

Understanding Humor



Intervention Overview

As educators, it can be helpful to understand humor and its benefits to maximize its effect in our lives. The Benign Violation Theory categorizes humor as something that is simultaneously harmless, but a violation of our beliefs or expectations. This 'sweet spot' is different for all of us depending on how we perceive the situation (Humor Research Team, 2015, n.p.). To become better at humor, Andrew Tarvin (2017), a comedian and consultant, suggests that we start by sharing our point of view. Understanding that humor is a skill, helps us see that the more we attend to it and learn from our mistakes, the better we can become. Specifically in the classroom, Elias (2015) suggests that teachers can set up a joke Friday, laugh at themselves more often, and share memes and jokes.

For humor to be most effective and appreciated by students, teachers are encouraged to use humor that is appropriate and/or relates to the content or point of the lesson (Edwards and Gibboney, 1992, 22-23). There are four main types of humor that are considered appropriate:

- Related humor: jokes, stories, school life stereotypes, teacher performance and role-playing activities related to the course content
- Unrelated humor: Humor using the same categories listed above, but not related to class material
- Self-disparaging humor: embarrassing stories, making fun of self, making fun of silly mistakes made in class
- Unintentional or unplanned humor (Jonas, 2010, p. 5)

Humor is important to learning because it reduces students' anxiety levels and helps them feel more comfortable in the classroom. Not only does humor reduce symptoms of emotional distress, but it also promotes positive emotions. Studies have found that the use of humor in the classroom increases self-esteem, alertness and creativity (Lujan & DiCarlo, 2016; Savage et al., 2017).

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