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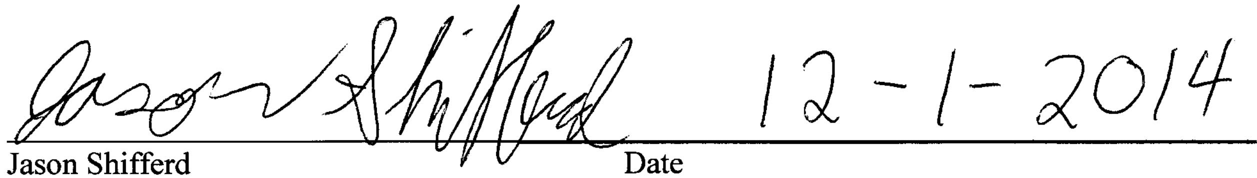

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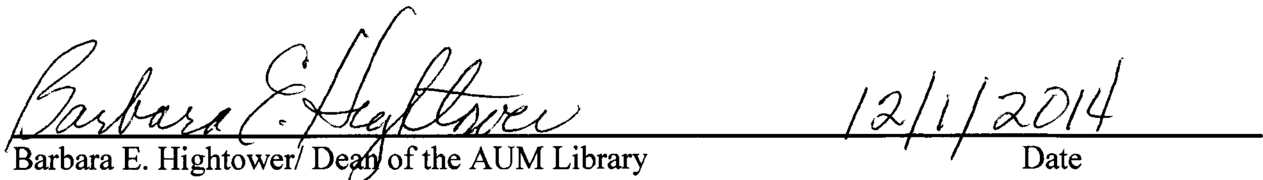

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The Case for Humor in the Classroom:

An Annotated Bibliography

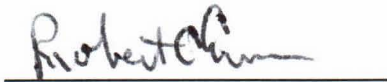
By Jason Shifferd

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University at Montgomery
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Master of Liberal Arts

Montgomery, Alabama

20 December 2014

Approved by



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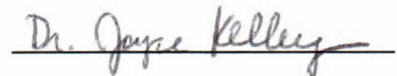

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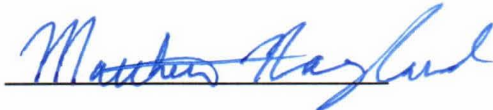

Dr. Matthew Ragland
Associate Provost

This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of

Emily M. Cliff

August 15, 1989 – May 5, 2014

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Prospectus

Brief Overview

In the thesis proposed below, I hope to provide a highly detailed annotated bibliography on the use of humor in teaching, preceded by a thorough introduction to and overview of the works included in the bibliography. Additionally, I hope to use the introduction to explain and support my own views on the topic. Since no work exists that resembles the one I am proposing, I hope that my thesis may make an important contribution to scholarship on this issue.

Explanation and Justification

The class clown—every decent-sized classroom has one. Considered the bane of every teacher's existence, the class clown is infamous for disrupting the learning process with humorous remarks and pranks, which draw attention away from the teacher and the lecture and cause the classroom to erupt in laughter. Given that the teacher constantly has to silence the class clown in an effort to keep the course material on track and maintain professionalism, or even remove him or her from the classroom altogether, teachers often come off as humorless creatures, much to the dismay of bored students whose sole ray of light in a tedious lecture on the ionization of O2 molecules is the comedic style of the class clown.

But what if the teacher *is* the class clown? What if, instead of distracting from the lecture, the class clown's—that is, the teacher's—humor is *incorporated* into the lecture? Various American educators, ranging from elementary school through college, have

found that humor can serve as an effective means of building a strong connection between teacher and student while engaging students in the learning process. This thesis will serve as a highly detailed annotated bibliography of texts dealing with the use of humor as a teaching technique. The thesis will also offer extended discussion of the topic—discussion drawing on other writers' research while contributing additional ideas and insights.

As Ronald A. Berk argues in his book *Humor as an Instructional Defibrillator*, a sense of humor can eliminate the barrier that separates students from the teacher: "It opens up communication that is not based on fear or intimidation. Instead, the communication is positive, constructive, and relaxed.... A bonding or rapport develops between you and your students that is founded on respect, trust, and fun" (Berk 4). In general, students enter into the classroom at the beginning of each semester with a sense of anxiety, the intensity of which depends upon the individual's own sense of uncertainty, especially if students are not familiar with the teacher. After all, the teacher is a highly educated person who knows the course materials inside and out, whose job is to judge a student's performance and determine whether he or she is worthy of advancing to the next level or if the student's every hope and dream should be crushed on the spot. No pressure, right? However, when the teacher jokes, smiles, and makes eye contact with students, the self-inflicted inferiority complex that weighs down many students is shattered as the teacher is brought closer to the students' level. The teacher can mold an image of himself or herself as a friendly person whose passion is to help students learn and achieve their goals.

Besides eliminating pressure, humor can also help a teacher keep students attentive. Internal, and even external, distractions are ever present in students' lives (Berk 5), but a funny and likable teacher can hold a student's attention more effectively and communicate the subject matter in an enjoyable and memorable way. Students will look forward to attending class with a compassionate and humorous teacher. "Compassionate" is the keyword, as comedy and human emotions can sometimes conflict with one another. As any standup comedian is aware (and some careers are built on breaching these boundaries), there is a line that usually cannot be crossed without negative consequences. While a sense of humor is generally seen as a positive characteristic, comedy can be a cruel art form involving ridicule and mockery. After all, comedy often focuses on the absurd, and when it is used to hurt others, in this case students, an emotional disconnection takes place (Berk 14). When a student is humiliated, he or she may never return to the classroom. College life can be stressful for a student, and it is not made better when the professor makes the student feel stupid or inferior. Some students treated this way might even give up on academia altogether, and these students might otherwise have had promising futures. One potential workaround which many comedians utilize involves self-satire (Berk 12), in which the joker (in this case, the teacher) makes fun of himself or herself, effectively eliminating the aura of superiority the teacher might otherwise possess and creating a friendlier and more relaxed atmosphere for the students.

In *The Laughing Classroom: Everyone's Guide to Teaching with Humor and Play*, Diana Loomans and Karen Kolberg define four styles of humor utilized by aspiring comedians. The most ideal style of humor for a teacher, or even for people in general, is the role of the Joy Master (Loomans 16). The Joy Master understands the difference

between fun, playful humor and hurtful, biting humor. The inverse to the Joy Master is the Life Mocker, who is known for teasing, ridicule, sarcasm, and cynicism. Life Mockers "win the admiration but not the affection of their peers" (Loomans 19). They see themselves as superior, they comment on what is wrong with the world around them, and they ridicule the very idea of kindness and sensitivity towards the feelings of others. Unfortunately, educators of this variety exist, and while some people are amused by their sneering style of comedy, so long as they are not the butts of the Life Mocker's jokes, ultimately people are turned away from individuals with reputations for rude, dehumanizing humor.

Between the Joy Master and the Life Mocker exist two additional variations. These can overlap with the positive characteristics of the Joy Master or with the negative traits of the Life Mocker. The first is the Fun Meister, who is known for laughing loudly, playing around, and being silly (Loomans 17). The Fun Meister generally engages in physical or slapstick comedy. The other is the Joke Maker, whose comedy is more verbal and focuses on wit. Joke Makers are known for their humorous anecdotes and their well-timed delivery of punchlines (Loomans 18). When overlapping with the Joy Master, a Fun Meister is playful and enjoys clowning around; when overlapping with the Life Mocker, the Fun Meister may ridicule others through impersonations or cruel pranks. When the Joke Maker overlaps with the Joy Master, the humor can be inspiring and instructional, using satire to teach while not making the joke's listeners the object of mockery; when the Joke Maker overlaps with the Life Mocker, however, the listener is the object of the satire, and the joker may use his or her jokes as a means to vent anger or frustration toward another individual. This brand of demeaning demeanor, while it might

be amusing to some third party observers, is not an effective strategy for teaching. It turns students off rather than engaging them in the course material. A good teacher encourages students to learn rather than mocking their supposed ignorance, and being a Joy Master is one way to achieve this goal.

The Joy Master has the ability to use humor to heal (Loomans 15). In *The Psychology of Humor*, Rod A. Martin asserts that "By joking and laughing about issues that normally arouse feelings of anxiety and tension, children are able to feel less threatened and gain a sense of mastery" (Martin 248). This assertion applies, however, not only to children, but also to adults. Humor can help a person cope with adversity by turning a problem into a joke. For instance, political satirists use problems with the government as a basis for comedy, thereby providing a nice relief from the doom and gloom of the 24-hour news stations. However, one must be careful when making light of such heavy topics. Two topics to steer clear of in the realm of humor are death and tragedy, especially if these affect any of the students directly. As an old proverb states, "Don't mock the dead… unless it's Hitler."

The issue of the healing power of comedy and whether it was appropriate to laugh in light of a recent tragedy was a major topic for discussion in the United States following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. "That tragedy had such a profound effect on everyone that comedy clubs shut down for a couple of weeks and Jay Leno and David Letterman went on hiatus" (Berk 19). For many people, it seemed that comedy and laughter would be disrespectful to the victims and their loved ones. Eventually, however, life went on and the laughter resumed. Comedians found that a safe outlet for topical humor regarding 9/11 was to avoid even the remote possibility of seeming to mock the

victims and instead to focus their mockery on the terrorists. *South Park*, for instance, aired an episode depicting a comical showdown between the show's most popular character, Eric Cartman, and al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, hearkening back to World War II era *Looney Tunes* mocking leaders of the Axis powers (especially Hitler). That episode of *South Park* concluded with the fictional death of bin Laden. This sort of satire served to bring people together in laughter, helping to ease the wounds of the 9/11 tragedy and making America seem strong once again. Such comedy demonstrated that in a battle to break American spirits, the terrorists had lost.

The healing power of comedy can equally apply to any situation, including the stress of academia. Humor can make just about any negative situation into a positive one. For example, in *The Laughing Classroom*, Loomans and Kolberg relay a story about a woman named Diane who, after committing a minor traffic violation, had to attend a mandatory eight-hour session of trafficking school: "Several friends warned her to prepare for the longest, most boring experience of her life" (Loomans 32). To her surprise, however, she soon learned that a local comedy group was teaching the class and incorporating "humor, acting, jokes, and music into the day" (32). As a result, Diane was attentive during class, she scored 100 percent on the quiz, and she retained the vast amount of information that was relayed to her during the lecture. A class that she had dreaded ended up being a pleasant experience for her in which she made new friends and laughed all the while. Most importantly, she learned a lot more than she probably would have had the class been the long and boring experience she was expecting.

The best humor, especially for school-age young people, is relatable and deals with familiar situations and problems in real life. This is especially effective in classes

dealing with the humanities (such as classes in literature, theatre, and philosophy) or in classes dealing with the social sciences (such as psychology). By incorporating humor into material being taught, the teacher can convey anecdotes about aspects of life to which students are able to relate, such as relationships, dealing with parents, the responsibilities that come with growing up, and the stress of having to deal with academic responsibilities. This brand of humor connects with students because it lets them know that they are not alone, that there are many others just like them who share their anxieties. When the teacher understands and acknowledges these anxieties, students feel more at ease as they can relate to the teacher as well as his or her jokes.

While incorporating comedy into the teaching process can be effective in grabbing the attention of students and easing their anxieties, the technique has not been exempt from criticism. As Harry Dhand states in *Techniques of Teaching*, "Humour may not be received well by some students. They may consider it a waste of time" (Dhand 105). Dhand advises teachers to "use humour sparingly" so as not to detract from the effectiveness of lessons, and he also advises that humor not be a major focal point of teaching a class. After all, an educator's primary role is just that—to educate. Whatever jokes and anecdotes the teacher decides to incorporate into the class should flow naturally with and from the material and not be forced into every discussion. The teacher is still a teacher and not a standup comedian.

Additionally, humor is not for everyone. Some people, and by extension some teachers, are simply not funny. While there are books and websites suggesting how to be funny, Dhand believes that aspiring educators should focus primarily on "their lessons – objectives, opener, content, activities, closure, evaluative criteria, then may consider

humour" (105). If a teacher who is not naturally funny still insists on trying to be humorous, Berk proposes a few methods by which teachers might hone their comedic abilities more effectively. First, he suggests a method called "incongruity" or "contrast resolution," which begins with expected content that "usually is serious material to set up the humor," and ends with an unexpected twist or punchline, "which is an outrageous spin or a ridiculous outcome" (Berk 6). Berk also proposes a humor trifecta, which opens with the expected, a common situation or problem; continues with the expected, a "build-up of tension" (Berk 7); and concludes with the unexpected, which is the joke's punchline. While these formulas can be helpful, some people may lack a sense of timing or delivery. Nothing falls flatter than a bad joke, and a study conducted by Nancy Bell of Washington State University shows that some people, especially close friends and relatives, react with absolute disgust and hostility towards unfunny humor. To avoid those awkward silences or even rude comebacks that occur whenever a joke backfires, it may be safest to avoid potentially bad jokes altogether.

Some jokes backfire because they rub people the wrong way. A joking teacher must be conscious of the sensibilities of the student body. Besides avoiding jokes that ridicule and humiliate students for their individual characteristics, a teacher must never joke about taboo topics such as religion and politics and should also avoid humorous remarks involving race, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or any other kind of cultural background by which students may define themselves. Even jokes that are not intended to be offensive can sometimes be taken the wrong way, and while standup comedians often turn to these subjects for material, George Carlin and Dave Chappelle were never college professors, and their brand of humor almost certainly has no place in the classroom. Even

worse, some people have no idea how to be funny without making some kind of shocking or offensive remark out of the blue. These sorts of people had best keep their senses of humor to themselves. Comedy in the classroom should serve an educational purpose, and so shouting obscenities, for instance, is the wrong way to approach this method.

The negatives of humor aside, comedy is especially effective in fields of study that utilize the right hemisphere of the brain, such as literature, music, theatre, and art. The right side of the brain is associated with creativity, and humor is, after all, a creative art. Berk takes this assertion a step further by comparing the process of understanding humor—that is, getting the joke—to creative problem-solving, also an ability deriving from the right hemispheres of our brains: both "getting" jokes and solving problems "require the novel and successful manipulation of ideas" (Berk 6-7). Recognizing the joke's incongruity, Berk continues, is equivalent to identifying the problem, while understanding the punchline is equal to solving the problem. In short, a good sense of humor can not only promote critical thinking, an essential criterion for any liberal arts class, but can also enhance creative problem-solving skills.

The ideas discussed in this prospectus are only a few of many relevant to the use of humor in the classroom. Therefore the proposed thesis will, in large part, offer a heavily-annotated bibliography on the topic of humor in teaching. Some of the sources that will be annotated deal directly with the topic. Others have to do with the study of humor in a much broader sense, covering its many functions and uses. Some sources pertain to teaching techniques—including, but not limited to, humor, but most of the sources will contain at least a small section on the issue of humor in teaching. Only in recent years has the art of humor become a serious topic for research and study and, as

such, few sources deal solely with humor in teaching. Because no annotated bibliography on this topic seems at present to exist, an annotated compilation of sources pertaining to this topic, featuring detailed descriptions of each source, would be useful to educators seeking to try new techniques to engage their students. By including a comprehensive introduction to the bibliography, I hope to provide readers with an overview of previous research on the use of humor in teaching while also offering suggestions, arguments, and conclusions of my own.

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The Case for Humor in the Classroom: An Annotated Bibliography

Introduction

It is the first day of classes. The students sit tensely in their seats, dreading the moment of their instructor's arrival. As the professor walks into the classroom, all banter immediately ceases. The only sound is that of the professor shuffling his way to the front of the classroom, setting his briefcase on the floor, and slamming his books on his desk. He has a reputation across campus for being a no-nonsense professor who takes his work, and the subject matter that he teaches, very seriously. He is intolerant of tomfoolery, and he is quick to ridicule any student who dares to make an uneducated statement or ask questions. Therefore, student engagement in his classes tends to be low since students fear humiliation. Many of these students will drop his class within the first week, damaging the school's student retention rating. Is this really the job that educators are sent to do?

This scenario seems like a typical college experience to the average freshman. Of course, the majority of college professors are not quite this stiff, but nevertheless many students perceive them as such. While most instructors do not intend to be killjoys or to make their students tremble in fear at their mere presence, most of them also take their work very seriously, and they expect their students to take the material seriously as well. Therefore, they have little tolerance for joking and playing in the classroom. However, could there be a way to synthesize play with learning? The concept of *edutainment*—a portmanteau of *education* and *entertainment*—is hardly a new idea. Over the last twenty-five years or so, scholars have researched the effectiveness of using humor as a teaching tool. The results are often mixed, but most of the time, they tend to be relatively positive.

A similar scenario to the one described above is conveyed in Diana Loomans and Karen Kolberg's *The Laughing Classroom: Everyone's Guide to Teaching with Humor and Play* in a section called "Before and Laughter Scenarios." This kind of humorless scenario is then juxtaposed against another scenario of a professor who is jolly and cracks jokes at every opportunity. Here, Loomans and Kolberg paint their picture of the ideal educator, one who uses humor to inspire students and make them want to learn: "Jenny laughed aloud, and then smiled at Robert. At that moment, she knew that the course would end far too soon and that Professor Cantor would be an instructor she'd remember for a long, long time" (171). Through this and many other scenarios, Loomans and Kolberg argue that by using humor in the classroom, educators can help ease student anxieties, engage students in class material that they might otherwise find boring, motivate students to attend class, and make lessons more memorable so that students may better retain information.

