

## Remember Humor for Memory Retention

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My memories of second grade are fuzzy except for two specific recollections. One is being sent to the hallway for talking too much (no one who knows me finds this hard to believe). The other is hearing an answer from a classmate to a question in religion class. We were asked what we would do if we knew we were going to die next week. Many of us said that we would pray and go to church, but one bright child answered that he would buy a package of lifesavers. All of us laughed including our teacher. Why do I remember these incidents? Our strongest recollections are usually connected with strong emotional memories.

The climate of a school mirrors the emotional practices employed by staff. Each individual brings their emotional disposition to work each day. At the same time, there are certain factors in place including grades, assessments, detentions and government mandates that impact the emotions of both students and staff. These emotional factors are imbedded in most school cultures. What is the emotional common denominator? Although it is like the invisible elephant in the room, I believe that the emotion of fear permeates our systems. Since fear can and does immediately activate the reflective response system of our brain, it has long been used to manipulate teacher behavior and student learning.

Emotions drive learning. Research links positive emotionality to increased learning. Humor, fun and play are a core component in creating an optimal learning environment. An environment of fun indicates a culture of trust. Making a conscious decision to focus on the joyful emotions will provide an antidote to the anxiety and stress that seem to be more and more prevalent in our schools.

Humor is a powerful emotion that can grab a student's attention, put information into the working memory and help retain that knowledge. How can we integrate humor into the learning process? Here is a brief description of The Educator's Tackle Box as detailed in my book, *Using Humor to Maximize Learning: the Links between Positive Emotions and Learning*:

### **THE EDUCATOR'S TACKLE BOX**

THE HOOK: capture and retain student attention

THE LINE: expand student comprehension

THE SINKER: increase the opportunity for memory retention

The process described in this metaphor involves a purposeful and powerful use of humor for the purpose of memory retention. Humor has the ability to capture attention (hook); manipulate this information in the working memory (line) and become a part of our automatic response system (sinker).

Here are some practical suggestions for employing the use of humor in your classroom.

- ☺ Hook student interest by starting lessons with a joke/story about the topic.
- ☺ Ask students for the line by supplying the study questions including different types of humor (including metaphors, puns and riddles).
- ☺ Use the best of these study questions in your assessment and sink the knowledge into the long term memory.

Most of us have never taken a humor studies course, but most educators believe humor is integral to their teaching practice. Yet a focus on the positive emotions might seem like an oxymoron to many teachers who are rooted in a system based on fear. As we learn more about our brains and how we learn, it is imperative that we begin to assimilate humor as the emotion of choice in the learning process. Encourage the nut within you to grow!

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

*For links to the research supporting the use of humor in learning, please go to Mary Kay's web site <http://www.questforhumor.com/>. Mary Kay is past-president of AATH (Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor) <http://www.aath.org/> and is the 2016 **AATH Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient**. She is the founder of the AATH Humor Academy Certified Humor Professional (CHP) Program. Invitations to present to your group are welcomed with enthusiasm! You can find her on twitter [@marykaymorrisson](https://twitter.com/marykaymorrisson)*