Can Stand-Up Comedy be Used to Improve Classroom Management? An In-Depth Examination and Comparative Analysis of Stand-Up Comedy and Classroom Management Practices

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ABSTRACT

Classroom application of humour has been shown by scholars to have numerous positive effects upon teaching and learning. However, can the techniques of a profession based upon the production and delivery of humour, like stand-up comedy, benefit the classroom as well? This research thesis explores whether the tools and techniques used in the profession of stand-up comedy can be applied to improve teaching methodology, with emphasis on classroom management. In order to observe the types of communication techniques that comedians utilize during their performances, data is acquired by collecting field notes from attendance at comedy events, and by transcribing several YouTube clips from stand-up comedians' acts. Using the theoretical framework of discourse analysis, the data is analyzed, discussing whether any connections can be made between stand-up and classroom management practices known to be effective. Finally, it is discussed whether enough similarities exist between these professions to merit further research into this topic.

ABRÉGÉ

Des études ont démontré que l'application de l'humour en classe a de nombreux effets positifs sur l'enseignement et l'apprentissage. Les techniques d'une profession basée sur la production et la diffusion d'humour, comme le stand-up humoristique, quant à elles, peuvent-elles également profiter à la classe ? Cette thèse de recherche explore la question des outils et techniques utilisés dans la profession d'humoriste et si ceux-ci sont utiles pour améliorer la méthodologie d'enseignement, en particulier en ce qui concerne la gestion de classe. Afin d'observer les types de techniques de communication que les humoristes utilisent lors de leurs performances, les données sont acquises en collectant des notes de terrain lors de spectacles d'humour et en transcrivant plusieurs extraits YouTube de numéros comiques. En utilisant le cadre théorique de l'analyse du discours, cette thèse examine les données en explorant les liens qui peuvent être établis entre les pratiques du stand-up et de la gestion de classe. Enfin, il en va de la question des similitudes qui existent entre ces professions et si elles sont suffisantes pour mériter des recherches plus approfondies sur le sujet.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Questions

When conducting research into a topic that involves examining personal experiences, it can be difficult to find a methodological structure that is adequately suited for capturing the essence of these lived moments. Autoethnographic biography is one viable means for accomplishing this goal. According to Murray (2019), autoethnographic life writing, or biography, "charts ideas in the process of discovery (and thwarting), insisting on the messy, convoluted connections between the cerebral and the visceral" (p. 96). Essentially this entails sharing one's understanding and experience of a concrete chain of events through a personal lens. While there is no fixed checklist or inventory of methods from which to create such a piece of writing, it is precisely this ambiguity that allows for its applicability towards a variety of cultural contexts (Murray, 2019). Autoethnographic biography enables the author to share what it was like to live through a particular moment from their own particular cultural vantage point.

Field experiences are designed not only to help future teachers familiarize themselves with teaching methodology, but to give these aspiring instructors a chance to develop their voices within a professional community. What made my particular learning experience unique was that my decision to join the teaching community was followed shortly thereafter by my foray into the profession of stand-up comedy. In essence, I underwent professional development within two fields of practice simultaneously. While these career choices were unconnected at first, I quickly began to notice many similarities between the cultures of teaching and stand-up comedy. This ultimately led me to ask the question of whether becoming a comedian while receiving teacher training may have played a significant role in the development of my skills as a

teacher. Did my classroom management skills improve as a result of my B. Ed program and field experiences exclusively, or was being a stand-up comedian part of this equation too? Thus, the objective of my thesis research is to explore whether there is a connection to be made between the art of being funny on stage, and the challenge of maintaining a classroom. More specifically, I will be focusing on whether the performative methods of stand-up comedy (with particular consideration of crowd work), have the potential to benefit the way teachers engage in classroom management. As such, my **primary research questions** are as follows:

1. Are there any notable similarities between classroom management practices and stand-up comedy practices? If so, what are they?
2. Can stand-up comedy practices, with special attention towards crowd work, be adapted to improve teachers' classroom management skills? If so, how might this be accomplished?

My personal experience, while anecdotal in nature, lends credibility to my research question and will serve as a springboard into this project's theoretical analysis. This section will also work as an example of the stories we may have to dissect and analyze when conducting future research. As such, I would like to introduce my study through an autoethnographic biography, and share the story of how I became a teacher/comedian:

1.2 Autoethnographic Biography

Prior to entering the teaching profession, stand-up comedy had been a staple source of enjoyment in my life for about as long as I could remember. For instance, as a young boy, I would regularly stay awake well into the night in order to watch various comedy specials on television. As for my early educational experience, although I had a knack for making my peers laugh, I wouldn't really describe myself as having been the "class clown" per-se. However, being the subject of bullying for a large portion of my childhood, I frequently found myself

looking at life through a comical lens in order to bring comfort against the harshness of the world. In my opinion, laughter made life much more enjoyable, and I always looked up to teachers who used humour in their lessons. I felt that the funnier they were, the more they seemed to care about my learning and wellbeing. This in turn reinforced the development of my own sense of humour, and helped form a vital part of my personality. Watching stand-up comedy specials on television also served as an excellent outlet for my intellectual curiosity, especially since these comedians would expose me to a wide variety of philosophical and sociological perspectives. In my adolescence, when YouTube started to gain popularity, I immersed myself in the now more easily accessible works of George Carlin, Louis C.K., Robin Williams, Eddie Murphy, Dave Chappelle, Bill Burr, John Pinette, Russel Peters, Jimmy Carr, and Lewis Black, just to name a few; these comedians would eventually inspire me to develop my own comedic style and perspective.

Fast-forward to my first semester of the B. Ed. program at McGill. The year was 2013, and as a fledgling teacher, I brimmed with the hope of making a difference in my field of study. I read voraciously, doing my best to absorb as much information as possible about teaching and its intricacies. I listened intently to my professors, aspiring to glean some of their expertise in order to better my craft. However, no amount of educational theory could ever truly prepare me for what I would eventually have to experience first-hand: teaching actual students. The only way I would know with certainty whether teaching was the right profession to pursue, was to *practice* teaching. The McGill educational department accounts for this fact by requiring its students to enlist in a series of four field experiences, where future teachers are given the opportunity to work in collaboration with various schools and mentors in order to develop professional

competencies. Most importantly, it is within these periods that aspiring teachers are given the freedom to discover and grow their professional identities.

In November of 2013, for my first field experience, I was placed at Laurier Macdonald High School, which is also commonly referred to as LMAC. During the three weeks of my teacher training, I worked diligently to understand the school's cultural context; I interacted regularly with teaching staff, maintenance workers, counsellors, cafeteria employees, principals and students. I became familiar with my surroundings quite rapidly - my supervisor encouraged the group of student teachers I was part of to talk to as many school personnel as possible. I learned a lot about LMAC's *mode de vie* and internal workings, which proved to be rather useful for getting along with its occupants. However, I also found my first field experience to be rather insular in nature, since it provided me with limited opportunities to express myself within the classroom. I spent virtually no time teaching, and most of my time observing the structural proceedings of my classes. In spite of my restricted involvement, I made sure to take extensive notes of the way my co-operating teachers acted, paying particular attention to their use of gestures, tone, and body language. At this point, I was aware of the fact that a significant part of the art of teaching consisted of communication, but I was still uncertain of exactly which techniques would work best with students. I found that teachers often varied their behavior and classroom management strategies depending on particular group dynamics, as well as their own personalities. Thus, I quickly came to the realization that context strongly influenced teaching effectiveness. It was also during this time that I learned the valuable skill of lesson planning; this would greatly benefit my teaching performance later in the program.

In April of 2014, I was placed for my second field experience at John Paul II High School. Although I had the chance to practice classroom management on several occasions

during these few weeks, I still felt as though I had plenty of room for improvement in this particular competency. I had created several lesson plans with the help of my co-operating teacher and a fellow classmate, but only truly got the opportunity to begin gaining my independence as a teacher later on in my training program. However, something truly remarkable happened to me at the end of this field experience: After I delivered the lesson for my final evaluation, my supervisor pulled me aside and told me, in full confidence, that one of my greatest qualities as a teacher was my sense of humour. He had seen plenty of developing teachers experimenting with different teaching styles, but in his opinion, the best ones were those who strove to make their students think outside the box, and have fun while doing so. Nevertheless, this compliment came with a caveat: He warned me that my willingness to take risks in the classroom and push students to think critically about the curriculum might backfire – parents and students that remain tied to traditional methods of learning may be averse to changing their minds. As a result, his advice was for me to continue paying attention to the needs of my students, and ensure that everyone feels safe enough to express themselves. Basically, this was my first real brush with the pedagogical power of humour in education, and I decided from this moment on that I would incorporate it as often as I could throughout my career.

In the meantime, my interest in stand-up comedy finally started to grow beyond simply watching specials on YouTube, or attending the occasional show at mainstream venues like the Comedy Nest. A close friend of mine had recently graduated from film studies at Concordia, and was left with the task of finding a job that was suited to his particular set of skills. With an open mind and a tremendous amount of self-confidence, he ultimately decided to try his hand at a career in stand-up comedy. While this did not affect me personally at first, my friend would often make a point of talking about his experiences as a comedian and informing me about how

fulfilling they were. Since he was new to the field, he also frequently invited me to come support him by watching his shows. Thus, over the course of roughly a year, I opted to follow along with him to several of his gigs. Initially this was mostly out of friendly support and curiosity, but I gradually grew a strong affinity for the comedy club environment. During this period, I acquainted myself with many other comedians, as well as numerous showrunners - people involved in the production of events. Eventually, my exposure to the behind-the-scenes world of stand-up comedy would lead me to make the decision to try it for myself.

Finally, on one fateful night in December of 2015, I entered a dimly lit downtown pub with the goal of performing stand-up comedy for the very first time. The venue, while unassuming on the exterior, was warm and inviting, and drew in a large crowd of young professionals looking for a fun night out. Prior to that evening, I never really felt like I had the confidence or the talent to make anything special out of comedy. I was an outsider; an interested observer who believed that *maybe* I could do it under the right circumstances or with enough support. After years of watching other people perform, I thought I knew a fair amount about stand-up and how it worked. However, much like my decision to pursue teaching, there was only one way to ascertain with certainty whether this profession was right for me: by going up on stage and telling people jokes. Thus, with a deep breath and a heavily beating heart, I walked onstage and delivered my very first comedy set. Much to my surprise, it wasn't terrible! In hindsight, it probably was, but the feeling of exhilaration I got after performing – albeit to a warm and exceptionally understanding crowd - was unlike anything I had ever experienced before. I know this might seem cliché, but it was at this moment that I realized I wanted to pursue comedy professionally.

From that night onward, I began to perform at as many open mics as possible. I took plenty of notes, doing my best to track the progress of my performances. I constantly reviewed and revised my jokes, and tried to expand my material to accommodate for a broader audience. I paid close attention to current events and trends, with the intent of making my content fresh, relatable and enjoyable. Additionally, I forged some strong connections with other fledgling comedians, which provided me with some much-needed developmental support. I also engaged in conversations with numerous veterans in the field, hoping to gain as much of their expertise as my mind could carry. This involved discussing their techniques, subject matters, and previous experiences out in the field. I noticed that the success of a performance depended largely on context; what worked for one audience would not necessarily work well with another. However, comedians with more talent and experience tended to negate these factors by adapting their content to specific situations. Much like during my teacher training, I also paid special attention to my peers' use of gestures, tone, posture and body language. These were the first steps towards developing my reputation and voice within the Montreal stand-up comedy community.

In September of 2016, I was placed for my third professional field experience at Vincent Massey Collegiate. What set this particular field work apart from its predecessors was the fact that I was finally given the room to teach (mostly) independently. Within a few weeks of my experience, I noticed that my voice and presence in the classroom began to improve. This was verified by my field supervisor, who noted in one of my evaluations that my student engagement was very strong. In terms of classroom management, I found that students responded quite well to my use of humour during activities; their demeanors were generally pleasant, and I had relatively few behavioral difficulties to attend to. At this point, I had practiced stand-up comedy for almost a year. Whenever things got tough in the classroom, I reminded myself that if I could

handle a room full of drunken, distracted people at a bar on a weekday night, I could definitely manage teaching a group of rowdy teenagers. In time, my confidence in my ability to teach improved significantly, allowing me to develop a strong and dynamic rapport with each of my groups. Being only a few years older than some of my students (I was 25 years old, and my secondary 4 groups were roughly sixteen), I placed myself in what could be best described as the position of a helpful mentor. As such, the relationships I formed with my students were authentic; I pushed my students to achieve their best, all while remaining amicable.

Now let's jump forward to my final field experience. In February of 2017, I was placed once again at LMAC high school. In collaboration with my co-operating teacher, I managed three groups of secondary five students, and one secondary four group. At this point, my teaching style was already fairly developed, and I was comfortable enough in my abilities to present my material confidently. My students were generally quite receptive to my teaching methods, and seem to have enjoyed my presence in the classroom as well. I also learned some valuable lessons about classroom management: the two worst things that a teacher can lose are his voice and his patience. I frequently made links between the content that I taught and the culture of my students. I tried my best to make my educational material as accessible and relatable as possible by connecting it to personal anecdotes, popular culture and broader social contexts. In the meantime, I applied the same principle to stand-up comedy, and continued to make significant advancements in my comedy career. I finally started to move beyond the local open-mic circuit and got booked for some paid gigs. While this may not seem like much progress on the surface, it is important to be aware of the fact that it is relatively difficult for anglophone comedians in Montreal to earn money from stand-up. Doing this requires comedians to grow

from the status of amateur to one of semi-professional or professional. At this point, my skills as a comedian had matured to a semi-professional level.

By the end of my field experiences, I realized that being a good teacher involves a willingness to invest ample amounts of time and energy into facilitating the learning and wellbeing of his students. This requires constant reflection, and a strong drive for self-improvement. Additionally, my experiences showed me that teaching demands compassion and humility, and the ability to listen to the needs of his classroom and pupils. Most importantly, in order to excel as a teacher, one must be able to present oneself to the scrutiny and judgement of others without fear. Teaching is a highly performative act that requires mutual participation from the teacher and his students; doing this necessitates a tremendous degree of self-confidence, among other skills. Although I already possessed a fair understanding of this concept upon my introduction to the teaching program, it was only later on throughout my field experiences and performances on stage that I learned the true value of an ability to perform for an audience. My foray into the world of stand-up comedy, in conjunction with my unique educational field experiences, helped mold me into the teacher/comedian that I am today. As such, my research seeks to bring these two once-separate fields of study together. Perhaps teaching practices can benefit from the tools that stand-up comedians use on stage.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERARY REVIEW

In order to set the stage for my thesis research, this chapter will attempt to review a wide array of academic discourse regarding the use of humour by teachers in educational contexts. However, due to the nature of my thesis questions, I will be focusing primarily on works which examine how humour and humorous interaction may be used by teachers as a tool for *classroom management*. The first topic to be explored will be the concept of classroom management itself. While this investigation will by no means be comprehensive, I will discuss the merits of some of the most commonly and effectively used or recommended classroom management techniques. My inquiry will then be followed by an overview of the various definitions and types of measurements that scholars have produced when trying to describe humour. Bringing the two focuses together, I will then review some of the most prevalent ways in which academics have argued that humour can be applied for the challenge of classroom management. This review will lead to the provision of several criticisms and suggestions for addressing some of the gaps that exist in contemporary humour studies. Finally, I will propose some alternative avenues for future research, with special attention given to the possibility of improving classroom management strategies by drawing from the professional practices of stand-up comedy. In conducting this critical review, it is hoped that the current literature in the field of humour studies on education will be updated in order to reflect the numerous theoretical changes and advancements that have been made in recent years.

2.1 Classroom Management: Understanding a Core Teaching Practice

What does it mean to manage a classroom? Furthermore, which techniques, if any, are considered to work best for the task of maintaining a classroom's functions? Classroom

management can loosely be defined as "how things are generally carried out in the classroom" (Roth, 2014, p. 15). While this summation appears vague at first, the reason behind such an open-ended description is that there is no universally accepted manner by which to run a classroom. What may work exceptionally well for one individual teacher may be inadequate, or even disastrous for another. Teaching methodology can vary based on a large number of contextual factors (i.e., professional preferences, available resources, classroom composition and setting, etc.). As such, these discrepancies have resulted in considerable debate amongst academics regarding the application of specific techniques. However, by conducting a review of the existing educational literature on classroom management, I have found there to be a clear convergence upon six key concepts or methods by which scholars believe teachers may effectively manage their classrooms. In addition, I will be tying in some analogies to humour and stand-up comedy as I discuss these methods.

2.1.1 Establishing Standards, Rules and Procedures

In order for a classroom to function at all, it is argued that one of the first things a teacher must do is establish a proper set of standards for students to follow. In essence, students need to know how to act in and around the classroom, and standards serve as way of setting the groundwork for teachers' expectations for their pupils. McLeod et. al (2003) suggest that standards should be general enough to apply within a broad spectrum of situations, and simple enough to avoid being taken advantage of through loopholes (p. 76). Standards should also apply at both the academic and behavioral levels (McLeod et. al, 2003). Some examples that teachers may use include "Students are polite, prompt, and prepared" and "Students are respectful, responsible, and ready to learn" (McLeod et. al, 2003, p. 76). Furthermore, standards should be reasonable in nature, and adequately enforceable (McLeod et. al, 2003). Students' awareness of

these expectations gives them clarity and allows them to focus on performing to the best of their capacities.

While standards accomplish the task of establishing teachers' expectations for their students' conduct on a general level, these can be clarified further by the application of rules, or codes. Much like standards, rules should be reasonable in their application, but are distinguished by their concrete and "absolute" nature (McLeod et. al, 2003, p. 76). It is also worth underlining the importance of routines or procedures (see e.g., McLeod et. al, 2003; Roth, 2014). These can be quite numerous, and apply to a wide variety of processes that take place within the classroom (McLeod et. al, 2003). Generally, students tend to respond well to environments in which they feel comfortable and safe. Due to their predictability and concrete applicability, routines can help bring comfort and stability to a classroom, especially at earlier stages of development. In sum, standards, rules and procedures that are universally agreed upon may therefore ultimately work as a means of managing a classroom. These can also serve as the basis for establishing a strong, reliable relationship between teachers and students.

2.1.2 Lesson Planning

Another tool which scholars argue is integral for maintaining the functions of a classroom is the educational practice of lesson planning. However, how do teachers prepare an effective lesson plan? While there is a high degree of variability as to the application of a definite methodology, some consensus exists upon the importance of the concept of student engagement. For instance, according to Roth (2014), a key element for keeping students interested in learning is providing lessons that challenge them. In general, lessons should be high-energy, evoke mild competition and controversy, and apply some pressure on students to perform at their best (Roth, 2014). Furthermore, it is believed that the most effective lessons require planning *specifically* for

students to be actively engaged in their material (Roth, 2014). In order to accomplish this task, Roth suggests that teachers frequently check for student understanding. This process requires allowing for moments within instruction where teachers can inquire about their pupils' learning progress directly (Roth, 2014). In addition, the incorporation of signals for attention and transitions between activities, can be critical for monitoring and maintaining students' understanding of material (Roth, 2014). The author proposes the use of visual props (ex. a stop sign, red light, thumbs up, raised hand), auditory cues (ex. bells, clapping hands, alarm sounds, etc.) or call-and-response signals, where teachers make statements which call upon students and expect some sort of preordained reply (ex. teacher says, "Hocus pocus," students reply with, "Everybody focus") (Roth, 2014, p. 85).

