Can Training Help Teachers Include Humour to Engage Adolescents with Challenging Behaviour?

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_In loving memory of Steve who loved to laugh, 1954-2011_
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**Acronyms used in the thesis;**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>Autism Spectrum Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BD</td>
<td>Behaviour Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Conduct Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEST</td>
<td>Department of Education, Science and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSM</td>
<td>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>Emotionally Disturbed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODD</td>
<td>Oppositional Defiant Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WBE</td>
<td>Warmth behind the eyes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

This study investigated the effect of training teachers to include humour in their classrooms and the impact of this humour on school engagement for those students with challenging behaviour. Five teachers from a secondary school in New South Wales participated in the study. The study uses a conceptual framework which incorporates positive educational practices and the promotion of humour through non-verbal communication to manage challenging behaviours. Recent studies in neuroscience validate these assertions with evidence of capacity building in individuals through exposure to humour. The unique ability of humour to divert conflict and reframe concepts is of benefit for this cohort of students. The social benefits of increased social cohesion and removing threat can manifest in relationship building and establishing reciprocity between students and teachers.

The teachers’ teaching practices using humour to manage challenging behaviours were observed in four sessions. The teachers were also interviewed about the issues and challenges faced by teachers of these students with challenging behaviours. The data were analysed using a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative procedures.

The results showed that training can change teachers’ communication style to include more humour. There was evidence that teachers who reflect on their lesson content and delivery can have a positive effect on students who are disengaged and can subsequently increase connection to school.
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