# Chapter 6
# Theories and Practice of Humor for Adult Instruction

**Peter M. Jonas**
*Cardinal Stritch University, USA*

## ABSTRACT

*This chapter is designed around the research questions: 1) What are the most plausible theories behind why we laugh, and 2) How can the theories help to enhance the learning environment. The author utilized a meta-synthesis for the research component, which is a scientific approach to selecting, appraising, and summarizing empirical qualitative studies on a specific topic and systematically analyzing the data to cross-check the evidence for repeating themes. In other words, "to steal from one is plagiarism, but to steal from many is research." While there are a multiplicity of theories on why people laugh, this chapter only discusses the main concepts: relief theory, superiority theory, incongruity theory, entropy, and the benign violation theory. If you know why people laugh, you can use this information to transform your leadership, improve your teaching, and build relationships. Consequently, for a teacher of adult students, once you get people laughing, you can teach them anything. Laughing students become engaged students and learning students. (Drop the mic.)*

## THEORIES OF HUMOR FOR ADULT INSTRUCTION

"All theories are wrong, but some of them are useful" is a phrase generally attributed to George Box, a statistician at the University of Madison, Wisconsin. In its purest sense, Pamela Shoemaker denotes that quality theories should be designed to highlight relationships, connections, and interdependencies in the phenomenon of interest. The best ones help to make predictions about that phenomenon. (Shoemaker, P. J., Tankard, J. W., & Lasorsa, D. L., 2003.) So, the reason to study theories is not because they are wrong, but because they are useful in predicting cause effects. Therefore, this chapter will examine the main theories on how to use humor to enhance the educational environment or even an entire organization.

This chapter is designed around the research question of: 1) what are the most plausible theories behind why we laugh, and 2) how can the theories help to enhance the learning environment. The author utilized a meta-synthesis for the research component, which is a scientific approach to selecting, appraising, and summarizing empirical qualitative studies on a specific topic and systematically analyzing the data to cross-check the evidence for repeating themes. In other words, "to steal from one is plagiarism, but to steal from many is research."

While there are a multiplicity of theories on why people laugh, this chapter only discusses the main concepts: Relief Theory; Superiority Theory; Incongruity Theory; Entropy; and the Benign Violation Theory. Most people assume that people laugh simply because something is funny. But Robert Provine (2000), wrote in "The Science of Laughter" that his research indicated that laughter is more of a social phenomena than anything else. People typically laugh at more mundane items than "funny ones. For example, simple comments like, "hello, how are you" and "how is the weather" evoked as much laughter as a joke. In fact, Provine found that: "Laughter was 30 times more frequent in social than solitary situations".

## Nature vs. Nurture

When my daughter gave birth to our first grandchild, Elyse, we couldn't have been any happier. That's it, I just wanted to get the name of my granddaughter in this chapter. Seriously, what do you think was one of the first things that Elyse did that sent my daughter, Katie, to the phone to immediately call me? Elyse smiled. This brings up the argument of whether laughter is a natural or a cultural phenomenon: nature vs nurture? Let's look at two stories to help answer the question.

20 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/theories-and-practice-of-humor-for-adult-instruction/209484

## Related Content

### Workplace Incivility in Schools
Thomas G. Reioand Stephanie M. Reio (2011). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology (pp. 23-35).*
www.irma-international.org/article/workplace-incivility-schools/51644

### The Gig-Juggler: Part-Time Faculty in the For-Profit University
Lana Nassen (2022). *Driving Innovation With For-Profit Adult Higher Education Online Institutions (pp. 212-231).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-gig-juggler/297778

### The Power, Peril, and Promise of Information Technology to Community Education
Valerie C. Bryan (2013). *Technology Use and Research Approaches for Community Education and Professional Development (pp. 1-23).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/power-peril-promise-information-technology/74270

### Predictors of Instructional Strategy Use of Faculty in Career and Technical Education Programs: Signature Pedagogies of the Field
Edward C. Fletcher Jr.and Yenni Djajalaksana (2014). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology (pp. 45-65).*
www.irma-international.org/article/predictors-of-instructional-strategy-use-of-faculty-in-career-and-technical-education-programs/116777

### 21st Century Teaching and Learning through E-Portfolios: Potentials and Challenges in Teacher Education
Yi-Ping Huang (2012). *E-Portfolios and Global Diffusion: Solutions for Collaborative Education (pp. 70-83).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/21st-century-teaching-learning-through/64032