

**CLASS CLOWN AND COURT JESTER:
A CASE STUDY APPROACH TO THE TRADITION OF THE FOOL**

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ABSTRACT

Though he is well known, the Class Clown is not particularly well understood. With the exception of one quantitative study by Damingo and Purkey (1978), no significant research has been written on this witty character. The educational community has viewed the Class Clown by and large as an under-achieving student who, in his efforts to get attention, is a disruptive force in the classroom. As such, his behaviour, though often enormously funny, is a threat to the conformity and stability that good classroom discipline demands.

There is, however, another way of looking at the Class Clown. In light of the historical and literary traditions of the Fool found in ancient and mediaeval societies, the Class Clown has a very important role to play in modern classrooms. His ambiguous nature, his role as a perturber of social order, and his perspective as a detached observer set him apart to be not just the humorist, but also the critic, and the sage—even in his adolescence.

Through the narrative of a case study approach, one single life story of a Class Clown is examined. This prototypical case study is offered with the intent of furthering research on the Class Clown.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	iv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND.....	3
Literature Review.....	4
The Tradition of the Fool.....	15
Conclusion.....	25
Approach to the Study.....	26
CHAPTER 3: METHOD.....	31
Design.....	31
Participants.....	33
Collection of Information.....	36
Procedure.....	37
Analysis.....	39
CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY: PORTRAIT OF A CLASS CLOWN.....	41
The Career of a Class Clown: A Narrative Account.....	41
Examination of Themes.....	65
Conclusion.....	76
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION.....	78
Statement of Findings.....	78
Limitations of the Study.....	81
Implications for Theory.....	81
Implications for Practice.....	83
Implications for Further Research.....	85
Summary.....	87
REFERENCES.....	89
APPENDIX I.....	95
Subject Consent Forms.....	96
Interview Questions.....	102

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There arose a chorus of grumbling. Imagine assigning homework to a Grade 9 English class two days before Halloween! The teacher was quick to face the seething rebellion head on.

“Ladies and gentlemen, let’s get real! What do you think this is, Club Med?”

In dumbfounded silence they sat in submission and then a small familiar voiced chirped, “Hands up, baby, hands up” Energy exploded as the whole class, including the teacher, raised their arms waving them side to side and joined in until the song had run its course.

“Alright,” the teacher mused to himself, “So how do I get out of this one?”

But before he finished the thought, that voice from the third row gave forth again with a confident chuckle and the pacing of the professional.

“Sixty minutes with Mr. C.—could you imagine a week?”

Room 301 erupted with laughter, again.

The Class Clown, the teacher, and the other students in the classroom echo the ancient roles and relationships of the court jester, the king, and his courtiers.

The research issue of this paper concerns the role and significance of the Class Clown. It appears that he plays a crucial part in the drama of the classroom and has a necessary place in the social fabric of the school. The Class Clown also acts out of his own sense of self, and it may be that he fits with the long and unforgettable tradition of the Fool. For the Class Clown, what is the meaning of his role and experience as lived in the classroom?

Typically, teachers perceive the Class Clown as a disruptive and unruly nuisance. This student is too often discounted as a comic thorn in the educational side or the paramount behaviour management challenge who needs to be stifled or, better still, trained to act appropriately. Perhaps, however, the Class Clown has a place beyond the classic teacher-student dynamic.

There are a host of questions which revolve around the person of the Class Clown. Why does a student adopt the role of the Class Clown? What significance does that role play for him, for his peers, and for his teachers? How do teachers perceive and respond

to his clowning? What can we learn from folly in the classroom, and how can we interact with this phenomenon more successfully?

By increasing our understanding of the role and significance of the Class Clown, we may, as educators and counsellors, be able to effect some much needed change in our classrooms. Perhaps the dignity and mystery of the Fool hold an important message for us that can radically alter our appreciation, not just of the Class Clown, but of classroom interactions and learning environments.

The tradition of the Fool has been a long-standing fascination for me. Regardless of the particular manifestation of folly, the Fool issues from an ancient tradition in which some of the more stirring and deeply paradoxical questions about the nature of being, of happiness, and of wisdom arise. To not be aware of the tradition simply because it is disguised by adolescent modernity would be a tragedy. There may be power in the role, and substance to the experience of the Class Clown.

Through a narrative study of one particular Class Clown, I hope to bring together case study research and some themes from the tradition of the Fool. I begin with a research question. What is the role and experience of a Class Clown? Next, some background work, which includes both a review of educational and psychological literature on the Class Clown, as well as an examination of the tradition of the Fool. With this background in mind, I present a case study of a particular Class Clown. A narrative account of his experiences along with some reflection of pertinent themes follows. My study ends with a final chapter in which I discuss implications for further research.

CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

Ernest makes others laugh. He may not do well in school and he may rarely lift a finger to do any work, but he has a gift for mirth. The class had been using the past few weeks preparing for major oral presentations, and, to his credit, Ernest actually did some studying. He had a topic, had given the impression of researching it, and had even turned in his outline. So what if it was late, doodled upon, and crumpled.

The day for Ernest's presentation arrived, and he took the podium. Of course, in spite of coaching to the contrary, he was funny—the subtle humour of facial expression, intonation and pacing. John Cleese could not have done better. And then he flushed, paused and shuffled uncomfortably. Ernest had lost his place and did not have a clue where he was or what he now should do. But, as the colour left his face and the gleam returned to his eye, he looked up apologetically, "I'm sorry, I can't read my Mom's handwriting."

No further learning was attempted that period.

According to a study by Damingo and Purkey (1978), Class Clowns are not rare. Approximately one of every thirty-five students is apt to be a Class Clown—nearly enough for one Clown to be present in every classroom. Despite the prevalence of Class Clowns, however, there is scarcely any study on the topic. "Clowns may be well and active in our schools, but they are absent from our research. A computer search of Eric and Psychological abstracts, using a variety of descriptors, reveals no studies on Class Clowns" (Damingo and Purkey, p. 391). Damingo and Purkey (1978) found no studies on Class Clowns prior to 1978. With the exception of their study, I have found no study since 1978.¹ Accordingly, this review of literature is based upon perceptions of, rather than empirical studies on, Class Clowns. These views portray clowning both negatively and positively, but given the lack of research available on the Class Clown, this review

¹ Bits and pieces of work have been done on the Class Clown in the context of the study of misbehaviour, classroom management, humour in education, or the study of the gifted, but this is the only publication to be identified exclusively on the Class Clown. The only other related title which was found to have the term 'Clown' in it is "The Gifted-Talented-Creative Child May Range From Being Completely Invisible to Being the Class Wit, Punster-Joker-Clown" *Creative Child-Adult Quarterly* 13, 1982, pp.184-6. As indicated in its abstract this brief journal focuses on advise to teachers to react constructively to class jokers by seeing their attention seeking behaviour in the light of their giftedness. As with much of the related research, the focus is on the teacher and management issues rather than on the phenomenon of the Class Clown.

extends coverage to the ambiguous nature of humour and to the ancient tradition of the Fool.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL EXAMINATIONS OF THE CLASS CLOWN

Silence in literature speaks loudly. The absence of significant study is curious given the prevalent nature of the phenomenon of the Class Clown in educational settings. Some insights, direct or indirect, can be found, but it must be stressed that this information is generally incidental to the main interests of these works. A few relevant points have been found in the study of discipline and classroom management, student misbehaviours, small group dynamics, motivation for clowning behaviour, and humour in education. There is a vast amount of literature on discipline and classroom management but there is little to be found on the Class Clown.² Most of the books are written to answer the question, 'How can teachers best manage their classrooms?' Conformity to accepted norms requires the suppression of clowning behaviour in the thinking of much of educational research. Why do these works on behaviour and management problems fail to mention Class Clowns? Is it because clowning is not considered a matter worthy of discipline? Any mention of the Clown, however brief or indirect, almost always portrays him as disruptive and as an impediment to the flow of the educational process.³ This review of relevant literature is organised under four headings: negative perceptions of Class Clowns; positive portrayals of Class Clowns;

² Kounin, Ginott, Cantel, and Glasser are educational theorists who make no mention of Class Clowns (Charles, 1989). Others who fail to mention the Class Clown are: LaMancuas (1969), Galloway (1976), Purkey (1978), Kolesnik (1978), Altmann (1982), Tillman (1982), Chamberlin (1984), Lawrence, Steed, & Young (1984), Watkins & Wagner (1987), Docking (1987), McManus (1989), and Behaviourists like Sabatino, Sabatino & , Harris (1972), Clarizo (1976), O'Leary & O'Leary (1977), Madsen & Madsen (1981), Mann (1983), and Long & Frye (1989).

³ The Class Clown will be referred to as 'he' for the remainder of this paper for the simple reason that the overwhelming majority of Class Clowns are males. In the Domingo and Purkey study, only sixteen percent of the Class Clowns are female while females comprised fifty-seven percent of the total sample (p. 393). No reasons are given for this predominance of male Clowns.

an empirical portrait of Class Clowns; and the ambiguity of clowning and humour. The extent of research committed to understanding this well known personality is interesting but incomplete.

NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF THE CLASS CLOWN

Most of the references cited in this review paint a negative picture of the Class Clown. From a teacher's perspective, clowning behaviour may be, at times, a pleasant reprieve, but it is generally an annoying distraction or a threat to classroom order. Damingo and Purkey write about the unruly and attention seeking aspects of the Class Clown who, although he participates actively in class, many teachers view as ultimately a negative force that needs to be controlled or eliminated (p. 396). Many of the classroom management texts call clowning a disruptive behaviour.⁴ DeBruyn and Larson (1984) suggest that the Class Clown may:

disrupt with wisecracks, do or say anything to be in the spotlight, not know when to stop, respond with a smart aleck response, enjoy the attention of a reprimand, be quite funny and cannot be overlooked, be very bright and/or a very poor student, be popular and gregarious, be physically and mentally active, often appear to be emotionally immature, bother other students, be more of a loner than a leader, clown around rather than do work, be very peer conscious, cover poor performance with clowning, be hyperactive, be very insecure, and often be unprepared for class (p. 54).

Compared with the sketchy portraits of other authors, this is a comprehensive description of the Clown.

As with so much of the writing in the educational field, the authors' focus is on identifying and solving management issues from the teacher's perspective. The assumption that clowning is a problem behaviour that needs to be diminished fits with the tone of much of educational practice, but may in fact be a harmful approach both to the Class Clown and to the dynamic of the whole class experience.

⁴ Hargreaves, Hester, & Mellor (1975), Volkmann (1978, p. 55), Millman, Schaefer, & Cohen (1980, p. 71), DeBruyn and Larson (1984, p.54), Wolfgang & Glickmann (1986, p. 61), Dembro (1988), Cangelosi (1988, p. 20), Charles (1989, p. 5), Dreikurs (Charles 1989, p.86), Jones (Charles 1989, p. 89), and Jones & Jones (1990), are some examples of this perspective.

What causes a student to adopt the role of the Class Clown? Most of what is written on Class Clowns lists their behaviour as springing from either inferiority or attention seeking.⁵ There is a strong connection between the two. Feeling uncertain of his own place or academic ability, the Clown may act in such a way as to draw attention to himself through humour. After all, it is better to be known as the funny man than as the dunce or the social outcast.

What is clear from the review in this section is that most authors have written about the Class Clown negatively. The recommendation is that the Class Clown must be controlled and educated to behave appropriately—just like all the other students.

POSITIVE PORTRAYALS OF THE CLASS CLOWN

Humorist, entertainer, comedian—many teachers will concede that the Class Clown is a gifted wit who causes laughter. Many authors describe the Clown as a creative, intelligent, and active personality who, regardless of his shortcomings, defence mechanisms, or misbehaviours, is an active class participant. Though some of his antics are annoying distractions, he adds vitality to class interactions.

What is a teacher to do with a Class Clown? He cannot be ignored for he is simply too funny or disruptive; he does not suffer ridicule or discipline without there being some aftershock in the class; and he is not easily intimidated. DeBruyn and Larson (1984) suggest that a teacher might simply begin by enjoying the humour. To ignore the Class Clown would be to entertain disaster, for one of his chief problems is knowing when to quit.⁶ Any threatening or isolating of the Class Clown will not succeed and

⁵ Damingo and Purkey (1978, p. 396), Volkmann (1978, p.55), Millman (1980, p. 71), DeBruyn and Larson (1984, p. 55), and Cangelosi (1988, p. 270) each take this perspective.

⁶ If stopping the clowning behaviour is one of the major problems that these students face then the issue of compulsion arises. In what ways do they actually exercise control over their actions and what feelings do they have about being 'overcome' with a desire to act out the part of the Clown? How can they be assisted to turn the humour on and off, for the humour itself is not necessarily problematic so much as the incessant and uncontrollable jesting. Sprick (1985) wonders whether the entertaining posture of the Clown becomes a non-thinking habit (p. 165).

may stem from an inaccurate assumption that clowning is an assault on the teacher. The failure to see humour as a positive human characteristic can increase the frustration of the teacher and invite continued clowning. An alliance needs to be built through the use of the teacher's own sense of humour so that the Class Clown can be integrated into the class to make it more interesting. This sort of 'if you cannot beat them, join them' approach has merit, for it acknowledges that the Class Clown plays a powerful role in the classroom. By prizing the gift of humour in the educational process and working with a creative entertainer, learning might even be enhanced—it is far better to embrace humour than lose jousting matches with these jesters and their disarming wit!

Satir (1991) identifies "Being Irrelevant" as a survival stance that children adopt. This posture is often confused by adults with amusing or clowning behaviour. Her insights bear some reflection. If the 'Irrelevant's' behaviour is incorrectly seen as clowning, then he may, like the Class Clown, be misunderstood and labelled as a misbehaviour problem. It may well be that the negative perception of the Class Clown by educational writers amounts to misinterpretation of the 'Irrelevant' stance.

The 'Irrelevant' has to be constantly busy in order to distract others (and even themselves) from deeper issues. Often labelled by society as "spontaneous and cheerful," the 'Irrelevant' is enjoyed because he breaks tension or despair. Satir portrays a Clown who is an humorist, but one who whirls in order to distract. This perspective is significant. The Class Clown is not a behaviour problem who destroys the teacher's classroom control, but a person caught in the cyclone of his own distraction. The Clown may be looking for help in his jesting, and, more than a laugh or a rebuke, he may need an empathic connection.

Another concept that Satir develops is the cosmic joke which is "a moment when we see the ridiculous or humorous aspect in what we had taken so seriously, namely ourselves in a situation we approached with a life-or-death attitude"

(p. 110).⁷ Through the perspective of self reflection we are able to see ourselves “as caricatures of absurdity,” and we are able to laugh (p. 202). The Class Clown, standing in the tradition of the Fool, may have insight into the cosmic joke. He may have the wisdom to see, even in his few short years, his own absurdity as well as others.’

AN EMPIRICAL PORTRAIT OF CLASS CLOWNS

Amazingly, there is only one identified study written specifically on the Class Clown. Published in 1978, Damingo and Purkey’s study is a quantitative examination of this student. From a sample of 3500 Florida Grade 8 students, the authors identify ninety-six Class Clowns. They are compared with 237 of their classmates on four different scales which measured teacher ratings, student self esteem and school attitudes.⁸

Damingo and Purkey find Class Clowns to be predominantly males who report lower attitudes towards principals and teachers than do their peers. However they perceive themselves positively in that they usually view themselves as being vocal and active participants who exercise leadership among their peers. They see themselves as intelligent, creative, independent, and non-conforming. Teachers tend to view Class Clowns as higher in participation, assertiveness, unruliness, attention-seeking, cheerfulness, and leadership but lower in achievement than their less-witty fellow students.⁹ Peers see Class Clowns as well-accepted influential leaders (pp. 391-396).

⁷ The theme of the cosmic joke has been elucidated by others. Even Herman Melville wrote in 1851, “There are certain queer times and occasions in this strange mixed affair we call life when a man takes this whole universe for a vast practical joke, though the wit thereof he dimly discerns, and more suspects that the joke is at nobody’s expense but his own” (from Lewis, 1989).

⁸ The method and results of these tests are of some interest as they relate to the researchers’ purpose of “exploring the self perceptions and teacher perceptions of students identified by classmates as Class Clowns” (p. 392). The measures used were the Florida Key (an inferred self concept scale), the Classroom Behaviour Inventory, the Student School Attitude Scale and the Self Esteem Inventory.

⁹ This idea is supported by the ‘Observer Wit Tally’ developed by Goodchilds, which is a quantitative measure of humorous acts that demonstrates that wits are more active participants than non-wits (Goldstein & McGhee, 1972, p. 254).

The findings indicate a close fit between the Class Clowns' perception of themselves and the descriptions reported by their teachers and peers.

Two pictures of the Grade 8 Class Clown are painted in this study. On the one hand, he (and he is seven times more likely to be a male) is a dynamic personality in the classroom. He is creative, intelligent, vocal, and active. He commands respect from his peers, but his behaviour is usually perceived as attention-getting. His wit and cheerfulness may not compensate for his lower accomplishment in his studies, but his assertive and non-conforming presence can not go unnoticed. On the other, he may also appear to be somewhat of an isolate who uses others in his pursuit of laughter.

The conclusions of the Damingo and Purkey study include only a partial explanation of clowning behaviours. The authors contend that "the attention seeking and unruly aspects of clowning behaviour may result from adolescent techniques used to make classmates laugh" (p. 396). This bears some reflection. Could it be that the apparent connection between clowning and attention-seeking has more to do with the social dynamics of groups than with the internal processes of the person?

Another important point of discussion raised by Damingo and Purkey focuses on teacher perception of clowning and humour. They note that "some teachers may fail to distinguish between comic and hostile humour and classify it all as disruptive without seeing positive ways in which to use humour and meet their own objectives" (p. 396).

The authors believe that further research on Class Clowns is warranted. The vigour of their adolescent humour can make a positive contribution in the classroom. It is for educators to understand the dynamic place of the Class Clown.

THE AMBIGUITY OF CLOWNING AND HUMOUR

Humour holds high office in our lives. Indeed, we need to carefully cultivate the place of humour in our centres of learning, and esteem the comic in our midst, for he

dispenses both mirth and uncertainty. The force of this need is ably described by Fisher and Fisher (1981):

The comic, in opening wide the door to surprise, intimates that anything is possible. He dramatises the likelihood of the unpredictable. He conveys the view that we are surrounded by forces that are bound to lead us into unexpected trajectories.... He knows that inevitably the individual will be starkly surprised by the course of events. Comedy prepares the audience for novel intrusion by showing that customary and usually dependable rules are illusory.... In effect, the comic prepares his audience for chaos and half convinces it that chaos can be fun." (as quoted in Lewis, 1989, p. 89)

All humorists fill this office, and the Class Clown may play as significant a role in his context as professional comedians do in society at large. It may be that, as Damingo and Purkey believe, "because of the importance of humour in social systems, the study of class clowns may add to an understanding of the role of humour in the educational process" (p. 398).

Sprick (1985) cites four possible motives for clowning. The first is simply that the person is genuinely funny and that he uses his wit and clever abilities in the exercise of humour. In this sense the Clown acts not from some weakness or inadequacy but from a strength of person that is positive albeit distracting. The second possible motivation is boredom. School is simply too easy for the Clown and so he fills his time with humour. If this is the case then perhaps he is to be commended for choosing the path of laughter rather than another manifestation of boredom such as violence or vandalism. Sprick's third idea is that the Clown engages in an intellectual competition with the teacher. Related to this idea is the fourth possible motivation in which the Class Clown openly defies the authority of the teacher and seeks to manipulate or control the classroom (p. 165). Sprick's ideas are not based on any empirical research, yet they carry the weight of reflection. A teacher's theoretical assumptions may make her tend to draw erroneous conclusions about the motivations behind a Class Clown's behaviour. The Clown, in his role as humorist, is ambiguous and not easily understood.

The fool can fill a number of specific roles in the group. He represents the rejected

values, lost causes, fiascos, and incompetencies of the larger gathering. His lowly yet valued position in the office of scapegoat and butt of humour gives him licence to depart from the group's accepted social norms with a unique impunity. In so doing, he may end up actually supporting the sense of propriety that he violates. The process of "ascribing the role of fool to people as a means of enforcing conformity, pressing for social adjustment, or simply eliminating the deviant" is a fascinating concept (Goldstein and McGhee, p. 106). The humour of the fool, then, has a social function that needs further exploration.

