour in relation to 'superiority theories' may on occasions be seen as a manifestation of power imbalances between genders. Certainly, as shown in many cultural histories, women dared not openly show their sense of humour. Bryant's study (1979) tended to show that when it came to student evaluations of instructors, females tended to receive lower evaluations when they used humour. It may be suggested that this outcome was and is a conditional factor in that woman, from a cultural standpoint, were simply not encouraged to behave in this manner. Whether this is due to rigid expectations about perceived proper behaviour for women, or a rejection of male modes is not clear. Findings from these studies indicate the importance of applying sensitivity to gender and power differentials when using humour in teaching.

Research on humour within the domain of adult education has been sparse until relatively recent times. As the theoretical interest in humour has expanded, so too has interest in the practical value of humour. Morreall (1991) is recognised as being prominent in the field of educational research, focusing on humour and its potential applications, not only in education but also across a diverse range of working environments. He makes the important observation that *"all this interest in the value of humour in the workplace represents an important swing away from the traditional assessment of humour as frivolous and unproductive."* and asserts that humour belongs in the workplace because it promotes *"health, mental flexibility, and smooth social relations."* (1991). I think it is important to emphasise here that we who are involved in education are in the business of communication and humour's

perception as a social activity is increasingly viewed as a part of effective communication by researchers and scholars (Bryant et al, 1988).

Alleviating Stress in the Classroom

Learning and fun are synonymous as far as young children are concerned but later education is generally viewed as a serious business, which can involve peer and family pressures to improve one's status within society. The introduction of humour in our classrooms can encourage healthy catharsis during stressful situations; improve social integration and solidarity among students. Humour, in relation to release/relief theories, can be a socially acceptable way to express aggression and tension and can help people escape from a variety of pressures. (Hallinger, 1997).

Education in the modern workplace involves stress related to increased demands to attend to administration and documentation and increased accountability. We are all human beings, and inevitably stressful factors in our 'civilian' or professional lives will leak into our classroom settings. What can we do, therefore, to improve our effectiveness as teachers and thus enhance performance?

In a study on humour and teacher 'burnout' by Law Ning Chi (1992) it was discovered that teachers who had a greater sense of humour and utilised this facility in coping with daily stressful events, experienced a lesser degree of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and low personal accomplishment. Sex, age, and years of teaching experience were important factors in this study. It was reported that female, single, younger instructors with fewer years of teaching experience showed more burnout in emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment. On the

other hand, male teachers with more years of teaching experience had a greater sense of humour in the school setting, tending to use humour as a coping mechanism in dealing with their daily stress.

To use the analogy of the teacher as a 'conductor' of an orchestra, we may notice a particular section is not pulling its weight, affecting our levels and effectiveness of instruction. If the student body, be it an individual or individuals, is affected then we may be facing a 'critical meltdown' in the effectiveness of the learning environment which may inhibit the learning process. This is where I believe humour could play a valuable role in improving the bond between teacher and student and student to student.

When our understanding of our world is shown, in some way, to be deficient, we may experience distress, ranging from minor irritations to frustration, to fear to outright terror. When our understanding is improved in such a way that we can now deal with this previously frightening situation, or it is changed, removed, or avoided, we can feel delight, ranging from modest relief to great joy. Humour can play a part in this process by evoking a sudden awareness of an alternative connection in distressful situations, which may in turn assist in the alleviation of that distress. Stress in a classroom can manifest itself through negative social dynamics, in personality clash caused by cultural, ideological, political, religious, sexual, or gender differentials. A teacher can use humour in such events to diffuse hostility, conflict and to encourage co-operation, thus reinforcing or dissolving the boundaries of a group (Barecca, 1991). Humour may allow disengagement from predicaments which can provide time to regain strength. Thus it is an important 'coping' mechanism relating to the relief/release theories described in the previous chapter.

Findings from my own research (Watt, 2004) revealed that the majority of teacher participants utilised humour as an "ice-breaker" at the onset of a lesson, commonly used as a method of relieving stress and anxiety in the classroom. Interviewees reported having used humour to reduce frustration, maintain a sense of perspective, increase group cohesion and as a positive way of managing tense moments. All of these factors were perceived as major contributions in creating the atmosphere of confidence needed to empower students with the freedom to experiment and make mistakes.

Applying humour under such circumstances relates to the relief or release theories, in which tension is released by a pleasurable response to a humorous anecdote or joke; this was described by Freud as the displacement or transference of psychic energy created by conflict (Freud, 1905).

Incongruous humour, which supplies a surprising, illogical or unexpected juxtaposition of ideas/situations, has the potential to provide a new way of approaching a problem or set of problems. This may have benefits in a classroom situation by providing a means by which students and teachers are able to express underlying issues relating to complex areas of the subject being studied or through social conflicts that cannot be expressed directly. Humour can allow problems to be brought back to manageable proportions or can allow those involved to find adequate solutions more easily (Crawford, 1994).

There is both observational and experimental evidence to suggest that humour has the capacity to reduce negative affective states (Martin &

Lefcourt, 1983). Many of these studies have concluded that humour's biological impact on our bodies has similar effects to that of physical exercise, therefore, under certain conditions where humour is not hurtful or offensive it can be physiologically therapeutic (Cornett, 1986). A positive response to humour can improve blood flow and exercises the lungs, diaphragm, and face muscles. It can also cause the brain to release endorphins, natural painkillers, which make one feel good and promote the production of catecholamines, chemicals which increase alertness and can reduce feelings of stress and tension. There is some evidence to support the idea that physiological changes induced in humorous situations can assist in the creation of a more positive and relaxed emotional climate which may contribute to helping students to focus (Sousa, 2000).

In the area of health care many practitioners regard humour as an important tool. Buxman and Le Moine (1995) discuss the importance of the use of humour in medicine. *"Humour is a healthy therapeutic tool we must recognise, cultivate and use"(p114).* Many of the ways humour is utilised in this profession may be equally applicable in education, such as stress reduction, intimacy, conflict reduction, coping, self-disclosure, reduction of boredom, having a ripple effect on morale and self-encouragement, provide job satisfaction, increase attention and stimulate creative and divergent thinking. It would appear from personal observations that younger teachers new to the profession are not always aware of the stress factors in the job and may lack the relevant training to effectively cope with stress.

One of the aims of this thesis is to increase awareness of the potentials of humour in teaching practice. Humour consists of a set of attitudes and

skills that can be learnt through practice. Those with staff development responsibilities and teacher training institutions should perhaps consider encouraging teachers to learn more about humour, providing them with the opportunities of developing such skills. For example, college authorities could emphasize the many potentials humour has as a coping strategy, providing novice instructors with seminars on the subject. Education departments and teachers unions could organise workshops or in-service programmes for instructors on how developing a sense of humour can assist in coping with and keeping stress in perspective.

When addressing humour from a philosophical perspective as one of the most significant aspects of life and our relationship with other people, one could refer to humour as a form of 'mental hygiene' for the prevention of depression, needless worry, hatred and frustration.

"It is important to educate ourselves in humour because it does not tolerate anger, hopelessness, and helplessness." (Hofner and Schactner, 1995 p.67).

Humour-orientation and Learning

An aspect of my exploratory research for this thesis (Watt, 2004) looked at how humour could play an important role in contributing to teachers' immediacy behaviours; such behaviours refer to an instructor's use of communicative styles that enhance physical and psychological closeness between themselves and their students. Mehrabian (1969) developed the concept of immediacy as different types of communication behaviours in teachers. Immediacy consists of verbal and non-verbal behaviours operating to reduce perceived physical or psychological distance between

student and instructor. These behaviours refer to movement, enthusiasm, use of gestures, humour and vocal variety. Instructor immediacy, and in particular their "humour-orientation" (teachers who use humour more frequently and effectively) has been found to be an important variable for influencing an instructor's effectiveness (Frymier and Franzer. 1998).

Interviews with colleagues and research on immediacy behaviours revealed an awareness that humorous interaction, as an integral part of teachers' immediacy behaviours, assisted in providing flexibility in both visual and vocal aspects of pedagogical communication (Watt, 2004). It appeared that many of my colleagues recognised the role of humour in giving their students the impression of not only being in control of their environment but energised by it, thus developing confidence, in the students, of their abilities as communicators. It became evident from discussions with teachers about this study that styles and intensity of immediacy behaviours linked to individual personality would often dictate the intensity and regularity of humour usage. High immediacy teachers, of a more extrovert nature, who rely upon strong vocal expressions, relaxed body posture and eye contact tended to use humour in their teaching on a more regular and natural basis, than their low immediacy colleagues (Frymier et al, 1998.).

An important study examined the relationship in adult education between teacher humour-orientation and learning, in relation to non verbal immediacy and socio-communicative style (Bainbridge, et al 1998). The authors concluded that if humour is a means for enhancing immediacy, teachers high in humour-orientation tended to be associated with increased levels of student learning. They also found that students who participated in their study paid more attention and were more willing to

attend class when humour was regularly used in the classroom. Results from my own interviews, in my exploratory research (Watt, 2004), echoed similar findings from this and other studies. Additionally, humour-orientation in teachers was positively associated with communicator adaptability. Teachers with high humour orientations appear more flexible in their communication with others, possessing a strong need for creating rewarding impressions in their receivers. One may hypothesise that effective use of humour requires the ability to be assertive and responsive, important and accepted qualities in teaching.

As our educational institutions continue to engage in organisational soul-searching, teaching effectiveness and the methodologies we use in our pedagogies receive increased attention. The need for instructional improvement in adult education is the subject of much discussion as is the role of the instructor in the delivery of student-centered learning. Pollio and Humphreys (1996) found that effective teaching revolves around the connection established between the instructor and the student; the behaviour of the teacher will therefore influence the quality of instruction and the learning environment that is created. Humour is often identified as a teaching technique for developing a positive learning environment (Fergusson and Campinha-Bacote, 1989; Schuarz. 1989; Warnock, 1989; Walter, 1990; Hill, 1998). Humour may prove to be an important catalyst for the promotion of a dynamic, exciting and enlivening learning environment, where all the educational elements converge and teacher and student are both positive and excited about learning.

There may be certain aspects to the courses we teach which students may find intimidating or difficult to comprehend and will tend to avoid due to a lack of self-confidence, perceived difficulty of the material, or a

previous negative experience in a content area. In adult education these 'blocks' can often be traced to a negative learning experience from earlier education. By reducing anxiety, through the introduction of a humorous slant on difficult areas of comprehension, through the use of pun, allegory or metaphor, an improved level of student receptiveness to alarming or difficult material can result. (Bryant et al, 1980).

Appropriate and Inappropriate Humour in Teaching

What types of humour should educators utilise and avoid when teaching their students? If we are looking to improve the receptiveness of our students to what we are teaching then we must consider the importance of relevant humour in informative discourse, in other words humour, which is in some way related to the programme of study. There is some evidence to support the idea that for humour to be most effective in the classroom as a means of retaining knowledge that it is when it is linked to the concepts being studied (Bryant et al, 1998).

A teacher who employs 'negative' humour more often than not will create an atmosphere of tension and submission. If a teacher attempts to employ inappropriate or negative humour, such as sarcasm, disparagement (aimed at students) or humour which is overtly racist or sexist. This can be perceived as a source of ridicule and can create an atmosphere than can impede learning by eroding a student/teacher relationship based upon trust and mutual respect. From a positive perspective the 'social function' of humour, for example, jokes and pleasantries help provide a relaxed atmosphere in the teaching situation (Ziv, 1998).

A three-step method exists for delivering content-relevant humour (Pollio, 2002; Ziv, 1988). Firstly, the instructor explains the content information without humour. The humorous example in demonstration or activity then follows the explanation. Finally, the instructor summarizes the information and how it relates to the humorous event. Ziv (1988) discovered that this method radically improved the final exam results of his students in the English department.

Additionally, students tend to value and appreciate teachers who can effectively use humour in their instruction (Garner, 2003). Lowman (1994) discovered that effective college teachers were often described by their students as "enthusiastic" and those who used humour in their instruction rated more highly. Lowman's review of the teaching philosophies of highly-rated teachers found the use of humour to be an important component of their pedagogies (Lowman, 1994).

There is always the potential for too much of a good thing and certain dangers can exist for instructors who overuse humour in their delivery. In my own exploratory research (Watt, 2004), I discovered that certain instructors observed that if humour was used in a forced or labored manner, which is out of character, this would often be perceived by their students as being negative and tedious. If a teacher is observed to be clowning around too much during a lesson this may undermine his/her credibility. In *A Perfect Education*, Eble (1966) says to instructors: *"Education should teach us to play the wise fool rather than the solemn ass."* (p.48)

The manner in which humour is delivered by instructors, is therefore of paramount importance when planning a course, the main concepts should

be well delineated, and the humour related to those concepts, intending to make them clearer, must be interjected in the appropriate places. (Ziv, 1998).

