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Perceptions of Teachers: Effects of Principals Uses of Humor on Teacher Job Satisfaction.

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Perceptions of Teachers: Effects of Principals' Uses of Humor

on Teacher Job Satisfaction

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by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to determine if teachers' job satisfaction was greater when

working for principals with higher perceived use of humor. The study also examined the

effects of principals' use of humor on perceived leadership effectiveness and level of

personal relationship.

The researcher used a 36-question survey instrument to collect data. A population of 796

educators in a public school system in Northeast Tennessee was given an opportunity to

participate in this research. There were 450 completed surveys (56%) returned.

There were 4 major findings from this study. Teachers reported that it was appropriate

for principals to use humor in a school setting to a significant level ($p < 0.001$). Data

from the surveys also indicated that teachers had significantly higher reported job

satisfaction ($p < 0.001$) when working for principals who used humor when compared to

principals who did not use humor regularly. The research also showed that teachers had

significantly higher reported personal relationships ($p < 0.001$) with principals who use

humor regularly. In addition, teachers in this study rated leadership effectiveness

significantly higher ($p < 0.001$) for principals who regularly used humor when compared to those who did not.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to three very important women in my life. The first is my grandmother, Kathleen Fields. From a young age she instilled in me the importance of learning and the value of an education. She repeatedly reminded me that an education is something that once gained, can never be taken away from you. As a classroom teacher for more than 40 years, she exemplifies what it means to "teach" in every action she undertakes.

I also dedicate this work to my mother, Deborah Noe. She instilled in me the need to work hard and accept criticism from any angle. She accepted no excuses for shortcomings and mistakes but was relentless in defending me. When others thought that "humor" was a topic that could not be taken seriously, she simply rolled her eyes and told them that they would see for themselves when it was all over.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my younger sister, Jeri Ann Bailey. She has been my biggest fan no matter what the undertaking. She was always willing to listen to me complain and whine when things were not going well or as quickly as I wanted. When I needed time away from my computer and spreadsheets, she was there to entertain me.

Without the support of these three women, there is no doubt that I would have never made it through the somewhat emotional challenges associated with the dissertation process. There have been bumps in the road and each of you lifted me up and helped carry me over them. I thank you and love you very much.

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My Chairperson Dr. Virginia Foley guided me through this process with the grace and encouragement of an angel. Anyone who knows me well recognizes that I am not the easiest person to "lead" through an amusement park much less a formal research study. Dr. Foley, you are an absolutely amazing woman and I will never forget your kindness and the faith you had in me as well as my topic. While others outside my committee smiled politely at the idea of humor as a dissertation topic, you jumped excitedly and encouraged me all the way. Thank you.

Dr. Glover, you may be the most patient man I have ever met. When I came to you with a ridiculous idea and thought you would never approve, you would always surprise me with, "…if the research is there I say go with it." Well, the research was there and I went with it. It took almost 675 hours to accomplish, but that is 1,012 Glover hours. Thank you for everything.

Dr. Good, you were the backbone behind my entire research operation. When the statistical analysis became too great for my brain to comprehend (or my ADHD to allow) you always brought me back to where I needed to be. Your candid support of my humor made some of the tougher days of this study bearable. Thank you for everything.

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be loved by everyone who really knows you, all while giving candid advice, opinions, and criticisms. In our first doctoral class together, you asked our cohort to define "charisma." I could not do it then, but I can now. Charisma is what you have, Dr. Ralston. Thank you for everything.

I would be remiss if I did not also acknowledge Dr. B. Lee Hurren, Mrs. Joanne B. Phillips, and Dr. Pamela H. Scott for their time and assistance in critiquing my research instrument used in this study.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

"A sense of humor is part of the art of leadership,
of getting along with people, of getting things done"
~ Dwight D. Eisenhower (Phillips, 2007, p. 410).

If a person can make others laugh, that person can get them to listen to almost

anything else that needs to be said. Using humor with people, especially in professional

settings, has many benefits for school principals and other leaders. The psychological

benefits of using humor when communicating have been found to include reducing stress,

reducing anxiety, increasing motivation, and making listeners feel more connected to the

speaker (Berk, 2003; Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009). According to Martin (2001) laughter

also has been found to be of physiological benefit to people in that it may reduce levels of

stress hormones in the body, improve immunity, benefit the cardiovascular system, and

increase tolerance for pain. Humor can potentially make people feel better both

physically and mentally about themselves and their jobs.

One of the greatest challenges facing all principals and school districts today is

retaining teachers. Bobek (2002) discussed the U.S. Department of Education's statistic

that over 20% of new teachers leave the profession within 3 years. In a related 2007

report, The National Center for Educational Statistics surveyed former teachers to find

that over 30% of them had left the field because they were dissatisfied with the school,

teaching assignment, or teaching as a career. An additional 25% did not state they were

dissatisfied but decided to choose a career outside the field of education. Bobek asserted

that principals who promoted teacher resiliency heightened career satisfaction. Bobek

said that teacher attrition was a serious problem for new teachers who needed to receive

more insight, understanding, and support from coworkers as well as from principals (Bobek, 2002). Teachers also needed to feel empowered by their principals in order to be satisfied with their jobs according to Petty (2007). Inman and Marlow (2004) said that principals must form relationships with teachers to foster creativity and promote the teachers' ideas. Hoy and Miskel (2008) described effective principals as leaders who recognized the need to form personal, meaningful relationships with teachers to gain their loyalty and trust. They contended that if principals formed such relationships and gained the teachers' loyalty and trust teacher job satisfaction could improve. Using humor and laughter regularly could enhance a principal's ability to form meaningful relationships with faculty members. Hurren (2010) stated that skillful use of humor by a principal also promotes a positive school climate that results in greater effectiveness of school-wide programs and other efforts.

Gunn (2002) asserted that a workplace that is lighthearted is often a more productive workplace, and meetings where laughter is encouraged usually yield creative results. Both of these ideas were directly linked to promoting teachers' creativity and empowerment.

Other effects of humor were also found in addition to the health benefits and teacher empowerment linked to use of humor and laughter. Duncan (as cited in Hurren, 2001) noted that humor provided relief from personal and professional frustrations, prevented boredom, and even fostered friendships. The suggestion that a principal could assist a teacher in dealing with frustrations could be a key to improving that teacher's job satisfaction. Furthermore, preventing boredom in the workplace could only improve a faculty member's view of that principal's effectiveness according to Hurren (2001). The

idea of forming professional friendships with colleagues could also improve job satisfaction for teachers. Wanting to work with people one enjoys being around and considers to be friends is human nature.

Purpose of the Study

According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2007) many teachers who leave education did so because they are dissatisfied with their teaching assignments or schools. Many states having reported teacher shortages, it is essential to address potential causes of this trend. A key factor in teacher job satisfaction in schools was the principals and their relationship with the teachers.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess whether principals' use of humor affected the job satisfaction of the teachers who work for them and to determine if the use of humor affected the perceptions their teachers hold regarding those principals' leadership.

Research Questions

To examine the effects that principals' use of humor has on teachers, their job satisfaction, and their perceptions on leadership, the following research questions were posed:

Question 1: Do teachers who have principals who regularly use humor have significantly higher reported job satisfaction than teachers who have principals who do not regularly use humor?

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Question 2: To what extent do teachers report that it is appropriate for principals to use humor in school settings?

Question 3: To what extent do teachers tend to see principals who use humor as more effective leaders?

Question 4: Do teachers have stronger personal relationships with principals who use humor regularly than those teachers with principals who do not?

Significance of Study

In 2001 Hurren reported that over 7,000 studies had been found dealing with job satisfaction on the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). In 2010, ERIC listed 7,064 studies relating to general job satisfaction and only one peer-reviewed journal article using the keywords "humor" and "principal." The research surrounding teachers' job satisfaction grew very little during that 9-year period. The research available regarding principals and humor was extremely limited. This study adds to the base of knowledge regarding school administrators' use of humor and the effects it has on teachers' job satisfaction and perceptions. Furthermore, this study illuminated the potential benefits of principals' using humor possibly including the improvement of teachers' job satisfaction, the enhancement of school climate, and the establishment of positive professional relationships with teachers.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms were defined for the purposes of this study because certain terms may have multiple meanings:

Humor: An instance in which an intentionally comical or funny message was communicated by the principal and perceived as humorous by the participants in this study. Such messages may have been verbal or nonverbal and may have included cartoons, gentle sarcasm, personal anecdotes, funny stories, jokes, or other forms of communication.

Job satisfaction: The degree to which teachers reported positive or negative feelings about their jobs within the school.

Principal: The building level administrator who was the supervisor of all teachers, staff members, and other administrators in each school. This term does not include assistant principals.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Certain limitations existed regarding this study due to the nature of the population that was chosen. The population was delimited to all of the teachers in a single school system in northeast Tennessee. Therefore, the results of this study may not be generalized to any other education system. All teachers in all schools in this school system were invited to participate. It is possible that the opinions and views of those teachers who did agree to participate were different from those who chose not to participate.

The survey instrument used in this study was designed and used for the first time during this research. I am employed by the school system for which the employees comprise the population of this study. There may be limitations or bias associated with the wording, semantics, the ordering of questions and other aspects of the instrument. To

minimize any such limitations, I requested and obtained critiques of the survey

instrument from three other professional educators (see Appendix A). Their critiques

have included proofreading, suggestions to improve clarity of meaning and thereby

facilitate understanding and increase validity. The survey instrument was also subjected

to two separate field tests that resulted in improvements and therefore greater validity.

Participation in this study was voluntary. Complete confidentiality was assured to

all invited participants.

Overview of the Study

This chapter established the need and the basis for this research study to be

conducted. It included an introduction to the study, statement of the purpose of the study,

research questions, definitions of relevant terms, and the limitations and delimitations of

the study.

Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature related to this study. Chapter 3

describes the research methods and development of the instrument that were used in the

study. Chapter 4 presents data analysis and the findings of the study and Chapter 5

includes a summary of the findings of the study, conclusions, and recommendations for

further research and recommendations to improve practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This chapter serves as a review of the literature, research, and studies related to using humor in educational settings. Concepts related to teacher empowerment, performance, and job satisfaction as well as student benefits as they relate to use of humor are examined. The psychological benefits of using humor as well as the physiological effects of humor are also reviewed. Humor is examined as it relates to facilitating communication and effective leadership. The common criticisms associated with the study of humor and the appropriate uses of humor are also discussed.