The value of humor in the classroom is shared by many other authors whose work is described in this annotated bibliography, including Doni Tamblyn, Diane Hodges, Ronald A. Berk, Bruce A. Goebel, Harry Dhand, and Rod A. Martin. Though there are several overlaps in their arguments, there is some mild disagreement among them regarding the extent to which humor should be incorporated into the curriculum. For example, Hodges tends to encourage humor and play in the school workplace among colleagues, and Goebel even goes as far as to say that humor should be "a part of the curriculum itself" (xviii) rather than just an afterthought. On the other hand, Dhand asserts that humor "should be used for specific purposes" and that "If the teacher does not feel comfortable with humour, humour should not be forced on students" (105).

Additionally, Berk makes a distinction between the types of humor that are appropriate for use within the classroom and the types that are not. In particular, he emphasizes the importance of avoiding offensive humor as well as jokes that make specific students their target, as such humor can be damaging to an individual's self-esteem.

While these authors all support the use of humor in academia to varying degrees, many of them acknowledge and respond to arguments against the use of humor and play in the classroom. Perhaps the most prevalent of these arguments is that education is too serious a matter to permit the use of humor. On the contrary, Loomans and Kolberg make the opposite assertion: "Education is too important to be taken seriously!" (6) To them, the distinction between a stiff, overly serious instructor and a funny, playful instructor lies in their attitudes towards the naturally fun-seeking behavior of most children. As an example, they find that the serious instructor refers to a rowdy group of students as a bunch of hooligans whose misbehavior must be corrected, whereas the funny instructor sees that same group of students as being a delightfully energetic group of imaginative youngsters. As a result, the latter instructor is better suited to reach out to those children and bring out their full learning potential.

In the introduction to *Humor Writing: Activities for the English Classroom*, Goebel provides readers with a list of reasons why many educators are hesitant to incorporate humor into their lesson plans. The first of those reasons is that humor might be perceived as a waste of time. To overcome this problem, he suggests that one should work the humor into the lessons themselves rather than using humor as a diversion from course materials. Other common reasons for avoiding humor are that educators are afraid of being perceived as unproductive and unprofessional, or that they might lose control

over their class by conveying a lack of discipline. Therefore, it is important for educators to know their limitations when it comes to humor; humor can be helpful in shattering the barrier between the instructor and the students, but the instructor should still be able to assert himself or herself as the authoritative figure within the classroom. Lastly, many educators simply feel that they are inadequate at telling jokes, and so the class may not respond well to humor. However, in a section of *Laugh and Learn: 95 Ways to Use Humor for More Effective Teaching and Training* entitled "The Case Against Teaching Through Stand-Up Comedy," Doni Tamblyn distinguishes between *humor* and *jokes*: "You can use humor beautifully and expertly without telling a single joke" (9). Humor, Tamblyn argues, is closely intertwined with creativity and play, forces that come naturally to most people and which, she asserts, "everyone needs to be good at" (10). She offers the example of Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone With the Wind* using curtain fabric to create a gown. This, Tamblyn argues, is creativity. Tamblyn then discusses Carol Burnett's portrayal of Scarlett O'Hara, in which she wore the same dress, but with curtain rods sticking out. Burnett took the creativity one step further by including not only the curtain fabric, but also the curtain rods, in the dress, and that, Tamblyn states, is humor.

In *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach*, Rod A. Martin draws further parallels between humor and play. The art of play, as well as the expression of laughter, is a universal behavior among human beings across all cultures. Martin notes that laughter comes naturally even to babies, and that "even children born deaf and blind have been reported to laugh appropriately without ever having perceived the laughter of others" (3). Besides humans, even primates are said to exhibit laughter and other expressions of amusement. In addition to audible laughter, several apes have been known

to play, roughhouse, and otherwise behave in an unusual manner for no obvious reason other than for their own amusement and the amusement of others. Thus, the art of humor seems innate within the majority of humans as well as in many other animals. Even educators who feel as though they are not funny and do not have a talent for joke-making can still incorporate humor and play into the classroom. Humor depends on self-awareness, and those who can see the ironic or the ridiculous side of life, such as in themselves and in the material they are teaching, will be able to amuse students and thereby retain their attention and interest.

Humor is natural. People joke with their friends, relatives, colleagues, and acquaintances every day. While people might normally react with amusement and laughter towards jokes or cartoons, most humor occurs during everyday social interactions. Martin observes that "the shared experience of mirth serves important social functions in establishing and maintaining close relationships, enhanced feelings of attraction and commitment, and coordinating mutually beneficial activities" (114). In other words, humor tends to bring people together and create a friendly, warm, and cooperative atmosphere. Martin suggests that humor is essential to maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships and that it has even contributed to the evolutionary survival of our species.

Perhaps one of humor's most important functions is its ability to give people control over their ability to handle adversity. Tamblyn relays an anecdote in which one of her Irish friends asks her how to make God laugh, and when she is unable to answer, the friend responds, "Tell Him your plans" (10). Tamblyn asserts that humor allows a person to handle life's unpredictable nature and accept that life is less than perfect. Life will

always find ways to stress us out, but we can either become lost in despair or we can cope with hardship through laughter. To illustrate this point, Tamblyn offers another anecdote in which a family, before evacuating their home in Hawaii during Hurricane Andrew, spray-painted on their garage door "I've fallen, and I can't get up" (36). While this family's sense of humor did not negate the fact that their house was badly damaged in the storm, it did help to lessen their problems by preventing their stress levels from reaching unmanageable levels. Stress hormones, Tamblyn notes, can have detrimental effects on the brain, including the deaths of brain cells. A good sense of humor, therefore, can alleviate stress and prevent long-term psychological and neurological damage. In a less extreme sense, Tamblyn notes that college students have to cope with stress on a regular basis, and so a funny, playful teacher has the power to relieve tension and anxiety in his or her classroom. This power can only help to enhance student engagement and performance.

When dealing with hardship, humor can help an individual to put things into perspective. In *The Healing Power of Humor: Techniques for Getting through Loss, Setbacks, Upsets, Disappointments, Difficulties, Trials, Tribulations, and All That Not-So-Funny Stuff*, Allen Klein compares the use of humor to cope with adverse situations to "those old-fashioned topsy-turvy drawings. You hold it one way and you see a picture of a man who is sad. You turn it around, and the man's beard becomes his hair, his mustache becomes his eyebrows, and suddenly the man is smiling—the same picture, but when seen from another angle it looks entirely different" (11). Humor, Klein argues, can serve a similar purpose by allowing us to see our problems from another perspective, which oftentimes makes our problems seem less serious. Klein further notes that laughter

and pain tend to go hand-in-hand, citing that comedians often embrace a marriage of the comic and the tragic. Even the lingo that comedians use seems to invoke feelings of pain, with expressions like "punchline" or sayings such as "I *killed* the audience" and "They *died* laughing" (20). Klein further points out the similarities between laughter and crying, noting that they look and sound alike and even serve similar purposes. Sometimes people laugh so hard that they cry, while others cry tears of joy the same way they would cry tears of pain. Citing a biochemist named Dr. William Frey II, Klein suggests that tears of sorrow and tears of joy serve the same function of flushing harmful, stress-inducing toxins from the body. He distinguishes between these emotional tears and other tears that are caused by environmental irritants such as the art of onion-cutting.

While humor can certainly be a powerful tool for coping with adversity and hardship, few people find it appropriate to laugh in the face of real tragedy. However, whether or not we realize it, we use humor and laughter to see us through even the most difficult of losses, namely a death of a loved one. Klein points out that "Funerals are generally grim and solemn affairs" and suggests that "we can allow … some lighter moments in these ceremonies … to be more of a celebration for a life lived rather than just the mourning of a life lost" (195). For many people, though, this is already the prevailing attitude. Family and friends will often share humorous anecdotes with one another about their lost loved one. They will recall, during eulogies, all of the most positive characteristics of the deceased, notably the person's sense of humor or playful side, or they will recall a funny story surrounding the deceased. Many people do, in fact, realize the power of humor when coping with hardship. In her dying days, Klein's wife would often tell her grieving husband, "Hey, stop being so morose. I'm still here. We can

still laugh together" (xviii). Those who are terminally ill or otherwise know that they do not have much time left generally dislike being surrounded by glum expressions and feelings of gloom. They are often the first to welcome laughter and humor into the situation. While losing his wife was an extremely painful experience for Klein, her attitude about her own mortality was contagious, as Klein illustrates in the final chapter of his book: "When I die, I want all my friends and family to celebrate" (205). There is always a sense that one must be sad and never crack a smile, let alone crack a joke or laugh, when a person is dying, but the dying individual may be the first to insist that laughing is not only okay, but that it is therapeutic for everyone involved.

Nevertheless, there are instances in which most people would consider humor to be inappropriate, or at the very least, would consider certain brands of humor to be inappropriate. For example, humor should not be used for the sake of mockery or ridicule, especially against loved ones. While the art of satire serves the purpose of correcting idiotic or wrongful behavior, and while many people tease their loved ones out of jest with no real hurtful intentions, humor can sometimes be hurtful. By nature, humor always has a "target," someone or something being mocked, and so it is generally advised that one be careful not to offend someone the person making the joke does not wish to offend. As a general rule, one should never mock the dead, unless it's Hitler.

Martin notes that humor can serve aggressive functions. Teasing, for instance, can be used for persuasive purposes through its mockery of another person's behavior. Teasing is essentially a safe way to express disapproval to a loved one with little fear of repercussion; if a person reacts negatively to such criticism, one can easily fall back upon the excuse that "I was just joking" (125). One might see teasing as a playful and friendly

way of forcing another to think or act differently; it is a gentler form of persuasion than coercion.

In *Humor as an Instructional Defibrillator*, Ronald A. Berk discusses various forms of offensive humor while noting that these brands of comedy are not appropriate for classroom use. Berk argues that targeting students as the "butt" of an educator's jokes "can squash a student's motivation or spirit to learn, which results in a loss of spunk. Once you've lost spunk, it's over" (14). One such brand of humor that Berk advises against using is put-downs. While Berk acknowledges that put-downs are common in everyday social interactions as well as in the media, he argues that the college classroom is no place for put-downs as this type of humor tends to tear students down rather than build them up, the opposite of any decent educator's ultimate goal. He acknowledges that it is tempting for any educator to want to call out a student for not paying attention in class, such as in the case of a student asking his or her instructor a question about a matter that the instructor had just covered, but then Berk urges readers to think about whether or not they have ever zoned out during a lecture or a presentation that they were forced to sit through. In this way, Berk urges educators to empathize with students.

Another example of offensive humor that Berk warns readers to avoid using in the classroom is sarcasm. Berk describes sarcasm as "cutting, caustic, biting, derisive, sneering, harsh, sardonic, or bitter" (16). While he admits that sarcasm can sometimes be used effectively, such as in the case of self-deprecating humor or as a reaction to some kind of inconvenience (such as the failure of technology in the classroom), or even to indirectly reprimand certain student behaviors without calling out anyone in particular, Berk stands firm on his belief that negative use of sarcasm is never appropriate for

classroom use. By the same account, Berk insists that educators not use ridicule on their students, noting that the primary function of ridicule is to humiliate. Again, putting a student on the spot in such a manner and embarrassing him or her in front of his or her peers will only cause that student to disconnect from the course and from the learning process.

Other forms of humor that Berk deems inappropriate for use in the classroom include sexual content and innuendo, profanity, vulgarity, and perhaps most important of all, sensitive personal experiences. The three former categories of humor are largely dependent upon shock value and are generally desperate and thoughtless attempts to garner nervous laughter. However effectively some films and television shows might manage to pull off these brands of comedy, they simply do not belong in the classroom.

The lattermost category of humor refers to jokes about touchy subjects, ranging from alcohol and drug addiction to rape and even death. Again, Berk cites the media as a place in which jokes about sensitive topics are commonplace. "Do the jabs at Ted Kennedy, Bill Clinton, Betty Ford, Robert Downey, Jr., and Michael Jackson suggest examples of this type of derisive humor spewed by talk-show comedians? Steer clear of this category" (19). While one might not intend to be controversial while making light of these topics, odds are high that any one of these subjects might hit too close to home for certain students, and so educators must be very careful when making a joke about something as serious as alcoholism or murder.

On the other side of the argument, however, there are those who argue that we should be willing to joke about these forbidden topics. Again, for many people, humor is therapeutic in helping a person to cope with life's hardships, up to and including death

itself. As an example, Berk cites the general lack of humor in the media following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In the aftermath of such a catastrophic tragedy, most people felt that laughter was not an appropriate emotion to feel during such a time. Comics were afraid that any topical humor they made would be misconstrued as jabs against the victims, or at the very least it would be considered disrespectful to their memory.

As time passed, however, comics found that the safest way to make light of such a dark occurrence was to direct the humor at the terrorists. By mocking al-Qaeda, comedians could not only continue to create humor that was relevant to the times, but they had also discovered an avenue by which to heal a wounded nation. For example, in November following the attacks, Comedy Central's *South Park* aired an episode that captured perfectly the outbursts of paranoia and patriotism that had overtaken America in the two months prior, but besides making us laugh at ourselves, *South Park* made audiences laugh at the terrorists as it drew inspiration from World War II-era Looney Tunes. However, instead of Daffy Duck taking on Hitler and his Nazis, Eric Cartman was pitted against Osama bin Laden in a slapstick showdown, which made it a point to mock, humiliate, and ultimately kill off the terrorist leader. The episode ends on a patriotic note as the boys salute the American flag, which remains on-screen as the credits roll. Not only was the episode well-received, but it was even nominated for a Primetime Emmy. It showed the American people that it was not only okay to laugh again, but that doing so was necessary. In a battle to break American spirits, the terrorists had lost.

This instance was, of course, not the first time anyone had ever considered that humor could be used as a powerful tool for healing a broken spirit. Martin has found that

many people use humor as a mechanism for coping with stress and adversity. For instance, he cites a case study of 60 Amerian POWs who had been held captive in Vietnam. "When asked about their methods of coping, most of the participants emphasized the importance of humor in maintaining their resilience. Humor was described as a way of eliciting positive emotions, maintaining group cohesion and morale, and fighting back at the captors" (287). Martin adds that the POWs would direct their insults at their enemies, giving the POWs a sense of mastery in a situation that was actually beyond their control. Through the telling of jokes, prisoners would cheer each other up, motivating their brothers in arms to endure the hardship until they were rescued. Otherwise, they might not have survived imprisonment.

The same is applicable to Holocaust survivors. The Holocaust is generally considered the most taboo subject for humor, often seen as the greatest tragedy and the most deplorable act of evil in the history of humankind. Martin cites Viktor Frankl, who argued that humor was instrumental to one's self-preservation in the concentration camps. Besides mocking the guards, the prisoners would also joke with one another about their ability to adjust to everyday life after they were freed: "For example, one prisoner joked that at future dinner engagements they might forget themselves and ask the hostess to ladle the soup from the bottom of the pot to get the treasured vegetables instead of the watery broth on top" (288). Not only did this type of humor boost morale, but it also gave prisoners reason to believe that they would, in fact, be set free. Martin also cites the 1997 film *Life is Beautiful*, a fictional tragicomedy in which a Jewish father goes above and beyond to amuse his son in order to shield him from the reality of the Nazi death camp; the father makes believe that the Holocaust is a game, and the winner gets to ride in a

tank when it is all over. Though the film is fiction, it demonstrates hypothetically how humor might have been helpful to the survival of humans in the most spirit-crushing of situations. The fact that the film was so popular suggests that most viewers found its assumptions plausible.

Martin's text is largely an analysis of humor from a psychological perspective. The text is intended to be used in psychology classes, either as the main text in a specialized class on humor in psychology, or as a supporting text in a general psychology class in which an instructor may incorporate a unit on humor in psychology. The book explores the uses of humor in psychotherapy and in treatment of depression, anxiety, and stress as well as in boosting morale for patients of other diseases such as cancer. Besides the sheer enjoyment of comedy and its morale-boosting potential, humor can also be used to put a person's irrational beliefs and assumptions into perspective through the use of hyperbole: "The aim of the therapy is … to challenge and dispute clients' false beliefs and to replace them with more realistic and adaptive assumptions and attitudes" (338). In general, therapists and counselors tend to find that a good sense of humor is a healthy sign of a person's mental and psychological well-being. Nevertheless, Martin does warn against using certain types of humor in therapy, and he also notes that some patients may not react as well to humor as others. As always, humor should never be used disparagingly against a patient, especially one who is prone to depression and thoughts of suicide.

Besides advocating the use of humor in therapy, Martin also believes that humor has its place in both the school and the workplace. In both cases, he argues that "humor is a mode of communication that is frequently used to convey certain types of information

that would be more difficult to express using a more serious mode" (361-2). He further asserts that while many people find academic and workplace environments to be ideally serious places, humor is actually common in both of these environments. Just as an employer, a teacher, or any other authoritative figure might utilize humor to connect with his or her employees or students, those employees and students might frequently joke with one another in order to relieve stress and help each other, and themselves, get through the workday. Though not as extreme as the examples relating to POWs and Holocaust prisoners, this scenario is another example of people using humor to take control of and cope with unfavorable situations.