Humour can be a risky business, for we do not always know other people's personalities, their backgrounds and experiences and there is always some risk involved when we joke around people. Part of our job, as teachers, is to find out about our students first by assessing situations, age groups, cultural backgrounds, ethnicity or disabilities in order to establish some rapport and understanding of the social dynamic. Humour is a powerful commodity that can enable the user to communicate and connect or just as easily separate and destroy relationships (Kelly 2004). When we are wielding such an emotive tool in our classrooms we would be strongly advised to take care and consideration when directing humorous commentary at the group or an individual (Snetsinger and Grabowski, 1993).

The victim's discomfort is magnified by the fact that learning in this situation is not a viable option and may lead to an individual becoming the class scapegoat. Our present climate of 'political correctness' has witnessed people saying we should not allow a joke which might hurt anybody's feelings, ever. This, in my opinion, could actually stunt humour's effectiveness. Morreall (2004) thinks this is just way too protective." *If every time I told a funny story and thought who could this offend, I would simply have to shut up" (p.4)*. Morreall's basic principle is if one is going to amuse people with a funny story, ask yourself if the addressee would be offended by this, then apply a modicum of common sense and consideration when delivering your story.

Psychologist Charles Gruner (1985) found from his research that a modicum of apt, relevant humour in informative discourse will probably produce a more favorable audience response toward the speaker. Thus educators who use humour may enhance their "character" ratings, implying trustworthiness and likeability, without decreasing student's perception of their expertise.

The use of self-depreciating humour or the ability to laugh at oneself in public may further enhance a teacher's image. (Gruner, 1985). Speech experts disagree about the benefits of laughing at oneself in public. Some say it shows warmth and approachability, indicates a good sense of humour and that one does not take oneself too seriously (Gruner, 1985). Others claim self-ridicule may actually have the effect of displacing credibility. My own experiences have shown that self-disparaging humour is an effective way of displacing an error or mishap particularly during practical demonstrations, and is an excellent way of illustrating ones humanness to other people, placing the student/teacher relationship on a more even-footing. Psychologist Charles Gruner (1985) deduced from his research that for self-disparaging humour to be effective it must be indirect, witty and based on clever word play, as opposed to a direct exaggeration of ones own personal defects.

Humour may not be for everyone or for every class; however if students and practicing teachers are given the opportunity within adult education to assess the benefits and pitfalls of using humour, this information may help promote creative and dynamic teaching in an environment conducive to optimal student learning. Humour as an acceptable tool in teaching carries the advantage of expressing the personality of the teacher as well as functioning as a method of communication.

Humour in Improving Student Learning

Can the inclusion of humour in our teaching methodologies assist our students in the retention of information? This is a question that will reoccur in various forms throughout this thesis. Research into cognitive theories on humour and neuroscientific research are beginning to show that appropriate humour forms aid cognitive processing and possibly affective and psychomotor learning (Anderson and Pichert, 1978) when closely linked with instructional design. Freud (1905) identified humour as providing an economy in the expenditure of effort as much the same way nature seeks states of minimum energy. Within this framework, humour can be viewed as making possible the processing and storage of new concepts which may have exceeded an individual's capacity. Humour may therefore act in the same way as mnemonic devices or aide-memories (such as slide-shows, humorous or satirical artworks or other object d'art relating to the subject being taught) playing a part in facilitating learning through its impact on attention and memory. Humorous interjection by instructors serves to enhance recall by attracting attention to a stimulus that may previously have been considered boring or inconsequential. A study by Kaplas and Pascoe (1977) examined the effects of humour and humorous examples upon the comprehension and retention of lecture material. A test of comprehension was given twice, firstly immediately following the lecture then again after a six-week gap. The first test provided evidence that immediate comprehension was not facilitated, specifically in reference to the humorous material in the lecture. Six weeks later, however the same test illustrated a marked improvement in the retention of concept humour material which included humorous concepts specific to course content.

In Jeannie Ormrond's book, Human Learning (1995), she states: *"if we want to move information from the sensory register into the working memory, it appears that, at least in most cases, we must pay attention to it."* So, information that individuals pay attention to advances to working memory as opposed to information not attended to will often be lost from the memory system. Derks, Gardner and Argawal (1998) reporting on a study on humour discovered 62 percent of material laughed at was remembered, but only 8 percent of material which elicited no laughter was recalled. A theoretical explanation for the humour-learning relationship was proposed by Ziv (1978) and is based on the attention gaining and holding power of humour. This theoretical explanation was advanced by Kelly and Gorham (1988) to explain the immediacy-learning relationship. The attention-gaining explanation indicates that a variable such as immediacy is arousing, which is related to memory, which in turn is related to cognitive learning. It is important to recognise that many studies have taken into consideration that students participate from a position of vulnerability. It is agreed that an overuse of humour may be viewed as an additional overload for students who are having enough trouble tackling the basics, let alone figuring out why something is funny (Gruner, 1985. Ziv, 1998).

As adults our childlike curiosity is still within us and nonsense or humour are effective means of triggering the memory. Humour has been shown to develop higher-order thinking skills which promote the development of modes of thinking which are investigative, searching, grasping and filled with trial and error (Wilsen, 1987). Alice Risen (1999), a psychologist at the University of Maryland in Baltimore has proposed that humour can effectively bridge the right and left hemispheres of the brain, the

practical, situated on the left and the intuitive or creative on the right, to convert a *"ha-ha"* into an *"aha!"*.

Similar work is being undertaken in the area of visual communications where some theorists believe that humans are genetically wired to communicate visually. Semir Zeki (2003), a neurologist theorised about the visual brain and what he called "neuroesthetics", the study of the neural basis for perception, creativity and achievement, and surmised that there is a link between neural development, aesthetic experience and cognitive development. It may be of interest to theoreticians of neuroesthetics to include humour in their studies since there are recognised links between humour and the creative process. I am not a neuroscientist and will leave this area to the experts, but there are a number of important lessons to be gleaned from neuroscientific research on humour, which have relevance to the promotion of higher thinking. The cognitive and affective components of jokes are reflected in the different brain areas that are activated with humour, activating areas used for language processing, reward and emotion. The time course of activation (at the onset of a joke through to completion) goes from cognitive areas to affective areas. Some of the cognitive areas activated by humour are associated with ambiguity resolution.

In Raskin's Semantic Script-based Theory of Humour (Raskin, 1985) he describes this sentence; *"The first thing that strikes a stranger in New York is a big car,"* as being processed in such a way that the meaning of the word "strikes" which is first activated as the one indicating surprise. This is followed by the activation of the collision meaning of "strikes" after reaching "a big car". With these two meanings active simultaneously ambiguity is created; therefore the resolution of this ambiguity is what

creates the humour. Reframed in a recent version of Raskin's theory, the General Theory of Verbal Humour (Attardo, 1993) the incongruity-resolution aspect is accompanied by "knowledge resources" designed to allow for the influence of things like context, reasoning and text-comprehension processes, important factors when teaching a programme of study. According to this theory the primary aspects of humorous texts, situations or visual imagery, which distinguishes them from their non-humorous counterparts, is the ambiguity or incongruity that must be resolved.

Conclusions

Adult learners have a diverse range of needs and their education usually involves a high degree of communication between teacher and student. Researchers have indicated that the use of humour can be a valuable teaching strategy when it is content-relevant and addresses learners' needs. There is evidence to suggest that the appropriate use of humour can positively influence teachers' effectiveness, enhance rapport and communication between teacher and students and facilitate the learning process. It may also assist in providing a more conducive environment for learning by reducing potential and actual stresses generated within the classroom. The use of humour as a teaching strategy needs to be considered with care since inappropriate use can lead to negative outcomes.

It has been noted that some instructors are resistant to using humour in their methodologies. This may reflect beliefs that use equates with lack of relevance, seriousness or professionalism. It may also imply a lack of knowledge as to how humour can be effectively utilised. The extent to

which educators use humour is variable and dependent on factors such as age, gender and length of teaching experience. Just as educators have unique communication styles there appear to be unique and individual humour styles. Given that the use of humour appears to have benefits on many levels it would seem important to increase awareness of the value of incorporating humour into adult teaching methodologies.

Chapter 3

How can Humour in Transformative Learning Help Overcome cognitive Dissonance?

"... the being of ourselves is meaning; the being of society is meaning. This new view encourages us towards a creative attitude and fundamentally it opens the way to the transformation of the human being because a change of meaning is a change of being." (Bohm, 1989)

In this section I will question the role of humour in transformative learning, focusing on the potential complimentary role of humour in the alleviation of cognitive dissonance. I will re-examine some of the theories on humour examined in Chapter 1 and will re-contextualise them as important coping mechanisms and ways of surmounting anxieties often experienced through transformative learning.

Much of adult education is concerned with personal growth and development, which as an evolutionary process can involve difficult periods of transformation. These changes may be emotional, intellectual, philosophical, physical, cultural or spiritual and may be induced and observed by educators and experienced and acknowledged by learners. Educators have a role to play in assisting individuals through the processes of understanding and interpreting their experiences and to make explicit underlying preconceptions. In acknowledging that there are challenges to be faced in the transformative learning experience, do

teachers need to find different ways to help with the complex issues that students can experience?

In my role as a professional adult educator I have often witnessed students experience periods of disorientation, alienation and frustration, as they tackle new and often challenging information. Within teaching practice the discomforts experienced by students, and indeed educators, can manifest themselves in many ways. For example, they may become evident through conceptual struggles with the concept of visual metaphor, moral or ethical dilemmas when dealing with culturally-sensitive or emotive blocks of text, the technical challenges posed in dealing with a new medium or simply a lack of motivation. As adult educators we must equip ourselves to deal with these all too common problems our students face. We must develop an understanding of why and how certain established perceptions, values and beliefs can filter and block student's abilities to transform their understanding of the world in which they live. Humour allows students and educators to express many of the underlying issues that create dissonance and diffuse tensions helping bring problems back to a manageable size so those involved can find solutions more easily.

<u>Transformative Learning</u>

"Transformative learning attempts to explain how our expectations, framed within cultural assumptions and presuppositions, directly influence the meaning we derive from our experiences." (Mezirow, 1991, p. 116).

The American educational scholar Jack Mezirow (1991) developed one of the central critical theories of personal and socio-cultural alteration in education in 1978; it is called transformative learning. Over the last twenty-nine years theoretical analyses and ethnographic and phenomenological research in this area of critical reflection has deepened our understanding as educators of what it means to learn in adulthood.

Transformative learning can be defined as learning that instigates profound change in the learner, more so than other forms of learning, especially learning experiences which shape the recipient and produce a significant impact or paradigm shift, thus affecting the learner's subsequent experiences. Centrality of experience, critical reflection and rational discourse in the process of meaning structure transformation are three common themes in Mezirow's theory (Taylor, 1998) which has its basis in psychoanalytic theory (Boyd and Myers, 1988) and critical social theory (Scott, 1997).

Transformative learning offers a theory of learning that is uniquely adult, abstract, idealised and grounded in the nature of human communication. Transformative learning makes the attempt to explain how our experiences, framed within cultural assumption and presuppositions, directly influence the meanings which we derive from our experiences. It is the reconsideration or reassessment of meaning structures from life experiences that is addressed by perspective transformation. An adult who has to readdress the assumption that they cannot draw or paint – which may have been invoked by social values, cultural attitudes or negative educational practices during childhood – may, through a positive and supportive programme of study, see the creative process as accessible and possible. Therefore when the student is led to reflect on and question

something which was previously taken for granted and thereby changes their views or perspectives, transformative learning has taken place.

Contemporary existential thinkers have divided the transformation cycle into three specific phases: alienation, reframing and contractual solidarity. The initial phase in the development of a new meaning perspective may involve disorientation and disequilibrium with the aim of evoking a sense of alienation which in turn has the potential to enhance the individual's self-actualisation process. Reframing requires critical examination of internalised values, beliefs and assumptions. As the learner becomes more critically aware of their perspective and is exposed through the learning process to alternatives, the option to change that perspective becomes a possibility. In order to ease the discomfiture accompanying such reappraisals and assist in the consolidation and implementation of newly developed perspectives, a learning contract explaining the nature of the learning to be undertaken and its possible consequences is encouraged. Merizow (1991) suggests that transformation of perspectives requires group or social interaction to enable hitherto undisclosed meaning schemes to be uncovered.

Mezirow distinguished one of the main characteristics of transformative adult learning in the process of "critical reflection" based on Habermas' view of rationality and analysis (Habermas, 1991). Critical reflection refers to questioning the integrity of assumptions and beliefs based on prior experience. It often occurs in response to an awareness of a contradiction among our thoughts, feelings and actions. In essence, we realise something is not consistent with what we hold to be true and act in relation to our world. *"Reflection is the appreciative process by which we change our minds, literally and figuratively. It is the process of*

turning our attention to the justification for what we know, feel, believe and act upon" (Mezirow, 1991 p.44).