Teacher Empowerment, Performance, and Job Satisfaction

Teacher empowerment and the basic needs for teachers to be successful were investigated in a study performed by Petty (2007) in which she examined the specific needs for teachers to feel empowered. Included in her findings was the essential need for teachers to have support from administrators. Petty urged that through this support teachers are more likely to feel empowered and empowered teachers tend to remain in the classroom. A similar study by Inman and Marlow (2004) found that teacher empowerment, especially among new teachers, is gained through a sense of support from coworkers and a positive work environment. Teachers who do not have this support often feel isolated, have lower self-esteem, and lower efficacy.

Davis and Wilson (2000) cited research that directly linked teacher job satisfaction to stress levels as they examined whether or not a principal can influence teacher empowerment – including job satisfaction and stress levels. Their research was

performed on 660 teachers and 40 school principals in eastern Washington. They found that teachers' motivation was significantly impacted by certain "empowering behaviors" of the principals. Such motivation may be indirectly linked to teacher job satisfaction and stress (Davis & Wilson, 2000). Hoy and Miskel (2008) asserted that motivation is consistently linked to job satisfaction in educational research. Keiser and Shen (2000), concurred with the assessment that principals' behaviors are linked to teacher empowerment. However, they found discrepancy in the levels that teachers felt empowered in their schools versus how empowered principals felt the teachers were. Principals reported that teachers were significantly more empowered within the schools than the teachers reported.

Arendt (2006) performed a field study on 193 leaders and 528 subordinates to examine the effects of leaders' use of positive humor on subordinates' self-efficacy and creative performance. She found that a leader's use of humor does positively relate to subordinates' creative performance.

In a related study Puderbaugh (2006) found significant correlations between perceived styles of humor used by managers or other workplace leaders and job satisfaction. She examined the effects of perceived humor on supervision, contingent rewards, operating procedures, communication, and total job satisfaction. She found significant correlations between supervisor's perceived humor styles and several areas of job satisfaction (supervision, contingent rewards, operating procedures, communication, and overall satisfaction).

Anderson (2005) concluded that leadership styles can improve as a result of incorporating humor. His findings indicated that humor from leaders improves morale,

aids in accomplishing goals and relieves work related stress. Vecchio, Justin, and Pearce (2009) found that principals' uses of humor do have an effect on teachers' job performance. However, they also argued that the effect of this humor is dependent on the integrity of and the contingent rewards used by the principals as they interact with teachers.

<div style="text-align: center;">Humor and Student Benefits</div>

In his book titled <u>Humor as an Instructional Defibrillator</u> Ronald Berk (2002) wrote that humor in a school has five key areas in which it may benefit students. These areas were teacher to student relationships, classroom atmosphere, student responsiveness, test performance and attendance.

Teacher to Student Relationships

Wanzer and Frymier (1999) collected data from 314 college students and confirmed their hypothesis that a teachers' orientation to humor was positively associated with affective learning. They also found that students indicated they learned more from teachers who they felt were more oriented toward using humor in the classroom. Berk (2002) agreed with this assertion by reasoning that educators can better establish relationships with students by using humor as a teaching tool. Kher, Molstad, and Donahue (1999) affirmed that humor in a classroom setting fosters mutual openness, respect, and contributes to overall teaching effectiveness. Research also supports the idea that teachers who use humor are rated higher or viewed positively by both students and their peers (Garner, 2006; Torok, McMorris, & Lin, 2004).

Johnson (2005) summarized many of the leading ideas regarding humor and relationships in schools, stating:

So humor and laughter are part of the development of the individual child – and support the personal, spiritual and professional development of the teacher. Laughter is about autonomy, but it is also a unifying force. Laughter builds the relationship in the classroom and the playground – and in the staff room. These relationships are between the child and child, child and adult, adult and child, and adult and adult. (p. 91)

In an extensive qualitative study Ennis (2003) interviewed 50 students and their teachers and made over 250 hours of ethnographic observations on students in first through fifth grades. She observed and interviewed teachers using planned and purposeful humor to gain students' attention and assist them in focusing. These teachers reported that the humor relieved stress, tension, and anxiousness for both students and themselves. Students reported that the humor was relaxing and made learning more accessible for both "skilled" and "unskilled" students. Ennis reported that this study indicates that humor used within a positive environment appeared to be an effective learning tool.

Humor can also be of great benefit to counselors who see students on a regular basis. This is especially true for African American students as humor can play a powerful role in their lives as related to lifestyles and personal achievement (Vereen, Butler, Williams, Darg, & Downing, 2006).

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Classroom Atmosphere

Millard (1999) argued that humor should be considered a serious strategy for teachers to use in their classrooms. She asserted that humor energizes students, diffuses tense situations, minimizes behavioral problems, and makes both teaching and learning fun.

Glenn (as cited in Garner, 2006) stated that humor can help an individual engage the learning process by creating a positive environment in which defenses are lowered and students are better able to focus and attend to the information being presented. Sallis, Rule, and Jennings (2009) found that incorporating humor in the form of cartoons was effective at keeping students on task and motivating underachieving students. Spaeth (2001) agreed that cartoons can be an effective presentation tool and added that one does not have to tell jokes to use humor. She asserted that humor can be incorporated through "fun facts" as well as through the use of props.

In a study performed on 124 college students and professors Torok et al. (2004) found that students and professors alike appreciate the use of humor in the classroom. Over half of the students in this study reported on an open-ended survey that humor facilitated attentiveness, lowered classroom tension, and assisted them in understanding concepts presented in lectures. Well over half of the participants in this study insisted that humor creates a sense of community within a classroom setting.

Johnson (2007) argued that humor creates an atmosphere that causes students to enjoy attending class and can be used to garner their undivided attention. She added that using humor requires little resources and can turn a troubled classroom into an effective one quite easily.

Student Responsiveness

Research suggests that humor can benefit children and teenagers as they cope with physical and emotional changes (Gibson, 2003a). Berk (2002) stated that humor can allow for greater spatial temporal reasoning as well as grab students' interest. He asserted that it facilitates problem solving and increases alertness and memory in discussions and debates. Vande Berg and Van Bockern (1995) argued that humor is an effective way to help troubled students establish connections with teachers, defuse conflicts, and cope with pain and anxiety.

Fovet (2009) used focus groups, questionnaires, classroom observations, and data from social networking websites used by students to study the effects of humor on students with social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties (SEBD). In this extensive study Fovet found humor to be a technique to which SEBD students were receptive and asserted that this was linked to a need from these students to develop genuine relationships with teachers.

Student Performance

In another study Berk (2000) found that when humor is injected into tests, anxiety, tension, and stress are reduced and test performance is increased. He added that incorporating humor in the test directions can also prime a student's problem solving abilities. Berk (2002) also insisted that the many benefits of humor can have a positive effect on student attendance and that good attendance enhances student academic achievement across the board. Goebel (2009) asserted that when humor is directly linked to objectives and material being covered, there is an increase in learning, attention, and retention.

Research also indicated that humor may benefit students in specific classes. This was especially true for English and language arts classes. McMahon (1999) found that emphasizing humor in great works of literature enhanced the learning experiences for her students. McMahon required students to write parodies of famous works, create funny home videos of famous scenes from various writings, and used humor in preparing for her classes. Tatum (1999) found similar techniques with humorous puns and plays on words were effective teaching strategies in the classroom. Boerman-Coernell (1999) added that humor can be found within literary works and jokes can be made about literature to enhance lessons. Minchew and Hopper (2008) affirmed that using humor in grammar, poetry, and vocabulary fostered both learning and enjoyment. Elementary school students may also be encouraged to become lifelong readers if exposed to humorous books (Fuhler, Farris, & Walther, 1999).

In a related study Aria and Tracey (2003) performed a study of 84 seventh grade students in which they were presented vocabulary lessons. Some students in this study were used as an experimental group in which they were taught vocabulary using humorous contexts. Other students were used as a control group and received typical vocabulary lessons without the humor. Pre- and posttest examinations indicated that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group for these vocabulary lessons.

Arnsan (2000) presented research that indicated humor should be used in library settings in addition to classrooms. He found that it facilitated learning and enhanced bibliographic instruction.

Humor was also found to be an effective teaching tool in science and math classes. Lipp (2001) used jokes in teaching algebra based word problems to middle school students. Jokes were used as starting points for solving word problems to assist students in finding alternative solutions to such problems. Garrett and Shade (2004) promoted the idea of using humorous assignments when teaching a science curriculum. They asserted that the use of comedy-based assignments and humor can assist students in identifying and explaining concepts.

Humor may also be an effective tool in technology courses as well (Flowers, 2001). In technology classes such as surveying Flowers stated that incorporating humor such as relevant jokes, humorous photos, or even mock experiment reports can increase creativity and motivation. James (2004) found a need for humor to be incorporated into online courses. He concluded that humor in online courses improved divergent thinking and increased learning as defined by improved exam scores.

Grisaffe, Blom, and Burke (2003) found that humor can be used by coaches as well as teachers in an effort to enhance performance. They found a moderate to high correlation between athletes liking their coaches and those coaches using humor. This correlation did not indicate causation, but these researchers identified the possibility that the results could be linked to winning percentages and player satisfaction.

Psychological Benefits

Sigmond Freud (1960) viewed humor and jokes as forms of defense mechanisms. He saw humor as something that could protect you from the reality of uncomfortable situations and override the negative effects of such realities. Galloway and Cropley

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(1999) agreed with Freud in that they assert that humor encourages objectivity that often cushions the effects of negative emotional responses.

In a study related to these notions Strick, van Baaren, and van Knippenberg (2009) surveyed 90 students asking them to rate how unpleasant they felt after viewing a series of neutral or negative pictures. During some of the trials subjects were shown a humorous stimulus after viewing the pictures. The researchers found that humor captured the subjects' attention to a degree that allowed the negative emotions to be regulated. They concluded that people can ease the stress of emotional momentary adversities by being exposed to humor.