There are also those who assert that the school and the workplace do not have to be humorless, stressful environments. Diane Hodges is one such person. In her book *Looking Forward to Monday Morning*, Hodges emphasizes the importance of appreciation: "Recognition and appreciation for a job well done is a key motivator for employees. But many managers don't understand how powerful it is, and they often don't think about giving that recognition" (xi). She goes on to assert that many employees, regardless of how well they are paid or how good their benefits are, end up leaving their jobs due to feeling that they are not being appreciated at work. Therefore, Hodges proposes a variety of appreciation activities and gestures of recognition to help employers to motivate their employees. Having worked as a public school principal, she understands the stress of being an educator as well as being a supervisor to educators. Therefore, she is compassionate to her subordinates as she believes that they will work harder and be more productive when they are shown positive reinforcement and given the recognition

that they deserve. Hopefully, that positivity will then trickle downward from the teachers to the students, leading to a more productive and more pleasant learning environment.

Besides motivating students, humor can also help students better retain information. For example, Tamblyn argues that humor forces the brain to connect with information in a way that a serious and boring lecture might not. This is due to a factor that Tamblyn refers to as "personal relevancy." An individual may only feel compelled to care about information when he or she feels that it is relevant and relatable to himself or herself. "You have no doubt noticed," Tamblyn remarks, "how you find a story more compelling when you can see parallels in it to your own life. In the same way, learners will respond better when an example or problem you use easily relates back to their own experiences" (128). Humor is an effective tool for connecting academic material to the average person's everyday life and routines. That is because humor already deals with the relatable; most jokes ridicule or poke fun at a common ridiculous, sometimes frustrating, aspect of life that most people deal with and can relate to. By the same account, educators might use humor to relate teaching material to their students' lives, making that material seem more important to those students, thereby increasing the likelihood that students will remember that material come test time.

While Loomans and Kolberg, as well as Berk, do briefly argue the *why* of humor in the classroom, they focus the majority of their texts on the *how*. In the first chapter of *Humor as an Instructional Defibrillator*, Berk explains the most basic method of humor in what he calls the Trifecta Formula: "serious set-up with commonly understood situation or content," followed by "build-up of tension," and then finally "*Unexpected Twist*—punchline" (7). In other words, one should start with a normal scenario and build

up the audience's expectations toward a particular climax, and then end with a completely unexpected outcome, betraying the audience's expectations. Using this simple formula as a starting point, Berk spends the bulk of the text discussing humorous activities that an educator might incorporate into his or her class.

However, Berk advises against using humor simply for its own sake at the expense of the educational value of course content. In Chapter 6, for instance, he discusses multiple choice questions and the ways in which humor might compromise the test's ability to evaluate the student's knowledge. Berk argues that humorous, but incorrect, answer choices should not be presented as possible correct answer choices if their sole purpose is to amuse. He notes that these answer choices are generally easy to predict as wrong, and so their appearances should be consistent so that questions containing humorous answer choices will not be easier to answer by the process of elimination. One suggestion he has is to tack on the humorous answer choice to the end, perhaps as a letter E, while providing students with an answer sheet that only contains bubbles for answers A-D. For example, in a mathematical equation, the answers might be A. 2, B. 4, C. 6, D., 8, and E. "Who do we appreciate?" (200). In this case, answer choice E should not appear on the answer sheet, thus giving students a 25% chance to answer the question correctly based on the four remaining answer choices. The idea behind these humorous answer choices, then, is to relieve test anxiety, not to make test questions easier (or harder) to answer.

In his text, Goebel suggests activities specific to the English classroom. Goebel argues that "language and syntax can be inherently amusing" (3), citing that from the time they are young, people find amusement in puns, words with multiple meanings,

unusual-sounding words, and even made-up nonsense words. Throughout his text, Goebel discusses the many ways in which language learning and composition can be comical. For instance, he discusses comical fiction in Chapter 2. He discusses formulas pertaining to comedic stories such as character archetypes, exaggeration of characters' flaws, and obstacles to complicate characters' goals. When describing each activity, Goebel provides examples of comic writing. For instance, in one of his hypothetical comedic stories, he states, "Jason is arrogantly intelligent, cluelessly geeky, grossly incompetent at all things physical, and obsessed with video games" (39). Here, he has created a character, personality quirks for that character, and flaws for that character which might lead to some comical situations for him. Besides commenting on fiction, Goebel also discusses techniques for writing humorous nonfiction, essays, poetry, and parodies in his text.

Most of the authors whose opinions are surveyed in this thesis acknowledge that there is a lack of concrete studies proving that humor is an effective pedagogical tool. Studies that have been conducted on the matter have often produced mixed results. While students usually respond positively to humor within the classroom, this does not necessarily mean that they are learning any better. Many of the ideas summarized in this thesis are simply that: ideas. Some of the techniques discussed are ones that the authors themselves, in their own pedagogical endeavors, have employed. Several of the authors also admit that some audiences respond to humor differently than others, and so some techniques that might work with a particular group may not work as well with another. It is also important to understand that there are different types of humor, some of which might have detrimental effects on student morale, retention, and performance. These

outcomes are the opposite of what pedagogical humor is intended to accomplish. Ultimately, the use of humor and other pedagogical techniques are a matter of trial and error left up to the individual, and no educator who feels uncomfortable using these techniques should feel obligated to force humor into his or her course. The study of pedagogical humor is relatively new, and so more research is needed. However, I believe that such exploration is worthwhile, and so I feel that it would be valuable to bring these studies together into a larger discussion of the issue, which is the main intent behind this annotated bibliography. Having completed this bibliography, I am now in a position to explore this topic even more fully at an even more advanced level.

Through my own experiences as a college freshman English Composition instructor, I have found that humor is met with a generally positive reception by my students. At the same time, I have found that a lot of what I have read during my research is also true. For instance, different students, and even bodies of students, respond differently to humor than others. When I teach three identical classes, I often tend to reuse the same jokes. While one of my classes might laugh hysterically, the next class may respond to the same joke with dead silence, while the third one chuckles a little. So far, I have not had any experiences with students being offended by my jokes as I am extremely careful not to mock students or joke about heavy subjects (I have suffered enough backlash for using off-color humor with friends in the past, well before becoming an educator, that I am now painfully aware of what types of jokes I should avoid making at others' expense).

Besides the immediate responses to my jokes, students are able to give me more concrete feedback to my use of humor and my generally light-hearted disposition through

their teacher evaluation forms. While I have on at least one occasion had a student comment that my class could be a little more serious, most comments about my use of humor have been positive. As these evaluation forms are anonymous, I cannot identify the particular students who made these comments, and so I cannot determine the effectiveness of my use of humor on these students' ability to grasp the material. For what it is worth, student evaluations are held towards the end of the semester, and most students who make it to the end of the semester ultimately end up passing. In addition, I recently heard from one of my colleagues, who tutors one of my students at the Auburn Montgomery Learning Center, that she found me intimidating at first, describing me as a really tall, really smart guy (her words, not mine). Over time, however, she felt more at ease around me because of my sense of humor. She then described me as "cool." While she is a good student who maintains a high average in the class, I again cannot say with certainty that my use of humor is a reason why, and it would probably be safe on my part to assume that her commitment to her education, as illustrated by her weekly visits to the Learning Center, has had more to do with her success in my class than my use of humor. Still, if my humor is enough just to make her feel comfortable in my classroom, then I cannot really say that there are any negative repercussions to my use thereof.

As many of the texts annotated in this bibliography suggest, I do not force humor into any of my lectures. I let the humor flow naturally as I am teaching the material. I sometimes use funny videos to illustrate a point relevant to the lesson. I also sometimes interject humorous comments as I am lecturing, which is simply a habit of mine that is simply carried over from my everyday conversations. Sometimes, my slideshows may contain humorous images or internet memes in order to liven up the presentations. Not

everything I say is humorous; humor is a complement to my lectures, but it does not comprise the lectures themselves. Whether or not my jokes make the lessons more memorable is uncertain. Humor is not the only technique that I use to help students retain information, after all. Humor may also help me to maintain students' attention, though based on some students' chattering amongst themselves and playing with their smart phones, I cannot say that this technique is foolproof. Perhaps my biggest challenge in the aftermath of a humorous quip is to keep the lecture on track and not allowing students to veer class time towards play time. Again, my main goal as an educator is to educate, not to entertain. However, as I have not had any particularly negative experiences using humor in the classroom, I will continue to do so for as long as I can see that it yields positive feedback from my students. With time and experience, I will be able to better ascertain the effectiveness of humor at large, when best to use it, how best to use it, and what types are most effective.

Barth, Roland S. *A Personal Vision of a Good School.* 1990. *Phi Delta Kappan 71*(7): 512-516. 24 June 2014.

In this short journal article, Barth discusses ways in which any school system might be improved. Among the eight methods he mentions is the incorporation of humor into the curriculum. Barth compiled this list based on conversations with his colleagues, his own work in the school system, visits to other schools, and simply through reading, writing, and teaching. He emphasizes that this article is not a prediction of the direction in which schools will go, but rather a vision of how schools could, and ideally should, be run: "I find this continuous exercise in vision-making to be engaging, often useful, and, above all, hopeful. And those of us who work in or near public schools always welcome hope" (512). Barth envisions a school wherein he would be proud to work, whether as a teacher or as a principal, and where he would be willing to send his daughters. Barth explains each of his eight points for his vision of what the best possible school would look like.

First, Barth desires that a school be a community of learners—not just the students, but also the teachers and principal. Barth observes that far too often, students, teachers, and principals are treated as though they exist on separate planes, but the truth of the matter is that they are all under the same roof, and they all have something to teach each other, as opposed to the usual notion wherein adults impart knowledge to children in a one-way relationship. In particular, Barth dislikes negative interpersonal relationships between these three groups, as well as parents, and states that "The most memorable schools I visit are the ones that have begun to find ways of transforming these adversarial relationships into cooperative and collegial ones" (513). Barth envisions a school in

which teachers share their ideas, their successes, and their failures with one another in order to refine their teaching methods, in which the principal becomes an active observer in the classroom process and imparts wisdom to his or her subordinates, and in which students can interact with their peers, their teachers, and their principal as learners and as fellow citizens.

Next, Barth envisions a school wherein the faculty and students are willing to take risks, with a safety net in place to protect them from potential repercussions. In other words, faculty should be willing to make changes to their teaching methods and techniques if they want students to think in non-linear ways. As an example, Barth cites a time when he attended a doctoral candidate's dissertation defense; during the defense, the candidate described the body language that a principal sends to a teacher whenever that teacher proposes a new idea: "furrowed brow, worried look, bent shoulders" (514). These signals are usually followed by excuses from the principal as to why this new idea is a bad one. Even when the principal consents to the idea, the burden of responsibility should there be any mishaps falls upon the teacher who proposed the idea, which tends to discourage teachers from proposing new ideas at all. Barth asserts that we exist in a culture of caution, wherein people do not want to try new ideas because they are risky. He finds this attitude regrettable as he believes that risk-taking can be an educational experience. The question educators should ask themselves, then, is what the children would learn from the experience, not whether the experience follows the safest and most familiar route.

Additionally, Barth desires to see an academic community whose participants are there by choice. He acknowledges that the primary reason anyone attends school is out of

obligation; children are obligated by truancy laws to attend school, and while adults have a choice in the matter, those who have chosen to be teachers are bound to this role until death or retirement. Barth argues that "The highly routinized nature of work in schools tends to make automatons of us all" (516). His solution to the tedium of academic work is to allow teachers to take leaves of absence whenever requested so that they may reevaluate their lives and return to work with fresh minds and renewed motivation. As a result, teachers will be more dedicated to their work, and that sense of dedication and commitment will make its way to their students.

Barth also longs to see a school that respects diversity. He finds that differences are generally seen as a nuisance in a worst case scenario and are ignored in a best case scenario. In an ideal scenario, however, Barth feels that faculty should celebrate students' differences, whether cultural, philosophical, or behavioral: "I would prefer my children to be in a school in which differences are looked for, attended to, and celebrated as good news, as opportunities for learning" (517). While Barth does not suggest that misbehavior should be exalted, he does feel that differences in social class, gender, race, religion, and age should be viewed in a positive light so as to broaden children's minds to the diverse world in which they live.

On a similar note, Barth would like to see a school that serves as a place for philosophers. He asserts that 5- and 6-year-olds are philosophers, but in a classroom filled with twenty-five students, one person, the teacher, does 80% of the talking, thus turning those young philosophers into "producers" as they grow older. Barth therefore encourages a classroom environment in which children's thoughts are allowed to flourish and develop as they grow. Again, this idea draws upon Barth's desire to see diversity in

schools be celebrated as each young philosopher can bring his or her own ideas to the table.

The sixth facet of academic life that Barth would like to see reformed is the use of humor in schools. While many schools and members of faculty may feel disinterest or even contempt towards the use of humor in the learning process, Barth asserts that humor already exists in schools whether faculty are conscious of the fact or not. While teachers and principals might have a tendency to resist using humor while occupying such serious positions, Barth counters that "humor, like risk-taking and diversity, is strongly associated with learning and the development of intelligence, not to mention its importance to the quality of life" (518). Humor, Barth asserts, makes humans happier and therefore more productive. The humorous occurrences Barth witnessed as a principal often got him through the most stressful and tedious of work days. Barth takes his point even further by arguing for the medical benefits of laughter: "Laughter causes the lungs to pump out carbon dioxide, the eyes to cleanse themselves with tears, the muscles to relax, the flow of adrenaline to increase, and the cardiovascular system to be exercised" (519). He also points out that laughter causes the body to release endorphins into the bloodstream, reducing pain. Therefore, laughter is beneficial to all inhabitants of the school environment.

Additionally, Barth would like to see schools serve as communities for leaders. Leadership, he argues, should not simply be the responsibility of a superintendent, a principal, or a department chair. Rather, everyone involved in the school, from librarians and guidance counselors all the way down to parents and students, should feel as if they are instrumental parts of the academic community, in which all have some kind of

leadership-related contribution to make. Barth believes that a school should be shaped by the individuals within it rather than by a few elite individuals.

Barth's last point, and the one he spends the most time discussing, concerns anxiety and standards. Barth asserts that "too many schools are characterized by high anxiety and *low* standards" (520). Too often, the very pressure that teachers use to try to enhance student performance can end up having the opposite effect as students become bogged down by the pressures of academia such as threats of failure or notes to parents. Using his own daughter as an example, Barth claims that these fears and anxieties only inhibit student learning by causing emotional distress. However, one year, the faculty at Barth's daughter's school decided that final exam scores could only raise students' grades, not lower them. As a result, Barth's daughter met with her classmates, studied for her exams, and retained the information that she learned, uninhibited by stress and anxiety. This is perhaps the most radical of Barth's ideas and is not a risk that very many schools would be willing to take, but Barth's testimony is that this approach was a more successful one than the normal approach seen in most schools.

Barth is the founding director of the Principals' Center and a senior lecturer in education at Harvard University. In this article, Barth answers the question of what, but not how. In other words, he explains all the ways in which he would like to see schools change and improve. However, he never describes how he thinks administrators should pull these changes off. He leaves those details for readers to decide upon. Although the use of humor in the teaching process comprises only a part of this article's contents, all of the facets of academia addressed in this article are relevant to the common theme of creating a more relaxed and dynamic learning environment. The incorporation of humor

into the school curriculum is a crucial step towards achieving this goal as it helps to break down the typical authoritarian structure present in most schools while reducing stress and anxiety for students, for teachers, for principals, and for everyone else involved in the educational process.

Berk, Ronald A. *Humor as an Instructional Defibrillator: Evidence-Based Techniques in Teaching and Assessment*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, LLC, 2002. Print.

Berk argues that teachers, particularly college professors, can use humor to serve a variety of functions. One way he believes humor can be useful is to shatter the barrier that separates a professor from his or her students. "It opens up communication that's not based on fear or intimidation. Instead, the communication is positive, constructive, and relaxed" (4). Humor helps to humanize a professor in the students' eyes so that they do not fear feeling embarrassed or nervous about expressing themselves. The students then view the professor not as a frightening authority figure, but as a joyous mentor. As such, a connection is built between the students and the professor.

The second reason Berk gives us for using humor in the classroom is to engage students. Students will care more about the material, and therefore pay attention, if the professor relays information in an entertaining manner. After all, "Students enter our classrooms with their own baggage of personal distractions.... Our job is to snap them to attention and concentrate it on the topic for the day—to be fully engaged in learning activities" (5). Berk believes that an instructor can accomplish this goal by entertaining the students while simultaneously educating them.

The last major reason Berk believes that humor is a useful technique for educators to utilize is that humor can motivate students to make the class a high priority. Humor is an attention grabber, and the expectation that they will be entertained is often motivation enough for students to attend class. "The students should feel like they're rushing to open a birthday gift" (10). The challenge presented to instructors is to make their students care about the material they're teaching. The first step to accomplishing that goal is to gaining

the students' undivided attention, and the instructor can continue to maintain the students' interest by continually working humor into the curriculum.