According to Nussbaum (1997), the central task of the educator is to confront the passivity of the pupil, challenging the mind to take charge of its own thought. This, I believe, is a critical aspect of the teaching process, particularly in the visual arts where often the student is confronted by the complexity of perception and its relationship with understanding the nature of reality. Daloz (1986) recognised that growth can be a risky and frightening journey into the unknown, as students are challenged to disengage from old preconceptions. When the educator consciously includes the potential to disrupt the learner's world view, stimulate uncertainty, ambiguity and doubt in their previously taken for granted understanding of experience, an important consideration must be to establish an atmosphere of trust and care, facilitating sensitive relationships amongst participants (Taylor, 1998). Educators can assist in this process by establishing themselves as role models, willing to demonstrate their own willingness to learn and change.

Over some decades the understanding of humour has increased and a view has evolved that status humour is a social tool, by way of the role it plays in communication and the uses it is put to in familiar and new situations. Coser (1962) paid particular attention to the functions of humour concerning people's adaptability to new situations and roles. She discovered that humour could enable people to establish an identity and arrive at consensus and cohesion among themselves such that a group structure emerged with boundaries. This appears important because of its applicability to other similar situations in which individuals or groups are thrust into a new social system such as a classroom.

I would propose in this context that humour may be used initially to "test" the relationships amongst the group and assist in providing an atmosphere in which anxiety levels are lowered and comfort levels increased. I have found this particularly useful at the beginning of an illustration class as a means of helping students overcome the trepidation's they may perceive about the contents of a new brief. Secondly, humour may aid individuals assessment of the groups attitude towards the concepts floated. Similarly at the conclusion of a brief, during group critique sessions, I have found humour an excellent means by which to overcome the often painful shyness experienced when students are required to verbally justify their work in a group setting.

The profound and often distressing ambiguities that may occur during a transformational learning experience may be helped through the development and cultivation of a sense of humour. One way a sense of humour relates to better coping with stressful situations has to do with the types of cognitive appraisals that individuals make about such events. In a study by Kuiper, Martin and Oinger (1983) it was revealed that those with a more developed sense of humour appear to appraise potentially stressful situations as more challenging rather than threatening. They also evaluate their own performance and adjust their expectations for future performance in a more realistic and self-protective manner. Many of the authors cited throughout this work have suggested that humour involves a playful shift in perspective in which the incongruous or ludicrous aspects of a situation are enjoyed. This would suggest that part of the stress-buffering effects of humour may reside in an ability to shift one's perspective in a playful manner, rather than remaining trapped in one way of looking at things.

Therapeutic Potentials of Humour in Overcoming Dissonance

The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger, 1957) is one of the most influential and widely debated theories in social psychology. The main focus of cognitive dissonance is attitude change dealing with pairs of cognitions. Festinger (1957) states that a learner will tend to seek consonance between cognitions or ways of acquiring knowledge perceptions. When this consonance or harmony with belief is challenged by a new and incongruent cognition the learner will experience a state of tension or dissonance. The more entrenched a particular cognition or belief, for example,"I am 100% sure I cannot draw", the greater the dissonance when this view is challenged.

Leon Festinger (1957) states in his theory that an attitude or belief is challenged by a new and incongruent cognition. As described in earlier chapters, incongruity has played a major role in the construction of contemporary theoretical paradigms in humour research. Humour's role in relation to Incongruity theories could be to act as a coping mechanism, or as a way of 'reframing'; a form of cognitive reappraisal which may permit the individual to asses the problem from a fresh perspective. I have used humour in such circumstances to ease the burden of suffering and to illustrate that they are not alone in coping with dissonance thus developing a sense of shared humanity. Similar incongruities are taking place when an individual experiences cognitive dissonance in an educational context where a slice of new information is contradicting an existing belief system, and where humour may be able to define and create a relationship between apparently incompatible contexts.

A number of important ethical issues arise when considering the planning and delivery of transformational learning programmes, including the right of educators to encourage learning which may alter perceptions and understanding and the influence of interpersonal dynamics and the balance of power in the educator-student relationship.

Cognitive dissonance can play a major role in conflict, as can humour, both in its perpetuation and in its elimination. In spite of peoples desire to avoid it, the proper use of cognitive dissonance can be a useful tool in overcoming conflict. By introducing it to highlight the conflict between what people know and do, we can encourage a change in thought or action.

Paradoxical Intention

Humour may provide the sugar-coating on the pill that may provide relief from the discomforts that critical reflection can induce in transformative learning. Mental health professionals utilise humour in a number of ways to reveal things about their patients thinking and personality, revealing various types of defense mechanisms and fallacies in reasoning. One of these, which I have adapted for use in the classroom, is paradoxical intention, or as coined by Viktor Frankl (1969), logotherapy, which involves doing the very thing one, fears to do. For example, if one is afraid of a paintbrush, attend a painting class. By not providing counterpressure the defenses are disarmed. Anticipatory anxiety as a self-defeating prophecy is potentially undermined. This may also involve exaggeration through the production of a caricature or comical sketch of the undesired activity, which I have witnessed as producing a cathartic effect.

Lamb (1980), a logotherapist, defines paradoxical intention as the exaggeration of symptoms to the point of absurdity to induce laughter over their absurdity. An instructor should of course take great care when employing such a technique, ensuring the student is responding favourably. Paradoxical intention can expose self-contradiction through humour which, I believe, is central to this technique; *"Paradoxical intention should always be formulated in as humorous a manner as possible"* (Frankl, 1978).

The detachment that this so often affords also allows the distance needed to have control over ones situation, ones perspective on the uncertainty and oneself. It should therefore become a choice the student can make. Another relieving aspect is that the student is encouraged to laugh at himself or herself. Just by being told to do what one does not want to do can, in some circumstances, create a humorous attitude. The Gestaltian approach to the use of paradox states that before change can occur one must first get in touch with the present and be oneself, which within the transformation cycle requires a critical self-examination of the internalised values, beliefs and assumptions presently held. Gestalt therapy (Maier, 1932) involves experiencing rather than just intellectually talking about what is wrong. It may be suggested that humour be engaged to explore oneself by the examination of ones humour through the use of contradiction humour, insight humour etc. Humour also allows one to act naturally, creatively and spontaneously. Paradox, in Gestalt therapy is used to frustrate the client into taking the responsibility for integrating the self. The way out of a fixed mental trap is to paradoxically get deeper into it and purposely give up our self-domineering control. As with humour therapy, the initial paradox and

confusion is transformed into acceptable integration and resolution. The cure for negative emotion is to re-integrate it as a positive emotion, for example as humour. (Seltzer, 1986).

Provocative Therapy (Humour Therapy)

Another approach which may be adopted by instructors of adult education, which is also used by psychotherapists, is "Provocative Therapy" developed by Farrelly and Brandsma (1974). Interestingly, their original title was "Humour Therapy". In regard to humour it involves the uses of humour to provoke the client/student into certain kinds of behaviours. The student would be presented with a challenge or challenges, which persuade them to take the responsibility to change. Its goals for a student would be affirmation of self-worth, adaptive responses and perspectival thinking, critical factors in overcoming cognitive dissonance in a learning situation. Humour provides the possibility for distancing, breaking old and set patterns of thinking, (elements central to Mezirow's patterns of transformative learning), the juxtaposition of the real/unreal and metaphor/fantasy and undermining the overserious. Humour used in provocative therapy is intended to exaggerate maladaptive behaviour and ones worst fears about oneself and paradoxically may have the abilities to provoke self- and other-enhancing behaviours. If such an approach were to be used in an educational setting the educator must once again construct humour with a positive regard for the student, stressing the positive successes of the student/s. The instructor should always be kind, warm and caring avoiding negative disparaging or sarcastic forms of humour. Teachers should keep in mind that ridicule, aggression, mockery and being sardonic are negative evaluations and in an educational setting will not be

regarded as humour and have a negative effect in a transformative learning situation. Jack Mezirow (1991) described a transformative learning environment as one in which *"the participants have full information, have equal opportunity to assume various roles, can be critically reflective of assumptions, are empathic and good listeners and are willing to search for common ground or a synthesis of different points of view"(p.86).*

Mezirow advocated that transformational learning occurs through discussion and exploration of concepts, assuming relations of equality among participants in reflective discourse. However, in reality most human relationships are asymmetrical, or hierarchical in nature. As in psychotherapeutic relationships between patient and doctor, the use of humour in the student/teacher relationship is viewed as a recognisable 'bridging mechanism', assisting in relaxing the implicit power relationship between student and teacher. Exploratory research for this thesis revealed that instructors generally agreed that lighthearted self-disparagement proved to be an effective way of "humanising" themselves to their students, thus developing a more open and trusting relationship assisting in creating rapport.

Personal Construct Theory

The 'framing' and networking of knowledge and skill memories form a crucial reference for comparisons. From the viewpoint of cognitive psychology these constructions are referred to in Personal Construct Theory (Kelly, 1955). Personal constructs are developed from the earliest moment, when babies record the experiences of their senses and utilise a growing collection of memories as a means of comparative analysis in

order to evaluate and comprehend the reality of the world in which they live. In adulthood our collections of personal constructs continue to be added to and at times adjusted. Personal constructs are referred to by the subconscious as the individual judges the acceptability of concepts or approaches, even if a dismissing decision is overturned by the 'suspension of criticism' rule (Kelly, 1955). In some cases though, concepts can be in conflict with core constructs and can become blocked from communication. I have observed that it is the open-minded students who have learned to adjust their constructs and are more willing to entertain a concept which others might block. This theory would suggest that, by reference to our personal constructs, we could identify opportunities and solutions as well as incongruities. This is where humour may provide the necessary 'stepping stones' for personal construct adjustment by providing a sympathetic medium for comparing perceptions. Personal constructs may be a source of cognitive dissonance but coupled with thinking and learning styles are core to the unique perceptions of reality which make us all individuals.

Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804) stated that humour arises *"from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing"*. More is implied here than simply surprise, Kant suggests that humour consists of the violent dissolution of an emotional attitude. This is done by the abrupt intrusion into the attitude that is felt not to belong there, of some element that has strayed, as it were, from another 'compartment' of our minds.

Humour used with the appropriate discretion and respect to the individual or groups moral or ethical viewpoints may establish an acceptable link between old and new beliefs. Pogrebin and Poole (1988) identified humour's potential for "probing" or "exploration": in this sense an

instructor would be able to test the attitudes and beliefs of their students in a non-threatening, off-record manner. In this way we can begin to clarify boundaries and standards within the social dynamic of the group. According to incongruity theories of humour it is not merely that unexpected connections can be found between apparently dissimilar things, as in metaphor or analogy, proper social norms are also involved. By this, I mean in any community certain attitudes are felt to be appropriate to some things but not to others.

Humour has the ability to highlight discrepancies, which in turn can arouse a reappraisal of the cause of dissonance. By using metaphorical or analogous descriptions one can demonstrate that what is appropriate to the one can also be inappropriate to the other. Henry Fielding, in his novel "Jonathan Wild", portrays the exploits of a highwayman in terms usually reserved for military heroes; here the effect is to cast doubt on the conventional system of values. Oscar Wilde's witticism that a particular man *"hasn't a single redeeming vice,"* may be taken as a gibe at the boredom he finds in British men or as a questioning of the conventional Victorian attitudes towards religion and ethics. Occasionally, as Bergson (1956) pointed out, humour may be at the expense of the individual who is unable to live up to the conventional requirements.

Recent theorists and academics that are involved in the research of humour tend to denigrate Freud's 'relief/release' theories on humour. In reference to the repressive nature of cognitive dissonance I believe that a reappraisal is necessary.

In the human mind, according to Freud (1905), the normal state is one in which certain inhibitions are maintained on an ongoing basis. The

process of maturation and acculturation consists in the development of an ego, torn between the demands of the id (subconscious) and the superego. The ego ruled by the reality principle, attempts to mediate between the desires of the id, governed by the pleasure principle and the moral demands of the superego. When this becomes problematic censorship occurs and threatening thoughts are pushed down into the unconscious. The continued repression of these thoughts/ideas/beliefs, Freud believed, required constant expenditures of psychic energy. What jokes do is to tap the power of repressed thoughts and so offer a temporary relief from the energy being invested in the mechanisms of repression. According to Freud, the genius of jokes is their ability to release repressed thoughts and saves us the trouble and energy we expend in repressing them in the first place. In effect, a joke pulls the chair out from under our inhibitions.