Kelly (2002) investigated the psychological relationship between worrying and humor. He surveyed 140 individuals using the Worry Domains Questionnaire and the Multidimensional Sense of Humor Scale. His research showed that worry has a significantly negative relationship to humor. He concluded that individuals with a strong sense of humor are less likely to worry, and humor could possibly moderate the relationship between worry and stress.

Ventis, Higbee, and Murdock (2001) used an experimental design to study the psychotherapeutic effects that humor has on fear. These researchers took 40 students who were highly fearful of spiders and safely exposed them to an American tarantula and then assigned them to one of three treatment groups. One treatment group used systematic desensitization (the traditional approach), the second used humor desensitization, and the final group was untreated as a control. Humor desensitization was found to perform as well as the more traditional systematic desensitization at reducing fear in this study.

Lyttle (2010) examined the role that humor plays in persuasion by studying the responses of 148 participants to what the Lockheed Martin Corporation calls "The Ethics Challenge." This training module takes an interactive gaming format and it was modified so that some versions would include cartoons and humorous interjections. He found that humor does play a role in persuasion. He also found that ironic humor was more effective than cartoon humor at persuading subjects, but found that self-effacing types of humor were most effective. The persuasive power of humor also plays a role in the influential realm of advertising as well (Cline & Kellaris, 2003).

Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2001) examined the psychological attributes of humor in discussions among groups of individuals. They performed an extensive qualitative study on 29 discussion groups (data from previous studies) to investigate the connections between successful uses of humor and the relationship between the success and a user's status, gender, level of participation, and number of interruptions. They also analyzed the leading theories on the function of humor.

Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2001) reported that one group of theories on the function of humor relates to what they call "mean-marking." This school of thinking regarding the function of humor entails using humor to define your own reality and your interactions with others. They classified a second group of related theories as "hierarchy building." According to Robinson and Smith-Lovin these theories relate the function of humor to creating or emphasizing the different statuses among interacting individuals. A theory in this hierarchy building category that is often cited in research is Lafave's 1972 Superiority Theory. Lafave contended that individuals appreciate humor if it is directed at categories or groups to which they do not belong.

A third group of functional theories of humor described by Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2001) are those that involve "cohesion building." Theories in this group relate the function of humor to building or strengthening bonds between individuals within social groups (Francis, 1994). Their final functional group of theories for humor included those related to "tension relief." Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2001) claimed that most of the theories in this classification relate to the psychological benefits of humor reducing stress.

Nevertheless, the study by Robinson and Smith-Lovin (2001) did not overwhelmingly support any single group of these theories with regard to the psychological function of humor. They found that there are circumstances and situations in which most if not all of these theories regarding the function of humor could be applicable. They also found that men tell more jokes than women, but that use of humor increased for women when there were no men present. They also found that speakers are less likely to interject humor if they are interrupted frequently and that joking is a behavior that is usually reserved for the people of high status within a differentiated social group.

<center>Physiological Effects</center>

In their book titled <u>If They Are Laughing They Just Might Be Listening</u> Lundberg and Thurston (2002) presented an overview of the physiological health benefits of using humor in schools. They stated that laughter increases oxygen levels in the blood, decreases blood pressure, increases heart rate, stimulates the release of natural pain relievers, and boosts immunity. Berk (2002) concured with these assertions and added

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that humor and laughter also play physiological roles with regards to exercising muscles, stimulating circulation, and decreasing the levels of stress hormones in the body. Wilkins and Eisenbraun (2009) cited empirical evidence that indicates laughter may increase pain tolerance, reduce the effects of bronchial asthma, decrease skin allergies, and decrease the effects of diabetic neuropathology. Numerous studies indicate that humor may benefit human health and healthcare in a variety of ways (Buchowski et al., 2007; Buxman, 2008; Lash, 2005; Wooten, 1997).

Cardiovascular Benefits

Miller and Fry (2009) summarized current research on the effects of mirthful laughter on the human cardiovascular system. They presented that the cells of the inner blood vessel lining (vascular endothelium) secrete chemicals such as nitric oxide (NO) that reduces vascular inflammation and decreases aggregation of white blood cells and platelets. Miller and Fry also asserted that mirthful laughter induces the release of endorphins and that these endorphins enhance the production of NO. They further hypothesized that laughter has an effect on the cardiovascular system that is opposite in nature to that of mental stress and depression.

Wilkins and Eisenbraun (2009) agreed with the notion that humor and laughter are of physiological relevance as related to reducing stress. They reported that many of the physiological conditions associated with poor health are exacerbated by stress and tension. Wilkins and Eisenbraun claimed that humor could be viewed as a coping mechanism when the health benefits related to losing the anxiety related to stress were observed.

In a related study Szabo (2003) found that 20 minutes of exposure to humor was more effective at reducing anxiety than 20 minutes of exercise. Szabo referenced work performed by Sobel and Ornstein (1997) that attributed some of these findings to the notion that laughter is like "inner jogging" and affects the body in ways that are similar to physical exercise in that it affects heart rate, respiratory rate, and blood pressure.

Immunity and Pain

In his bestselling book titled Anatomy of an Illness Norman Cousins (1979) detailed his personal account of how humor assisted him in overcoming a debilitating disease called ankylosing spondylitis. Cousins was told by doctors that this autoimmune disease was incurable and would progressively worsen. After getting his family doctor to agree, he worked with him to treat the condition using a regimen of laughter and vitamin C. While medicines and pain relievers were of little help, the regimen of comedy movies and laughter improved his condition. Other doctors and researchers were skeptical that laughter was what cured him. Cousins summarized his thoughts on such doubts by stating:

> How scientific was it to believe that laughter – as well as positive emotions in general – was affecting my body chemistry for the better? If laughter did in fact have a salutary effect on the body's chemistry, it seemed at least theoretically likely that it would enhance the body's ability to fight the inflammation. So we took sedimentation rate readings just before and several hours after the laughter episodes. Each time, there was a drop of at least five points. The drop by itself was not substantial, but it held and was cumulative. I was greatly elated that there is a physiologic basis for the ancient theory that laughter is good medicine. (p. 44)

Rayl (2000) presented studies by a research group called "Rx Laughter" who performed a 5 year study on the effects that laughter has on children with life-threatening illnesses. Rx Laughter found that when exposed to humorous movies, children's tolerance to pain was increased. Much of the research for Rx Laughter was performed by Stuber and colleagues (2007) and involved subjecting children ages 7-16 to comedy movies before asking them to perform a painful task. The children were asked to submerge one of their arms in ice water until it felt uncomfortable. The results were that humorous videos were found to be statistically significant for improving tolerance for a moderately painful stimulus. The notion of humor serving as a pain reliever is also supported by research performed by Digney (2009).

Berk (as cited in Rayl, 2000) also reported that laughter plays a role in the activation of T-lymphocytes and T-cells that have helper/suppressor markers. Berk affirmed that mirthful laughter plays a role in the physiology and chemistry of the human body related to immunity and normal cell production.

Hoare (2004) reported that laughter can reduce levels of stress hormones such as cortisol and stimulate the production of stress reducing and pain relieving endorphins. He argued that laughter is empowering and motivating as it can affect a patient's chance for recovery from an illness.

<center>Leadership and Communication</center>

Gibson (2003b) stated that regardless of the career one chooses, high stress levels are bound to occur at times. She asserted that humor in the workplace balances stress levels, motivates staff, energizes meetings, reduces conflicts, and improves

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communication. She added that workplaces with leaders who share smiles and laughter have more productive work forces. Gibson credited this to employees feeling appreciated or having a sense of purpose that causes them to work more productively.

Barden (2007) viewed humor as a window into someone's personality much the same way a resume´ is a window into someone's experiences. He stated that a sense of humor is one of the critical qualities of leadership in that it enlivens the workplace, reduces stress, and serves as common ground for coworkers who otherwise might be distanced from each other. He affirmed applicants or candidates for employment who use appropriate humor are generally preferred over those who do not.

Reese (2009) presented the benefits of using humor from a school leadership perspective. Reese presented several scenarios in which school leaders must have a sense of humor in order to cope or deal with the stresses of running a successful school. She mentioned situations in which principals kissed pigs in front of students and colleagues, were repeatedly dropped in dunk tanks, and sat in a lawn chairs on top of the school during poor weather. She also presented research that indicates that humor is an excellent resource to use during the change process within an education setting. Reese stated that effective principals are willing to do almost anything to promote success in their schools. She contended that one such tool for promoting success is the appropriate use of humor.

Decker and Rotondo (2001) performed a quantitative study to determine if use of humor affected subordinates' perceptions of leadership behaviors and effectiveness. They also studied the effects of humor as related to gender and leadership. Decker and Rotondo took data from 359 questionnaires gathered from a random sample of subordinate level

employees. These surveys contained questions regarding their managers' use and appreciation of humor and their leadership behaviors. Bivariate correlations were performed on the data and indicated that positive humor increased perceptions of desirable tasks and relationship behavior. It was also noted that leaders who were reported using positive humor were viewed as more effective by their subordinates.

Anderson (2005) conducted a qualitative study in an effort to determine if humor can be used to improve a leadership style and if effective use of humor is a learned behavior or an innate gift. Through coded interviews with military officers he found that it was likely that humor could improve leadership style by improving morale, assisting in accomplishing goals, and relieving workplace stress. Interview participants reported that humor was often incorporated naturally into their personalities, but that it was also learned and not a "gift."

In an in depth overview of past research on organizational humor Yarwood (1995) argued that managers and other leaders should recognize the importance of humor in communication. Humor can convey insights about the social dynamics of an organization that no other form of communication can. He argued that humor may be funny on the surface, but it can carry deeper messages. Yarwood strongly encouraged leaders, "to accept humor as an important form of communication, to understand why both they and employees engage in humor, and seek to understand alike its contributions and dysfunctions relative to organizational purposes and more general societal standards of fair play" (p. 89).

Meyer (2000) asserted that humor is an influential tool for communication in that it has persuasive influence. He claimed that it can assist people in mutually identifying

with one another while communicating and assist in gauging each other's positions and values.

