Can humour help the Early Years supply teacher in developing positive relationships with staff and pupils?

Louie Werth
Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge
lw471@cam.ac.uk

Abstract

This paper considers the effectiveness of humour as an approach to enable supply teachers in the Early Years to develop relationships with pupils and staff. Often called substitute teachers in the United States and elsewhere, supply teachers are temporary teachers who schools hire to cover lessons when a permanent employed teacher is not available (OFSTED, 2002).

The paper first discusses the primary challenges supply teachers face, and highlights how isolation from peers and a lack of respect from pupils resulting in misbehaviour (Duggleby & Bardai, 2007; Nidds, 2009) are often seen as key challenges. This research then builds on the idea that the root of these issues can be due to the lack of relationship the supply teacher has with staff and pupils when they begin the day (Cornwal, 2004). The research uses Autoethnography from a constructivist, symbolic interactionist approach and involves autoethnographic study at 8 different days across 7 different settings (classes) across London, England. Field notes and a journal were used during these studies and semi structured interviews were held with three other supply teachers who worked in different schools across England. The study revealed that humour could frequently help the supply teacher in building positive relationships with staff and pupils, the results also suggested that humour could, at times, be a gateway through which a deeper level of relationship could be established.

Introduction

This study considers the role of humour in building teacher-pupil relationships within the context of being a supply teacher in nursery and reception classes (children aged between 3-5 years old).

Often referred to as a substitute teacher in the United States and elsewhere (Cornwall, 2004), Supply Teachers are defined by the school's regulator OFSTED (2002) as temporary

teachers who schools hire to cover lessons when a permanent teacher is not available. It has been suggested that students spend between and 5%-10% each year of their school life with a supply teacher (Varlas, 2001). Glatfelter (2006) suggests the total amount of time children spend with a supply teacher during their school career is around the equivalent of a whole school year. These statistics underline the claim that without supply teachers, schools could not operate effectively (Duggleby & Badali, 2007) and that effective supply teachers are crucial to ensuring student achievement (Gresham, Donihoo & Cox, 2007).

In my role as a supply teacher I can be teaching up to 150 new children each week and working with up to 15 support staff. This has meant that the ability to quickly build effective working relationships with pupils and staff has been a critical and daily challenge. Humour is often considered key in developing relationships (Dean & Major, 2008; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). As a result, I have often used humour to introduce myself during the register time at the beginning of the day. I have used this as a way of developing rapport, allowing the children to get to know me and to explain my behavioural expectations in ways that are clear but do not create further tensions or fears. Additionally, I have also often used humour with the support staff to ensure we are both positive towards one another and able to communicate openly throughout the day. I have also used humour to manage disruptive behaviour, or to bring challenging children 'on side' before or after a behavioural incident.
This study was designed to enable me to look more critically and analytically at the way I use humour and the impact of humour use.

1. Current relevant issues in research

An issue raised throughout the literature is the issue of teacher isolation and the attitudes of schools and peers towards the supply teacher. Cornwall (2004) states that some supply teachers can feel that the attitudes of full time staff are negative and that this is subsequently reflected in the way the children view them. The itinerant nature of the supply job can result in isolation from peers (Duggleby & Bardai, 2007) and a feeling of marginalization (Damianos, 1998). Some supply teachers report an often negative and unwelcoming reception from staff when they start the day at their new school (Snyder, 1995).

It has been suggested that pupils, as well as teachers, often do not respect supply teachers as proper teachers (Cornwall, 2005). This in turn results in misbehaviour (Nidds, 2009; Abdal-

Haqq, 1997). Classroom management is therefore considered one of the greatest challenges faced by supply teachers (Abdal-Haqq, 1997; Duggleby & Badali, 2007). Ofsted (2002) stated that approximately one quarter of the observed lessons taught by supply teachers in primary schools had lower standards of attitude to work and behaviour in comparison to permanent teachers in the same school. It is no surprise, therefore, that supply teachers' behaviour management abilities are a concern of teachers (Tomlinson, 1997) and Head teachers (Nidds, 2009). This is a concern raised across the literature both geographically and chronologically. Gonzalez (2002) discusses that poor pupil behaviour also had a strong negative effect on supply teacher retention rates, with 80% of 133 supply teachers surveyed having left the profession citing poor pupil behaviour. These statistics underline the view of Lunay (2004) that supply teachers without good behaviour management skills will not survive long in the profession, and the need for supply teachers to have resilience (Jennings, 2001).