It is also important to note that the most optimally engaging lessons should attempt to meet all students' learning needs (McLeod et al., 2003). To fulfil this task, it is recommended to have an outline to *guide* thinking, with clear goals in mind. Such forethought reduces the amount of time writing detailed plans, which ultimately translates to greater efficiency in reaching these goals. However, while there is merit to having a strong core structure in their lessons, teachers must be willing to engage in critical reflection in order to adjust and obtain their learning objectives. Furthermore, teachers should seek to incorporate a broad array of teaching materials. This pedagogical openness allows for more flexibility in responding to challenges and students' needs, enabling teachers to reach the widest possible audience through their lessons (McLeod et al., 2003). My participation in the field of stand-up comedy suggests that this practice might be considered analogous to a comedian writing material for a set. A comedian may have a specific group of topics or jokes prepared in advance, but should be able to adapt their jokes in order to accommodate to their audience's response. Having an outline can serve as a helpful device,

allowing comedians to possess a broader choice of material under a variety of performance contexts. Within a classroom setting, using this technique gives teachers the freedom to experiment and find the best strategies for enhancing student learning.

2.1.3 Effective communication

Teaching is, by definition, a performative job that necessitates a direct line of communication between a teacher and a learner. In essence, the performance of teaching cannot take place without an active dialogue and interaction between individuals. Teachers must be able to present information in an articulate manner, but must also be attentive to the responses of their pupils. Simply put, this task requires the capacity to both speak *and* listen. As such, one of the cornerstones of the teaching profession is the ability to communicate effectively.

There are a number of factors which can determine the level of effectiveness of a teacher's communication. In terms of verbal communication, it seems that what matters most is not just *what* is said, but *how* it is said. For instance, modulating the tone and cadence of one's voice to appear more approachable and welcoming may assist students in feeling more comfortable in the classroom (McLeod et al., 2003). However, Roth (2014) suggests that, "using different vocal inflections in the classroom is appropriate only if it has a legitimate educational purpose, does not demean students, and does not result in yelling, which is often ineffective" (p. 26). Essentially, what this statement implies is that teachers possess the freedom to speak in whichever tone they deem necessary, as long as they do not interfere with student wellbeing or learning.

On the other hand, a significant portion of communication occurs without the need for speech. For instance, Cummings (2000) suggests that teachers may wish to incorporate hand

movements, facial expressions, and large body action, which are also seen as indicators of enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is generally accepted as an important characteristic of effective teachers, being associated with student learning gains (Cummings, 2000). Furthermore, teachers often utilize physical proximity as a means of preventing disruptive or inappropriate behaviors (McLeod et al., 2003) On the positive side, proximity allows teachers to connect with students on a more direct and immediate level, which may assist in maintaining their attention. Teachers also use the practice of waiting to keep their students on track with what they are supposed to be doing (McLeod et al., 2003). This method typically involves pausing one's instruction until students are quiet, or ready to jump back into the task at hand (McLeod et al., 2003).

Importantly, nonverbal responses to students, used *in conjunction* with verbal cues, can also play a vital role in classroom management (McLeod et al., 2003). For example, several scholars in classroom management studies suggest that the use of eye contact is crucial for active listening (Cummings, 2000). Along with providing students with visual attention, active listening involves teachers clarifying student statements, paraphrasing (repeating out loud so that others can hear and understand what students have said), and asking mediational questions (McLeod et al., 2003). Moreover, while eye contact plays a significant role in effective communication, it also serves as a powerful means of maintaining teachers' authority; the appropriate use of teacher gaze can assist in keeping students' attention, but can also help control or prevent disruptions (Roth, 2014). In sum, effective communication allows teachers to create strong and meaningful connections with their students, helping to establish the foundation for positive and productive learning environments.

2.1.4 Managing Teacher Behavior/Conduct

The art of managing a classroom requires more than simply accounting for *students*' behavior; the way a *teacher* acts in his/her classroom is quintessential for creating and maintaining an environment conducive to student learning. Unfortunately, this is not always a simple task. One aspect of classroom management that may pose as a challenge to some teachers is dealing with their own emotions, especially during stressful encounters with students. According to Roth (2014), "it is extremely important for teachers to control their emotions and stay calm" (p. 26). If possible, the author suggests that teachers should seek to avoid confrontations with their students while under duress; losing self-control can lead to a loss of respect and increased difficulty with making decisions (Roth, 2014). Instead, instructors are encouraged to maintain standards and codes of conduct for both themselves and their students (see Roth, 2014, Ch 4).

When it comes to managing the conduct of their students, it must be emphasized that teachers' actions play a strong role in determining their pupils' behavioral outcomes. Teachers serve as powerful role models in the classroom; it is therefore logical to assume that modelling and reinforcing positive behaviors while avoiding negative behaviors would likely encourage students to adapt these behaviors as well (McLeod et al., 2003). Positive reinforcement of appropriate behavior may also be beneficial for enhancing classroom conduct (McLeod et al., 2003). In a similar fashion, the psychological principle of negative reinforcement may serve to eliminate inappropriate student behaviors or improve the likelihood of appropriate ones (McLeod et al., 2003). In a classroom context, this process entails teachers applying a negative stimulus in response to a negative behavior (i.e., punishment), then removing a negative stimulus when a positive behavior is displayed (McLeod et al, 2003). Another effective tool for removing or

limiting negative student behaviors is through the concept of extinction. According to this method, teachers must give no reinforcement or attention at all towards a student's behavior (i.e., by ignoring it), which ultimately leads to the reduction, or extinction of said behavior (McLeod et al., 2003). Within the context of stand-up comedy, this technique is also commonly used by comedians to avoid hecklers or disruptions from the audience; a lack of interaction generally reduces the likelihood of negative behavior being repeated or escalated.

Another key element of managing teacher behavior is the practice of preventing teacher *misbehavior* (Cummings, 2000). Teachers are people too, and can sometimes make mistakes in their conduct that may result in negative consequences; managing a classroom is emotionally and cognitively demanding even in the best of cases. In order to prevent the most extreme outcomes from occurring, it is recommended that instructors avoid using emotional threats such as negative language, bullying, intimidation, put-downs, or other similarly hurtful actions, (Cummings, 2000). While this advice may seem obvious at first, it can sometimes be challenging for teachers to remain composed under stressful situations. Engaging in outwardly hostile behaviors can be detrimental in a wide variety of manners, and is actively harmful to student learning. Language plays a similar role in comedy settings, and regrettably, it is not always positive. Comedians can sometimes resort to insults, but this is generally used as a social lubricant (i.e., playful teasing) rather than a means for bullying. In addition, comedians must exercise caution when using quips or jabs at the audience's expense, since being hurtful can ultimately also damage a comedian's overall reputation. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that teachers do their best to act in ways that reflect the attitudes of respect and professionalism, even under significant stress.

2.1.5 Creating and Maintaining a Positive/Supportive Learning Environment

One of the most significant aspects of classroom management is the setting in which it takes place, *the classroom*. While there may be some variation with regards to outside factors such as the specific layout of the school, the socioeconomic context of its location and students, etc., teachers have a decidedly strong influence over the types of physical and cultural environments in which they work. Generally speaking, much of the current literature on classroom management suggests that positive, or supportive learning environments tend to be more conducive to student learning and information retention (see Darling & Civikly, 1987). McLeod et al. (2003) take this notion further, claiming that the first step towards effective classroom management is to, "establish a positive class climate based on mutual trust, respect and caring" (p. 62). Another common method by which teachers can encourage a positive learning environment is through the strategic use of praise towards students (Roth, 2014). Compliments' utility extends to a variety of purposes such as bolstering students' confidence, providing constructive feedback, and promoting good behavior. However, it must be noted that compliments should be "genuine, specific, and never contrived" (Roth, 2014, p. 28). This quality helps build an authenticity and trust between teachers and their students while simultaneously preventing instructors from appearing disingenuous. Roth also suggests that teachers supply their students with enough encouragement throughout their lessons. This method includes the action of instructors finding and emphasizing student strengths, even when they make mistakes (Roth, 2014). The benefit here is that students can receive realistic and constructive feedback on their learning while still feeling that they are part of a supportive and accepting environment (Roth, 2014).

McLeod et al. (2003) also extoll the significance of teacher language, claiming that the use of positive presuppositions may contribute to a positive classroom environment (p. 69). To accomplish this goal, the authors suggest that teachers attempt to maintain a high ratio of positive to negative statements when addressing students (McLeod et al., 2003). A more positive style of language is believed to convey an atmosphere of acceptance and empathy, which may ultimately be conducive to greater student engagement (McLeod et al., 2003). Similar to teachers, comedians have also been observed demonstrating such types of behavior and language in their audience interactions (which will be expanded upon in chapter 3). While there is merit to a positive verbal approach, teachers should not feel restrained by this strategy; in the end, it is up to the instructor to exhibit professional judgement as to what works best in the classroom.

Some studies, such as the one conducted by Cummings (2000), suggest that teachers can further enhance their learning environments by changing or altering their immediate *physical* surroundings. For example, teachers can adjust the classroom's seating arrangement in a variety of patterns in order to accommodate for different learning situations (Cummings, 2000). Ideally, it is recommended that "seating pattern should both maximize opportunity to focus on a task and actively listen" (Cummings, 2000, p. 40). Seating arrangement plays an implicit role in establishing expectations between teachers and students, and has been shown to have a significant impact on learning outcomes. (For further in-depth reading on the effects of physical environment on learning, see Jonassen & Land, 2012).

2.1.6 Connecting Strategies: Connecting with Students

While there is significant weight attached to the five classroom management strategies previously discussed, we must now cover what is perhaps the most important technique of all: the ability to bond and connect with one's students. Research supports the idea that the

foundation of a positive classroom climate, or indeed many other aspects of classroom management, is the *connection* established between teachers and students (McLoed et al., 2003). Teaching does not occur in a vacuum; by its very nature, teaching is a dynamic process which requires the active participation and involvement of an audience (i.e., students). In order to ensure that students accomplish learning objectives within a curriculum, teachers must be able to effectively "tune in" with their audience and be receptive to their particular needs. This involves teachers making an effort to move beyond simply possessing the beneficial qualities of appearing likable or friendly to their pupils. Instead, teachers should strive to achieve a strong mutual understanding with their students. As echoed in McLeod et al.'s work, Roth (2014) suggests that *respect* is a prerequisite factor in developing healthy connections in the classroom. In essence, before any pedagogical activities take place, children should be shown that teachers care about them, and that they deserve to be treated with dignity. This dignification can be accomplished by instructors habitually displaying interest in their students' lives, ideas, and activities (Roth, 2014). In addition, Roth proposes the adoption of Glasser's seven connecting habits: caring, listening, supporting, contributing, encouraging, trusting, and befriending (Roth, 2014, p. 25). Instructors can further improve the quality of classroom interaction by getting to know their students and engaging in meaningful dialogue (Cummings, 2000). It must be noted that although there may be benefits to maintaining an open line of communication or dialogue with one's pupils, the degree of openness between teachers and students depends largely on personal preference or professional judgement.

Another vital means for teachers establishing strong connections with students is the act of building community *among* students (McLeod et al., 2003). By instilling a sense of belonging, or a shared classroom culture, teachers can help foster trust between students as well as deepen their

rapport with them. Teachers play a pivotal role in determining the dynamics that occur in class; this is especially important since "the quality of relationships that kids have with their peers affects both their academic achievement and their school behavior" (McLeod et al., 2003, p. 70). Teachers should also strive to encourage active involvement of students (Cummings, 2000). This objective can be likened to the art of audience engagement in the professional practice of stand-up comedy. Although many comedians rely largely on pre-prepared material when performing, my personal observations within the field suggest that some of the most effective and impactful humorists are often those who use humour to attempt to better understand and connect with their audiences. As such, these six principles of classroom management suggest that humour can play a useful role in organizing classroom activities and encouraging student participation.

2.2. *Varying Definitions and Measurement of Humour*

Before being able to draw any kind of inference about its effects on classroom management, most humour studies are predicated on a fundamental question: What *is* humour? It would appear that conceptual definitions for humour vary enormously across the field. While there is no precise agreement on what humour is exactly, research seems to converge on the idea that it entails the communication and experience of joy or amusement (Banas et al., 2011). At the biological level, the process of humour can be described as a set of physiological responses to stimuli. Alternatively, from a more philosophical perspective, humour may perhaps be identified as a lived, human, conscious experience; a generally positive (but not always) psychological response to a sociological circumstance.

It should be emphasized that there has been a significant amount of debate concerning the *types*, or forms of humour that exist. Some researchers have attempted to narrow these down to general categories such as contiguous or integrated (Bolkan et al., 2018), self-deprecating, other-

devaluing, body language, and witty response (Chiang et al., 2016). In his study on the application of humour as a teaching strategy, Wandersee (1982) developed several charts identifying various sources and forms of humour. In this case, sources refer to situations or scenarios that can be interpreted humorously (i.e., a violation of normal order of events, a minor inconvenience, etc.) while forms refer to the ways in which humorous material are presented (i.e., puns, set-up and punchline jokes, anecdotes, etc.). Other academics have delved further into humour distinctions, looking not just at their functions, but on their variation according to context. For example, some researchers believe that humour can be labelled as "appropriate" or "inappropriate" depending on its source, form, mode of employment, and recipients (see Wanzer et al., 2006).

Another prominent point of contention among researchers is the fact that it is difficult to measure the effects of something as complex and situationally variable as humour. This being the case, there is no one fixed way by which to define, collect and evaluate data concerning this concept. As a result, academics in the field have attempted to apply a variable assortment of measurement methods such as the use of surveys, self-reports, and checklists of criteria deemed relevant for observation. In their promising study, Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield (1991) argue that attitudes and predisposition towards enacting humorous messages can be measured by a Humour Orientation scale. Essentially, individuals possess particular inclinations or appreciations of humour, and their likelihood of humour usage ranges based on these factors. However, usage does not necessarily equate with *aptitude* of humour usage. For example, the capacity to understand and appreciate a joke does not make someone a stand-up comedian, no matter how funny they believe themselves to be.

2.3. Humour on Classroom Management

There is a clear dearth in the literature when it comes to finding studies that concern themselves specifically with humour's potential applications in classroom management. However, I have noticed three major aspects of instructional humour that pertain to classroom management that researchers have shown to be interested in observing or testing. The first of these is whether humour can be used to **attract or maintain student attention**. For example, in their study on humour in higher education, Powell & Andreson (1985) observe that humour is often an, "effective method for gaining and holding the attention of an audience, and for reviving that attention if it be observed to flag" (p. 80). Some researchers found that humour was specifically useful for attracting the attention of young children, suggesting that teachers use "frequent short bursts of humour to attract and maintain interest" in their students (Banas et al., 2011, p. 132).

Secondly, educational researchers seem interested in observing whether humour can be used to **improve the quality of learning content**, particularly by making it more engaging and memorable. While humour's connection to classroom management is not necessarily direct in this case, one study claims that, "humour can effect a more active involvement of students in the work of the classroom, drawing in some of those who otherwise might remain on the margin of activities" (Powell & Andreson, 1985, p. 80). It can be argued that a more active academically engaged classroom is likely easier to maintain, at least from a disciplinary perspective. If students are appropriately motivated to focus their attention on school work, it follows logically that they will be less inclined to exhibit disruptive behaviors. There is also evidence to support the idea that the formation of children's sense of humour follows alongside their cognitive and intellectual development (Valett, 1981). For instance, Powell & Andreson (1985) suggest that the

cognitive processes involved in resolving or "seeing the joke" provide the experience of gratification, and bolster students' intrinsic motivation, which may be of substantial value for learning (p. 81).

Thirdly, much research has been focused on examining whether/how humour can be used to create a **positive classroom learning environment**. Despite some disagreements about its nature, the general consensus in the literature is that humour can have a positive affect on students' learning environments (Bolkan et al., 2018). More specifically, it has been shown to improve students' mood, and overall sense of wellbeing (Bolkan et al., 2018). The classroom environment is also strongly connected to the concept of immediacy. Essentially, immediacy involves communication behaviors that convey warmth, closeness, and involvement among interactants (Banas et al, 2011). This communication serves to create a positive interaction between participants, building interpersonal closeness at both a verbal and nonverbal level (Banas et al., 2011). It is believed that the relationship between immediacy and humour is likely bi-directional, in that humour increases perceptions of immediacy but immediacy also influences how humour use is perceived (Banas et al., 2011). While not explicitly stated in Banas et al.'s analysis, the implication here is that immediacy may have potential applications to classroom management. Many behaviors used by teachers when being humorous (e.g., smiling, vocal variety, gestures, and facial expressiveness) are also considered immediacy behaviors (Banas et al., 2011). Thus, being humorous may result in a stronger level of immediacy between teachers and students.

Humour also possesses certain social functions, and can have a variety of effects on social settings. For instance, humour can serve as "a social lubricant and/or irritant depending upon how it is viewed by participants in the interaction" (Darling & Civikly, 1987, p. 24). This

has numerous potential implications for improving classroom management: When humour is understood and socially acceptable, it is more likely to have a positive effect on social interaction. One study among college teachers proposed that appropriate humour may even influence the effectiveness of teacher power and compliance-gaining strategies; it may be that teachers who are humorous will be more effective in gaining the compliance of their students (Punyanunt, 2000). While their research was focused on college educators, it may be theoretically possible to extrapolate a similar application of appropriate humour across other levels of education.

2.4. Criticisms and Suggestions

One of the most obvious issues to be found with humour studies in general is that it is challenging to determine the exact nature of humour. Most studies recognize the subjectivity of humour, and tend to accommodate for this ambiguity by establishing independently consistent parameters by which to define it. The problem here is that the results of individual studies may therefore be difficult to reproduce or verify, even under similar circumstances.

Another vital issue with the current literature on humour studies in education is validity. It is difficult to ascertain the validity of particular measurement approaches if there is no consensus over what to measure. As such, this situation runs the risk of creating biases in data recording. For example, one research assumed that the validity of their self-reporting measurement approach for assessing individual humour differences was strong because "it [was] positive, socially approved, and functional," (Booth-Butterfield & Booth-Butterfield, 1991, p. 208). However, this assertion neglects to account for the Dunning-Kreuger effect, which observes that people often consider themselves to be better than they truly are at performing a skill/task (see Kreuger & Dunning, 1999). Due to the positive associations that exist with having

a strong sense of humour, it would be advantageous to the individual to self-report as having a higher humour orientation. This predisposition can therefore run the risk of skewing results by creating a greater incidence of participants reporting a high humour orientation. However, it must be acknowledged that there is conflicting evidence about whether student learning outcomes can be directly improved by a teacher's use of humour (Bolkan et al., 2018). Banas et al. (2011) recommend that, "in order for instructors low in humour orientation to benefit from the positive aspects of humour, they might consider incorporating a humorous video clip, or adding a cartoon to their slides can inject humour but make the burden of spontaneous humour less cumbersome" (p. 135). While this suggestion may be largely sound advice, the production/generation of humour should not be viewed as a burden; labelling it as such defeats the purpose of its use. In addition, simply incorporating the occasional joke within a lesson does not equate with using humour as a *teaching method*, and will not necessarily lead to long-term learning benefits. In addition, some scholars assert that humour also has the potential to serve as a distraction in the classroom, and can even prove detrimental to learning under certain circumstances. For example, in their study of humour usage in higher education, Powell & Andresen (1985) warn that, "if an excessive amount of humorous material is introduced then an appropriate atmosphere for learning will not be maintained and the students will tend to focus on the wit of the teacher rather than upon the content of what they are supposed to be learning" (p. 84). Essentially, this notion implies that an excess of humour may undermine the credibility of a teacher and detract from the effectiveness of his teaching (Powell & Andresen, 1985).