Thompson (2010) also found that humor can be related to trust with regard to professional relationships and communication. She found that shared laughter facilitated communication just as trust assists in building communication competence. Barsoux (2010) agrees by adding that humor strengthens trust and brings down communication barriers between leaders and subordinates.

Miczo (2010) performed a study to determine if greater willingness to communicate predicted greater humor skill. He also investigated humor orientation as it relates to reported loneliness as well as humor ability as a predictor of stress. The data supported his hypothesis that low levels of interpersonal anxiety with regards to communicating did predict greater skill at being humorous.

Criticisms

Bennett (2003) argued that while much media and medical literature have touted the benefits of using humor, research is insufficient to validate such claims. He asserted that humor therapy has not gained widespread acceptance because humor research often negates the claims made regarding the benefits of using humor. He also suggested that humor studies are often poorly designed, have small sample sizes, and inadequate experimental controls. Bennett conceded that humor research indicates that laughter plays a role in stress reduction and lowering of both anxiety and reported levels of pain.

Bateman (2006) examined the relationship between a leader's sense of humor and situational leadership styles as it related to subordinates developmental levels. While he

asserted that effective use of humor can produce and enhance supportive behaviors of subordinates, he found no correlation between humor and leadership style.

Saroglou and Scariot (2002) found that different styles of using humor corresponded to different personality types in students. They examined the relationship that social humor, self-enhancing humor, self-defeating humor, and hostile humor have with self-esteem, school motivation, school performance, and several personality-related traits. Aside from certain personality traits, the research team found that humor style had no direct or indirect impact on students' academic performance.

<div align="center">Appropriate Usage</div>

If humor is to be used in a school setting, it should be used appropriately. Wanzer, Frymier, Wojtaszczyk, and Smith (2006) surveyed nearly 300 students to determine what types of humor they felt were appropriate (and inappropriate) for classroom use by teachers. The students were presented an open-ended question to answer regarding the types of appropriate humor they had personally observed instructors using in class. A second question was asked regarding inappropriate humor that had been observed. They concluded through these surveys that student reported appropriate use of humor by teachers could be classified into four major categories. Students reported that appropriate humor could be related to subject matter, self-disparaging towards the teacher, mild humor unrelated to course material, or unintentional humor students found funny that a teacher did not intend to be humorous. The humor that students deemed to be inappropriate were also classified into categories (despite some overlap) and labeled as "disparaging" or "offensive" humor. The researchers found that students had very little

difficulty identifying what was appropriate versus inappropriate use of humor. They argued that teachers should not use humor that targets a particular student or group. They also strongly discouraged joking about students' personal lives, interests, appearances, genders, or religions.

In a follow-up study Frymier, Wanzer, and Wojtaszczyk (2008) surveyed 352 students to determine the reasons humor use was deemed appropriate or inappropriate by students. This research team suggested that teachers who were more humor-oriented had greater skill at using humor and this could be linked to how it was perceived by students. They suggested that the teacher's communication style could also be linked to these perceptions. It was also noted that the personality characteristics of the students also likely played a role in determining what was viewed as appropriate or inappropriate. While the researchers found no clear patterns of how perceptions related to teacher characteristics, they did find that students' perceptions of appropriate use of humor frequently overlapped with what was considered inappropriate.

Hellman (2007) insisted that the easiest way to incorporate appropriate humor is to use it in a fashion that best fits your own personality. He also argued that there is a time for humor and a time to be serious and that it is important for students to recognize this. He urged professionals who use humor to use only that which is politically correct and to make sure to know the "audience" before you attempt the humor. Hellman also suggested that it is important to also recognize and acknowledge the humor used by those around you.

Kher, Molstad, and Donahue (1999) added that inappropriate use of humor can create a hostile learning environment. The importance of avoiding sarcasm, hostile

humor, sexual humor, and otherwise negative humor is supported by other research as well (Brown, 1995; Pollack & Freda, 1997; Torok, McMorris, & Lin, 2004).

Summary

This chapter has summarized much of the current research regarding humor and laughter. It has shown that research indicates humor can be beneficial to students, teachers, and school leaders. Chapter 2 also introduced the potential psychological as well as physiological benefits of humor and laughter. It has reviewed the likely benefits of using humor as a communication tool as well as its effects on leadership strategies. The chapter also introduced some of the criticisms common among research studies associated with the benefits of humor use. This chapter also reported the precautions associated with humor use and the importance of using humor appropriately within a school setting.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to investigate whether or not principals' use of humor affected the job satisfaction of the teachers who work for them and to determine if the use of humor affected the perceptions the teachers held regarding those principals' leadership.

The data were collected from surveys completed by willing teachers within a single school system in Northeast Tennessee. The data were treated using descriptive and inferential statistics. The methodology in this chapter was divided into five main sections:

1. Population

2. Instrumentation

3. Data Collection

4. Data Analysis

5. Dissemination of Results

Population

The population of this study consisted of 796 Pre-K through 12th grade educators within the selected public school system. These teachers included general education, special education, art, music, and vocational teachers and library media specialists. Administrators were not asked to complete surveys. There were 450 surveys returned for use in this study.

Instrumentation

The survey instrument (Educators' Perceptions of Administrators' Use of Humor) used for data collection in this study was designed by the researcher (see Appendix B). The survey instrument was designed to empirically measure the perceptions that educators have regarding humor use in general, building level principals' uses of humor, and perceptions of job satisfaction and leader effectiveness as they relate to principals' uses of humor. The survey instrument consisted of 30 items using a Likert scale format. The instrument included one additional open-ended question that allowed respondents to offer other areas of humor used by administrators not included in the other 30 items. The survey instrument also included five questions related to demographics of the respondents.

The 30 items of Likert format were designed using a scale from 1 to 5 as follows: (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Moderately Disagree; (3) Neither/Neutral; (4) Moderately Agree; (5) Strongly Agree. Each of these 30 items was related to one of the four research questions or as part of the baseline to establish whether or not a principal uses humor in the professional setting. Each item on the survey was classified into categories as either part of the baseline, job satisfaction, appropriate use, effective leadership, or personal relationships.

The scale score for each of these categories was derived by adding the assigned numeric values for each response from a survey. The items that were used to measure results for each category are shown below:

Baseline

9. My building level principal has a good sense of humor.

11. My principal uses humor during faculty meetings.

Job Satisfaction

3. Principals who use humor generally have teachers who are more satisfied.

15. I enjoy my current teaching assignment.

18. I am NOT appreciated for my hard work by my principal.

19. My principal is satisfied with my job performance.

24. I could be more successful if my principal used humor more often.

26. My school would be a better place if my principal used more humor.

29. The teachers in my school are happy with teaching overall.

Appropriate Use

2. Principals showing students that they have a sense of humor is good practice.

5. It is acceptable for principals to tell appropriate jokes to teachers.

6. It is NOT appropriate for principals to hang cartoons in their offices.

7. It is acceptable for principals to share funny personal stories with teachers.

8. A principal using humor during faculty meetings is a needless distraction.

20. I appreciate seeing a principal use humor when interacting with students.

25. I like it when my principal shares funny personal stories with our staff.

Effective Leadership

1. Having a good sense of humor is a necessity for being an effective principal.

10. My principal is a good leader for our school.

17. My principal would be a better leader if he used more humor.

21. My principal would be more effective if he/she was more serious.

27. I would respect my principal more as a leader if he/she used more humor.

28. My principal is more respected because he/she has a sense of humor.

30. My principal is an effective leader.

Personal Relationships

4. It is easier to get to know a principal who has a sense of humor.

12. I would feel comfortable sharing a joke with my principal.

13. I would feel comfortable sharing a personal problem with my principal.

14. I do NOT have a strong personal relationship with my principal.

16. My principal cares about me as a professional.

22. My principal cares about me on a personal level.

23. I do NOT consider my principal to be a friend.

Two separate pilot studies were conducted using the survey instrument. One of the studies was conducted with graduate students and the other with undergraduate students in a teacher preparation program. The purpose of both studies was to identify wording, semantics, or items on the instrument that could be misinterpreted or misunderstood. These studies also assisted in determining the approximate amount of time that would be needed to complete the surveys. No participants in the pilot studies were from the population of educators used in the actual research.

To increase content validity for the survey, a panel of three independent judges was used to evaluate the instrument (see Appendix A). Each of the three judges

evaluated the instrument with regard to the research questions, content, and potential ability for the instrument to collect data.

Data Collection Procedures

Permission to perform this study was obtained from the Director of Schools for the public school system selected for this research (see Appendix E). Permission was also granted to attend a regularly scheduled principals' meeting at the central office to briefly explain the study and request cooperation from the building level principals. It was requested that each of the 27 principals allow the researcher to contact them at a later date to schedule a convenient time to attend a faculty meeting to present the surveys to the respective staff members. The principals were also given a cover letter that briefly explained the research, assured them that participation was voluntary, and assured them of complete anonymity of participants.

The faculty meetings were scheduled and most were attended by the researcher. The research was explained to the teachers and any teacher who was willing to participate was given a survey by a volunteer teacher from that staff. After completion of the survey, the teachers were asked to return them to a box located near the exit. It was explained to the participants that their voluntary completion of the surveys would serve as their signed consent statements to use the surveys in a published research study.

Data Analysis

The data that were collected from the surveys were analyzed using SPSS statistical software for Windows. For clarity of presentation the Likert scale was reversed in the analyses. This reversal was necessary to ensure that higher (or lower) statistical means corresponded to higher (or lower) measures in each survey category. The statistics used to answer the research questions and the null hypotheses associated with each question are presented in the following section.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Question 1: Do teachers who have principals who regularly use humor have significantly higher reported job satisfaction than teachers who have principals who do not regularly use humor?

To address this question survey data were analyzed using a *t* test for independent samples.

> Ho1: There is no significant difference in reported job satisfaction between teachers who perceive their principals regularly using humor and those principals who are not perceived as using humor regularly.

Question 2: To what extent do teachers report that it is appropriate for principals to use humor in school settings?

To address this question, survey data were analyzed using a single sample *t* test with choice "3" from the survey, which represents neutrality, serving as the test variable.