After establishing his reasons, Berk establishes a distinction between the types of humor that are helpful and the types of humor that are harmful to the learning experience. Humor, Berk argues, should never be used to humiliate a student. In one hypothetical example he provides, a student asks the teacher a question about a point that the teacher had just covered. Berk advises against "[making] a joke about that student's not paying attention, so he or she is the butt of your put-down" (16). Here, Berk insists that the instructor simply answer the question respectfully while taking into consideration the many possible reasons why a student's mind might have wandered off during a lecture. One key to successfully incorporating humor into the curriculum is knowing when not to use it. Berk insists that humor should never be used to ridicule or mock students. Likewise, he advises against using vulgar and offensive humor as these types of humor can destroy whatever connection the professor has with his or her students.

In some of the book's later chapters, Berk suggests ways in which instructors might incorporate humor into their lesson plans. Throughout Chapter 3, he suggests incorporating music into classroom lectures. This method entails an "*expected* serious premise, statement, or context related to course content" followed by an "*unexpected* jolt of music" (69). Berk suggests having a music player of some sort ready for the sake of the music's comedic timing. For instance, in preparation for a test, an instructor might play the theme from the *Rocky* movies. The abruptness and out-of-place setting work together to make students laugh, which also helps to relieve pre-test anxieties.

In Chapter 8, Berk suggests ways that an instructor might make tests humorous, although this technique has to be used carefully so as not to compromise the test's intended goal of measuring students' grasp of the course material. One method that Berk suggests is to add a humorous "option E" to a multiple choice test. For example, a question asking "Who wrote *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*?" (237) would contain the answer choices T. S. Eliot (the correct answer), A. E..*[sic]* Housman, C. S. Lewis, J. D. Salinger, and L. L. Bean. Berk warns against presenting these humorous answers as actual possibilities for fear that a student might select an answer that was only thrown in to amuse him or her. One remedy he suggests is to use a ScanTron or other answer form with only four bubbles or boxes available to choose from so that "choice 'E' would not even be an option for the students to choose accidentally" (238). After all, the purpose of these humorous answer choices is to relieve test anxiety and motivate students to keep going; they should neither help nor hinder a student's ability to answer a question correctly.

Another technique Berk proposes is that humor can be incorporated into the stem of a multiple choice question. The answer choices would then be mostly serious, perhaps with a humorous letter "E" tacked on as well. For example: "If your urologist says, 'You have a kidney stone the size of the Epcot golf ball,' this is an example of a(an)" (240). The answer choices include "analogy," "hyperbole *[the correct answer]*," "metaphor," "simile," and "rather unsettling thought." While the stem of the question contains humor, it does not impede a student's ability to answer the question. Instead, it serves the test's intended purpose of measuring student comprehension of course material while also amusing the student and by extension relieving test-taking anxiety.

At the time of this book's publication, Dr. Berk was a Professor of Biostatistics and Measurement as well as Associate Dean for Teaching at the School of Nursing at John Hopkins University. He has received numerous awards and achievements such as the University's Alumni Association Excellence in Teaching Award in 1993 and the Caroline Pennington Award for Teaching Excellence in 1997. He was inducted as a Fellow into the Oxford Society of Scholars in 1998. This text is one of the finest and most detailed sources dealing with the issue of incorporating humor into teaching. As an award-winning college professor with a PhD and years of experience, Berk is qualified to tackle this issue. In this book, he provides valid reasons (many of which are based on research he has conducted and others that he has tested himself) for thinking that humor is an effective tool for teaching. He goes even further by detailing the many ways teaching can be (and should not be) used in the classroom.

Dhand, Harry. *Techniques of Teaching*. New Delhi: APH Publishing, 2008. Print.

This book is a collection of over a hundred techniques and strategies that teachers might use to enhance the learning experience in their classrooms. In the introduction, Dhand establishes that these techniques are simply suggestions on his part, not quick fixes for any classroom problems. He elaborates by saying that each classroom environment is different, and that each class will have its own needs and problems, so teachers should approach each situation on a case-by-case basis, sometimes even on an individual basis depending on the students. Nevertheless, Dhand provides teachers with what he calls "bare threads" and states that "they must weave the fabric themselves" (xiii). In other words, Dhand suggests several teaching techniques, but it is up to instructors utilizing his suggestions to determine which ones to use, when, and how.

From there, the book is organized into several small sections based on the individual techniques. Each section consists of approximately 2-3 pages, give or take. The sections are then divided even further into three passages: "What," "How," and "Important Considerations." The "What" passages are usually comprised of a single paragraph explaining the technique being detailed in that section. "How" passages usually appear in list form. These passages serve as a step-by-step process by which teachers and instructors may incorporate the technique into the course curriculum. Finally, the "Important Considerations" passage is also presented in list form, except rather than suggesting a process for using a technique, these points explain miscellaneous information about techniques that may not otherwise be self-evident. For instance, this section might explain the reasoning behind the technique, or the types of lessons

instructors might teach their students by employing a technique; sometimes, this passage might explain how not to use a particular technique.

The contents are organized alphabetically, but the section most relevant to this bibliography is the one entitled "Humour." Dhand argues that humor not only relieves boredom, but it also makes "the teaching-learning process more interesting, lively and effective" (104). Furthermore, Dhand argues that humor can create a warmer classroom environment, putting students at ease. Dhand primarily suggests incorporating humor into history, social studies, and literature classes because they teach life lessons through by conveying factual information.

Dhand argues that humor can be used in seven main ways. The first way is to "spice up the situation or event" (104) by use of jokes, sarcasm, and satire. The second way is to make uptight students feel at ease during tense situations, such as during a test. The third way is to use humor to engage students who are otherwise uninterested in the subject. The fourth way is to use humor when referring to "words, situations, characters, historical or current political personalities" (104), allowing students to relate to the material by drawing a connection between the subject and something relevant in the world today with which students might connect. The fifth way is to use humor to help students remember material; information is easier to recall when associated with a joke or funny situation. The sixth way is to use humor to set the mood or the tone of the class, encouraging higher attendance rates in the future. The seventh and final way is to use wit and humor as therapy for students, making it easier for them to cope with their problems and to overcome trials in life.

Thereafter, Dhand presents eight important considerations regarding the use of humor in the classroom. First, he states that humor "should be used for specific purposes" (105); in other words, it should help students learn the material rather than being used for its own sake. Second, he argues that only teachers who feel comfortable using humor should employ it, and that humor must take a backseat to important lesson criteria such as "objectives, opener, content, activities, closure, [and] evaluative criteria" (105). Third, Dhand points out the many factors that teachers must consider before attempting to use humor. These include "Teaching style, the personality of the teacher, the tone of the school and the classroom, unpredictable nature of humour, 'timing' and the nature of the subject matter" (105); in some situations, certain types of humor may not be appropriate. Fourth, Dhand advises instructors not to use humor to mock or ridicule students, and to observe carefully how their use of humor is affecting each student. Fifth, he suggests that teachers should use humor sparingly, as their primary job is to teach, not to entertain. Sixth, humor should have a particular objective; there needs to be a reason why an instructor chooses to use comedy to convey a message. Seventh, Dhand observes that some students may consider humor a waste of time, and that teachers should observe which students react well to it and which ones do not. Eighth and last, Dhand advises that humor be spaced out, as the level of fun should not compromise the educational integrity of the class.

Besides discussing humor, this book also contains sections on other techniques involving fun and play. Perhaps most closely related to humor is the section on "Cartoons." Dhand asserts that cartoons, particularly political cartoons, can be used to teach students lessons about the world around them through social commentary. They can

also be analyzed objectively. Dhand suggests using cartoons that imply or reveal a particular bias in order to teach students how to detect bias. "Whenever possible," he says, "the teacher must present all sides of an issue" (19). A teacher might juxtapose a political cartoon with a liberal leaning to one on the same topic with a conservative leaning.

Another activity that Dhand suggests involves roleplaying the lives of ancestors, perhaps for a history class or for a class on genetics. Such an assignment would require students to research their ancestors as well as interview family members and act out skits. Not only would this activity be fun and engaging for students, but they would learn about their family history and heritage, and perhaps something about world history, as well. Similarly, Dhand also suggests playing "Simulation Games," which he defines as "a simplified version of reality, that is, a replica of a real situation whereby the student lives vicariously" (189). Again, just as with the use of humor, Dhand advises that simulation games be used strategically—not as time-fillers or as substitutes for learning the material, but as complements to lesson plans. "If there is not sufficient follow up and discussion," Dhand says, "students may learn very little from their experience" (190). In short, fun and games should never comprise an entire class, but depending on the teacher, the students, and the subject, they can serve as helpful means by which to engage students in the learning process, to help students remember the material, and to motivate students to participate in classroom activities.

Harry Dhand teaches Curriculum Studies at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, Canada. He earned his Master of Arts in History as well as in Business Technology from Panjab University in Chandigarh, India, and he received a Master of

Arts in Education and his Doctorate in Education from the University of Montana in Missoula, Montana. He has taught in Canada for over three decades, and in 1982, he received a national award of merit from *The History and Social Science Teacher*. He has played an integral role in Project Canada West, has been a major contributor to the Canada Studies Foundation, and he has published several books and articles such as *Research in Teaching of the Social Studies: A Handbook for Teachers*, four volumes of *Research in Social Studies at Canadian Universities 1960-1985*, and *Social Studies Laboratory*. He has also been on several editorial boards for numerous journals on education.

Goebel, Bruce A. *Humor Writing: Activities for the English Classroom.* Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2011. Print.

Goebel opens this book by discussing a concept he calls "humorphobia," the notion that life, or any particular aspect thereof, is too serious to be joked about or laughed at. In particular, there is an attitude within schools that the classroom is no place for laughter or play, that the subject matter is too important to be funny. On the contrary, Goebel argues that the material taught in schools is too important not to be funny: "This phobia is unfortunate because humor can benefit teachers and students in many ways, from the personal to the educational" (xvi). Goebel defends his thesis by asserting that humor is a healthy outlet through which people can cope with life's struggles. Furthermore, when educators use humor, they can shatter barriers between themselves and students, creating a student-teacher connection that might not otherwise exist. In particular, Goebel feels that humor is most effective in the English classroom. After all, many types of humor rely on a clever use of language, from puns and wordplay to satire and sarcasm. Goebel thus provides readers with four chapters containing various techniques that English instructors might use to incorporate humor into their course curricula, with over 150 proposed class activities featured throughout.

Chapter 1 is entitled "Humorous Words, Phrases and Sentences." Goebel opens the chapter by explaining what constitutes humor in the first place. Humans, by nature, are pattern-seeking creatures, and when a pattern is disrupted—that is to say that one's expectations are betrayed—humor is born. Therefore, comedy follows a formula of setup, twist, and unexpected payoff. People are prone to follow routines; a disruption in the routine will therefore merit an emotional response, whether comic or tragic. For instance,

it is normal for one to drink coffee in the morning before work; it is not normal, however, for one to find a fish in his or her coffee.

Goebel goes on to acknowledge that sometimes comedy is hostile. Comedy almost always has a target, and educators who utilize humor should be wary about using students as target for their jokes. To avoid this scenario, Goebel suggests using self-deprecating humor so that oneself, rather than an unsuspecting student, is the victim of the joke. Likewise, Goebel insists that all humorous writing activities contain the stipulation that students must not ridicule real life individuals such as classmates, faculty, staff, or anyone else other than perhaps oneself. Likewise, Goebel advises against using humor to discriminate: "If the target of the humor is…a disempowered group, and the joke is told by a representative of a group in power, then the humor is oppressive" (2). The reverse, Goebel states, is "subversive." For the most part, Goebel encourages readers to avoid jokes about race, sex, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion.

From there, Goebel begins to discuss what constitutes language-based humor. He encourages readers to follow a trial-and-error process as some jokes will fall flat. Citing a quote from Drew Carey, Goebel argues that comedians might keep one out of every ten jokes that they write. When writing language-based humor, one must understand what makes language funny. "Language humor relies on the sounds of words, words with multiple meanings, unusual word combinations, and unusual syntax" (3). For instance, Goebel discusses portmanteaus, or "the mixing of the sound of two words to form a new word that contains the meaning of both original words" (5). Some examples of common portmanteaus that Goebel lists are *brunch* and *liger*. These words are humorous because they are clever combinations of words used to represent a meal between the times of

breakfast and lunch and a crossbreed between a lion and a tiger. Goebel also cites puns as another example of language humor. Puns rely largely on homographs, homophones, and hominoids—in other words, words that are similar to one another in sound or in spelling and can, for humorous purposes, take on multiple meanings. People are fascinated by the clever use of words with double meanings, and so they often react with amusement to puns.

Another type of language humor that Goebel discusses in Chapter 1 is the Rule of Three, wherein a list contains two items that belong to a logical sequence, followed by an unexpected third item. For example: "He was my dream date: *tall, dark,* and *dumb*" (22). The first two items in this list are characteristics one might associate with an ideal mate, but the last one is ironic because one would not expect dumbness to be a desirable trait. Similarly, Goebel also discusses reversals, jokes in which the punchline—that is, the result of the setup—defies and even contradicts the listener's expectations. Goebel cites an example from an Oscar Wilde quote in which Wilde states that he once believed that money was the most important thing in life when he was young. Wilde takes his nugget of wisdom in a different direction than the audience expects by saying that now that he is old, he knows this claim to be true. The setup of this joke leads readers to believe that Wilde is imparting sage advice, that the most important thing in life is not money, but rather something of no monetary value such as family, friendship, or love. No one expects Wilde to affirm what he believed when he was young.

Chapter 2 is entitled "Funny Stories and Essays." Goebel opens the chapter by pointing out schools' inclination towards teaching tragic literature and how rare it is for a comedy to be part of the curriculum for a literature class: "There is an unwritten rule that,

whether experiencing the Trojan War or World War II, the plight of peasants under tyrannical rule or the plight of African Americans under slavery, struggles with disability or struggles with patriarchy, great wisdom can only come from readers vicariously experiencing great pain" (32). However, Goebel argues that students will not care about the subject matter of any book that bores them. To that end, Goebel proposes that literature instructors incorporate more comedies into the class curriculum, asserting that comedy can address serious issues in a way that reaches students more effectively than tragedy.

From there, Goebel discusses how to write humorous stories. He starts by distinguishing between funny moments and funny stories. For example, "the time Dad's turkey exploded on Thanksgiving, or when my brother got his head stuck between the stairway banister rails" (34) might make some people chuckle, but they are not stories. They lack plot and conflict. Funny stories might be comprised of moments such as the aforementioned, but they must be linked together by a cohesive narrative driven by characters whose goals are frustrated by obstacles. Goebel discusses humorous character archetypes typically found in television sitcoms such as "The Logical Smart One" and "The Lovable Loser." After listing several common sitcom character archetypes, Goebel suggests putting these characters together to see how they might play off of each other. For instance, how would the Logical Smart One deal with the Dumb One, or with the characters known simply as "In Their Own Universe"? How would the Mean One interact with the Lovable Loser, the Neurotic, or the Dumb One?

Once these characters are established, Goebel states that they must be given four characteristics in order to create comical conflict: a character's *comic perspective*, *flaws*,

exaggerated outcome of those flaws, and *humanity*. In other words, the character must have some sort of motivation that is hindered by the character's flaws, which lead to one or several worst case scenarios, but the character must be relatable and human enough to make the audience care about him or her. For maximum comic effect, Goebel suggests placing characters into situations in which they are least able to adapt. For example, "if a rich, pampered, unintentionally snobby (but still likeable) character is comfortable in a world of Beverly Hills or Manhattan parties, what happens if she is marooned in the wilderness?" Possible comedic moments could entail "such topics as clothes, food, sleeping accommodations, hygiene, makeup, and hair" (38). On page 39, Goebel presents readers with a chart wherein aspiring comedy writers can list their characters, those characters' flaws, and conflicts that might arise as a result of those flaws.

Also in Chapter 2, Goebel discusses humorous essays and other nonfiction forms of humorous writing. In Chapter 3, entitled "Light Verse," he focuses on humorous poetry and song lyrics. These three forms of writing are similar in that they do not require characters or conflicts. Nevertheless, Goebel discusses guidelines for incorporating humor into each of these forms of writing. For instance, the humorous essay should have "some kernel of truth to what is being said about a topic" (55), even if that truth is "twisted" and contains no sense of fairness or balance, as in a satirical essay. Goebel provides several examples of nonfiction forms of comical writing such as interviews, letters, diaries, and journals. Each of these works might follow a format typical to a standard interview, letter, diary, or journal, except that they would contain humorous quotations, anecdotes, and one-liners which, as Goebel stated earlier in the chapter, would not be enough to constitute a funny story.

As for poetry, Goebel notes that most students despise poetry, particularly poetry intended for intellectuals, but that elements such as rhyme, rhythm, and meter appeal even to the common masses, most commonly in the form of the lyrical song. Humorous poems and song lyrics may contain any of the wordplay discussed in the first chapter, such as puns, and they can still address serious issues. "In this sense, light verse may be light in its approach, but perhaps not in its intentions" (67). Goebel once again argues that a humorous poem can serve the same educational purpose as a serious or tragic poem, but humorous poetry might be better at catching students' interests and maintaining lasting appeal.