Within any small group someone will play the fool. This is as true for school settings as it is for less formal gatherings. Insights into the place of humour in small groups are relevant to the study of clowning. The Class Clown may take the position of entertainer in the group but he does so by virtue of the role he has as a specific social type. He may provide a great side show that steals the spotlight from the teacher or he may become the butt of all jokes.¹⁰ The group dynamic requires that someone play the part of the Fool, and someone will don the cap and bells and take his place.

Lewis (1989) concludes that the root of all humour is incongruity. He is convinced that "humorous experiences originate in the perception of an incongruity: a pairing of ideas, images or events that are not ordinarily joined and do not seem to make sense" and that in most cases humour appreciation is based on a two-stage process of first perceiving an incongruity and then resolving it (pp. 8-9). Lewis's definition of the incongruous is similar to Willeford's (1969) description of boundaries and chaos, and it is the gift of the humorist to be able to probe the ambiguity of those places. Humour is therefore, for Lewis, also a forceful learning tool, for it is in deviation from the norm

¹⁰ This role is described by Klapp in "The Fool as a Social Type (Goldstein and McGhee, 1972, p.106). The fool has licence, yet is an example of the prohibition against violation of the norms and expectations of both the group and the authority figure who leads the group. The fool is a rebel, outcast, prophet, and whipping boy, and his office is a well defined social phenomenon.

and the expected that humour delights.¹¹ Jokes and humour may also be based upon a certain degree of misdirection. The jokester is a perpetrator of anarchy and misrule. One of the functions of humour is to disrupt the comfortable equilibrium. There is power in this sort of disruption, and in the hands of a skillful Class Clown it cannot be ignored.

Taking a different stance, Goldstein and McGhee (1972) contend that, at the heart of the matter, humour is related to the truth of the human condition. Laughter can easily reveal balance and health as much as mental conflict or worry since humour is an expression of both pain and pleasure (pp. 27-28). What Goldstein and McGhee offer is a paradigm for looking into the various aspects of humour, both personal and interpersonal. Their focus is predominantly cognitive, for humour, writes McGhee, requires “a high level of cognitive mastery over the environment coincident with the acquisition of conceptual thought capabilities” (p. 78). Agreeing with Damingo and Purkey, he argues that one must be bright and perceptive to be funny.

Bennett (1991), in examining oral traditions and storytellers, concludes that all good humour is ultimately grounded in folklore traditions. The moral lesson from a “Humorous Repertoire of an Asian Storyteller” may serve to make this point.

Once a schoolmaster was teaching his class of eleven-year olds. He was in the middle of explaining to his children some oral arithmetic. An inspector suddenly walked into his classroom without any warning. The teacher felt a bit nervous about his sudden arrival. And the inspector asked the teacher what he was teaching. The teacher said, ‘At this hour of the day, we do oral arithmetic.’ The inspector said, in official mood, ‘Do they learn, do they understand what you are teaching?’ The teacher replied, ‘Yes!’ in a very firm voice. ‘You can test them if you like.’ The inspector said, ‘Very well, I will.’ Then the inspector addressed the class and said to them, ‘Children, listen very carefully! I am going to give you an oral test.’ All the children were very quiet and serious. And then the inspector began to say, ‘I bought a pair of shoes for twenty rupees, a shirt for twenty-five rupees, a suit for eighty rupees, and a tie for five rupees. Have you all got it?’ All the children replied, ‘Yes, Sir!’ The he asked, ‘Now tell me my age.’ All the children were very quiet, but one boy raised his hand. He said, ‘Forty years, Sir.’ The inspector exclaimed, ‘Very good! But how did you know? It wasn’t in the given question.’ The

¹¹ Lewis identifies a study by Zillman & Bryant (1983) “Uses and Effects of Humour in Educational Ventures” in Handbook of Humour Research 2 where it is believed that humour can be used very effectively in helping children both to concentrate and acquire knowledge (p. 73). Another aspect of the role of humour is that it is an essential component of growth. For it is in the midst of confusion, paradox and uncertainty that real growth occurs.

boy said, 'It was very simple, because I know somebody around me there.' The inspector said, 'Could you explain what and where? How do you know?' The boy said, 'There is a man down the road where I live. He is twenty. And he is half-mad. From there I guessed you must be forty.' All the boys burst into laughter and the inspector left in haste (p. 63).

Unperturbed by misplaced authority, the Class Clown seizes an opportunity either with the naivete of the natural innocent or the insight of the wizened fool. In either case he champions right against might and disarms an oppressive bureaucrat with humour. That this story is found in the literature on humour demonstrates further the absence of direct research on the Class Clown.

Perhaps Stephen Leacock (1937) ought to be given the final word here.

The people who sit down to write books on humour are scientific people, philosophical analysers who feel that they must make something serious, something real out of it, and show us that humour can, in the proper hands, be made as dull and as respectable as philology or epistemology (p. 15).

Leacock defines humour simply as "the kindly contemplation of the incongruities of life, and the artistic expression thereof" (p. 11).¹² Humour, ultimately is about incongruity in life. Humour provides relief from pain and "consolation against the shortcomings of life" and it is therefore laced with what Leacock calls the "ingenuity of the juxtaposition of the incongruous" (p. 102). It is this shifting and combining of unrelated ideas together that provides the opportunity for viewing a situation, idea or character from a new perspective. To be able to laugh at ineptitude, distress, or temporary misfortune—the inconvenient and chaotic realities of life—is to have the wisdom of humour.

Since humour is a creative art form, Leacock prizes it highly. Self contained, metaphorical, and rich in comparison, humour "in its highest reach touches the sublime; humour in its highest reach mingles with pathos: it voices sorrow for our human lot and reconciliation with it" (p. 232). And so, "A simpleton who heard that

¹² Incongruity can be found in puns for "however critics may take offence, a double meaning has double sense" (Leacock, p. 41). It is also found in the expression of ideas. Interchanges like the following are easily found. "Is this Wemsely?" "No, Thursday" "Yes I am. Let's have a drink!" (p. 53).

parrots live for 200 years bought one to see if it was true” (p. 214).

Humour has a powerful place in peoples’ lives and gathering places. The study of humour provides part of a background for an examination of the Class Clown. Wit, mirth and laughter, inextricably linked to this person and to the educational process, may have a variety of causes and consequences. What is certain is that, like the Class Clown himself, humour demands a response, and it hopes (with a wry smile) to be graced with laughter in reply.

THE NEED FOR MORE STUDY OF CLASS CLOWNS

Not only have Class Clowns not been studied, but “with few exceptions humour among adolescents has remained unexplored” (DaMingo and Purkey, p. 392). Humour is unquestionably important in social systems, and it may be that the study of Class Clowns “may add to an understanding of the role of humour in the educational process” (Millman, Schaefer & Cohen, p. 78). Most of the study of witty events deals with everything but the central figure—the witty person. This lamentable fact fits with the lack of research on the Class Clown who is, if nothing else, a sort of wit, half or otherwise.

Damingo and Purkey believe that further research of the Class Clown is warranted. The vigour of his adolescent humour and presence can work as a positive contribution in the classroom. It is for educators to understand the dynamic place of the Class Clown and to enhance the positive aspects of clowning. For as witty adults they become (according to Damingo and Purkey) people of high self esteem and achievement—“professional comedians are frequently our most perceptive social commentators. Perhaps the same may be true of Class Clowns” (p. 397). In this role of commentator, the Class Clown stands in the literary tradition of the Fool.

THE TRADITION OF THE FOOL

The message of traditional folly is all but lost to us moderns. For centuries, the Fool has held high office in carnival, court, and theatre as the misunderstood champion of disorder and mirth. Whether through defect or design, his folly speaks ambiguously about authority, chaos, and truth. In understanding the Fool's message we may be able to see the Class Clown in a new light. The extent of the research on the Fool indicates that he plays significantly in both the history and literature of ancient and mediaeval worlds.¹³ In this chapter, the review of pertinent research focuses on four themes: the Fool as an ambiguous character, the Fool as the perturber of order, the Fool as a detached observer, and the Fool and modern times.

THE FOOL AS AN AMBIGUOUS CHARACTER

Although readily identified, the Fool is an ambiguous character who may be more than a purveyor of nonsense. The Fool is, by his very nature, made of a number of opposing qualities. He is the moron who is the prophet, and the outcast who is the mascot. Like a pair of bellows ('follis' is the Latin for windbag), the Fool may chatter nonsense, or he may prove to be unpredictably sage-like (Lukens, p. 77). Wearing a mask of folly, the Fool may lack judgment, he might guard truth, and he may hold a mirror to the non-fool world.

Who is the fool? What is clear from much of the literature is that we are all fools. Pascal's states that, "man is so necessarily foolish that not to be a fool is merely a varied

¹³ It is not possible to give proper due to the scope and depth of study of the traditional Fool in this context. A thorough examination would necessarily include research of folklore fools across the globe and through the ages in which chronological developments in both historical and literary fools are studied. It is hoped that the portraits in this section will provide sufficient background for furthering an understanding of the Class Clown.

freak of folly.”¹⁴ Part of the reality of being a fool in this sense is the inability to see one’s own folly and either laugh or pursue a different journey.

Who then is the Fool? Though diverse, Fools have much in common. Willeford (1969) sees the Fool as a sort of flamboyant eccentric who commands our attention even if he does nothing at all (p. 4). The Fool exists on the fringe of social convention, and thus has a licence which frees him from responsibility and consequence. In Willeford’s thinking, “most of the people we recognize as fools experience the world and act within it in ways that indicate a fundamental abnormality, real or pretended, of psychic functioning” (p. 22). Many authors classify the Fool under a variety of headings, but his ambiguous nature does not lend itself to these impositions.¹⁵ Three general descriptions, however, that seem to capture the Fool even in his ambiguity are the Natural Fool, the Social Fool and the Wise Fool.

The abnormality of the Natural Fool is one of his most striking characteristics. He appears to lack something in terms of appearance, intellect or will, but whether he is viewed as an earthly fool, a simpleton, or a deformed creature, the Natural Fool exploits his weaknesses to his advantage (Welsford, p. 1).

Sometimes the Natural Fool is called an Earthly Fool. He is the 'Fool Proper' in the sense that his folly is ultimately of a moral nature. Bent on impiety, his vice is evident and virtue absent. A brief glance at Psalm 14, The Praise of Folly by Erasmus, or The Ship of Fools by Brant confirms the portrait of this type of Fool as a denier of God who uses his foolishness to cloak immorality. For ancient and mediaeval thinkers, this folly, which is generally contrasted with godliness, is significant in light of its eternal

¹⁴ The universality of folly is an old and respected idea. Socrates tells us that the wise man knows himself to be a fool; Ecclesiastes 1:15 states that “The number of fools is infinite;” and T.S. Eliot reminds us that “it will do you no harm to find yourself ridiculous, resign yourself to the fool that you are” (“The Cocktail Party”). The distinction between fools and Fools serves to identify the difference between common and specific associations with folly. The Fool in this paper is the one who stands apart by virtue of the motley nature of his presence above the common folly of the rest of us.

¹⁵ Welsford (1966), Willeford (1969), Lukens (1977), Zijderveld (1982), and Guinness (1983) discriminate between natural and artificial fools.

consequences.

The Natural Fool may also be deformed, simple, or deranged. Always a spectacle, he may be a clod who lacks judgment, or an idiot without moral or social sense. To come across a Fool is to encounter some sort of madman or imbecile who embodies chaos. The strange attraction and amusement of these characters can be traced as far back as the fifth century B.C. to Danga, the pharaoh's dwarf-fool (Goldsmith, p. 55). The Natural Fool may have a hideous attraction, but his folly stems from a deficiency that runs deeper than his misshapen figure or curious behaviour.

Being professionally mad, the Social Fool is a performer. Whether he is identified as a Buffoon, Carnival Clown, Court Jester, or Comic, the Social Fool, since his appearance in ancient times, has survived through his impersonation of the insensibility of the Natural Fool. The artificial nature of his folly is itself ambiguous because it is not easy to know whether, behind all his acting, he is not a Natural Fool after all. The court jester,

the figure in the eared hood and motley coat, because of some real or assumed defect of mind, was maintained by a person of rank for amusement. His characteristic behaviour, as entertainer, licensed critic and ironical observer of folly, derived from various sources. He had the gaiety of the jongleur, the candour of the ancient poets and the ironical perception of a Socrates (Goldsmith, p. vii).

Exactly who the Fool is, and what he is about, is uncertain, but to be successful, the Social Fool requires talent and insight. As Viola says of Touchstone in As You Like It, "This fellow is wise enough to play the fool, and to do that well craves a kind of wit" (III.i.66).

The Wise Fool may not act or speak much differently from the Natural or Social Fool and yet he is blessed with insight into higher truths. Because of this association, he fits with the ancient traditions of the saint, the mage, and the Shaman.¹⁶ The Wise Fool speaks truth, yet his truth-telling is not necessarily central to his being and may be

¹⁶ Willeford (1969) and Williams (1979) discuss Jung's archetypes which are related to the Fool. The trickster, wise old man, and shaman fit with the detachment, deliberate obscurity, and hidden wisdom of the Fool, the poet and the clairvoyant.

interchangeable with freakishness, madness or stupidity in both his action and expression (Willeford, p. 26).

The ambiguity of the Fool is a complex matter. Even these three types of Fools—the Natural, Social and Wise—are not easily distinguished. The difficulty stems from the fact that the Fool is often 'both ... and' rather than 'either ... or.' He lacks judgment and yet guards truth; his foolish behaviour may always be the feigned madness of the wise (Lukens, p. 138).

The Fool wears a mask and never completely removes it.¹⁷ Appearance, words, and behaviour can each serve to this end. It is difficult to accuse a Fool of meaning anything, for his foolish words may be nothing more than the babbling of the idiot or a disguise which reveals hidden truth to some but appears to be senseless chatter to others.

According to Goldsmith (1958), the Fool is essentially a truthful person. "If he disguised his true wits under a fool's cap and bells, he did so in order that he might speak the truth more freely and more fearlessly" (p. 11). Arden (1980) identifies three facets of the Fool: he is lowly, wrong-headed, and basically a truth-teller (p. 163). But it is difficult to know how seriously a fool is meant to be taken. The Fool's insight is generally thinly disguised as a form of insanity or innocence. As such, he is set apart as a divine madman or a kind of seer who has the freedom to speak and behave capriciously as the "all-licensed fool" (Goldsmith, p. 6). The privilege and power of speaking the truth are vital to the Fool. In a very real sense he represents consciousness in the midst of nonsense and he draws on the mythical, sacred, and ritualistic symbols of the past (Welsford, p. 97).

Another aspect of the ambiguity of the Fool is that he is much like a mirror. A 1619 epitaph to the fool Miesko recommends that people should

treat such creatures kindly and use them as looking glasses for their own weaknesses and

¹⁷ According to Arden (1980), 'mask' comes from the Arabic 'maskharah' which means a buffoon. The mask of folly allows the Fool to speak the truth (p. 67).

emphasise the idea that much could be learned from the paradoxical combination of natural folly with spiritual wisdom which was to be found in Miesko (Welsford, p. 157).

The Fool is, for Willeford (1969), a double who is both the image of ourselves and also of his own divided self. We thus come to expect a confusion in his utterances that calls into question the normal order (p. 49). Meaning and meaninglessness are woven together in the Fool's pointed nonsense, and the confusion that this causes is central to his person.

An amusing story, retold by Dorson (1975), of the thirteenth century sham wise man Nasreddin Hodja demonstrates the ambiguity of the Fool. Tamerlane, a cruel sultan, is invading the region of Anatolia. The people of the town beg the Hodja to use his resourcefulness against the invaders so that they might remain safe against the oncoming armies of Tamerlane.

Hodja had the people construct a camel skin tent outside of the town gates in which he waited wearing nothing but a bright orange turban. When the advanced guard of Tamerlane's army arrived and looked inside the tent their eyes fell upon the Hodja. He told them that he was the 'God of Earth' in a solemn voice. The soldiers were uncertain but decided to report the matter to their master. Tamerlane arrived and a dialogue ensued.

'You, my good fellow, are the God of Earth. Is that not right?

'That's right, your Excellency.'

'Well since you are the God of Earth, I order you to produce a miracle. If you can't, I'll have your head cut off for insolence.'

Then turning to his blind daughter, Tamerlane spelled out the miracle to be performed. 'I order you to open her eyes.'

Oh, your excellency, I said that I am the God of Earth. And indeed I am. But in this capacity I also have an agreement with the God of the Sky. You see, he is responsible for the upper part of the body, and I for the lower. To open your daughter's eyes would be a violation of our agreement. But if your daughter has anything that needs opening below her waist, I would be most willing to render my humble services' (p. 237).

Wise, artificial, or natural, this Fool stands a sultan on his ear and turns an army on its heels. Though ambiguous, his folly is powerful and his insight sublime.

The ambiguous nature of the Fool implies that he cannot be easily understood. Because he might be more or less than he appears to be, the Fool is enigmatic, and as such he brings, along with a trail of laughter, the power to disturb much of what we

take for granted as being normal.

THE FOOL AS PERTURBER OF ORDER

By his wit and satire, the Fool mocks authority and convention, but he also reminds us of the pretension of order and the proximity of chaos. Over and over again, the Fool undermines conventional perceptions of the world and power. As such, he breaks rules, criticises authority, celebrates the Feast of Fools, and stands at the boundary between order and chaos.

There are dozens of examples of Fools who break convention and challenge authority. Marcolf and Eulenspiegel (spiteful mediaeval tricksters), Buchner's Valerio, and Shakespeare's Falstaff each represent the force of folly at work in shaking social order.¹⁸ Falstaff appears as a "magnificent irrelevance" who is "preternally wise with a wisdom which contrasts strongly with the values of the so-called great and honourable" (Marshall, pp. 3, 26). As such, he leads the attack on conventional knowledge and power-seeking, and is ultimately rejected—even though he is an archetypal learned fool who restores sanity and brings health to those around him. As a perturber of order, the Fool holds a power far beyond his seeming folly, for as Williams (1979) believes, "one thing is clear: the fool, whoever and wherever he is, is not merely foolish, and the trickster does more than tricks" (p. 1). As a trickster he has much success in getting the better of those in authority.

Fools, especially court jesters and stage fools, have built reputations on their witty attacks on authority figures. Robert Armin, Shakespeare's actor-fool, makes an account of Will Somers, Henry VIII's well known jester.

In he [Somers] comes, and finding the king at dinner and the cardinal by attending, to disgrace him that he never loved, Harry, sayes he, lend me ten pound. What to do? sayes the king. To pay three or four of the cardinal's creditors, quoth he, to whom my word is past, and they come now for the money. That thou shalt, Will, quoth he. Creditors of

¹⁸ Goldsmith (1958), Welsford (1966), Willeford (1969), Lukens (1977), Williams (1979), Zijerdveld (1982), Marshall (1989), and Bennett (1991) all hold the view of the Fool as disturber of order.

mine? sayes the cardinal: Ile give your grace my head if any man can justly aske me a penny. No! sayes Will. Lend me ten pounds; if I pay it not where thou owest it, Ile give thee twenty for it. Doe so, sayes the king. That I will, my liege, sayes the cardinal, though I know I owe none. With that he lends Will ten pounds. Will goes to the gate, distributes it to the poore, and brought the empty bag. There is thy bag againe, sayes he: they creditors are satisfied, and my word out of danger.

Who received? says the king; the brewer or the baker? Neyther (Harry), sayes Will Somers. But, Cardinal, answer me one thing: to who dost thou owe thy soule? To God, quoth he. To whom thy wealth? To the poore, sayes he. Take thy forfeit (Harry) sayes the foole; open confession, open penance: his head is thine, for to the poore at the gate I paid his debt, which he yeelds is due.... The king laught at the jest, and so did the cardinal for a shew, but it grieved him to jest away ten pounds so (Goldsmith, p. 36).