The issue of behaviour management should however be seen within the wider context of the challenge of the supply teacher experience. The supply teacher often arrives at an unfamiliar school with unfamiliar pupils (Johnson, 2013). As a result, teachers can find it very difficult to build relationships with the children they work with (Cornwall, 2004; Nidds 2009). Isolation from peers (Damianos, 1998; Duggleby & Badali, 2007; Snyder, 1995), the lack of respect by children (Cornwall, 2005; Nidds, 2009) and the subsequent misbehaviour (Abdal-Haqq, 1997) all in part relate to unfamiliarity and a lack of relationship. Cornwall (2004) draws a clear link between lack of relationship with pupils, lack of respect and the subsequent misbehaviour. Makewa, Role & Genga (2011) also state that effective behaviour management occurs primarily through a positive teacher-pupil relationship. Similarly, Glatfelter (2006) suggests that a crucial component of developing supply teachers into competent instructors is dependent upon them establishing relationships with school staff. It could be argued then, that the key theme in the literature – presented as a potential mediator of the issues with regards to staff isolation, lack of pupil respect and pupil misbehaviour – is developing effective relationships with staff and students.

1.1 Humour and developing relationships

Humour has been noted as a key method of building relationships (Dean & Major, 2008; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Teachers who use humour are often more positively rated by their

pupils (Garner, 2003) with pupils citing fostering better teacher- pupil relations as a key effect of teachers using humour in their teaching (Makewa et al., 2011). It is claimed that effective use of humour in the classroom and the enhanced teacher-student relationship that comes from this, in turn enhances student engagement and learning (Strean, 2011). This may be particularly important for the supply teacher who needs to quickly build relationships so as to continue the children's learning during their (often brief) cover period.

Humour may be beneficial to this end as by using humour the teacher can foster a positive social and emotional environment (Sambrani, Mani, Almeida & Jakubovski, 2014). Teacher's use of humour can also help to reduce stress and anxiety in pupils (Berk & Nanda, 1998). It could be suggested that the disruption caused by the lack of routine and the arrival of an unfamiliar teacher may cause anxiety to young children, as a result, use of humour may help to rebalance this. On discussing their own perceptions of their use of humour, O'Connor (2013) found that teacher responses fell into three themes. These were humour to develop relationships with shy children, humour to manage behavioural issues and a general perception of using humour to get a class 'on side' (O'Connor, 2013). Two of these responses have significant implications for the role of humour to tackle the issues faced by supply teachers. In discussing their use of humour to manage behavioural issues, teachers commented on their desire to maintain and build relationships with problematic children (O' Connor, 2013). This could be an issue for supply teachers who may deal with issues of misbehaviour (Nidds, 2009) with little knowledge, understanding or relationship with the pupil (Cornwall, 2004). Teachers reflected on how they used humour to diminish the harshness of reprimands so as to build relationships and de-escalate behaviour. Such an approach may be of benefit to supply teachers as the lack of relationship they have with pupils could result in teacher's reprimands causing them to come across to the class as overly harsh or unfair.

Secondly, the concept of humour being used so as to get children 'on side' (O'Connor, 2013) resonates with the concern in the supply teacher literature of supply teachers not having the respect of their pupils (Abdul-Haaq, 1997; Cornwall, 2005; Nidds, 2009; Snyder, 1995). One teacher in the O'Connor (2013) study discussed the potential of humour for building mutual respect between teachers and pupils. It is possible that, with humour, supply teachers may be

able to quickly build a mutual respect built on humour as opposed to dominant authority which some supply teachers, out of fear, seek to establish (Thompson, 2014).

A more difficult potential area is using humour to develop relationships with staff so as to overcome the issues related to isolation (Duggleby & Bardia, 2007). Literature suggests that the process of using humour to build relationships with colleagues in the work place has been over simplified. The receptiveness of humour and its potential to develop a positive relationship, are based upon a range of complex social and relational factors and hierarchies (Cooper, 2008). Such levels of previous relationship are not readily available to the supply teacher and so success cannot at all be guaranteed. Within a classroom context, one supply teacher talked of how humour was part of her larger than life personality which she used to capture students' attention (Thompson, 2014). This resonates with the self-enhancing approach to humour (Romero & Curthids, 2006) and it could be suggested that this may be the best way to use humour with staff as it is based upon the personal characteristics of the teacher and not on creating an opportunity to broadcast amusing material which may predicate some form of relationship. It also may have the effect of capturing attention and building relationship as this is precisely the effect this form of humour had on students (Thompson, 2014).

1.2 Humour, age and the Early Years Foundation Stage

The work of McGhee (1971) is the classic piece on this issue and is frequently used in research on this subject. McGhee (1971) states that, from three to five years old (the age of the children in this study) children develop conceptual incongruity. Pitri (2011) argues that truly humorous events occur when there are conceptual shifts, which can be seen in McGhee's (1971) development stages starting from age 2.

Loizou (2005) noted children enjoying humour based upon disobeying or mocking the adult, demonstrating young children's potential to enjoy and generate empowerment humour in which authorities are challenged and social orders are disrupted by the lesser. It could be suggested therefore, that for supply teachers to effectively use humour to enhance lessons and develop relationships with children, incongruous and perhaps at times empowerment based subversive humour would be best to use.

1.3 The Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum (DfE, 2014)

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is the statutory framework of provision in England for all Early Years providers (EYFS, 2014). Though humour is not specifically mentioned in the EYFS curriculum, the non-statutory guidance to the curriculum, 'Development Matters' (Early Education, 2012), gives 'Understanding humour' as a target for children aged 40-60 months within the 'Understanding Language' section of the curriculum.

