Knowledge About Overseas Students

It is obvious that host faculty cannot be expected to become familiar with students' native languages. However, knowledge about a language is quite different from knowing how to speak it, and some insights can be picked up without too much difficulty. This is of particular value for short-term visits. Where an exchange program is involved, perhaps faculty members may have previously visited their student's homeland. Did they attempt to learn something about the language and the culture, even if not achieving the ideal of fluency (Uhl, 1991)?

For instance, a great deal of confusion with Thais can be avoided by knowing that in Thai "yes" is used to show agreement to a negative question, where in English we would use "no it's not raining, is it?"—"yes" [i.e., I agree with you, it's not raining]. In fact, most languages follow the Thai, not the English, pattern. Some basic cultural knowledge is also useful. For instance, Thais will normally answer "no" when asked if they would like a cup of coffee. This might mean "no, because I don't want to bother you, even though I'm very thirsty." If the offer is repeated it is quite likely that the answer will change to "yes." But if not repeated, the Thai may feel slightly upset at having no second chance.

Conclusion

Despite problems that might arise, the high motivation and potential of many Thai nurse educators who go overseas is manifested by their successful completion of courses and their increased knowledge and experience when they return home. As English becomes more widespread in Thailand through, for instance, the media and tourism, it is possible that language problems will be somewhat alleviated. In the meantime, greater cooperation and information sharing between base and host institutions, either through direct communication or indirectly through publications, can only be of benefit. This benefit is likely to be greatest where the base institution is in a position to take some positive action, perhaps through a language consultant, so that as many problems as possible can be solved before nurse educators begin their study adventure overseas.

References


Facilitating Learning with Humor

Marilee Kuhrik, PhD, RN; Nancy Kuhrik, PhD, RN; and Paula A. Berry, MS Ed, MT(ASCP)

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

—Ecclesiastes 3:4

S cholars and philosophers throughout history have studied humor and why people laugh, with philosophers being the first laughter critics. While Plato described laughter as something to be avoided, Aristotle believed people used it too much. Christians of the Middle Ages considered laughter and play contradictory with their values, and Pilgrims thought humor was representative of a mental disorder (Ruxton, 1988). Early church leaders associated classroom laughter with foolishness, sinfulness, disobedience, and loss of respect for authorities while teachers were fearful of the association of laughter with poor control and lack of credibility. However, the humorless teacher with exaggerated dignity and pomposity has been criticized in education-based satire (Hill, 1988).

"Positive benefits of humor were recognized in philosophical and medical literature with 16th century physicians believing laughter was a healthy form of physical exercise. Contemporary theories were developed because of extreme positions regarding the value of humor...evil beyond control vs. healthy and beneficial. Although one specific theory of humor does not exist, each theory adds to its understanding" (Ruxton, 1988).

Superiority theories, among the oldest, most widespread theories of humor, "view laughter as an expression of superiority over others" (Ruxton, 1988, p. 56) with examples including ethnic jokes and cartoons depicting the "slip-on-a-banana peel" concept. Relief theories subscribe that laughter serves as an energy releaser and a body cleansing agent. Freud believed negative emotions were released through laughter (Ruxton, 1988).

Humor provides a significant contribution to all aspects of society with the adage "laughter is the best medicine" holding true from a physiological standpoint. Laughter, compared to "internal jogging," produces positive effects on blood pressure, respiration, and suppression of stress-related hormones (Goodman, 1989). Studies focusing on the body's response to humor demonstrate a pattern of stimulation and relaxation similar to benefits provided by physical exercise. The discovery of endorphins has encouraged studies of...
chemical-neurological connections within the body affecting stress-related ailments such as ulcers, headaches, and high blood pressure (Ruxton, 1988).

Laughter causes an acceleration of heartbeat and respirations resulting in increased blood oxygen levels (Henry & Moody, 1985; Hill, 1988). The chest, abdomen, and face get a vigorous workout including holding one’s stomach, rolling on the floor, and in extreme cases losing bladder control. More violent forms of laughter include screaming or howling. Side-splitting laughter caused by greater diaphragmatic convulsions producing abdominal pain may resemble what happens during crying (Hill, 1988).