Using his license to the full, Somers, without fear of reprisal, ably demonstrates his ability to challenge a figure of spiritual authority.¹⁹ The power of the Fool is built upon his “being an unstable and strange element in an otherwise harmonious and closely knit society” (Savard, p. 28). The Fool thus is at liberty to satirise and undermine both the structures and offices which hold society together as well as attack the naked power that lies beneath any office of authority.

Fools may lead others away from rebellion against social order. The Lord of Misrule, as the central figure in the mediaeval Feast of Fools and its ancient counterpart, the Feast of Saturnalia, has a special though dangerous place in the community.

Welsford (1966) states that

there is nothing essentially immoral or blasphemous or rebellious about clownage. On the contrary, it may easily act as a preservative by providing a corrective to the pretentious vanity of officialdom, a safety-valve for unruliness, a wholesome nourishment to the sense of secret spiritual independence of that which would otherwise be intolerable tyranny of circumstances (p.319).

What these past societies understood is that it is better to allow what cannot be controlled or ignored to have measured expression rather than free reign.

In a very real sense Fools, in their lives, Societies, and Festivals, as well as stage, carnival, and court performances, stand as doorkeepers to chaos. Willeford (1969) develops this idea in great detail and concludes that the Fool “maintains the

¹⁹ Other notable examples of Fools who challenge the social order are found in The Praise of Folly by Erasmus (1979), Don Quixote by Cervantes (1981), The Idiot by Dostoevsky (1984), Ivanhoe by Scott, and The Good Soldier Svejk by Hasek (1973).

relationship between the ordered world and the chaos excluded from it” (p. 26).

Transgressing the bounds of propriety in his failure to cope with convention, the Fool does not suffer the usual loss of dignity associated with social failure. Indeed, the Fool, “in his connection with nothingness may jar us into an awareness of how far away we are from reality, how much we are like the Fool of one of the conventional Tarot packs who, lost in his dreams, is about to step over a precipice” (Willeford, p. 62). In either his cunning wit or innocent stupidity, the Fool constantly crosses the boundary between chaos and order and implicitly perturbs our sense of reason and convention. It is said that the Clown Bebe, when found sobbing inconsolably while dragging a salted herring behind him, answered his fellow clowns that, while taking it out for a walk, the herring had fallen into a puddle and drowned (Willeford, p. 133). Here is delusion that bewilders the intellect and a folly that disturbs our understanding of order and propriety.

THE FOOL AS DETACHED OBSERVER

Standing at the fringe, the Fool may be a disinterested truth-teller whose apparent madness masks his breadth of perspective. The Fool is a detached observer who lives at the boundary not just between order and chaos but also between what is and what appears to be, and is often confused with the silly and deluded.

Shakespeare has given us splendid Fools who typify the idea of detachment.

Goldsmith (1958), in commenting on Feste and Lear’s Fool concludes that,

the fool in Shakespeare’s comic fable and the fool in his tragic fable have several things in common. Both stand a little aside of the main action of their plays, but both serve important dramatic functions. Lear’s Fool intensifies the pathos and at the same time humanises the tragedy for us. In a like manner, Feste tempers the comedy of Twelfth Night, simultaneously rendering it gayer and more thoughtful. And in the usual blending of detachment with sympathy, of irony and pity, the wise fool finds his reason for being (p. 104).

It is in the detached observer that the comic spirit finds a home. By being on the outside, the Fool has more freedom to serve as a commentator, to provide counterpoint, and to give his humour free reign. He is the “all-licensed critic who sees and speaks the real truth about the people about him” as only a disinterested truth teller can (Welsford, p. 255).

Living at the boundary, the Fool is connected to the magical, illusory, unconscious, primitive, and supernatural in life. He is able to play games therefore with our contemporary assumptions about reality and he violates the precepts, norms and values that are so dear to our sense of order. He demonstrates by his contrary nature that rationality and normalcy as prescribed by society are not the only ways of living in the world. “One kind of fool refuses to live in the present reality, with its calculated pretence of reason and order” seeing in life either nothingness or a cosmic joke; the other also refuses to live in the present reality, but senses a deeper reality of divine order at work (Zijderveld, p. 194). Both unmask the pretensions of normal life. The Fool perceives that the world has more to do with seeming than with seeing, for too much of our world is actually unknown and irrational. To take the imposition of order too seriously is the height of folly, and so the Fool, standing aside, sees through the illusion. “At the border of consciousness the fool has seen and heard the transcendent value that is only available to fools” (Willeford, p. 137). He cannot make it intelligible to us partly through his own limitations and partly because of the inaccessibility of that which is beyond us.

It is the Holy Fool who has the strongest connection with a higher power. “Sage folly alone can save us from the raving lunacy of the princes of this age” (Savard, p. xi). These Fools are happily misunderstood as simpletons and madmen. Isaiah walked naked as a warning to his frantic times; St. Paul considered himself a fool for Christ’s sake; and St. Anthony roamed the desert as a saintly fool. Along with myriad others,

they willingly adopt the mantle of lunacy to cover their deep sanctity. The Wise Fool alone understands that folly—the genuine article—is to mistake the true nature of things and the means of attaining our true desires. For him, the answer to life lies beyond the strictures of social convention. Guinness (1983) identifies this character as the Third Fool.²⁰ He is the Fool Maker whose great strength is turning things around. In his jesting he reveals new meanings through his punch lines, and in his masquerading he overcomes the oppression of freedom and truth. Only the Third Fool knows that the “last laugh and the ultimate truth belong together,” for he alone is “wise enough to play the fool. For when the wise are foolish, the wealthy poor and the godly worldly, it takes a special folly to subvert such foolishness, a special wit to teach true wisdom” (p. 231).

THE FOOL AND MODERN TIMES

The Fool prospered in times when the sacred, the spiritual and the magical had not been put aside by rationalism. Marshall (1989) concludes that “the impoverishment of symbolism in our time, our rejection and suppression of the towering figures of myth and fable, have reduced our ability to understand, enjoy, endure and even feel life to the point where experience has become a colourless waste” (p. 198). He is not alone in his conviction. Zijderveld (1982) claims that “rational man is too one-dimensional to be able to really understand the fool” (p.31). Going further, Welsford (1966) states that the Fool “has no place in the coming of the modern age in a world increasingly dominated by the notions of the puritan, the scientist, and the captain of industry; for strange as it may seem, the fool in cap and bells can only flourish among people who have

²⁰ The First Fool is the Fool Proper who is morally stupid; the Second is the Fool Bearer who is called a fool by the world but is not worsted by the experience. His resilience is based on “the discrepancy between the apparent and the real, between the way things are and the way things will be. Knowing this discrepancy, the fool bearer is always able to bounce back, and his laughter is neither bitter nor escapist but an expression of faith” (Guinness, p. 229).

sacraments, who value symbols as well as tools” (p. 195). The Fool belonged to the mediaeval world as the voice of counterpoint. However, with the loss of its original vigour and pith, traditional folly has also lost its magical and mythical aura.

Yet the Fool continues in his role even to our day in one form or another. He has slowly become less of a critic and more of a showman (Billington, p. 79). As a representative of counter reality, the traditional Fool holds a mocking mirror to society that “does not only reflect, as a profound mimesis, the animalistic, pre-civilized, regressive features of mankind, but presents at the very same time a disturbed and fragmented picture of modernity” (Zijderveld, p. 89). Though the Fool may have lost his voice, he has much to say to us moderns.

The Function of the Fool

My God who would choose to be professionally mad in this age?
Who needs the fool?
Take away the fool and let the senile sages drool
Over their moral porridge in the clinics of the emperor.
Yet it was a profession, practised with placid guile
Detachment, candour, self-respect:
The fool brought to it what he knew of truth and amity.
One of an extinguishable species in a resilient genus
He understood how never to overplay and then how not
To underrate the fever of life in legs that will rot
And guessed that there was no true cuckold but calamity.

(Evans, 1977)

CONCLUSION

With the exception of the work of Damingo and Purkey (1978), references to the Class Clown are either brief or absent in current educational and psychological literature. No detailed study of this character has yet been attempted. Some of the authors have provided solid questions and salient insights into the Class Clown but they have not offered any thing more either quantitative or phenomenological examination. There is agreement that the Class Clown has a dynamic presence in

schools and that more research is required to understand his motivation and role more fully. What has been written is interesting but incomplete. The trail ends here.

Whether the Class Clown has been overlooked because he has been classified as an annoying behavioural problem or because he is so prevalent remains a mystery. What is evident is that the Class Clown will continue to bring mirth and disruption into schools and that teachers and classmates will follow along with laughter in his train. The time for further study of the Class Clown is upon us.

According to Welsford (1966), “there is a tradition that the cap and bells sometimes cover a head not altogether devoid of common sense”(p. xi). An ambiguous character who perturbs social order as a detached observer, the Fool has survived the centuries of change essentially intact. In his myriad forms he has succeeded to confound and surprise those around him even as they laugh. Though he may be merely an innocent imbecile he might also be a cunning trickster or a wizened saint. Regardless, he has always had a mystique of truth and transcendence about him and he cannot be ignored. The Fool is still alive, though not highly regarded, in modern times, and it may be that the Class Clown, himself an ambiguous perturber, may have more connection with the traditional Fool than we might first suppose.

APPROACH TO THE STUDY

It's 11:23 a.m. and I'm on my way to the main office with an armload of paperwork. Nathaniel is sitting in the hallway outside of his Grade 9 Math class. This is not particularly unusual apart from the fact that he is half-way through the lunch he has just purchased in the cafeteria. I can't resist ferreting out the story.

“Howdy, good lunch?”

“Not bad.” (munch munch)

“So Nathaniel, why are you eating in the hallway during your Math class, lunch doesn't start for another three-quarters of an hour?”

“Mr. K. kicked me out. I was sitting here feeling hungry and thinking about how long the lineup will be in the caf, so I went and bought my lunch early.” (munch munch)

"Gee, it must be nice owning the universe!"

"Oh, I don't own it, I'm just renting it for the week." (munch munch)

Just renting it for the week—a Class Clown is pretty hard to miss. Granted, there is not much to be found on the Class Clown in educational literature, but everyone has sat in classrooms where he works his magic. But what is the nature and function of the Class Clown? It is apparent that he is an ambiguous character, that the issues surrounding him are complex, and that a holistic study of the Clown is needed.

No two fools are the same and yet they are readily identified for their folly. The Class Clown appears to be a species of student with great variety. In motivation, appearance, and performance he may vary greatly; both his affect and effect may be identified along a wide continuum. He may be a natural humorist who loves to laugh, or he may be acting from a sense of inadequacy, or a desire for attention. He may be an intelligent and quick-witted comedian, or a bizarre simpleton whose mirth, though accidental, is nevertheless delightful. He may be cynical and malicious, or he may be carefree and benevolent. He might lead a rebellion for the sake of disruption, or challenge the inappropriate use of authority. He may or may not be able to exercise self control in his clowning, and he may use a variety of comic effects from body humour, satire, jokes, puns, parodies, and pranks. Finally, he may be polished in his delivery, or bumble as a rough amateur. The Class Clown, for all these varieties, is nevertheless an active force in schools—but he is not particularly well understood.

Standing in the ancient tradition of the Fool, the Class Clown is a very significant figure. We need to know the place that both he and humour hold in schools, and we need to re-educate ourselves in our dealings with him. Rather than, as current literature suggests, simply identifying that further study of the Class Clown is necessary, or viewing him as a threat that requires discipline, we must see the Class Clown in a new way. He loves to stand in the limelight.

A detailed examination of the nature and function of the Class Clown is needed. The Damingo and Purkey (1978) paper is the only study of the Class Clown to date, and it is admittedly superficial. One of their conclusions is that further research is warranted. Though some information can be gleaned from the statistical data that quantitative studies like theirs, I believe that case study, which combines a trustworthy narrative account with critical analysis, provides the depth required to further an understanding of the Class Clown.

The methodological approach, therefore, involves a detailed exploratory single case study. One revelatory case serves as prototypical. The formulation of this case study approach follows along the lines of a variation of narrative research. The following steps have been undertaken.

1. I identified a Class Clown with whom I could work, and developed a narrative paradigm for a Class Clown.
2. I arranged interviews with the Class Clown. These followed a prescribed format of prepared questions through which the life line of the key events was established. Through anecdotal stories we traced his career from his emergence into adopting the role of Fool in the classroom to the end of the life line. Through this process of interviews he was able to remember incidents of clowning and an outline began to present itself. From this foundation, I asked the Clown to tell his story. Through questions and paraphrases we clarified descriptions of events and experiences with the intention of increasing the coherence and depth of the narrative.

I also undertook interviews with the Clown's teachers and peers. I posed questions regarding the nature and behaviour of the Clown. I was particularly interested in their authentic reaction to the antics of the Clown. These interviews

were used to confirm, clarify and enhance the narrative told by the Clown himself.

3. Based on these interviews, school records, pictures and other pertinent data, I developed a narrative account of the Class Clown's role and significance.
4. The account was verified by the Clown himself. I asked him key questions dealing with omissions ('Have I left anything important out of this account?') and commission ('Have I distorted anything in this narrative?') to ensure that the story accurately reflects the Clown's own experience and sense of his role. I used the same procedure with his teachers and peers.
5. The validity and reliability of the account need to be confirmed. The narrative has construct validity because of the use of divergent sources of evidence (interviews, records, grades, tests, various informants), the establishment of a chain of events, and the review of the draft report by the key informants. Pattern analysis and explanation building provide a basis for internal validity. I looked for convergence on the main threads of the story and the events, and the report was verified by the Class Clown himself.

I established reliability through the use of case study protocols. A chain of events has been maintained - the narrative can be traced to the original data. Also, I have been sensitized by the intensive nature of the study to the significance of the issues and dimensions of the Clown and to the themes that emerged.

6. Analysis of this story was undertaken as a literary and historical criticism of the whole narrative as well as of the details of the scenes and anecdotes therein. A pattern of prototypical events (i.e. the phenomenology of antics) has been suggested and confirmed within the context of other anecdotes of contemporary Class Clowns and in the rich heritage of the Fool in historical and literary sources.

Let us now examine the life of one Class Clown.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

“Tell me Oliver, what was your earliest experience of being a Class Clown?”

“The first time ever was in grade 1. I remember being with a good friend of mine and—perhaps we were being silly—we hauled our shirts up around our heads over our ears and walked around shaking our bodies a lot. The shirts flew about and we made some sort of goofy noises. I remember everyone laughing—until the teacher came and took our shirts off and threw them in the garbage.

We forgot to pick them up later that day, and she didn’t get them for us after school, and, well, the garbage got thrown out. As you can well imagine this was very upsetting for both our parents, and the teacher offered to buy us new shirts and all that.

We never did get new shirts, you know. But the point is that that was the first time I acted like a Clown—the only time in Grade One, and pretty much the only really memorable time in elementary school. I was pretty quiet after that. I suppose that I must have had a lot of sugar that afternoon because it was a very unique experience.”

A case study approach to the research of a Class Clown is an excellent way of constructing a plausible interpretation of his experience. The narrative account that this approach affords follows the pattern of other successful ethnographic research including a description of the design, participants, collection of information, procedures, and analysis.

DESIGN

What is it like being a Class Clown? Through the unfolding of a story, a narrative approach provides a wealth, depth, and complexity of experience which cannot be captured through quantitative research. “In general, case study is probably the preferred approach to narrative construction largely because an investigator can gather divergent sources of evidence and rich, compelling detail to support convergence into a narrative description” (Cochran, 1990, p. 79). This study, therefore, is designed around an exploratory single case study, and includes the development of a sound and

trustworthy narrative account along with a thematic analysis of the experiences of a Class Clown.

What are the essential meanings of the experiences of a Class Clown? In order to understand, and thus construct, a possible interpretation of the nature of that experience is the work of the narrative approach, or what VanManen calls “hermeneutic phenomenology” (1990, p. 40). This type of research includes both a description and interpretation of those experiences in order to uncover the meaning and significance of clowning for the Clown. In this sense, the essential meaning is located in the narrative of the career of the Class Clown. A “narrative is a synthetic form, a coherent pattern through time that is capable of representing a career. To describe a person's career is to tell a story” (Cochran, 1990, p. 71). As such, there is a beginning, middle, and end which can be used to shed light on the lived experiences of the Class Clown. Significant meaning is found in the midst of conflict, and a narrative account reflects the tensions that drive the story.

The purpose of all such study is of great importance. Especially in the modern age where “a general cynicism and narcissism have tended to reduce and erode the meaning and significance that children have or could have in our lives” (VanManen, p. 142). VanManen goes further and suggests that, beginning with Socrates, the point of pedagogy has been to point children towards virtue and acknowledge the complexity of living things (p. 156). The narrative approach to the study of the Class Clown may, or may not, assist in an understanding of the former, but it is most certainly based upon the latter. Living is complex; Class Clowns are complex. The narrative approach, as opposed to something quantitative, considers the Clown without reducing him into simple categories or classifications.

The attempt to make the phenomenon of the Class Clown intelligible is well suited to the telling of a story. Through the use of the interview, the investigator and the

participant work together as collaborators (Mischler, 1986). As with any research, there are inevitable limitations to the approach that is taken. A single participant has the obvious limitations of his own role and perspective where he is apt to focus on the immediate and functional aspects of his experiences. However, as Cochran (1990) has suggested, through the use of the interview, he can gain the advantage of becoming a spectator as well as a participant in his own life (p. 75). As a spectator, he can thus enjoy the detachment that he needs to savour and recount his story. The narrative approach allows him the opportunity to reflect. In the interview, the collaborators can gain insight into the complexity of the Clown as a person. This is crucial, for “without knowledge of individuals as persons who think, feel, and do; who have aims, beliefs, and values, there is no basis for story” (Cochran, 1990, p. 77).

The investigation of real life experience within its contexts is central to researching case studies (Yin, 1984). By examining the Class Clown within his surroundings in school, together with some of his teachers and peers, he is well placed in his context. The Class Clown does not exist in isolation. To study him requires interviews with these other 'players' which in turn add to the construct validity of the research through the multiple sources of evidence of the informants.

Once the story has been told by all the subjects, then the narrative must be developed so that patterns and themes can be explored. The purpose of the narrative is to reveal the meanings that give structure to the story (Cochran, 1990, p. 80). Case study design, which includes research questions, protocols for information gathering, formulation of a narrative, and an analysis of the themes of that story, allows for a detailed approach to hear and understand the complexity of any lived experience—including that of a Class Clown.

PARTICIPANTS

The chief participant, the Class Clown, is of paramount importance. It was necessary to find someone with whom I thought I could work, and who others readily identified as a Class Clown. It occurred to me that there were advantages to choosing a subject from our school, provided that a suitable one could be found. My relationships with staff and students afford a depth of rapport and trust that would be difficult to match in another setting. Interviewing would proceed within a shared context, and I could be far less obtrusive as a participant-observer in my own school. Also, I would not have to commute.

I still had to find a good example of a Class Clown. This was a reasonably easy task, for my position as counsellor in an urban high school with a population of around two thousand people has given me opportunity to observe and work with a large number of students and teachers.

Why Oliver? Of the many candidates currently active in our school he is but one of numerous striking examples of a Class Clown. I began with my own experience and asked myself, “Who is the most evident Class Clown among my students?” Oliver. Then I went and asked some teachers (working with students across the grade levels) who they would identify as being prominent Clowns in their classes. Among other names, one continued to come to the fore—Oliver. As time has continued to go by and I have discussed my thesis topic with other colleagues and a number of students, they have asked me who I am using as the chief subject of the study. My usual response has been to ask them who they would identify as a good example of a Class Clown, and again, the one name that emerged repeatedly was Oliver.

I remember the day when one of my students was waiting for me in my office. This in itself was not unusual, but, while I had stepped out to dig up some information, he must have been sniffing around my desk, noticed a copy of my thesis proposal, and

been caught by its title. He was chuckling when I returned, and said, “So sir, I guess you're going to interview Oliver for this, eh?” The host of witnesses all pointed in the same direction.