Humour in a Transformational Classroom

The visual arts educator regularly experiences students who have a prosaic approach to thinking about visual problem solving, psychologists call this "functional fixedness": they see only the obvious way of looking at a problem, the same comfortable way they always think about it. Another barrier is self-censorship, that inner voice of judgement that can confine the creative spirit within the boundaries of what is deemed acceptable. It is this voice that whispers, "they'll think I'm foolish", or "that will never work". This throws up a whole set of challenges for the educator because the existence of dissonance, being psychologically uncomfortable, motivates a student to reduce the dissonance often leading to his/her avoidance of information which may hinder the students understanding of the subject being taught.

Expanding on Festinger's theory (1957), Harmon, Jones and Mills (1999) have categorised the experience of cognitive dissonance into four main paradigms. Firstly, the Free-Choice Paradigm, where dissonance occurs as the result of a decision being made. Secondly, the Belief-Disconfirmation Paradigm, when dissonance arises from exposure to information inconsistent with ones beliefs. Thirdly, the Effort-Justification Paradigm, stating that dissonance is aroused whenever a person engages in unpleasant activity with intentions to gain a desirable result. Fourthly, the Induced-Compliance Paradigm, where dissonance takes place when one does or says something that is contrary to an existing belief or attitude.

Teachers will often notice how many students in adult education desire an orderly world, since they have come into education from an often formalised and structured daily regime. Entering the world of education, perhaps for the first time in a long while, students can be constantly aware of the limits of their comprehension, and many of them live in a rather constant, if modest, state of anxiety, that is, of expecting the unexpected. Humour can contribute to the understanding and acceptance of these facts for it can have the capacity to illustrate the possibility that the surprises are seldom as great as our anxiety about them. It can alleviate uneasiness or embarrassment in transformative learning situations assisting students out of difficult situations. It may be worthwhile to distinguish "higher" from "lower" forms of humour, in this case to reduce dissonance. Lower forms of humour which derives from others weakness, or failures (superiority theory) may serve a conservative function in that it can protect the status quo of certain beliefs and values by manipulating dissonant information or beating-up disagreeable others. Higher forms of humour which are based on relief of distress through true

adaptation of learning show our fear to be baseless through a higher construction of the situation.

From the perspective of alleviating dissonance, let us examine humour as the sudden awareness of an 'alternative construction' of a distressful situation, which to some extent dissipates that distress. To illustrate this, I will use the analogy from children's humour in which the dissipation of distress is not under the control of the child itself but provided by another. The other in this case would be the teacher. The archetype is "peek-a-boo". The humour lies in the discovery of safety within fear. First, the infant is uncertain, slightly afraid; then the fear is shown to be illusory, just like laughter, humour's physical counterpoint is relaxation within stress.

Humour often appears to be in the eye of the beholder and it would be beneficial for an instructor to identify variables that affect the perception of humour in order to avoid compounding cognitive dissonance. Jokes and cartoons that require the resolution of incongruities, characterised by punch lines in which the surprising incongruity can be completely resolved, work well in a classroom environment. In my own practice, I have witnessed initial confusion or disparity amongst students, but if suitable explanation of the joke is supplied, an entirely new trend of thought may be exposed. Although individuals might differ with respect to how they perceive and/or resolve the incongruity, they have the sense of having "gotten the point" or understood the joke once resolution information has been identified.

Robert Boyd's (1988) work on transformative learning, based upon analytic or depth psychology, along with the work of Patricia Cranton

(1994), relies heavily on Jungian philosophical models which are essentially constructivist and theoretically similar to transformative learning theory. Particular references can be drawn in relation to teaching visual communication in their emphasis on the use of extrarational sources such as symbols, images and archetypes to assist in creating a personal vision or meaning of what it means to be human.

Robert Boyd's theory on Carl Jung's concept of individuation pointed at the use of humour as being a catalyst for inducing critical reflection. Jung defines individuation as a *"process by which individual beings are being formed and differentiated ... having as its goal the development of the individual personality"* (Jacoby, 1990.) This is important from the viewpoint of the visual communicator in that humour shares many cognitive operations with creative thinking and may provide considerable insight into individual personalities. From this perspective, images convey the ways in which we invest or withdraw meaning from the social world, and through visual metaphor, pun, irony, political satire and cartooning can have a transformative effect and influence on the integrity of our belief systems.

According to Boyd (1989) a transformative education fosters the natural processes of individuation through imaginative engagement with different dimensions of ones unconscious life. This engagement reflects an ongoing dialogue between ego consciousness and ones unconscious. Many of the learning situations I employ in the visual communications classroom, such as open critique sessions, visual literacy seminars or technical demonstrations are capable of evoking potentially powerful emotions and images among adults. By deploying humorous dialogue and/ or imagery a cushioning effect will often occur, dis-arming

dissonances allowing a class to release tensions and reflect on their reactions and responses.

One of the most common stressors in a visual communications classroom is anxiety over skill levels and one of the most effective ways of countering dissonance over this is to 'slip on a banana skin', when the instructor deliberately (or not) makes a mistake during a technical demonstration. Supplemented with a humorously self-depreciating remark, this will visibly put the less confident at ease by showing that the masters or mistresses are also fallible.

Conclusion

Paulo Freire's (1978) theory of a horizontal student-teacher relationship describes the teacher working on an equal footing with the student. This is where the student/teacher dialogue is based on the foundation of mutual trust. Humour may help to provide such an atmosphere of trust in the educational setting where anything can be shared and talked about, helping to facilitate emancipatory transformation. I believe that the development of a supportive sense of humour in both instructor and student contributes to the development of a sense of personal power and self-worth both crucial elements in transformational learning in adult education.

Humour in the classroom can be an effective buffer, by which to ease tensions, for the teacher who may encounter varying levels of frustration as emotional fallout resulting from transformational learning. Mezirow (1991) himself recognised the need for a supportive classroom

environment in order to foster critical self-reflection, creating a teaching space more inclusive, discriminatory and integrative of experience.

Research findings suggest that educators who apply humorous anecdote, analogy and story-telling experience increased levels of inquiry and curiosity, witnessing their students becoming more receptive to new ideas. It would therefore appear that humour has the potential for reducing dissonance factors in the transformative learning process and may assist in helping to overcome the psychological discomforts that can block the motivation for change.

Chapter 4

How Does Humour Help Develop Visual Literacy and Creative Thinking?

In this chapter I will examine the influence of an increasingly visual culture in contemporary society and its relevance to teaching practice in art and design. I will focus upon the importance of visual literacy and the use of humour within the visual arts as a means of developing visual literacy skills, thereby providing insight into how visual structures are created to convey visual messages. This will be enhanced through a brief historical perspective on selected examples of humour usage in visual art.

I will establish links which support the belief that humour has an important role to play in the development of literacy and creative thinking, focusing on the theories of bisociative (Koestler, 1976), divergent (Guilford, 1967) and lateral thinking (De Bono, 1971). I will ask, in relation to these theories, what connections may exist between humour and creative thinking which can assist students involved in the process of image making to overcome 'blocks', providing fresh perspectives and approaches to visual problem -solving.

Through the conjunction of bisociative, divergent, and lateral thinking, the applications of metaphor, pun, allegory and analogy can all be applied in a visual context as well as the verbal. I will demonstrate how all of these mechanisms, in particular visual metaphor, can be put to use in the visual communications classroom. I will also discuss how metaphor can

be viewed as one of the fundamental links in the creation of not only verbal humour, but is equally important in the production of visual communications. I will explore how metaphor, not just in language but particularly in aesthetic experience, can be important to concept generation in how visual communicators perceive and cope with the incongruities of their world through humour.

Visual Literacy: Finding Meaning in Imagery

"A wise man once said that a picture is worth one thousand words. But when visual symbols are used in place of words to express an idea or evoke a feeling or mood within us, it is necessary for the viewer to be able to understand the message" (Oring, 2000 p.56).

Contemporary culture has become increasingly dependent on the use of the visual image as a form of communication. For many people their understanding of the world is being accomplished more through reading words than by reading images. As the human race enters a new millennium, mass-produced and multi-media imagery is becoming ever more pervasive throughout a wide range of cultures. An increasing number of people's lives are dominated by computer and television screens, images in our newspapers and magazines and we are besieged by billboards and advertising, much of which is infused with varying levels and types of humour. Our economies rely heavily on visual representation and a sense of design, style and feel. It is increasingly difficult to avoid our highly saturated culture of the image and spectacle.

Different skills are called upon to construct meaning from the huge variety of images in contemporary culture. A straightforward news photograph will require fewer, simpler operations than a psychologically manipulative advertisement, an illustration will engage the viewer differently from an abstract painting, a kitchen chair differently from a 19th Century farm implement, a street sign from a road map and so on. Some images ask to be understood at face value, others have greater built-in complexity, including the possibility of symbolic, implied and other mysterious meanings. Branton (1999) states that the use and interpretation of images is a specific language in the sense that images are used to communicate messages that must be decoded in order to have meaning.

Visual literacy is in essence the ability to find meaning in imagery. It can be understood as being the ability to understand and use images, including the ability to think, learn and express oneself in terms of images. Becoming visually literate is as important to a visual communicator as to a writer understanding grammar, spelling and sensitivities to character and plot development. Important concepts that fall within the domain of visual literacy include the language of pictures, word and picture relationships, symbols and symbolism and notions of visual persuasion, basic comprehension of semiotics and hermeneutics.

Research in the field of visual literacy suggests that the use of visual aids in teaching is effective in facilitating learning and critical thinking (McKay, 1999; Mawter and Michaels, 2006). In my role as a teacher of visual communications I foster the development of students' levels of visual literacy in order to assist them in the task of enhancing their technical skills and also their cognitive and intellectual levels. This has

led me to explore alternative routes that may help facilitate students understanding of the creative process, in particular the effective use of humour as an educational tool.

Conveying humour through visual imagery requires a need to understand visual language, including being alert to visual messages and critically reading or viewing images as the language of the messages. Mawter and Michaels (2006) claim that humour requires individuals to be flexible in their thinking. They assert that humour enables people to consider multiple perspectives, compare established facts with alternatives simultaneously, observe and interpret, value and judge (or suspend judgement) as well as tolerate paradox, predict consequences and develop options.

Yuri Borer conceptualised humour as a form of aesthetic insight: *"The comical in art is a means to uncover the contradiction of reality and as such is an aesthetic form of critique"* (Borer, 1993). Just as in insightful forms of humour, the visual communicator may use various types, levels and intensities of humour within their imagery to make criticisms of their culture, be it political, religious, social or otherwise.

Efland (2002) contends that works of art are more than formal designs that arouse interest. They are, very often, about issues that affect their social and personal worlds. Efland (2002) argues that art is educationally important, in that the arts can help individuals to integrate their understanding of the world. Humour can provide a similar function by providing fresh insights and angles on reality (Morreall, 2004). Often the intention in the humorous mode is to construct an alternative meaning to the prevailing one. As with the stand-up comedian, where a favorable

response from the recipient relies upon them 'getting' the joke, the visual communicator must also ensure that their viewers understand the message within the image. A cartoon, for example, involves consideration of different aspects of the scene in a process of interpretation in which the desired goal is an effect of clarity or comprehension accompanied, hopefully, by the pleasure of humour.

Few practising teachers today would disagree that visual aids play an important role in the learning process as an effective way to support the written or spoken subject. Teachers who utilise visual humour in the form of slide shows, mnemonics: such as picture puzzles and memory games and other forms of aide memoirs may benefit from developing their visual literacy skills. The eye can be trained to identify visual cues and interpret the intent of visual messages. Although the use of visuals in education has been consistently shown to aid in learning not all strategies are effective in facilitating mental connections. Williams and Dwyer (1999) suggest that visualisation alone is less effective in facilitating learning. The use of strategies that focus on entertaining or exciting aspects of presentation rather than thoughtful analysis of underlying meanings can detract from the teacher's intent (Sherry, 1996).

If teachers are to utilise humorous images appropriately and assist students to interpret them effectively, teachers could benefit from training in the basic principles of visual literacy. De Porter (1992) states that; *"when you are aware of how you and others perceive and process information, you can make learning and communication easier" (p.74)*

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Creative Thinking: Bisociative and Divergent Thinking

Similar cognitive processes are shared by creative thinking and by certain humour insights, particularly when deciphering incongruity in humour. As with humour, there is no single, authoritative perspective or definition of creativity. Numerous categorisations exist, including psychoanalytic, perceptual, humanistic, cognitive and composite (Busse and Mansfield, 1980; Houtz, 1994). These categorisations provide frameworks for inquiry into creativity and a backdrop for understanding creative process. Bailin (1994) suggests that there are shared beliefs about the nature of creativity. He states that creativity is often associated with originality that the value of creative products cannot be objectively ascertained, and that beyond products, creativity can manifest itself in new ways of thinking that break with previously established norms. Herrmann (1996) recognised creativity as the *"ability to challenge assumptions, recognize patterns, see in new ways, make connections, take risks and seize upon chance."*

E. Paul Torrance (1988) believes that all individuals are creative and considers creativity developmentally as opposed to those who believe creativity is established at an early age. His research has shown that creativity does not develop in a linear fashion and that it is possible to use activities, teaching methods, motivation and procedures to nurture creative growth.