In addition, educational context can greatly influence a variety of factors, such as the types of humour used by instructors, effectiveness of humour strategies, and impact of humour on learning. For instance, humour methods utilized by teachers within a high school environment

may prove to be unsuccessful in a university setting. When compared with their high school counterparts, university teachers typically devote less attention to the discipline of their students, and more to the explication and comprehension of complex concepts. This reduces the overall strictness of classroom management techniques, and may allow professors to use humour in a more liberal manner. Furthermore, the motivation of students may differ significantly between educational contexts, especially when contrasting basic and higher learning settings. Logically speaking, people willing to pay thousands of dollars for their education are more likely to invest time and energy into learning when compared to high school students who are limited to fulfilling institutionally determined curricula until graduation or upon reaching a certain age. Other factors, such as the attributed gender of an instructor, may play a role in the types of humour and functions that are used in the classroom. In one study, researchers found that "men used humour to enliven and entertain their classes, whereas women either avoided humour or used it to gain control of classroom disruption" (Banas et al., 2011, p. 125).

2.5. Stand-up Comedy on Classroom Management

Managing a classroom is no laughing matter; while there is an abundance of literature regarding the pedagogical use of *humour*, there is very little research to be found which concerns itself specifically with the potential applications of *stand-up comedy* in the classroom. Being a stand-up comedian necessitates the acquisition, development and application of techniques which produce humour. If humour can be a useful tool for classroom management, it follows logically that it may be possible to draw from the practices of a profession designed to produce humour. One key difficulty when considering the validity of studies on the effectiveness of humour in the classroom is whether what is being observed is actually humour. What I hope to accomplish in my research is to side-step this issue by examining humour production in its

natural habitat (i.e., comedy clubs, or spaces where people locally identify what is being generated as humour). Given the difficulties of educational research on humour that study actual educational settings as their site, I will instead be studying stand-up comedy settings and extrapolating the techniques of humour found there for potential classroom applications.

Some educational research has already attempted to examine the possible utility of stand-up comedy within a classroom context. One notable study observed how showing stand-up comedy video clips might be used to more adequately illustrate sociological concepts to groups of university students taking a sociology class, as compared to traditional teaching methods (Bingham & Hernandez, 2009). These authors found that "the use of comedians to model sociological perspectives increased student ability to apply course concepts, decreased student anxiety when tackling new concepts, and engaged a broader number of students during class discussion" (p. 335). In a similar manner, Particelli (2016) observed how prominent social critics and comedians such as Dave Chapelle can serve as models for critical discourse in the classroom. The implication here is that if using comedic examples improves learning, makes students less anxious, and increases engagement in course material, this will ultimately facilitate classroom management. However, it is important to distinguish that simply showing stand-up comedy clips or talking about comedians has little discernible value when it comes specifically to classroom management. Instead, the benefits here stem from students' better understanding of course material contributing to a more positive learning environment. This in turn may also improve student motivation and reduce the likelihood of inappropriate behaviors.

Alternatively, it may be more fruitful to observe whether the *techniques* of stand-up comedians can be co-opted in order to improve teaching methodology and/or student learning outcomes. In their promising study, authors McCarron & Savin-Baden (2008) propose that,

"adopting some of the techniques practised by stand-up comedians can help teachers in higher education challenge students in ways that will ultimately improve the student learning experience overall" (p. 355). More specifically, they suggest the use of four primary methods from stand-up comedy: 1) improvisation of material instead of preparation, 2) personal detachment from students/audience rather than forming relationships, 3) challenging rather than coddling their audience, and 4) learning no names instead of most names (see McCarron & Savin-Baden, 2008). While these ideas may seem counterintuitive at first glance, it would be worth investigating the potential impact that these techniques may have upon classroom management.

One prominent study by Powell & Andreson (1985) makes several connections between the professions of teaching and comedy, arguing that the activity of teaching requires a sense of timing and an alertness to the response of the learners, which are also skills of central importance in the communication of humour. Furthermore, the authors observe how the use of the voice and bodily movements are essential skills to have for both teachers and professional humorists alike (Powell & Andreson, 1985). In order for to instructors to capitalize on this connection, the authors suggest that staff development programs should provide opportunities for academics to practice their humour presentation skills. This includes encouraging teachers to take workshops on lecturing methods designed to focus upon the techniques for presenting humorous materials; during these workshops, teachers can receive constructive comments on matters such as timing, gestures, voice, and the aptness of the material (Powell & Andreson, 1985). These techniques are all factors involved in *classroom management* as well. Essentially, the implication here is that it is not necessary to be funny per se, or have a high humour orientation in order for an instructor to benefit from the effects of humour integration. With the appropriate type and degree of practice, instructors may be able to develop the skills and techniques required to adequately present

educational material in a humorous or engaging manner. Such skills might include effective verbal or physical communication, maintaining audience attention, as well as the ability to interact comfortably with a crowd.

Drawing from my own experience as a comedian, as well as the implications of Powell & Andreson's study, one of the most beneficial areas of comedic practice, or more specifically, stand-up comedy, to compare and connect with teaching, would be from what is called crowd work. Crowd work refers to the act of a comedian/performer interacting with an audience in an organic, authentic and spontaneous manner. The performance of crowd work appears to share some similarities with the concept of immediacy. Practicing one's skill for positively interacting with an audience may help build bonds between teachers and students. This may also improve overall social cohesion in the classroom. Unfortunately, there is still a dearth in the research with regards to whether the practice of stand-up can be used to improve specific classroom management techniques. Investigating this issue further could potentially be beneficial not just to individual teachers, but to the field of education at large. As such, my next chapter will focus on answering one vital question: What do stand-up comedians do? In addition, this chapter will pay particular attention to what they do during crowd work.

CHAPTER 3 – ANALYSIS

In my previous chapter, I worked to establish a relatively sound understanding of the foundation of classroom management techniques and principles. This undertaking involved exploring as many methods as possible, but focused on those that were most widely accepted as essential for teachers to adopt. In covering such a breadth of educational tools, I also observed a consensus in the existing research that teachers' use of humour might play a role in improving various aspects of teaching and learning. This ultimately invoked the possibility of a pedagogical connection between the teaching profession and that of stand-up comedy. If classroom management can be positively influenced by humour, then perhaps we may glean some useful information from analyzing the practices of a profession based on its production – stand-up comedy. The goal of this chapter is therefore to observe and lay out the techniques that comedians use to engage audiences which may have relevance for classroom contexts. In order to examine the possible connections between the work of comedians on a stage and teachers in front of a classroom, this chapter will endeavor to answer the following question: What do stand-up comedians do?

3.1. Data Selection/Theory/Methodology

To provide evidence to support my thesis research, I will first be drawing information from my personal experience as a stand-up comedian. As I communicated in my introduction/autoethnographic biography, I have been a practicing comic in the Montreal region for several years. As such, I have gained intimate acquaintance with various codes and conventions of the profession, allowing me to develop a deeper understanding of stand-up comedy's inner workings. This includes a familiarization with a diverse array of strategies and

resources that comedians use to succeed on stage, extending beyond those generally observed by spectators. Such a personal position offers a strong vantage point from which to identify and analyze the techniques used throughout comedy performances. However, my participatory familiarity will also be paired with extensive humour research scholarship to serve as a theoretical basis for explaining the profession's structure.

Secondly, I have transcribed five excerpts of YouTube video clips displaying various comedians performing what is called *crowd work*. In the context of stand-up comedy, crowd work refers to the act of a comedian or performer conversing or interacting with an audience in an organic, authentic and spontaneous or unscripted manner. My primary reason for selecting the medium of YouTube is due to the quality, practicality, as well as abundance of source material offered on the platform. The site hosts countless hours of information-rich audio and visual content related to stand-up comedy, much of which includes vignettes created and shared publicly by internationally recognized professional comedians. This attests to the professional legitimacy of such artifacts, while also allowing easy accessibility for a general audience. In addition, publicly available content also comes with the benefit of not requiring ethical permission to use; almost anyone with an internet connection can view, analyze, and react to YouTube videos, as long as their actions conform to the website's community guidelines. Therefore, since these clips were already found on the YouTube platform as part of public domain, it was not necessary to receive REB approval to use them in my research.

Thirdly, I have personally attended and spectated several comedy nights/events at various venues throughout the Montreal region, and transcribed my notes from these occasions. I will be using these field notes as a supplementary source of data regarding how comedians comport themselves and interact with crowds. My motive for selecting this method was to bring greater

ethnographical depth to my portrayal and understanding of the Montreal comedy scene. While there is merit to transcribing and analyzing YouTube clips, being a part of the action provides a more vibrant, authentic experience than just observing performances from distance of a screen. Most importantly, my physical presence at these events enabled me to witness comedians' interactions with their audiences firsthand. As such, my spectatorship likely facilitated the identification of certain trends and patterns in both comedian and audience behavior, which were not necessarily accessible online. Similarly, my live attendance of comedy shows may have also assisted in noticing interactions within the YouTube clips that I may not have perceived otherwise. Hopefully, this approach will help to further respond to my research questions.

Essentially, the purpose of both the YouTube and field note transcriptions is to examine the tools and techniques used by professional comedians in their domain, and ultimately weigh in on whether, or how, teachers might stand to benefit their teaching methods by applying those same tools. Through observing and analysing comedians' techniques in greater detail, we may be able to draw some connections between those used by teachers, especially in the context of classroom management. For example, it *may* be possible to incorporate comedians' utilization of crowd work as a model for interaction between students and teachers in a classroom. If, how, and why is what I intend to shed light on through my research.

It must be noted that in moments of crowd work, what matters most to their success is not necessarily the *content* that comedians deliver (i.e., jokes), but the act of delivery in-and-of-itself, which effectively elicits positive audience response. Such elicitation and responses involve a wide array of complex sociolinguistic mechanisms, including laughter, smiles, social cohesion, and rapport between comics and audiences. Research suggests stand-up comedy as a, "genre [whose] success depends [greatly] on the comedians' use of language, nonverbal cues, and the

audience's approval of the comedians' presentations," (Filani, 2015, p. 77). I will thus be utilizing a combination of interactional and conversational discourse analysis towards examining comedy events. In this way, my study extends from Powell & Andreson's (1985) study by attending to the performative aspects of stand-up/audience interaction.

Interactional discourse analysis, or interactional sociolinguistics (IS) in this case, refers to an investigation of the process by which individuals create meaning and understanding within social interactions (Gumperz, 2015). Conversational analysis, on the other hand, focuses on the speech patterns and performative dynamics of verbal interactions between individuals (Schegloff, 2015). As such, my transcriptions place particular attention upon the interactions and conversations that occur between the comedians and their spectators. This requires the notation of comedians' gestures, facial movement patterns, pauses, specific word emphases, and body movement. It is also necessary to investigate types of audience response such as laughter and its duration (For further reading on conversation analysis, see Schegloff, 1997; Schegloff, 1992).

The five video clips were selected based on whether they involved comedians performing crowd work, their audio quality, and whether they occurred in the context of a professional setting, such as a comedy club. Since I am interested in examining the potential classroom application of effective interactional techniques used by stand-up comedians, the clips were also chosen to mostly reflect the *successful* use of crowd work. This implies that the comedians obtained significant positive audience responses, such as laughter and willing participation. Conversely, the field notes drawn from attending live comedy events depict a range of successful, moderate, and unsuccessful or weak performances. These live shows did not necessarily occur under optimal circumstances, so it follows logically that we would observe greater variation in crowd responses. Live attendance also provides a useful foil to put successful

crowd work in clearer view. Fluctuation in the degree of positive response may be related to several factors including individual comedians' skill levels, confidence, experience, overall inclination towards crowd interaction, and interpersonal relatability between comics and their audiences. Discrepancies in crowd receptivity may also be linked to differences in situational contexts; this includes aspects such as locations, showtimes, and popularity or reputation associated with the venues.

The age, gender and ethnicity of the comedians and audience were not factored in when determining the clips chosen. However, it is important to note that these variables may have played a role in the success of their crowd work; some comedians make liberal use of their belonging to particular social or cultural groups in order to connect with audiences at large. The structure of these transcriptions was inspired largely by the work of Victor Fei Lim, whose research focuses on teachers' use of gestures in the classroom (see Lim, 2019). The reader must also be advised that some of the language and material found within the YouTube clips and field note transcripts may be considered offensive or provocative in nature. Humour in crowd work can sometimes be subversive or play on contentious themes, which leads to the possibility of being labelled inappropriate or politically incorrect. As such, my analysis will avoid these issues and instead focus primarily on the *ways* that comedians deliver their material. While subversive jokes might work within a comedy club, these likely do not translate well to the context of a classroom. Further investigation of this topic will be conducted in Chapter 4.

3.2. The Basic Tools of Stand-up Comedy: What do Stand-Up Comedians Do?

Before we begin this section, it must be prefaced that there are no concrete, fixed modes of performing stand-up comedy. Though there are schools and academies available for people willing to invest in a more formal comedic education, such as Quebec's *École Nationale de*

l'Humour, attendance at these institutions is by no means necessary for a successful comedy career. Just about anyone can join the community of practice of stand-up comedy; however, it takes an abundance of time, practice, preparation and patience to develop the knowledge and skills required to advance professionally. Based on my field research attending comedy events, transcriptions of stand-up comedy samples, as well as my own personal experience as a comedian, these are some observations regarding the tools and objectives that stand-up comedians engage in as integral parts of their craft.

3.2.1 Tell Jokes

It goes without say that telling jokes is perhaps the most fundamental aspect of stand-up comedy. Comedy is considered a performance art or craft by its practitioners, much like other performance professions such as acting, improvisation, dancing, musical theater or opera. As such, stand-up comedy necessitates a significant amount of preparation and rehearsal, while also maintaining live interaction with an audience. Essentially, the primary objective of a stand-up comedian can be defined as entertaining an audience by producing and performing humorous material, or jokes. However, the process by which comics choose to fulfill this task is a completely separate and complex matter. Through my analysis of the data, I have identified several primary methods that comics use to accomplish their goal of telling jokes.

Preparation and Practice. One of the first key aspects of the comedic process is the devotion of time towards preparation and practice of material. While some entertainers rely on their charming personalities and facility with social interaction, successful comics do not simply walk onto a stage and tell jokes. To begin, in order to prepare material for a set, comedians must conduct research into viable topics or ideas. This task often involves paying attention to current trends or events, especially if a comedian prefers to remain topical. Once some jokes have been

written, which poses a challenge in its own right, comics must take care to rehearse enough to be confident in their performances. Even in cases of improvised bits – scenarios where comedians openly invite audiences to participate in the production of humorous outcomes – stand-ups will spend lots of time prior to their shows anticipating potential situations or responses; this ensures that no matter what types of answers or interactions the audience provides, they are most likely to be entertained. For instance, in Transcript 4, we see a clear example of Baggy, a comedian of Indian descent, commencing his set with a joke following a classic set-up and punchline structure:

Example 1

1. (Introductory song "Sexy and I Know It" plays)
2. (Audience cheers)
3. (Baggy walks on stage)
4. **Baggy**: I'm sexy and I *know* it
5. (Pause for 1 second)
6. Unfortunately I'm the only one who knows it.

Transcript 4 Excerpt A)

This format typically entails the establishment of a premise, followed by what is colloquially known as a "pivot," or a subversion of expectations. The comedian establishes his presence on stage with the assertion of "I'm sexy and I know it," pauses briefly, then follows up with the self-defeating line, "Unfortunately I'm the only one who knows it." The utilization of such a procedure strongly suggests prior knowledge and preparation of joke-writing; Baggy took the time to properly enunciate his opening line, paused to allow the audience to understand and process his set-up, then delivered the punchline. Baggy likely rehearsed this particular joke beforehand, or at the very least anticipated its delivery at some point. Such reasoning is further supported by Baggy's choice to introduce himself onstage with the song, "*Sexy and I Know It*." Choosing to start his performance through a popular song paired with an ironic self-deprecation

suggests that Baggy may have anticipated his audience would respond favorably to such content. Being prepared for various types of audience feedback and interactions is an integral aspect of stand-up training, and allows comedians mobility to react effectively to different scenarios.

Use of Comedic "Voice" and Effective Communication. In order to develop and maintain their "voice," or comedic personas, comedians must consistently hone their speaking and writing skills. Much like in other performance-based professions, when it comes to the art of telling jokes, a comedian's persona must make use of tone, volume, word choice and timing in order to have significant impact on the scope of their success. This also serves the purpose of giving comedians a competitive edge over their peers; comedians that elicit the strongest responses from crowds tend to be the ones most likely to be given greater opportunities for performance in the future. Comedic personality can also be seen as a potential contributing factor in the odds of successful performance, since the comedy profession tends to attract people based on their desire make people laugh. However, due to such high degree of subjectivity, what works exceptionally well for one individual may fail spectacularly for someone else. While there is a certain degree of emulation and collaboration that occurs within the comedy scene, each comedian has their own particular way of presenting themselves and communicating their jokes. As such, we can observe many different styles of communication used on stage. Examples drawn from personal experience in the field include, but are not limited to, witty one-liners, deadpan delivery, angry ranting, celebrity impressions, sound effects, and story-telling. "Ethnic" comedians, or those who focus much of their material on matters of culture and race, often incorporate accents, commentaries and slang related to their own specific social groups. As a developing comedian myself, I have also attempted to utilize most of these strategies at some point in my career.

However, the on-stage persona that seems to best fit my capabilities at the moment is one which involves sharing witty observations and humorous personal anecdotes.

Several researchers have also attempted to classify the variation that exists in comedic expression amongst humorists. In his rhetorical analysis of examples of Persian stand-up comedy, author Heidari-Shahreza (2017) categorized several humorists' joking styles as falling within some combination of four primary types: language-based, logic-based, identity-based and action-based (p. 372). Though this study was focused on Persian comedy, the author's analysis is certainly applicable within North America as well. While this list is by no means fully comprehensive, we can observe several clear examples in the YouTube transcripts of comedians adopting some of these types of humour. For instance, comedian Adam Ray seems to focus his style on identity-based humour. In Transcript 1 (see appendix "Data Transcription" below), the comic engages in an extended dialogue with an audience member who happens to be an aspiring actor. Upon learning of the attendee's profession, Adam affirms with an emphasized "hell yeah" then proceeds to ask, "Have we seen you in anything?" (Transcript 1, lines 26-29). Not only does this demand for more specific information demonstrate Adam's genuine interest and enthusiasm in the identity of the audience member, but it allows the comedian with the opportunity to prod further and gather more material to joke with. Adam quickly turns his subsequent line of questions with the quip, "Yeah, you're moving back home for sure" which receives several seconds of audience laughter (Transcript 1, line 39-42). This back-and-forth dialogue establishes Adam's outward supportiveness of his peers, while simultaneously positioning him as someone who is, humorously, and easily disappointed. Alternatively, in Transcript 3, – a different performance of the same comedian – Adam's "voice" appears to combine identity-based humour with action-based humour; this is exemplified by commenting on how his own personality would

not mesh well with more demanding professions like being a bouncer or a fireman. The comedian then goes on to create a fictional scenario where his personal inclination towards humour interferes with his performance in these other domains.

Baggy, on the other hand, seems to communicate through a combination of language and identity-based humour.

Example 2

7. (Audience laughter)
8. (Baggy smiles)
9. (Waves his hand at an audience member sitting in the back of the room.)
10. **Baggy**: Hi.
11. (Pause for 1 second)
12. What is your name?
13. **Audience member**: Varadarajan
14. **Baggy**: Varadarajan
15. (Points hand at audience member)
16. he is standing up and telling this is not classroom ra I am not missu
17. (Pause for 3 seconds)
18. (Audience laughs)
19. **Baggy**: *Teacher*'s day was *yesterday*
20. (Pause for 1 second)
21. (Points arm back)
22. *Today* is stand-up comedy show. Varadarajan very slow.