Oliver is a young man who does not easily escape your attention. At the time of completion of this thesis, he is eighteen years old and attending university in another province. He is an only child and has lived most of his life with his mother. His parents divorced when he was quite young, but his mother remarried when Oliver was in senior high school. He has an uneventful medical history and appears to have reached his developmental milestones early. Oliver's academic records indicate intelligence but inconsistent work habits and grades. He has studied in enriched programs at one elementary school and two high schools: a smaller school for grades 8 and 9 and our school for grades 10 to 12.

The secondary subjects include a number of Oliver's teachers and peers. I contacted ten of his teachers in person, and explained to them the research proposal along with my expectations about their participation. Each of these consented to be interviewed and understood their right to withdraw without prejudice. These teachers represent a cross-section of subject areas (Mathematics, Science, English, History, Theatre Arts and Physical Education) and have taught Oliver during at least one of his three years with us. Although gender does not appear to be an issue in terms of teacher response to the Class Clown's behaviour, I have chosen five male and five female teachers with the intention of providing a balanced perspective from the front of the class. All of these teachers are highly professional and have careers ranging from seven to thirty years duration.

The peers that I interviewed are, like Oliver, now graduates. The ten students that I contacted each agreed to participate in this study and understood all aspects of consent.

As with the teachers, half of these informants are male and half female in order to provide a balanced perspective from the peers as well. These informants, who represent a variety of social groups, had all been classmates or teachers of Oliver over the last few years. They appear to have reflected intelligently and meaningfully upon their experiences of this Class Clown .

COLLECTION OF INFORMATION

The interview has provided the richest source of information for this case study. However, other sources of evidence have been used to compliment the interview. As VanManen (1990) has suggested, language is the reservoir of experience and it is through language that experiences are both described and interpreted. To that end, I have used both oral and written information.

School records provided a sense of academic progress and have helped me to understand the teachers' reactions to Oliver in as much as report cards and anecdotal records can. Comments and assessments have proven useful in indicating a sense of teacher perceptions of this Class Clown and also in providing confirmation for Oliver's own sense of academic progress and effort.

As a teacher in the school I had numerous opportunities to watch Oliver as a participant-observer. This happened both in my own classes as a counsellor and also through other subject areas. Through these experiences I have been able to make use of my own first hand impressions as another source of information.

Interviews with teachers and peers, following a list of prescribed questions, have been of great value in confirming and providing perspective to Oliver's story. The 'triangulation' of these interviews has been especially helpful in terms of developing the themes and patterns of the narrative.

Interviews with Oliver provided the greatest source of information upon which the

narrative has been built. Beginning with the discussion of prepared questions which helped Oliver recall his clowning, and ending with the telling of his story, these interviews are the basis not only of the life line of his experience, but also of the development of themes in his career as Class Clown.

PROCEDURE

The narrative protocols of the case study approach have already been detailed in the previous chapter under the heading of 'Approach.' However, some further points need to be made.

Having determined the research question about the Class Clown, I tried to sensitize myself to understanding his role and the issues that surround him. I began with a renewed examination of the case study approach and then started to address material relevant to the Class Clown himself. A search through background information was very helpful to this end. What became apparent very quickly was that there is little to be found on the Class Clown. By contrast, however, the vast wealth of folk tales and analysis on the tradition of the Fool has provided invaluable insights about the Class Clown.

With this search behind me I began my work with Oliver. I initially contacted him over the phone and explained my thesis proposal along with my desire to interview him as the primary subject of the study. I also discussed with him the process involved in terms of consent, interviews and verification of his account. I asked him to discuss the matter carefully with his mother, and reinforced the idea that he could withdraw at any time without prejudice.

He was delighted. We arranged a time, and subsequently met and discussed the consent form which he read, signed and took home. I explained my expectations and the case study procedures to him and spent time working through his questions. Oliver

agreed to be interviewed, and expressed appreciation for, what he referred to with a grin, “the opportunity to further the pursuit of academic research.” I also spoke with his mother and she too was in favour of Oliver's involvement in the project.

During the first set of interviews, we followed a prescribed format of prepared questions and established a chronology of the key events of his experience as a Class Clown.¹ His background experiences in his home and community provided a place from which he talked about his school in four phases: elementary school, grade 8, grades 9 through 11, and grade 12. Stories of his career began to provide a sense of shape to a life line with a beginning, middle, and end—from his emerging experiences as a Class Clown to a sense of demise and refinement in his graduating year. Through this process of interviews, memories were rekindled for Oliver, and an outline began to present itself to me.

Oliver appeared to be very relaxed in these meetings as he answered the questions and discussed in detail his experiences. His enthusiasm and the momentary sparklings of wit made the process entertaining—we laughed loudly more than a few times.

This foundation provided a basis for further reflection. When we met for the next interview, I asked Oliver to tell his story. He did so eagerly. Interviewing gave an opportunity for Oliver to reflect and to uncover the tensions in his story. This reflective process shows an important aspect of case study methodology, for it yields more as it goes along. Oliver gains insight into his story simply through telling it. Where appropriate, I asked him to clarify his description of events and experiences, or paraphrased his ideas. Throughout the process we worked together to increase the coherence and depth of the narrative.

As mentioned above, I also interviewed some of Oliver's teachers and peers. I asked questions which struck at the nature and behaviour of the Clown and tried to draw out

¹ The list of questions used in the interviewing is found in the Appendix.

their personal reactions to his antics.² These interviews were used to confirm, clarify, and enhance the narrative that had been told by Oliver. Along with these interviews, I reflected on school records and reports as I sought to collect comprehensive sources of evidence.

The steps of transcription and preparation of a narrative account of the Class Clown's role and significance afforded me the opportunity to reflect further on Oliver's story. I then presented the narrative to Oliver and the other participants, and they confirmed the developed account as being free from any significant omissions or distortions. With a reliable narrative in hand, I then continued with the analysis and began to examine patterns, ambiguities, and themes.

ANALYSIS

The process of analyzing the collected information is crucial for any case study. It involves the transcription of the interviews, the preparation of information, the writing of a narrative account, and the identification of meaningful themes.

Working from audiotape recording of the interviews with Oliver, it was an easy task to have an accurate transcript of the story as he told it. Although the written account cannot capture the tone, mood, or emotion of his words, it does nevertheless accurately reflect his ideas, memories, and understanding of his own experience. The transcription of all the interviews is an essential step in the development of a case study narrative.

The preparation of the materials that have been collected from the interviews, observations, and records involves continued reworking. By reading, rereading, and reflecting upon this pool of information, I immersed myself in Oliver's story and began to gain a sense of patterns, incongruities, and key points of his story line. Mischler (1986) has a few ideas that bear directly here. The relative plausibility of any

² The list of these questions is also found in the Appendix.

interpretation must rest upon an understanding that the method and approach of research affect the type and quality of information gathered, the collaborative work of the investigator and informant, and the ways that meanings are constructed. All such research must be somewhat tentative. However, through the use of multiple sources and chains of evidence, the reflected experience of the Class Clown can be accurately portrayed. The story he has told as a spectator of his own career is presented, like a tapestry, not just with details and patterns, but also with the themes that are run like threads throughout. In following these threads we can perceive the deep patterns in the experience of the Class Clown.

A danger with taking a narrative approach is that it can be imposed on the information that has been collected and therefore distort or even negate the person's experience. This has not happened in Oliver's case. His own sense of the development of his career as a Class Clown follows naturally along the pattern of a story. This is not surprising given the research of Cochran (1990) and VanManen (1990) who see in "real lived experiences" the life themes which can be discovered through reflection in a story.

Oliver's description of himself as a Class Clown follows a chronological pattern with a beginning, in which he has some tentative experiences, through to his establishing of himself as a Class Clown without rivals, to a very real academic crisis in his graduating year in which he curtails his clowning. Even then, he never really abandons his sense of being a Clown. He emerges; he succeeds. Almost utterly defeated, he refines his role by moving through the crisis.

The identification of meaningful themes can be entertained only after an accurate narrative account has been established. Only once the story has been told, can it be analyzed. Through constant review of the information from all the sources, patterns begin to emerge and, from these, themes become evident. Some of these hold much greater significance than others. The chief themes are the ones that play prominently in

the Class Clown's life; the others, although important, do not weigh as heavily. Themes may present themselves with great clarity or may be shrouded in ambiguity. We turn, then, to the story and its themes, as told largely by Oliver himself, of his experiences as a Class Clown.

CHAPTER 4: CASE STUDY: PORTRAIT OF A CLASS CLOWN

Mr. Richards stood in front of his new class. In and of itself this was not peculiar as he had done so hundreds of times before, only on this occasion the 'new class' is one that he has inherited in the middle of the school year.

"OK people, I need you to understand that, since you are a senior class, I want to do everything I can to provide continuity for you with the style and approach that Mrs. Lynders took during the fall. If you have any suggestions about how I can make this transition easier for you, please do not hesitate to ask. Anything anyone would like to say?"

An awkward silence fell on the classroom; here was an opportunity for students to reshape a teacher.

"Well Sir,"

All eyes turned on Oliver.

"You could always wear a dress."

The experiences of one student provide the depth of information needed to study the phenomenon of the Class Clown. Case study method is the framework which gives structure to the portrayal of those experiences. This portrait includes a narrative account of the career of a Clown named Oliver, along with an examination of themes that thread through his story.³

THE CAREER OF A CLASS CLOWN: A NARRATIVE ACCOUNT

Oliver has a clear sense that the seeds of his clowning can be traced outside of school in other areas of his life and also within school to those highly impressionable years in the primary grades. His anecdote of a grade 1 shirtless reprobate tells of an experience that stunned him into a dormancy from which he did not rise until seven years later. Through the intermediate grades he describes himself as a cooperative and unnoticed student. If he did make a lot of noise or act up, it was within a group rather than as someone standing out on his own. One thing is clear, however: Oliver's career as a

³ Oliver is, of course, not his real name. All names in this study have been changed in order to guard the privacy of both the humorous and the humourless.

Class Clown took off in grade 8.

The narrative account of his career as a Class Clown is largely written in the first person. It is, after all, Oliver's story.⁴ Where appropriate, the insights and experiences of his teachers and peers have been inserted to complement and add perspective to his experiences. The story has been told with three stages in mind: the beginning, where he establishes his reputation; the middle, in which he perfects his comic form; and the end, where he faces academic disaster and refines his expression of folly.

Oliver is a memorable character. His teachers and peers describe him as a very outgoing and gregarious person who entertains by his highly social and extroverted personality. As with many Class Clowns, Oliver may not have been the only one expecting himself to fulfil the role once he got started.

Oliver is readily identified as not just a Class Clown, but as one of the more striking Class Clowns that many of his teachers can remember. Yet there are few specific stories that they can recall about him. It seems that it is his comic presence and the lighting identification of the incongruous that have solidified him in this role. His humour is generally delivered in the form of puns, and he uses these skillfully in pointing out contradictions. They usually result in laughter. The following story, as recounted by one of his teachers, shows Oliver in fine form.

The teacher had just settled the class. After all the bell had sounded a few minutes before. The problem was that the guest speaker, the Principal, had not yet arrived. What to do? A few more minutes passed awkwardly. Eventually Mr. Richards decided he had better check to find out what happened—probably another administrative emergency.

Mr. Richards spoke quickly in a whispered hush on the house phone and then gently hung up the receiver.

"OK class, please pull out your books and open to chapter 12. Unfortunately Mr. Douglas will not be joining us today. I'm sorry. He said he will try to come next week and deliver his time management lecture."

"Why can't he come today?" It was Oliver.

"Um, apparently he forgot."

"He forgot! He forgot! Our Principal was supposed to speak to us about time

⁴ The text reflects the spirit of Oliver's words and ideas taken from the transcript of his interviews. Where necessary, the syntax and style have been edited for the sake of clarity.

management, only he forgot to show up.”

As he retold this story, it was some time before Mr. Richards finished chuckling.

The Beginning: A reputation is established

Although he has no recollection of any specific incidents that occurred that put him into the role of the Class Clown, he thinks that his actual clowning begins at the start of high school.

I know I forced myself to be outgoing, and to speak up. At the time I thought it was a way to not be swallowed up. I recognized the situation at the beginning of high school to be overbearing and that this was a way to survive. In elementary school I wasn't that way at all—not loud or anything—and I wonder how I discovered clowning as a tool in the first place. To clown around was one way that I was sure to be noticed, and also to maintain my personality.

I still remember my first day in the high school, being embarrassed at running into this girl in my grade who was about a foot and a half taller than me, and feeling totally boggled. I had heard all of these horror stories about secondary school and I had a lot of apprehensions. The way I dealt with it was to be witty. I guess I figured (not that it was rational or anything) that if I could get a laugh then I wouldn't be swallowed up. If I could get a laugh then I'd have a place. By the end of the month I had established myself as somebody with a reputation for being funny.

What I really wanted to do was to make friends. I know that it was always difficult for me to do. And I suppose that is why I took up being a Class Clown, because that is one way to be noticed. People think that you are funny and they like you, and yet you haven't forced yourself into being one-on-one without a straight man.

My top year for being the Class Clown was definitely in grade 8 where I didn't have to devote much energy to being a student, and so I could really work at being the Class Clown. There wasn't much work to do, and, because I had always seen myself as a good student, I thought I could get by, and so let things slide without my marks really going up or down. And also, there were so many silly things that we did in grade 8 that made it so much easier.

We did a split between Art, Foods, Woodwork, and Drama. And we were doing an awful job of making things to eat, pretending to be flowers or farm animals, or doing rather pathetic paintings. And for me, because I've never been any good at art, the Art class was an hour that I could devote completely to being the Class Clown. It was a perfect opportunity. And so, I got to run around the room with all sorts of messy things like paint, and it was pretty easy to get a

laugh.

In Art I had all sorts of ideas about what art is supposed to be, and the Art teacher did not encourage those ideas. I remember having a friend, and we had to paint a painting. He painted what he thought was a gas mask which looked like a female gender sign, and then he painted over it, and then painted it all black and told the teacher that it was a sign of destruction. She made him do it all over again. And I thought there was something very comical about that whole thing, because art is supposed to be quite expressive, and there he is expressing himself even though he didn't want to do it in the first place, and there were water colours dripping all over the place. And the Art teacher is telling him he can't express himself like that—I think there was a sort of reversal there.

He was expressing himself as is the right of the artist, and the teacher was saying that he couldn't. I never really liked that art teacher. I just found those classes to be quite closed and really boring for me. Not that the art was really easy for me but I knew from past experience that I was not very good in it and not interested. Also, it was not just boring, but it was like having a substitute teacher. She had no control over us.

In the Foods section we were making breads and all sorts of Anglo-Saxon things like coffee cakes. The point is that, even then, I knew that I was never going to make a coffee cake in my life. None of this seemed to matter. You see, I had learned how to cook from my father, and so I learned in class quite quickly. We also had a Shop class in there. It was basic, and we could fool around. In fact, all four sections were pretty basic and left all sorts of time for me to pursue being a Clown.

One thing is that once you have established yourself as the Class Clown then it is an easy role to do—if you are any good at it. One of the things that I do remember that was intentional, not that there were many, was early in grade 8. There was a rumour that our English teacher was a bit of an alcoholic and there was great speculation about what was in the thermos that he would bring to school every morning.

I remember going up and smelling the thermos and joining in the 'there's brandy in that coffee' bandwagon. I don't know if that was playing the fool. I mean, people would laugh, and I suppose I instigated the rumour or at least added a lot more to the theory than other people did.

My reputation as a Class Clown was built mostly on one-liners and snide remarks. It was the witty comments that I made while the teacher was talking that brought me most of the laughs. In this way I had established myself as somebody with a reputation of being funny in class. There were other things that happened that were actually accidental, but someone else would look at them and think that they were comical, or even theatrical.

I remember once, maybe in the middle of grade 8, we were playing flag football. Mr. Curtis, the P.E. teacher was participating, and he was wearing red flags and red shorts. Well, he had the ball and was deking this way and that,

trying to score a touchdown. I was the last person back. He ran towards me and then pulled a move to try to fake me out. Well, I didn't want him to score, so I sort of dove out towards him and grabbed the red, you see, and, well, ended up pulling both the flags and the shorts off.

He was one of those macho types who wasn't wearing any underwear. So he sort of staggered about for a few feet and was almost tripped up by his shorts.

Everyone thought it was enormously funny and laughed a lot. I definitely didn't mean to expose my P.E. teacher to the world, but as it had happened, it was taken to be a very funny event. I didn't get into trouble for it—or for a lot of the things that I did. He knew that it was an accident.

But, you see, I already had a reputation up to that point of being funny, so that experience elevated me to a peak of class clownishness.

It is always satisfying to see the reaction to my clowning. I enjoy getting a laugh. Once you've established the reputation, then you have to fill the role, and it's an easy role to fill because it feels good and is expected of you. It is so easy to play up to that expectation. The result is that it is really easy for me to play the fool.

Once you become the Class Clown, then that's who you are.

And if you are any good at it—in fact I don't believe you can do it unless you are any good at it—then it is really easy to be the Class Clown. Once the reputation of being comical was established, and that involved a certain amount of coincidence, then it was a snap. Two weeks of joking, and there I was! And of course the clowning is a great way of getting attention.

Oliver is readily identified as a Clown, but who is the Class Clown and what is he like? For Oliver's teachers and peers, each Class Clown is singular.⁵ Only one student wears the cap and bells at one time, no matter how many other tumblers and jugglers provide entertainment with him. One voice dominates. He is a student whose wit is a consistent component of his character, for he is intentionally funny and pushes the limits of humour. The rest of the class relies on him to be funny and to provide the insights which lead to laughter. He may use slapstick or a dry wit, but to be successful he has to gauge the teacher's nature and mood to ensure that he is not constantly clashing with her. He is both ass and angel—both a positive and a negative force—who, as he grows up through high school, learns about limits, his effect on

⁵ The perceptions of a Class Clown held by Oliver's teachers and peers is an important part of their understanding of their experiences with him. The description of a Class Clown offered here is a composite of those perceptions, and they are quite applicable to Oliver.

others, and his role as a humorist. He wants to be recognized and is not afraid of drawing attention to himself.

The Class Clown provides levity and often eases tension. As opposed to students who have bizarre behaviour, or who are naturally foolish, the Class Clown is a humorist who works hard to protect his image.

He is an independent learner and a free thinker who is willing to take some risks. The Class Clown is bright. Much of what he does is seen as an intellectual competition either with himself, with the teacher, or with the class as a whole. There is an overriding sense that the Class Clown is tuned to a different frequency.

He is a performer and entertainer. Although he might distract or annoy, his humour grows out of something that is important to him, rather than simply for the purpose of getting attention.

Although his joking seems to some people to be somewhat like a game, and to others like a continuation of his stage performances, many of Oliver's teachers and peers are not comfortable labelling his actions as 'attention getting.' There is a sense that there is more going on than simply meeting a need, or covering up shortcomings. One of his teachers speaks about 'triggers,' and that Oliver gets a twinkle in his eye, and telegraphs in his expression a deliberately outrageous perspective. He is set apart by seeing things out of the ordinary.

Oliver expresses his sense of standing out and finding a place in a number of different ways.

Actually, I am an only child. I was the only person in both my Mom's and my Dad's lives and I guess I was used to getting a lot of attention from each of them. So maybe when I went to school, especially high school, I expected the same level of attention there as well. Then again, I know there were times when I felt I was not getting enough attention at home or school, especially in grade 8 and 9. I don't know.

Well, given that I acted out, you know, and did pretty well at it (not that I did anything really radical or destructive). I definitely didn't conform.

For example, my uncle owns a sort of, well, we call it a 'schmate' business—which is basically into clothing—back east. He used to send me all sorts of things. And at the time in grade 8 and 9 there were these 'jams'—these sort of baggy, loud shorts which were hideous sorts of things. I had a whole closet full of them. Along with the shirts of course, and I would wear them with outrageous colour combinations. I think I liked them and thought they looked good, mostly because they were bright. And I even bought four pair of Converse Allstars in different colours and would wear different combinations of the shoes.

So even in this there was a sort of physical humour. There was always a lot of colour on me and it was difficult not to be noticed. To the point that, even now, people who I haven't seen for a long time come up and ask me if I still wear those crazy clothes.