> Ho2: Teachers do not feel it is appropriate for principals to use humor in the school setting.

Question 3: To what extent do teachers tend to see principals who use humor as more

effective leaders?

To address this question survey data were analyzed using a correlation between baseline

questions and the effective leadership questions from the survey.

Ho3: There is no significant relationship in perceived leadership effectiveness

between principals who reportedly use humor and those who do not use

humor.

Question 4: Do teachers have stronger personal relationships with principals who use

humor regularly than those teachers with principals who do not?

To address this question survey data were analyzed using a *t* test for independent

samples.

Ho4: There is no significant difference in teachers' perceived strength of personal

relationship between principals who reportedly use humor regularly and

those principals who do not.

Dissemination of Results

The results of this study were made available to any participants from the

population who requested them. The Central Office for the school system in this study

was also presented with a copy of the results from this study. The results were also

published and recorded in the East Tennessee State University Library and a hard bound

copy was placed in the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis department at East

Tennessee State University. Results of this study were also published and made available

electronically online. Publication was also sought in educational journals.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether principals' use of humor affected the job satisfaction of the teachers who work for them and to determine if the use of humor affected the perceptions teachers hold regarding those principals' leadership. The five areas of focus that the instrument used were:

1. A Baseline to Determine Teacher's Perception of Principal's Humor

2. Job Satisfaction of Teachers

3. Appropriate Use of Humor

4. Effective Leadership of the Principal

5. Personal Relationships between Teachers and the Principal

The research questions that served as a framework for this study were:

1. Do teachers who have principals who regularly use humor have significantly higher reported job satisfaction than teachers who have principals who do not regularly use humor?

2. To what extent do teachers report that it is appropriate for principals to use humor in school settings?

3. To what extent do teachers tend to see principals who use humor as more effective leaders?

4. Do teachers have stronger personal relationships with principals who use humor regularly than those teachers with principals who do not?

Demographic Data

Demographic data were collected as part of the survey instrument used in this study (see Appendix B). These data included the respondent's gender, the principal's gender, years of experience teaching, highest level or degree of education, and the subject area and grade levels served.

Description of Population

The school system in this study is comprised of 27 total elementary, intermediate, middle, and high schools. The population consisted of 796 certified teachers, vocational teachers, and school counselors from the schools in this district. The participants in this study are referred to as the "teachers" in this chapter. From this population of teachers, 450 responses were received for an overall response rate of 56%.

Table 1 shows the number and percentage of each type of school included in the study.

Table1

Number and Percentage of Each Type of School

Type of School	*N*	%
Elementary School	15	55.6
Intermediate School	1	3.7
Middle School	7	25.9
High School	4	14.8
Total	27	100.0

Table 2 shows the demographics by gender of the teachers and principals in the study.

Table 2

Gender of Teachers and Principals

	Teachers		Principals	
Gender	*N*	%	*N*	%
Male	92	20.4	15	55.6
Female	352	78.2	12	44.4
No Response	6	1.3	0	0.0
Total	450	99.9*	27	100.0

*Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table 3 shows the numbers and percentages for the highest degree earned for the teachers in this study.

Table 3

Highest Degrees Earned By Teachers

Degree	*N*	%
Bachelor's	153	34.0
Master's	262	58.2
Education Specialist	21	4.7
Doctorate	3	0.7
No Response	11	2.4
Total	450	100.0

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for the years of experience for the teachers in this study.

Table 4

Years of Experience for Teachers

Years	*N*	%
1-4	76	16.9
5-10	109	24.2
11-15	92	20.4
16-20	42	9.3
21-25	33	7.3
26-30	30	6.6
Over 30	54	12.0
No Response	10	2.2
Total	450	98.9*

*Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Table 5 shows the numbers and percentages of teachers from each subject and grade level in the study.

Table 5

Subject and Grade Level of Teachers

Subject or Grade Level	*N*	%
Elementary	226	50.2
Middle	88	19.6
High School (all subjects)	95	21.1
Special Education (any grade)	20	4.4
Other	10	2.2
No Response	11	2.4
Total	450	99.9*

*Total does not equal 100% due to rounding.

Data

Research Question 1

Do teachers who have principals who regularly use humor have significantly higher reported job satisfaction than teachers who have principals who do not regularly use humor?

Ho1: There is no significant difference in reported job satisfaction between teachers who perceived their principals regularly using humor and those principals who are not perceived as using humor regularly.

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean ($\bar{x}$)

teacher reported job satisfaction for teachers with principals who use humor was

significantly different from the mean ($\bar{x}$) teacher reported job satisfaction for teachers

with principals who do not use humor. The reported level of job satisfaction on the

survey instrument (see Appendix B) was the test variable and the grouping variable was

the principals' reported use of humor. The test was significant, $t(410) = 11.64$, $p < .001$.

The null hypothesis was rejected. There were 38 participants who indicated that their

principal's use of humor was neutral. Those data were not used for this analysis. Those

teachers reporting that humor was used by their principals ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.39$) tended

to report higher job satisfaction than those who reported principals not using humor ($M =$

2.92, $SD = 0.56$). The 95% confidence interval for the differences in means was 0.72 to

1.01. The η^2 index was 0.25 which indicated a large effect size. Figure 1 shows the

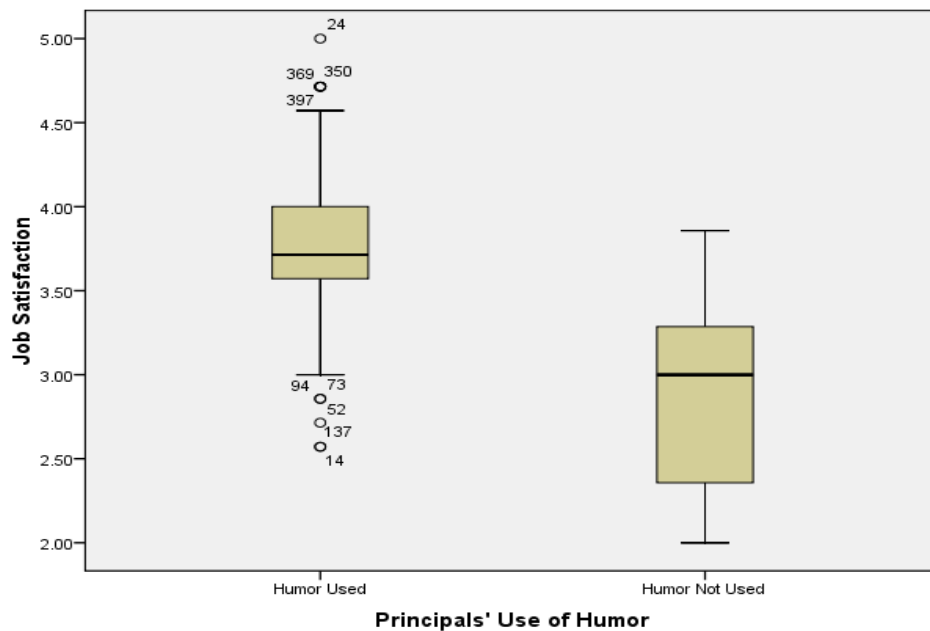distributions for the two groups.

Figure 1. Distribution of Reported Job Satisfaction for Principals Who Use Humor and
Principals Who Do Not Use Humor

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Research Question 2

To what extent do teachers report that it is appropriate for principals to use humor in school settings?

Ho2: Teachers do not feel it is appropriate for principals to use humor in the school setting.

A one-sample *t* test was conducted on the Appropriate Use data from the survey instrument used in this study (see Appendix B) to evaluate whether their mean was significantly different from 3, the neutral value for appropriate use in the survey. The sample mean of 4.11 ($SD = 0.63$) was significantly different from 3, $t(449) = 37.54$, p < .001. The null hypothesis was rejected. The 95% confidence interval for the sample mean ranged from 1.05 to 1.17. The η^2 index was 0.76 which indicated a large effect size. The results support the conclusion that teachers report that it is appropriate for principals to use humor in the school setting. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the data.
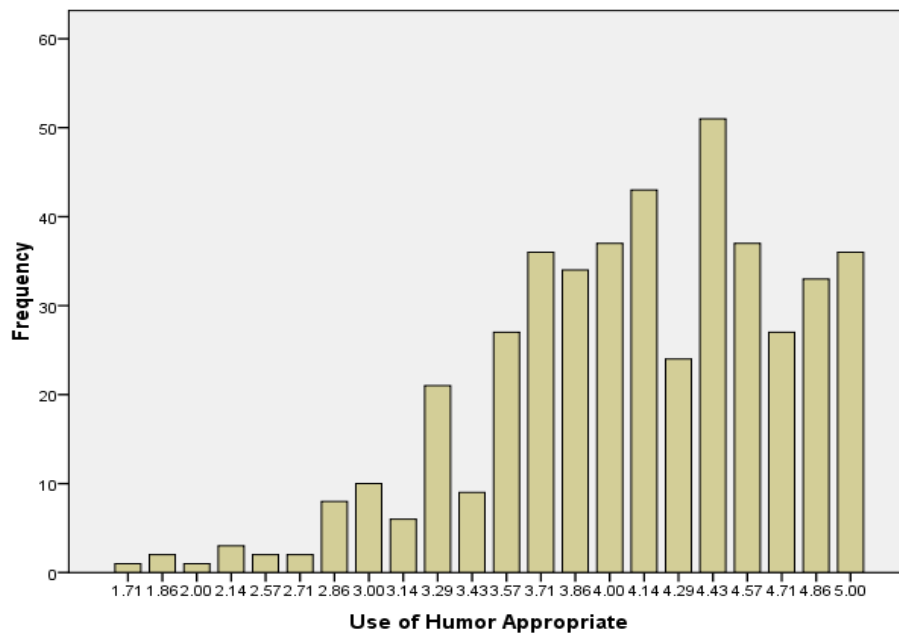

Figure 2. Frequencies at Which Teachers Report Principals' Using Humor is
        Appropriate in School Settings

Research Question 3

To what extent do teachers tend to see principals who use humor as more effective leaders?