Transcript 4 Excerpt B)

After calling upon an audience member to share his name, Baggy follows with a jibe which teases the attendee for standing up to answer. Baggy makes the comparison of the audience member acting as though he were in a classroom and the comedian was a teacher, which humorously disrupts the established norms or logical proceedings of a stand-up comedy show. This alleged misunderstanding goes on to affect the rest of Baggy's conversation with the audience; many of the comedian's consequent jokes revolve on the absurdity and ironic willingness of Varadarajan to support Baggy in his romantic pursuits. In essence, through clever

linguistic manipulation and subversion of social expectations, Baggy demonstrates the ability to communicate effectively with his audience. Baggy presents his identity as an affable, witty individual, who is largely concerned with gaining the affection and support of his peers. This image seems to work in his favor, since Baggy receives significantly positive audience interaction and response, frequent participation, and lots of laughter. Additionally, it is worth noting that Baggy may also be using his identity as an Indian comic to connect with his crowd, especially through the words "ra" and "missu." Further discussion of this topic will be provided in section 3.2.2 of this chapter.

Physical Presence and Body Language. Much of a comedian's impact on their audience comes from the way they use their appearance and body language on stage. Research suggests that "the use of gestures is recognised as an important resource for meaning-making" (Lim, 2019, p. 84). Similar to verbal communication, there is a great degree of variety to be found in the way that comics express themselves physically. Hand gestures and body movements are often incorporated for emphasis, to enhance comedic personas (some people are even recognized for their specific tics), and for comedic effect. Some comedians are fond of using props or slap-stick as part of their routines, but this practice is not common. Furthermore, facial expressions and posture can be seen as an indicator of confidence, or lack thereof. In my personal observations as a stand-up comic, more experienced comedians tend to exude greater confidence and comfort on stage, while those with less practice might struggle with presentation anxiety or nervousness. In addition, special attention must be given to the use of eye contact, which can strongly affect the degree of connection one makes with an audience. This technique ultimately also bears significant impact on the success of a comedic performance. My field notes demonstrate this phenomenon quite clearly; In both comedy events I attended, the comedians who elicited the

greatest audience responses were generally those who presented themselves as vividly as possible on stage. This process involved performing dynamic actions such as walking across the stage, looking directly at individuals or groups within the crowd, waving, smiling, laughing, or pointing out towards audience members. The comedians who appeared to be most adept at utilizing physical presence and body language were primarily the hosts, or MCs. These professionals were likely more familiar, or experienced, with the art of non-verbal communication. Alternatively, comedians who performed most poorly, or received less audience response, were typically those who neglected to maintain eye contact, use hand gestures, or move around on stage. For example, in Sample 2 of my field notes, I observed one particular comedian presenting himself with relatively little energy; the comic moved very infrequently, and stood close to the microphone, which is commonly perceived as a "rookie" mistake. Furthermore, when one of his jokes failed to land, the comedian responded by creating an awkward pause and looking down at the floor. This halt in communication and aversion of gaze may imply a loss, or lack, of confidence on the part of the comic.

In virtually all of the YouTube transcripts, we can observe comedians making use of body language, eye contact, and physical mannerisms to accomplish their goal of entertaining the audience. One notable instance, in Transcript 4, shows Baggy beginning his audience interaction by gazing at and waving explicitly towards a spectator sitting in the back of the room. Interestingly, Baggy also smiles while doing so, possibly indicating friendliness as well a as willingness to form connections with others. Baggy then moves beyond body language, and establishes a line of verbal communication with Varadarajan by saying "hi" (lines 7-10).

Another fascinating moment occurs in Transcript 5 when comedian Drew Lynch decides to directly call out and verbally reprimand an audience member for being on his phone throughout the show:

Example 3

1. (Comedian Drew Lynch looks at an audience member with concern on his face. Drew is holding a coffee cup with his left hand.)
2. **Drew:** (pointing at audience member) Sir, are you gonna be on your phone the
3. whole show?
4. (Drew pauses for 3 seconds while looking at audience member)
5. (Rest of audience "ooohs" and laughs in response)
6. **Drew**: It's been like I gave you like twenty minutes, to like check emails, text
7. your side chick get *off* your *shit*.
8. (Pauses for 2 seconds)
9. (Audience cheers)
10. **Drew**: It's *rude*. (Nods head) It's rude.
11. (Drew pauses for 7 seconds)
12. (Audience cheers)
13. (Looks down at shoes)
14. (Takes sip of tea)
15. (Returns to look at interrupting audience member)

Transcript 5 Excerpt A)

Before needing to say anything at all, Drew's facial expression already conveys feelings of concern and disappointment; analysis of the YouTube clip shows his brow to be furrowed, eyes narrowed, and mouth pulled down into a slight frown. Drew then goes a step further in his body language and makes these sentiments explicit when he points directly at the offending audience member before speaking. After asking the individual if he is "gonna be on [his] phone the whole show," Drew maintains his gaze towards the individual while the rest of the audience reacts in shock and laughter. These actions appear to demonstrate Drew's ability to express discontent and control disruptions, while simultaneously keeping his spectators entertained.

Practice Flexibility/Adaptability. Despite its inherently humorous nature, stand-up comedy can sometimes be a stressful profession. Comedy shows occur in a wide variety of forms and contexts, ranging from the casual nature of the late-night open mic at a bar, to the sophistication of a show in a concert hall during the Just For Laughs festival. Furthermore, comedians interact with a plethora of different types of people in their profession, some of which may eventually provide opportunities for future career advancement. The pressure to perform is also exacerbated by the fact that comics must simultaneously pay attention to their audiences, writing, delivery, and stage presence. To account for these challenges, comedians must demonstrate the ability to perform in both informal and formal environments. Furthermore, comics must develop the ability to adapt and respond to unexpected situations.

We can observe in several transcripts examples of comedians creating jokes based on their interactions or adapting pre-existing material to fit situational context. For instance, in Transcript 3, Adam responds to the discovery of an audience member being a bouncer:

Example 4

7. **Adam**: What's up dude?
8. (Individual's response is inaudible)
9. (Some audience laughter.)
10. **Adam**: Ha you fu – you are a *big* dude.
11. (Pauses to take a drink)
12. (Audience cheers)
13. (Quickly returns eye contact with individual)
14. **Adam**: You a bouncer out here?
15. **Bouncer**: I am.
16. **Adam**: You are?
17. (Pauses)
18. (Presses hand on forehead)
19. (Pushes hair up)
20. (Returns hand to waist level)
21. **Adam**: What came first, the fuckin'
22. (Gestures with open hand toward chest)

23. arms, the the necklace (raises hand) –
24. **Bouncer**: Chest.
25. (Audience laughter)
26. (Adam lowers hand)
27. (Exhales briefly)
28. (Turns to rest of audience)
29. (Shows facial expression of disappointment)
30. (Waves arm forward toward audience)
31. (Shakes head)
32. (Turns back to face the individual)
33. **Adam**: Spoken like a *true* bouncer.
34. (Pause for 2 seconds)
35. (Audience laughter.)

Transcript 3 Excerpt A)

When Adam asks the bouncer, "What came first?" the audience member immediately responds with the punchline "chest" and receives laughter from both the comedian and the rest of the audience. The humour of this response is likely based upon some stereotype regarding bouncers or similarly large men. After taking some time to pause and allow the audience an applause break, Adam confirms this by shaking his head and retorting with the quip "spoken like a *true* bouncer" (Transcript 3, line 33). In this occasion, Adam displays the ability to respond quickly and humorously to audience interaction. The comedian was likely not expecting to be placed in a situation where he would be challenged on the delivery of a joke, yet Adam managed to keep the flow of conversation funny and engaging by acknowledging the audience's contribution. Throughout his interactions with the bouncer, Adam regains control and attention on stage, yet continues to show keen interest in the audience member's lifestyle. This eventually leads the comedian into a making joke about how he would act as a firefighter:

Example 5

66. **Adam**: See that's why I could never do like a job like *that*
67. (Flicks index finger at bouncer)
68. or like be a firefighter, because I'd be too concerned with like saying something

69. cool (laughs, pause for 1 second while audience laughs), and hilarious like the
70. comic in me, you know like, if I was a firefighter, pulling to a house, hotter than
71. anticipated, you know, ha I'd be more concerned than saving lives with saying
72. something cool before I went in like in the movies, you know
73. (Adam faces audience)
74. (Impersonates fictional character.)
75. **Adam**: (impersonation) Adam *wait*, don't go in there!
76. (Turns back to face curtain)
77. (Turns and looks stoically at audience)
78. **Adam**: It's *ok.*
79. (2 second pause)
80. It – the- ho- I love how- I love the- I love how hot it – Fu-
81. (Shakes head)
82. (Throws up hands in disappointment)
83. (Turns to left audience)
84. You know, something cool, and fuckin'- yeah-
85. (Adam lowers his hand)
86. (Laughs)
87. (Audience erupts into laughter)
88. **Adam**: So (chuckles), heat's my middle *name* (chuckles).

Transcript 3 Excerpt B)

Firefighting is an entirely different profession from being a bouncer, which raises the possibility that Adam was modifying or adapting a previously used bit or joke he had about his lack of compatibility with certain jobs for this unanticipated occasion. It may also be the case that Adam attempted to incorporate some improvisation or ad-lib to his performance, since he faltered and stuttered in the delivery of his punchline in lines 75-88. This reasoning is further supported by his break in sentence structure and partial utterance of the expletive, "Fu." By subsequently shaking his head, throwing up his hands in disappointment, and turning away from a central position on stage, Adam gives the impression of giving up his attempt to derive a joke from his new fictional scenario. Fortunately, this alleged failure results in even more laughter from the audience.

Another similar example of a comedian creating or adapting material to suit a specific audience occurs in Transcript 2, when Moshe converses with several women sitting in the front row of the venue. While the *content* his jokes might be considered offensive or sexist in this case, what matters most for the sake of our analysis is the *structure* of Moshe's interactions:

Example 6

52. **Moshe**: What about you?
53. **Third woman**: (inaudible, shakes her head)
54. **Moshe**: You don't know?
55. **Third woman**: (shakes her head) No.
56. **Moshe**: *Yeah*, there you go.
57. (Pauses for 2 seconds)
58. (Audience laughs)
59. (Turns to look at rest of audience)
60. (Women in the front row laugh)
61. **Moshe**: Even at Christian college there's always *one*, right?
62. (Pauses)
63. **Moshe** (imitating typical "college girl") I don't fucking *care* (holds mouth open)
64. (Pauses for 2 seconds)
65. (Audience laughs)
66. **Moshe**: (imitating typical "college girl") I'm here to drink the sacrament wine
67. and pa(ha)rty.

Transcript 2 Excerpt A)

After questioning these women about where they attend school, Moshe discovers that the third woman does not know what profession she wishes to join once she completes her studies. This prompts Moshe to make a joke about how despite attending a "Christian college," the woman has no plans to take her education seriously. This quip seems to have emerged organically from the conversation; Moshe was unlikely to have known this piece of information about the audience member prior to his performance. However, the specificity of this material may have prompted Moshe's utilization of a stereotypical "college girl" accent, in order to attempt to increase his joke's accessibility to the overall audience. By introducing this

stereotypical inflection and gesticulation, Moshe taps into a more stereotyped understanding of college girls' behavior, and ultimately receives positive audience response.

3.2.2 Connect with Audiences: Crowd Work

It is also important to note that flexibility and adaptability are vital for connecting with audiences on a level beyond simply telling jokes. Performing comedy directly for an audience often involves comedians' use of dialogue, or conversation. This serves to produce an experience of live, authentic, and often unscripted human interaction. In such respect, stand-up comedy differs significantly from other performance arts, since the onus for successful performance falls on both its practitioners *and* its audiences. If a comedian tells jokes to an audience and receives no laughter, then they have essentially failed in their responsibility to entertain. Similarly, if a comedian attempts to converse with a crowd and obtains no feedback, then they have failed to connect. Therefore, comedians must develop their interpersonal skills in order to communicate more deeply and effectively with their audiences, and ultimately amuse them. Subsequently, audiences must be willing to place themselves within a mindset of receiving performance: by virtue of their attendance at shows, spectators make the conscious decision to be a part of the entertainment process.

While audience interaction may play a role in various forms of performance art, one of the key differences between stand-up comedy and other performance-based professions is the practice of crowd work. Crowd work distinguishes itself from standard joke-telling, or using pre-written, "canned" jokes in the way that expectations are established between performers and their audiences (Filani, 2015). In the most basic form of stand-up comedy, comedians "do the talking without expecting the audience to reciprocate the jokes or interrupt their monologues" (Filani, 2015, p. 78). In essence, this means comedians walking up on stage and telling jokes, without

relying on participation other than laughter from their audiences. However, crowd work requires a delicate and complex interplay of proximity and contact occurring between individual performers and their viewers. In sum, comedians who perform crowd work talk *with* their audiences rather than talking *to* them. These comedians also form what is termed as a "joking relationship" with their audiences in the course of crowd work, which can be described as "a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in in turn is required to take no offence" (Filani, 2017, p. 443).

Analysis of the five transcripts and field notes supports this notion, showing that crowd work appears to involve comedians' extensive use of conversational humour. In what Filani (2015) terms as "conversational jokes" audiences generally show engagement either by waiting for a turn to reciprocate the speaker's joke or by giving feedback in form of their responses (p. 78). Conversational jokes are described as "instances of spontaneous interactional humour [including] any form of language constructions, words, phrases, sentences and multi-turn exchanges, which are aimed at deriving humorous response from the recipients" (Filani, 2015, p. 76). All five of the YouTube clips were selected largely on the basis that they demonstrate frequent back-and-forth dialogue occurring between comedians and their audiences. Furthermore, the transcripts show numerous instances of comedians directly calling upon or inviting interaction from individuals present. For example, in Transcript 4, Baggy chose to carry out a discussion with his audience rather than simply moving on and sticking to a script. Baggy's introduction through the song, "*Sexy and I Know It*," was likely selected as an ironic way to establish the tone and style of his performance. However, this very first joke, which invoked playful judgement about his overconfidence or lack of sexiness, quickly resulted in a series of extended humorous exchanges

with crowd members asserting otherwise. This scenario therefore demonstrates that audience interaction and feedback can be an integral aspect of the overall success of a comedic performance. Consequently, we must also draw attention to the role of audience context in comedians' ability to adapt and react to feedback. If a comedian wishes to connect with a crowd, then they must at least attempt to be aware of *who* they are trying to bond with.

Awareness of audience. In an ever-evolving social and political world, comedians are required to pay close attention to the types of crowds they perform for. In the broadest sense, connecting with audiences and engaging in crowd work involves being aware of current trends and events, and trying to remain relevant or topical. One author suggests that a useful "method for establishing rapport with an audience early in a routine is the comedian's facility for assessing the energy and social perspectives of the audience to determine what parts of their routine should be kept or omitted" (DeCamp, 2015, p. 455). As such, comics might try to reach specific types of audiences by tailoring material to suit their particular needs. For example, the "political" comic, or one who focuses primarily on making political arguments, may wish to direct his attention toward themes of a political nature.

However, at the more immediate level, comedians must also be cognizant of the people directly present in the rooms where they are performing. Colloquially, this can be referred to the act of "reading the room." This process includes consideration of the audience's age, sex, gender, social, ethnic or racial background. Furthermore, certain comedy events require focus on a specific theme, or place explicit limitations on what can, or cannot, be talked about. In severe cases, breaking these rules or set of established guidelines may result in strict consequences such as unemployment, loss of reputation, or banishment from some locations. Thus, comedians must exhibit a close consideration of context if they desire to be successful. We can see clear evidence

of this phenomenon occurring in my field note samples: during both comedy events, the MCs, or hosts, appeared especially invested in gauging the audience's overall composition and mood. In order to ascertain relevant information from their crowds, hosts inquired about topics such as people's professions, places of origin, relationship statuses, and so on. In addition, MCs would ensure that audience members received positive affirmation for providing these personal details, or for answering conversational questions. Acknowledgement is widely recognized as "a powerful tool in winning the favor of an audience" (DeCamp, 2015, p. 460). As such, this goal was usually accomplished primarily through comedians laughing, smiling, demanding applause breaks for individuals, or giving direct compliments. On one occasion, the host made frequent requests for confirmation from the rest of their spectators, asking questions such as, "does that sound good?" (Sample 1). All of these actions can be argued as facilitating comedians' task of connecting more intimately with their public.

Create community. According to British comedian and writer Oliver Double, a significant, "portion of a stand-up comic's success depends on building a rapport or 'sense of community' with an audience" (As quoted in DeCamp, 2015, p. 450). More specifically, comedians often develop rapport by establishing some common referential point of interest at the opening of their performances (DeCamp, 2015). This includes a wide range of potential categorizations such as nationality, gender, race and place of origin, but can also apply to cultural affiliations or preferences. Additionally, some comedians might utilize their *own* membership within a particular type of community in order to gain favor from audience members sharing such identities. Analysis of my field notes and YouTube transcripts supports this notion. For example, during the second show I attended, the host took a moment to ask the crowd if there were any immigrants present at the function. Upon receiving some confirmation in this regard, the

comedian proceeded to comment casually about the neighborhood surrounding the venue (Sample 2). This commentary created a sense of unity through having a local, shared experience with the crowd; audience members subsequently displayed openness towards sharing information about themselves, as well as an overall willingness to interact with other comedians. However, it is important to note that this strategy requires skill, and does not always work out in a comedian's favor. During the first event I attended, I witnessed one comic attempting, unsuccessfully, to connect with hockey fans in the crowd. For the majority of his set, the comedian tried sharing his opinions about the management of hockey teams, and made several obscure references to events or people within the sport. Unfortunately, these "jokes" received rather poor feedback from the audience, who appeared visibly bored and provided limited laughter (Sample 1). In my analysis, I believe that this failure to establish rapport was likely due either to the individual stand-up's lack of relatability, or inability to "read the room" and perceive the absence of hockey community members present at the event.

Another moment worth investigating occurred in Transcript 4 (already mentioned above), when Baggy responded to an audience member sharing his name. Upon witnessing the man standing up, Baggy retorted with the statement, "he is standing up and telling this is not classroom *ra* I am not *missu*" (Transcript 4, line 16, italics added). Although his performance was given in the English language, Baggy's use of the words "ra" and "missu" are not part of a typical western English lexicon. Baggy's speech is also notably interspersed with several repetitions of "ra" as well as other similar utterances such as "da" and "ah" throughout his set. While these word choices may have been unconscious or unintentional, it is important to note that a person's fluent use of slang terms may serve as a means for demonstrating one's belonging to a cultural community. It is therefore possible that Baggy was incorporating such language to

project his identity as an Indian comedian, and using this create a stronger bond or rapport with his audience.

Comedians can also be seen using crowd work to produce "inside" jokes, or jokes that can only be fully understood or appreciated within the community or context formed by a particular performance. For example, in Transcript 5, comedian Drew attempted to address several disorderly audience behaviors throughout his show, which ultimately culminated in a humorous impersonation of the evolution of these disruptive events. Similarly, in Transcript 3, Adam used the presence of a bouncer sitting in the front row to produce jokes about their individual appearance and mannerisms. Such jokes could not have emerged within any other environment, and were the direct product of their immediate, specific surroundings.

Self-deprecate. Another common way for comedians to connect with their audiences is through the use of self-deprecating humour. Audiences generally seek out and pay for attendance at stand-up shows, which carries the implication of a certain set of expectations: Audiences wish to be entertained. While it can be argued that audiences play a significant role in the existence of comedic events (shows would not occur if people did not show willingness to attend), comedians are those who are best equipped, and ultimately responsible, for the delivery of entertainment. By standing on stage, often literally above their crowds, comedians essentially occupy both a figurative and physically elevated status throughout their performances. Self-deprecation is frequently used to relieve this tension in the performer-audience power dynamic. Comedians can be seen as employing self-denigrating motifs in their sets in order to "play down their institutional authority and reduce the interactional distance between themselves and their audiences" (Filani, 2015, p. 93). Self-deprecative material also functions as a means for bridging the gap between performer and attendee, creating a conversational dynamic which places both

parties on equal footing. In order to accomplish the challenge of gaining the audience's attention and acceptance, some researchers believe that "the self that the comedian presents must come across as honest and real, even if it involves some expected level of exaggeration" (DeCamp, 2015, p. 456).

