

The Top Ten Reasons Humor is FUNdamental for Learning

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Today's mighty oak is just yesterday's nut that held its ground.

Humor is just the fertilizer needed to nurture stressed kids and anxious educators as they cope with the cognitive/technological revolution that is shaping 21st century education. Humor is rarely looked at as an essential part of student growth or as a credible teaching technique. However, a review of neuroscience research indicates that healthy and positive humor can have a significant impact on student learning. The purposeful cultivation of humor practice nourishes both effective teaching and learning!

Here are the top ten reasons that flourishing educators purposefully choose humor as an essential teaching strategy:

- 10. Humor plants memories.** Powerful emotions are at the root of long-term memory. Ask your students what their strongest memory of school has been so far. Have them categorize how they felt about this experience by charting these memories as either joyful or anxiety producing. Encourage students to think about why they remember this incident. Discuss how they can use humor (a strong emotion), as a device to help them remember information. **When the memory goes-forget it!**
- 9. Humor grows coping skills.** Humor has often been used as a survival technique for prisoners of war. Educators need to survive constant change with new mandates and testing requirements coming frequently from policy makers and legislators. There are numerous “survival” issues in education today! Some research indicates that laughter increases adrenaline, oxygen flow, and pulse rate. After laughter, most people report feeling relaxed and calm. **No sense being pessimistic, it wouldn't work anyway!**
- 8. Humor cultivates energy and engagement.** The traditional auditory lecture is one of the least effective ways to facilitate learning. Purposeful games, directed play and physical activity all promote humor and learning. The research on the benefits of movement and learning supports the idea that play and laughter increase the oxygen levels and energy that are critical for learning. **Energizer Bunny Arrested; Charged With Battery!**
- 7. Humor captures and retains attention.** Laughter and surprise can hook even the most reluctant student. “Emotion drives attention and attention drives learning” (Sylwester, 1995). The brain cannot learn if it is not attending. Humor generates something unexpected, which alerts the attentional center of the brain and increases the likelihood of information recall. It can be integrated into all aspects of the learning process as described by the Educators Tackle Box in *Using Humor to Maximize Learning* (Morrison, 2008). The purposeful use of humor is a skill that can be practiced and enhanced. A favorite follow-up strategy is to invite the students to read a section of the lesson and create a joke or riddle about

- that segment. Some of these can be used in the actual test for the chapter. **Lost In Thought-It's Unfamiliar Territory!**
6. **Humor neutralizes stress.** Humor will decrease depression, loneliness and anger. The contagious nature of laughter is caused by mirror neurons or “brain cells that become active when an organism is watching an expression or behavior that they themselves can perform.” If you see someone laughing, even if you don’t know the reason for the laughter, you will probably laugh anyway. The imitative behavior is due to mirror neurons being stimulated. Stress levels have been increasing for both students and teacher. Laughter is contagious. Catch it! Spread it! **He Who Laughs-Lasts!**
 5. **Humor is the #1 Characteristic Students Value in a Teacher.** They may not remember what you taught, but they will remember your sense of humor and the relationships produced in the classroom. Build a *Humor Haven* in your classroom filled with joke, riddle and humorous story books. Depending on the age of your students, you can add clown noses, squish balls, games and puzzles. *Make Their Day*—every single day with laughter and fun. It will make your day too! **What would Scooby do?**
 4. **Humor enhances creativity.** The employment market has transitioned from agriculture and manufacturing jobs to positions requiring ingenuity and inventiveness. Humor promotes creativity and critical thinking skills. Often humor comes from unconnected, random thoughts. Grow creativity through laughter yoga, telling funny stories or playing games. **Do Not Disturb, I am Disturbed Enough Already!**
 3. **Humor facilitates communication.** Humor is a great way to build relationships with students, colleagues and parents. Understanding your humor style will assist your humor practice. Humor is a social lubricant. It has the power to generate a culture of trust in your organization. If you understand and nurture a constructive humor style, it will positively impact your ability to communicate. Humorous interaction between coworkers encourages a healthy, productive work environment. **A Closed Mouth Gathers No Foot!**
 2. **Humor supports the change process.** Educators are faced with change on a daily basis. When you can laugh about new mandates or disruptive behavior issues, you know you are able to cope with these challenges. Plan for how you and your colleagues will use humor to cope with new standards, testing, or stressed kids. A great strategy is to create a top ten list of “What’s So Funny” about the upcoming change. **Change is good-you go first!**

And now for the number one reason to laugh frequently and often...

1. **Humor Is FREE and FUN.** Teaching is a joyful experience. The current focus on accountability and data-driven instruction can bury our sense of humor driving it underground. Dig around for humor resources to share with your students and colleagues. Do not let anything rob you of your passion for bringing joy to your students and remember a sense of humor is free and fun! **I want to live forever-so far so good!**

Hold your ground when it comes to your beliefs about how to plant the seeds of learning in your workplace. Weed out the humordoomers and their negative comments. Do not give them the time or energy required to creep into the culture of learning in your environment.

Nurture the nuts in your care. Nurture your own sense of humor, by spending time in developing and growing your humor practice. Consider keeping a humor journal, spending time with colleagues who make you laugh, and purposefully including humor in every lesson everyday. Carefully cultivate your *humor being* to fully share the abundance of joyful teaching. Remember humor is a *fundamental* factor in the cognitive/technological revolution that needs to shape 21st century education.

Never take life too seriously- you won't get out alive.

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Ideas for improving your humor practice can be found in Mary Kay's book, **Using Humor to Maximize Learning; The Links between the Positive Emotions and Education**. For links to the research supporting the use of humor in learning, please go to Mary Kay's links page on her web site <http://www.questforhumor.com/>. Check out her blog [Choosing To Teach With Good Humor](#). Mary Kay is president of AATH (Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor) <http://www.aath.org/> and was the **Humor: No Laughing Matter Conference** co-chair. She invites you to join the AATH conference in Chicago April 7-10, 2012. Contact Mary Kay at marykay@questforhumor.com