Ho3: There is no significant relationship in perceived leadership effectiveness between principals who reportedly use humor and those who do not use humor.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to test the relationship between principals' use of humor and perceived leadership effectiveness. The result of the analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between principals' use of humor (M = 4.08, SD = 0.89) and perceived leadership effectiveness (M = 3.62, SD = 0.55) and a statistically significant correlation [$r(448) = .498$, p < .001]. The null hypothesis was rejected. In general, the results suggest that principals who use humor tend to have a higher level of perceived leadership effectiveness. Figure 3 shows the distribution of the data.
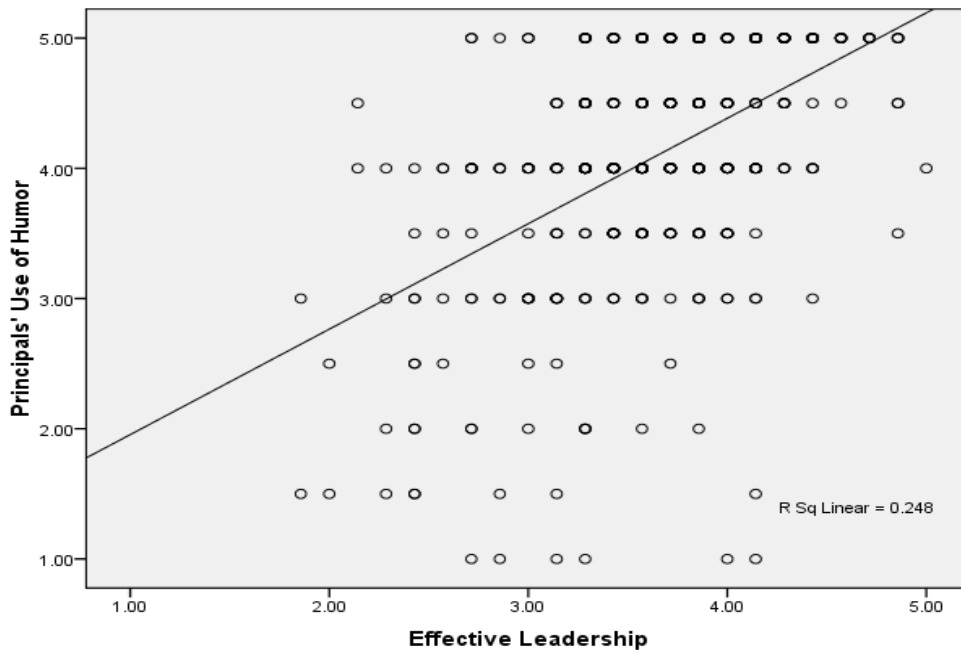

Figure 3. Distribution of Data from Correlation Between Principals' Use of Humor and Perceived Leadership Effectiveness

Research Question 4

Do teachers have stronger personal relationships with principals who use humor regularly than those teachers with principals who do not?

Ho4: There is no significant difference in teachers' perceived strength of personal relationship between principals who reportedly use humor regularly and those principals who do not.

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean teacher reported personal relationships for teachers with principals who use humor was significantly different from the mean teacher reported personal relationships for teachers with principals who do not use humor. The reported level of personal relationship on the survey instrument (see Appendix B) was the test variable and the grouping variable was the principals' reported use of humor. The test was significant, $t(410) = 15.00$, $p < .001$. The null hypothesis was rejected. There were 38 participants who indicated that their principal's use of humor was neutral. Those data were not used for this analysis. Those teachers reporting that humor was used by their principals ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 0.60$) tended to report stronger personal relationships with their principals than those who reported principals not using humor ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.66$). The 95% confidence interval for the differences in means was 1.45 to 1.88. The η^2 index was 0.35 which indicated a large effect size. Figure 4 shows the distributions for the two groups.
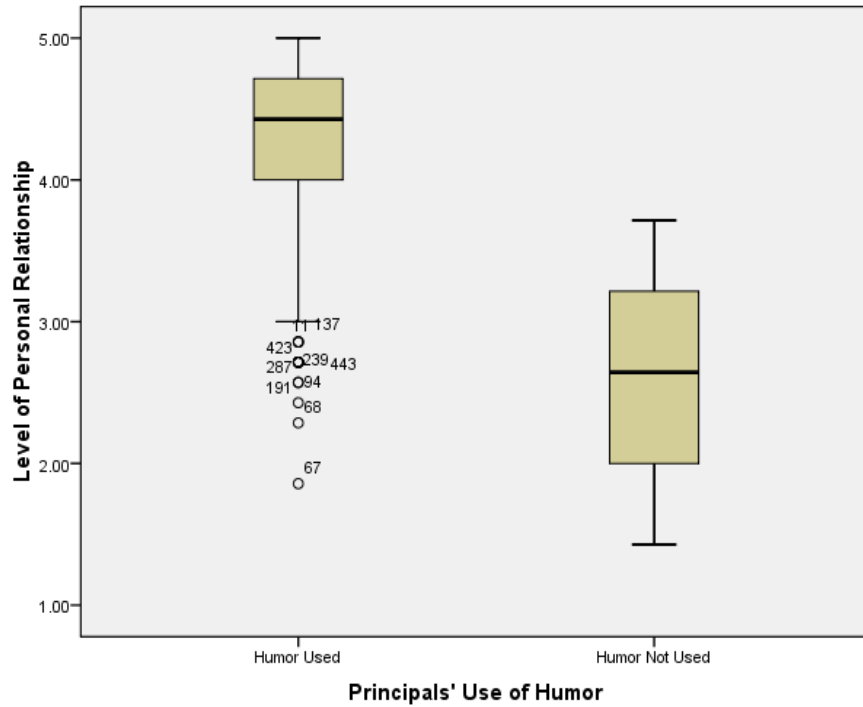
Figure 4. Distribution of Reported Personal Relationships for Principals Who Use Humor and Principals Who Do Not Use Humor

Open-Ended Responses

A single question on the survey instrument (see Appendix B) was designed to allow participants to comment on the instrument, principals' use of humor, or other areas related to the study. The following responses were reported (edited only for spelling and omission of names):

1. "To me, humor has nothing to do with one's ability to lead, demonstrate administrative abilities, or a genuine concern for faculty, staff, and students. An effective principal is one that guides those he/she is responsible for with integrity and the ability to make fair decisions. Humor has its benefits, but

does not qualify as an effective administrator. At times it may be used to avoid difficult situations that need serious attention."

2. "My principal's use of humor does not distract from faculty meetings or conversations. She uses it in a way to enhance her points or to make someone feel better about a situation."

3. "[My principal] tries to use humor, but comes across more as sarcasm."

4. "I enjoy a good sense of humor. I think it would make me feel more relaxed and enjoy my work atmosphere more."

5. "Humor has its place in life! Too much and you are not taken seriously! Too little and you are a prude! Moderately and you will be fine and accepted. It can be a useful tool for personal effect!

6. "Administrators only joke with certain staff members."

7. "I don't necessarily have suggestions about humor, but a simple experience with eye contact from my principal would be fabulous. Although, humor may make him more approachable."

8. "Balance is key – humor when appropriate, seriousness when it is time to be serious. The administrators here do a good job of this."

9. "Thank you for addressing this subject! Humor is the balm for the soul and Heaven knows in our profession we need a laugh every now and then!"

10. "Our principal uses humor well in a professional way, not in a 'joke telling' way."

11. "Humor is good as long as it is appropriate humor. Herein lies the problem – what is 'appropriate' to me might be offensive to someone else or visa-versa.

Sometimes it is better to be 'strictly business' rather than risk offending someone – a fine line."

12. "I appreciate a principal who is able to laugh at his/her own mistakes. We all make them, and we can laugh at ourselves too.

13. "Joking all the time or telling silly or inappropriate jokes is not necessary, but being friendly and more open with faculty is important. Teachers should not fear the administration at the same level as the students. The principals and teachers should be careful about joking too much with students."

14. "Humor can be used to make students and teachers feel at ease and not personally attacked during a discussion."

15. "Humor makes anyone more approachable."

16. "I appreciate humor (not gross or crass) but 'cute,' funny, loving – you have to have a sense of humor, truly in any job! I'm very thankful our principal has a great, healthy sense of humor!"

17. "[This opinion is] not a reflection on our principal. This is a reflection on mandates from the state."

18. "Always very friendly and welcoming to people – but able to be serious about education."

19. "Being about to laugh at himself or tell stories about when he made a mistake."

20. "I respect my principal because she is an effective role model and leader, regardless of her humor. I will say, however, that she has an amazing sense of humor!"

21. "I love to laugh. The endorphins rush/high is a pleasure. We need that several times a day. Our principal has an effective mix of serious and humorous. We need more and more of those principals."

22. "Humor is not needed in all situations, but helps in many situations."

23. "I feel that my principal uses a very good blend of both seriousness and humor."

24. "Communicating through humor (not silliness or jokes) is a good tool for dealing with teachers as long as it doesn't break down the respect. Deference is still important. Humor is nice, respect and encouragement from principal to teacher is essential."

25. "If you mean having a sense of humor is being able to laugh at yourself and not offend easily, then yes! But, not making jokes at others' expense!"

26. "A sense of humor should never be at someone else's expense. Also, being able to not take yourself too seriously helps. My principal has the correct balance. He is a great leader!"

Summary

There were four major findings from this study related to principals' use of humor in the school setting. With regards to job satisfaction, teachers who reported working with principals who use humor in the school setting reported higher levels of satisfaction than teachers working with principals who did not use humor. The difference in means between the two groups was found to be significant.

Teachers also reported that it was appropriate for principals to use humor in a school setting. When the mean response to the survey questions regarding appropriate use of humor by a principal was compared to the neutral value (3) the difference was found to be significant. This significant difference was skewed such that the results favored humor use being appropriate in the school setting.

The survey results also indicated that teachers perceived principals who use humor as being more effective leaders than those principals who do not use humor. The correlation between leadership effectiveness and principals' use of humor indicated a strong positive relationship between those two variables.

With regards to personal relationships, teachers who reported working with principals who use humor in the school setting reported stronger personal relationships with their principals than teachers working with principals who did not use humor. The difference in means between the two groups was found to be significant.