Therefore, through acknowledging their flaws and quirks in humorous ways, comedians can make themselves appear more vulnerable and human. Ultimately, this enables audiences to see comics beyond simply as a means of entertainment and encourages interaction. For example, in Transcript 3, as discussed above, Adam talks about how he personally can never be a bouncer or a firefighter due to the fact that he would be too concerned with outward appearances, or the pressure to say something "cool." The comic tries to devise a clever punchline on the spot, but fails to do so. Adam acknowledges this failure, and draws upon this irony in order to receive more laughter from the audience. By choosing to act in such a way, Adam displays the appearance of accessibility and vulnerability – he presents himself as someone who is flawed, yet willing to disclose this at his own expense.

Another example of comedian self-deprecation worth examining occurs in Transcript 5:

Example 7

24. **Drew**: Ok I just I didn't want to call you out but I was like I was waiting and I
25. was like *bro*, I'm like I'm like super *funny*, so I didn't know.
26. (Pause for 3 seconds)
27. (Audience laughs)
28. (Drew continues to look at the interrupting audience member)
29. (Quickly turns his head away)
30. (Looks down at the floor)
31. **Drew**: It's tough. It's a tough call,
32. (Laughs while facing the wall)
33. you know.
34. (As Drew is walking towards the stool on stage, an audience member yells inaudibly at him)
35. (Drew quickly turns to face the audience)

36. (Walks forward)
37. **Drew**: You what?
38. (Unintelligible yelling)
39. **Drew**: Maybe – Ok, you need to speak, English.
40. (Pause for 1 second)
41. (Audience laughs)
42. **Drew**: *How* am I the more articulate *one* than the two of us?
43. (Drew pauses for 3 seconds)
44. (Audience laughs)

Transcript 5 Excerpt B)

In this instance, Drew tries to regain a distracted audience member's attention by ironically calling himself "super funny" (line 25). At a later point in his set, Drew, who has a stutter which he often refers to in his act, hears another audience member yelling inaudibly at him and pauses to ask, "how am I the more articulate one of the two of us?" (Transcript 5, line 42). On this occasion, Drew draws upon his speech impediment and uses this to place himself on an arguably similar conversational footing to the attendee. While the comedian's joke pokes fun at the audience member, this ultimately happens at Drew's expense.

3.2.3 Create Moments of Articulation or Expression: Give Audience a Voice

Comedians who decide to utilize the practice of crowd work provide their audiences with content which delves far beyond simply telling jokes. Instead, these stand-ups can be viewed as attempting to bridge the gap between performance and spectatorship: by allowing audiences the opportunity to share their immediate thoughts and opinions, this affords them a certain degree of agency, or voice, in determining the overall outcome of an event. *In-situ* verbal feedback, coupled with the expression of laughter, can often serve as a driving force behind the direction and success of a comedian's routine. In turn, audiences may also receive a more authentic, wholesome experience. However, this does not mean that audiences get to speak whenever they so desire. In actuality, comedians can be seen as engaging in a delicate balance of authority and

performance, especially through the use of what Filani (2015) terms “allowable contributions.” In sum, whenever they relinquish the floor to their crowds, comedians “strategically deemphasize their institutional conversational superiority so as to achieve interactional intimacy with the audience” (Filani, 2015, p. 91). On one hand, audiences are permitted to provide feedback and relay their feelings directly towards performers. On the other hand, comedians control the overall flow of conversation, as well as the types of topics discussed. We can thus perceive the role of comedian as being in a position of authority, but only insofar as permitted by their spectators.

Successful articulation, or personal expression, goes beyond social context in these situations. It depends largely on the comedians’ individual abilities to navigate social interactions and create their own opportunities for humour. Furthermore, in these cases, what matters most to their success is, once again, not necessarily the *content* that comedians deliver (i.e., jokes), but the act of delivery in-and-of-itself, which effectively interacts with, and elicits positive response from, the audience. In several instances within my transcripts, comedians appear to give their audiences a voice, or ability to express themselves, through three primary methods: being relatable, personal commentary, and speaking “one-to-many.”

Comedian Relatability. Being relatable entails making a personal connection between the comedian and the audience. In order to attain this goal, comedians typically ask the audience questions about profession, school, relationships, age, background, etc., and use these details to authenticate or reassure their relationship with the people they choose to interact with. For example, in Transcript 1, Adam relies heavily on his relatable personality to forge a bond with the audience, especially through his interactions with a man sitting close by:

Example 8

15. **Adam**: I like your style dude.
16. You look sharp.
17. You're like dude, I didn't know what I have to offer.
18. (Pauses for 2 seconds)
19. (Audience laughter)
20. So I'm gonna go out and fuckin' find friends on a Friday night.
21. (While turning to audience) It's find. friend. Friday if you fuckin'
22. follow you (turns to audience member 1) on *Twitter*
23. Which I *don't*, but I will tonight.
24. (Pause for 2 seconds)
25. (Audience laughter.)
26. **Adam**: (looking at audience member 1) What do you do?
27. **Audience member 1**: I'm an actor
28. **Adam**: You're an actor? *Hell* yeah
29. ah -wa- uh- mayb- Have we seen you in anything?

Transcript 1 Excerpt A)

After Adam comments on the man's appearance, he asks the individual audience member, "What do you do?" (Transcript 1, line 26). Upon being informed that audience member 1 is an actor, Adam immediately affirms him with the statement, "You're an actor? *Hell* yeah" (Transcript 1, line 28). This emphasis and enthusiasm likely serve to create a dynamic of trust between the comedian and the audience member; Adam exploits this connection repeatedly throughout their exchange in order to achieve articulation and elicit laughter from both the individual and the audience at large. By repeating that audience member 1 is an actor, Adam also provides this individual with some positive attention and recognition from the rest of the audience. The actor is, in a sense, simultaneously permitted to voice his identity with Adam and everyone else.

In a similar fashion, in Transcript 2, Moshe asks the women questions about their age, which school they go to, and which majors they have chosen. Moshe asks them these questions as a group, but also makes sure to address each member individually. Being encouraged to share

such information establishes a sense of acknowledgement and trust from the audience, which also provides them with some agency over Moshe's comedic timing and flow; the answers that they give inform the rest of Moshe's performance.

Personal Commentary. Alternatively, some comedians decide to utilize personal commentary as a way to enable themselves or their audiences to achieve moments of articulation. Personal commentary involves comedians making personalized or individualized comments on the audience's appearance, apparent personality, character, or in response to answers to previous questions. This strategy is often accomplished through the use of compliments or insults. For instance, in Transcript 1, Adam begins his crowd work by addressing an individual audience member and asking, "What's up, man?" (Transcript 1, line 2). In acknowledging the man's presence, the comedian quickly breaks down the boundary between performance and observation, and sets the stage for further personal interaction. Such reasoning is supported by the fact that Adam then begins to poke fun about the audience member's decision to come to the show by himself, but quickly moves on to compliment the individual by saying, "I like your style dude. You look sharp" (Transcript 1, lines 15-16). This statement serves to prop up the individual's status, and is likely an attempt to negate any previous feelings of insult or offense. Adam then essentially turns the audience member's isolation into an absurd, humorous and positive scenario where he regularly attempts to find friends on Fridays, and posts about his adventures on Twitter (Transcript 1, lines 17-23). In this instance, Adam displays the ability to successfully navigate social circumstances in order to achieve a personal moment of self-expression: a joke that receives the positive feedback of laughter. In addition, the audience member was also given the chance to receive some attention and express himself in a humorous way. Similarly, in Transcript 3, Adam makes the statement, "you are a *big* dude" towards the

bouncer sitting in front of him (Transcript 3, line 10). This positive observation results in a moment of audience cheering and enables Adam to continue probing the bouncer for more relevant, entertaining information. This also rewarded the bouncer with the opportunity to engage in witty repartee towards Adam.

In contrast, Transcript 2 shows Moshe establishing a connection with his audience primarily through playful insults (note, the following transcript contains offensive language):

Example 9

2. **Moshe**: How old are you guys?
3. (Pause for 2 seconds)
4. (Audience laughs.)
5. **One of the women**: Twenty
6. **Moshe**: You guys are *twenty*?
7. (Leans head forward)
8. Oh,
9. (Pulls head back)
10. you haven't *done* anything.
11. Or experienced life in any *way* that's crazy.
12. (Audience applauds)
13. (Girls in front row laugh)
14. **Moshe**: Are you guys in high school?-
15. No, you're twenty. That'd be-
16. "Are you retarded?
17. Are you all retarded people?"
18. (Audience applauds)
19. (4 women sitting in front row laugh.)
20. **Moshe**: Have you not been able to get (breathes) out of high school?
21. Are you stupid? Ok, great.
22. (Pauses for 1 second)
23. (Audience laughs)
24. **Moshe**: I'm kidding
25. wha- haha -wha- no- but what mall do you guys work at?
26. (Pause for 2 seconds)
27. (Audience laughs)
28. (Girls in front laugh along)
29. (Moshe shakes his head)
30. (Smiles at the girls)

31. **Moshe**: That's so mean. Also, a bit rude.
Transcript 2 Excerpt B)

There is an obvious risk involved with this procedure: using insults and offensive language may result in the audience's personal offense, distrust of the professional comedian, or loss of interest in the material in general. An insulted person can often lose their voice, or refrain from participating altogether. However, teasing can also be a way to break personal boundaries and forge connections between people, and is often a sign of deeper trust in a relationship. For example, upon hearing that the four women sitting in the front are all twenty years old, Moshe responds with a commentary on how they "haven't *done* anything" or "experienced life in any *way*" (Transcript 2, line 10-11). While this line of responses appears shocking at first, it quickly elicits laughter from the four women as well as the audience at large. It is quite likely that Moshe's stresses on the words "done" and "way" were done sarcastically, thus sending the message to his audience that he was merely joking. Once they understood his tone to be humorous, the audience may have felt safe enough to laugh at their flaws in a non-threatening manner. Moshe then proceeds to push the joke further by asking the question, "what mall do you guys work at?" which immediately receives more laughter (Transcript 2, line 25). However, Moshe shows awareness that this joke may have crossed a personal line, and expresses feelings of regret by saying, "That's so mean. Also, a bit rude" (Transcript 2, line 31). Such phrasing seems to demonstrate Moshe's understanding that while he must be socially successful and receive laughter, this should not necessarily come at the expense of others' emotional wellbeing. The audience's continued willingness to engage with him afterwards further demonstrates the success of his tactic.

"One-to-many" Interactions. It is important to note that while the comedians observed in the transcripts often interact with their audience at an individual level, they also attempt to make

these individual interactions accessible to the rest of the audience. This gives agency for articulation to both the comedians *and* the audience. All of these interactions are facilitated by comedians' use of gestures, gazes and deliberate pauses. In Transcript 1, Adam repeatedly illustrates an awareness of his greater audience:

Example 10

1. (Adam looks at audience member 1 in the left corner of the front row.)
2. **Adam**: What's up, man?
3. (Adam nods and turns to face the audience)
4. (Audience begins to laugh)
5. (Adam pauses for 2 seconds)
6. (Audience laughter)
7. (Turns back to audience member 1)
8. **Adam**: (To audience member 1) Did – uh- Did you come with somebody and
9. they bailed out?

Transcript 1 Excerpt B)

Adam's opening line is preceded by a glance at audience member 1, immediately followed by a glance at the audience, a two second pause for laughter, then a turn back to the individual audience member. At a later point in his set, upon learning that the audience member is an actor, Adam asks him, "Have we seen you in anything?" (Transcript 1, line 29). Adam's use of the inclusive "we" in this moment is significant because his interaction takes place in the context and presence of other people. This phrasing serves the double purpose of placing Adam in charge, while also giving the audience member some agency over the direction of their conversation. In another instance, before Adam inquires about the audience member's first impression of their place of residence, he turns and waves at the rest of the audience:

Example 11

32. **Audience member 1**: I just moved here six weeks ago.
33. **Adam**: Oh shit! Dude.

34. **Audience member 1**: Yeah really
35. (Adam waves hand at audience.)
36. **Adam**: First impressions?
37. **Audience member 1**: It's hard, love it, but it's hard as shit
38. (Audience laughter)
39. **Adam**: Yeah.
40. Yeah you're moving back home for sure.
41. (Pauses for 3 seconds)
42. (Audience laughter)
43. (During pause, Adam turns to the audience)
44. (Smiles, chuckles briefly)
45. **Adam** (to audience): I mean *six* (turns to face audience member 1) *weeks*?!

Transcript 1 Excerpt C)

By performing such an action, this reminds the room that Adam is still aware of them despite the conversation, while also building anticipation for a punch-line. Upon delivering the quip that audience member 1 is "moving back home for sure" Adam turns to the rest of the audience, emphasizes and repeats the number of weeks the actor has lived in the neighborhood, and turns back to face the actor. Adam thus cleverly demonstrates his ability to engage in conversational humor with both an individual and a crowd.

Similarly, in Transcript 2, Moshe asks the third woman in the group what she wants to do with her degree after leaving "Christian school" to which she replies that she does not know (Transcript 2, line 52-55). Moshe takes this opportunity to set up a joke at her expense. He replies with, "*Yeah*, there you go," then pauses for 2 seconds while the audience laughs (Transcript 2, line 56-58). Moshe expertly establishes a connection with the rest of the audience by turning to look them while the women in the front row laugh.

In Transcript 4, Baggy also uses this "one-to-many" strategy rather effectively. The comedian deftly weaves through a series of interactions with an audience member named Varadarajan, and uses these exchanges to connect with the crowd. For instance, upon

Varadarajan sharing his name, Baggy retorts with the line, "*he* is standing up and telling, this is not classroom ra, I am not missu" (Transcript 4, line 16). By using the word "he," we can assume that Baggy is addressing the crowd at large. However, in the act of identifying the individual's behaviours, Baggy also places the spotlight on Varadarajan, allowing his particular voice to be heard. Incidentally, Baggy is also seen explicitly using the *crowd* to talk to Varadarajan on a number of occasions. For example, Baggy makes the statement, "ladies and gentlemen, Varadarajan wants to talk to me, very badly," and follows the general audience's laughter with the line, "if you guys don't mind let me take two minutes of his time tell ra" (Transcript 4, line 28-31). In this case, the comedian humorously assumes that the audience member had something worth expressing, which ultimately opens Baggy up to further opportunities for interaction and input from the crowd.

Concluding Remarks

In sum, a discourse analysis/conversational analysis approach to several field samples and YouTube clips of stand-up comedy revealed that comedians make use of a wide variety of strategies for effective performance. While telling jokes is generally considered one of the primary goals of stand-up, comedians were revealed to achieve this through preparation and practice of their material, mastering comedic voice and effective communication, physical presence and body language, and maintaining flexibility and adaptability throughout different contexts. The second main objective of comedians was found to be connecting to audiences. This was shown to be accomplished through crowd work, awareness of audience, creating community, and the use of self-deprecative actions or material. A third significant goal for effective performance was found to be allowing audiences to self-express. Comedians were observed succeeding in this task by being relatable, engaging in personal commentary, and

engaging in one-to-many interactions with their crowds. In my next chapter, I will be discussing whether, or how, these tools and strategies bear any similarities to classroom management techniques. Hopefully, this will bear significant implications for pedagogical improvement.

CHAPTER 4 - DISCUSSION

Classroom Management and Stand-Up Comedy: How Might Teachers Benefit from Comedy Techniques?

In my literature review chapter, I explored the existent research on humour's influence on classroom management, then raised the question of whether the practices of a humour-based profession, like stand-up comedy, might hold some value for the challenge of classroom management. As such, in my subsequent chapter, I worked to establish a basic, yet fundamental understanding of what stand-up comedians do, particularly in the ways they engage their audience. This goal was accomplished by attending and transcribing the occurrences of several live comedy events, selecting and transcribing five YouTube clips involving comedians performing "crowd work," unscripted interaction with the audience, as well as drawing from my own personal experience as a stand-up comic. By examining this information through a discourse analytic lens, I explored a wide array of professional strategies that comedians utilize in order to enhance the probability of producing successful performative outcomes. These techniques included, but were not limited to: effective verbal and non-verbal communication, positive language, personal commentary, complimenting audiences, presenting a likable image, crowd work, communicating one-to-many, audience awareness, flexibility/adaptability, being relatable, and self-deprecation.

Now that we have covered such a breadth of information regarding the teaching and stand-up comedy professions, our main query remains: How does it all connect? In this chapter, I will be discussing what I consider to be the focal point of my research – the possibility of a theoretical link between stand-up comedy and teaching practices. My thesis questions are

therefore as follows: Do any of the techniques used by comedians have the potential to be incorporated within the context of teaching and classroom management? If so, which aspects of teaching or classroom management might stand to benefit the most? My research and analysis give good indication that several stand-up comedy techniques *do* in fact have some potential for pedagogical application. Moreover, my interpretation of the data suggests that the central advantage such techniques may provide is that they could be used by teachers to create or improve conditions for student engagement and involvement.

4.1. *A Theory of "Effective" Classroom Management*

Before we begin our discussion, we must first re-establish what it means to manage a classroom. This is due largely to the fact that our assessment of the value of stand-up comedy techniques is contingent upon our conception of a productive teaching methodology and learning environment. Without a clear understanding of some of the core tenets of classroom management, it would be impossible to determine whether stand-up comedy practices could have any bearing at all within an educational context. We must therefore pose a question that was previously explored in chapter 2: What makes for effective classroom management? Unfortunately, research suggests that there is no definitive or universal answer to this inquiry; the term "effective" is largely subjective and as such is open to interpretation. For example, definitions of best teaching practices often vary according to culture, context, and audience (Liew, 2013). It is therefore quite possible that the same pedagogical approach may receive entirely different outcomes within alternate settings (Liew, 2013). Despite such nuances in understanding ideal classroom management practices, I have found that one fundamental principle stands most relevantly for the purpose of my thesis question: the importance of student engagement and involvement. More specifically, this refers to the process by which teachers

create and sustain a learning environment that encourages student involvement and engagement. Although there is considerable merit to be found in teachers' capacity for maintaining order and control in their classrooms – students generally need discipline and structure in their lives, and tend to function more efficiently when tasks and procedures are made clear - learning requires considerably more than students' following of instructions and obedience towards rules and conventions. Instead, students should be sufficiently determined to take an active part in their own education. Ideally, this also implies that pupils are predominantly motivated by the intrinsic value of learning itself, rather than the traditionally extrinsic rewards of scholarly achievement such as praise from peers, opportunities for future success, improved reputation, or career advancement. By being in an environment which pushes students to intellectually engage with academic material and build upon their understanding of the world, students can ultimately gain agency over their personal growth. In essence, students should enjoy and pursue learning for learning's sake, and teachers should do their best to facilitate this attitude through their classroom management practices. More precisely, my synthesis of existing research into classroom management literature suggests that teachers should strive to: 1) create a positive learning environment, 2) attract and maintain student attention, and 3) form authentic connections with their students, in order to have the best chance at producing a rich, learner-centered classroom management style. Further elaboration upon these points will be made in subsequent sections of this chapter. While a number of advancements have been made with regards to ameliorating classroom management practices in general, unfortunately, there is still a dearth in the literature when it comes to examining the results of the direct application of tools from performance-based professions – especially from stand-up comedy – as well as the fine-grained interactional practices that centre on learner engagement. To fill this gap, I propose that

some of the stand-up comedy techniques I observed in my field research may potentially be used to improve all three aforementioned integral aspects of classroom management. As a result, this would also serve to enhance student involvement and engagement.