The fourth and final chapter is entitled "Parody," the art of mimicking another individual's art, usually for the purpose of ridicule. Goebel notes that parody is one of the most popular forms of comedy in the modern era: "Ours is a time that thrives on the ironic humor that comes from such juxtaposition of disparate texts" (98). Whether by ridiculing popular culture or politics, the art of parody holds a strong niche in the entertainment industry today. Goebel even asserts that the presence of satire in the media is a sign that one is living in a democracy, as no one living in an oppressive dictatorship would dare mock those in power for fear of one's life. In fact, Goebel cites a Pew Research Poll from 2004 in which over 20% of young people polled claimed that they depend upon Comedy Central's *The Daily Show* as their primary outlet for news because they believe that the more "serious" cable news networks are less factual and less reliable than the satirical news program. Throughout Chapter 4, Goebel discusses many venues in which an aspiring writer might incorporate the art of parody such as journalism, academic

texts, and how-to articles. Furthermore, one might incorporate elements of parody into the writing of funny stories and nonfiction.

Bruce A. Goebel is a former secondary English teacher who currently teaches English at Western Washington University. He teaches "courses on humor, American literature, young adult literature, and English teaching methods" (back cover). This book not only does a fantastic job of defining what constitutes humor and its many subgenres, but it also provides numerous activities to accompany each chapter's contents. Goebel insists that instructors could either incorporate small elements of his book's activities into their lessons or go so far as to create an entire unit on humor writing. Either way, this book is a great resource for language educators looking to create a deeper connection with their students through humor.

Hodges, Diane. *Laugh Lines for Educators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2006.

Print.

This bulk of this text is not intended to prove or defend a thesis. Rather, it is a compilation of jokes based around the common theme of academia. If the text has a thesis at all, Hodges reveals it in the preface: "Find humor in all aspects of your life.... It is then that you will be able to survive it" (iv). She tells us about a time when she, as Director of a school, would post memos of jokes and motivational sayings on the bulletin board to help boost faculty morale. However, it occurred to her that no one was paying any attention to the bulletin board. That is when she had the idea for "Restroom Readings." She began posting these jokes and motivational sayings in restroom stalls instead since the restroom was the one place that all staff members frequented. Soon, others began to contribute to "The Wall" as well. From there, Hodges transcribed jokes from the wall and compiled them into a book. She concludes the preface by saying that "Humor just makes you feel better!" (iv) and asks that her readers share the laughs from this book in their own workplaces.

The book is divided into five sections, each containing jokes based around a particular theme, which is almost always some derivative of the key theme of academia. The first section is a compilation of jokes and anecdotes about young children. One anecdote portrays God as a frustrated parent to a disobedient Adam and Eve, who bicker over whose fault it is that they ate an apple that their Father had instructed them not to eat. The punchline is that God created childbirth as a way to punish Adam and Eve by forcing them to experience the same kinds of scenarios. Also included in this section is a list entitled "Things I've Learned From My Children," which includes such epiphanies as

"A king-size waterbed holds enough water to fill a 2000 square foot ranch house ¼-inch deep" and "If you hook a dog leash over a ceiling fan, the motor is not strong enough to rotate a 42-pound boy wearing Batman underwear and a Superman cape" (3). The section also contains several advisory quotes from children, such as "Never tell your mom her diet's not working" and "Never try to baptize a cat" (4). The majority of anecdotes involve conversations between adults and children, which usually result in the children innocently making remarks that are shocking, offensive, naïve, or even sometimes perceptive beyond their years.

The second section deals more directly with teaching. It opens with a list of actual rules that teachers in 1915 had to follow, ranging from as ordinary as "Your dresses not be any shorter than two inches above the ankle" to as restrictive as "You may not ride in a carriage or automobile with any man unless he is your father or brother" and as absurd as "You may not loiter downtown in ice cream stores" (30). What follows is a list entitled "Are You Acting Too Much Like A Teacher?" in which mannerisms and habits of teachers are placed in ordinary social settings, ranging from "Do you ask guests if they have remembered their scarves and mittens as they leave your home?" to "Do you ask a quiet person at a party if he has something to share with the group?" (31). The section also contains several anecdotes about teachers and teaching, addressing such topics as low salaries, misbehaving children, forbiddance of teachers to pray in spite of their overwhelming responsibilities, and an English teacher correcting St. Peter's grammar at the Pearly Gates.

The third section is titled "School Daze." The jokes and anecdotes in this section deal with everyday school occurrences. For instance, one anecdote involves students

giving gifts to their teacher on the last day of school while the teacher guesses each gift based on the occupation of the kids' parents. However, she incorrectly guesses that the last child's gift is a bottle of wine or champagne as he is the son of a liquor store owner. After noticing that the box is leaking and tasting the dripping liquid, the teacher finally asks what the gift is, only to learn that it is a puppy. This section also contains a list of well-known proverbs that children had to complete, with the most humorous results being printed. These proverbs range from "Better to be safe than punch a fifth grader" (50) and "You have nothing to fear but homework" (70). There are some jokes directed at junior high and high school students, such as a list of politically correct terms for teenagers. For instance, a student who fails a class is "passing impaired," a student in detention is "exit delayed," a lazy student is "energetically declined," and a student sleeping in class is "rationing consciousness" (73). The humor in this section covers school life from nursery through high school; it is not until the subsequent section that college life is touched upon.

The penultimate section is simply entitled "College." The manner of anecdotes is similar to that of the previous section in its irony and occasional sarcasm, but now the subject matter relates specifically to college courses. For instance, one anecdote involves a chemistry professor dropping a silver coin into an acid and asking his students if it will dissolve, to which one student claims that it will not, reasoning that "if it would, you wouldn't have dropped it in" (79). As one might expect, the humor is also slightly raunchier, such as in an anecdote about fines against students who visit the opposite sex's dormitory, in which one male student asks, "How much for a season pass?" (78). The

humor in this section deals not only with college itself, but also the life of the average college student, including on-campus living and the transition into adulthood.

The last section deals with holidays, and is divided into multiple sub-sections, the first three being the most significant to teachers and students: Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. The jokes in these sub-sections do not necessarily pertain to school life, but rather to life during the holidays when school is generally out of session. The jokes are generally targeted towards adults—for instance, one Halloween joke involves an IRS agent taking 28% of a person's candy in taxes. Other jokes are more child-oriented, such as a list of Christmas carol lyrics that children recited incorrectly, such as "Sleep in heavenly peas" and "Barney's the king of Israel" (110). Beyond the three major sub-sections are even smaller sub-sections pertaining to New Year's Day, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Easter, and Memorial Day.

Diane Hodges works for a consulting firm called Threshold Group as a Managing Partner. She has also been a teacher for over three decades. She is also the author of six published books, including one entitled *Looking Forward to Monday Morning*, "in which she has compiled ideas for recognition, appreciation, and fun things that can be done at work—all on a low budget" (v). Specifically, it pertains to having fun and laughing in an educational environment. She specializes in assisting high school students prepare for the work world by helping them to create professional portfolios and résumés. Other positions that she has held include "human resources director, director of instructional services, executive director of career and technology education, principal, counselor, and instructor" (vi). She obtained her doctorate degree at Michigan State University, and she has received state and national leadership awards.

Aside from a short introduction spanning less than a full page in the preface of the book, this text does not focus on a thesis or attempt to defend any kind of assertion. Hodges' purpose is very simple: she wants to make her audience laugh. For this reason, the majority of the book is comprised of anecdotes, humorous lists, and a few one-liners. Whereas most of the sources in this bibliography spend the majority of their pages defending their reasoning by citing research and experiments, Hodges briefly states her reasoning in the preface, and then executes, throughout the rest of the text, her strategy of using humor to heal.

Hodges, Diane. *Looking Forward to Monday Morning: Ideas for Recognition and Appreciation Activities and Fun Things to Do at Work for Educators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2005. Print.

In the introduction, Hodges states her case for writing this book. She feels that one of the leading causes of low employee retention in any workplace is a lack of recognition and appreciation for the workers. While other factors such as low wages and lack of job security certainly factor into this equation, Hodges finds that workers who feel unappreciated are less productive than those whose employers, colleagues, and subordinates make them feel like an asset to the company. In particular, Hodges points out the high level of teacher turnover in the United States. Citing the National Center for Education Statistics, Hodges states that 20% of new hires leave the teaching profession within their first three years. Hodges asserts that "Creating a work environment that is fun and where appreciation is shown is crucial" (xiii).

Hodges spends the rest of the introduction proposing ways in which employers can make their employees feel important and necessary. One suggestion is that staff members be allowed to take part in the planning and implementation of company programs. Hodges uses her own personal experiences as a school administrator and as a principal to illustrate the effectiveness of her technique: "Before initiating the program I conducted a survey of the staff to find out how they wanted to be recognized. I then created a committee comprised of members from each employee group to develop and implement the program, and found that just including staff members in the process was a method of recognition in itself" (xiv-xv). Hodges also suggests less formal ways of showing employee recognition. One such manner of expression is visual. Visual

recognition can take on a number of forms such as certificates, plaques, letters, cards, or even something as simple as a smile. Another manner of expressing recognition is through auditory recognition. In other words, employers should be willing to thank or congratulate employees for a job well done. Lastly, Hodges suggests kinesthetic ways of showing appreciation such as a handshake, a pat on the back, or a hug. However, she clarifies that one must be certain that the recipient of a physical expression of gratitude must be comfortable with the person expressing the gratitude so as not to cause allegations of sexual harassment. Hodges ends the introduction by insisting that principals, deans, and other authoritative figures with the academic field be willing to change the program frequently so that it stays fresh and new, thus retaining employees' interest.

The first two chapters discuss activities, both formal and informal, that schools can conduct to show recognition to the staff at large. Formal activities, as covered in Chapter 1, include appreciation events and awards such as end-of-year appreciation luncheons, certificates of appreciation for educators, and teacher-of-the-year celebrations. Teachers selected to be teacher of the year could receive such mementos as "a *Teacher of the Year* license plate, canvas bag, plaque, and a glass etching" (12-13). Chapter 2 details informal gestures of appreciation. For instance, Hodges proposes placing a whiteboard or chalkboard, which she calls the *Appreciation Chalkboard*, in a location where several people are likely to see it, such as near an elevator or restroom. There, Hodges proposes that staff use this board to write positive notes to one another, many of which can praise and congratulate colleagues for personal matters such as running a 5K race, having a baby, or going 35 days without smoking. Other informal gestures of gratitude and

appreciation can include rewarding colleagues and subordinates with food or just simply giving someone a little bit of time out of one's hectic work schedule.

In addition to employee recognition, Hodges also insists that the school work environment be a fun one by incorporating humor into the academic workplace. One idea she proposes is called Rx for a Good Year: "Give staff members a medicine bottle filled with jelly beans in various colors and flavors prescribed for the treatment of 'budget-itis, phone call ear, no time to sleep, busy day blues,' and to help them maintain a positive attitude" (66). In addition to gag gifts such as this one, Hodges also provides games that faculty can play with one another at the beginning of the school year in order to get to know each other. One such game is the "What Did You Do This Summer?" Scavenger Hunt, in which members of faculty receive a list of summer activities and must find colleagues who partook in those activities over the preceding summer to sign their names underneath the activity. Another ice-breaking game is called Two Truths and a Lie, in which each faculty member writes down two things he or she did over the summer as well as one lie, and the rest of the faculty must guess which item is the lie. Besides post-summer activities, there are also activities and games for getting acquainted for colleagues throughout the year. Similar to the aforementioned scavenger hunt, there is also a "Getting to Know You" Scavenger Hunt, which has the same general premise as the "What Did You Do This Summer" Scavenger Hunt, except that the items pertain to more general characteristics about a person such as being born outside of the United States, wearing contact lenses, or being single.

Above all, Hodges emphasizes the importance of one's attitude. "Your attitude is your self-picture. Do a self-check to see if you light up the room when people walk into

it—or out of it" (98). Attitude is contagious, and so Hodges encourages educators and other workers involved in the academic workplace to avoid pessimistic thoughts as well as individuals who spread negativity wherever they go, and to instead speak positively about one's colleagues and oneself. For example, most people hate Monday because it marks the beginning of the work week. Therefore, Hodges suggests that principals and administrative officials make Monday into a "Positive Day" by creating fun and humorous activities for those days. One example she provides is called "The Wall" or "Restroom Readings," in which she and her colleagues post jokes and cartoon strips on the walls of the restroom, a place that everyone visits. Hodges' other book *Laugh Lines for Educators* features several of the jokes that she and her colleagues have posted on the bathroom walls over the years. Hodges emphasizes the importance of humor in Chapter 5, claiming that children laugh a hundred times as much as adults while arguing that "Laughter is a sign of healthy self-esteem and adds to a positive attitude" (100). Life will always be filled with hardships, and no matter how professional an individual is, he or she will make mistakes at work. However, Hodges asserts that being able to laugh at one's hardships and errors will help that person to cope and learn from the experience. Sharing embarrassing stories about past mishaps with one's colleagues can help those colleagues to feel better about their own mistakes, especially rookies who think that they are the only ones who make mistakes.

Throughout this book, Hodges emphasizes the importance of creating a happy, comfortable, and pleasing work environment. She asserts this notion in the most literal sense in Chapter 9, wherein she discusses the office environment: "The environment in which you spend 2,000 hours a year has a great influence on whether you look forward to

going to work. Create a place that feels good, makes you feel productive, appreciated, and 'fits' you. Make it an inviting place that welcomes you and others every day and where you love spending time" (173). One way she suggests livening up the office is by adding color everywhere and in every way possible, such as by keeping colored paper clips, notebooks, pens, and file folders in the office. When decorating rooms, one must be conscious of the psychology of colors. For example, Hodges notes that orange was a poor color choice for her school's media center because it was too lively a color, and so students could not focus on studying. When the room was painted white with soft pastels, the room felt more relaxed, and students began using the media center. Hodges goes over various different color choices and the effects they have on the human psyche.

Hodges also discusses the lighting of one's office environment. She insists that one allow natural light into the office, if possible, in order to overcome seasonal blues. "People who work with good lighting have been found to perform faster and make fewer mistakes" (174), she argues. However, if one does not a window in his or her office, Hodges encourages the use of lamps in addition to overhead lighting.

Finally, Hodges encourages office workers to decorate their workspaces with sentimental items that make a person's office uniquely one's own. She encourages workers to display certificates, awards, and other symbols of great accomplishments on the walls, such as college degrees. In addition, she suggests creating a bulletin board of things and people one loves, such as family members, friends, spouse, and pets, and also motivational images and cartoons. The idea is to make the office an uplifting place for an individual to be in.

Diane Hodges serves as Managing Partner for Threshold Group, "a consulting firm specializing in training and staff development" (195). She has been an educator for over three decades and is now a public speaker in the national and international communities, sharing her passion for teaching and helping high school students to develop their portfolios for when they are ready enter the workforce. Other positions she has held include "human resources director, university instructor, director of instruction, secondary school principal, and…elementary and middle school counselor" (195). She received her doctorate degree from Michigan State University, has received several national and state leadership awards, and has published five other books in addition to this one, including *Laugh Lines for Educators*.

Looking Forward to Monday is a very innovative and useful text for educators and academic administrators alike. It contains several different ideas for activities and gestures to create a friendly, happy, and productive work environment at schools. Hodges advocates the use of humor in academia not just as an instructional tool, but also as a means of creating a pleasant environment for instructors themselves, whether in the classroom, the office, or even the restroom. By creating such an environment, Hodges believes that schools can achieve greater teacher retention, have more motivated and productive teachers, and overall improve the atmosphere and quality of the education process at large. With her experience as an educator and as a principal, she has been able to put her theories to practice. Her techniques are not only useful to educational workplaces, but also to office and corporate workplaces at large.

Klein, Allen. *The Healing Power of Humor: Techniques for Getting through Loss, Setbacks, Upsets, Disappointments, Difficulties, Trials, Tribulations, and All That Not-So-Funny Stuff.* Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1989. Print.

In the introduction, Klein explains his incentive for writing this book. Having lost his wife Ellen, he understands despair. However, in Ellen's final days, she insisted that her husband stop being morose: "I'm still here. We can *still* laugh together" (xviii). Whenever the Kleins managed to laugh together, they briefly forgot that Ellen was dying, and even the most painful of times became a joyful memory for Klein. Through this experience, Klein realized the power of humor as a tool for overcoming adversity and tragedy, not just in the face of death, but also when dealing with lesser problems ranging from job loss to traffic jams. Klein clarifies that humor does not necessarily rectify a problem; the problem will still exist, and there will still be pain. However, he learned an important lesson from his wife during her illness. He realized that humor has the power to alleviate sadness and pain and, if only for a little while, allow those suffering to enjoy even the darkest of moments. Since then, he has gone on to teach the public about the power of humor as a tool for relief, be it at the workplace, in school, and even in hospice care.

Part I of the book is entitled "Learning to Laugh." This section is the shortest of the three parts to this book, being comprised of only two chapters. Chapter 1 opens by explaining the psychological benefits of humor. Klein first argues that humor gives us power: "In laughter, we transcend our predicaments. We are lifted above our feelings of fear, discouragement, and despair. People who can laugh at their setbacks no longer feel sorry for themselves. They feel uplifted, encouraged, and empowered" (4). Klein gives an

example of a Soviet prisoner named Natan Sharansky, who for nine years was threatened with the possibility of the firing squad. His main antagonist was fear. However, he turned that fear into something ordinary and casual by joking about it; the Russian word *rastrel*, meaning "firing squad," lost its effect on him the more he used the word humorously.