Several strands of theory support inquiry into creativity. A view of creativity in which there has been a growing consensus is that it is composite concept, the product not just of individual traits, but also of societal and environmental factors. Arthur Koestler (1964) considered

creativity as being a mental process involving the generation of new ideas or concepts or new associations between existing ideas of concepts; he proposed the composite theory that all-creative activity, the conscious and unconscious processes that underlie artistic originality (ah), scientific discovery (aha) and comic inspiration (haha), share a fundamental pattern (Koestler, 1976). He delineated between associative thinking and bisociative thinking, the former as being the thinking used on one plane or subject, while creative acts demanded bisociative thinking. Koestler (1975) wrote of bisociative thinking as being "*a transitory double minded state of unstable equilibrium where the balance of both emotion and thought is disturbed*" (p.36).

The term bisociative thinking was coined to distinguish the various routines of associative thinking from the creative jump which connects previously unconnected frames of references and makes us experience reality on several planes at once (Koestler, 1976). He took up the theme that an idea is not merely associated with one frame of reference, but simultaneously juxtaposes and synthesizes two quite different frames of reference, that is it "bisociates"them. This is where Koestler drew parallels between creativity and humour, particularly in incongruous humour, where there is the perceiving of a situation or idea in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference.

Similar to bisociative thinking, divergent thinking has been identified as a generative cognitive process associated with creative production (Ward, Smith and Finke, 1999). Guilford (1967) included divergent thinking as a facet of his structure of intellect and proposed that it functioned as a process which can yield a variety of outcomes or solutions to a given problem. He described divergent thinking as a characteristic of creative

minds, consisting of four factors: fluency, the ability to produce many ideas; flexibility, the production of a wide variety of ideas; originality, producing novel ideas; and elaboration, adding value to existing ideas (Guilford, 1967).

Both bisociative and divergent thinking can be used in teaching practice to foster learning and creativity. The bisociative format can be used within the field of the visual arts to assist students to consider and make connections between apparently incongruous objects. Humour can be utilised in this process in order to draw attention to the juxtaposition of frames of reference, enhancing recognition of patterns or links or of differences and juxtapositions. Examples include the use of visual or verbal puns, both of which produce the collision of two incongruous cognitive frames of reference. The punch line of a joke provides a cognitive jolt, demanding that the listeners suddenly shift their frame of reference to a contrasting one; it is insufficient for the comic to merely provide two frames of reference. The aesthetic form requires the comic to set up one frame of reference and provide a link to another which is unexpected but connected via the link.

The use of divergent thinking can also be helpful for students in bridging these gaps and assisting them to develop new ways of looking for and at patterns from different perspectives. Baer (1993) contends that divergent thinking can be an effective means by which visual communications students can brainstorm, generating multiple solutions to problems. This may often involve taking risks because there always exists the possibility that their ideas will lead to failure. This element of risk or uncertainty can be a daunting challenge and may often lead to perceptual and conceptual blocks. A sense of open-mindedness and ability to be open to

alternatives is a major component in the creative process, but does not always flow with regularity. The experiential nature of humour in providing a bridging dynamic between the dissociative elements of a dilemma has the potential to facilitate the process. The use of humour can indicate the existence of alternatives and allow multiple perspectives to be considered.

Lateral Thinking, Creativity and Humour

Popular psychology sometimes associates creativity with lateral thinking. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, lateral thinking is *"...a way of thinking which seeks the solution to intractable problems through unorthodox methods, or elements which would normally be ignored by logical thinking."*

Edward De Bono's work in the field of creative thinking led to the introduction and popularisation of the term "lateral thinking". His theories explicitly linked lateral thinking with insight, creativity and humour. (De Bono, 1971). He recognised that humour may well be a precursor to what is labeled as creativity and can be a carrier or catalyst for it (De Bono, 1970). How we cognitively process humour may aptly convey how the brain works as a thinking tool, with learning occurring when a jump in perception occurs, the result being a new idea or insight. Jokes and humorous anecdotes require the manipulation of their elements into an authentic form, as do other art forms, requiring the perception of disparate frames of reference and possible connections between them. According to Torrance (1988) and Koestler (1964) this is the essence of creativity. It requires an understanding of how one might shift from one

set of assumptions to another; this correlates with what De Bono termed lateral thinking.

De Bono (1970) believed that lateral thinking could be taught and advocated a step-by-step approach. Firstly, it is necessary to set a fixed allocation of alternative approaches before proceeding with a further step. Attention rotation, divides a problem up into parts so that a student would not set up a monopoly of attention on a single approach. Cross-fertilization, meaning what another person "sees" may provide a fresh and dissimilar approach. This could imply a reversal of direction in looking at the question and random input from external sources which would influence the older relationships. While some people would be more natural lateral thinkers than others de Bono points out that this is true in any subject area but that people can be taught this concept and turn it into a resident skill.

Lateral thinking suggests that the student can explore different ways of examining a challenging task, instead of accepting what appears to be the solution with seemingly the most potential. In my view humour is a useful catalyst in which to initialise and ease tensions and fears resulting from conceptual blocks in the creative process. It allows students to explore alternative and more lateral routes, to embrace non-sequentiality: to jump out of the frame of reference or work from several points and link them together. It also permits the undoing of selection processes, thinking outside of logical progression into pathways that may seem wrong, but may provide original alternatives, helping to shift the focus of concern creating the block. I would note here that De Bono's ideas around lateral thinking may have a role to play in Leon Festinger's theory of Cognitive Dissonance (1957) as described in Chapter Three.

I believe that it is important when teaching visual communications that students generate multiple images early on in the process in order to provide alternatives. Lateral thinking techniques can be particularly effective in this process, at the onset of a project by exploring possibilities and by yielding a variety of solutions to a given problem. Situational oscillation or travelling down a seemingly normal path but with a very unusual or unexpected end result often leads to a humorous outcome which may provide the stimulation for further investigation. Thus humour is providing a conative, or motivational, function.

Metaphor – Making the Message Memorable

Metaphors are statements based on some kind of analogy where two things are compared to each other; they are powerful creative tools that allow comparison and categorisation of materially unlike entities. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) claimed that metaphor is a part of everyday speech that affects the ways in which we perceive, think and act. Nerlich and Clarke (2001) perceive metaphor as a major cognitive mechanism by which the mind operates as a connecting organ. A good metaphor, they perceive reaches parts of the brain that other cognitive mechanisms cannot. Good metaphors can expand the mind, fire the imagination and may lead to consciousness of oneself and others. Nerlich and Clarke (2001) also claim that metaphors create cognitive and possibly neurological bonds between conceptual or mental domains and may also create social bonds.

Traditionalist views on 'meaning' in Western philosophy and linguistics appear to permit metaphor very little role in our understanding of our

world and ourselves (Lakoff and Johnson, 1979). Since the publication of Kuhn's (1970) model of scientific thinking, rhetoricians generally accept that metaphors pervade all forms of knowledge, and may allow knowledge to be seen in a new perspective. If we accept the evidence put forward by George Lakoff (1979) that demonstrates that metaphor is pervasive in everyday language and thought, then this may have implications for how we approach and construct our teaching methodologies.

From an experientialist perspective, humankind is viewed as part of the environment not separate from it: one cannot function within the environment without changing it or being changed by it. In terms of aesthetic experience, the experientialist view provides us with a definition of metaphor as a matter of imaginative rationality. Providing us with an understanding of one kind of experience in terms of another, creating coherences by virtue of imposing gestalts which are structured by the natural dimensions of experience (Lackoff and Johnson, 1998). As for aesthetic insight, humour can be the foundation upon which to create elaborate, fantastic extended metaphors or myths. It is ironic but one of the most effective ways of communicating a serious point is through humour, allegory or myth. When I illustrated the then American president Ronald Reagan with the attributes of Frankenstein's monster, this initially raises a smile, but by tapping into the literary myth the visual metaphor implies that this man represented a threat to peace and stability.

Metaphors used in teaching can enhance the learning process and are most helpful when they effectively and accurately communicate their intended relationship between the better and lesser-known concepts. Properly used they can provide a type of shorthand to help define the

intangible or abstract. Williams (1986) indicated that metaphors that are relevant to students' interests offer maximum effectiveness. Williams extrapolates that a sound metaphorical selection can assist a student in absorbing and assimilating information. Teachers, he ascertains, are most effective when they relate the concept or theory that is being discussed to a metaphoric example that is understood within the framework and context of the student's base of knowledge. Teachers should ensure that the coherence of the metaphor is accurate or clear; if not, the intended effect of greater understanding of the topic or issues can be lost. Earle (1995) cautioned against the use of mixed metaphors or imprecise analogies. Unfocused analogical and metaphorical contrasts may adversely impact students understanding, perceptions, and actions, resulting in unintentional consequences. This can be true if the class is composed of students with culturally divergent backgrounds. Metaphor, similar to humour useage, is most effective in the classroom when its use is appropriate to the audience, targeted to the topic, and placed in the context of the learning experience.

Metaphors are really statements based on some kind of analogy where two things are compared to each other. Visual metaphor is an important convention in illustration, which is literally the visualisation of a block of text where words and imagery are inextricably linked. Understanding and applying the concept of visual metaphor is of paramount importance when I teach illustration and visual literacy classes and provides insightful approaches to how students interpret text visually. By juxtaposing elements from a body of text with apparently incongruous characteristics a secondary or subliminal message or meaning can be achieved which commands the viewers attention, urging them to resolve or find meaning in the visual clues provided.

In an illustrative context -where text and image are linked- an image which captures a viewers attention will also create a connective causeway from the image into the text. This will establish a symbiotic relationship in which the reading of the text continues to enlighten the viewer on the meanings presented in the illustration.

Brown (1976), a specialist in the sociology of art, notes that metaphors provide a perspective on knowledge just as scientific paradigms provide a perspective on theoretical knowledge. My own perception is that an understanding of metaphor is an essential element for teachers because of their ability to provide schemes or cognitive models that are the basis for thought. Metaphors may help provide us with valuable insights, telling us much about those who use them, giving us insight into how these individuals view the world in which they live.

Verbal joking requires communication of a scenario or set of expectations or paradigm before the delivery of a punch line, often demanding an unsettling shift to a related by unexpected result, often if the result is predictable the joke may fall flat. Linguistic theories of humour (Raskin, 1985) state that a humorous text must relate to two different, and opposing scenarios. The person who is processing the text does not detect this duality at first, a certain element in the text betrays this duality. The processor at some point realises the duality, the opposition, and consequently, the tension between the two scenarios. It is then that the tension can be translated into laughter.

Graphic humour, as a visual genre, is a master of the indirect saying. Metaphor is regularly employed for presenting one idea through another.

In order to highlight the deceits of authority, often seen in political satire through cartooning, the artist may utilise everyday language and knowledge of strange, unusual perspectives to construct metaphors that can clash with accepted ways of thinking. Thus, a comparison can be drawn between this type of conceptual conflict and the definition of humour which perceives of a situation where two frames of reference or contexts are associated at the same time, both consistent within themselves but mutually incompatible (Koestler, 1982).

The use of metaphor in graphic humour has the ability to put together what can often be a complex political, cultural or socially taboo subject in a simple and direct fashion. Cartoons can be seen to use metaphor in a particularly dialogical manner. The topic alluded to metaphorically is generally known to the viewer, within a specific cultural context, for it has been presented in the media framed by a system of categories and values thus creating a common understanding. The cartoons metaphoric allusion to the topic is presented in such a way as to dialogically comment on both the topic and the frame or perspective of its common understanding. Humour is free enough for suspending, evading or mocking the laws of logic, the rules of behaviour or the hierarchies of prestige, precisely because the pleasure it gives and the social value it has in temporarily freeing us from them.

To provide an example of how public understanding is frequently based on metaphors through images and literary narratives is when in 1997 scientists first cloned Dolly the sheep. People were subjected to images of androids, armies of little Hitler's and humans on assembly lines. Frankenstein and Brave New World became the catch phrase of the day. The relevance of this is that although people might pick simple metaphors

or images to make the unknown understandable, this does not mean that all metaphors reduce complexity. Although metaphors can lead to biases they can also clarify things. This means that seeing a contentious social issue through the glasses of a dominant metaphor, people might either overexaggerate the risks associated with it, or undervalue the benefits associated with it or vice versa.

Similar to solving the incongruities in humorous verbal events, an instructor of visual communications can develop their students understanding of the complexities and nuances of visual metaphor. By pointing out examples and designing appropriate programmes of study students can learn the agreed-upon rules, the schemata, the conventions and grammars for the intentional creation of meaning within specific contexts that makes metaphor possible.