4.2 Stand-Up Comedy, Positive Learning Environments, and Positive Audience Expectations

Much like what makes for "effective" teaching, the notion of what is considered a "positive" environment is subject to interpretation. However, a general understanding of the existing literature on classroom management suggests that a positive label can apply to settings which promote student learning and growth on a holistic, interpersonal level. In practice, this involves teachers incorporating strategies which take individual students' learning needs into account, while also providing reassurance, affirmation, and supportive feedback. Essentially, the central argument here is that students need to be valued, dignified and respected; surroundings and teaching methodologies through which instructors aspire towards such values can prime students towards having positive expectations of learning, promote engagement and involvement, and ultimately obtain greater academic results (see Roth, 2014, Ch. 1).

This is where I believe the first conceptual link can be argued to exist between classroom management and stand-up comedy practices. One of the primary objectives of a comedian, by definition, is to entertain and elicit laughter through the production of comedic material. It therefore follows that audiences are likely to arrive at comedy venues with preconceived expectations of laughter; audience members typically seek out shows to attend, pay for admission, and often by virtue of their presence within the venues themselves, are psychologically primed to anticipate entertainment. As an aside, while not all venues are necessarily explicitly designed with laughter in mind, it would be difficult to imagine anything

other than comedy occurring at an establishment called the "Comedy Nest." Such a frame of mind immediately invokes a greater possibility of audience members holding positive feelings and attitudes towards the proceedings of comedic events. The potential benefit, and link to classroom management here, rests in the fact that teachers have already been shown to use strategies such as incorporating humour to "[contribute] to the creation of an atmosphere in which learning is more likely to occur" (Powell & Andresen, 1985, p. 80). In sum, learning environments which tolerate and encourage humour, are argued to "[give] students the freedom to cultivate personal exploration, discovery, play, and risk-taking" which ultimately helps create a support system that allows for human error (Korobkin, 1988, p. 156). By extension, we can surmise that if teachers prepare their classroom environments or act in ways which condition students towards having positive expectations of learning, then this might benefit overall classroom management effectiveness. More specifically, these types of surroundings would encourage students to actively participate in classroom functions, as well as intellectually engage with learning materials. In their research, Powell & Andresen (1985) support this idea, suggesting that, "if students adopt a positive attitude towards a learning task and to their teacher then they are more likely to approach the task with enthusiasm and perhaps wish to come to share the interests, attitudes and knowledge of the teacher" (p. 80).

4.2.1 Compliments and Personal Commentary

When it comes to both stand-up comedy and classroom management, it is important to note that positive audience expectations are not always enough to guarantee a successful performance. One of the ways in which I observed comedians directly contributing to a positive environment for their spectators was through the use of **compliments** or praise. These were often combined with **personal commentary** – highly personalized remarks or statements tailored

towards specific individuals - with the underlying intent of generating amusement for all members present. A conversational analysis approach suggests that these types of interactions seemed to work well for generating positive audience response. This reasoning is supported by the fact that in both my transcription of live comedy events and YouTube clips, comedians' compliments or commentaries were frequently followed by dialogue occurring in which members of the crowd laughed, shared personal opinions, or exchanged information about themselves. Importantly, these results also point towards the possibility of compliments increasing the audience's willingness to engage and interact with comedians. In contrast, comedians who did not engage in complimentary behaviours generally appeared to receive less frequent, as well as less positive audience feedback overall.

Applied in a classroom context, educational research demonstrates that teachers' use of genuine compliments are also potentially beneficial for student engagement and feelings of wellbeing. Children crave attention and personal validation, and giving students praise is considered to be an effective method for addressing this need (Roth, 2014). In his work on effective classroom management strategies, Roth (2014) takes this point further, suggesting that, "one of the best ways to help a child develop healthy self-esteem is to find and emphasize his or her strengths" (p. 37). In principle, compliments are integral for maintaining a positive environment because students who feel genuinely valued and confident in their abilities are more likely to contribute in the classroom, engage in discussion, and form healthy connections with their teachers (See Roth, 2014, Ch. 1). As an added benefit, some literature on environment and education suggests that a positive communicative climate can strongly influence student learning outcomes. For instance, in their seminal study on the effects of teacher humour on student perceptions of classroom communicative climate, Darling & Civikly (1987) argue that, "students

in classes with supportive climates retain significantly more information than those in classes with defensive climates" (p. 25). Compliments therefore share a common utility among teachers and comedians for improving the likelihood of a successful performance of their duties: a positively supported audience implies greater overall engagement.

Alternatively, many comedians choose to tease, or poke fun at their audiences, in order to create environments that are conducive to laughter. While this does not necessarily equate with a "positive" surrounding *per se*, teasing-based humour can certainly work in a comedian's favour when it comes to generating audience response and feedback. Having noted this strategy being used quite frequently in my field observations, I can also personally attest to its effectiveness at producing humorous dialogue with a crowd. Studies suggest that teasing might be useful for improving classroom morale and a variety of prosocial outcomes in certain circumstances (Banas et al., 2011). However, teasing has also been shown to risk becoming a proverbial "double-edged sword"; excessive or inappropriate remarks may result in harming students' self-esteem, as well as feelings of resentment towards their instructors (Banas et al., 2011).

One of the key differences between a comedy context and a classroom is that individuals typically enter comedy settings with the expectation that what a comedian says or does is defined by the purpose of entertainment. This mindset affords comedians greater liberty to take risks in their performances, such as drawing humorous material at the expense of their spectators. In comedy clubs, teasing can serve to fuel discussion and feedback, and can even promote rapport between comedians and audience members. One notable example of this phenomenon occurred in Transcript 4, when comedian Baggy poked fun at a man named Varadarajan early on in his set, then used this humorous initial exchange to work the rest of the crowd for the remainder of his performance. However, teasing is not a performative strategy that students would typically

expect from their teachers, unless conditioned otherwise. Essentially, teasing would best achieve its intended results in an environment where students feel safe enough to know that it occurs without ill will. Therefore, students must be made aware of the fact that teachers poke fun not just to garner attention or exercise authority, but with the purpose of enriching their pupils' overall educational experience.

It is also worth acknowledging that despite its counterintuitive conceptual nature, some researchers argue for the notion that environments in which students feel emotionally challenged, rather than safe, can also encourage engagement. For instance, Bergin (1999) claims that, "emotions toward content do not have to be positive to foster interest in learning" (p. 90). McCarron & Savin-Baden (2008) take this notion further, confronting the basic assumption that students must be comfortable and that engagement always has to be enjoyable, in order for effective learning to occur. By drawing from the profession of stand-up comedy, where comedians' relationships and interactions with their crowds can be impersonal, and sometimes even hostile, the authors propose that university teachers should instead create an environment which challenges students to think critically and to move beyond their comfort zones (McCarron & Savin-Baden, 2008).

4.2.2. Effective Communication: Creating a Positive Environment through Verbal and Body Language

> "Like the theater actor, the teacher-as-performer assumes a stage persona, asserts stage presence, and communicates through verbal and nonverbal actions to engage—even educate—the hearts and minds of student-audiences," (Liew, 2013, p. 262).

Like many other performance-based professions, teaching relies heavily on the need to express information towards audiences in a clear and compelling way. As such, one of the most

crucial tools in a teacher's arsenal is the ability to communicate effectively. More specifically to a classroom management context, evidence suggests that a capacity for *positive* verbal language and body language forms an integral part of an effective communication skillset. The central argument here is that if teachers present themselves and interact positively with their students, then this likely to facilitate overall student engagement. In their research, Darling & Civikly (1987) support this notion, claiming that, "when teachers use supportive communicative behaviors, their students also tend to be supportive" (p. 25). In essence, the implication is that through frequent exposure and encouragement, students become increasingly likely to reciprocate their teachers' positive attitudes and behaviours. My field research within the profession of stand-up comedy also corroborates this idea. In my YouTube transcriptions and field notes, I observed numerous instances of comedians positively affecting their surroundings by utilizing positive language. This phenomenon typically occurred through affirmative speech patterns towards audience members, and was often intermingled with compliments. For example, during one live performance I attended, the host regularly referred to the audience by the terms, "awesome" or "fantastic" (see Field Notes, Sample 1). Another explicit instance of such verbal affirmation occurred in Transcript 1, where upon learning about a spectator's profession, comedian Adam responded with an emphatic, "hell yeah" (line 26-28). Conversational analysis demonstrates that these utterances served towards more than simply enhancing audience enjoyment. Instead, stand-up comics appeared to use affirmative language primarily to invite attention from, or towards, audience members, as well as contribute to the overall flow of their performances. For instance, during the live events that I attended, many comedians were observed laughing with and requesting applause breaks for those who chose to interact and/or share information with the room (see Field Notes Sample 1, 2). This can be argued as lending to

an environment which positively encourages involvement and engagement, while also having the benefit of being conducive to the audience's enjoyment of the show. As such, teachers might benefit from incorporating the use of affirmative language within their classroom management strategies.

In my field research, I also observed comedians positively affecting their environments through **body language**. This strategy includes the employment of smiles, nodding, laughter, waves, gestures, and perhaps most significantly, eye contact. Fortunately, by virtue of participating in professional development, most teachers already have extensive training in this regard. For example, hand movements, facial expression and large body action are all recognized as important aspects of effective communication, and are also seen as indicators of teacher enthusiasm (Cummings, 2000). Additionally, in his work on classroom management techniques, Roth (2014) argues that, "a teacher's smile and the way he or she greets students entering the classroom can guide students toward the academic means desired" (p. 39). When applied specifically to humour, teachers have also been recorded as making themselves funny by using their bodies "in the production of particular kinds of humorous bodily habitus" (Tait et al., 2015, p. 10).

4.3 Stand-Up Comedy and Attracting and Maintaining Student Attention

The second generally accepted requirement for creating a rich, learner-centered classroom management style is the task of attracting and maintaining student attention. The primary reason for this being the case is, in sum, because it is virtually impossible to teach an audience that is unwilling to be taught. If students lack motivation or desire to follow teachers' instructions, this can prove detrimental on a number of issues; inattentiveness or disinterest may potentially lead to disruptive classroom behaviours, poor teacher/student connections, and

ultimately detract from students' overall academic advancement. Alternatively, when students are given enough opportunities to devote sufficient intellectual energy towards their teachers and learning material, this implies increased levels of individual engagement and involvement, which may positively affect the depth and quality of their educational experience. Therefore, if teachers wish to provide optimal learning environments, they must consistently strive to innovate in the process of keeping their students motivated and interested in pedagogical material.

4.3.1. Teacher/Comedian Likeability and Relatability

One significant factor that has been shown to affect the challenge of attracting and maintaining student attention is teacher likeability. The term "likeable" can be defined as possessing attributes, or acting in manners, which serve to generate positive associations or feelings towards an individual. On a similar note, the concept of relatability implies a capacity for drawing attention and identification with someone's personal qualities, status, or situational context. Research suggests that students are generally more likely to devote their interest, or pay attention, towards an instructor they find relatable, while also tending to work harder for teachers they like (Roth, 2014, Ch. 1). Importantly, this tendency also implies a greater probability of student engagement and involvement under likeable, and/or relatable teachers, since students who work harder are typically more invested in the overall quality and process of their learning.

When observing within a stand-up comedy context, likeability and relatability are also recognized as important influences towards maintaining audience attention, thereby additionally affecting the potential outcome of a performance. In her analysis of comedians' performance strategies' impact on persuasion, humour researcher DeCamp (2015) notes that, "without likability established through some combination of monitoring tension/energy, acknowledgment of (possible) audience reactions, personal relatability and credibility, and use of equalizing and

humanizing self-deprecation, a stand-up comedian's set can rapidly lose the audience" (p. 457). In essence, when comedians utilize strategies which allow for self-representation as relatable, likeable individuals, this can help sustain audiences' interest, engagement, and promote audience feedback - usually expressed through laughter. It may therefore be worthwhile to adopt a similar approach, or draw inspiration from such methods within a classroom. My previous transcript analysis in Chapter 3 uncovered numerous examples of comedians using likeability or relatability to connect with, and sustain the attention of their audiences. For instance, in Transcript 4, stand-up comic Baggy was observed frequently incorporating a combination of facial gestures -primarily smiles - and laughter throughout his set (see Transcript 4). Similarly, in Transcript 1, Adam expresses audible admiration upon learning that one of his audience members is an actor (Transcript 1, line 28). These mannerisms can be argued as enabling comedians to present themselves as being approachable and amicable, which likely facilitates further audience interactions. It is important to note that in an educational context, these expressions are generally considered immediacy behaviours, or actions that encourage closeness or emotional proximity between individuals (see Banas et al, 2011).

Perhaps more significantly, if comedians *fail to* present themselves or their material as likeable or relatable, then this can detract from audiences' willingness to engage or interact with performers. My field research within Montreal's local comedy scene corroborates this notion. For instance, during one live show that I attended, a comedian effectively "bombed" his set by forcing too many of his jokes to rely on obscure references or niche content (see Field Notes Sample 1). This poor response was manifested through the audience appearing visibly bored, and not producing much laughter. In addition, the comedian made what is colloquially referred to in the business as a "rookie mistake" and neglected to make eye contact with the attendees. Such

obscurity in joke content, combined with a lack of immediacy behaviours or personable communication, seemed to prevent the crowd from understanding and identifying with the material and the comedian. By extension, it is possible to ascertain that teachers would experience similar detriments in student engagement if they failed to present as likeable or relatable.

Another factor worth mentioning that has been shown to play a role in upholding audience attention is **presentation style**. In my transcript analysis, I observed various comedy styles which incorporated language-based, logic-based, identity-based, and action-based humour (Heidari-Shahreza, 2017). Comedians were shown to use these styles to relate with and support audiences, while also gathering information for further jokes. Research suggests that within an educational context "teacher communicator style in relation to *perceived openness, friendliness*, impression leaving, and dramatic style could significantly reduce the psychological distance between students and teachers" (Downs et al., 1988, p. 128; emphasis added). It is therefore possible that with some modifications, these comedic styles may serve as comparative models for which teaching personas to adapt. However, there is still significant room for research with regards to the potential impact that teachers' humour styles and personas may have on classroom management (see Tait et al., 2015).

4.3.2. Flexibility and Adaptability

Adapting and responding to unexpected situations is generally considered paramount to effective classroom management, especially if teachers wish to maintain their students' attention. Much like stand-up comics, teachers must be able to think on their feet and respond to unanticipated scenarios in their workplace. Challenges such as waning interest, boring or difficult topics, personal issues, or disruptive behaviours can significantly affect students' focus,

which can thus create a negative impact on student engagement and involvement. Fortunately, teachers who are flexible and responsive to changes in their environments can even go so far as to take advantage of such unforeseen occasions, turning them into viable learning experiences (Foster, 2015). However, despite teachers' pre-existing familiarity with the necessity of flexibility and adaptability, it may be useful to observe comedians' use of this skillset. The primary reason for this argument is that stand-up comedians generally respond to, and take advantage of, a wider, more frequently variable set of environments than teachers, particularly during crowd work. As a result, comedians tend to broaden their range by adapting humorous material towards subjects that people can relate to, while also remaining conscious of their immediate surroundings and interactions. A prominent case of this type of adaptation was observed in Transcript 4, where stand-up comedian Baggy began his show with a pre-written joke regarding the song "Sexy and I Know It" (Transcript 4, line 1-6). While the joke was generally well-received, an audience member reacted to Baggy's presence in a much more humorous manner, which ultimately lead the comedian to decide to perform ad-lib exchanges with the crowd based on this interjection for the rest of his set. In this scenario, Baggy demonstrated the potential reward that may derive from adapting pre-existing material to suit a changing environment: an increased possibility of audience engagement and involvement.

4.3.3. Attention to Audience

In order to positively affect the chance of career and performative success, comedians must learn to adapt their material to an ever-variable crowd. Audiences can fluctuate based on a multitude of factors such as geographical location, time of performance, type of venue, as well as a comedian's degree of professional development. For example, a fledgling, or amateur comic is unlikely to be officially invited to perform at a high-level event such as the Just for Laughs

festival. As such, a stand-up comedian will likely never perform for the exact same live audience twice. This variability inevitably places further pressure upon the challenge of connecting with and maintaining the interest of a crowd. One particular method that I observed comedians utilizing to counter this challenge is the act of directly analyzing the composition of their audiences, what is colloquially referred to as, "reading the room." This technique can be summarized as comedians attempting to get a general feel for, or understanding of, their crowds' moods, temperaments, interests, preferences, demographic, and so on. Such a task is typically accomplished through immediate visual observation, but comedians also engage in simple probatory dialogue with audiences in order to garner more details. Furthermore, some comedians may ask confirmatory questions such as, "does that sound good?" in order to take note of their audiences' level of engagement (See Field Notes Sample 1). These types of inquiries bear a striking resemblance to teachers checking on student engagement, and can possibly be emulated within a classroom context to improve teachers' overall rapport with their pupils.

While "reading the room" may serve useful in a comedy setting, teachers would likely need to apply this strategy on a much deeper level in order for it to work within a classroom context. Evidence suggests that teachers should to get to know their students well enough to develop positive relationships if they wish to manage their classrooms effectively. However, it may be useful for teachers to try to remain current in their discussions so as to maintain student interest. This requires paying attention to trends, local events, popular culture, as well as adapting to individual students' preferences. For example, teachers may strive towards finding a common interest in sports, video games, movies, music, or other hobbies. Fortunately, teachers already have the advantage of typically being expected to know their student audiences, especially at the elementary or high school grade. Teachers' relationships with students can be

influenced by a multitude of variables such as geographical location, affiliation within local communities, or one's reputation developed within a particular school/establishment. Nevertheless, teachers are also afforded a much longer period during which to get to learn about and connect with their students, whether this is achieved over the course of a semester, a school year, or sometimes even a lifetime. Change is an inevitable aspect of life, and can occur regularly in a classroom. However, it is safe to assume that this applies to a stable set of students at most times.

While comedians are not inherently obliged to engage in unscripted interactions or force audience participation, preparing and developing material which is engaging enough to invoke attention seems to improve their likelihood of producing a successful performance. Part of this preparatory process includes anticipating potential audience responses or feedback to certain material, and being ready to adapt such content accordingly. From a pedagogical standpoint, this may be viewed as comparable to teachers planning their lessons for student engagement, which is generally considered to positively affect student learning outcomes. In their research, McCarron & Savin-Baden (2008) address the importance of unscripted interaction between teachers and students. The authors argue that unscripted conversations provide students with a more "authentic" learning experience, and are ultimately beneficial for their intellectual development (McCarron & Savin-Baden, 2008). However, it is worth noting that being unscripted does not equate with being unplanned. Although teachers are not explicitly obligated to know their students personally, instructors should possess at least some awareness of the pupils they interact with on a daily basis. Students present from a large diversity of backgrounds, abilities, interests and personalities, which can result in unique individual challenges for teachers to address. It would therefore be advantageous for teachers anticipate or recognize these personal

or individual factors which may interact with situational factors to create interest, or lack of interest, and adapt their teaching methods accordingly (Bergin, 1999).

4.4 Stand-Up Comedy and Connecting with Students

"When students participate in a classroom discussion, they become co-performers at liberty to enact the play in an infinite variety of ways, according to the contextual contingencies of live participation," (Liew, 2013, p. 263).