“When laughter subsides, the pulse rate drops below normal and skeletal muscles become deeply relaxed” (Henry & Moody, 1985, p. 8).

Using humor as a teaching method is likely to initiate, maintain, and enhance learner interest (Dodge & Rossett, 1982). College students find creative qualities of instructional humor compatible with learning, and its presence opens learners to divergent thinking (Korobkin, 1989). Inclusion of classroom humor not only contributes expression of more divergent thinking but may also precipitate a classroom interaction that is more free (Ziv, 1976). Ziv’s (1983) data indicate a humorous atmosphere influences students’ scores on divergent thinking. Four identified features include the fun mood; incongruity; the contagiousness of laughter; and the triggering effect of humor. The fun mood provides opportunity for unlikely and outrageous ideas to surface, increasing creativity. Second, incongruity occurs when consequences are unexpected and things have double meaning. Creative thinking results from a deviation in the usual linear thinking process. Third, the contagious aspect of laughter was found to have a positive reinforcing effect on the group increasing cohesiveness and reducing social anxiety. Finally, use of humor and its ability to decrease anxiety triggers generation of nonconventional and creative thinking (Ziv, 1976, 1983).

The instructional usefulness of humor appears to be that when laughing at what is being studied, the person feels good about it and is stopping to enjoy what was learned. Competence is reasserted in the laugh or smile (Rutkaus, 1981).

Using humor wisely is encouraged to facilitate classroom learning process without endangering the teacher’s professional credibility. Of course, there are limits determining what is funny and what isn’t, and the mere inclusion of classroom humor does not automatically guarantee learning will take place; it must not exceed appropriate boundaries. Examples of humor not reflecting good taste include joking in reference to sex, ethnicity, race, or religion (Korobkin, 1989). Additionally, teachers should be sensitive to various differences in a culturally diverse setting. Certain cultures may not recognize humor as a socially acceptable phenomenon. Various times in a person’s life may result in particular personal experiences or events when acceptance of humorous situations is not appreciated. Such situations need to be handled individually.

Instructors must be cognizant of classroom humor being used by students. Overuse of cynicism, satire, or clownish behavior may be an indicator of a student’s poor self-image. Absence of humor in a small group may signify presence of anxiety, poor communication, low cohesiveness, alienation, or stress. It may be necessary to observe these behaviors in determining patterns of more serious concerns requiring further interventions.

A major function of humor is creation of a positive learning environment; laughter in the classroom signals students are learning. Students who have humorous teachers are promised enjoyment and rate good teachers, in addition to their subject knowledge, as making the subject more interesting. Retention of classroom subject matter by humorous lectures has been studied, with most specialists agreeing classroom humor enhances the learning experience, especially in rote learning. It must be noted, however, that humor does not replace repetition as a teaching method, and the most effective humor is when jokes and anecdotes relate to material being taught. Humor aids comprehension of new material by adding a joke or humorous story serving to teach by example. This association is what helps students remember subject matter and is especially true with “concept learning” where anecdotes facilitate comprehension. Although explanatory anecdotes don’t have to be funny to accomplish lesson goals, they are more appealing and enjoyable. A playful atmosphere during questioning and answering allows for more creative expression of unique ideas. Additionally, by relaying jokes amongst themselves and explaining joke content, students reciprocate knowledge (Hill, 1988).

Learning can be facilitated by effective use of humorous methods in the classroom. When humor is used as a teaching strategy, an environment demonstrating care, flexibility, and open communication develops between student and instructor resulting in freedom and openness. Additionally, the instructor’s authoritari-an position is reduced, creating the position of facilitator in the learning process. Fear, anxiety, and tension become decreased as a student-instructor partnership develops (Watson & Emerson, 1988).

The fact that learning is more enjoyable and less stressful during laughter-filled moments in the classroom is obvious. This quality to stimulate classroom laughter is important for students who have negative perceptions about school and may be potential dropouts. Korobkin (1989) refers to benefits of humor in relieving tension and relaxing an audience. It reduces anxiety by communicating the humorist’s ability to joke, make errors, and reduces threats or fears resulting in an environment that diminishes student anxiety and encourages creativity.