The open-ended question responses indicated that some of the participants had concerns about appropriate use of humor and feel that a combination of humor and a degree of seriousness result in more effective leadership. These responses indicated generally favorable opinions regarding principals using humor as long as the humor was not sarcastic or otherwise inappropriate.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A person without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs —
jolted by every pebble in the road
~ Henry Ward Beecher (Strick et al, 2009, p. 574).

Summary

The atmosphere and mood of a school is set by the leadership team in that school. With over 20% of all teachers leaving the profession within their first 3 years of teaching, principals are faced with trying to find ways to keep teachers satisfied and content with their jobs (Bobek, 2002). Using humor in a school setting is a simple and inexpensive technique to improving a school climate and potentially improving teacher job satisfaction.

This study focused on teachers' perceptions of their building level principals' use of humor and whether this humor affected the teachers' overall job satisfaction. In this chapter a summary of the study is presented, findings are discussed, and recommendations for future practice and research are described.

The purpose of this study was to assess whether principals' use of humor affected the job satisfaction of the teachers who work for them and to determine if the use of humor affected the perceptions their teachers hold regarding those principals' leadership. This study also examined the relationship between principals' use of humor and the perceived level of personal relationship that the teachers have with those principals.

A 36-item Likert-format survey instrument was designed to collect data. This instrument was subjected to professional reviewers as well as two separate pilot studies to improve clarity and increase validity. This instrument included 30 survey questions

related to humor, one open response question related to humor, and five demographic questions. After obtaining written permission, these surveys were distributed to a population of 796 educators in a single public school system in Northeast Tennessee. There were 450 surveys returned indicating an overall response rate of 56%.

The five key areas on which the survey instrument focused were:

1. Baseline questions to determine if the participants identified the principals that they worked for as using humor in the school setting.

2. Job satisfaction questions to determine the degree to which the participants were satisfied with their current jobs.

3. Appropriate use questions related to whether or not participants felt that use of humor was appropriate within the school setting.

4. Effective leadership questions to establish the level to which the participants perceived their principals as effective leaders.

5. Personal relationship questions to determine the participants' perceived levels of personal connection to their principals.

Each of these key areas (except the baseline) was based on a research question for this study.

Statistical analyses were generated using SPSS for Windows and the statistical significance was set at the 0.05 level. Independent samples *t* tests, Pearson correlations, and one sample *t* tests were all used as part of the overall analysis of results.

Findings

This study was based on four research questions and each question was tested using null the hypothesis with significance set at the 0.05 level. The percentage of each school type that participated in this study was elementary schools 55.6%, intermediate school 3.7%, middle schools 25.9%, and high schools 14.8%. The sample of participants was composed of 20.4% males and 78.2% females and the principals discussed in this study were 55.6% males and 44.4% females.

Research Question 1

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean teacher reported job satisfaction for teachers with principals who use humor was significantly different from the mean teacher reported job satisfaction for teachers with principals who do not use humor. This test was significant ($p < 0.001$) and the null hypothesis was rejected. Teachers' job satisfaction was reported at significantly higher levels by teachers with principals who used humor in the school setting.

These findings support previous research performed by Hurren (2006) in which he found that when principals shared humor with teachers that those teachers were more satisfied with their jobs and in turn performed better in their classrooms. Other research performed by Petty (2007) linked job satisfaction and teacher retention. She concluded that when teachers are empowered by their principals to make decisions about their own school and classrooms they have higher levels of job satisfaction.

Research Question 2

A one-sample *t* test was conducted on the Appropriate Use data from the survey instrument used in this study (see Appendix B) to evaluate whether their mean was

significantly different from 3, the neutral value for appropriate use in the survey. This test indicated that participants did feel that it was appropriate for principals to use humor in a school setting. These results were significant ($p < 0.001$) and the null hypothesis was rejected.

Berk (2002) asserts that humor is most definitely appropriate for educational settings as long as you avoid certain types of humor. Berk states that put-downs, sarcasm, ridicule, sexual or profane jokes, and sensitive issues should never be sources of humor in an educational setting. He also recommends not using humor based on disabilities, physical appearance, or humor directed toward coworkers.

Research Question 3

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to test the relationship between principals' use of humor and perceived leadership effectiveness. This analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between principals' use of humor and perceived leadership effectiveness   ($p < 0.001$) and the null hypothesis was rejected.

The results of this analysis coincide with the views and findings of Tamblyn (2003). In her book she stated that, "Members of any group – no matter what level – need to feel they can rely on their leader, and this is far easier to do with a leader who appears relaxed and confidant. In your position, you do not have the luxury of being humorless" (p. 112). She insists that humor allows followers to feel safer and more comfortable around leaders.

Sala (as cited in Pink, 2006) writes, "Humor, used skillfully, greases the management wheels" (p. 198). He asserts that it can improve leadership by reducing hostility, relieve tension, improve morale, and help communicate difficult messages. His

research also indicated that the most effective leaders employed humor twice as often as "middle-of-the-pack" leaders.

Research Question 4

An independent samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean ($\bar{x}$) teacher reported level of personal relationships for teachers with principals who use humor was significantly different from the mean ($\bar{x}$) teacher reported level of personal relationships for teachers with principals who do not use humor. This test was significant ($p < 0.001$) and the null hypothesis was rejected. The teachers in this study reported having stronger personal relationships with principals who used humor as compared to those principals who did not use humor in the school setting.

Hurren (2006) reported that 35% of public school teachers seriously consider leaving the profession and their top reason for leaving is often attributed to difficulties with the administration. Administrators having healthy personal relationships with their teachers could reduce some of the job dissatisfaction associated with this profession.

Open-Ended Responses

A single question on the survey instrument was designed to allow participants to comment on the instrument, humor in general, or other areas related to the study. There were 26 responses to this question. These responses indicated that the participants have personal feelings regarding humor use in schools and how it relates to a principal's leadership. Several of the responses stated that humor was acceptable as long as it was appropriate humor that was being used. Participants also indicated that they appreciated principals who laughed at their own mistakes and shortcomings. The responses also

showed that participants appreciated principals who can balance between when to be humorous and when to be serious.

Conclusions

The findings from this study show that teachers in this school system generally appreciate the use of humor by building level principals. The teachers feel that it is appropriate for a principal to use humor in a school setting. These teachers tend to have higher perceived job satisfaction when working for a principal who uses humor regularly as compared to a principal who seldom or never uses humor. The teachers view principals who use humor regularly as more effective leaders when compared to those principals who do not use humor regularly. These teachers also tend to have a stronger personal relationship with principals who use humor when compared to those who do not.

The literature reviewed indicated that many teachers leave the education profession within 3 years. Many of the teachers who leave report that one of the key reasons they left was because of job satisfaction or difficulties with the administration (Bobek, 2002; Hurren, 2006). This study found that humor can potentially improve job satisfaction for teachers. The findings indicate that principals can use appropriate humor in the school setting to improve job satisfaction as well as strengthen their personal relationships with the teachers. Both of these factors could improve retention rates with teachers.

While this study did encompass an entire school system in Northeast Tennessee, it may not be a good representation of other school districts in Tennessee or elsewhere.

Recommendations for Future Research

With teachers leaving the field of education at alarming rates, it is essential to have principals who are willing to try to motivate, encourage, and improve job satisfaction for them. The literature showed that principals face demanding and stressful jobs. It is difficult to imagine that principals do not desire to have a teaching staff that is more motivated and satisfied with teaching. Humor is a tool that is both inexpensive and simple to implement that can improve job satisfaction and personal relationships. The area of humor in education should be researched further as a tool to improve education and teaching conditions as a whole.

The following recommendations for further research are proposed:

1. Research should be conducted using a larger population. Using a single system as was done in this study limits the ability to make predictions outside this school system.

2. Research should be conducted to examine the relationship between principals' use of humor, gender of the principals, and the gender of teachers working for those principals. Demographic data from this study showed that 78% of the respondents were female while 56% of the principals who were being evaluated were male.

3. Research should be conducted to study the relationship between years of experience of teachers and principals' use of humor. Over 61% of the teachers in this study had 15 years of experience or fewer.

4. Research should be conducted to investigate the relationship between educational background of teachers and principals' use of humor.

Less than 6% of the participants in this study indicated they had an education specialist or doctorate degree.

5. Research should be conducted to examine the types of humor that teachers feel are inappropriate in a school setting. Much of the literature reviewed in this study cautioned against the use of inappropriate humor, but only general examples of what is deemed inappropriate were found. Teachers in this study indicated that principals should be careful not to use inappropriate humor.

6. Research should be conducted to study the differences between how teachers evaluate their colleagues' use of humor as compared to their principal's use of humor. The standard for humor use could be significantly different for principals as compared to teachers.

7. Research should be conducted to examine how teachers define humor. A clearer definition of what teachers consider to be 'humor' is needed in order to improve experimental design as related to humor usage in school settings.

8. Research should be conducted to investigate principals' levels of job satisfaction as it relates to their uses of humor.

Recommendations for Future Practice

The following recommendations for future practice are proposed:

1. There should be support for principals who make efforts to improve teacher job satisfaction by using humor within their schools. This

support could take the form of simple positive reinforcement or ideally

be included as part of a principal's performance contract.

2. Principals should be trained by mentors on how to effectively use

   humor in a school setting. Every school system has leaders who use

   humor regularly and effectively. These leaders should be asked to

   train others by modeling the manner in which they employ humor in

   their schools. The benefits of using humor should be shown to all

   administrators.

3. Every employee in public education should be encouraged to laugh

   regularly and use humor often. No one should be asked to pretend to

   be someone they are not, but everyone can laugh and share humor.

   This should be encouraged and the idea that everything in education is

   a serious matter should be questioned.

Closing

This research has added to the body of knowledge related to principal leadership.

Principals set the tone for the overall atmosphere within a school. This research should

be beneficial to any current or prospective principals as they evaluate their personal needs

for becoming an effective leader. Effective leadership demands principals who maintain

and improve levels of job satisfaction in their schools. Humor is one tool that effective

principals can always carry in their toolboxes to help teachers and students succeed.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Panel of Judges for Instrument Review

The following educators reviewed the survey instrument used in this research for proofreading, made suggestions to improve clarity of meaning and thereby facilitate understanding and increase validity.