Humour can also be conceptualized as a form of play and playfulness (Burt & Sugawara, 1988). Burt & Sugawara (1988) highlight the way in which play in an early years setting can form a natural context for humour to develop and be built upon by a class teacher. The EYFS (DfE, 2014) emphatically states the importance of play for early learning and the role of adults in supporting play, thus supporting the potential for humour to develop through playful contexts, enhancing experiences in the early years setting (Burt & Sugawara, 1988, Loizou, 2005).

As a result of the above literature review, this study considered the specific questions:

- What styles of humour were used in the classroom and how did children/ staff members react?
- Did the reaction to the humour or any follow up from the use of humour demonstrate a positive relationship had been established?

2. Methodology

This chapter demonstrates a coherent justification for the autoethnographic approach used in this research to answer the above questions in relation to the wider question: *Can humour help the Early Years supply teacher in developing positive relationships with staff and pupils?*

2.1 Epistemology and theoretical perspective

Across the humour literature there is a consistent theme of the relationship between previous knowledge, cultural understandings, personal capabilities and the functions of these in causing something to be perceived as humorous (Ashkenazi & David, 1998; Chiaro, 2005; Giora, 1991; Graesser, Long & Mio 1989). It could be argued that the interplay between previous knowledge and cultural perceptions for humour to be understood resonates with constructivist perceptions of knowledge which fit within the interpretivist paradigm of knowledge (Williamson, 2006). An early and seminal work on symbolic interactionism demonstrates its

potential as a theoretical perspective for understanding, grounding and explaining the constructivist epistemology of humour. Blumer (1969) states that symbolic interactionism as an approach rests upon three ideas. Firstly, that human beings react and act towards things in light of the meaning they have created for them. The second idea is that the meaning of things is derived from or comes out of the social interactions a person has with others. The third idea is that the meanings found are handled within and modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters.

Blumer (1969) explains that the result of this approach to meaning making that symbolic interactionism posits is that there is an emphasis on the process of interpreting. As a result of this process, meaning is centred on interpretation, handling, suspending, selecting, regrouping and transforming meanings in light of the situation he is placed in. Such a definition seems apt as it clearly correlates with meaning making as it relates to generating and understanding humour.

2.2 Research design

As previously mentioned, within the constructivist, interpretivist paradigm, there is an emphasis on naturalistic enquiry which entails fieldwork taking place within a natural setting (Williamson, 2006). This approach seemed apt, as the study considered the potentially constructivist body of knowledge (Grasser et al., 1989) of humour within the class setting. Similarly, the symbolic interactionist approach's emphasis on the individual's need to interact with himself/herself to generate meaning, and the role of their social interactions and environment in generating meaning is particularly relevant (Blumer, 1969). This establishes the need to identify humour by engaging with research within a natural setting through which the children may have constructed and be co-constructing meaning. The naturalistic autoethnographic methodology employed by this study is now considered.

2.2.1 Autoethnography

Autoethnography seeks to describe and analyse personal experiences in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). A key part to Autoethnography is that the researcher is in some sense a member of the social world under study whether covertly or completely (Anderson, 2006). The unique difference between the researcher and other participants is that he or she is also part of the social sciences community and must invest time

and energy into collecting and reflecting on collected data as well as engaging in the community they are a part of (Strathern, 1987). Such a description usefully describes this study's researcher who is a member of the social world of the school during placements, the social world of supply teachers, as well as the world of social science research as a result of this study.

One key reason for using this approach is that the field of humour investigated in this study has some direct relation to the autoethnographic methodology. Hemmingson (2008) argues for the use of stand-up comedy as a means of translating autoethnographic research, based upon the idea that stand-up comedy is by definition an example of autoethnography. Hemmingson (2008) argues that many of the best comics are autobiographical in nature, detailing usually personal reflective stories to illustrate points, some of which are then related to theory or larger societal issues, as a result, the parallel between autoethnography and stand-up comedy is drawn.

2.2.2 Sample

This study was conducted with five schools across eight days. All schools were based either in North or East London. All of the nurseries and schools involved were state schools and the classes were diverse with children from a range of ethic, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. One limitation was the sample was purposive (Bowen, 2008) due to the itinerant nature of supply teacher placements. The research was conducted over eight days across a one month period. Across the three schools there were a total of seven different settings (individual classes).

Table 1

Placement Dates and locations.

Date	School	Class
20th March 2015	A East London	Nursery
23rd March 2015	A East London	Nursery
24th March 2015	B North London	Nursery AM Reception (Class 1) PM
25 March 2015	B North London	Reception (Class 2) AM
20th April 2015	C East London	Reception
29th April 2015	A East London	Reception
30th April 2015	C East London	Nursery
1st May 2015	A East London	Reception

2.3 Methods

The primary methods used to capture the fieldwork experience data were field notes and an ongoing reflective journal. To supplement the fieldwork, semi structured interviews were also conducted with three supply teachers.