The third quintessential element required for producing an effective classroom management style is the challenge of connecting with students while providing them with sufficient opportunities for active contribution in classroom dynamics. When teachers form strong interpersonal relationships with their students, these bonds may also extend towards students' overall quality of learning. While there is no doubt as to the significance of teachers' performance upon student learning, *in-situ* participation allows students the individual agency to step further and actively taking charge of the direction and depth of their educational experience. One of the primary ways that instructors enable this to happen is through engaging in verbal discourse, or dialogue, with their students. Dialogue, by definition, is a process which demands participation from all parties involved. However, students' talking does not necessarily equate with genuine involvement or learning. As such, it is important for teachers to maintain an open, spontaneous, and authentic dialogue with students while presenting learning material. This teaching practice, especially when combined with humour, can strongly affect the development of rapport and trust between instructors and their pupils (Wandersee, 1982). This is explained by the fact that students' perceptions of instructor humour orientation are positively related to perceptions of nonverbal immediacy (Banas et al., 2010). In addition, research suggests that "many of the behaviours instructors enact when they are being humorous (e.g., smiling, vocal

variety, gestures, and facial expressiveness) are also immediacy behaviors" (Banas et al., 2010, p. 128).

4.4.1. Can Crowd Work Function in a Classroom?

Despite teachers' best efforts to plan and control the events that occur within a classroom, it is impossible to teach students without at least some degree of variability taking place. Unscripted fluctuation of students' needs, temperaments and feedback means that teachers must make complex actions and interactions that are "at once strategic and spontaneous, calculated and contingent" (Liew, 2013, p. 263). Essentially, a teacher's role in managing a classroom is to orchestrate a "productive balance between repetition and improvisation, conformity and creativity, in concert with students as "spect-actors" in a live pedagogical performance" (Liew, 2013, p. 263). While students are expected to listen and observe teachers' delivery of educational content, they can also strongly affect the types of interactions and pedagogical outcomes of their learning situations by virtue of participation.

Throughout my various field notes and YouTube transcriptions of stand-up comedy events, I have ascertained that **crowd work** is an invaluable tool for comedians to create dialogue and connect with their audiences. In sum, this practice involves comedians directly interacting with audiences in an organic, unscripted manner, and often using these interactions with the goal of producing humorous material. Many of the previous stand-up comedy methods we have analyzed, such as likeability and relatability, compliments and personal commentary, positive verbal or non-verbal communication, and audience attention, can be used to create spontaneous dialogue and bridge the interpersonal gap between performers and their crowds. Crowd work can invariably be compared to the overall process of classroom management itself, since teachers are required to engage with their own crowds on a regular basis: students. If we

were to apply the fundamental principle of crowd work to classroom management, teachers might be encouraged to strive towards talking *with* their students rather than *to* them, or by simply delivering content. Much like in stand-up comedy, this inherently involves instructors listening to audiences' feedback, and adapting their material accordingly. In addition, teachers may wish to enforce supportive classroom behaviours in order to build rapport and trust with their students.

4.4.2. Self-deprecation

While the act of being relatable has been shown to be integral for captivating people's attention both on stage and in a classroom, relatability also possesses the advantage of facilitating the creation of personal connections with an audience. One practice that I have observed comedians using to achieve this goal is the incorporation of **self-deprecative material**. As indicated in my field notes and YouTube transcriptions, comedians would often self-deprecate by poking fun at their own personal shortcomings, physical appearance, mannerisms, and various other characteristics. When applied in a classroom context, teachers' use of self-deprecation can serve as a means for lowering personal barriers; the act of acknowledging one's faults, especially if done in a humorous way, can help teachers appear more relatable or likeable. It is also worth mentioning that self-deprecation may assist in mitigating negative perceptions of authority, as well as relieving tension within a conventional teacher-student power dynamic. Classroom management, by definition, is a process which involves teacher control or regulation of classroom functions. The use of self-deprecative humour invokes a sense of humility, but also implies the acceptance and understanding of other people's flaws. As such, this style of humour may ultimately contribute to students possessing more positive attitudes towards each other and their teachers (Chiang et al., 2016). This in turn may facilitate the creation of interpersonal bonds

between teachers and their pupils, and thus potentially give students the courage to become more involved in classroom functions, or engage in dialogue with their teachers.

While teachers have already been extensively documented as making use of self-deprecation (see Chiang et al., 2016), the types of interactions that occur as a result can vary significantly when compared to other performance-based professionals such as stand-up comedians. Self-deprecation serves the purpose of inviting evaluation, and thus inherently involves the audience in this procedure. However, one obvious, yet key difference worth exploring is that comedians perform within an entertainment-centered context. Audiences generally enter comedy venues with the expectation of hearing comedians tell jokes, regardless of the damage these may cause, or whose expense these humorous bits come from. Consequently, self-deprecating humour tends to work well in such settings, where audience-performer relationships are *temporary*. However, this style of presentation may not necessarily always function optimally when used on a long-term basis. In a classroom, where teachers are generally expected to sustain long-standing relationships with their students, self-deprecation can sometimes run a slight risk of being construed as inappropriate or harmful to one's learning experience (Wanzer et al., 2006). Fortunately, evidence suggests that a "willingness to be spontaneous and 'imperfect' enough to be able to laugh at [oneself] will better enable students to cope with self-fears, reduce stereotyped perceptions of 'school,' create a dynamic learning environment, and foster a sharing and concerned attitude among all learning participants" (Korobkin, 1988, p. 155).

4.4.3. Managing Participation: Allowable Contributions and Audience Cohesiveness

A key tenet of maintaining a vibrant and dynamic classroom management style is the challenge of balancing teacher authority and student participation. On one hand, students should be provided with sufficient opportunities to express themselves and develop their personal identities or voice. However, within elementary and high school settings, teachers are also professionally required to follow a set curriculum. This places certain limitations upon the degree of freedom students have when it comes to choosing topics of interest, as well as the amount of time available for class discussion. One stand-up comedy tool that I surmise teachers may benefit from in this regard is the regulation of allowable contributions. In sum, direct input from the audience may be permitted or even overtly requested, but only at the discretion of the performer (see Filani, 2015). While exercising this decision may not necessarily increase the *amount* of student engagement *per se*, allowing students to contribute to their own educational experience can positively influence the *quality* of teacher-student interactions. Much like teachers, comedians exert a significant influence upon turn-taking and topic control while delivering material (Filani, 2015). When applied in a classroom context, a teacher can use the concept of allowable contributions in order to moderate student behaviours that are acceptable or forbidden, while reinforcing positive behaviours. Teachers may also wish to draw from the practices of stand-up comedy and incorporate humour within this process in order to improve their odds of successful classroom management. For instance, although focused on application within a college classroom setting, Punyanunt (2000) supports the idea that "appropriate humour used with compliance-gaining tactics may bring about a prosocial atmosphere and thus foster a positive teacher-student interaction and relationship" (p.31). Furthermore, humour usage may

also impact the effectiveness of teacher power and compliance-gaining strategies (Punyanunt, 2000).

Another method that comedians use to form connections with their audience and encourage group cohesiveness is by playing into identity, or **creating community**. In order to accomplish this, some stand-up comics choose to make jokes or comment upon their own ethnic identity, and relate to audiences accordingly. For example, in Transcript 4, comedian Baggy was observed incorporating several slang words throughout his set, such as "ra" and "missu" (see Transcript 4, line 16). This type of communication can be useful within a classroom, especially since shared identity is also recognized as a significant contributor to student interest in learning (see Bergin, 1999). In his research on influences on classroom interest, Bergin (1999) states that, "as people grow up, they come to identify with certain groups and to see themselves as part of some groups and outsiders from other groups" (p. 89). Classroom community can therefore serve as a strong motivator for active participation. In addition, the literature suggests that the cultivation of group humor, or "inside jokes" can further improve cohesiveness and directly affect task productivity and learner satisfaction (Korobkin, 1988). It is worth noting that while ethnicity and group identity can serve as material for self and other deprecation in a comedy club environment, this could have very detrimental consequences in the classroom. However, the larger point remains that practice of recognizing difference and sameness can indeed build community.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I discussed and established various parallels to exist between stand-up comedy and teaching practices. In order to promote student engagement and involvement, teachers must perform the tasks of creating a positive learning environment, attracting and

maintain student attention, and forming authentic connections with their students. By conducting my own examination and analysis of stand-up comedy practices, and comparing these to those of teachers, I ascertained that some methods might in fact be beneficial for creating an effective classroom management style. More specifically, comedians' use of positive language, compliments and personal commentary, and effective communication, were shown to be potentially useful for teachers creating positive learning environments. Additionally, comedians' use of likeability and relatability, flexibility and adaptability, as well as attention to audience, were discussed as hypothetically relevant towards teachers maintaining student focus. Finally, comedians' incorporation of crowd work, self-deprecation, and moderation of allowable contributions, were explored as relevant towards the goal of connecting with students. In essence, teachers are not obliged to become joke writers if they wish to instruct and form connections with their students. Instead, they must hone their capacity to speak and act in ways that are compelling and interesting enough to promote engagement and involvement. It is important to note that comedians' communication techniques can be improved by practice and observation, and are in principle quite similar to many other tools in a teacher's repertoire (Powell & Andresen, 1985). Teachers may therefore find it useful to take note from comedians' performances, especially in comics' methods of interaction with a crowd.

CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION

Having undergone professional development as both a teacher and stand-up comedian, I observed the possibility that my instructor training may have been influenced by my burgeoning comedy career. The discovery of this connection between humour and teaching led me to pose the question of whether the tools of a profession *based* on humour production, such as stand-up comedy, might be useful for improving teaching methodology. In a bid to answer this question, my first step was to conduct an extensive literary review of effective classroom management practices, and the impact of humour on classroom management. Many of these texts discussed the importance of teachers' incorporation of humour, as well as the potential utility of stand-up comedy *principles* in a classroom. Unfortunately, much to my surprise, there was a demonstrable lack of research to be found explicitly concerning the applicability of stand-up comedy *methods* for classroom management. As such, my thesis endeavored to try to fill this gap in the existing literature; I would use my vantage point as a teacher-comedian to outline these professions' practices, then engage in a critical comparative analysis to determine whether there was enough overlap between them to suggest any potential application within an educational context.

From an early stage in my career as a comedian, I quickly determined that stand-up comedy is a highly dynamic and socially interactive profession. In addition, I learned that much of comedy's interpersonal impact comes from the conversation, or discourse, that occurs between practitioners and their crowds. As a result, I decided to take a discourse and conversational analysis approach in order to ascertain a more critical, academic representation of stand-up comedy practices. To accomplish this, I transcribed and analyzed five YouTube clips featuring comedians performing successful instances of crowd work. To supplement my fine-grained discourse analysis, I also attended and notated several live comedy events in Montreal

and drew from my personal experience as a stand-up comedian for verification. Together, this data provided a snapshot of the subtle interactional practices that stand-up comedians used. My analysis revealed how comedians make use of various performative strategies such as effective communication, positive audience interaction, relatability towards others, self-deprecation and connecting with their crowds. This information then served as the basis for achieving the primary academic innovation and contribution of my thesis research: by taking a discourse/conversational analysis approach towards comparing stand-up comedy and teaching methodology, I was able to confidently ascertain there to be enough direct similarities between both professions' practices to merit further investigation. Most promisingly, my research demonstrated that the tools of a performance-based career like stand-up comedy might be of particular interest for the goal of improving student engagement and involvement.

5.1 Challenges/Issues

Although my research into stand-up comedy methods suggests a certain degree of promise with regards to pedagogical applicability, it is important to acknowledge the obvious fact that not everything that comedians do would necessarily translate well in a formal classroom context. One point of interest worth discussing is that despite its practitioners' best intentions, stand-up comedy can be informal, subversive, confrontational, or even offensive in nature. Some comedians choose to employ audience teasing, or put-down humour based on insulting others. In addition, many stand-ups use expletive language or gestures throughout their sets. While these strategies may prove highly effective and entertaining for audiences on stage, it would be difficult to imagine teachers being permitted or wanting to use such freedom of expression within the confines of a classroom or school community.

Another aspect outside the scope of my thesis research is the potential difference in applicability by level of education. The stand-up comedy methods I examined would very likely work differently within a high school, elementary or university setting. There is certainly room for expansion upon this subject, and targeted research within each of these domains may elucidate some potential answers. Looking more closely at the actual uptake and use of stand-up or stand-up like discoursal strategies within different educational contexts would be the obvious next step in a research project on this topic. However, the goal of my thesis research was to establish the *potential* for classroom practice, not to make conclusive claims about whether and how they actually do work in the classroom.

It is also important to acknowledge that I may have missed some visual cues, lines of communication, or misinterpreted some comedy techniques in my observation, transcription, and evaluation of comedy events. My vantage point as a teacher-comedian, despite its advantages, may have also acted as a source of bias with regards to my overall research perspective. Performing stand-up comedy is a highly dynamic and subjective process, and is thus open to interpretation when it comes to fully understanding its inner mechanisms. In addition, my analysis neglected to discuss the skills that comedians develop *outside* the realm of the stage, especially through engaging in active communication, reflection and feedback with peers. While this aspect of performing stand-up comedy is not quite evident from my field notes or YouTube transcripts, I believe it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that in order to gain success, many comedians try to better themselves by partaking in professional dialogue. Having performed in the field myself for a number of years, I can attest that much of my own career development derived from interactions with colleagues, mentors, and friends. One of the benefits of belonging to a vibrant and evolving community of practice like stand-up comedy is that

individual practitioners can ask other members for their opinions on choice of words, delivery, posture, stage presence, tone, material, and effectiveness of performance. Whether feedback occurs backstage, in a green room, at a pub, at a lavish theater, or online, this fluid interaction drives comedians to reflect on their practices and make the changes needed for success. As Wiggins (2012) explains, it is important for comics to maintain a reliable and open line of communication with their peers, since "performers can only adjust their performance successfully if the information fed back to them is stable, accurate, and trustworthy" (p. 15).

5.2 *Implications for Further Analysis*

While my attempt to dissect and understand the practices of stand-up comedy may have covered a substantial amount of ground, there is still plenty of room for more in-depth conversational analysis and discourse analysis study. Throughout my work, I utilized conversational and discourse analysis lenses to examine the interactions taking place between comedians and audiences, then extrapolated on how these interplays might improve classroom management practices. One possible way to expand upon this research would be to identify and analyze the underlying sociological or psychological conventions and expectations found in overall speech patterns and visual cues occurring during comedy shows. This would be used to help explain why certain behaviours manifest, and if, or how, these patterns might be applicable within a pedagogical context. Additionally, we might also benefit by specifying our scope of research towards understanding *audience* behaviours in the context of stand-up comedy. In conducting such analysis, we may be able to learn more about the complex communication mechanisms at play during live performances, and potentially also apply these lessons in classroom management.

On a more practical note, I believe that there may be a strong pedagogical potential for the application of stand-up comedy methods, as with other methods in the performing arts, as part of student teacher training or professional development workshops. Since complex, "whole group" communication is such a key part of the performative aspect of stand-up comedy, teachers' observation of, or even peripheral participation in the comedy community may ultimately benefit their teaching. For instance, being given the opportunity to practice delivering mock versions of comedy sets in small, controlled doses (e.g., a standard five-minute open mic time slot), may serve to enhance instructors' humour production, verbal communication, time management, and presentation skills. These scenarios would allow student teachers to practice and acquire the tools of comedy in safe, supportive environments. In addition, prospective teachers might be encouraged to attend real live comedy events and record their observations, focusing heavily on the ways that comedians interact with crowds and present themselves to an audience. Student teachers may also be given several opportunities to speak with willing comedians regarding the tools of their craft. These might occur through conference meetings, personal interviews, or even during live comedy events. Most importantly, the implication here is that these lessons and interactions may hopefully result in the development of effective classroom management skills.

Perhaps the most exciting broader implication for further analysis invoked by my research is that it is not limited to stand-up comedy. Effective communication skills, attention to audience, as well as various other teaching/stand-up comedy practices that I observed can theoretically be developed by partaking in plenty of other performance-based professions or vocations such as theater, acting, singing, music and improv. Evidence suggests that training teachers as performing artists, with live and unpredictable students as their medium, can help

build their proficiencies (Dawe, 1987). By virtue of participation, teachers may practice gestures, modulate vocal dynamics, learn how to follow a question/answer dynamic, and ultimately push students to learn. Many of these tools have already been shown by existing pedagogical literature to be transferable to the classroom. Since my research was able to ascertain such a rich, illuminating comparison of stand-up comedy and teaching methods through a discourse conversational analysis lens, it may also be worthwhile to apply this perspective towards similar performative professions. Hopefully, this might also potentially serve to further enhance classroom management practices.

5.3 Final Thoughts

The performance arts clearly have much to offer educators in terms of effective teacher development. The art of managing attention and engagement in the classroom, much like the art of maintaining attention and engagement in the comedy club, responds to innumerable contextual features that govern the teaching and learning (or stand-up) situation. Yet, the variability of the teaching situation, and the artistic response to that situation, does not mean that teachers cannot be prepared in a similar manner to their performance-based counterparts.

However, the true takeaway message from my research is that the key to understanding stand-up comedy methods, as well as effective classroom management, is the practitioner's ability to produce and navigate immediate, genuine social interaction. Much like in a comedy context, teachers must be able to *listen* to their audiences, then react appropriately to feedback *in the moment*, despite also involving some degree of preparation and anticipation. Teaching, like comedy, is a dual process which necessitates both a performer and a recipient, yet both roles are inextricably influenced and molded by the types of interactions and conversations that take place within such a dynamic. Students have a fundamental need to be heard, listened to, understood,

and included. My thesis research suggests that stand-up comedy practices, with special attention to crowd work, may offer teachers greater insight into the goal of meeting these needs.

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APPENDIX

Transcription Conventions

Italics: emphasis on particular word

! : Volume increase

? : Interrogative tone

- : break in word/interruption

Underline: emphasis on letter

, : Natural pause during sentence

. : Pause at end of sentence

Data Transcription

Transcript 1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1al-rYtida4

"Crowd Work (Adam Ray)": 00:00-1:04

(Adam looks at audience member 1 in the left corner of the front row.)
Adam: What's up, man?
(Adam nods and turns to face the audience)
(Audience begins to laugh)
(Adam pauses for 2 seconds)
(Audience laughter)
(Turns back to audience member 1)
Adam: (To audience member 1) Did – uh- Did you come with somebody and
they bailed out?
No
(Audience laughter)
Adam: Just like to - chill incognito in the corner.
(1 second pause)
(Audience laughter)
Adam: I like your style dude.
You look sharp.
You're like dude, I didn't know what I have to offer.
(Pauses for 2 seconds)
(Audience laughter)
So I'm gonna go out and fuckin' find friends on a Friday night.
(While turning to audience) It's find. friend. Friday if you fuckin'
follow you (turns to audience member 1) on *Twitter*
Which I *don't*, but I will tonight.
(Pause for 2 seconds)
(Audience laughter.)
Adam: (looking at audience member 1) What do you do?
Audience member 1: I'm an actor
Adam: You're an actor? *Hell* yeah
ah -wa- uh- mayb- Have we seen you in anything?
Audience member 1: No, I'm just studying.
Adam: You're just studying.
Audience member 1: I just moved here six weeks ago.
Adam: Oh shit! Dude.
Audience member 1: Yeah really
(Adam waves hand at audience.)
Adam: First impressions?