Many artistic movements have utilised the eloquent and often-arcane powers of visual metaphor to instigate political, philosophical, ideological or social change. The emphasis on art as a form of education or as an agent for social change has frequently been at odds with work that encourages laughter. Perhaps this is because its imperatives fail to recognize the redemption that humour can offer from recognition that we are complicit in the misfortunes and inequities of contemporary reality. In doing so, art can often be aggressive and confrontational, take for example the works of the British satirical cartoonists Gerald Scarfe and Ralph Steadman.

The British journalist and literary critic Arthur Koestler (1968) noted that almost all-modern theories of humour recognise "*a component of malice, of debasement of the other fellow and of aggressive defensive self-*

assertion" (p.32). Visual humour may sometimes be cruel but, paradoxically, it is invariably thoughtful- often allowing the viewer to have the last laugh.

Humour in the Visual Arts

Artists throughout the ages have utilised humour to comic effect, for example by using parody, satire or irony. Creative arts, painting and sculpture were for a long time, in Europe, tuned into Platonic and Christian heritage. It frequently happens that a work which was not meant to be comic will strike people as funny, perhaps only a century after its creation. During the medieval period, Platonic metaphysics dictated the comic genre and could appear only on the margins, or when it was presented at the very centre, it was not acknowledged as such, lest the artist face the wrath of the church, more often than not his employer. As the Enlightenment deconstructed metaphysics and Platonism, the comic genre began to be inspired by an increasing number of fragmented philosophies, including rational skepticism. Ideas and philosophies, which had once dominated European thought, or everyday reasoning and the beautiful or unreflective beliefs, of totality, wholeness and holiness, all, became the objects of imagistic comedy. Making fun of art critics, art writers, art merchants and art patrons has its own tradition and continues to flourish.

From the 20th Century onwards artworks made fun of art critics by putting the critics "ideas" about true art or criticism on the canvas and ridiculing them in a satirical, ironical or humorous fashion. Raoul Hausmann, a Dadaist, merged the satirical presentation of the art critic with social criticism or social satire in a well-known photomontage (1919-1920).

The message here illustrates the art critic, the agent of capitalism, lionising Venus and killing "alternative" artists. Marcel Duchamp in his Mona Lisa with Moustache and Andy Warhol's multiple Marilyn Monroes have both utilised two western icons of beauty and produced examples of parody or caricature in modern art. Warhol expressed, but also bracketed, packaged and ironized the spirit of reproduction. Pop art makes fun of popular taste and represents it simultaneously. Duchamp, again, in his purchase of a urinal from a plumbing store, signed as Mutt (The Fountain, 1917) and sent to an art exhibition was, perhaps for the first time, raising a question about art by presenting art through a practical joke. Was Duchamp replacing the question "what is beautiful?" with the question "what is art?" and "what makes art an art?" If we accept this premise then Duchamp's practical joke can be viewed as a philosophical gesture.

One of the movements synonymous with humour is the Surrealist movement. First described as a form of aesthetic in the early 20th Century several avant-garde movements calling themselves, variously, Dadaists, Surrealists and Futurists began to argue for an art that was random, jarring and illogical. The objectives of these movements were to a considerable extent serious, committed to undermining the solemnity and self-satisfaction of the artistic establishment of their day. The bizarre juxtapositions, absurd situations and nonsense logic in their art was often based on the non-sequitur, in which one statement is followed by another with no logical progressions; examples are often seen in the dreamlike and occasionally unsettling images of Salvador Dali, and Rene Magritte. *"To see one thing as if it were another creates a tension between two perspectives: The thing as itself and the thing as something else. To*

resolve this tension by finding an integrated interpretation is a satisfying achievement" (Holyoak and Thagard, 1995).

The surrealist painter Rene Magritte is one of the greatest modern comic artists embodying the intimate relationship between philosophical thinking and comic art. The two major comic constituents of Magritte's work are dissociation, which we know from jokes, and presenting metaphors in a literary sense. Bisociation is also typical of Magritte's work without text. Magritte, then, excels in pictorial puzzle jokes. These are comic pictures, which are not jokes, but suggest a humorous understanding of an idea, thought, or institution through pictorial associations. The artist's imagination is not accidental, it is a personal imagination where things, stories and relations are torn apart and put together in a unique way, the meaning of which is not always easy to find. After laughter comes reflection, the aftershock of the image entails thinking. What may often look absurd for the conventionally blinded eye comes to make sense once considered and thought about.

One of the most significant ways artists have manifested elements of the humorous in their work has been through a process of Detournement. Detournement is a concept developed by the movement called The Radical Situationists of the 1950's and the 1960's, in which the pre-existing structures and procedures of daily life are calculatedly subverted. Here, the mundane becomes comically estranged and fantastic, prompting the viewer to recognise much of the absurdity that characterises his or her daily life.

An example of this can be viewed in Christian Jankowski's video installation, The Hunt (1992), in which he is seen hunting in a

supermarket with a bow and arrow. Jankowski's introduction of a more primitive masculine rite into such an everyday occupation creates a discomforting recognition of the extent to which our lives have become divorced from active engagement with the world around us.

Not all-visual imagery is, of course, based on humour or has a humorous context, but analogies can be drawn between humour, in particular joke interpretation and the interpretation of an artwork. Both possess the ability to bring people out of themselves, to reinforce our shared feelings, our shared humanity and capacity for feelings. Similar to certain works of art, in a very good joke every element has a point, meaning, each of its elements can be accounted for in connection with explaining the joke or artwork.

What I will term 'abstract' humour or humour that seems to occur when criticism and often logic, have been suspended often encourages and permits the origination of incongruities and novelties in student and professional work, via associations, metaphors and "what-if…" scenarios. While these incongruities may not necessarily provide a direct solution to a visual problem-solving challenge, they can provide important creative 'stepping stones'. These provide learning opportunities in two senses: they may lead on to a solution or they may provide a clearer perspective of the challenge, which informs further, or even reveals a potential approach to a solution.

Allegory, Ambiguity and Puns

Allegory is a type of metaphor, deriving from the Greek word allegories, which means to speak figuratively. With allegory one seems to be saying

one thing, but rather says another, this like irony can create humour. To see one thing as if it were another creates a tension between two perspectives: the thing as itself and the thing as something else. To resolve this tension by finding an integrated interpretation is a satisfying achievement (Holyoak and Thagard, 1995). Scholars and art historians are constantly peeling away layers of artworks like onions, revealing hidden meanings and messages, possibly hidden even to the artist. Allegory can be taken in two ways: one humorous, one serious. One can say things and be critical in this indirect fashion where serious, direct presentation would otherwise be unacceptable alternately due to a lack of evidence or because the reader/viewer would be offended.

Allegory in the 16th century led to emblem books and pictorial iconology. This is symbolism or metaphorical imagery of a perceptual sort. It is as if art or certain perceptual objects have some mystical meaning. Just as symbol may be question-begging or arbitrary, emblems and icons may be illusory. Each believer undermines the next believers myth, each may even perceive the others belief as a joke.

Ambiguity humour is a mistake or clash of different meanings, often involving double or multiple meanings taken in incongruous or wrong ways. Rudolf von Allers (1955) asserted that metaphor is almost always ambiguous. Metaphor relates unlike things and does not specify how these things are related. The relation is uncertain and open to various interpretations. Metaphor is often interesting or humorous because of such ambiguity. "Humans are computers" is in part a joke but also an interesting hypothesis, or metaphor, which may be expanded upon in order to gain insight. A pun is also a shift of context requiring an adjustment of our attention from the meanings to the words and sounds,

themselves. Once again, a statement is not funny because it is a pun, it is funny because the clash of meanings brought together is incongruous, but seems to be congruous, or congruous but seems incongruous. James Brown (1956) stated that puns link two contexts, reconcile disparate meanings, and have a semi-metaphoric status.

Visual puns are similar to verbal puns if we drop "words" and replace them with "symbols". In visual communications the visual pun is the use of a symbol to suggest two or more meanings or different associations or the use of two or more symbols of the same or nearly the same appearance or sound with different meanings. The pun is created when these symbols are used in context in such a manner that both meanings are possible giving added meaning to the overall statement. With access and understanding of these forms of bisociative thought processes a student of visual communications can begin to understand and deliver imagery which operates on a humorous and/or analytical level and becomes aware that one or more symbols have multiple associations applicable to one statement. Torrance (1988) stated the essence of creativity lies in making connections between disparate frames of reference. For a moment, the pun, metaphor, allegory etc. creates an intellectual puzzle, and somewhere in between the short time when the viewer recognizes the possible associations and solves the puzzle, the message seeps into the unconscious. Similar to verbal humour when we 'get' the punch line, after a visual puzzle is solved, there is an intellectual release of tension in the form of smiles, laughter, groans or other acts of recognition.

Metaphor and analogy can be and are widely used in adult education settings, not just in visual communications. When thoughts and ideas are

paraphrased, teachers will often utilise metaphorical analogy. Bowers (1993) suggests that all human thinking is metaphorical at its epicentre and the use of metaphor in pedagogy is innate.

Using Context to Find Meaning

Successful engagement is a major function that bridges humour, in all forms of comedic interaction, and in visual communications. Construction of context with familiar symbols can create meaning from everyday expressions, such as idioms, axioms and cliches. These forms of expression represent a shared understanding and are based on common language and cultural experience. This can initiate a collaborative process of constructing meaning. Like a familiar greeting, they welcome the viewer, open a conversation and start a dialogue.

Cognitive challenges, such as those elicited through metaphor, pun, or analogy, can make ideas more memorable. Games and puzzles require participation and challenge viewers to discover solutions, as do messages that elicit an emotional response, such as humour and surprise. In an interview with Steven Heller (1999), Rand said, *"The notion of taking things out of context and giving them new meanings is inherently funny."* Surprise and familiarity are a part of humour – too much familiarity, there's no surprise; little surprise, there's no humour.

Surrounding and opposing ideas with objects and thoughts from unexpected sources, the visual communicator, just as some humourists, can utilise the emotional response connected with surprise, to make ideas more memorable. Informing ideas with history, cultural context, personal experiences and knowledge empowers people to participate in interactive

communicational spaces by constructing the context and meaning necessary for understanding.

There exist ambiguities in both art and humour. Yet both the artist and the teller of a humorous tale draw their viewer or audience into a funnel. Background assumptions must be engaged, agreement in judgements are assumed, the onlooker's attention must be focused or compressed, and ultimately they should be led to see matters in a quite specific way in order to get the point. It is often the case that interpretations of visual and verbal humour are rarely universal. People do sometimes laugh at things that are not funny, doing so for social reasons, for example, to maintain inclusion in a group. Similarly people sometimes do not laugh at things that are funny, doing so for social reasons, examples being due to embarrassment or moral objections. In a sense the hearer or viewer should already be familiar with all the appropriate elements within the humour to understand it. If this is not the case, it may lead to many misunderstandings when jokes are told across cultures, or in unfamiliar contexts.

Conclusion

Visual imagery as a form of communication has become increasingly important within contemporary culture requiring the use of different skills to enable construction of meaning. Visual literacy refers to the ability to find meaning in imagery. Research in this area indicates that visual aids can be effective in enhancing practical and cognitive skills and facilitating learning and critical thinking.

Bisociative, divergent and lateral thinking have been identified as being generative cognitive processes which are linked to creative production. Humour can be used within these formats in order to act as a catalyst for creativity. Humour, as in creative thinking, requires people to play with ideas and to change their mental perspectives. Metaphor, allegory, ambiguity and pun share an ability to enhance these processes by facilitating connections between disparate frames of reference. The literature suggests that their effectiveness in learning must be clear, coherent and subject-relevant. In the classroom this can provide the impetus to promote truly novel ideas, not only in visual communications but also across multidisciplinary zones.

The following chapter will examine humour and learning from diverse cultural perspectives. To extract humour from its cultural context, particularly where language and meanings are important can be problematic. A wider cultural perspective on humour and learning will generate other suggestions in terms of stimulating and sustaining interest and motivation, enhancing meaning and understanding, providing benefits to adult learning.

Chapter 5

How does Culture Impact on Humour in the Classroom?

In this chapter I will ask how humour may assist in dealing with taboos and controversial topics that can arise from wider cultural issues in adult education classrooms. I will examine humour as an emotion and explore some of the social facets and functions of humour from the perspective of ever-increasing cultural globalisation within our communities. I have chosen to focus on religion, gender, politics and ethnic issues because these are areas, which I believe often create the greatest disparity amongst people.

Throughout our histories humour has prompted discussions by philosophers, religious leaders, from the earliest scribes to contemporary writers and artists, from folk medicine to modern medicine. It has been viewed alternatively, and sometimes simultaneously, as healthy and devilish. Humour and one of its physical manifestations, laughter, have been subjects prone to discourse and debate, of business and pleasure, or entertainment and scorn. With the deconstruction of metaphysical systems in philosophy, the way has been cleared for more intensive reflection on humour. Recently, as we have seen in this work, it has become of increasing interest to practitioners in the health fields, both physical and psychological, and in my own area of expertise, education.