Klein further observes that most comedians, cartoonists, and entertainers have experienced loss at some point in their lives, usually in their childhoods, and that they use comedy as a means of gaining power over their grief. Charlie Chaplin, Klein points out, lost his father to alcoholism when he was five years old, and afterwards his mother went insane. Chaplin reflects the hardships of his upbringing in a comical manner through his films, such as in the shoe-eating scene from *Gold Rush*. Although the circumstances were not humorous, Chaplin could see the humor in the absurdity of the situation.

Klein also argues that humor helps us cope. "Much of the suffering we experience is not a result of our difficulties but how we view them. It is not so much the actual event that causes us pain as how we relate to it" (7). As an example, Klein tells us of a time when he was driving down the highway and his radiator exploded. The situation was obviously very frustrating for him as he had to wait for roadside assistance, all while dreading the inevitable expenses that awaited him, not to mention that his trip was to be delayed by this occurrence. However, Klein amused himself while waiting for the tow truck by creating a castle out of Coca-Cola cans, disposable cups, and matchbooks. Through a simple act of amusement and creativity, Klein was able to distract his mind from the situation at hand and make light of the situation. In doing so, he did not erase his problems, but he did not fret over them either, which would have only made his problems worse.

Klein goes on to add that scientists have discovered a connection between mental and physical health. One example he gives of the connection between mind and body is of hemophiliac children, who bleed easily not only because of injury, but also due to sadness and crying. Additionally, those who are cynical and angry by nature are more prone to heart attacks than those who are more optimistic. Depression and grief can, and in many cases do, cause physical illnesses and disorders. Therefore, having a positive attitude, and being able to laugh off problems, can prove healthy to one's mental, and even physical, health.

Next, Klein asserts that humor provides perspective. In other words, humor helps us to see our hardships differently from how we might view them when we are sad or angry. As an example, Klein shows us a letter that he had read in a newspaper from a young female college student to her parents apologizing for having not written to them in a long time. In the letter, the student explains to her parents that her dorm burned down, destroying all of her belongings and landing her in the hospital, and that in the aftermath, she was forced to move in with a guy and that she is now pregnant. In the postscript, she explains that none of the above is true, but that she received a D in French and a C in math and chemistry, adding that "I just wanted to make sure that you keep it all in perspective" (14). This girl was able to soften the blow of bad news by lowering her parents' expectations even further with a fictional scenario far worse than the actual situation. In doing so, she not only managed to find a creative and funny way to deliver bad news to her parents, but she managed to put a bad situation into its proper perspective by illustrating how much worse life could be, and that a few low marks do not signify the end of the world.

Finally, Klein argues that humor keeps us balanced. Taking life and the world too seriously, Klein argues, can cause physical and mental illnesses. Seeing humor in unfavorable situations can prevent the situation from worsening by keeping it from affecting our health and well-being. Humor can have a positive psychological impact on a person, as in the case of Norman Cousins, who overcame a collagen disease by, in addition to ingesting large amounts of Vitamin C, learning how to laugh despite his pain. As a result, Cousins found it easier to sleep painlessly. Just as negativity can hinder the recovery process, positivity can mitigate it, and humor creates positive feelings.

In Part II of the book, Klein goes over the ways in which humor can be used to help people endure frustrating moments in life. In order to be able to see humor within every bad situation, one must first accept that there will be problems with every vocation one may pursue. "If you are a baker, chances are you will burn a few cakes every now and then. If you are a homemaker, you will break a few dishes from time to time. If you are a clerk at a supermarket, there is a great possibility that one day one of the grocery bags will burst as you finish filling it" (42). Klein compares these "punches" in life to the "punchline" of a joke, wherein we expect life to take us in one direction only for it to take us down a completely different path. Therefore, we should not only prepare for those worst case scenarios to happen, but we should take them lightly. For instance, Klein observes that anyone who drives a car may one day be pulled over by a police officer. He then relays an anecdote about a woman who, after being pulled over and asked for her license, handed the police officer not only her driver's license, but also a GET OUT OF JAIL FREE card from Monopoly. Klein spends the rest of Part II offering suggestions for

how to lighten a difficult situation with humor, ranging from exaggeration to wordplay and from nonsense to simply letting go of our frustrations.

Part III, the last part of the book, covers perhaps the most difficult time of all for a person to find humor or a reason to laugh: when a loved one has died. "Humor cannot stop us from dying," Klein tells us, "but it helps us live with it and deal with it" (183). This particular topic is personal to Klein as his wife's death is what inspired him to write this book. However, Klein shares his wife's words of wisdom with his readers: "Life is too short to concentrate on the dark threads; look for, celebrate, and enjoy the ones of gold and silver" (164). Klein points out that not only can humor be comforting to those mourning the deceased, but also to the terminally ill and dying. Discussing some particular examples of such persons, Klein says that humor "showed them that they did not have to be blinded by pain and suffering" (165). Klein notes that most people are afraid to laugh in the face of death and illness because they believe that it is inappropriate, that death is supposed to be serious and solemn. People deny themselves permission to find humor or joy in anything during such times, or else they believe other people would deny them permission to do so. While Klein does not argue that one should not cry when a loved one passes away, Klein does argue that people should not close themselves off from laughter during such times as laughter has the ability to heal and gives us the strength to endure hardship. Thus, Klein argues for a more balanced approach to coping with death: grieve for the loss, but smile at the memories, and cherish the moments that a sick person has left in this world.

Allen Klein is a self-proclaimed "jollytologist." He is nationally recognized as a humor educator and speaker. He also published *The Whole Mirth Catalog: A Super*

Complete Collection of Things, and he wrote *Quotations to Cheer You Up When the World Is Getting You Down*. Klein travels the United States and involves his audience in activities that teach them "humor tools and techniques to enhance both their work and their life" (215). He currently resides in San Francisco, California. While this text does not deal specifically with the incorporation of humor into academic settings, it is nevertheless a valuable resource for any educator seeking to connect with his or her students on a more personal level and to ease students' anxieties in the classroom as they deal with hardships in life. Even for persons beyond the field of academia, though, this text is a great read for anyone who may be stressed or grieving and having a hard time seeing the funny side of life.

Loomans, Diana and Karen Kolberg. *The Laughing Classroom: Everyone's Guide to Teaching with Humor and Play*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 1993. Print.

Loomans and Kolberg open their text with a discussion of all the anxieties of being a teacher. They acknowledge that teachers work "such long hours, with such little pay, for so little appreciation or recognition" that teaching might strike some people as unappealing (3). Likewise, students have anxieties of their own, such as concerns about graded assignments and forced social interactions. However, there is a silver lining: the ability of educators to laugh and to make their students laugh with them. Laughter, Loomans and Kolberg argue, can help motivate students by turning a potentially hostile environment such as a classroom into a place of joy. While the authors acknowledge that "one person's paradise is another's hell" (6)—in other words, that this technique might work better for some people than for others—they also assert that almost no one will admit to being humorless: "[H]umor is universal and exists in some form within all cultures and, hopefully, within the learning environment" (13). In other words, while different people might have different perceptions of what is or is not funny, laughter is a solid technique that can work with almost any group of students.

In Chapter 5, Loomans and Kolberg distinguish between positive and negative humor techniques teachers can use in the classroom: "There are two very distinct sides to the humor coin: the comic and the tragic. Humor can…educate or denigrate, heal or harm, embrace or deface" (14). To further illustrate their thesis, the authors break down humorous teachers into four types: the Joy Master, the Life Mocker, the Joke Maker, and the Fun Meister. The latter two types possess both positive and negative qualities, and the

former two feature either the best of both worlds or the worst characteristics of both of the latter two kinds of humorist.

The Joke Maker employs verbal humor, while the Fun Meister incorporates more physical elements into his or her routine. On the positive end of the spectrum, the Joke Maker is known for wordplay, anecdotes, and parody, and is both instructive and insightful. Meanwhile, the Fun Meister demonstrates elements of slapstick and clowning, and tends to be naïve, imitative, and entertaining. On the negative side, however, the Joke Maker can be insulting, biting, and satiric, and can resort to stereotyping and other forms of destructive comedy. The Fun Meister might use ridicule and dark humor centered around tragedy and suffering; such humor can be hurtful and degrading. When the Joy Master combines the best of the Joke Maker and the Fun Meister, he or she is inspiring, inclusive, warm-hearted, innocent, and humanizing. His or her high-level play can be healing. On the other hand, the Life Mocker is cynical, sarcastic, exclusive, cold-hearted, worldly, and dehumanizing.

Once Loomans and Kolberg have established both the right and wrong types of humor to use in a classroom setting, they spend the next few chapters suggesting ways to incorporate humor into the curriculum. For instance, Chapter 13 presents us with a scenario in which a woman named Diane was forced to take an eight-hour driving seminar as punishment for a minor traffic offense. She was dreading the experience, expecting it to be long and boring, until she heard that "a local comedy group was licensed to teach the course" and that they "planned to incorporate humor, acting, jokes, and music into the day" (32). The lesson involved group participation in various traffic scenarios, and by the time it was over, not only was Diane's face aching from all the

laughter, but she had scored 100 percent on the morning quiz and she had made several new friends. Humor was not only an effective teaching tool, but it was also an effective tool for healing. What was initially an act of discipline became a source of fun, while the intended effect of teaching a lesson was not only uncompromised, but strengthened.

Chapter 28 deals specifically with the topic of humor that heals: "According to recent research conducted by a leading university in the Midwest, 80 percent of teachers polled claimed that the main problems in their schools involved discipline" (153). However, Loomans and Kolberg argue that classrooms in which laughter and playfulness are abundant tend to have better-behaved and better-performing students. Imposing a strict environment that discourages playfulness does not eliminate playfulness. Instead, that playfulness becomes misdirected, the result being disruptive and rebellious behavior. On the other hand, "Teachers…have commented on a decrease in behavior problems in direct proportion to the addition of humor and play into the classroom" (153). Humans have a tendency to be creative, and everyone desires to be happy. If authoritative control tries to inhibit this creativity and search for joy, the result is a host of disciplinary problems.

Throughout the text, Loomans and Kolberg suggest many ways in which teachers can incorporate humor and play into the learning process. For example, Chapter 31 is entitled "Before and Laughter Scenarios" (160). Each scenario begins with a "Before" segment, wherein the teacher intimidates his or her students, and then concludes with a segment entitled "…And Laughter," in which a similar scenario is presented, except now the professor is trying to appeal to students' sense of humor by incorporating playfulness into the class lecture. Scene 4, for instance, begins with an Anatomy and Physiology

instructor named Professor Cantor, who opens the first class by saying, "I'm going to see to it that you are challenged the way a college student should be challenged. You will be taking an extensive test each week. I'll expect you to read two chapters per week. The questions will be difficult, and to answer them successfully you'll have to know the material as well as you know your social security number" (169). Professor Cantor goes on to say that forty percent of the class, initially comprised of five hundred students, will drop before April. This version of Professor Cantor is then juxtaposed with a humorous version of the same professor clad in a "nineteenth-century costume" (170). Professor Cantor then begins conversing with his model skeleton and making puns such as "Work them to the bone" (170) and "That's why he's just a bag of bones!" (171). In the former scenario, Professor Cantor frightens the students, scaring several of them away before the first assignment is even issued. In the latter scenario, however, Professor Cantor not only gets his students' attention with his whimsical behavior, but he motivates them through laughter and entertainment. The students in the former scenario give up without even trying; the students in the latter scenario will work harder in exchange for bearing witness to Professor Cantor's amusing antics.

Diana Loomans is a college instructor as well as the creator of The Laughing Classroom programs. She is renowned for her innovative and dynamic teaching style, which leaves "participants inspired, roused, and highly motivated" (back cover). She is also a bestselling author of titles such as *The Lovables*, *Positively Mother Goose*, and *Full Steam Ahead*. Currently, she directs the Global Learning and The Quantum Success Coaching Institute in Los Angeles, California. Karen Kolberg is a co-founder of an improvisation company called ComedySportz, for which "she has written, directed, and

produced more than forty original theater productions, including a full-length musical" (back cover). She is also the president of KJK Enterprises in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and she delivers presentations to universities and Fortune 500 companies on "creativity, accelerated learning techniques, and stress management" (back cover).

This text is very creative and engaging with its use of humorous illustrations, but not every technique is useful or applicable to every kind of class. The text attempts to reach a broad audience, never covering any one particular subject or educational level in any kind of detail, and therefore fails to connect to instructors of all subjects and educational levels as effectively as it potentially could. In appearance, it seems as if it is intended for elementary education because of the simple nature of the illustrations. However, the accompanying text frequently refers to colleges and professors. Even so, many of the playful suggestions for class activities seem more along the lines of the kind of humor small children might find amusing rather than the kind high school and college students might laugh at. Nonetheless, this book makes a compelling case for the use of humor and play in any school curriculum, and its effort to reach a broad audience ensures it almost always offers something worthwhile to instructors in all disciplines and on all levels of learning.

Martin, Rod A. *The Psychology of Humor: An Integrative Approach.* Burlington, MA: Elsevier Academic Press, 2007. Print.

In the preface and the beginning of the first chapter of this book, Martin laments the general lack of literature on humor from a psychological perspective. He comments that laughter and amusement are such common, everyday occurrences experienced universally by all races and in all societies that one would think that more literature would exist on the psychological effects of humor on people. However, he notes that "Because humor is so familiar and is such an enjoyable and playful activity, many people might think they already understand it and do not need research in psychology to explain it" (1). As a result, few psychology textbooks discuss humor in any great length, if at all, and few scholarly books or articles discuss the psychology of humor. However, Martin acknowledges that scholars in various other disciplines have conducted a lot of research on humor's role in their fields in recent years and have published their findings. Martin has compiled elements of the research in these various fields into a single book while also relating these findings to the many different branches of psychology. In doing so, he hopes to reach a broad audience not only of psychology students and scholars, but also of researchers and academics in other fields of study. Martin attempts to break down the basics of psychology in a manner that is understandable to readers less familiar with the field than he is.

Martin puts a particular emphasis on the emotional aspects of humor as well as the forms it can take. "Psychological studies have shown that exposure to humorous stimuli produces an increase in positive affect and mood" (7). Smiling and laughter are expressions of the emotion of mirth, similar to how frowning and yelling are expressions

of anger, and so laughter is a social behavior; "if there were no other people to communicate to," Martin argues, "we would not need laughter" (9). Martin discusses several forms that humor can take. One such form is the standard joke, which is comprised of a setup and a punchline, wherein the setup directs the audience's mind toward a logical conclusion, and then the punchline betrays that expectation with a different, oftentimes nonsensical, conclusion. Most daily humor, however, comes from what Martin calls "Spontaneous Conversational Humor," which is generally comprised of anecdotes, stories about one's experiences, which are often bizarre; wordplay, such as puns or distortions of the meanings of words; and irony, wherein the literal meaning deviates from the intended meaning of a word or statement. Lastly, Martin acknowledges unintentional humor, wherein something humorous occurs or is said by accident, such as a Freudian slip or a physical mishap.

After determining what humor is and identifying some of the most common forms of humor, Martin discusses the psychological functions of humor. Martin argues that while humor is generally considered playful and non-serious, it can be, and in many cases is, "used for additional purposes relating to social communication and influence, tension relief, and coping with adversity" (15). In terms of social communication, people use humor partly to amuse other people in order to impress them with their wit and gain their approval. Humor can also be used to avoid hostile confrontations by addressing a concern in a comical manner. Additionally, humor can prevent an argument between friends from escalating to the point of destroying the friendship by allowing the friends to see the humorous side of their conflict. In many cases, the phrase "I was only joking" might be used in the event that a friend does not respond well to a humorous intervention, allowing

the person cracking the joke to retract whatever message he or she might have been trying, in all seriousness, to get across. However, aggressive humor such as teasing and ridicule is often employed in order to coerce another individual to adopt one's opinion, such as in the art of satire.

Back on the positive end of the spectrum, humor can be used to cope with adversity and stress. Martin argues that humor allows people to see their problems from a new perspective, which in turn causes their problems to seem not as threatening and allows them to come up with creative problem-solving solutions. Additionally, the positive emotion of mirth allows for a quicker recovery from cardiovascular-related problems induced by high levels of stress such as heart disease and high blood pressure. Therefore, humor is useful for both mental and physical health. "Studies of survivors of extreme adversity such as the brutal conditions of concentration camps indicate that humor, in the form of joking about the oppressors as well as the hardships endured, is often an important means of…maintaining group cohesion and morale…and thereby enabling individuals to survive in seemingly hopeless circumstances" (19). Even when enduring less adverse hardships than those already mentioned, people use humor to distance themselves from their anxieties by making light of threatening situations. Martin cites examples of cancer patients using humor to cope with their illness so that they may still enjoy life, or even healthy people joking and laughing about death as a mechanism for coping with their own mortality. People can also relive their frustrations with other individuals by making jokes at the expense of those who frustrate them and yet must be tolerated, such as authoritative figures. Thus, humor is a helpful tool for allowing people not to be defeated by life's hardships.