2.3.1 Field notes

The approach to field notes taken by this study was that of running accounts of events (Sanjek, 1990) sometimes known as inscription (Clifford, 1990) or jotted notes (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2007). Though there are a number of ways of doing autoethnographic research, the traditional way is to make ongoing notes chronologically throughout the experience being studied, with these notes being subsequently used to generate the more in depth autoethnographic write ups, such an approach ensures a greater number of experiences are recorded and subsequently used (Ellis, 2004).

2.3.2 Reflective journals

Journals can be seen as a common approach in many qualitative types of research but particularly to autoethnography (Ellis, 2000). One of the ways a narrative approach can be made uniquely viable with an autoethnographic approach is when the focus of the narrative includes documenting the cultural impact of the work itself (Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008). This was particularly seen in my study where the impact of humour upon relationships and the classroom culture was clearly and consistently considered. A benefit of using a personal narrative approach like journal writing in autoethnography is that it can enable the author to explicitly link literature to narrated personal experience (Holt, 2008). This was viewed as important in light of the literature based questions this study sought to answer.

2.3.3 Semi structured interviews

Semi structured interviews can be defined as an interview which is conversational in style with some flexibility but with clear questions and topics which must be covered (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). Heyl (2001) describes the purpose of interviewing in ethnographic research as "…a way of shedding light on the personal experiences, interpersonal dynamics and cultural meanings of participants in their social worlds" (Heyl, 2001 p. 372). To achieve this, other

supply teachers were interviewed to see how and if they used humour to create bonds with pupils and staff. These interviews were undertaken via Skype.

2.4 Data analysis

There were two approaches to analysis used for the data sets. The first was content analysis across a range of themes; the second was a critical incident approach. These approaches were applied across all three data sources resulting in a deeper level of analysis and the greater possibility of triangulation.

2.4.1 Content analysis.

One of the benefits of a content analysis approach to analysing qualitative data is that hierarchical analysis can result in identifying common themes or patterns which may result in greater reliability (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). This was considered vital to combat the potential for this autoethnographic research to become narcissistic and irrelevant (Delamont, 2007) and to ensure an element of analytic reflexivity, resulting in genuine implications for the culture (supply teaching) studied (Anderson, 2006). One key element to analysis in autoethnographic research is that the data interpretation categories are not built into the data collection set or methods but instead come forth from the data analysis process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The emphasis on clear in-depth content analysis, to create generality (Sparkes & Smith, 2009) and the centrality of the analysis procedure in generating relevant themes, highlighted the importance of using a clear, comprehensive and well-organized analysis tool. As a result, NVivo 10 was used for thematic content analysis across all information sources.

2.4.2 Critical incident analysis.

There are a wide range of definitions of critical incidents (Schwester, 2012). Within teaching, however, critical incidents can be defined as events that are considered critical in that they are indicative of underlying trends, motivations and structures, with their analysis resulting in the increased understanding of an area of professional practice (Tripp, 2011). Angelides (2001) approach to educational autoethnographic research was used which states critical incidents do not need to be catastrophic or unique but are instead to be minor but important

incidences with their criticality being instead dependent on the significance and meaning given to them by the researcher.

2.5 Ethics

Consent is often considered the primary ethical issue when conducting research which involves young children (Kirk 2007). Informed consent was, therefore, sought from the Head teacher on behalf of the primary school and the individual teachers and children involved. This consent was gained from the Head teachers involved, prior to the research beginning, without duress or pressure (British Educational Research Association 2011). To ensure informed consent (Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin & Robinson, 2010) Head teachers were given a clear written form that outlined the practices, approaches and purpose of the research.

With regards to the supply teacher interviewees, all were given the opportunity to give consent without duress or pressure (BERA, 2011) both during the initial contact and at the beginning of the interview. A clear description of the purpose of the interviews in relation to the research was given to ensure informed consent (Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin & Robinson, 2010). Participants were also informed that they could refuse to answer questions and could end the interview or withdraw their involvement at any point during or after the interview if they wished (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2013).

3. Findings & Discussion

Within autoethnographic research there is a need for interpretation categories to not be built in to the research and for results to come from the data set naturally (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). However, Duncan (2008) states the importance of autoethnographic accounts moving away from emotive writing styles and connecting accounts and content to broader themes. As a result, this section relates findings to the Literature Review themes, as well as highlighting naturally occurring findings (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) that were not conceived at the start of the study, but were of importance. The critical incident approach is used sporadically throughout (Webster & Mertova, 2007).

3.1 Using humour with pupils

Table 2 demonstrates the frequency that each humour style was used. It is interesting to note that silly voices, an area not considered in the literature review was most frequent in comparison to empowerment humour which was discussed and was utilised least. The lack of empowerment humour may relate to the issue of not wanting to give a reason for pupils to not respect the supply teacher (Cornwall, 2005).