Ziv (1976) examined the effects of humor on student learning, or convergent thinking, and found in highly anxious students, humor facilitated learning. Another study indicated highly creative undergraduate students had a better sense of humor than their peers. One reason for the powerful effect of humor rests in the listener. Rutkaus (1981) reported the use of humor affects listeners more deeply than logical presentation of facts. A possible explanation for this effect may include the listener accepting the message of humor without mental censorship, because laughing bypasses many defensive mechanisms associated with maturation. Using jokes or anecdotes to enhance stories provides an association to a memorable event and students are more likely to remember information (Hill, 1988).

Telling a short humorous story or joke helps get the class off to a relaxed start. Recognition of a funny anecdote enables learners to feel competent, knowledgeable, and demonstrates understanding and iden-
tification with the situation well enough to appreciate the humor involved (Dodge & Rossett, 1982). Either sharing a cartoon relevant to classroom material or having the class compose an appropriate cartoon caption encourages creativity and relieves student anxiety and tension. This activity may be especially helpful prior to stressful events such as presentations, discussions, or exams (Watson & Emerson, 1988).

Tendentious humor includes victimization and audience perception of superiority over someone or something that is typified by comedians such as Don Rickles and Archie Bunker. Although it can be used by teachers who gently tease students during classroom interactions, caution should be exercised when using this type of humor to prevent a student from feeling picked on or intimidated (Dodge & Rossett, 1982).

Wearing humorous attire on holidays or special occasions demonstrates classroom humor. The instructor who dresses to match holiday seasons is allowing spontaneity, enthusiasm, and creativity to permeate the classroom. Besides relieving anxiety and stress, it promotes a communicative bond between student and instructor and lightens the mood of classroom atmosphere for that day (Watson & Emerson, 1988).

Set induction enhances didactic learning by capturing student attention at the beginning of class, increases intellectual learning through emotional experiences, and refers to those actions, and statements by the instructor designed to relate student experiences to the lesson objective. This form of humor is effective, especially in the Humanities, with examples including use of songs, dress, artifacts, and mental exercises (Furlong, 1982). For example, a class on weight control might include bringing in 20 pounds of fat from a local butcher shop to help prove a point.

Use of humor is most beneficial during the instructional presentation as opposed to assessment of student learning. Funny test items, although meant to decrease anxiety, may in fact not be well received by the college age or adult students and may actually confound them (Korobkin, 1989).

Although pleasure of humor may appear short-lived, it has far-reaching consequences. One study indicates a statistically significant, positive effect on content retention 6 weeks after information was humorously presented (Korobkin, 1989). A close relationship exists between retention and instructional humor, characterized by mnemonic devices that jog the memory for test takers.

Whereas humor is characterized by making people laugh, it is not necessarily jokes, stories, and anecdotes but an attitude; teachers don't have to make students laugh by adding humor to their presentations. The spirit of fun needs to be established when covering material with the introduction of a hint of humor in telling the audience of one's awareness of the content's importance.

In summary, use of humor can bring immeasurable classroom pleasure and benefits for students and teacher. When used skillfully, it can be an important tool in the development of a positive learning environment by providing an enjoyable atmosphere and being effective in learning retention.

References


Writing and Thinking: A Process to Critical Understanding

Paula C. Broussard, RN, MN, and Melinda G. Oberleitner, RN, DNS, OCN

This article is a report of faculty efforts focused on implementation of writing-to-learn concepts across a nursing curriculum using frameworks proposed by Davidhizar (1993) and McCarthy and Bowers (1994). Davidhizar provides several reasons for assisting students to develop writing skills. These reasons include writing as a means of advancing the profession, to develop skill in writing for publication, to develop competence, and to enhance learning. Davidhizar stresses that writing for publication should be encouraged at the undergraduate level because many nurses will not choose to progress to the master's level, where writing for publication is often a requirement. McCarthy and Bowers describe placement of writing assignments in nursing courses and give examples of how writing-to-learn (WTL) was incorporated into the courses as an instructional strategy. With these frameworks as guides, methods have been developed in our undergraduate nursing curriculum that take the student from specific content-focused, in-class writing projects at the freshman level to higher level writing for publication projects at the senior level. Table 1 outlines curricular writing-to-learn strategies.

Art Young (1993) differentiates between WTL and writing to communicate. The integration of both techniques culminates in discovery and critical