In all my grade 8 classes there was a laid back and casual attitude, and I don't think there was any class where you couldn't say something. I guess there was less discipline, and we probably got away with more, and took advantage of that. Whenever I was kind of bored with what I was doing—which happened quite a lot—my mind would wander and I would start to use attention seeking behaviour. I call it attention seeking behaviour because that is what the result was, but that isn't so much why I did it. It was absolute boredom, and I wanted to do something else. It didn't occur to me that I was bothering someone else.

The other thing is that I remember my math teacher (who I really liked) who ran a sort of no nonsense type of class. She was the teacher I think I had the least hostility towards. And if I started to joke around with someone, then she would just say basically something like, "Shut up!" And I would. Whereas with the Art teacher, who was the teacher that I probably liked least, she didn't try to have any control, which gave me a license to fool around.

It definitely wasn't obvious to me what I was doing, like 'OK, I'm going to get a laugh now.' But if I was just sitting in class not very interested or maybe I just felt that I wasn't getting noticed, then maybe I'd start clowning. But I really had to be aware of it in order to stop. The teacher would have to tell me to be quiet, I mean repeatedly tell me, or else one of my peers would have to tell me to stop talking. This would happen more in grade 9 than in grade 8. Then I would shut up. But it was like a real blow to me because if you are on stage, and you are trying to impress an audience, and someone throws a tomato at you, then you're going to run off stage. I guess I would get all upset and angry on the inside but would a lot of the time just keep going. What I probably said in my mind was that I felt that I was really quite a cool guy and that I had this very liberal anti-authority kind of attitude. I wanted to let them know that I was not just going to sit back and do what I was told for six hours a day. I guess that's what I told myself anyway. It was a need to stand out from my peers.

I know that a lot of times when I was bored I'd start clowning around because for me it was easy to do. I wonder what it was that initially started that in me,

but once I got going then it was no problem.

There are these triggers that sometimes go off, and a lot of times I would say something. In elementary school the triggers were not there as often, and when they were, I wouldn't respond by saying anything. I guess I wasn't the type of kid to act out in any way. I didn't really draw any attention to myself. So there were triggers inside but I didn't do anything with them.

But when I got to high school, in grade 8, I'd say that ninety-nine percent of the time when these triggers hit then I would say something. And I remember that happening to me a lot. It would usually be a pun of some sort. A lot of them didn't work and I realised it in the middle of saying it, or it would work, but it wasn't necessarily a good pun. People would laugh and there were a lot that were funny.

But of course it was a lot more than just puns. Something would appear to be funny and I'd say it, and people would laugh. That would happen all the time.

I think that if I was interested in something then I would be concentrating, and so the trigger would be in the back of my mind and I wouldn't really pay much attention to it. But if I was bored, then the trigger would be right there, and I would say something for sure. I think what happened basically in grade 8 was that I started concentrating more on the triggers because I would get a response or a laugh from others and so I went with it.

A lot of the time this felt like a rush. Not that I'd be thinking about my clowning and say to myself, "Yah, I'm having a lot of fun right now, this is great!" I probably wouldn't be aware of why I was enjoying myself, but just that I was having a good time. When one joke was done, the next one would be right there, and I'd deliver it with good timing.

The teacher would be talking, and I'd say something and everyone would laugh, and then things would die down for a bit. Then another opportunity would come and I would say something else. The space between the two jokes was a time to limber up and get ready for the next one.

After clowning around I'd know that I had been pretty funny and would have a smile on my face. I would get great satisfaction looking around and seeing the smiles on my friends' faces—it made me feel that I was doing the right thing.

I would joke around for my own benefit, not for the teachers or my peers. But pleasing my classmates and seeing that they were laughing at what I said always gave me a lot of satisfaction.

In grade 8 and 9 I didn't do any academic work and in grade 9 I got on the honour list. I was stunned—as stunned as anyone else—because I hadn't consciously done any work, although I was interested in getting into an enriched class in grade 10.

Also I remember that I was told in elementary school that I wouldn't be able to slide through if I didn't do any work. But I did slide through. That was a kind

of a fuel for my fire because I could rationalise that I was someone who made others laugh and I didn't have to do any work. It was the making of others laugh that was very satisfying for me and a great reward in terms of my social circles.

Identified by his teachers as being a bright student who could pick up in class without having done his readings, Oliver is perceptive enough and has strong enough verbal skills to be engaged in discussion and yet do little actual work. The bravado of his class participation, however, did not mask his lack of actual studying.

Oliver's sense of his academic minimalism is echoed by his teachers. According to his grade seven report card, "He is identified as very bright yet under-achieving. He hands in assignments late and does not work seriously." This pattern continues. In grade 8, teacher reports contain comments like, "Too much attention-seeking behaviour. Frequently disrupts the entire class," and "There is a tendency to be easily distracted." These type of comments follow with unsurprising consistency throughout his high school career. On the other hand, his drama teachers have noted that Oliver is "an enthusiastic student who is actively involved in class," and that he "displays exceptional ability. Further study in this area is recommended."

Oliver is seen by a few of his teachers as a risk taker. Set apart by his need to provide humour, he is (in a sense) a high achiever. Here is a refreshing perspective. He has done something more valuable than simply providing an answer to the prescribed question, for he has been creative—he has entertained. His energy and attention have been directed to being the Class Clown rather than to his schooling. In the eyes of those around him, Oliver, like most Class Clowns, is not working to his academic potential, but he is very successful in his witticism and the enjoyment he provides for others. He is, therefore, accomplished, and holds a prestigious position of high status which can only be achieved through concerted effort. Oliver too has this sense of his own 'work' as a Clown. Rather than pouring his energies into his studies, he focuses his

attention on the triggers. He would learn the material that he was interested in and poke fun at the rest. In either case he would listen attentively. He has to have good listening skills to bring mirth into a situation that he finds boring.

The Middle: Perfecting a Clowning Form

When I came here in grade 10, I began mastering the art of responding to these triggers. I don't know, but I think a lot of people may have that—something happens and then inside there is something that is a different way of seeing.

It's something that happens on the outside. Lets say you were going to read a paragraph on some topic and it would be the structure of the sentence or something that is said. There is something peculiar about the picture I get in my mind. I know that what I'll say will be funny. It's that I see something different about what is written or said, and then I am able to make a joke.

People are always saying things that set off triggers for me. Sometimes they are things that do not quite fit, or maybe they can be taken in a different way. Just the other day a friend of mine told me that at the beginning of a lecture, the professor burst in and began looking around the room for something. Then he raced around the front of the lecture hall searching high and low, all the while muttering, "I've lost my stool, I've lost my stool!" Well, the amazing thing was that my friend was the only one who laughed.

He must hear the triggers too.

I was thinking since last time we talked. I remember we were talking about universities and travelling, and the teacher asking someone if they were interested in studying abroad.

And I said, "Boy, would I ever!" You know, it was that sort of thing, like a pun or playing on words or a parody or something. I thought it was a good pun.

I never had any specific targets for my clowning. Sometimes I might be out to impress someone in particular, like this girl in grade 10—in that case she became a target as an audience. I guess I'd use my stuff as sort of a pick up routine.

But I don't think I was making fun of anyone; its more like I'm looking for something funny in what's happening. Whenever I clowned around, it was always at my own expense because it took away from what I was supposed to be doing. Maybe sometimes I would take a subtle jab at a teacher, but it didn't happen very often. In that sense I suppose there was a bit of a power struggle.

I don't think I targeted teachers. Even when I was really funny, teachers would maybe laugh or smile, but I didn't feel like I was doing it for them.

I guess if you look at a stand-up comic, they will tell a joke and then another one builds on it. Well, with a teacher you might tell one joke and that's as far as

you can go. The teacher is on a different wave length than a grade 9 or 10 student. I don't think my sense of humour necessarily appealed to teachers as much as it did to my peers. Also, the teacher has an hour to teach their lesson, so even if they find the first step funny, they aren't going to want to let you go further. I think the teacher just wanted to get on with the lesson.

It wasn't like we were adversaries. I wasn't interested in a power struggle, and I don't think I ever expected to win the clash. I don't think any of my peers expected the Class Clown to win, and I don't think that any teacher expected to lose either.

Maybe there was something in the act of standing up and challenging authority. It may be really cool to do that in grade 8 or 9 but it wears a bit thin as you grow older.

I guess that I was always the Class Clown even though there were times when I was dormant. When there was someone else in the class who was funny or noisy, I would have a strategy. I could sit back, because I knew that in a little while I would have my golden opportunity. I would always be the Class Clown; I always had my reserves for later.

In terms of turning my clowning off, there was always a desire to do more. But if I wasn't getting the right response then it became a challenge. Like a standup comedian. If you are getting laugh after laugh, then you can do a half hour show. But if you are not getting any reaction, then you are going to want to get off as soon as possible, although you are still a comedian when you leave the stage.

When I came here I found the school to be a little more orderly, and also that enriched teachers were more interested in developing ideas. Even though I came to a large school from a small one, it wasn't very different for me because I was in more of a tight knit group with the enriched classes. So I didn't have much of a problem adjusting. And in grade 10 it was easy to be the Class Clown partly because I felt comfortable and also because I could reuse old material. It wasn't all that difficult and I felt that I could continue to slide by.

There is a sense that, inevitably, more of the teachers' time was directed to Oliver as a Class Clown than to other students. In some classes, when he was absent, both students and teachers commented on how much work they were able to accomplish without him. Others expressed no difference at all.

As a Clown Oliver seems to be performing for the benefit of his peers rather than as a confrontation with his teachers. Though there is no malice in his clowning, he seems unaware of the impact it has on others when he has gone too far. This fits with Oliver's

own perception.

In another sense, Oliver also offers protection for the shy students. His humorous responses often make the class safe for these people because he turns the teacher's attention away from them and toward himself. It may be that this is a responsibility that, at some level, the Class Clown knows that he carries. Through his humour, he protects those who feel uncomfortable or awkward. It appears that Oliver has fulfilled this function without knowing it.

Many teachers recognize that their own sense of humour affects their reaction to Oliver. If they are authoritarian in their approach, then Oliver may be unusually quiet. It seems he needs room to perform. Teachers who value humour, or who may have been some sort of Clown themselves, are more apt to accommodate him than those who place a high value on an orderly classroom. A teacher's responses to clowning also appears to vary according to her subject area. A science teacher concluded that, "Oliver had all the potential to be a really disruptive Class Clown, but I wouldn't let him, not in my class. Besides, he was scared of the content." Oliver agrees with part of this; clowning is better suited to certain curricular areas and learning situations.

His effect on teachers varies. For some, he provides relief—as the Clown, he takes on the teacher's role as entertainer. For others, he is an annoying (though funny) sidelight that needs to be put out.

Many of his teachers feel that he must be listening carefully or else he would not be able to jump in with his puns, no matter how bored he appears to be. He enjoys derailing the train of thought or changing the switching so that it takes a different direction. For a teacher who enjoys this challenge, it certainly makes the class more interesting! It is significant that Oliver's perception is quite different. His sense is that teachers do not have much time for him, and that he has little impact on them. Part of what may be happening is that the Class Clown is both much more as well as much less

than he appears.

Whether or not teachers view clowning as something necessary and positive in their classroom, the Class Clown may well be providing a service with his levity. He brings more moments of mirth than of mayhem.

He may, in part, be implicitly challenging the authority of the classroom. However, because he approaches with humour, he suggests that a positive exchange between the teacher and student is possible, without confrontation, and thus he enriches the learning atmosphere. Oliver may call into question the limitations and authority of the teacher, yet he does so without leading or promoting actual rebellion.⁶ Without becoming cynical, and armed with a perception about people and social groupings, the Clown has much to offer. He sees the foibles and points them out—not destructively, but amusingly—and he shows himself to be someone who is willing to throw out an idea and take a risk. He seems invulnerable to the authority of the teacher as he stands outside of the conventions of reading, writing and answering on topic.

Like anyone else, when Oliver is disciplined, he needs to believe that what he has done and been reprimanded for was wrong, if not, then he has a huge arsenal to use against the teacher and he can muster the support of his peers.

There is a recognition that clowning and humour are things that teachers simply cannot stop. Any Clown, including Oliver, will only be frustrated if he is prevented from having any impact on his peers. In this sense he wants recognition and respect for his sense of humour. Oliver reflects on his interactions with others.

A lot of times the teacher would respond with a frown. For all the people who were laughing, there was usually at least one who had lost his concentration and it would take him that much longer to get back on track. And much of the

⁶ This idea bears serious consideration. It is not unlike the relationship between the King and his Court Jester or the Feast of Fools which allowed a 'controlled' ridicule of the structures of authority in mediaeval Europe which may have provided a safety valve that prevented outright rebellion. Additionally, Willis' (1977) suggestion that education involves a tenuous exchange of cooperation for the sake of learning between the authority of the teacher and the respect of the student also fits here. The role of the Class Clown may be an essential component in our schools. In each of these cases, authority, though mimicked and satirised is actually reaffirmed. This is the Fool's role of social perturber.

time one of my outbursts was like a distraction—often on topic or related to the discussion, but not particularly helpful. The teacher would have to work harder to get peoples' attention back to the lesson. One or two times the teacher may have taken one of my quips, used the energy that flowed from the joke, and turned it back into the lesson, but I don't think that happened very often.

A teacher's response is critical to a Class Clown. In some ways if there is a standoffishness, then whatever the teacher does is going to be considered an attack. If they are ignoring the Clown then that will make him think either, 'I've already one the battle, just a few more assaults,' or else, 'This is some sort of strategy, you know they are trying to distract the class from my distractions,' and that also adds fuel to the fire.

I don't think it is possible to play along with the clowning without losing the class to the Clown altogether. And I think that a few teachers have been effective and made me sit down and do my work. The Math teacher in grade 8 was very blunt, not nasty, just sort of 'Sit down and shut up, this is what we are doing.' Other teachers would try a desperate plea, but I wouldn't recommend it.

Ultimately, the person who suffered the most from my behaviour was me. So I would probably say, don't add fuel to the fire by fighting back, but let the fire burn out or rage on. It seems that by trying to deal with it causes it to rage on. And I don't know what it was about that Math teacher that caused her to have such an effect except that she reminded me of my mother.

Even though I don't remember getting kicked out of class all that much, I don't think teachers had all that much time for me. All I remember is being told by teachers to be quiet and I usually would, for a bit. The exception was when we got out of P.E. for Guidance. This was an exciting time for us because we hoped to see dirty pictures and that sort of thing, and I was probably in a worse stew there than in other classes.

Any time that we had a substitute teacher, especially if she was horrible, she would expect the worst—especially if she was experienced. And she would be determined not to take any grief from the students. It was a great opportunity to joke, although that was when I would get kicked out of class, by substitutes, not the regular teachers.

There were different types of classes too. In the discussion-oriented subjects, like English and History, what I had to say didn't necessarily break the flow of concentration. I think that a lot of my humour may have even sparked a question in someone's mind. In that sense my clowning may have helped.

But if it was a Math class or a lecture of some kind, then that was different. I mean, how can a Class Clown's humour help explain a formula without distracting or getting off topic?

He would work within the accepted patterns of behaviour in the class. Oliver was

never found swinging from the lights; rather, he made use of the circumstances and content of the class as the forum for his humour. His work was more commentary than action, and as such was often a great source of amusement.

In reply to the question, “How do you get Oliver to stop?” one of Oliver's teachers replied, “Put it this way, one day I had to threaten him with duct tape.”

Oliver would always provide a laugh. At times, however, he was so insistent that he caused exasperation for both his teachers and peers. Whether they saw this as an enormous need to express something or an irresistible need to be heard, those around Oliver identify that he would both distract and add flair to a lesson. Especially in his senior year, it was the former that seemed to stick more in peoples' minds. Oliver's clowning was getting increasingly in the way of more than just his own learning.

I'd call clowning a behaviour and not a misbehaviour. There were definitely a lot of times that my clowning made the class more interesting and also made people see things in a new light, say to literature, history, or the arts especially. While reading a novel, the joking can add something even while it distracts, and lead to another path because these are not linear things.

In the right subject or discussion clowning can add perspective and a creative element. Another thing is that clowning is much more effective in a discussion than in a lecture. A quip is going to have a good impact in a lecture—especially when it has some thought to it. In this sense the triggers are just a different way of seeing something and are creative and actually add something from a strange or, hopefully, funny perspective. In this sense, clowning can really bring forth new ideas through the use of humour and draw out the energy of the class. In Math it may be too straight for humour to be all that helpful. Maybe that's why I shut up there, but in the humanities there is lots of room for joking.

I still had my lines, but I didn't use them as much as in grade 8 and 9. I think they were more effective because I used them less. It became harder for people to regain their concentration after I would do something humorous.

I think I made it harder for people, and they began to dislike it. I think I knew it at the time—I don't know how consciously—but when I was aware of it I did a tentative poking. If my finger got bent back then I'd back off; but it was very rarely that I succeeded in doing that.

Even in grade 12, at least the first part of the year, some people would still joke around with me, but they were generally more interested in being serious about their studies. I'm not saying I was never serious, but when I should have been serious or would have benefited from being serious, I put more importance

on being the Clown and pointing out that I was still around.

By his final year of high school, Oliver had added frequent lateness to his list of academic bad habits. With a certain measure of fondness one of his peers remembers Oliver's creative use of excuses to explain his inability to arrive on time for first period. It became something of a ritual.

“May I come in, I've had a terrible morning?”

“OK, Oliver what is it this time?”

“You are not going to believe this. Five of them.”

“Five of what, were you threatened?”

“No, no nothing like that, five car accidents. I was in five car accidents—you're lucky that I even got here at all.”

“OK fine, just sit down.”

On his way to his seat those around him heard Oliver mumble, “Of course what's really amazing is that I don't even drive.”⁷

The End: Academic Crisis and the Refinement of Folly

By grade 11, the work was starting to get harder but I didn't pay attention to it and was still making excuses. I knew that I wasn't sliding by any more. In fact, I was starting to grind to a halt. The C+'s were turning into C-'s and so forth.

After years of not striving to my potential I sort of ran out of the basic core ability to get by without doing any studying. I ran into a wall.

Things were moving faster in the enriched program, and there was more and more complicated work. But I kept using my excuse that I was bored, and so avoided doing my work.

And by paying attention to the triggers, clowning around, and making people laugh, I at least was assured of a place; no matter what it cost me. By being funny, by being noticed, I had popularity.

But for me, in grade 11 and 12, where everyone around me was quite serious about their studies because they were interested in the effect of their schooling on the rest of their lives, I knew that whenever I needed to actually work or learn that I could. But I wasn't organised or disciplined.

The point is that the teachers were really interested in us doing the work and so if I broke in there with my jokes, then I knew they didn't appreciate it because it took away from the learning and we had to be organised and disciplined to get

⁷ I have used a bit of latitude in embellishing the recollections of several of Oliver's peers in this anecdote. The story nevertheless reflects the spirit of his early morning explanations.

the work done.

I don't know if I was in denial or just didn't notice. But basically I think people either lost interest or were annoyed with having to listen to Oliver after a while.

If I was one of four people doing a group presentation, then the only thing that I would be good at is the presentation itself. I wouldn't do very much in terms of the actual preparation, and that had a negative effect on my classmates. I didn't do the work and was in the habit of relying on past skill. I was trying to slide by and wasn't getting away with it anymore. Yet I couldn't really do anything about it.

His peers have a love-hate relationship with Oliver. They are envious of his apparent outgoing behaviour and confidence. They love to laugh and see him challenge authority, set teachers off, and generally cause a degree of confusion. He keeps things lively and provides a comfortable atmosphere in which to study. But at the same time, with increasing pressure as graduation approaches, they tire of his actions and interruptions. Oliver is also not seen to be particularly reliable. In Theatre classes, for instances, many students are unwilling to work with him or cast him in plays because, although they recognize his brilliance in terms of performance, his inability to focus and actually do the work of preparation makes him too unreliable. If you wanted to do well, you wouldn't want to work with Oliver, but if you wanted to laugh, well that was a different story. At times they resent the inordinate amount of attention that he receives, however this is largely based upon the teacher's reaction.

I think that in grade 11 my social status started to change as I began to upset people more and more. I recognize that this happened especially as the other students were thinking more seriously about their academics and I was still thinking about being funny at every opportunity. The teachers too seemed to have less and less time for me.