Table 2

Types of humour used with pupils

Type of humour	No of incidents	No of settings
Silly Voices	20	7
All singing	18	7
Changing song lyrics (Singing)	13	4
Surreal Singing (Singing)	5	4
All Incongruity	13	7
Incongruity w/props (Incongruity)	10	7
All Physical humour	6	2
Small facial gestures (physical humour)	5	2
Whole body movement (Physical humour)	1	1
Empowerment humour	4	3
Whole class humour	5	4

3.1.1 Location and context.

Though not originally considered, analysis showed that though there were only 5 incidents where humour was used with the whole class in comparison to a number of 1:1 or small group (4 pupils) incidents, the responses were at their greatest. This can be explained through the phenomenon of contagion where group laughter in children escalates (Sherman, 1975).

I tried to balance a soft toy on a jar and it fell off, the children laughed, I repeated this throughout the activity with each subsequent toy and the class began to laugh almost as one with each one. It built up each time until the final fourth item. (School B, Reception Class 2)

This issue of contagion demonstrates the potential power of humour in supporting young children to focus, engage and enjoy didactic teaching sessions that Fisher (2011) highlights are typically considered boring and difficult for children transitioning from play based pedagogies in Reception class to didactic pedagogies in Year 1.

3.1.2 Children's reactions to humour.

The three key responses to humour use were laughing and making positive statements to the teacher, copying the teacher actions, telling others and expressing confusion.

3.1.2.1 Laughing, making statements to the teacher and copying.

Though it was originally believed that children's reactions would be implicit, many children reacted with laughter and positive statements including:

'You're so fun' (School A, Nursery Class)
'You're funny' (School C, Reception Class)
'You like being in our class, don't you? Why you silly and funny all the time?' (School A, Nursery Class)
'Mr. Werth, you're funny'. (School B, Reception Class 1)

By far the most common phrase was 'you're funny'. On five occasions children hugged me after laughing at a joke, with one child following me around the room. Children also frequently copied my use of humour or extended it themselves to create their own. These results potentially confirm the potential of humour to build relationships (Dean & Major 2008; Groom, 2006; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006) and the suggestion that humour has an enhancing effect of teacher pupil relationship (Makewa et al. 2011).

3.1.2.2 Telling others.

Another, less expected reaction with a total of two incidents in one setting was that after a humorous incident on a 1:1 level, the child would go and tell his or her friends about what had happened. This would usually result in both children looking to me and then laughing with themselves.

What is of particular interest here is, typically of this reaction, a single humorous event is taken by the child and repeated and communicated to his peers. What is interesting here in these incidents is that the child acts as your representative and ambassador to a class. It could be suggested that the child creates a by-proxy relationship between you and the other children. The children gain a group awareness through what their friends tell them that I as the teacher am someone positive and funny. This both saves on time and, it could be suggested, is more meaningful as I am gaining a form of 'recommendation' from the children to others in the class.

3.1.2.3 Confusion.

There was a total of four negative reactions to the use of humour. Two related to singing where I changed the lyrics to the wrong words, with children thinking had made a genuine mistake. The other two reactions related to incongruity, first – child's reaction to me using a pencil as a moustache was him looking at me blankly and saying, 'it's not a moustache'. Second when I jokingly said, 'I'm going to eat you' turned to me confused and said, 'that's illegal'. What is important to note is that these were far less than the positive reactions to the exact same stimuli. This highlights that while there may be trends in humour development at young ages (McGhee, 1971) children may still have their own humour tastes (Garner, 2003). It is also important to note that when children reacted negatively, it was not upsetting or distressing to the child, just not particularly funny to them. It is also important to note that no negative relationship traits developed as a result of unsuccessful uses of humour.

3.2 Managing behaviour with humour

Though there were only five behavioural issues reported in the field notes and diary entries across four of the settings, it was clear from the interviews that, as suggested in the literature, behaviour management was a major concern for supply teachers (Nidds, 2009). With regards to the fieldwork, all the five behaviour management situations encountered (in four settings), were dealt with using light hearted humorous sentences intended to highlight the issue to the child and prompt the expected behaviour. A journal example reads:

Near the end of the day, a child is running 'Do I need to hang you upside down in the rain from the roof and hurl objects at you?' I ask. The child smiles, laughs and walks. (School A, Reception Class)

Interestingly, though the other teachers interviewed referred to the school's behaviour policy and being strict, here the use of comical threat as opposed to a real threat such as losing golden time, generates the required behaviour whilst not damaging the relationship with the child.

3.2.1 Support staff concerns

An unexpected finding was that there was a situation at three of the settings where humour and children's uses of it brought suspicion and concern. In one incident, a support staff member warned me of a child who 'tries to make others laugh…he's a bit of a comedian'. Similarly, one of the supply teachers interviewed commented on an issue with a child he negatively referred to as 'the class clown'. Such attitudes resonate with the idea of seeing such a child as a disruptive class clown as opposed a child who should instead be considered as an individual with natural comic skill (Beatty-O'ferrall, Green & Hanna, 2010).