37. **Audience member 1**: It's hard, love it, but it's hard as shit
38. (Audience laughter)
39. **Adam**: Yeah.
40. Yeah you're moving back home for sure.
41. (Pauses for 3 seconds)
42. (Audience laughter)
43. (During pause, Adam turns to the audience)
44. (Smiles, chuckles briefly)
45. **Adam** (to audience): I mean *six* (turns to face audience member 1) *weeks*?!
46. **Adam:** Yeah of *course* it's harder yeah, but dude just fuckin' stick with it,
47. you know?
48. If you stay in it long enough, like, and you were a good dude and you
49. work *hard* fuckin' it'll work out for it
50. (Adam nods at audience member 1)
51. (Smiles)
52. (Audience applauds)
53. **Adam**: Yeah
54. But also (turns to audience, then turns to audience member 1)
55. Fuckin' maybe it *won't*, you'll move *back*, you know what I'm
56. saying? Like-
57. (Audience laughter)
58. (Adam turns to the audience)
59. **Adam**: I believe what I said, (turns to audience member 1) but also, it might
60. *not*, you know?

Transcript 2

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n1GDjv8wxAw

"20 Years Old, Moshe Kasher, Stand-up Comedy": 00:00-1:05

1. (Moshe looks down at 4 women sitting in the front row)
2. **Moshe**: How old are you guys?
3. (Pause for 2 seconds)
4. (Audience laughs.)
5. **One of the women**: Twenty
6. **Moshe**: You guys are *twenty*?
7. (Leans head forward)
8. Oh,
9. (Pulls head back)
10. you haven't *done* anything.
11. Or experienced life in any *way* that's crazy.
12. (Audience applauds)
13. (Girls in front row laugh)
14. **Moshe**: Are you guys in high school?-
15. No, you're twenty. That'd be-
16. "Are you retarded?
17. Are you all retarded people?"
18. (Audience applauds)
19. (4 women sitting in front row laugh.)
20. **Moshe**: Have you not been able to get (breathes) out of high school?
21. Are you stupid? Ok, great.
22. (Pauses for 1 second)
23. (Audience laughs)
24. **Moshe**: I'm kidding
25. wha- haha -wha- no- but what mall do you guys work at?
26. (Pause for 2 seconds)
27. (Audience laughs)
28. (Girls in front laugh along)
29. (Moshe shakes his head)
30. (Smiles at the girls)
31. **Moshe**: That's so mean. Also, a bit rude.
32. Are you in college?
33. **4 women in front**: (nodding) Yes.
34. **Moshe**: Where at?
35. **4 women in front**: (Jumbled simultaneous response) Azuza Pacific.
36. **Moshe**: And what do you- what is that? Is that a Catholic school? (Pauses)
37. **4 women in front** (Jumbled simultaneous response) No but it's Christian.
38. **Moshe**: Christian?

39. *Video cuts*
40. **Moshe**: (to the 4 women in front, who are not visible) Um, so what would you
41. like to do with your *degree* when you get out of Christian school?
42. **One of the women**: Go to medical school
43. **Moshe** (raises eyebrow): Oh you want to be a *doctor*? What kind?
44. **Same woman**: Hematologist
45. **Moshe**: Hematologist?
46. Fuck, I don't know what that is either
47. (Pauses for 1 second)
48. (Audience laughs)
49. *Video cuts*
50. (Moshe looks down at women in front row)
51. (Addresses third woman from the left)
52. **Moshe**: What about you?
53. **Third woman**: (inaudible, shakes her head)
54. **Moshe**: You don't know?
55. **Third woman**: (shakes her head) No.
56. **Moshe**: *Yeah*, there you go.
57. (Pauses for 2 seconds)
58. (Audience laughs)
59. (Turns to look at rest of audience)
60. (Women in the front row laugh)
61. **Moshe**: Even at Christian college there's always *one*, right?
62. (Pauses)
63. **Moshe** (imitating typical "college girl") I don't fucking *care* (holds mouth open)
64. (Pauses for 2 seconds)
65. (Audience laughs)
66. **Moshe**: (imitating typical "college girl") I'm here to drink the sacrament wine
67. and pa(ha)rty.
68. (Looks down at microphone)
69. (Audience laughs)
70. *Video cuts*

Transcript 3

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzYjuontYZU&list=LLW_pod-reEffy039P2ZJyxw&index=5&t=0s

"Comic Adam Ray - crowd work in VANCOUVER 4/20/18": 00:05-1:42

1. (Audience laughter)
2. (Adam reaches for his drink)
3. (Laughs briefly)
4. (Turns to face an audience member - a bouncer - sitting in the front)
5. (Adam smiles)
6. (Raises his glass)
7. **Adam**: What's up dude?
8. (Individual's response is inaudible)
9. (Some audience laughter.)
10. **Adam**: Ha you fu – you are a *big* dude.
11. (Pauses to take a drink)
12. (Audience cheers)
13. (Quickly returns eye contact with individual)
14. **Adam**: You a bouncer out here?
15. **Bouncer**: I am.
16. **Adam**: You are?
17. (Pauses)
18. (Presses hand on forehead)
19. (Pushes hair up)
20. (Returns hand to waist level)
21. **Adam**: What came first, the fuckin'
22. (Gestures with open hand toward chest)
23. arms, the the necklace (raises hand) –
24. **Bouncer**: Chest.
25. (Audience laughter)
26. (Adam lowers hand)
27. (Exhales briefly)
28. (Turns to rest of audience)
29. (Shows facial expression of disappointment)
30. (Waves arm forward toward audience)
31. (Shakes head)
32. (Turns back to face the individual)
33. **Adam**: Spoken like a *true* bouncer.
34. (Pause for 2 seconds)
35. (Audience laughter.)
36. **Adam:** Do you get to – do you get to really (1 second pause) kick some ass? Like if you
37. find yourself in po- Do you do you do you get bummed? If there's a night that

goes by and you're like I didn't get to, get in somebody's face, or you y-
Bouncer: Uh, that's part of the job.
Adam: It is, yeah. (Nods) *Fuck* that's cool.
(Pause for 2 seconds)
(Audience laughs)
(Turns to audience)
(Quickly turns back to bouncer.)
Adam: Do you have any sort of go-to bouncer line? Like, if someone's a little too fucked
up and they're like,
(Changes tone to impersonate fictional character)
come on *man* I just, I wanna, that's it's my friend's *birthday*. And you're like,
(Turns forward to face general audience)
(Looks up)
fuckin', *happy fuckin' birthday*, you know.
(2 second pause)
(Audience laughter)
(Comedian chuckles briefly)
(Looks down at audience)
(Looks forward)
Adam: Guess *I'll* be eating your cake, *bitch*. You know
(Turns to bouncer)
(Chuckles briefly)
(Audience increases laughter, then subsides)
Adam: Do you do you, try to have fun with it like that? Or-
Bouncer: Definitely, yeah
Adam: Yeah.
(Adam turns back to the audience)
(Pauses for 2 seconds.)
Adam: See that's why I could never do like a job like *that*
(Flicks index finger at bouncer)
or like be a firefighter, because I'd be too concerned with like saying something
cool (laughs, pause for 1 second while audience laughs), and hilarious like the
comic in me, you know like, if I was a firefighter, pulling to a house, hotter than
anticipated, you know, ha I'd be more concerned than saving lives with saying
something cool before I went in like in the movies, you know
(Adam faces audience)
(Impersonates fictional character.)
Adam: (impersonation) Adam *wait*, don't go in there!
(Turns back to face curtain)
(Turns and looks stoically at audience)
Adam: It's *ok.*
(2 second pause)
It – the- ho- I love how- I love the- I love how hot it – Fu-

81. (Shakes head)
82. (Throws up hands in disappointment)
83. (Turns to left audience)
84. You know, something cool, and fuckin'- yeah-
85. (Adam lowers his hand)
86. (Laughs)
87. (Audience erupts into laughter)
88. **Adam**: So (chuckles), heat's my middle *name* (chuckles).

Transcript 4

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRoqK5BgSpQ&t=5s

"A Conversation with the Audience- Standup Comedy video by Baggy" 0:21-1:55

1. (Introductory song "Sexy and I Know It" plays)
2. (Audience cheers)
3. (Baggy walks on stage)
4. **Baggy**: I'm sexy and I *know* it
5. (Pause for 1 second)
6. Unfortunately I'm the only one who knows it.
7. (Audience laughter)
8. (Baggy smiles)
9. (Waves his hand at an audience member sitting in the back of the room.)
10. **Baggy**: Hi.
11. (Pause for 1 second)
12. What is your name?
13. **Audience member**: Varadarajan
14. **Baggy**: Varadarajan
15. (Points hand at audience member)
16. he is standing up and telling this is not classroom ra I am not missu
17. (Pause for 3 seconds)
18. (Audience laughs)
19. **Baggy**: *Teacher*'s day was *yesterday*
20. (Pause for 1 second)
21. (Points arm back)
22. *Today* is stand-up comedy show. Varadarajan very slow.
23. (Varadarajan is chatting with fellow audience members in the back)
24. (Baggy calls upon him)
25. **Baggy**: Sorry, yes, Varadarajan, something you wanted to tell?
26. (Pause for 2 seconds)
27. (Audience laughs)
28. **Baggy**: Ladies and gentlemen, Varadarajan wants to talk to me, very badly.
29. (Pause 1 second)
30. (Audience laughter)
31. **Baggy**: If you guys *don't* mind let me take two minutes of his time tell ra
32. (Pauses for 2 seconds)
33. (Audience laughter)
34. What did you want to tell Varadarajan?
35. (Audience member whoops in the background)
36. **Friend of Varadarajan**: He thinks you're sexy!
37. (Baggy smiles)
38. (Chuckles)

Baggy: *You* believe I am *sexy*?
(Chuckles)
(Pauses for 2 seconds)
(Audience laughs and cheers)
Baggy: Varadarajan! *Thank* you *very* much!
(Pauses for 1 second)
(Baggy circles his hand towards audience)
Baggy: How many of you have *come*?
(Pauses for 2 seconds)
(Audience laughter)
(Baggy smiles and laughs)
Baggy: No *da!* Not cum I mean like how many of you have come to the
show!
(Pause 6 seconds for applause break)
(Friends of Varadarajan are cheering him on)
Baggy: How many of you have *attended* this evening function?
(Pause for 1 second)
Like *that* I am asking.
(Pause for 1 second)
(Audience laughter)
Baggy: Big group has come ah? In that any ladies are there?
(Pause for 2 seconds)
(Audience laughter)
Baggy: Er *ladies* please raise your hand, (raises hand) not *all* ladies. The,
ladies from that group
(Baggy circles hand toward group sitting next to Varadarajan)
(Someone raises hand)
Baggy: Hello. Hi. What are your names?
(Pauses for 1.5 seconds)
(Response unintelligible).
Baggy: Ashvita, Viji how do you know Varadarajan?
(Pauses for 3 seconds)
(Audience laughs)
(Baggy smiles)
(Raises arm at chest level with hand facing forward)
Baggy: Because I like his taste in *men* (lowers hand)
(Pauses for 5 seconds)
(Audience laughs)
(Baggy smiles)
(Turns away)
(Looks down)
(Looks back at audience)
Baggy: Maybe! you should also have *same* taste, that's why I'm telling

82. (Pause for 2 seconds)
83. (Audience laughs)
84. **Baggy**: Thank you Varadarajan, you can become my manager slash broker
85. starting instantly.

Transcript 5

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zp0TJSyLX40

"Comedian Regrets Calling Out Guy In Audience" 0:20-2:27

*important note: Drew Lynch has a slight stutter, but this does not impede his pacing and diction. Thus in order to facilitate the reading and analysis of this transcript, I have chosen not to include his moments of stuttering.

(Comedian Drew Lynch looks at an audience member with concern on his face. Drew is holding a coffee cup with his left hand.)
Drew: (pointing at audience member) Sir, are you gonna be on your phone the
whole show?
(Drew pauses for 3 seconds while looking at audience member)
(Rest of audience "ooohs" and laughs in response)
Drew: It's been like I gave you like twenty minutes, to like check emails, text
your side chick get *off* your *shit*.
(Pauses for 2 seconds)
(Audience cheers)
Drew: It's *rude*. (Nods head) It's rude.
(Drew pauses for 7 seconds)
(Audience cheers)
(Looks down at shoes)
(Takes sip of tea)
(Returns to look at interrupting audience member)
Drew: Are you *good*? Is it an *emergency*?
(Pauses for 1 second)
(Audience laughter)
Drew: No you *good*?
(Pauses for 1 second)
(Looks down)
(Smiles)
(Glances back at audience member)
Drew: Ok I just I didn't want to call you out but I was like I was waiting and I
was like *bro*, I'm like I'm like super *funny*, so I didn't know.
(Pause for 3 seconds)
(Audience laughs)
(Drew continues to look at the interrupting audience member)
(Quickly turns his head away)
(Looks down at the floor)
Drew: It's tough. It's a tough call,
(Laughs while facing the wall)
you know.
(As Drew is walking towards the stool on stage, an audience member yells inaudibly at him)

35. (Drew quickly turns to face the audience)
36. (Walks forward)
37. **Drew**: You what?
38. (Unintelligible yelling)
39. **Drew**: Maybe – Ok, you need to speak, English.
40. (Pause for 1 second)
41. (Audience laughs)
42. **Drew**: *How* am I the more articulate *one* than the two of us?
43. (Drew pauses for 3 seconds)
44. (Audience laughs)
45. (Drew nervously glances across the audience to observe their reaction)
46. **Drew**: What in-
47. (Audience member interrupts unintelligibly)
48. **Drew**: Oh shit, hang on.
49. (Audience cheers)
50. I'm not asking for *louder, sir*. No no
51. (Pauses for 1 second) (Audience laughs)
52. I need *diction*, umm.
53. (Pauses for laughter break)
54. (Drew looks down at feet)
55. (Turns to face away from audience)
56. *Video cuts
57. **Drew**: Why don't *you* text *that* guy, and that guy will see it,
58. (Flips hand toward face)
59. and…
60. (Pauses for 10 seconds)
61. (Audience laughter)
62. (Drew laughs loudly along with them)
63. (Taps his knee with the microphone)
64. (Turns back to the audience)
65. (Drew tries to start speaking again, but laughs once more)
66. (Leans on the brick wall backdrop)
67. (Raises his left leg to the wall)
68. (Takes a sip of tea)
69. *After 10 seconds have passed, the laughter in the audience starts to die down.
70. (Drew places his cup back on the stool)
71. (Walks towards the audience)
72. (A woman from the back of the room screams out a "woo" to get Drew's attention.)
73. **Woman in back**: Hey!
74. (Drew turns to face her with a look of disappointment)
75. It's my birthday!
76. **Drew**: Alright, I'm gonna try, hang on, hang on. I don't –
77. **Woman in back**: It's my birthday!

78. (Drew raises hand with open palm, then drops it)
79. **Drew**: Goddamn it.
80. (Pauses for 4 seconds)
81. (Audience laughs)
82. (Drew laughs along with them and maintains gaze on woman)
83. **Drew**: You know, when I was, I knew something this moment was missing was a
84. white bitch going -
85. (In a loud, high pitch, mocking voice, Drew impersonates woman in back saying "it's my birthday" but in gibberish.)
86. (Drew pauses for 6 seconds)
87. (Audience laughs)
88. (Drew looks down at audience)
89. (Shakes his head)
90. (Smiles)
91. **Drew**: (While waving hand at audience member) Or is it just that guy is slowly
92. morphing into a white chick?
93. (Drew performs a three-part gibberish impersonation which begins with the first audience member's interruption, then gradually morphs into the "it's my birthday" imitation.)
94. (Drew pauses for 4 seconds)
95. (Audience laughs.)
96. **Drew**: It's cool to see evolution, that was *nice*.
97. (Drew turns and walks to the left)
98. I like the *before* and after.

Field Research Notes

Sample 1: Comedy Nest, Wednesday February 19, 2020

-Upon entering the venue, my evening begins with a small, casual greeting with a local comedian. I will attempt to maintain minimal interaction with other comics until after the show.

-I establish my role as an observer by sitting in the back of the room. This is an optimal vantage point, allowing me to view the stage and crowd to the fullest extent.

-I did not inform any comedians of my note-taking, so as to reduce potential skewing or influencing of observed activities on stage. Most of the comedians performing tonight know me or have met me before.

-There are roughly 70-80 audience members present, with a mixed ethnic make-up and age range.

-Ambiance is casual but professional; there is a 5$ entrance fee for customers, but comedians enter for free.

-Customers can find advertisements for upcoming shows on each table; these consist of small postcards with the venue's logo.

-Two large screens above the stage displaying assortment of jokes and promotions of upcoming shows.

-Had a brief exchange with the venue's bartender, who came to take my order. She noticed my pen and notepad, and asked me what I was up to. Informed her that I would be taking notes of the proceedings of the evening, and that I was doing this to write my Master's thesis. With a wry grin, she responded by saying, "as if you don't already know what happens at a comedy show."

-"Comedy Lab" theme: audience is informed that comedians will be performing new jokes (which may positively affect or lower expectations)

-Host of show walks on stage, is wearing a white lab coat over a plain t-shirt and jeans.

-Repeats sentences to keep audience attention.

-Calls on audience for confirmation often, asking questions like, "does that sound good?"

-Asks who is from out of town.

-Builds rapport with couple sitting in front. Looks directly at them, smiles and gestures towards them.

-Asks audience for professions. One audience member states that they have a cubicle job.

-Applause break for people from Calgary and New Brunswick.

-“What do you do for a living?”

-Mix of compliments and insults towards audience; host varies his responses based on audience feedback. Dialogue is interspersed with laughter from the host and crowd.

-“Wow, that’s pretty lame.” Or “You guys are awesome.”

First act:

-minimal interaction with audience. Gets up to stage, tells jokes, pauses to let audience laugh, then proceeds to tell next jokes.

Host:

-Compliments audience member’s moustache. Points him out. Asks for profession, where he is from.

“You guys are fantastic.”

-Regularly reaffirms previous comedians, asks audience to give another round of applause.

-One comedian bombs his set. Little audience interaction, content is very niche (relates to management of hockey teams, makes obscure references) and unrelatable. Maintains little/no eye contact. Poor response from audience (no laughter, visibly bored).

-Host maintains eye contact with audience. Raises tone before introducing comics.

-One comedian begins by commenting on his sexuality, then tries to poke fun at audience. Walks around stage a lot, maintains eye contact. Wide range of vocal inflection, keeps audience engaged. Compliments attractiveness of audience members and their “hotness,” then makes comparison between Montrealers and his place of origin (some small town in Ontario).

Sample 2: Bar Villeray, Wednesday February 26, 2020

-Small room, approximately 45-50 people at full capacity. Roughly 30-35 audience members present, excluding comedians.

-Location is a small, possibly Italian bar lounge. Stage is set up in the back right corner of the venue. Ads for karaoke nights every Saturday. Bilingual venue, but show is in English.

-Featuring wide range of comedy backgrounds; some semi-professional, some pro, some preparing for Just For Laughs festival auditions. Several have already performed at JFL.

-Audience mostly young, white, male. 25-45 years old.

-Host starts show by relating to audience. Asks if there are any immigrants present. Speaks about neighborhood around the bar.

-Calls out (points at) and asks for a round of applause for a father and daughter sitting together in the audience.

-Scans the room for couples, asks how they met, how long they have been together, gives round of applause.

-Raises audience's attention by regularly encouraging cheers and applause.

-One comedian moves freely across the stage, looks across whole audience. Uses lots of hand gestures. Motions towards people sitting in the front.

-Host keeps show rolling by jumping ahead to the next comic.

-One comedian seems to have some trouble with a few new jokes. Moves on to the next joke as soon as he recognizes that his previous joke did not work. Awkward chuckle during silence. Jokes about his last joke flopping; does this in a very sarcastic/sardonic tone. Displays self-awareness, tries to encourage audience entertainment.

-One comic has low energy, little movement, sticks very close to the microphone. (This is commonly seen as a rookie mistake.) Low voice, slow pace. Jokes have a moderate impact on audience, some slight laughter. Starts to gain traction when directly poking fun at the audience. One joke doesn't work. Long moment of silence, then the comic looks down at floor.