Culture is a state of intellectual, artistic or social development. It is the sense of place and of community, whether at local, national or global

levels. Culture can offer a sense of values, beliefs and attitudes, a sense of enhanced perception and well being. The domain of culture, or the space and place, are the foci of human experience, memory, desire and identity and provide an abstract mental blueprint or mental code. Apte (1985) places humour within an anthropological context, anchoring humour to culture. He asserts that humour is primarily the result of cultural perceptions, both individual and collective, of incongruity, exaggeration, distortion, and any unusual combinations of the cultural elements in external events. In the previous chapter I focused on the influence of humour on artistic or aesthetic culture, with specific reference to the visual arts and creative thinking.

Humour can be viewed as a means by which to enter into sensitive cultural topics and in dealing with difficult social issues, for example, those concerning age, gender, politics and racial issues. Humour is an important social device for enjoying and relating to others, serving as a means of gaining and sustaining attention, making ideas memorable and engaging them emotionally. This has occurred in diverse forms of cultural expression for thousands of years where artists have used humour to communicate with members of their own culture and with 'outsiders'.

Within the field of adult education we are witnessing ever-increasing ethnic diversity in our classrooms from community education through to universities. With the explosion of distance learning programmes and an increasing amount of teaching taking place in cyberspace using ever-evolving communication technologies, the educational world has become a melting pot of ethnic and cultural variety. Due to globalisation and the cultural diversity this brings to the adult education classroom, an increased awareness of the cultural profiles of students may be beneficial,

particularly if educators employ humour in their teaching. This could avoid potentially embarrassing, or worse, encounters with groups or individuals whose sense of humour may alter radically from their own. The diversity, meanings and purposes of humour could be of interest to anyone seeking to understand cultural perspectives and differences.

Defining Humour as an Emotion

Emotion may be considered one of the fundamental driving forces behind cultural development. This section will briefly ask how emotion and in particular humour as an emotion are defined.

People often value emotions as perhaps the most wonderful part of life, yet it was and is one of the least known about areas of our knowledge. The Encyclopedia Britannica (1955) states; *"our knowledge of the topic, emotion, is much less complete than our knowledge of the other topics in the field of psycholog"* (p.225). Research on emotion in the 21st century shows inadequate analysis, and the controversy between Freudians, behaviorists, Gestaltists and others still rages. Plato criticised laughter simply because he viewed it as an emotion, and considered emotions as irrational. The person overcome by emotion, in this view, is no longer guided by reason, and so acts in a less than "human" way. Plato's classification of amusement as an emotion which robs us of our rational control is highly contentious. Emotion may be defined as assessments that cause feelings and action in a certain context (Shibles, 1995). Emotion words describe assessments, feelings, actions and situations. If we look at a statement involving revenge, "you did something bad to me, and I'll get you back." If revenge did not involve such a statement, it might instead be anger, depression or some other emotion. We can

therefore differentiate between emotions because each involves different "self-talk" or "statements." Emotion then is not irrational; it involves thinking and reason, opposing the view that emotion is irrational, involving merely feeling. (Shibles, 1974). Feeling can be defined as bodily sensations such as pain sensations of pleasure, or tiredness. Shibles (1974) observes that to change emotion we must change our self-talk, if we see that emotions are assessments which cause feeling we can change our emotion by altering our assessments. When we view humour as an emotion, humour becomes more than just a bodily feeling or internal state and can be distinguished from other emotions by the different appraisals, feelings, actions and contexts involved in it.

In addition to mental deliberations, recent work on the psychology of emotions has provided evidence that emotions, both positive and negative, are characterised by a need to be shared socially and it has also been claimed that people appear to need to relieve emotional experiences through repetition (Rime et al, 1992). Humour and laughter resemble emotions in this aspect that people are prompt in repeating to one another humorous and amusing things they have heard or seen, thus becoming a part of their cultural heritage.

If emotions are statements which cause feeling, then no two emotions are ever exactly the same. Our statements, feelings, actions and the situation have changed. As Shibles states *"you can never have the same emotion twice when you see the same painting, listen to the same music or see the same emotionally involving person."* (Shibles, 1974). In the violent times in which we live we must carefully sensitise the emotions which can incite conflicts. By changing the assertions made about 'revenge', i.e. "revenge is sweet" this can be revised as revenge is not sweet, it is hurtful

and damaging, leading to further problems as we have witnessed over the years between Middle Eastern and Western dogmas. We may also become more revengeful if we become less critical, or if we are more enculturated to do so. Culture, as history has proven, is often the ally of negative emotions and the enemy of positive emotions.

The mental gymnastics we experience while creating or appreciating humour could be compared to the mental gymnastics philosophising puts us through. Part of the reason western philosophers are in the business is to escape ordinary mental perception, thinking about bizarre possible worlds, and having their wits jostled. This can also be compared to what people like about the best humour. At their best the philosopher and the humourist are undogmatic and are eager to challenge existing beliefs. Good humour, like good philosophy, has the capacity to be conceptually liberating.

When examining humour in cultural settings it is important to look beyond Western Philosophical tradition and examine other ethnic groups that approach humour from varying perspectives. It is often argued that humour is universal and cross-cultural, whereby humour is viewed as an objective phenomenon in all human cultures. On the other hand it is argued that cross-cultural differences are highly problematic due to different ways of using and understanding humour (Poulsen, 2002).

Humour and Religion

I will briefly examine here how different religious and spiritual groups treat the subject of humour. Humour and laughter, as I have highlighted, continue to be recognised as having benefits to physical and

psychological well-being. Has this been acknowledged by religious dogma as valuable preconditions for spiritual development? (Riggins, 2001). It would appear, particularly in the larger and more widespread religions, that sacred literature in general tends to be lacking in humour with more emphasis being given to conveying the seriousness of specific messages within scriptures or other teachings.

Christian scholars have for centuries been debating the acceptability of humour within the Christian faith. Piety has been associated with "gravity" and humour and laughter have been considered unseemly due to their association with triteness, superficiality, debauchery and carousing. A contrary argument is presented by Flynn (1960) quoting Charles Schutz, the creator of the cartoon Charlie Brown and Peanuts stating: *"Humour is a proof of faith, proof that everything is going to be alright with god. Nevertheless those who find no humour in faith are probably those who find the church a refuge for their own black way of looking at life"*(p.74). Interestingly, old Christian religious practices, influenced by earlier pagan rituals, are now being revived to celebrate, notably through practical jokes, the joke that God played on Satan at Easter. Easter in the Middle Ages and Renaissance was understood by the peasantry as an appointed time to laugh (Ecclesiastes 3:4). During the Medieval parodic-travestying 'Holiday of Fools' laughter was traditionally permitted in church. The preacher would allow himself to recite risqué jokes and gay-hearted anecdotes to encourage laughter. This was conceived as a cheerful rebirth after days of melancholy and fasting. Comparable to the Release/Relief theories described in Chapter1. Migliore (1986) is appreciative of humour in human life in general and in Christian life in particular. He stated that the quality of humour, be it harsh or gentle, destructive or humanising, depends on whither these contradictions and

incongruities are held to be eternal and inescapable or provisional and redeemable.

Although humour is not absent from religion, it appears that from a psychological perspective religion associates negatively with personality traits, cognitive structures and social consequences typical to humour, i.e. incongruity, ambiguity, low dogmatism and low authoritarianism, playfulness, spontaneity, affective and moral disengagement and especially transgression of prohibitions related to aggression/dominance and sexuality. (Saroglou, 2002). Yet a good example of the liberating power of humour can be found in Zen Buddhism, particularly in the eastern tradition of Rinzai. (Hyers, 1973). In opposition to western models Zen is not a system of explanations and arguments governed by rationalistic assumptions. Zen will often mix humour into religious and philosophical inquiry and may often seem to countenance disrespect for the very institutions of religion and philosophy. In Indian Buddhism, humour was looked down upon much as it was in western thought. But with the arrival of the Zen Masters attitudes changed. Their use of humour was not a stylistic device in their teaching; it sprang from their realisation of an emotional connection between humour, with its liberating, enlightening power and the central goal of Buddhism – which is to eliminate attachment, freeing people from all forms of mental bondage. What this non-attached stance shows us are the possibilities of a disengaged response to any absurdity.

Islamic faith is a huge and growing religion around the planet. Humour itself has been of great concern within Islam. A prominent Muslim scholar Yusuf 'Abdullah al-Qaradwi has commentated in a pamphlet 'Does Islam Go against Laughter?' (2004) states that *"laughter or joy is*

part of the instinctive feelings created in humans, and Islam, being a religion that calls man to the natural phenomenon of monotheism, is not expected to forbid humanity from expressing such natural feelings."(p.12) A teacher who may be prone to using satire in their classrooms would be advised to revise this option since satire is not tolerated in the Muslim faith and is considered blasphemous. Recent events concerning the publication of a series of satirical cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed in Danish and other international newspapers appeared not to have given this prior consideration, although I suspect they may have as an act of provocation resulting in retribution and violence across the globe.

With regard to humour in the Islamic faith, the renowned exception is to be found in Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam in which humour is commonly used against foolish rigidity and willful ignorance, notably through the numerous teachings tales of Mullah Nasruddin (Davies, 1996).

In Judaism humour would appear to be commonly practiced. Lionel Blue (1976) argues that the most typical weapon of Jewish spirituality is humour. Jewish humour is rooted in at least two traditions, one of which is based on an egalitarian tradition among the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe in which the powerful were often mocked subtly. The other from the intellectual and legal methods of the Talmud, which uses elaborate legal arguments and situations often so absurd as to be humorous in order to tease out the meaning of religious law. Jesters known as "badchens" would poke fun at prominent members of the community as social events providing humour as a good-natured leveling device. It really served as a kind of social catharsis, which particularly

brings to mind the movies of the Jewish comedian Woody Allen. Some teachers use the same self-disparaging humour as Woody Allen to remove the distance between themselves and their students.

There are a number of potential transcultural benefits which may directly influence the dynamics between belief frameworks. Humour can help bring into focus the present moment introducing a degree of curvature into linear frameworks which may exclude any other perspectives such as can often be the case with respect to strategic initiatives and research programmes as well as in the practice of some religious ritual. This curvature offered by humour provides a healthy interpretive perspective on what can readily be perceived as a grid-like organization of life experience.

Gender and Humour

Another important aspect when taking into consideration the cultural implications of applying humour to ones teaching methodologies are the issues concerning gender differentials. Where do men and women differ in their sense of what is or is not humorous? As well as an increase in ethnic diversity in our classrooms and lecture theatres we may often experience a majority of one sex or the other which will have a considerable influence on how we utilise humour in our tutoring. There are many cultures for which the masculinity/femininity of the instructor in an educational setting is of great importance. This will vary in intensity between countries and teaching practice needs to recognise that in more than a handful of countries, gender and age bias is a reality. In its strictest form, particularly in Muslim countries, a man may not take instructions of any kind from a woman. It is important that the

multicultural educator realises that gender bias may be a matter of cultural tradition and not a matter of personal attitude.

The relationship between humour and gender is becoming ever more complicated and a considerable amount of research is being undertaken on the subject. Power imbalances under the auspices of humour are viewed as reinforcing old belief-systems, blocking social change and preserving inequalities. Dundes (1987) claims that sheep and blonde joke cycles centering on the degradation of women, reflect men's struggles to deal with their anxiety about the changing role of women.

When examining gender and humour we are looking at interactions that entail a dynamic process where the characteristics of the joke teller and the recipient interact with the assumptions and embedded meaning behind the joke. It is the interactions between these factors which determine whether efforts to be funny are "acceptable" or not. It is important from an educational perspective that we briefly examine how certain humour types, cultural idioms and situational factors affect degrees of acceptability of gender-based humour in our classrooms.

Since the 1960's feminists and gay rights groups have challenged prevailing views about humour. Increasingly, gender-based humour is viewed as a manifestation of power imbalances between men and women, which in turn perpetuates that power disparity. Cloaked as "just having a good time", humour is perceived by many as a tool to demean, degrade and oppress women. This not only manifests itself in traditional male domains such as building sites, pubs and clubs but manifests itself in politics and within our educational establishments as well.

Various studies in the 1970's (Groch 1974, McGhee, 1979) on the development of children's humour showed dramatic differences between girls and boys. Somehow simplified, starting as late as pre-school age, boys tell more jokes, frolic and clown, while girls laugh more often. McGhee's research team discovered boys display more aggressive frivolous behavioural modes while at play than do girls. McGhee further postulated, through an "egalitarian hypothesis" that the sex-role convergence in recent decades will lead to more equal sharing of humour appreciation by the sexes. We have witnessed this occurring with more and more frequency in all industrialised countries in which jokes at the expense of man have become more commonplace, and also woman have become very active in film, television, cartoon, sit-com, stand-up comedy and the cabaret stage.