There were also two occasions where children's laughter caused support staff to assume poor behaviour and intervene. It could be suggested that, similar to the class clown issue, groups of children laughing was being interpreted by the support staff as the result of either disobedience or the supply teacher losing control of the class.

3.2.2 Humour leading to challenging behaviour

An unexpected situation that occurred six times across four of the settings was that, when using humour with children, the humour would escalate and the child's way of generating the humour or joining in with the humour was to do something that was a clear form of misbehaviour, with this including physical violence three times. This is significant as the amount of bad behaviour incidents as a result of humour is one more than the five behaviour incidents that happened during the research that were not humour related (see table 3 in the appendices).

It could be argued that if behaviour management is the primary concern for supply teachers (Cornwall, 2004, Nidds, 2009) and if using humour has the potential to generate more spontaneous misbehaviour then it should not be encouraged. However, it could be suggested that this is a social learning experience. Though humour has the potential for misbehaviour and things to get 'out of hand', it can also be used to help children to better understand what are acceptable ways to use humour and what are not within the social context of being in school.

3.3 Using humour with staff

With regards to humour and staff relationships, humour was seen to be used with the support staff I was working with, professional dialogue and friendships also developed with fellow supply teachers that I got to know, however little contact was made with the wider school environment.

3.3.1 Humour and support staff

There is a total of ten recorded incidents of humour being used with teaching assistants throughout the research across six of the settings. This is far lower than the number of times humour is recorded as being used with children. Of particular interest is that nine out of the ten times, the humour is not a form of humour used for the pupil's amusement but is instead an exchange between myself and the supply teacher, even if a pupil is present. These uses of humour also use ideas and subjects a pupil would not understand. The result of these interactions is sustained interactions with supply staff and a sense of relationship.

The positive responses and ongoing discussions with support staff also demonstrate that whilst there is concern that supply teachers can feel a sense of isolation from their peers (Cornwall, 2004; Duggleby & Bardai, 2007) humour may have a place in developing supply teacher-teaching assistant relationships. What is interesting however, is that the humour is perhaps the introduction to the relationship with the use of humour acting as an introductory experience that establishes a bond that can then lead onto more in-depth discussions.

3.3.2 Developing relationships with other supply teachers

Another unexpected development was that, through one setting, I got the opportunity to meet and talk with other supply teachers. It was interesting to note that we spent our lunch

together in the staff room and similarly 1:1 we conversed and that humour was not used in an overt way. The result of this was a sense of community:

At lunch, I speak with the supply teacher from Australia I had met last week and another supply teacher colleague…We sat at the table at lunch and talked about holidays, finding shifts, new jobs, difficult and good schools and children. It was good to meet and speak with others (School C, Reception Class)

Interestingly there is little reference to humour in these interactions, suggesting that whereas the research first proposed humour as a way of building and creating a relationship, the results may suggest humour is an active introduction and bridge that then leads to a form of more open and positive relationship rather than the relationship itself.

4. Recommendations & Conclusion

This section will draw on the findings in the previous section to make tentative conclusions and recommendations for the supply teacher community.

4.1 Recommendations

The purposive nature of the sample used in this study suggests the results may have limited generalisability (Bowen, 2008). However, the study findings do have some potential relevance and may raise questions for others within the supply teacher profession and the wider education network. For supply teachers, an interesting theme that emerged was concerns regarding behaviour management. All three interviewees mentioned the issue of being stricter so as to ensure good behaviour for the day, with two of the teachers openly admitting to being less comfortable with the authoritarian approach they took. An interesting observation in this study was that there were instances where humour was used successfully to manage low level disruption in that the child resumed expected behaviour and the relationship was not compromised. This study suggests that supply teachers may be able to utilise humour to manage low level disruption and thus be able to be less authoritarian in their approach and more comfortable with their own teaching styles whilst positively dealing with behaviour management issues.

Another issue highlighted is the benefit of creating a supply teacher community. Within this study, it was during discussions with fellow supply teachers that there was the greatest sense of belonging and relationship. This suggests the need for supply teachers to maintain open lines of communication with one another and for agencies to facilitate opportunities for supply staff to share ideas and practices, increase skills and enjoy social opportunities with others in their field.

Another issue raised is how humour, children's laughter and the 'class clown' phenomenon is interpreted and reacted to by staff. Laughter and children's production of humour should be considered by teachers as something that facilitates deeper understandings of children's personalities and when interacted with can be a way for teachers to build positive relationships with pupils. It should not be assumed that laughter or children who like to use humour are synonymous with misbehaviour.

Finally, the study suggests that the use of humour and the phenomenon of contagion provide a potential gateway for enabling young children to genuinely enjoy and engage positively with more formal didactic teaching sessions. A careful use of humour, therefore, may be extremely valuable in supporting classes to engage in more formal teaching approaches at this early age. This is crucial for preparing children for Key Stage 1 where these more formal didactic approaches are the primary teaching style (Fisher, 2011).