Well, I think my clowning declined significantly for a number of reasons. Exams were starting in the spring of grade 12 for the enriched program, and I had to get ready for those or else I'd be in the thick of it. This was an internal pressure to stop clowning, and to actually do the work. But also there was external pressure from peers that I felt because I didn't want them to lose their

concentration because of my clowning. I didn't want them to feel badly about me. And the third factor was that I had all my teachers making the point that I might not graduate and that they were still willing to help. And so, with the pressure inside myself and from my teachers and peers, I stopped sliding as much and began concentrating on what I was supposed to be doing.

I'm not sure of the reason that I slid like I did, but I think that it was partly as a distraction. I also needed friends and felt I had to do something to be noticed. And so as a Class Clown I was noticed and did have a lot of friends. But when I look back on it, my close friends were there not because of my clowning; the others only knew me as the Clown.

At the end of grade 12, when I put my energies into my work, these people—not my really close friends—would ask me why I was so quiet and if anything was wrong.

One of the things I needed to deal with was the need to get attention all the time. And even now I struggle with that. By being the Class Clown I could get attention. I think I wanted attention from peers, but in grade 12 my clowning was a distraction. The other students wanted to learn and not be distracted by my clowning. They sort of knew what to do, and ignored me. I wanted to be recognized by them, so I sort of would stop. I didn't see that as a challenge. Even though it would hurt to be ignored, if I stopped and thought about it then I'd realise that they had a goal in their studying and that I should not distract them. I still wanted their attention and everything, but not that way anymore.

And it wasn't so much that I was concerned about my friends' success, it was just that I didn't want to hinder my own social success. It wasn't any great act of generosity or anything. And I think that I was beginning to feel that I was losing my social status. I may have become more and more desperate and said things that weren't even all that funny. I was saying it more for the point of saying something than anything else. I noticed people backing away—which may also explain my loss of closeness to friends.

I'd like to reiterate that my clowning, even though it was a lot of fun, always got in the way of learning—of my peers learning and my own learning. Ultimately, the clowning was at my own expense; it cost me academically as well as in terms of my future, and the respect of my teachers and peers.

Also if being a Class Clown is what you are, and that's who you become, then you definitely lose something. You are seen as only a Clown by everyone, and maybe even by yourself, and nothing more. And that's sort of sad, isn't it, because, of course, there is more to a person than any one thing—even if that's being a Class Clown.

Oliver remains humorous but becomes far more serious. In the spring of his final year, a meeting is arranged with all of his teachers, his counsellor, and his mother. They

meet to discuss one agenda item: the possibility of Oliver successfully completing the year. The meeting is very imposing. Previously, teachers had recognized that Oliver had bluffed to make it through, but when he was confronted by the distinct possibility of not graduation, then he seemed to become more disciplined and to have found new limits.

I think that the meeting with my mother and all my teachers in the spring of grade 12 really hit hard. The message was clear, “Smarten up or you won’t graduate.” I had been aware that I wasn’t doing well for a long time, and I would be thinking about it and knew that I should be doing something else but I just couldn’t.

I didn’t clown at all at that meeting. If you had looked under the table my legs were pretty shaky. I had no more confidence; I had no more room left for joking.

But after that meeting I did start to put all my energy into working. Before, I knew what I should do and that I was not being successful in letting things slide, but I would joke more and more. But once I was really confronted, then I knew I couldn’t get away with the sliding, and so I focused and concentrated. Because of the concentration I guess I just stopped joking. The triggers were still there, but not as much, and I wouldn’t really respond to them.

But after the enriched exams in May, I sort of slid back and, even though I stayed pretty disciplined, I think I began to be sort of a classic Class Clown. I did this partly because I had completed most of what I needed to, and so had some breathing space even though I knew I wasn’t as ready as I could be for the provincials. I know that I’m intelligent enough to have done a lot better than I did, but I guess I had lost too much time and background. Still, I knew I had some room now, and everyone around me started to relax too.

Even at graduation, as I walked across the stage I did something stupid and got a laugh. I regret that now. At the time I was not conscious of doing it. I know that in the last few months of school I still did clown around a bit, though I was much more serious.

I think I learned that I can be humorous and also meet my responsibilities. I think the one thing that I am still good at, even in times of great stress is that the triggers are still there and I can still hear them with the same frequency as before, but my response is different. There are actually two responses: what I hear and what I put out. When I’m under a lot of stress then what I generate and what I say are different. I say less and am sometimes more critical about the triggers. I guess that when I’m under a lot of stress I don’t give myself as much credit, and so then I won’t think that maybe what I’m thinking is all that funny and so I

don't say anything. Or else sometimes I don't have much control, and so I just blab anything, But at that time I usually didn't say what was in my head from the trigger.

I'd have to say that even under great stress I can work well and not get bogged down. I think that is one thing that helped me with my studies. Although I still don't understand how I got into university.

If I didn't at least have these funny things going off in my head then I think I would have got totally stressed and probably would not have been able to handle it as well as I did.

I have become better organised. Academically I have not really had problems, in terms of understanding—my problem has been in how I have worked, or not worked. But I've had to learn to work smarter.

Some Reflections Upon Graduation

A lot of the time both in and out of school, I am always thinking things that are funny. In some situations I think I act like I did in elementary school with control, but then in others I do joke around. Another thing is that I am a little more conservative in things that I do now. I notice that I'm different. In grade 8, waiting for a bus we'd jump up and run onto the street and wave our arms, and now when my friends do that sort of thing I find myself sitting back and watching rather than, like before, probably taking the lead in all of that. The point is that before, I was doing something parents told you not to do, and probably now I've gone a bit more serious and I don't like looking like a total idiot while I'm walking around downtown or whatever. Now I think that that is really dumb and silly.

So I think that I am probably not that interested in joking around in public—where my friends are now getting used to this, sort of taking bigger steps away from what was acceptable. For me, I think I did that sort of experimenting when I was in early high school - trying to figure out what I could get away with, and now my friends are starting to do that more, and me less. Its sort of funny to see them not concentrating now when I am.

Sometimes I feel too wise these days, I see people acting the way people my age are seen to be acting—you know, juvenile—and while I was doing that six months ago and thinking that I was really great, but now, its not me any more.

My clowning reveals that I enjoy life. I laugh at a lot of things that may not be all that funny but I still get enjoyment out of it.

I've looked at a nut you know. There is a centre which is sort where I'm creative. I think my clowning is creative. I enjoy it and it brings me pleasure. I may or may not say something out loud, but there is definitely some inner humour. Where the triggers are. Then there is the inner shell. I don't find it all that funny necessarily, but I know if I say something that it will get a laugh and

that I'll enjoy that. And then there's the outer shell. This is where I stoop to really low humour and don't even get a laugh or any favourable response. Then I think, "Oh boy, that's pretty pathetic."

In grade 8 and 9, and even part of grade 10, I'd go to that third level because then I would get noticed. Even though it is so low and you are not even doing what you should be as a Clown—but at least I was still trying. And I think I learned to not go that far in the senior grades. It was sort of like killing yourself on stage.

I still see the world humorously. But I get more satisfaction inside myself rather than saying something funny or when others would laugh either at what I said or just the comical element. Now I just get the satisfaction from inside myself for even thinking the funny things even if I don't say anything. And when I do speak, then people do laugh and that is a real treasure. And because I don't do it all the time anymore then the expectation is quite different, and it is like it is almost a surprise and people really laugh and that is wonderful. I used to flood the market before and bombard people with my joking, but now, because I am much more selective in what I say, then there is a surprise in what I say, and the laugh is greater.

I think if there was something funny to be said in high school then I would probably say it. I almost felt obliged to. It was a role I had to play. An important part of humour is its spontaneity. And even if it is expected that I would say something, if its not spontaneous then it wouldn't have the same effect.

Humour should have a big place in school, but it is not easy. One thing is that teachers and students have a hard time joking with each other because what they find funny is quite different, and so if you talk about humour enhancing education then I think that is pretty hard without there being some common ground for the humour. Most students don't want to recognize the teacher as being hip or understanding teenage stuff. The interest in humour is different, and the role of the teacher and students also widens the gap.

I never really went out of my way to make a teacher laugh. One reason is that I don't like to challenge myself, and I know that that would be hard. I found, by experience, that to say something that had all the elements of humour including spontaneity has to just come to you. That was another kind of revelation.

I think that it is always good to have a chuckle.

I think that people need to laugh and although I'm not sure about where humour fits in with schooling, I think that it may even make learning better and certainly more fun. It makes school more interesting and may even provide a slightly different way of looking at things.

At my first high school there was about one male student for every four female students—which was great. I think that Class Clowns tend to be male; I don't think I know any girls who are actually Class Clowns.

I do remember Bertie, who was and still is what I consider to be one of the greatest sort of goofy people around. What I mean by goofy is that there are different ways of being a Class Clown and that what I did most of the time was through a type of behaviour in which I would spit out one-liners. But there are other things that go along with it. There are the things that happen accidentally and coincidentally, like with my P.E. teacher's red shorts. And even there I began to be aware of the gold mine of physical humour, especially as I was told that I was sort of clumsy growing up. But I guess that what I mean by being goofy is behaviour that is meant to try to get a laugh. It involves funny things, not aggressive or insulting or destructive sort of things. That's different. I'd never really do anything to try to damage anyone physically or emotionally, but on the other hand I know that there are times when I had hurt someone's feelings.

A Class Clown is someone who is pursuing mirth.

Then there was Danny who is a year ahead of me. He was completely irreverent and had this way of expressing something that would convey a boredom and a bit of annoyance that was really comical. He knew it too. It was the same kind of humour as Letterman, but a lot more. He wasn't worried about ratings. I recognized that he was really funny and that people liked him.

Damingo and Purkey, in their survey, used a number of characteristics to identify Class Clowns. Oliver's responses to these headings are markedly similar to their findings. He describes himself as being more intelligent than his peers—rating himself as a 8.7 on a 10 point scale. Additionally, he views himself as more independent, more assertive, more attention-seeking, more unruly, and more cheerful than his classmates. As with the Class Clowns from the Damingo and Purkey study, Oliver perceives himself as achieving less than his peers or his own abilities. The only real anomaly is that Oliver, along with his teachers and peers, does not see himself as a leader in his classes.

Oliver is successful as a Class Clown because he provides levity consistently and with confidence. He knows the role that he plays and chooses to clown rather than apply himself to serious academic study. Rather than trying to find the norm and fitting in, but missing it, he believes it is better to be on the edge and be quite different.

To be a successful Class Clown you have to have a good sense of humour. There are lots of people who don't and when they try to be a sort of clown, then it is painfully obvious that they are trying too hard and actually are not even funny. You have to have a good sense of humour as a general way of looking at things in your life.

And I guess that you have to have a certain level of intelligence to be a humorist and a Clown. Now maybe there are some people who are Class Clowns who are not intelligent, well they are idiots—or to use the correct language, they probably have some sort of learning disability—and they are a different type of Clown. They are the ones who are really foolish. They are not trying to be funny, but what they say or do ends up being funny even though they didn't mean to and don't know it. The point is, that if you are going to be a Class Clown, you have to be smart enough to know what is funny and how to make people laugh.

You also need to know people's behaviour and understand the effect that you have on them. You need to know about delivery and when to be quiet. Class Clowns who are joking all the time get boring really fast and don't seem to last. You can only use so much material, and if you use your humour too much then people stop listening and their expectations change. They don't want you to be funny anymore because you become too much of a distraction.

I think I was pretty easy to identify as a Class Clown. For one thing there is the clothing. I generally have worn outrageous clothing. And also my hair - it might not necessarily be comical but at least stands out as different. I haven't cut it since the summer before grade 8. Not on purpose, but I just never got around to it.

Also the behaviour. If there is an opportunity, then anyone who is good at it will clown around; and even if there isn't. That leads to different types of clowns. You know there is the idiot, and that's just someone who is such a bumbling fool that that is all that they do. I know for me that I was not really all that interested in doing what I was supposed to do as a student, so I started to joke around and pour my energies into clowning. I guess the only way to characterize that behaviour is that when one thing is going on, like a lesson, then a Class Clown will sidetrack with humour.

I sort of see myself as an entertainer, and that being a Class Clown is an extension of that. You know, you can catch my act at Punchlines, and then after that I'll be in room 317 from 1:00 to 2:00.

I have to let my clowning out once and a while. I had to do it and enjoyed doing it. What it took for me to stop fooling around was the very real fear of not graduating high school—that was a huge force to push me and my humour downwards.

I think my personality made me clown around, but my situation in grade 12 forced me to stop doing that.

If I had to do it all over again I think that in the middle of grade 10 I probably would have made a much more serious effort on my school work and not joked as much. But I would never really stop being the Clown.

After my grade 12 crisis, I performed less. So on the outside I stopped various things, but on the inside there were always the triggers and I'd think things and get a private chuckle and enjoy that. Whereas if I'm trying too hard to be funny for others, it might not be funny. But if it just pops into my head then I get a chuckle and some relief, especially if I am under stress.

I think that I am the Clown on the inside. I would say that being a Class Clown is more of who I am than just a role I have to put on. It comes from deeper inside than just doing it. I have learned to do it less, even though the humour is still running with energy inside me. I now have pretty good control on the outside. And when I am the Clown on the outside, I do it much more by choice and less frequently, and I think that I am even more funny because of it.

ESSENTIAL ASPECTS OF CLOWNING: AN EXAMINATION OF THEMES

“Themes are trustworthy reflections of experience” (Cochran, 1991, p. 80). Through the use of the narrative form, meaningful patterns of experience become apparent. Themes move the story along and develop over time. As the story is savoured, and the patterns become evident, so too the themes begin to emerge. How were the themes selected? Through interviewing and discussing with Oliver, reflecting on his narrative, and consulting with my supervisor, the themes presented themselves to me. They reflect the essential aspects of Oliver’s story of his clowning experiences. For Oliver, the threads that weave through his story blend into an intricate design. The themes of that design include a humorous way of looking at the world, the activation of clowning, finding a place, the gradual control of clowning, the inner role of the Fool, and the social function of the Class Clown. Oliver's clowning experience is complex. In searching for themes we attempt, not to reduce his story to some imposed simplistic structures, but rather, to endeavour to listen to the common and profound elements which make sense of his story.

A Humorous Way of Looking at the World: Mastering Incongruity

Comedy prepares the audience for novel intrusion by showing that customary and usually dependable rules are illusory....In effect, the comic prepares his audience for chaos and half convinces it that chaos can be fun.

(as quoted in Lewis, 1989, p. 89)

Oliver sees the world around him in comic relief. This has as much to do with a love of the humorous as it does with a bent toward the incongruous. Both seem to come naturally to Oliver.

When he says, “I think everything has humour in it,” he identifies something that is generated deep within him, and is given expression throughout his life. Statements such as: “I think people need to laugh,” and, “I am always thinking things that are

funny,” exemplify his personal philosophy. As a Class Clown, therefore, he describes himself as someone who is pursuing mirth. Ultimately, his clowning reveals that he enjoys life.

There is, however, more to be found here than just humour. Much of Oliver's clowning is not simply the pursuit of mirth, but the uncovering of the incongruous and the chaotic. In this sense he stands firmly in the tradition of the Fool as a detached observer who identifies and ushers in chaos. Whether he is skillfully creating puns and parodies, or drawing attention to a Principal who forgot to show up for his time management lecture, Oliver disturbs the accepted social conventions of the school by his insights and the resulting laughter. His humour flows from an understanding that people and their interactions are not necessarily as they appear, and that, given a bit of probing, the veneer of order often inadequately covers things not so easily contrived or controlled. That he does this through jest is a reflection of his creative flair. He does not just add humour, but also new ideas and ways of looking at situations through clowning.

Oliver is a Class Clown who sees his world as a humorous place where, because of his penchant for the incongruous, he can cause others to laugh. He has an eye for what does not fit; he has an ear for what sounds peculiar. He thinks somewhat differently, perhaps with a sort of humorous detachment. In this sense he helps the rest of us enjoy the revelation of chaos. With his aid, we can look at our lives in school with a measure of levity, for, as he firmly believes, “it is always good to have a chuckle.”

The Activation of Clowning: Boredom and Triggers

Though Oliver may look at his world through humorous eyes, his clowning is a manifestation of 'the triggers.' He describes these as a rush of energy that flows in the context of some incongruous situation. His response to the triggers is directly related to

his sense of boredom in the classroom. Because Oliver had for years been able to slide by in his studies without applying himself, and also because he had not been particularly challenged through his intermediate and junior secondary schooling, he spent increasing amounts of his time and talent concentrating on the triggers. In this way he was able to amuse himself. He also found that, by following the triggers, he gained the recognition he desired from other students. In the triggers lie the resources to entertain himself and to be a comic for others.

In some ways his description of 'the trigger' indicates his humorous approach to life. But there is more to it than simply a disposition. There is a sense that the stimulation of a trigger is not a conscious process. When peculiar things occur or are said in the class, the incongruous resonates within him. He hears and responds. He is like the traditional Fool, a detached observer who has insight into the transcendent order by virtue of his folly. He hears and sees the world differently. With his insight, Oliver plays the Fool, for he too brings an uncommon perspective to his classes.

Oliver senses that the triggers are always there, but he decides whether or not to act upon them. In elementary school he is aware of the triggers but does little with them. In grade 8 and 9 he acts upon almost all of them and thus perfects the art of responding to the triggers. But by the end of grade 12 he has learned to be selective.

When he feels bored, he hears the triggers and responds accordingly. This is how his clowning is activated. As a latent humorist, Oliver grows into full-blown clowning within the context of both his own tendency to avoid working at his studies, and a general sense of boredom. He does not feel challenged, and so he begins to play with the triggers. In this way a Clown is born. He needs something with which to occupy himself, and, for Oliver, that something is clowning. Both the triggers and his need to find a place among his peers allows him to emerge inevitably into the role of Class Clown.

A Search for Recognition: Finding a Place

I guess I figured that if I could get a laugh then I wouldn't be swallowed up. If I could get a laugh then I'd have a place. By the end of the month I had established myself as somebody with a reputation for being funny. And by paying attention to the triggers, clowning around, and making people laugh, I at least was assured of a place; no matter what it cost me. By being funny, by being noticed, I had popularity. (Oliver)

A need for recognition is one of the driving forces at work within Oliver, and thus one of the key ingredients to his clowning. Identifying early on a desire to stand out and be identified, much of Oliver's reflection on his experiences as a Class Clown revolves around this theme. Whether he is addressing the length of his hair, the outrageous flamboyance of his clothing, or the reputation of being a witty punster, Oliver appears as an unforgettable character. His need to be noticed is not unique. It is a decidedly human quality, but for him it appears to have the impetus of a driving force.

Class Clowns have long been accused of employing attention getting devices in order to meet some need or cover some inadequacy. According to this view, it is as if clowning is a gross compensatory behaviour that is both annoying and needs to be extinguished. If the Clown could develop a healthy sense of self esteem then his chronic need to act and and draw inappropriate attention to himself would go away. Most likely there is some problem to be found in his upbringing or current home situation. And so it goes.

The 'pathology approach' to clowning as a negative behaviour does not fit particularly well with Oliver's experience. The desire for a place does not stem from a weakness or problem so much as from a yearning for identity. Oliver is a creative, articulate and intelligent young man who uses his jesting to add to much more than take away from those around him.

Oliver can not abide the anonymity of conformity, so he takes pains to draw attention to himself as someone who lives at the fringe. He desires identification for his distinctiveness, and thus operates as a Clown in order to gain this recognition. Humour is his method of operation, and he uses it skillfully to gain popularity in his junior high years as well as notoriety throughout his whole high school career. He performs, as he mentions repeatedly, like a stand-up comedian. At times he must pause while others guffaw; at other times he must gingerly dodge a volley of rotting fruits and vegetables.

Everyone gets noticed for something. Rather than fulfilling the role of the Great Athlete (for which he is too clumsy) or the Great Academic (for which he is not sufficiently disciplined), Oliver adopts the role of the Great Humorist by becoming the Class Clown. Once started in the role, he realises that he is good at it, and, especially when he pays attention to the triggers, he can easily get a laugh. In clowning he has a place, and with his cap and bells placed lazily upon his head he is recognized for who he has become—the Class Clown. For, as Oliver reflects, “once you become a Class Clown, then that's who you are.”