Patterns of humorous attack are ritualized in many societies and practiced as ritual dueling much more by men than by women (Labov, 1972). Humorous aggression is gender-relevant. Precisely because verbal dueling is a traditional performance of masculinity, it can be exploited by women to communicate distance from societal expectations of femininity. Riot Girls, for example, also engage in forms of playful dueling. Age and milieu factors also influence the indexing of gender. Young middle-class women display according to Branner (2001) the greatest reserve with regard to aggressive and sexual joking, older lower-class women to a much lesser extent. Apte (1986) observed that in Asian societies women are freer to indulge in humorous activities as they grow older. Studies have shown that women's humour produced intimacy and familiarity, particularity amongst themselves. Jenkins (1985) and Painter (1996) ascribed a healing function to co-operative forms of joking in relation to the misfortunes of life. In this context, joking at ones own expense plays

a critical role. The storyteller does not invite the listener to laugh *at* her but to laugh *with* her about an absurd aspect of life. These are important factors that both the male and female instructor in adult education who wish to engage in humorous interactions should pay attention to. When everyone uses jokes to display their own imperfections, this can be self-affirming. Mitchell (1976) showed that women enjoyed the absurd potentials of jokes more than the aggressive potentials. I have often observed in classrooms that if students are relaxed enough and encouraged to joke about their own faults, ties will grow stronger among the jokers. Careful attention must be paid to the potential for cross-gender hostilities since co-operation and attack often go hand in hand in joking. People can joke at the expense of others (exclusion) and thereby reassure themselves of shared values and perspectives (inclusion). What Freud termed "tendentious humour", that is humour which is hostile or sexist, must be carefully monitored, completely excluded from the instructors humour repertoire and discursively discouraged in the classroom community. The majority of studies suggest that rather than forgetting 'Political Correctness' and just loosening up and enjoying all forms of humour, all of us should be on guard against the potentially seductive motives behind some jokes. This includes the misogynist view that may be held by men and women who show a pattern of enjoying and telling sexist jokes.

As we have seen throughout this thesis many psychologists and sociologists (Morreall, et al) have argued that humour possesses many positive functions in educative practice. When we are confronted with multicultural, multi-ethnic situations in our classrooms we must be wary about the type of humour we use, since the same basic joke can have racist and non-racist variants. Simon Critchley in his book 'On Humour'

(2002) provides us with an example of a joke possessing critical function since it mocks the pretensions of those in power: *"How many men does it take to tile a bathroom? I don't know. It depends on how thinly you slice them."*(p.72).

This is a good example of a type of humour which may change a situation, tell us something of who we are and the sort of environment we live in, perhaps even how things might be changed. Such a joke plays with accepted forms, thus making established structures of society unreal. But, there are forms of humour which are the antithesis of this, which are reactionary and reinforce a racist social consensus. Instances of this are jokes that laugh at the supposed stupidity or inadequacy of outsiders.

Ethnicity and Humour

Mindel (1981) characterizes an ethnic group as a body of people whose national, cultural, religious and racial identification do not set the dominant style of life or control the privileges and power in any given society. It is a group *which "consists of those who share a unique social and cultural heritage that is passed on from generation to generation"*(Mindel 1981). This differentiates between a minority group (even though they may exist in the minority) as a shared status relationship within the larger society, whereas an ethnic membership shares and draws attention to a cultural and historical particularity.

When talking about humour in context to race or ethnicity multicultural instructors need to be aware that much humour relies on race and cultural practice for effect. It does this by creating the feeling that we, the people who are telling the joke, are better in some way than they are, vis-a-vis

the people about whom the joke is being told. The potential for cultural insensitivity is obvious. Ethnic jokes can have the ability of helping us define ourselves by characterizing the group that we belong to and identifying the boundaries between others and ourselves.

In a study of ethnic humour, Leveen (1996) concluded that humour might be used by the dominant culture in an attempt to control the behaviour of ethnic sub-groups, particularly in regard to the need for members of these sub-groups to conform to the norms of the dominant culture. Here we have a group which is establishing or expressing its superiority. By making fun of peripheral and ambiguous groups they may reduce ambiguity and clarify boundaries or at least make ambiguity appear less threatening.

Jokes that have the capacity to evoke the ability to laugh at oneself and at racial stereotypes can have the effect of deflating harmful stereotypes and confirms the humanness of the ethnic group. Leveen (1996) commented that *"humour is a means of ingratiation, one's self earning acceptance of one's self and - through collective identity – ones group within the established culture"(p.34)*. According to Davies (1989), those who tell ethnic jokes do not necessarily believe that ethnic group members really possess the stereotypes depicted in the joke. He suggests that Jewish jokes, using stereotypes of money, are not necessarily anti-Semitic, for anti-Semites use devices other than jokes to express their animosity. In arguing against those who view ethnic jokes as a sign of prejudice Davies (1998) asserts: *"let us not forget that jokes are first and foremost jokes."* This is all fine and well but sensitivities, I feel, will be breached. Racist humour does offend. Gruner and Oring (1992), for example, argue, also, that jokes do not promote prejudice and stereotypes. I think that may be

true for sophisticated joke-tellers, but joke tellers and listeners who have limited or no association with the group or groups referred to then there is the possibility that some of the stereotypes may begin to be accepted.

It would appear that there is a long history of analysts who wish to celebrate the virtues of humour while not looking directly at humour's unambiguously racist forms. I would suggest that the instructor's role, when sensitive issues concerning race or ethnicity arise in the classroom, is to take a neutral stance unless of course a potential for aggressive tendencies, which in turn may give way to confrontation, is viewed as a possible outcome. An instructor may consider using self-disparagement by making a humorous comment about ones ethnicity in order to deflect tensions away from the hot-spot and ones self. Animosity can be disputed by bringing cultures together, using shared human failings as a common denominator. Alternatively if the instructor appears to laugh *at* and not *with* the absurdity of a racist stereotype or remark made by the perpetrator the humour is being used as a *"social corrective... intended to humiliate"* (Bergson, 1956). In a sense this is an effective inversion of Henri Bergson's theory which views humour as based on aggression or malice, but in this case no aggression or malice is intended, merely the intention of gaining the attention of the aggressor and the rest of the group, in order to release the tension. Humour fulfills an unusual social function through 'benign ridicule' in maintaining social order.

One of the ways in which instructors who wish to pre-determine students' levels of receptivity and acceptability of humour types and intensities may be to create a code of ethics. Reflective exercises which require students to carefully consider humour as a moral issue with potentially profound social implications could be an effective method of creating

such a code. Students may be asked, either individually or in groups, to reflect on when they have felt hurt or threatened by humour. Such discussions could clearly delineate the difference between issues of etiquette and moral issues, which relate to the treatment of others. Students could be asked to discuss whether or not laughter is involuntary? Can we control when we laugh and what we are laughing at? Students may assume that they do not control laughter, but in fact we do exercise a degree of control over laughter unlike sneezing or coughing. Discussion could be held to consider ethical issues such as if someone tells you a racist joke, and you laugh at it, does this suggest you are yourself a racist? What if someone of the race about whom the joke refers to told such a joke to you? Are jokes about homosexuals acceptable if a homosexual tells them? Or, can women tell jokes that offend or belittle women without it being an ethical issue? Assuming a group has agreed that humour is worthy of discussion and that it can be potentially harmful and therefore an ethical issue, students will have been confronted with having to consider their own reactions to humour as a moral and ethical issue.

Conclusion

Teachers who employ humour in their pedagogies should be aware of cultural diversity in their classrooms and be wary of its impact. Some humour has malicious components and may be hurtful to certain cultural groups. Humour, within its various cultural guises, can provide an acceptable means through which to communicate with others, whatever the distinction of culture, education or social background. All cultures may use humour to maintain social codes, but there are no universal social codes and so no universal humour. This is not just a matter of differences between cultures, since within all cultures, there will be

debates and conflicts about what constitutes appropriate behaviour. Accordingly, there will be debates about the appropriateness, morality and funniness of humour. Thus, humour is and will always be a matter of moral, political and aesthetic debate.

Within an adult educational setting humour can be used to challenge unexamined assumptions and to encourage self-reflection. Its potential to reframe understanding can promote integrative insight which, in turn, can assist in addressing issues relating to discrimination and cultural diversity in the classroom.

Reflections and Recommendations

Humour, by its dialogical nature, as an important aspect of how we communicate with one another as a species makes us all participants of what is happening within society and in that sense makes us equals in participation. Through humour people can develop and enhance their capacity to see that they have a predisposition to perceive contrasts, and to identify the incongruities of life. In this way, the synthesis of humour implies a profound patience, tolerance and understanding of human imperfection. Visual communicators in both fine art and design are often faced with the task of exploring a multitude of aspects of the human psyche as part of their research. I have found that one of the most natural and successful means of achieving this often-delicate task is through the observation of and interaction in humorous dialogue.

In a classroom setting, humour used with sensitivity and care can put students at ease with themselves, their teacher and with one another, allowing them to relax, take a breather and view their problems from a fresh perspective. This investigation has discovered that humour in an adult learning environment has the capacity to help displace fear of the unknown; of new and challenging philosophies, or ideas, skills and environments which the student is faced with in their journey through adult education. It is, I believe, part of the responsibility of the adult educator to assist in making this journey as enjoyable and meaningful as possible. This study has concluded that an appropriate, timely and considered application of humour by adult educators can be a valuable tool for establishing a classroom dynamic conducive to learning.

Humour has an important role to play in how we perceive others and ourselves. Humour is a unique process of maturity in the human being through which we face human limits with an attitude of joyous and realistic acceptance of our limitations. An important part of education is dealing with change and transformation and, as I have argued in this thesis, humour has an important role to play in how students and instructors cope with such events, which may challenge a person's cultural or philosophical belief. Humour situates the human being in the widest perspective of thought to understand how and why he/she acts. I would recommend further investigation into the potential benefits of humour in Transformational Learning, particularly from the perspective of its potentials for providing students who are experiencing cognitive dissonance an opportunity to view the cause(s) from a fresh or unexpected perspective.

The human being is constantly facing tension between freedom and necessity, understanding and misunderstanding, doubt and perplexity. Humour, which is positive and self-affirming, helps the individual overcome such tensions. There has been considerable research undertaken, in this field, in the areas of emergency work, psychology, medical practice and corporate business (Morreall, 2004) but very little in the area of adult education.

What I discovered whilst undertaking my exploratory research for this thesis was the lack of in-depth analysis of the connections between the creative problem solving processes in visual communications and the cognitive processes involved in incongruity resolution in humour. I would recommend further in-depth research into the psychological impact humour may have for fostering creativity, improving students

metacognitive understanding of their own and other peoples creative processes.

In the area of visual communications this could be linked to the principles of synectics which operates on the principle that, by using the minds remarkable capacity to connect seemingly irrelevant elements of thought, humans can spark surprising new ideas that may be developed into feasible solutions to problems.

From a humanist perspective, research which informs teachers of ways to improve their communication skills in their classrooms and lecture theatres must be welcomed and encouraged. Through further studies of humour from cultural perspectives, teachers, their students, and student teachers could develop a deeper understanding, respect and enjoyment of different cultures and in the process gain a better understanding of themselves and their own culture. As was highlighted in this thesis both humour and creativity involve playing with ideas and changing peoples mental perspective.

Humour may have a future in helping to develop a generation of learners free from the anxieties of linear thought, providing a sudden awareness of an alternative construction to problem-solving. Humour in the classroom, as I have exemplified can be a tricky business, timing, intention, format, and its impact on the social dynamic should be applied in a balanced and appropriate manner. Therefore my final recommendation would be the implementation of programmes and courses which inform teachers of the potential benefits and appropriate uses of humour in their pedagogies. This could be introduced at graduate and postgraduate levels as part of teacher-training programmes, and in the shape of informal seminars at

schools, colleges and universities for faculty and management. It appears evident that today's education is not based on humour, which may explain why most people lack or miss the intelligence of humour and the humour of intelligence.

Knowing, understanding and imagination nourish humour. Humour is one of the means by which to appreciate life in all its multiple expressions and feelings and it implies the courage for enthusiasm. This enthusiasm is something I want to be able to inspire in my students when I teach and I hope that this study along with future research will encourage teachers in adult education to introduce humour into their teaching strategies.

Any further research will need to look critically at the role of humour. The links to learning may be no more than what makes communication effective. In the analysis of good teaching, effective communication skills have long been recognised as vital components. Continuing to provide a wider perspective on humour and learning may generate other suggestions in terms of stimulating and sustaining interest and motivation, and enhancing meaning and understanding that brings direct benefits to adult learning.

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