4.2 Conclusion

This study has shown the complex yet potentially very positive effects humour can have on relationship development between supply teachers, support staff and children. The study has shown how humour may have a part to play in reducing supply teachers experiences of isolation from other staff (Duggleby & Bardai, 2007) and the issues of developing relationships with pupils and supporting good behaviour (Cornwall, 2004, Glatfelter, 2006). Finally, it has also demonstrated the limits of humour and, as a result, demonstrated the extent to which genuine relationships can be developed between supply teachers, staff and pupils. By seeing humour as a bridge towards relationship, as opposed to the end point of a relationship, the findings of this study suggest that humour has a part to play in enabling supply teachers to *genuinely* relate to, get to know and support the pupils and support the staff they work with. Despite only being temporary, humour may enable supply teachers to make genuine, positive relational impacts on children and colleagues alike.

References

Abdal-Haqq, I. (1997). Not Just a Warm Body: Changing Images of the Substitute Teacher. ERIC Digest. *ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education Washington DC*

Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of contemporary ethnography*, 35(4), 373-395.

Angelides, P. (2001). The development of an efficient technique for collecting and analyzing qualitative data: The analysis of critical incidents. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14(3), 429-442.

Ashkenazi, O., & Ravid, D. (1998). Children's understanding of linguistic humour: an aspect of metalinguistic awareness. *Cahiers de psychologie cognitive*, 17(2), 367-387.

Berk, R. A., & Nanda, J. P. (1998). Effects of jocular instructional methods on attitudes, anxiety, and achievement in statistics courses. *Humor* 4 (11), 383-410 DOI: 10.1515/humr.1998.11.4.383

Blumer, H. (1969). The methodological position of symbolic interactionism. *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*, 1-60.

Bowen, G. A. (2008). Naturalistic inquiry and the saturation concept: a research note. *Qualitative research*, 8(1), 137-152.

British Educational Research Association. (2011). BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research 2011. https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2011

Burt, L. M., & Sugawara, A. I. (1988). Children's humor: Implications for teaching. *Early Child Development and Care*, 37(1), 13-25.

Chiaro, D. (2005). Foreword. Verbally expressed humor and translation: An overview of a neglected field. *Humor*, 18(2), 135-145.

Clifford, J. (1990). Notes on (field) notes. In R. Sanjek (Ed.) *Fieldnotes: The makings of anthropology, 1990*, 47-70. Cornell University Press

Cooper, C. (2008). Elucidating the bonds of workplace humor: A relational process model. *Human Relations*, 61(8), 1087-1115.

Cornwall, G. (2004). A view from across the pond: Exploring the perceptions of supply (substitute) teachers in England. *SubJournal: For Personnel Responsible for Substitute Teaching*, 5(1), 9-19.

Damianos, M. (1998). *Substitute teachers in elementary schools and their professional discourse*. (Masters Thesis, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada). file://sbs2008/Userfolders$/downloads/LouieWerth/Downloads/MQ33929.pdf

Dean, R. A. K., & Major, J. E. (2008). From critical care to comfort care: the sustaining value of humour. *Journal of clinical nursing*, 17(8), 1088-1095.

Delamont, S. (2007, September). Arguments against auto-ethnography. In *Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference* (Vol. 5, p. 8).

Department for Education (2014) *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335504/EYFS_framework_from_1_September_2014__with_clarification_note.pdf

Department for Education and Science (1987) *The National Curriculum 5-16. A Consultation Document* London: Department for Education and Science

Duggleby, P., & Badali, S. (2007). Expectations and experiences of substitute teachers. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 53(1) 22-33.

Duncan, M. (2008). Autoethnography: Critical appreciation of an emerging art. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(4), 28-39.

Early Education (2012). Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage. *London: Early Education.*

Ellis, C. (2000). Creating criteria: An ethnographic short story. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6(2), 273-277.

Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Rowman Altamira.

Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: an overview. *Historical Social Research/Historische Sozialforschung*, 12 (10) 273-290.

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fargas-Malet, M., McSherry, D., Larkin, E., & Robinson, C. (2010). Research with children: Methodological issues and innovative techniques. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 8(2), 175-192.

Fisher, J. (2011). Building on the early years foundation stage: Developing good practice for transition into Key Stage 1. *Early Years*, 31(1), 31-42.

Garner, R. (2003). Which came first, the chicken or the egg? A foul metaphor for teaching. *Radical Pedagogy*, 5(2), 205-212.

Giora, R. (1991). On the cognitive aspects of the joke. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 16(5), 465-485.

Glatfelter, A. G. (2006). *Substitute Teachers as Effective Classroom Instructors*. [PhD Thesis] University of California, Los Angeles.

Graesser, A. C., Long, D. L., & Mio, J. S. (1989). What are the cognitive and conceptual components of humorous text?. *Poetics*, 18(1), 143-163.

Gresham, J., Donihoo, J., & Cox, T. (2007). Strategies to enhance your substitute Teaching. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 44(1), 28-32.