In subsequent chapters, Martin discusses some of the other uses and functions of humor. In Chapter 4, for instance, he talks about the effects of humor on cognition. Martin and many other theorists and researchers have cited a link between a person's sense of humor and creativity. Some researchers argue that humor is a type of creativity, while others believe that humor and creativity are separate, but closely related, phenomena. In either case, no one denies there being a correlation at all. Martin proposes two hypotheses as to how humor might influence creative thinking within people: "First, the flexible thought processes and activation of multiple schemas involved in the processing of incongruities in humor may facilitate the flexible and divergent thinking required for creativity" (102). In other words, the creation of a humorous scenario (in its most basic form, the setup and the punchline that betrays the expectations created by that setup) is complex and therefore requires the person conceiving the joke—or even someone trying to understand a joke—to think in a non-linear fashion. Second, the sensation of mirth created by humorous stimuli can help to alleviate anxiety and stress, allowing a person to think calmly and less rigidly about a problem or situation, and perhaps find a solution that is, like the punchline of a good joke, unexpected and clever.

Next, Martin asks if humor enhances memory, or rather if people remember material better when it is humorous. Martin cites experiments wherein evidence suggests that people pay a greater amount of attention to humorous stimuli and therefore put more effort into retaining information when it is humorous. For instance, when presented with a series of ordinary sentences and humorous counterparts to those sentences, most people were able to recall the humorous sentences word-for-word better than their non-humorous equivalents. In another experiment, participants read comic strips, some of

which were funny and some of which were not. While they were able to recall the basic premises of the non-humorous cartoons, they were able to quote dialogue verbatim from the humorous ones. "Overall, these findings suggest that humor serves as a sort of mnemonic technique of memory aid, causing greater elaboration of information and therefore enhancing its transfer and storage in long-term memory" (104). However, Martin also warns educators, advertisers, and others interested in using humor to promote memory retention that the use of humor alongside non-humorous information, such as course material or the name and purpose of a product, may compromise the audience's ability to remember the non-humorous elements of the lecture, advertisement, or other presentation of information. Therefore, Martin suggests that humor be integrated within course material or a promotion of a product in order to create a humorous association between the two that allows the audience to retain the important information as well as the humor.

In Chapter 11, Martin discusses the applications of humor not just in psychotherapy, but also in academia and the workplace. He starts by discussing several different therapeutic techniques involving humor, either on a large scale or as a complement to other therapeutic approaches. For example, those with irrational fears such as phobias can sometimes be rehabilitated through the use of humorous hyperboles of worst case scenarios revolving around their irrational fears. By mentioning these scenarios, therapists not only force patients to face their greatest fears, but they ease patients' anxieties in the process by turning their fears into objects of ridicule and amusement, allowing them to laugh in the face of what once frightened them. Even on a smaller scale, some therapists use humor simply to cheer patients up and create a

connection with them, allowing them to forget their problems momentarily and enjoy life. "Appropriate uses of humor by the therapist can also help clients to take a more tolerant view of life, accepting their own imperfections as well as the limitations and uncertainties of the world around them" (343). Moreover, humor helps to reduce the effects of negative emotions such as depression, stress, anxiety, and hostility, replacing them with positive feelings while also allowing patients to see the catalysts of their anxieties from another, more manageable perspective.

While education has been traditionally viewed as too serious of a matter to permit incorporation of humor into the learning process, Martin observes that in recent decades, educational trends have shifted towards creating a more relaxed and fun learning environment: "The current prevailing philosophy of education argues that students are much more likely to be motivated to learn and to retain information if they are happy and amused than if they are feeling anxious and threatened" (350). By relieving students of their fears, an educator can create a stronger connection with his or her students, again allowing for greater levels of creative thinking and problem-solving. Furthermore, incorporating humor into the curriculum can help to relieve student boredom, making students more interested in the material than they might otherwise be.

Like education, work is also generally viewed as too important to be funny. However, Martin notes that there are similar hypotheses about humor in the workplace as there are to the use of humor in other avenues of life such as therapy and education: "A number of people have suggested that a more playful work environment in which humor is encouraged might produce a happier, healthier, less stressed, and more productive work force, engendering better social interactions among workers and managers, and

fostering more creative thinking and problem solving" (360). Martin observes that in the last twenty years, a new type of business consultant, whom he refers to as a "humor consultant," has emerged to promote workplace humor in seminars across the world. During these workshops, humor consultants discuss ways in which workers can make their offices or places of business more lively and enjoyable such as by exchanging amusing stories with one another during breaks or by posting cartoons and jokes on bulletin boards to entertain and motivate each other throughout the day. In addition, supervisors and managers can use humor as a kinder, easier way to offer their subordinates constructive criticism on the job. Finally, Martin asserts that humor can bind a workforce together, creating what he calls an "organizational culture" that is able to maintain productivity and competitiveness in the free market. Simply by their use of humorous quips amongst one another, co-workers and colleagues are able to form a connection with one another, making it easier for them to work together, support and motivate each other, and solve problems together.

Rod A. Martin teaches psychology at the University of Western Ontario. His specialty is Clinical Psychology. Martin earned his B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. from the University of Waterloo. In recent years, Martin has developed a particular interest in humor, both as a personality trait and as a coping mechanism to deal with stress and to regulate both mental and physical health. It is because of that interest that Martin was driven to write this book. The book is intended to serve two functions. One of those functions is for psychology instructors, who may use this book as the primary textbook for a course on the psychology of humor, or at least as a complementary textbook for a psychology class wherein the instructor might incorporate a unit or a lesson on humor's

role in psychology. Martin laments that no such class exists at most schools, but having taught such a class himself, using this book as the primary text, he has found that the course is well-received and hopes that other psychology instructors might also one day adopt his idea. The other function that he hopes the book will serve is "as a useful research handbook for students as well as more seasoned academics who might be interested in conducting their own research in this topic area" (xvi). Martin is successful at discussing the psychology of humor in broad enough terms to reach out to a general audience of readers from multiple disciplines without alienating his primary reader-base in the field of psychology. This book is useful not only as a psychology course textbook, but also as a general overview for any individual of any profession or field of study.

Miller, Barbara N. *The Uses and Effects of Humor in the School Workplace*. Diss. University of Oregon, 2008. Web. 21 Jul. 2013.

Miller's doctoral dissertation explores the role that humor plays among teachers and within the workplace in general. Due to limited research on the matter, Miller does not make an argument for or against the use of humor. However, she does attempt to discern how faculty use humor and the effects that humor has on themselves, their colleagues, and their students. To conduct her study, Miller recruited twenty participants from one school to take a survey regarding the uses and effects of humor in their own school. From the results, Miller noticed a number of patterns among participants, with mostly positive results. However, she notes in her abstract that more research is needed in more diverse school settings before any real conclusions can be drawn about the correlation between use of humor in the classroom and student success and morale.

As this dissertation is exploratory, Miller takes on an inquisitive tone in her introduction by asking a number of questions: "What role does humor play for teachers in elementary schools?...Is the topic of humor one that should be addressed in teacher education programs? Should pre-service teachers receive information on appropriate uses of humor in their future prospective workplaces? Should in service teachers receive professional development on the role humor plays amongst adults in their schools?" (1). Miller notes there is rarely, if ever, any mention of humor during teacher training, and even if there is, it gets little more than a passing mention. However, she also observes that teachers, like other adults, use humor as a means of getting through the day, especially when working in a stressful environment. Given the diversity of any student body, a classroom can reflect a number of social problems, from laziness and apathy to

drug abuse and domestic violence. She argues that whether we realize it or not, we frequently use humor as a coping mechanism to deal with our problems.

Taking this assertion a step further, Miller argues that not only do teachers use humor as a coping mechanism, but also that educators could take humor even further by using comedy to create positive learning environments for their students. However, she reiterates that not enough research has been conducted to confirm or deny her thesis. She observes that humor is a force that people take for granted; it is a part of the work environment, but few generally perceive it as an important part. Miller also notes that humor can have both positive and negative effects, but she asserts that its effects are more often positive. Humor can make uncomfortable situations less awkward, relieve tension and stress, break the ice between two or more individuals, and above all else "improve the quality of life, job satisfaction, and performance" (3). To that end, Miller feels that it is necessary to ask teachers themselves what types of humor they frequently use or encounter and what effects humor has on themselves and on students.

As there are few studies about the effects of humor on education, Miller focuses her research on literature regarding the effects of humor in the workplace and in life as a whole. After her review of the literature, she relays the results of a survey she conducted with twenty teachers. Seventeen teachers responded that they have frequently witnessed staff using humor with one another, while the remaining three responded that they have only sometimes witnessed the same thing. These numbers are highly relevant to Miller's thesis. In another question, she asked whether teachers use humor with one another during the lesson-planning process, to which "[f]our responded 'very often' or 'often,' 10 responded 'sometimes,' and 6 responded 'rarely' or 'very rarely.'" (44). These numbers

appear less significant to Miller's case that humor is an effective tool in the academic workplace, even though lesson planning is one of the most stressful parts of the teaching profession.

Miller next inquired about the use of humor across hierarchical roles. Only two teachers responded that using humor with those above or below them in a hierarchy was a common habit for them; eleven responded that this trend occurs occasionally; and six responded that it is rare. These responses reflect that humor is rarely used when addressing an individual of different rank. Inversely, results illustrate that teachers frequently use humor when interacting with each other, with sixteen teachers responding with "very often" or "often," three responding with "sometimes," and only one responding with "rarely." Therefore, Miller's findings show that teachers are usually more comfortable joking around with their peers than with their supervisors. Several of these teachers agreed that humor is often a great tool to help them relieve stress after a long day, such as seeing "the funny side of situations that, at the time, were frustrating or hopeless" (45), as one teacher puts it.

Afterwards, Miller asked each of the same twenty teachers a series of questions regarding how frequently they encounter humor in their workplaces. One such question asked whether teachers witnessed their colleagues using humor to build friendships; sixteen people stated that such an occurrence is common while the remaining four answered that it happens sometimes. Additionally, nineteen teachers answered that they frequently or occasionally see humor being used to prove a point, and seventeen answered that they frequently or occasionally see humor being used to express approval. Again, these results reflect favorably on Miller's thesis.

Conversely, Miller also asked this same group of teachers how often they saw humor being used to express disapproval. Only one teacher answered that this was a frequent occurrence, while six others answered that it happens sometimes, ten said that it rarely happens, and one even said that this use of humor never takes place. These numbers would appear to indicate that humor is far more frequently used to build people up rather than to tear them down.

Positive uses of humor within the school workplace certainly seem to outweigh negative uses, at least according to the testimonies of these twenty teachers. For instance, while fourteen teachers answered that humor is often used, and six teachers answered that humor is sometimes used, to relieve tension and stress, only one person reported that humor is often used to exert power, with two reporting sometimes, eight reporting rarely, four reporting very rarely, four reporting never, and one person even choosing to withhold answering the question, "causing speculation as to whether this may have been a personal issue" (48). If one is to take these responses at face value, the results of this survey certainly seem to support Miller's hypothesis that humor is an effective tool in the learning environment.

Miller concludes her dissertation by discussing and analyzing the many uses that humor has in the school workplace based on her research, interviews, and survey responses. The most common use of humor, she found, was to make a difficult situation more lighthearted. She provides an example using a story the teachers told her about a colleague of theirs named Carol who used humor to cope with the loss of her dog. From that moment onward, the teachers would have regular meetings anytime they felt the need for a good laugh. Another common use of humor that Miller covers is to prevent burnout.

"The dimension of emotional exhaustion, described as the feeling that one has used up all of one's emotional resources, relates to the rejuvenation teachers reported from relief humor, as well as to biological uses of humor" (54). Thus, humor can relieve not only emotional stress, but even physical stress. Lastly, Miller observes that teachers use humor to build relationships with one another. Educators often share anecdotes with one another about their students, and in doing so they generate laughter and joy among their colleagues, building friendship and trust.

Barbara Miller has been an adjunct professor and educational consultant at the University of Oregon since 2000. Her areas of special interest include the role of humor in the school, both as a workplace and within the classroom itself; differentiated and brain-based learning; and special education (vi). She received an Associate of Science in Early Childhood in 1969 from the University of Cincinnati, a Bachelor of Science in Elementary and Special Education in 1971 from Ohio State University, a Master of Science in Special Education in 1992 from the University of Oregon, and a Doctor of Education in 2008 also from the University of Oregon. She produced this dissertation as part of her work on this final degree. She has received multiple awards, including the Dave Family Humor Scholarship from the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor in 2008; the Second Place International Award in the Enterprise Business Plan Competition and Presentation from the Association of Pacific Rim Universities in Singapore in 2006; and the First Place Award for Business Plan Development and Presentation in the Association of Pacific Rim Universities Enterprise Business Plan Competition from the University of Oregon in 2006. She had one major publication at the time of this dissertation entitled *Teacher Today*, published in 2005.

Shibley, Ike. *The Best of the Teaching Professor*. Madison: Magna Publications, 2005. Print.

This book contains a collection of articles from a newsletter entitled *The Teaching Professor*. In the introduction, Sibley refers to his newsletter as conversational, offering pedagogical advice while talking "with the reader, not at the reader" (3). Sibley states that he had a hard time narrowing down which articles to include in his "best of" collection, but he ultimately decided upon the articles that he believed offered the most practical advice. Sibley laments the current state of secondary education, but he feels optimistic about the possibilities for learning enhancement, which he discusses throughout the newsletter articles.

In Chapter 2, Shibley shapes his argument through the use of metaphors. Metaphors, he believes, can enhance a person's attitude and put the work that they do into perspective. For example, Shibley compares the ways two bricklayers describe their work. Whereas one bricklayer states that he is simply laying bricks, the other says that she is "building a cathedral, a grand structure that will seat 2,000 and enhance the community in many ways" (21). The woman's response is much more positive; she is looking at the bigger picture and seeing the long-term effects that the tedious job she is doing will have. She is looking forward to the fruits of her labor rather than just at the labor itself. Shibley argues that teachers should resemble bricklayers; teachers metaphorically lay down bricks to build student confidence, motivation, and intellect. To that end, Shibley encourages educators to look ahead to the grander scheme of their work as they are educating the generation that will inherit the world.

To that end, Shibley spends the third chapter introducing ideas for dynamic classroom activities. One exercise that Shibley has incorporated into his own management principles class is what he calls the Knowledge Game. Shibley divides his class into groups and projects questions onto the board via PowerPoint, then gives the groups twenty seconds to come up with an answer together before answering aloud. Thus, he incorporates the element of play into what might otherwise be a boring study session and review. In doing so, he makes it easier for his students to retain the information than if he simply gave a lecture or commanded his students to read their textbooks.

Chapter 4 is focused on lectures. It opens with a section on how to pace lectures properly. Shibley clarifies that the pace of a lecture has less to do with how quickly the speaker talks and more to do with students' individual perceptions—in other words, whether or not they can listen at the same pace at which the instructor is lecturing. In other words, if all the students need to do is listen, then the instructor can speak at a fairly fast pace. "If, on the other hand, they are supposed to take notes or do some thinking or problem-solving, the lecture must slow down accordingly" (38). Additionally, Shibley says that lecturers should not try to force too much new material into a single lecture as doing so will cause the lecture to seem too fast-paced; reviews, on the other hand, can cover more material as the information is already familiar to the listeners. Shibley offers a few suggestions as to how an instructor can detect his or her own pace when lecturing. These suggestions include listening to a recording of oneself lecturing, asking for feedback from students, and reading over students' notes.

Also in Chapter 4, Shibley discusses how to incorporate humor into class lectures. He starts by encouraging his readers to approach humor as a skill that anyone can learn as opposed to a gift with which a person is or is not born. Next, he advises that educators be sensitive to students' feelings: "Many popular comics rely on put-downs. They use humor based on race, sex, or religion, or that plays off someone's mistakes, etc. Humor at the expense of others has no place in the classroom" (40). Additionally, Shibley insists that instructors use humor sparingly as a supplement to the material. "When humor is used for the sake of humor…student respect for the material (and the instructor) diminishes" (40). Shibley also states that the style of the humor will depend largely on the subject being taught. To that end, he suggests that teachers use funny anecdotes from their own lives in order to demonstrate important concepts. However, Shibley also encourages instructors to borrow material from cartoons, comic strips, and comedians as well. The more popular a cultural icon is, the more likely the students are to appreciate the instructor's homage to the icon through his or her referential humor.

Humor, Shibley asserts, is largely based on the absurd. For that reason, Shibley also suggests that instructors apply "classroom concepts to unusual situations" (41). In other words, he encourages instructors to teach concepts that are not inherently funny in a manner that adds humor to them. For example, an anatomy instructor might demonstrate the physics of arm muscles by pulling on and wrestling with a gooey Tootsie Roll, or a math instructor might teach exponential functions with what Shibley calls the "Miller Lite Fermentation Formula" (41). Additionally, Shibley suggests using wordplay whenever a humorous-sounding vocabulary term is introduced. For instance, the geological term "water table" can be used to refer to a night stand next to a water bed, or

the anthropological term "instrumental aggression" could refer to the act of threatening a person with a violin.

