

THE USE OF UNIPACS IN THE STUDY OF HUMOR

by 6791

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As long as there have been teachers and there have been students, there has been humor in the classroom. Perhaps this has been unwanted humor with Billy sticking Sally's pigtail in the inkwell or the little boy who was caught daydreaming and punished with the hickory stick while his classmates struggled to suppress their giggles. Or perhaps the teacher has used humor to add zest to the lessons or to ease a tense situation.

Since humor has always been in the classroom it is time to put it in correct perspective. The problem then is to find if humor does have a place in the classroom and if it does, in what way should humor be implemented.

Since individualized instruction seems to be the desired goal for many of the ills in education, and a unipac with its pretest, behavioral objective, diversified learning activities, self-test, and post test which are all built around a single concept seems to be an excellent approach to individualization, the writer proposes to combine the "study" of humor with individualization through the use of unipacs.

These unipacs will be designed to teach the student humor through learning activities built around the cognitive and psycho-motor domains and to help expand his sense of humor through activities emphasizing the affective domain. The learning activities will emphasize a multi-media and diversified materials approach designed to meet the unique needs of each student. These unipacs will provide a motivational backdrop for the other learning activities in which the students will be engaged.

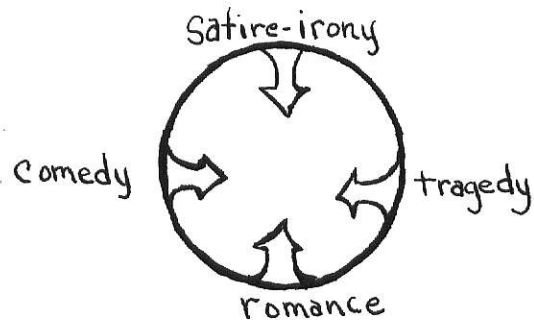
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The realm of literature about humor will be reviewed in four phases:
(1) a discussion of the definition of humor; (2) a summary of the psychological theories of humor; (3) a review of the research that has been done in this field; and (4) the humanitarian aspects of humor.

I. DEFINING HUMOR

It is a difficult task to define this nebulous term...humor. Being an English teacher makes it even more difficult since the term "comedy" is also widely used in the curriculum. Comedy, in its literal sense, should retain its relationship with tragedy. William G. McCollom has illustrated these opposing forces in the following way:¹



Horace Walpole state his view of comedy in a letter to Sir Horace Mann when he wrote that "the world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those who feel."²

¹William G. McCollom, The Divine Average (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University, 1971), p. 45.

²James K. Feibleman, In Praise of Comedy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937), p. 201.

James K. Feibleman states that all of the arts serve at one time or another as conveyors of comedy whether it be a funny picture, a piece of sculpture, literature, or dancing. Comedy also varies according to the object, person, issue, or institution under derogation and according to the degree of intensity. A comedy can be light and entertaining or satirical and biting.³

Truth seems to be an important element of comedy. Red Skelton said, "Humor is actual truth,"⁴ and Elmer M. Blistein commented that "the truth and the comedian are frequently tactless."⁵

Blistein makes another interesting observation about comedy and its audience. He finds the audience is basically primitive in its reaction to a comedy. The audience may appear to be highly civilized if judged according to speech, manners, and dress, but there is a primeval urge in any theatre audience that demands something more than intellectual stimulation, more than entertainment, more than comedy and laughter. In order to stand in awe, the people demand a victim, a victim who is destroyed. But this is not the role of the comic character who must be flexible, who must thrive on the spirit of compromise, who must have the ability to see the human situation from more than one point of view, and who is thus civilized. It is the tragic character who is also primitive, who captures the audience's awe.⁶

Feibleman explains the literal place of humor within the context of comedy. He states that there are degrees of comedy. He finds these degrees

³Ibid., p. 203.

⁴Don Herold, Humor in Advertising (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1963), p. 10.

⁵Elmer M. Blistein, Comedy in Action (Durham, N. C.: Drake University Press, 1964), p. 4.

⁶Ibid., p. 18.

to be:⁷

- Joy
- Divine Comedy
- Humour
- Irony
- Satire
- Sarcasm
- Wit
- Scorn

Reading up the list shows that comedy increases the breadth of its field of criticism but lessens the intensity of the criticism. Humour (notice the older form of the spelling which comes from the Greek idea that all men possessed four humours), for instance, is directed at a wider subject matter than is wit, but it is not so biting. Reading down the list, the converse is true; the intensity of the criticism is increased, and the breadth of the field is decreased. In this light wit does not deal with as much material as does humour, but it is more effective in attacking that with which it does deal. Thus comedy is intense over a narrow field and diffuse over a broad field.

To Feibleman joy is laughter without malice, reflects the happiness of childhood, and comes close to pure ecstasy. Divine comedy criticizes but with love, and it is so universal in ideas that the bitterness of personal and contemporary references are negligible. Humour is merely the recognition of the limitations of things and events. Irony, satire, and sarcasm are all directed against contemporary foibles as found in customs and institutions. Wit is the same as the above three, but it is directed at a narrower target. It chooses one contemporary item of weakness or even the foible of a single individual for attack. Feibleman concludes by stating that there is actually nothing funny about scorn, which is at the bottom of the list.⁸

⁷Feibleman, op. cit., p. 205.

⁸Ibid., p. 206.