Hamilton, M. L., Smith, L., & Worthington, K. (2008). Fitting the methodology with the research: An exploration of narrative, self-study and auto-ethnography. *Studying Teacher Education*, 4(1), 17-28.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. New York: Routledge.

Harrell, M. C., & Bradley, M. A. (2009). *Data collection methods. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups*. Rand National Defense Research Institute Sana Monica: California

Hemmingson, M. (2008). Make Them Giggle: Auto/Ethnography as Stand Up Comedy-A Response to Denzin's Call to Performance. *Creative Approaches to Research*, 1(2) 9-22 http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1131042

Heyl, B. S. (2001). Ethnographic interviewing. In P. Atkinson, A. Coffey, S. Delamont, Lofland, J. & Lofland, L. (Eds) *Handbook of ethnography*, London: Sage 369-383.

Holt, N. L. (2008). Representation, legitimation, and autoethnography: An autoethnographic writing story. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(1), 18-28.

Johnson, M. L. (2013). Contingency Plans for Substitute Teachers.*Journal of Modern Education Review*. 3 (1), 8-13

Kirk, S. (2007). Methodological and ethical issues in conducting qualitative research with children and young people: A literature review. *International journal of nursing studies*, 44(7), 1250-1260.

Legard, R., Keegan, J., & Ward, K. (2013). In-depth interviews. In J. Ritchie J. Lewis (Eds.) *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*, 138-169.

Loizou, E. (2005). Infant humor: The theory of the absurd and the empowerment theory. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 13(1), 43-53.

Lunay, R. (2004). Challenges facing the relief teacher and some simple suggestions for fostering improvement. *SubJournal*, 5 (1) 21-32

http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED491625.pdf#page=21.

Makewa, L. N., Role, E., & Genga, J. A. (2011). Teachers' Use of Humor in Teaching and Students' Rating of Their Effectiveness. *International Journal of Education*, 3(2), 1-17

McGhee, P. E. (1971). Development of the humor response: A review of the literature. *Psychological Bulletin*, 76(5), 328.

Nidds, J. A. (2009) Substitute Teachers: A Return to the Search for Meaningful Instruction in the Teacher's Absence. *Long Island Education Review*,8 (2) 39-44.

O'Connor, J. (2013). *Teachers' Perceptions of their use of Humour in the Primary Classroom* [PhD Thesis] University of East London.

http://roar.uel.ac.uk/3084/1/2013_OConnor_Professional%20Docterate.pdf

Ofsted (2002) *School's use of temporary teachers* Retrieved from the UK Government National Archives Website:

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/HMI-503.pdf

Pitri, E. (2011). Children's funny art and the form it can take over time. *International Journal of Education through Art*, 7(1), 81-96.

Romero, E. J., & Cruthirds, K. W. (2006). The use of humor in the workplace. *The Academy of Management Perspectives*, 20(2), 58-69.

Sambrani, T., Mani, S., Almeida, M., & Jakubovski, E. (2014) The Effect of Humour on Learning in an Educational Setting. *International Journal of Education and Psychological Research* 3(3) 52-55

Sanjek, R. (1990). *Fieldnotes: The makings of anthropology*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Schwester, R. (Ed.). (2012). *Handbook of critical incident analysis*. New York: Routledge.

Sherman, L. W. (1975). An ecological study of glee in small groups of preschool children. *Child development*, 46 (1) 53-61.

Snyder, J. F. (1995). Perceptions of Preservice Teachers: The Job Market, Why Teaching, and
Alternatives to Teaching. *Office of Career Services Division of Student Affairs Slippery Rock
University Slippery Rock, PA*
http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED390865.pdf

Sparkes, A. C., & Smith, B. (2009). Judging the quality of qualitative inquiry: Criterial and
relativism in action. *Psychology of sport and exercise*, 10(5), 491-497.

Strathern, M. 1987. The limits of auto-anthropology. In *Anthropology at home*, edited by A. Jackson,
16-37. London: Tavistock

Strean, W. B. (2011). Creating student engagement? HMM: Teaching and learning with humor,
music, and movement. *Creative Education*, *2*(03), 189.

Thompson, C.L. (2014) *The rookie teacher: A description of the occasional teaching experience as
seen through the eyes on new supply teachers.* [Master of Education Thesis] Queen's
University, Canada

Tomlinson, S. B. (1997). *A Substitute Teacher Training Program To Improve Skills and Confidence
in Substitute Teachers at the Middle School Level.*(Masters Thesis, Nova Southeastern
University, Florida, United States of America)
http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED417162.pdf

Tripp, D. (2011). *Critical Incidents in Teaching (Classic Edition): Developing Professional
Judgement*. New York: Routledge.

Varlas, L. (2001). Succeeding with substitute teachers. *Education Update*, 43(7), 4-5.

Webster, L. & Mertova, P. (2007). *Using narrative inquiry as a research method: An introduction to
using critical event narrative analysis in research on learning and teaching*. New York:
Routledge.

Williamson, K. (2006). Research in constructivist frameworks using ethnographic techniques.
Library trends, 55(1), 83-101.