

The use of Humor as an interactive teaching/training style

(The overall project idea is to develop methods how to motivate learners to learn.)

Target group: educators, teachers, trainers, (...).

“Humor is conceptually defined as an attitude, a perspective, a set of skills that can help a person to achieve important goals in life. Humor certainly includes jokes, but it goes way beyond joke-telling” (Goodman, 2005:6).

Regarding the high drop-out rates in adult education and the antiquated methods that the current educational system offers that, most of the times, doesn't match, with the learners' needs, I-MoToLe's overall project idea is to find new ways for educators, teachers, trainers and other professionals that works on educational field how to work and develop intrinsic motivation of their learners.

As humans, our rational thinking and the learning processes cannot be disassociated of our emotions. Our level of attention in a class or in training is direct related with our feelings and with the empathy that we can create with an educator; so to create a safe and enjoyable environment in a class/training will help on the learning process, not just to the learner's side, but in both directions. - The perception of a teacher/trainer as a person, flexible, open to interact and to laugh more than a static “object” of depositing knowledge and the valorization of the learners as people with a lot of content to be shared and also taught.

And the good news is that teachers do not have to be serious to be effective! The use of humor as a teaching/training style can relief the anxiety and stress of the parts involved on the process, creating a positive social and emotional learning environment where appears a common psychological bond between the learners and the teachers/trainers.

Use humor to teach can also produce and sustain interest and deep learning in the learners increasing the learning by itself, their self-motivation, the class attendance, and the test performance and increasing the divergent thinking while everyone is more engaged on the learning process.

The use of humor cannot be confused only as the use of jokes to make others' laugh. The use of humor goes way beyond of a communication skill: "From a psychological perspective, the humor process can be divided into four essential components: (1) **a social context**, (2) **a cognitive-perceptual process**, (3) **an emotional response**, and (4) **the vocal-behavioral expression of laughter**." (Martin, 2007, p. 5).

As an interactive teaching and training style, humor can be worked by ludic and more interactive activities, with story-telling and with body movement. (William B. Streat, Ph.D.)

Teachers/trainers are urged to seek better and alternative ways of teaching/training to improve their practice over and above the use of the traditional methods.

But how teaching and learning can be facilitated with the use of humor? As a pedagogic tool, positive and goal-directed humor facilitates the creation of an environment conducive to teaching/training and learning (M Chabeli, PhD) so is important to distinguish and well define the different humor facets.

Negative humor is seen as "an attitude or perspective that is intended to be little, ridicule, discriminate and encourage negativity amongst adult learners. Negative humor is disruptive and can divide them" (Kelly, 2005:2) while **positive humor** is defined as "An attitude or perspective that will reduce the tension in class/training. Adult learners feel relaxed and accepted so they can answer questions easily because they feel less intimidated". (Goodman, 2005:5)

When positive, when relevant to the subject matter being taught and when is delivered in a successful manner humor can indicate a signal of passion from the educator's side for teach,

showing that he/she does not see his work simply as a chore that must be done. On that way, it will help adult learners to fall in love with the content and their own learning (regarding them as human beings whose learning needs are to be met and not as objects who must be fed with book knowledge. (M Chabeli, PhD)

As a teaching style should be used as an integral part of the curriculum, not used only after completing serious work (Kelly,2005:4)! Once the teachers/trainings know where they want to get their learners (a short debriefing with themselves before a class – How it will be the best way to teach today? With which public am I working with? And which subject? Can I be funnier than I used to? Can I do it in a more curious or happier way? Can I use more suspense?) If we will be capable to mold our environment and create a way to get involved with the students the educators' actions will be much more effective and can turn the class/training in a more “Socratic maieutic” way without losing the focus.

Start the class with a little funny story related to the subject to be taught, or with an energizer, playing a little game with a bridge with the subject of the class can be a good start for facilitating teaching matters with humor. (William B. Streaan, Ph.D.)

Laughing along with students; and using relevant, interesting and light-hearted personal examples to highlight important points, as the self-deprecating humor can make the learners feel more comfortable with a presence of a teacher and stop looking at him/her as an “untouchable” authoritarian model.

“When properly used, humor can be an effective tool to make a class more enjoyable, reduce anxiety and improve the learning setting. The ‘ha ha’ of humor in the classroom may indeed contribute to the ‘aha’ of learning from the student.” (Drew C. Appleby, PhD)

Meantime, there are some prerequisites for a successful use of humor. The first is to know what is funny and the second is to be able to accurately predict what a particular audience will find to be funny, so then it can be mold an effective interest for the subject.

To use humor is not just a question of personality. Some teachers/trainers will do it naturally, without any particular methods, but it is also a skill than can be developed.

The important is that the teachers/trainers can adapt this methodology to their target group -to build group cohesion and install an environment of trust between the trainer and the group is crucial for training be well succeeded.

Between the consequences of the use of humor as a teaching style there is a creation of a relaxed and caring atmosphere where learning can be enhanced and appreciated. When learners (and also the educators) are relaxed, thinking becomes eminent and where criticism and values can be expressed and mistakes pointed out without destroying the learners' self-image differently than an authoritative and tense environment. (Robinson in Hayden-Miles, 2002:1) (M Chabeli, PhD)

Within this "safe" environment, the confidence and respect to the teacher rise and it becomes possible the creation of a trusting relationship between the educator and the learners what makes adult learners gain confidence and be eager to learn more, they feel more comfortable and more conducive to cooperate.

Subsequently, triggers a free introspection in a snowball in a spirit of exchange, which rules out any notion of constraint.



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