The Gradual Control of Clowning: From Compulsion to Choice

I think I am the clown, in my mind, but I have pretty good control on the outside. And when I am the clown on the outside, then I do it much more by choice, and less frequently. I think I am even more funny because of it.

Oliver's statement is taken from the latter part of his story and indicates where he ended up, not where he began. In grade 8, what he discovers is that the clowning flows from his natural disposition towards the humorous, and provides an excellent means of both staving off boredom and finding a place with his peers. However, as he performs more, and incidentally achieves less academically, he finds himself unable to exercise self control over his clowning. As he describes in his analogy of a nut,⁸ he finds himself clowning when he knows there is something humorous to address, or even when there

⁸ This analogy is found on p 60.

is not. In fact, he recognizes that he is over and over again compelled not just to fulfil the role of the Clown, but to be constantly distracting himself by his clowning. Even the irritation of his peers and the discipline of his teachers does little to prevent Oliver from performing. Through grades 8 to 10, Oliver both perfects the art of clowning and also becomes a slave to his role. He summarises this period quite well.

I used to flood the market before and bombard people with my joking, but now, because I am much more selective in what I say, then there is a surprise in what I say, and the laugh is greater.

I think if there was something funny to be said in high school then I would probably say it. I almost felt obliged to. It was a role I had to play. An important part of humour is its spontaneity. And even if it is expected that I would say something, if its not spontaneous then it wouldn't have the same effect.

He is the Clown, and must constantly demonstrate his humour. In this sense, he recognizes that he suffers the tyranny of being compelled to clown. Even then, however, when really pressed, he can temporarily stop. Yet this is never long lasting, for sooner than later—and generally sooner—a trigger sounds its familiar signal, and Oliver is at it again. Once the pattern has been established and the reputation built, it takes an enormous crisis for change to occur.

By settling down to his studies in the final term of grade 12, Oliver discovers some important things about his clowning. He realises that he no longer needs to get attention all the time, and that when he concentrates on his schooling, the triggers, which are still there, begin to fade somewhat into the background. Now, he decides when to respond. Though he still feels the trigger on the inside, he does not want to joke as before.

Having now graduated from high school, Oliver has a keen sense of the choice that he has in his clowning. He recognizes that there is a difference between what he may feel on the inside and how he decides to act on the outside. Having refined his perception of his identity and role as a Class Clown, he makes a clear distinction

between essence and activity. Though he performs less, in many ways he has become a better Clown. In part, this is due to the natural process of maturing through adolescence, but there may be more to it than this. Oliver has, especially through the academic crisis of his graduating year, discovered that the danger of his humour is that, if unchecked, it inevitably becomes self destructive. However, when he exercises control over his clowning by selectively acting upon the impulse of the triggers, then he can play the Fool with greater satisfaction. What had become a curse is now a blessing. He now controls and gives expression to the clowning that in junior high controlled him and drove him to distraction. Oliver summarizes his experience well.

I think that I am the Clown on the inside. I would say that being a Class Clown is more of who I am than just a role I have to put on. It comes from deeper inside than just doing it. I have learned to do it less, even though the humour is still running with energy inside me. I now have pretty good control on the outside.

The Inner Role of the Fool: The Class Clown in Himself

Also if being a Class Clown is what you are, and that's who you become, then you definitely lose something. You are seen as only a Clown by everyone, and maybe even by yourself, and nothing more. And that's sort of sad, isn't it, because, of course, there is more to a person than any one thing—even if that's being a Class Clown.

There are many sides to Oliver, and many dimensions to his clowning. Four of these have already been discussed: his humorous way of looking at life; boredom and 'the triggers;' his search for recognition; and his growing control over his clowning. These are part of his internal experiences as a Class Clown, but there are others. Oliver also views himself as a person who avoids challenges, and as an entertainer. These dimensions provide further substance to his role and insight into his experience.

Oliver has not been one to face up to challenges. His academic problems stem, in part, from his feelings of boredom, but also from a tendency to turn away from

challenge. Only when faced with possible failure in his final year does he apply himself to his studies. His sense of turning away from, rather than embracing, difficulties has been part of his clowning experience as well. If a joke bombed or people did not respond, Oliver says, “I wouldn't go back in and crusade to make a person laugh, and if I did I wouldn't put all my effort into it. I guess due to my fear of failure.” If he does not try, then he does not have to face failure; for any lack of success is merely a result of non-participation. This is how he conducts himself through the early years, but what he learns by the end of high school is that, both in his studies and clowning, when he applies himself he meets with success and feels gratified.

In many ways Oliver's sense of his own experience is masked with humble understatement. He does not give himself much credit for the positive impact of his clowning on others, and does not view himself as much of a risk taker. And yet, both his teachers and peers identify the challenge and achievement that he has faced with his wit. Few student are willing to take the risks that a Class Clown embraces. Day after day he gleefully stands up and performs, making others laugh, and draws attention to himself. It is the Class Clown who has the courage and alacrity to boldly address the incongruous, and the intelligence and wit to package it with humour.

Oliver loves to perform. His involvement in theatrical productions and his obvious talent for improvisation have won him acclaim in his schools. What he does in the classroom flows naturally from his yearning for the dramatic. In one of our interviews, Oliver remarked, “I sort of see myself as an entertainer, and that being a Class Clown is an extension of that. You know, you can catch my act at Punchlines, and then after that I'll be in room 317 from 1:00 to 2:00.” Though he invariably receives laughs for his efforts, there is always a tension for him in terms of the alienation and captivity of others. When he goes too far, he loses his audience. And, because he is seen as an entertainer, that is how both he and others treat him. The expectation limits him,

regardless of the complexity of the experience, to being simply a Class Clown. This is his role; this is who he has become. And if all he can do is perform, then he loses something of himself.

As a Class Clown, he is readily identifiable but not necessarily knowable. Is Oliver actually known by others? His motivation can be guessed at and his behaviour analysed, but who is the person hidden behind the clowning? While he is busily making others laugh, and thus ensuring himself a recognized place among his peers, he becomes so fused with his role that he ceases to be anything but a Clown. Oliver feels a sense of loss about this as though he has been diminished by his role. His clowning has not only cost him grades, but also taken away his identity.

However, in his final year of school, Oliver comes to realize that his few good friends accept him—that is, the person behind the motley garb—and that he does not have to perform for them. This he finds deeply gratifying. Oliver is a person who can stand aside from the spotlight and have a place in the hearts of true friends. For them, he does not need to perform to maintain their attention.

The Social Function of the Class Clown

Everybody I spoke to about Oliver readily identifies him as a Class Clown. They are familiar with the role and recognize how ably he fulfils the office. Not only can they define a Class Clown and fit Oliver's antics into the model that they describe, but they do so with a consistent representation of the Class Clown as serving significant social functions.

In the first place, he habitually causes laughter. Others come to expect this, and turn to Oliver for a humorous perspective. He is rarely found wanting. Like the Fool, he is the identified wit, and his rights and privileges are as informally entrenched as is his obligation to clown. Oliver is aware of this expectation and sees himself duty-bound to

fulfil the responsibility.

As the Class Clown, Oliver also plays the ambiguous role of the Sage-Fool. He can be taken either for more or less than he actually is. For instance, in the story in which Oliver suggested that the accommodating Mr. Richards could wear a dress, the teacher felt that Oliver was saying, "It's OK Sir, just be yourself." He saw in the jesting a profound message. But for Oliver, the teacher's invitation was simply a trigger that blasted inside him and he knew he had a gem of a joke. It may be that Oliver is unaware of the positive impact that he has on others. Much like Fools, who speak the truth without knowing it, Oliver serves as a positive agent in the classroom. He does protect the quiet ones in class by his willingness to perform. He does point out mistaken authority, and demonstrates the folly of taking oneself too seriously. It is doubtful that poor Mr. Curtis ever played flag football with his students the same way again. As the voice from the fringe, Oliver speaks with the authority of the detached observer and has licence to perturb the conventions of the classroom. A boring class is enlivened by his presence. The ridiculous seems to become more apparent through his wit. The incongruous is made evident, and what is taken for granted is given a fresh perspective.

Oliver's clowning is benign or harmless. He may be typical of many Class Clowns in his treatment of others. Though some students are destructive or vicious, there is a conspicuous absence of malicious intent in his clowning. Some teachers fail to see this, and find it difficult to make a distinction between beneficial and hostile forms of humour. One of the teachers I interviewed told the story of a thoroughly anti-social lad

whom he originally identified as a Class Clown.⁹ Upon reflection, however, he concluded that the student was a thoroughly destructive force in the classroom. We can make an important distinction between those who act out pathologically in a seemingly clownish manner and those who are true purveyors of mirth. Oliver's clowning stems from a love of humour and a desire to find a place. But he plays his part as the Class Clown in such a way that he adds to, rather than takes away from, the classroom. He is a constructive character who builds morale and cohesion in the group. This is the role of the humorist, and he fulfils it in an enriching manner. A group that laughs together at the incongruity in its midst is a healthier group. The Class Clown ensures that this happens.

Even though Oliver believes that his desire to sidetrack with humour is more for his own benefit than for any one else's, his antics affect others. This is inevitable for a Class Clown. Indeed, his identity is a highly social and public one. The role of the Clown can only be successfully filled by a certain sort of person. To be the quick-witted extrovert who engages others through funny outbursts and antics is to be in the limelight.

Of course, even a skillful Clown would be unable to attract and sustain attention, period after period, without the tacit consent, or even complicity, of the class. He performs to willing audiences who desire, no matter how captured they may feel, to have a humorist in their midst. Here is another aspect of the social dynamic of his clowning. As Goldstein and McGhee (1972) suggest, groups need Clowns; and educational settings require humorists.

The Class Clown serves a vital social role that is more visible in some classes than in

⁹ Jamie has never been an easy boy to teach. He is strangely fascinating to girls and causes giggles wherever he goes. His teacher remembers one particular period when he was sitting at the back of the class surrounded by a group of students who were tittering away wildly. As he approached to find out what all of the commotion was about he found Jamie sitting on a stool with his pants down around his ankles. He had wanted to show off a new pair of underwear—at least that was the story he told the Vice Principal. His 'off the wall' behaviour, over which he appears to have little control, appears to have a detrimental effect on others, and is part of a greater package of anti-social and criminal activity. Jamie has recently been spending his time in a Youth Detention Centre. His compulsive clowning, with its bizarre style, is very different from Oliver's.

others. Oliver reflects,

I'd call clowning a behaviour and not a misbehaviour. There were definitely a lot of times that my clowning made the class more interesting and also made people see things in a new light, say to literature, history, or the arts especially. . While reading a novel, the joking can add something even while it distracts, and lead to another path because these are not linear things.

In the right subject or discussion clowning can add perspective and a creative element.

Whether he intends it or not, Oliver's clowning serves others more than it distracts. His humour plays a vital role in the educational process. The social function of the office of the Class Clown is much more than simply self serving.

CONCLUSION

The narrative approach offers much depth to the study of Class Clowns. Through the reflected experiences of one such Clown, it becomes apparent that there is more going on here than current educational literature suggests. The Class Clown fulfils a vital role in the classroom. He holds an honoured office in the eyes of both his teachers and peers. Though he may not be particularly well understood, he cannot be ignored. The humour that he brings with him, regardless of how ambiguously he presents himself, seems to do more than simply cause laughter. For his audience, he provides a level of entertainment that would otherwise be missing. His peers, while conceding that he makes it more difficult for them to concentrate, admit that he makes the class much more interesting and lively.

Regardless of his impact on teachers and peers, Oliver's experience of being a Class Clown reflects a story of change. From his initial response to the triggers, through a sense of crisis and refinement, he has gained a controlled appreciation of his humorous way of looking at life. There is a creative ability involved in being able to respond to the triggers in a consistently humorous way that he has perfected through his high

school career. It is true that, by his senior year, his focus on jesting almost ended in academic failure. But, by learning to apply himself to his studies, he has discovered how to control his need to perform. He may have begun with an almost uncontrolled frenzy of hilarity, in which he would joke in order to gain a place of recognition for himself, but he has not remained there. By now, after graduating from high school, Oliver has gained a much more sophisticated appreciation for his interior sense of humour, and a strong measure of control of what and when he decides to perform. His identity as a Class Clown has crystallized through academic crisis. He can be the humorist without being driven to constantly perform.

Through the process of interviewing, Oliver has had the opportunity to reflect on his story. His recollections have helped him not simply to 'replay the tapes,' but to look closely at them and to gain new insight into his experiences. Oliver himself has uncovered the key themes in his life. He does see life with a humorous perspective—that is his approach. He has had a tendency to turn away from challenge, to feel bored, and to focus his energy and concentration on the triggers that snap inside him. But he has learned that he does not have to continue to do so. As with the rest of his life, this applies to his humour. Even here he can take risks and struggle to exercise control, and thus to become funnier in his delivery. He has gained an understanding that he does not have to perform to find a place for himself, and that his penchant for the incongruous and the humorous is not a cover for a need or a weakness. It may in fact be of a higher order. In laughter much truth may be found.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

One dreary Friday afternoon, Mr. Rutcliff attempts to engage his junior students in an enthralling discussion on what he refers to as 'the excitement of contemporary Canadian History.' As is his custom, he begins with a detailed description of some key figures, including the founding leader of the Canadian Communist Party, Mr. Tim Buck. Well, half way through his presentation, the dutiful scratching of pens is interrupted by a familiar voice.

"Sir?" questions Raymond.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Was his son named Tim Buck Too?"

Though it matters little, I have never forgotten the name of the first leader of the CCP. It is one of the few things I do remember from that class.

Many are the stories that we know about Class Clowns, yet little has been done to research them. My intention in this study has been to discover whether or not a Class Clown can, in spite of educational literature to the contrary, actually be a substantial person who may have a positive place in our schools. In this final chapter, the scope of the thesis will be discussed along the following lines: statement of findings, limitations of findings, implications for theory, implications for practice, implications for further research, and a summary.

STATEMENT OF FINDINGS

The narrative case study of Oliver provides insight into the phenomenon of the Class Clown. His story, based on his own reflections as well as the recollections of his peers and teachers, offers a colourful picture of a modern day jester. From his beginnings in grades 8 and 9, where he builds a reputation and exercises his mirth without restraint, Oliver skillfully learns the trade of clowning. Building upon his early experiences, he finds himself fused in his role and almost unable to stop acting out the part. In this way he continues to keep himself occupied at school and entertains his friends. However, the academic cost of his jesting becomes more apparent as the years

go by. In grade 12, Oliver is faced with a crisis—‘settle down and do your work, or you will not graduate’—through which he learns that he can still be the Class Clown, but he must primarily focus on his work. He subsequently clowns less, and finds success in his studies.

Oliver’s story, in each of its stages, is filled with themes that offer insight into the meaning and direction of that story. Oliver is a young man with a decidedly humorous orientation toward life. Given this outlook, his clowning is activated by ‘triggers’ in the context of a general sense of boredom in school. Oliver is an active person with a furtive imagination; thus he pursues mirth.

As the Class Clown, he finds success in his jesting and a place of recognition among his peers. Oliver’s need to be noticed may have initially driven him to his clowning, but once there, he finds an incredible outlet for his natural abilities. He performs, is recognized, and expends the energy that is not being directed toward his studies. In the beginning, Oliver senses that he is compelled to respond to the triggers, but, by the time he graduates from high school, he appreciates a sense of control over his actions. Now, when he clowns or acts humorously, he does so by choice.

Oliver’s clowning gave him an identity, but also made him one-dimensional. Within the context of others, the social function of his clowning is of far greater value than he might imagine. The positive influence of humour within any group, but especially within an educational setting, should not be undervalued. Oliver ushers in both chaos and mirth, and by so doing, helps those around him to have a chuckle.

Can we easily forget the Class Clown? It seems unlikely. Oliver, as a memorable Class Clown, remains long in the minds of those around him. His gift for uncovering the incongruous in our lives and interactions has given him a place of honour far beyond the recognition he desires. Though he clowns at his own expense, he may have gained more than he has lost. Oliver brings much levity to his own life as well as to to

the lives of those around him. He willingly offers the gift of laughter, and makes his classes different, simply by his presence. Though he does not literally wear the cap and bells or shake the bauble, Oliver serves, like other Fools before him, with infinite jest.

The narrative of Oliver's experiences as a Class Clown has been examined in the context of a thorough review of pertinent educational and psychological literature. While there is little to be found here on the Class Clown, what exists is largely negative. A qualitative study by Damingo and Purkey (1978) confirms the unquestionable presence of Class Clowns in our schools, and calls for further research.

A review of historical and literary traditions of the Fool has revealed some relevant themes to the experiences of the Class Clown. The Fool is an ambiguous character who appears to be both more and less than he actually is. He is the doorkeeper for the chaotic, and the mouth piece of the incongruous. As a perturber of social order, he challenges as well as guards authority; and as a detached observer, he appears to be connected to a higher power and remains somewhat disengaged from the situation before him. In modern times, the Fool has all but lost the voice of counterpoint. He has become less of a critic and more of a showman.

Class Clowns may be better understood if they are taken to be standing in this tradition. They are ambiguous in their use of humour, and mask their identities well. They definitely perturb the social order of the classroom. Yet there is often welcome humour in their disruptions, and justice in their defiance of abused power. Class Clowns do not fit in the middle of things, they thrive on the periphery. The perspective of detachment allows them to speak with fresh insight and to bring laughter. Class Clowns can be taken to be annoying or entertaining, and yet they may be much more than either of these. When they are understood in the tradition of the Fool, Class

Clowns are better appreciated. They are readily identified; they need to be honoured.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Though care has been taken to provide validity and reliability to this study, it is not generalizable to a larger population. Oliver's case study is an idiosyncratic narrative, and though it may be prototypical, it is nevertheless the story of but one Class Clown. However, what it offers is a detailed description of the experiences of that one Clown. This is, it is hoped, of value to the academic and educational community. The story line, with its evident stages, reveals themes that may, with further research, be characteristic of other Clowns.

The significance of this type of research lies not so much in the answers that it provides as in the type of questions that it raises. What is the experience of a Class Clown? What impact does a Class Clown have on the educational process? What place does humour have in our classrooms?—these questions warrant further study. In this sense, ethnographic research clarifies salient educational issues. This is an exploratory study. As such it is intended to lead to further research. I hope that the theoretical and practical understanding of the Class Clown will be advanced through this examination.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY

Oliver's story invalidates the view that the Class Clown is an instance of disruptive behaviour. The limited understanding of Class Clowns contained in educational research reflects the simplistic and one-sided perspective of social control theory in the classroom. In deference to current literature that addresses Class Clowns, my study demonstrates that there is more to this humorist than might at first be supposed. A Class Clown is not necessarily acting out compulsively, seeking attention,

demonstrating behaviour problems, or compensating for some sense of inferiority. Oliver does not readily fit into any of these categorizations. In fact, the positive aspects of his clowning, especially his natural inclination toward the humorous, contradict the negative approach to Class Clowns taken by many educational theorists.

Oliver's experience can be located in the rich tradition of the Fool. Like his ancient counterpart, he is an ambiguous character who perturbs the social order, serves as a doorkeeper for the chaotic, and has the insight of a detached observer. Though the tradition of the Fool is more of a conception than a theory, it remains an important consideration in understanding Class Clowns. Even though the Fool has lost the social recognition that he enjoyed in mediaeval times, his presence can still be felt informally. Like the Court Jester, Oliver fulfils a much needed role. We no longer have, in modern times, mediaeval society's appreciation for the Fool, but the function remains a significant part of our social institutions. Every group needs a humorist; and every classroom requires a Clown. By locating Class Clowns in the rich tradition of Fools is to give them back a dignified and respectable office. We need to know and wrestle with the Fools in our midst. Some may be mere idiots; others, agents of wisdom.