B. Lee Hurren, Ph.D.
Professor of Education
Chair, Department of Secondary Education
University of North Alabama

Joanne B. Phillips, MA
Retired Public School Teacher and Administrator
Student of Humor

Pamela H. Scott, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor
School System Leadership
Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis
East Tennessee State University

Survey Instrument

Educators' Perceptions of Administrators' Use of Humor

Please respond to the following survey items by circling the number that best corresponds with your perceptions of the effects that school building administrators' use of humor has on your job satisfaction. Please use the following scale when making your selections:

Choice	Meaning
1	**S**trongly **A**gree
2	**M**oderately **A**gree
3	**N**either (Neutral)
4	**M**oderately **D**isagree
5	**S**trongly **D**isagree

PERSONAL ASSESSMENT

	SA	MA	N	MD	SD

1. Having a good sense of humor is a necessity for being an effective principal. 1 2 3 4 5

2. Principals showing students that they have a sense of humor is good practice. 1 2 3 4 5

3. Principals who use humor generally have teachers who are more satisfied. 1 2 3 4 5

4. It is easier to get to know a principal who has a sense of humor. 1 2 3 4 5

5. It is acceptable for principals to tell appropriate jokes to teachers. 1 2 3 4 5

6. It is NOT appropriate for principals to hang cartoons in their offices. 1 2 3 4 5

7. It is acceptable for principals to share funny personal stories with teachers. 1 2 3 4 5

8. A principal using humor during faculty meetings is a needless distraction. 1 2 3 4 5

ADMINISTRATOR ASSESSMENT

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9.   My building level principal has a good sense of humor. 1 2 3 4 5

10. My principal is a good leader for our school. 1 2 3 4 5

11. My principal uses humor during faculty meetings. 1 2 3 4 5

PLEASE CONTINUE ➔➔➔

Choice	Meaning
1	**S**trongly **A**gree
2	**M**oderately **A**gree
3	**N**either (Neutral)
4	**M**oderately **D**isagree
5	**S**trongly **D**isagree

<u>SA MA N MD SD</u>

12. I would feel comfortable sharing a joke with my principal.   1 2 3 4 5

13. I would feel comfortable sharing a personal problem with my principal.   1 2 3 4 5

14. I do NOT have a strong personal relationship with my principal.   1 2 3 4 5

15. I enjoy my current teaching assignment.   1 2 3 4 5

16. My principal cares about me as a professional.   1 2 3 4 5

17. My principal would be a better leader if he used more humor.   1 2 3 4 5

18. I am NOT appreciated for my hard work by my principal.   1 2 3 4 5

19. My principal is satisfied with my job performance.   1 2 3 4 5

20. I appreciate seeing a principal use humor when interacting with students.   1 2 3 4 5

21. My principal would be more effective if he/she was more serious.   1 2 3 4 5

22. My principal cares about me on a personal level.   1 2 3 4 5

23. I do NOT consider my principal to be a friend.   1 2 3 4 5

24. I could be more successful if my principal used humor more often.   1 2 3 4 5

25. I like it when my principal shares funny personal stories with our staff.   1 2 3 4 5

26. My school would be a better place if my principal used more humor.   1 2 3 4 5

27. I would respect my principal more as a leader if he/she used more humor.   1 2 3 4 5

28. My principal is more respected because he/she has a sense of humor.   1 2 3 4 5

29. The teachers in my school are happy with teaching overall.   1 2 3 4 5

30. My principal is an effective leader.   1 2 3 4 5

Please Continue ➔➔➔

31. Are there any areas of an administrator's use of humor that you wish to note that were not addressed in this survey? If so, please list and describe them.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please check the appropriate response.

32. What is your gender? Male _____   Female _____

33. What is the gender of your principal?   Male _____   Female _____

34. How many years of experience do you have in teaching?

    1-4 _____   5-10 _____   11-15 _____   16-20 _____   21-25 _____

    26-30 _____   Over 30 _____

35. What is your highest degree or level of education?   Bachelor's _____

                                                          Master's _____

                                                          Specialist (Ed. S.) _____

                                                          Doctorate _____

Please Continue ➔➔➔

36. What subject/grades do you primarily teach?

School Counselor (any grade level) _____

Library Media Specialist (any grade level) _____

Elementary Grades (including Pre-K) _____

Middle School Grades (any subject area) _____

High School (any subject area) _____

Special Education (any grade level) _____

Other (please specify) _____

You have reached the end of the survey.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

APPENDIX C

Cover Letter to Participants

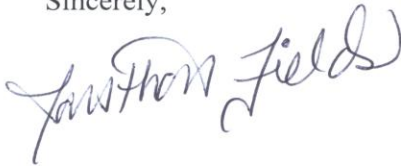Dear Teachers, Media Specialists, & Counselors,

     I am a science teacher at Sullivan North High School and a doctoral candidate at East Tennessee State University. The purpose in this correspondence is to request your assistance with a research study that I am performing through the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis department. The goal of my research is to determine if a principal's use of humor affects the perceptions of teachers with regards to job satisfaction.

     I am asking you to complete the enclosed survey as your input is essential to the success of this study. Dr. Jubal Yennie, the Director of Schools, has approved this research project. The survey should take approximately five minutes to complete. Your participation is completely voluntary.

     All responses are confidential and only group summary data will be reported. Nevertheless, you should be aware that while it is unlikely you could be identified, it is still possible. If there are any questions with which you feel uncomfortable answering, please feel free to omit them.

     Your assistance with this research study is greatly appreciated. If you would please consider completing this survey and returning it to the designated location/staff member in your building, I would greatly appreciate it.

Sincerely,

Jonathon Fields
138 Deadrick Drive
Kingsport, TN 37663
(423) 726-2069
jonathan.fields@sullivank12.net

Letter Seeking Permission to Conduct a Research Study

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY

August 31, 2010

Dear Dr. Yennie,

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me regarding the research I am conducting for my dissertation through East Tennessee State University. The major goal of my study is to determine if a principal's use of humor affects the perceptions of teachers with regards to job satisfaction. It is intended that the results from this study prove useful in strengthening the knowledge base on leadership practices used within our school system.

I will be using a questionnaire designed specifically for use in this study.

I am formally requesting permission to survey teachers, media specialists, and counselors in Sullivan County. All responses will remain confidential and only group summary data will be reported. No school names, principal names, or teacher names will be collected or revealed in any fashion. Results from the study will be shared with any participants requesting them. Results will also be shared with any principals making such a request as well as shared with you and the central office leadership team.

I am hoping you will grant me permission to complete this research in the Sullivan County school system.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jonathon P. Fields
Doctoral Fellow
East Tennessee State University
(423) 726-2069 (home)
(423) 354-1434 (work)

Letter Granting Permission to Conduct a Research Study

Sullivan County Department of Education

Director of Schools
Dr. Jubal Yennie

Assistant Director of Schools
Dr. Gene Johnson

P.O. Box 306
Blountville, Tennessee 37617
Phone: (423) 354-1000   Fax: (423) 354-1004

Board of Education
Ron Smith, Chairman
Betty Combs, Vice-Chairman
Jack Bales
Jerry Greene
Robyn Ivester
Jim Kiss
Dan Wells

September 8, 2010

To Whom It May Concern:

A request for permission to conduct a dissertation survey has been granted to Jonathan Fields, teacher at Sullivan North High School. It is my understanding this survey will be given to all principals and teachers in Sullivan County. The results of this research should prove helpful to our system. I feel sure the input he receives from our teachers and principals will be useful in the future.

I wish Mr. Fields the best of luck in this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Jubal C. Yennie, Ed.D.
Director of Schools

The Sullivan County Department of Education does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, religion, or age.

APPENDIX F

IRB Letter

ETSU

East Tennessee State University
Office for the Protection of Human Research Subjects • Box 70565 • Johnson City, Tennessee 37614-1707
Phone: (423) 439-6053 Fax: (423) 439-6060

IRB APPROVAL – Initial Exempt

October 11, 2010

Mr. Jonathon Fields
138 Deadrick Drive
Kingsport, TN 37663

RE: Perceptions of Teachers: Effects of Principals' Uses of Humor on Teacher Job Satisfaction

IRB #: c0910.15e

On **October 7, 2010**, an exempt approval was granted in accordance with 45 CFR 46. 101(b)(2). It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Policies. No continuing review is required. The exempt approval will be reported to the convened board on the next agenda.

- Form 103; Narrative (stamped approved 10/07/10); Potential conflict of interest (no conflict identified); CV; Intro letter (stamped approved 10/07/10); Survey; Permission from Sullivan County Department of Education; Assurance Statement

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others must be reported to the IRB (and VA R&D if applicable) within 10 working days.

Proposed changes in approved research cannot be initiated without IRB review and approval. The only exception to this rule is that a change can be made prior to IRB approval when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the research subjects [21 CFR 56.108 (a)(4)]. In such a case, the IRB must be promptly informed of the change following its implementation (within 10 working days) on Form 109 (www.etsu.edu/irb). The IRB will review the change to determine that it is consistent with ensuring the subject's continued welfare.

Sincerely,

Chris Ayres, Chair
ETSU Campus IRB

Cc: Virginia Foley, Ph.D.

Full AAHRPP Accreditation

Accredited Since December 2005

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VITA

JONATHON P. FIELDS

Personal Data:	Date of Birth: December 6, 1977
	Place of Birth: Kingsport, Tennessee
Education:	Public Schools, Rogersville, Tennessee (K-4)
	Public Schools, Sullivan County, Tennessee (5-12)
	B.S. Biology, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2002
	M.Ed., Milligan College, Milligan College, Tennessee, 2005
	Ed.D. Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis, East Tennessee State University, 2011
Professional Experience:	Teacher, Sullivan North High School, Sullivan County, Tennessee, 2003-2011
Honors and Awards:	Teacher of the Year (Building Level), 2003
	Putting Children First Award, 2006
Professional Affiliations:	National Science Teachers Association
	Kappa Delta Pi Education Honor Society
	National Education Association
	Golden Key International Honor Society
	Phi Kappa Phi