Finally, Shibley suggests that educators adopt humorous personas in the classroom. One suggestion he gives is to achieve humor through impersonations; a literature or theater instructor might dress in Renaissance clothing when teaching Shakespeare, or a science teacher might dress up as and quote Sherlock Holmes when teaching the scientific method. "Role-playing communicates that you don't take yourself too seriously" (41), Shibley argues. As examples, Shibley says that he keeps a police hat and baton nearby for discussing disciplinary actions and consequences, a set of angel wings for praying that students do not over-complicate subject matter, and a vampire costume for his accounting teacher persona "Account" Dracula. Shibley concludes his section on humor by encouraging educators to take risks, learn from their mistakes, and refine their teaching styles.

Dr. Ike Shibley is an assistant professor of chemistry at Penn State Berks-Lehigh Valley. He earned a Ph.D in biochemistry in 1996 from East Carolina University and a Bachelor of Sciences in Chemical Engineering in 1987 from the University of Pittsburgh. Shibley has worked for Penn State since 1996, where he serves as a sciences department coordinator. There, he researches the effects of fetal alcohol syndrome using a chicken embryo model. He also has a pedagogical interest in finding new ways to enhance student learning in colleges. It is for that reason that he writes his newsletter. A common theme that recurs throughout the articles selected for *The Best of the Teaching Professor* is the theme of play. Shibley finds that students have an easier time learning in less stressful environments in which play is not only allowed but also encouraged. Games make it

easier for students to retain and recall information while involving them more directly in the learning process; humor engages students, alleviates stress, and makes students more likely to pay attention to lectures of all paces. By offering these articles, Shibley makes his vision of a more learner-friendly school very clear.

Tamblyn, Doni. *Laugh and Learn: 95 Ways to Use Humor for More Effective Teaching and Training*. New York: American Management Association, 2003. Print.

Tamblyn opens by acknowledging that many educators believe in the ability of humor to help students learn and retain information. However, she believes that the reason humor is not more frequently incorporated into class curricula is due to the predetermined belief of most educators that humor is a gift that few people are born with rather than a skill that anyone can learn to develop. Tamblyn's argument is a combination of these two viewpoints: "humor is a gift…that you, I, and everyone else, were born with" (2). Another reason Tamblyn cites to explain why most educators avoid trying to use humor is the fear that a joke will "bomb." In other words, the joke will not be funny, and the class will not take anything the teacher says seriously ever again. Even worse, some educators fear offending their students with potentially off-color or inappropriate humor. In some cases, a topic may be deemed too serious for humor. However, Tamblyn argues not only that everyone is capable of effectively utilizing humor, but that humor is closely linked to creativity, which is a necessary virtue for solving difficult problems. "Humor, then, is just creativity that doesn't get the expected results" (11). To encourage such creativity, Tamblyn lists ninety-five techniques for educators to employ when using humor in the education process. The ninety-five techniques themselves have their own alphabetical table of contents to help readers easily locate each strategy.

Before delving into the techniques, however, Tamblyn opens by arguing the reasons why humor should be used in the classroom. Chapter 3 lists a series of reasons why humor can be used to deliver "brain-compatible learning," or learning appropriate to the brain's methods of taking in and retaining information. The first reason is that humor

is easy and natural. While Tamblyn acknowledges that the art of comedy is not necessarily easy, she makes a distinction between comedy as an art form and humor as an everyday tool for communication: "humor is less about jokes than about *play*—and play is an inborn human trait" (35). Playfulness is a natural human emotion, and Tamblyn asserts that it is a useful tool for connecting to students and helping them to connect to lessons and retain information.

The second reason is that humor reduces stress and any sense that students might have that their teacher is a threat to their aspirations. Tamblyn argues that stress and a sense of being under threat reduce the brain's ability to learn, and the resulting emotional stimulus "excites the 'fight or flight' mechanisms in the mid-brain" (36). Tamblyn even goes on to say that distress can cause brain cells to die. Inversely, laughter reduces stress, thus saving brain cells.

The third reason that Tamblyn offers is that humor brings people together. Tamblyn notes that two people involved in an argument will suddenly put their differences aside if something occurs to make the two people laugh. The fourth reason Tamblyn argues for the use of humor in academia is that "it enlists two of the communicator's best friends—relevancy and visual memory" (37). As an example, Tamblyn recalls a flight experience during which she was ignoring the flight attendant's safety review until she began incorporating jokes into the routine, such as "there is never any smoking aboard our flights. If we catch you smoking here at Southwest, you'll be asked to step out onto the wing and enjoy our feature presentation, *Gone with the Wind*" (38). Not only did the flight attendant catch Tamblyn's attention this way, but Tamblyn was better able to recall the experience because of the humor.

The fifth reason is emotional engagement. While a person might weigh his or her options logically based on a rational assessment of pros and cons, a decision will often be made largely based on emotion. Learners are the same: "Without emotion, cognitive thinking is limited" (39). In other words, learners will determine the importance of what an instructor is teaching them based on how they feel about the topic and they will retain the information only for as long as they believe they need to, even if it is only long enough to be able to pass a test. Humor, however, can engage people's emotions, thus making them want to learn and retain the material.

The sixth and final reason is that humor allows the brain to take a break to digest the information and give it meaning. Using a graph labelled "the curve of forgetting," Tamblyn illustrates the brain's tendency to forget. Memory retention, Tamblyn argues, is heightened by the brain's desire to retain information. Furthermore, "the brain can only take in so much information in a given time period" (41). The more an employer, for instance, allows employees in training to relax and not try to process even more information, the more likely those employees will be to recall the information that they have already been given. While employers might consider this technique to be an unproductive waste of time, Tamblyn argues that this strategy of not overloading the brain achieves greater long-term efficiency in regard to memory retention and is therefore an effective approach to use when teaching and training.

Subsequent chapters elaborate on each of these reasons while applying them to academia. In Chapter 5, Tamblyn discusses the effects of fear and intimidation in the classroom. In her example from her eight-grade math class, when corporal punishment was still legal in Canada, we are presented with a teacher who threatens all misbehavior

and shortcomings with "the strap." In this hostile environment, a student is unable to answer a simple math question, and instead nervously answers, "The strap?" (82). Based on this scenario, Tamblyn argues that fear and intimidation cause the brain to release stress hormones, stopping blood flow to the frontal lobe of the brain and hindering creative thinking. These stress hormones impair such essential skills as long-range planning, goal-setting, and judgment. However, if a teacher can make his or her students laugh, they will feel more at ease and therefore be able to think and perform better than they would under pressure.

In Chapter 6, Tamblyn illustrates how humor can bring people together and create a connection between a teacher and his or her students. The key to creating this connection is by establishing the classroom as a comfort zone for students, a process which Tamblyn breaks down into steps. The first step is to use plain language. Tamblyn feels that scholars, for no other reason than to try to sound sophisticated, use larger words than necessary, and more of those words, in order to establish a point that could be easily summarized in fewer and smaller words. The second step is to break the ice using self-deprecating humor. When educators broadcast their accomplishments, such as degrees, publications, and awards, they elevate their status well above that of their students. "It's pompous and annoying, and if anything, it makes you look less sure of yourself" (109), Tamblyn stresses. However, Tamblyn is not arguing that an educator should never talk about his or her accomplishments, but rather that the educator should not feel the need to make the students feel inferior. By using self-deprecating humor, the educator can bring himself or herself down to a more human level, making his or her accomplishments seem like the result of a long and difficult struggle of an ordinary person rather than the gifts of

a natural born genius. In doing so, the teacher's accomplishments seem much more achievable to the common student.

In Chapter 8, Tamblyn emphasizes the importance of engaging students' emotions. One has to be careful when using humor, as any joke can offend a person's sentiments. Therefore, Tamblyn argues, educators must understand their own emotions and those of the students in order to effectively incorporate humor into the teaching process. However, that is not to say that negative emotions cannot be expressed through humor. Tamblyn believes that humor can "create for ourselves a rare spirit of tolerance and community, in which even negative emotions can be expressed and dealt with constructively" (156). Humor, therefore, is an effective way to manage one's emotions and the emotions of others. However, in Chapter 10, Tamblyn advises against using humor as a tool for hurting others. While teasing is common between friends, it is not appropriate for an educator to use against his or her students unless an interpersonal relationship has been formed and there is an understanding between two individuals that these hurtful remarks are not intended to be hurtful, but rather playful. Tamblyn also advises against making jokes involving race, ethnicity, religion, obscenity, partisan politics, or sexual orientation (199-200).

Tamblyn wraps things up in Chapter 11 with a simple step-by-step process for using humor in the classroom. Step 1 is to keep it short: "The longer the joke, the funnier it had better be" (212). Step 2 is to make it specific. In other words, replace vague concepts like "the airport" with something in particular to which the students can relate, such as "JFK Airport" if one's students live in New York; it is much funnier to talk about how painful it is to navigate JFK Airport than just any random airport because the New

York audience can relate. Step 3 is to put the punchline at the end. A punchline should never be followed up by more explanation or buildup. Finally, Step 4 is to pause. Allow the audience to react, and allow laughter to release the tension.

Doni Tamblyn is the president of a Philadelphia-based training and consulting firm called HumorRules, founded in 1993. This firm “helps organizations to attract quality employees and build their skills quickly” (255). She has been writing and performing comedy for stage, radio, and television since 1979; was once a member of the American Film, Television, and Radio Actors Union; and founded two award-winning musical comedy groups: Sirens and The Dinettes. In 1989, Tamblyn began working for the California Department of Motor Vehicles as a professional comedian in order to “breathe life into state-sanctioned classes for traffic violators” (255). From then on, she began studying adult learning theories such as Accelerative Learning and Brain-Compatible Learning, theories which she covers in this book. Tamblyn is also a magna cum laude graduate from San Francisco State University and has a degree in Broadcast Communications. Her extensive education is reflected in this book, the contents of which cover a diversity of disciplines such as psychology, communication, and adult education.

Personal Reflection

It was January, 2001. I lay in my hospital bed, bored into depression, unsure if I would ever be set free from these shackles, or feeding tubes as the doctors called them. My phobia of needles had dissolved into complacency due to the routine nature of blood tests. My mother encouraged me to get out of my room, walk around the hospital, and mingle with other patients, but I had no interest in doing so. I had no interest in anything. "Stop feeling sorry for yourself!" my mom told me, having begun to lose patience. "All you had was back surgery, and so maybe things got a little complicated with your duodenum being sewn up during the stitching process. Suck it up! There are children in this hospital who have cancer, and some of them are terminal. You don't have it so bad!" Hearing about how much worse other people had it did nothing to make me feel better. In an effort to forget about the miserable state of the hospital environment, I flipped through the channels on the television, trying desperately to find something to watch other than the inauguration of George W. Bush.

That was when I stumbled upon Drew Carrey's *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* I had never actually seen the show, but I had heard about it from some friends, so I decided to give it a shot. Suddenly, I was overcome with this involuntary sensation that caused the edges of my mouth to stretch from ear to ear in the shape of the letter U. For the first time in over a month, I was smiling—and not just smiling, but laughing also! In an instant, I was no longer bored, miserable, or depressed. At that moment, I had discovered perhaps my most powerful tool for coping with adversities in life: humor.

Humor, I discovered, has the power to reinvigorate a person who has lost his or her motivation to carry on. In the months that followed, I overcame the stress of two

months' worth of make-up schoolwork by talking to my friends and joking around with them. Life had never been more enjoyable, and with my newfound sense of humor, I found myself attracting new friends. I realized then that humor has the power to bring people together. Though I was not yet sure what I wanted to do with my life, I knew that I wanted humor to be a part of my career. My dream back then was to be a writer, and while I primarily wrote fantasy with a mix of action and melodrama back in those days, I always made room for comic relief. After all, even William Shakespeare felt the need to relieve the tension in his tragic plays with humor once in a while.

I soon began to realize that humor had functions reaching far beyond the writing profession. Perhaps the best math teacher I ever had was my 11th grade Algebra II teacher, Mrs. Tyler. The reason I consider her the best is because of how effectively she helped her students to retain what she taught. With her spontaneous sense of humor and her many silly voices, she made math seem less monotonous and more fun. She never failed to maintain her students' attention, and moreover, I retained all the information she imparted. I passed the class with a 101 average, having answered most of the extra credit questions correctly in addition to acing all the tests. Thanks to Mrs. Tyler's efforts during the 2002-03 school year, I decided that a funny teacher is the best kind of teacher.

Just as I found humor to be a helpful tool in academia, I also found humor to be effective at getting me through the workday. For almost eleven years, I worked in the grocery business, and I cannot say that it was ever my dream job. For the first few years, I did my best to fade into the scenery, do my job adequately, and just survive until a better opportunity came my way. On a good day, I merely tolerated my job. It was easy to keep human interaction to a minimum as a bagboy, but one day in 2006, my front end

manager encouraged me to attend cashier orientation and learn how to run a register. I willingly complied, but I was not ecstatic about the idea. Being a cashier meant that I had to speak to virtually every customer who came into the store. I kept it a secret from no one, least of all my manager, that I was not happy with this new setup. After a while, though, I remembered the mood-altering power of humor, and so I put on my first genuine smile and began to joke around with the customers. Not only did my morale improve, but so too did that of my customers. Some customers came to know me as "the funny guy," and they would seek out my checkout line whenever they shopped. Humor had done more for me than just get me through what could have been a boring eight-hour shift; it also helped me to come out of my shell and become the social extrovert who I am today.

My friends often cite my sense of humor as one of my greatest strengths. I have found that I can form a bond with nearly anyone through humor. Humor can act as an icebreaker, and people are naturally attracted to those with a good sense of humor. Humor can put difficult situations into perspective, thereby giving us power over our problems and allowing us to laugh at them. Moreover, humor allows us to take ourselves less seriously, instilling within us a liberating sense of humility. Above all else, though, funny people are just more enjoyable to be around than humorless people. While humor is obviously no substitute for genuine compassion, it is nevertheless an excellent complement to any friendship.

As much as I enjoy laughing and making others laugh, even I have experienced moments when life just was not funny anymore. The death of my grandfather in August of 2005 marked the first time I had ever experienced loss of a close family member, and

it was a pain unlike any I had ever known before. However, one thing that people kept mentioning, including the pastor who officiated at his funeral, was my grandfather's great sense of humor. Indeed, my grandfather loved to joke around, and to this day, my family and I still recall some of his favorite jokes: "Does your face hurt? Because it's killing me!" "You're pretty close to a genius. Come this way and you'll be even closer to one." In the years since his passing, we have kept his memory and his spirit alive through retellings of his jokes. After my grandmother passed away in September of 2009, we took solace in knowing that they were together again, and we likewise remember her fondly through, among other things, our humorous anecdotes of the time we spent with her.

It is much harder to find cause for amusement in the face of tragedy, however, when a young person dies. In my grandparents' case, I feel a sense of closure in knowing that they led long, fulfilling lives. They had each other for fifty-two and a half years, and they had three children and five grandchildren together. Far greater than my sorrow in losing them was my sense of satisfaction in knowing that their lives were as complete as one could ever hope. That was not the case on May 5, 2014, when my good friend Emily Cliff, or Emmy as my friends and I knew her, departed this world after a 12-year on-and-off battle with leukemia and Hodgkin's lymphoma. She was 24 years old at the time of her passing, and for the first time in my life, I attended the funeral of someone younger than myself.

In an instant, life was no longer funny. For years, I had always said, "The day I stop laughing is the day I stop being me." For the better part of May, all I did was isolate myself with my memories, wishing for nothing short of the ability to travel to the past, for I felt that the future no longer had anything to offer me. Ultimately, however, those

memories are what saved me. When I think of Emmy, I remember her always smiling. I remember her sense of humor, and how much she enjoyed my web comics and my cartoon impersonations. I remember her once telling me, “Don’t ever change into something you’re not.” Whether I knew it at the time or not, I had become something I was not: a humorless cynic.

Spending time with Emmy’s family and friends was therapeutic during this time. I heard anecdotes about Emmy’s time in hospice and how she put smiles on everyone’s faces and even made people laugh. She knew that she would not live to see her twenty-fifth birthday that following August, and so she insisted on celebrating it a few months early with birthday cake-flavored ice cream. Emmy went through cartons and cartons of ice cream with no concerns about her weight or any health problems that might be associated with such mass consumption of junk food. After all, she noted, she would not have to live with the consequences, so she could enjoy all the ice cream she wanted. She insisted that no one cry for her, but instead urged her loved ones to get together and have a party. And indeed, after her funeral, we gathered together, ate, drank, said a toast for Emmy, shared stories of our memories with her, cried together, and most importantly, laughed together.

Remembering Emmy’s selflessness, optimism, and humor helped motivate me to continue writing this thesis. The contrast between her attitude in her final weeks of life and my attitude when I was in the hospital thirteen years earlier could not be any greater. When I was in the hospital, I wanted to die; she did not want to die, but she faced death fearlessly. When I was in the hospital, I thought only of my own misery; her primary concern was how everyone else would carry on after her passing. When I was in the

hospital, I did little more than sulk; Emmy made the most of her final days, and they were filled with smiles and laughter. She may not have lived as long as my grandparents, and she did not get to do everything she wanted in life, but her life was every bit as fulfilling as theirs. Emmy had defeated cancer four times in the past, and no matter how sick she got, she always believed that she had a bright future ahead of her. Conversely, when I was in the hospital, I never imagined that the best years of my life were still ahead of me, or that I would meet someone as inspiring as Emmy. Thank you, Emmy, for helping to make me the person, and the teacher, I am today, and for making this thesis possible.