Oliver's story validates and extends the positive portrayal of Clowns. Grounded in the tradition of the Fool, it has a rich and honourable heritage. His story also fits well with the ideas presented by Sprick (1985). Unlike many of his colleagues, Sprick suggests that the Clown's motivation could include boredom, a natural bent toward the humorous, and intellectual competition with the teacher. Though Oliver is reticent to admit to the third possibility, some of his teachers perceive that this is what he is all about. These explanations of the motivation for clowning behaviour reflect an appreciation of the value of clowning in our schools and affirm the place of the Clown in our classrooms.

Additionally, as Domingo and Purkey (1978) suggest, "the attention seeking and

unruly aspects of clowning behaviour may result from adolescent techniques used to make classmates laugh” (p. 396). It could be that the perceived connection between clowning and attention-seeking has more to do with the social dynamics of groups than with the internal processes of the person.

Satir (1991) makes favourable mention of Class Clowns in her identification of the Irrelevant coping stance. It would be interesting to investigate how many of the students identified as Class Clowns behave similarly to the whirling distraction that she describes. Certainly, Oliver does not identify himself as acting from these impulses, but there are other Clowns who may. If this is the case, then it may be that their particular reasons for adopting the role of the Class Clown may have much more to do with coping with other concerns. Although Oliver acknowledges his desire to find a place of recognition as being one of his primary motivations for his early clowning, he does not speak of the sort of experience to which Satir refers.

It may be that the office of a Class Clown is a necessary part of any healthy classroom. In which case, his role must be filled by someone. It appears that he must be intelligent, articulate, quick-witted, and humorous. His specific motivation and sense of reward may vary, but whoever he is, the Class Clown fulfils an identifiable role. Current theoretical approaches to educational groupings have not researched the social dynamic of clowning nor the place of humour in the educational process. The implications of my research indicate that a fresh and detailed examination is in order.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Class Clowns need to be better understood. Further research, both quantitative and qualitative, will help teachers and counsellors to recognize the peculiar issues and concerns that revolve around these students, and thus to have the knowledge and skill required to work with them more effectively.

Teachers' attitudes towards humour in the classroom needs to change for their own good as well as the good of their students. Damingo and Purkey note that "some teachers may fail to distinguish between comic and hostile humour and classify it all as disruptive without seeing positive ways in which to use humour and meet their own objectives" (p. 396). Since Class Clowns bring levity with them, the challenge for teachers is not only to make the distinction that Damingo and Purkey suggest, but to find ways of encouraging and working with the Clowns. Oliver's story bears witness to these challenges. Teachers who, like Mr. Richards, appreciate humour in their classes use it as an aid to learning, and make education a lot less dreary.

Additionally, teachers' attitudes towards Class Clowns need to change. To view Oliver as an attention-seeking student whose antics are blatant misbehaviours that need to be punished would be a tragic misunderstanding of his experience as well as the office of the Class Clown. Teachers need to value these modern day Court Jesters and find creative ways of capitalizing on their humour and helping them to exercise control in their clowning.

It is not uncommon for counsellors to have to deal with Class Clowns. But how are we to assist them? It is clear from Oliver's story that he has experienced an evolution in his clowning. He appears to be generally constructive, and receptive to being talked to—even if not particularly seriously. How can counsellors build therapeutic alliances with Class Clowns? How do we help them to balance the excesses of their role, and to gain more empathy for others? Although the motivation for their behaviour may be quite understandable, how do we help them to have a sense of mastery over their clowning?

The humour of the Clown may be, in part, a defence against something else. For Oliver, this appears to be related to some themes that he identifies as his avoidance of challenge. At the same time, however, it may spring from simply a way of looking at

the world. Oliver's triggers identify things which are incongruous and humorous, and so he clowns.

It may be that many Class Clowns find themselves enclosed in a box from which they cannot easily escape. Not only do most Clowns not take themselves very seriously because of their role, but neither do those around them. The expectation that the Class Clown will always be the joker is an enormous burden on his motley shoulders. This may in a very real sense negate him as a person.

Oliver himself said,

If being a Class Clown is what you are, and that's who you become, then you definitely lose something. You are seen as only a Clown by everyone, and maybe even by yourself, and nothing more. And that's sort of sad, isn't it, because, of course, there is more to a person than any one thing—even if that's being a Class Clown.

The Class Clown does not need to be fixed. His clowning may have cost him dearly, but what he may need is help and nurturing rather than a cure. How can a Class Clown continue in his role without losing his sense of personhood? What does it mean for him to succeed in his role as Class Clown, and yet also to achieve in his studies? How can he be helped to understand the effect he has on others in his classes? What does he gain from his clowning, and what does it cost him? These are but a few of the questions that counsellors may need to address with the Class Clowns with whom they work.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There are numerous questions that a study of this nature raises but does not answer. Perhaps this is as it should be, given the principal characters of the research. Fools and Clowns pose many more questions than they would ever dream of answering. Some concerns that may warrant further research include: gender and clowning, motivation and the behaviour of Class Clowns, the social function of humour and clowning in

schools, clowning and self control, and Clowns in their adulthood.

Why is it that the overwhelming majority of Class Clowns are males? According to Damingo and Purkey (1978) fewer than one in seven Class Clowns are female (p. 393) Although they offer no reason for the predominance of male clowns in schools, they seem to have uncovered a point of significance. Indeed, in my search through historical and literary traditions of folly, I came across mention of only one female Fool—Caterina Matta who lived in Renaissance Germany (Welsford, p. 135). Is it something about the male psyche or is it more socially acceptable for males to don the cap and bells than females? Are there Class Clowns in all-girl classes and schools? What was the school experience of female comics?

What motivates Class Clowns and what are the patterns of their behaviour? Further study, both phenomenological and statistical, may reveal patterns of motivation for Class Clowns. Does their clowning result from attention-seeking and inferiority, or are there other reasons related to their actions? What exactly do Class Clowns do? They are highly verbal and active, yet their humour includes much more than mere words. What are the patterns of their behaviour, and what is the significance of those actions for both the Class Clown and his audience?

What is the social function of clowning and humour? The traditional Fool and the Class Clown appear to enjoy privileged status because of the quality of their humour, but they also serve as the butt of jokes, the whipping boy, and the outcast. This curious mixture is part of their ambiguity, and it may serve a social as well as a personal function. Is the Class Clown, like the Lord of Misrule and the Court Jester before him, a living example of the traditional overthrower of social norms, part of a safety valve checking outright rebellion against authority and convention, or something altogether different? In addition to the special place that the Class Clown holds in any classroom, what is the place of humour in education? It may be that humour not only is an

essential ingredient in group settings, but may also serve as a vital educational tool. In what way can teachers work with a Class Clown to nurture the positive use of humour for the benefit of both class and Clown?

To what degree does any Class Clown have control over his behaviour? Is his clowning merely an unconscious or habitual action with no forethought, or can he turn his witty behaviour on and off at will? If his clowning is a compulsive behaviour, then what purpose does it serve for the Class Clown, and what needs are thus met? How does he feel about being overcome by the desire to act the part of the Clown? In what ways can he exercise self control and be able to regulate his clowning?

What is life like for the Class Clown after his schooling? One Class Clown, in response to the question about his post-secondary plans replied, “I want to be all-time ruler of time, space, and dimension, and then I’d like to travel.” Do they persist in their clowning and find ‘gameful’ employment as humorists of one form or another? What professions do they undertake? Or from another perspective, what were Charlie Chaplin, Danny Kaye, Robin Williams and Steve Martin like in school—were they Class Clowns?

SUMMARY

The Class Clown is worthy of our examination. He has much to offer and is not particularly well understood. Through the use of a narrative, the experience of a Class Clown named Oliver stands as a revelatory case study against the background of literature on the Class Clown and the traditional Fool. His story demonstrates the depth of experience and the vitality of the role of the Class Clown. My research indicates a need for further study. The Class Clown, if he is to be better understood, must be seen in light of the ancient tradition of folly. He is a humorist who brings insight as well as laughter. He plays a crucial social role in our schools and needs to be

encouraged and valued rather than punished or cured.

I conclude with a final story of a Class Clown. As with all good jesting, timing is everything, and Ernest is well known for his quick—and timely—wit. As a Fool, however, he does much more than given others an opportunity to chuckle. With him comes a disturbance of fossilized order, and an opportunity to see things in a new way. He is an agent of justice who pulls down the bad and the ridiculous. He provides insight into the chaotic, and his perturbation causes more than mere comic relief. Ultimately, that is the secret of the Fool, and the gift of his modern adolescent counterpart, the Class Clown.

We all gathered with the usual hubbub that follows successful activity. After all, there was now a tradition forming as this was our third outing to the arena. As usual, people were busy removing skates and exchanging them with the attendant for their street shoes. Everything seemed to be moving along smoothly.

And then it happened. Ernest, in true fashion, found himself in the thick of it. One way or another, several times each day it was as if a spotlight fell upon him and, with a full audience, the performance began again.

“What do you mean you don’t remember what shoes you wore?” the attendant growled between dirty teeth and cracked lips that balanced the short stub of a cigarette butt. A silence fell across the room as all eyes turned to centre stage. Even though he did not remember what shoes he had worn into the arena, Ernest continued to push the ice skates into the man’s face.

“With an intellect like yours,” the growling continued, “it’s pretty clear that you won’t be a brain surgeon.” Giggles and smirks reverberated as Ernest shifted uneasily in his socks. Then, with a sparkle in his eye and a raising of his chin, he said, “Yeah, you’re probably right. I guess I’ll end up working in an ice rink.”

He seemed to shimmer triumphantly as he was paraded, shoes in hand, to the parking lot followed, as usual, by a trail of laughter.

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APPENDIX I

CONSENT FORMS:

For the principal subject

For secondary subjects: Teachers

For secondary subjects: Peers

QUESTIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRIMARY SUBJECT: THE CLASS CLOWN

**QUESTIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECONDARY SUBJECTS:
TEACHERS OF THE CLASS CLOWN**

**QUESTIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECONDARY SUBJECTS:
PEERS OF THE CLASS CLOWN**

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Department of Counselling Psychology
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5780 Toronto Road
Vancouver, B.C.
V6T 1L2

Project Title: Class Clown and Court Jester: A Case Study Approach to the Tradition of the Fool. A Thesis topic as partial completion of the requirements for the M.A. program.

Investigators: Dr. L. Cochran - Thesis Supervisor (822-5354)
Mr. D. Chevreau - Investigator and Thesis Candidate (261-6334)

Purpose and Procedures:

This thesis involves an examination of the role and significance of the Class Clown. It appears that this character plays a crucial part in the drama of the classroom and the school and that his persona is in fact a necessary part of the social fabric of the institution. It may be that the Class Clown fits with the long and unforgettable tradition of The Fool.

The subject in this study will be asked to go through various interviews with the Investigator to discuss through answering questions the key events and experiences that he has had as Class Clown. Interviews will also be taken with the peers and teachers of the Class Clown and he may be asked to sit in group discussion with them. Along with any pertinent school records this information will be used to create a narrative account of the Class Clown's experiences. This narrative account will then be confirmed with the Class Clown to ensure that nothing has been either added or left out of his account.

Confidentiality:

The names of the participants will not be revealed in the study or in any of the documentation of the study. Initials will be used for the Class Clown himself but all other participants will not be referred to apart from "Teachers and Peers."

Time Commitment:

It is estimated that eight to ten hours of time will be required from the principal participant, the Class Clown, and one to two hours from the other participants.

Any inquiries concerning the procedures will be welcomed gladly; it is important that all subjects fully understand their involvement in this project.

A subject has the right to refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without prejudice.

Consent:

I, _____ give my consent to participating in this study.

(Signature)

I, _____ have received for my own records a copy of the consent form including all attachments.

(Signature)

Parental Consent

I consent / do not consent to my child's participation in this study.

(Signature)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Department of Counselling Psychology
Faculty of Education
5780 Toronto Road
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V6T 1L2

Project Title: Class Clown and Court Jester: A Case Study Approach to the Tradition of the Fool. A Thesis topic as partial completion of the requirements for the M.A. program.

Investigators: Dr. L. Cochran - Thesis Supervisor (822-5354)
Mr. D. Chevreau - Investigator and Thesis Candidate (261-6334)

Purpose and Procedures for Secondary Subjects—Teachers:

This thesis involves an examination of the role and significance of the Class Clown. It appears that this character plays a crucial part in the drama of the classroom and the school and that his persona is in fact a necessary part of the social fabric of the institution. It may be that the Class Clown fits with the long and unforgettable tradition of The Fool.

Interviews will be taken with the teachers of the Class Clown and he may be asked to sit in group discussion with them. This information will be used to create a narrative account of the Class Clown's experiences. This narrative will then be confirmed with the Class Clown to ensure that nothing has been either added or left out of his account.

Confidentiality:

The names of the participants will not be revealed in the study or in any of the documentation of the study. Initials will be used for the Class Clown himself but all other participants will not be referred to apart from "Teachers and Peers."

Time Commitment:

It is estimated that one to two hours will be required from the participants.

Any inquiries concerning the procedures will be welcomed gladly; it is important that all subjects fully understand their involvement in this project.

A subject has the right to refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without prejudice.

Consent:

I, _____ give my consent to participating in this study.

(Signature)

I, _____ have received for my own records a copy of the consent form including all attachments.

(Signature)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
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Project Title: Class Clown and Court Jester: A Case Study Approach to the Tradition of the Fool. A Thesis topic as partial completion of the requirements for the M.A. program.

Investigators: Dr. L. Cochran - Thesis Supervisor (822-5354)
Mr. D. Chevreau - Investigator and Thesis Candidate (261-6334)

Purpose and Procedures for Secondary Subjects—Peers:

This thesis involves an examination of the role and significance of the Class Clown. It appears that this character plays a crucial part in the drama of the classroom and the school and that his persona is in fact a necessary part of the social fabric of the institution. It may be that the Class Clown fits with the long and unforgettable tradition of The Fool.

Interviews will be taken with peers of the Class Clown and he may be asked to sit in group discussion with them. This information will be used to create a narrative account of the Class Clown's experiences. This narrative will then be confirmed with the Class Clown to ensure that nothing has been either added or left out of his account.

Confidentiality:

The names of the participants will not be revealed in the study or in any of the documentation of the study. Initials will be used for the Class Clown himself but all other participants will not be referred to apart from "Teachers and Peers."

Time Commitment:

It is estimated that one to two hours will be required from the participants.

Any inquiries concerning the procedures will be welcomed gladly; it is important that all subjects fully understand their involvement in this project.

A subject has the right to refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without prejudice.

Consent:

I, _____ give my consent to participating in this study.

(Signature)

I, _____ have received for my own records a copy of the consent form including all attachments.

(Signature)

QUESTIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRIMARY SUBJECT: THE CLASS CLOWN

The following list of questions reflects the prepared questions that the primary subject answered during our first session. They do not represent all of the questions found in both interviews for many of these were for the sake of clarification of his responses.

1. What is your home like? Could you describe your home and social situations from grade 8 to grade 12?
2. Can you describe your friendship groups and how you feel about going to school?
3. When did you first view yourself as a Class Clown?
4. In what ways do you remember acting out the role of the Class Clown? Were there any specific situations that helped you build a reputation as Class Clown?
5. How do you think you began to adopt the role of the Class Clown? How aware do you think you were of the time that you were doing this?
6. Who are some of the other Class Clowns that you have known and how have they acted?
7. Do you see yourself as intelligent, independent or non-conforming compared to your peers?
8. Compared to your peers, how would you rate yourself in terms of: achievement, participation, assertiveness, unruliness, attention seeking, cheerfulness, leadership?
9. On what do you target your humour?
10. What happens to you when you find yourself in the Class Clown role? Any changes for you in your experience between grades eight and ten or ten and twelve?
11. Are you ever aware of not being in your role as Class Clown?
12. Do you turn your role on and off?
13. What control do you have over acting out the role of Class Clown? Can you say more about your feeling of energy flow when a trigger strikes you?
14. What affect do you think your actions have had on your teachers and peers? What role does the teacher play in your clowning? What roles do your peers play?
15. Do you see yourself as helping or hindering the class?
16. In what ways does your clowning benefit the teacher? Do teachers ever benefit from your clowning?
17. What are some of the most memorable experiences for you as a Class Clown?
18. What are some stories you have of acting the part of the Class Clown?
19. In what ways do you find satisfaction in acting out the part of the Class Clown?
20. What is your motivation for these actions?
21. What is the significance for you in these behaviours? What satisfaction do you get from your clowning?
22. Do you see yourself as an entertainer? In what ways?

23. Do you generally make fun of others or yourself in your clowning? Explain. Do you ever clown at your own expense?
24. In what ways are you vocal and active in class?
25. What does the role and status of the Class Clown mean to you?
26. What is your attitude towards teachers and administration?
27. How do you know when to quit?
28. What has affected your clowning in the school? Why did you let up?
29. In what ways do you exercise control and have awareness of your clowning?
30. What does your laughing and joking reveal about you?
31. What is the force at work in you as Class Clown? What significance does your clowning hold for you?
32. In what ways is your clowning self serving/social serving?
33. In what ways is your clowning creative expression/defensive repression?
34. What do you need to do to be a good Class Clown these days?
35. Are you a Class Clown or do you only play the part of the Class Clown?

QUESTIONS ADDRESSED TO SECONDARY SUBJECTS: TEACHERS OF THE CLASS CLOWN

The following list of questions reflects the prepared questions that the secondary subjects answered during their interviews. In some cases there were additional informal or clarification questions asked in the course of the session.

1. How would you define someone as a Class Clown?
2. What do they do that sets them apart as a Class Clowns as opposed to an annoyance or behaviour problem?
3. What place does humour have in our schools? What place should it have?
4. What effect do you see the Class Clown having on teachers and peers?
5. How do you as a teacher try to discipline the Class Clown? Is this any different from other students?
6. In what ways does the Class Clown effect the classroom?
7. How does the Class Clown's attitude towards teachers fit with other student's attitudes towards teachers?
8. In what ways is this Class Clown vocal and active?
9. In what ways does this Class Clown exercise leadership?
10. In what ways does this Class Clown participate, act assertively, act unruly, seek attention, and appear to be cheerful as compared with their peers?
11. How does this Class Clown's achievement compare with peers? How do you see it comparing with his abilities?
12. If the Class Clown is misbehaving, how do you know, and what do you think his motivation is?
13. Is the Class Clown generally well-liked by his teachers?
14. Are there any special rules for the Class Clown?
15. What happens when the teacher tries to contain the Class Clown?
16. How much of the teacher's attention is directed to the Class Clown?
17. How much does the Class Clown control the class?
18. What techniques are useful for getting the Class Clown to co-operate with what teacher wants to do in the class?
19. What things does the Class Clown do that are positive? That are negative?
20. Who takes on the role when the Class Clown is absent?
21. What sort of student takes on the role of Class Clown?
22. Compared with other Class Clowns that you have known, how would you rate this Class Clown on a ten-point scale?
23. Any anecdotes or stories that you can remember?
24. How many years have you been teaching?

QUESTIONS ADDRESSED TO SECONDARY SUBJECTS: PEERS OF THE CLASS CLOWN

The following list of questions reflects the prepared questions that the secondary subjects answered during their interviews. In some cases there were additional informal or clarification questions asked in the course of the session.

1. How would you define someone as a Class Clown?
2. What do they do that sets them apart as a Class Clowns as opposed to an annoyance or behaviour problem?
3. What place does humour have in our schools? What place should it have?
4. What effect do you see the Class Clown having on teachers and peers?
5. In what ways does the Class Clown effect the classroom?
6. How does the Class Clown's attitude towards teachers fit with other student's attitudes towards teachers?
7. In what ways is this Class Clown vocal and active?
8. In what ways does this Class Clown participate, act assertively, act unruly, seek attention, and appear to be cheerful as compared with their peers?
9. How does this Class Clown's achievement compare with peers?
10. Is the Class Clown generally well-liked by his peers?
11. Are there any special rules for the Class Clown?
12. What happens when the teacher tries to contain the Class Clown?
13. How much of the teacher's attention is directed to the Class Clown?
14. How much does the Class Clown control the class?
15. What things does the Class Clown do that are positive? That are negative?
16. Who takes on the role when the Class Clown is absent?
17. Compared with other Class Clowns that you have known, how would you rate this Class Clown on a ten-point scale?
18. Any anecdotes or stories that you can remember?