Chapter 5
Finding the “Funny Bone”
in the Class Skeleton

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ABSTRACT

Some teachers have the natural ability to captivate their students, while others struggle to maintain classroom control. Utilizing comedy as a tool to deliver and maintain an audience’s attention is something that comics and GATEs have in common. Some teachers use videos, memes, or one-liners to their class laugh. For the author, a career in comedy began with family joke telling. It was when a high school student enrolled in standup comedy class that he unlocked his comedic talents and better prepared himself to become a teacher. The highs and lows of joke writing, stress of a performance, and its connection to teaching are described in detail.

WHAT’S ‘COMEDY’ GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Why did the GATE (Gifted And Talented Educator) cross the road? To try a new hobby.

So, it is not the funniest joke, but humor definitely plays an important part for many GATEs. GATEs have an arsenal of tools they utilize in order to present the classroom curriculum. It is taught that an ‘attention getter’ is how to begin a lesson. Getting the audiences’ attention, whether it is a class or employees, is easier for some. We have met people who naturally have an ‘aura’ of positivity that appears to radiate from them making almost anything they say sound positive or funny. It is as if they are always ready to cheer on a team or just finished getting a ‘high-five’ from their best friend. Their positivity relaxes those around them, making laughter come more easily.

There are two viewpoints when it comes to the talent of being funny. One group says that being funny is an inborn talent. They believe neither the number of classes or trials on stage will improve the comic’s performance. The other viewpoint says that training and timing can make almost anyone funny. The potential exists for most to have the ability to deliver a line with humor. The style of delivery can vary. For example, the grump in the faculty room can say the funniest joke he’s read online and it will fall flat to those around him. It falls flat not because the joke isn’t funny, but because of the vibe he gives off. Being funny is easier for some because they embrace the lighter side of life.

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Teachers are experts in knowing both their curriculum and their audience. They can tell when students are struggling to understand the concepts and redirect the lesson on the spot. This makes teachers much like stand-up comics. When a comic enters a room, he or she is expected to know their material, present it in an organized way, and gauge if the audience is receptive. Assessment for teachers is often written, while for a stand-up comedian, it’s laughter. By eliciting a response that reflects comprehension, both teacher and comedian know their outcomes have been met.

The inborn ability to have comedic timing appears to come naturally to some. Watching a stand-up comic tell jokes that cause an audience to erupt in laughter can look easy. What may not be included in the show are the jokes that didn’t work. The act of telling a joke requires timing, cleverness, and an ability to connect with others. When a comic doesn’t prepare a joke or deliver it properly, it will fall flat getting no laughs.

‘Bombing’ is when the audience has no reaction to a punch line. A comic ‘bombing’ can turn one’s stomach, making it painful to watch or experience. However, these are the moments when the greatest amount of learning occurs. Woody Allen is quoted saying, “If you’re not failing every now and again, it’s a sign you’re not doing anything very innovative.” This same concept can be applied when the class performs poorly on an assessment. Was it the way the material was presented? Did the students not study?

The experts on laughter are comics. The term comic refers to both comedians and comediennes. Many studies have been done examining the connection between I.Q. and humor. Janus performed a study looking at the IQ of full-time stand-up comedians. He found that both male and female stand-up comics have an above average IQ, with an average range from 126-138 (Greengross, 2013). Perhaps this is one of the reasons why comics are successful. They have the ability to analyze situations in a different way from the average population. The most effective public speakers are able to captivate a group’s attention using a collection of tools, of which humor is often a key element. In addition, having a sense of humor has been shown to have long term health benefits. According to the Mayo Clinic, a good laugh can “stimulate endorphin release, activate and relieve your stress response, and soothe tension” (2016). Humor can improve one’s life and skills in the workplace. Perhaps this is why some of my funniest friends are teachers.

**HUMOR ME**

My experience with stand-up comedy began in my early-teens. I started sixth grade in a new school district. My previous school was small, with a single fifth grade class, everyone knowing each other; it was much like one big family with all the usual bickering and joyous moments. My new school was the opposite. Every class period consisted of different students, each having his or her group of friends that had their own style, mannerisms, and uniqueness. This new arena was foreign to me and I struggled to make a niche for myself. Never before did the idea cross my mind that my classmates would not associate with others. I had to adapt or be an outcast.

Sensing ‘fresh meat’ some of my classmates saw me as an opportunity to demonstrate their preteen machismo by making remarks about my lack of style or my shyness. Looking back at pictures from my early teens, I have to admit I wasn’t a trendy kid. My body was in the out-of-shape early-teenage stage. To give you a visual, I wore a lanyard so I didn’t lose my house keys. I might have well written the insults for my classmates. I would not consider what was said to me as bullying; teasing is a more
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