

Notes on **Laughter Yoga** –

A seminar and laughter club experience
conducted by Dr. Mandan Kataria,
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These notes by Marc Helgesen.
www.ELTandhappiness.com

I wrote these notes to keep Dr. Kataria's ideas clear in my mind. I am happy to share them with other people. But Laughter Yoga is better experienced than read about. To get a better idea, before you read these notes, watch a bit of laughter yoga on youtube.com.

One particularly good example is at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hi1WPUeNDJI>
(or go to youtube.com and search for "Laughter Yoga in Cape Town.")

There are other laughter yoga videos at <http://www.youtube.com/laughteryoga>
Dr. Kataria's website is: www.laughteryoga.org

Key ideas:

Do this in **groups** – laughter is contagious so laughter works better in groups.
A group dynamic develops.

Eye contact is important. It helps laughter be contagious.

Yogic laughter is laughter plus yoga. A key is the increase of oxygen intake (normal breathing takes in 3-500 ml of air. There is 2500 ml of residual air in the lungs. Laughter forces much of that out. **Laughter is exhaling.** (Note: the work of Nobel winner Otto Warburg who found lack of oxygen in cells related to disease.)

The body reacts to laughter whether it is genuine or not. This, coupled with the contagious nature of laughter explains why *fake it 'til you make it* works.

10 or 15 or 20 minutes a day is best. Working with a group is best. But you can do it on your own when groups aren't possible.

Motional creates emotion.

The **mind – body connection** is a 2-way street. We know the mind effects the body. But the body also affects the mind. Posture is an example (consider the posture for sadness – we can't feel sad if we stand straight and look up.)

Kids laugh about 300 times a day.

Adults 15 or so times.

Why – Adults think too much! (overthink) (social monitoring, etc.)

Laugh like children do. – from the body, not the mind.

Getting started

– laugh (fake it) for one minute – open mouth a little wider than normal.

Note on hand claps- Hands are flat: palm-to-palm. There are lots of acupressure points (tsubo) on the palms so this stimulates them. (This is in contrast to normal clapping – fingers against the palm of the other hands).

Steps:

1. clap
2. clap in rhythm: (1, 2 – 1, 2, 3)
3. move around as you do it. (in a chair, then stand and walk around).
4. Say/ chant “**Ha, ha --- ho, ho, ho**”
5. Add dance-like movements with arms.

Keys:

- clapping
- breathing
- a child’s point of view
- laughter

A pattern:

- warm-up – physical movement. Arms and hands.
- laughter exercises
- laughter meditation
 - start with “ho, ho; ha-ha-ha”.

“punch” the arms different places while saying this.

In a group. About 10 minutes. Start low (volume) and slow. Let it become spontaneous. (for me, it was like waves of real laughter interspersed with contrived laughter.

- Lying on back. Focus on top of head:
 - o Exhale: feel the stress dissolving
 - o Inhale: feel the energy entering you.

Gradually move down body:

Head to neck. Through the arms. Chest to stomach. Back. Butt to legs, to knees, to calves, to toes.



Specific laughter exercises

(you can see many of these by going to the youtube.com videos mentioned at the beginning of this file).

These happen in a circle. Encourage people to move around. Eye contact is very important. The idea is to do a range of these to keep things (the feelings and the laughter) fresh.

- **Ho. Ho. Ha-ha-ha.** Chant this in rhythm to get started. Clap at the same time.

Move around.

- **Very good!, Very good. Yeah!** A chant after an activity. Arm go up and to the side on “very good” and up over the head (like a victory gesture) on “yeah!”

This is meant to be a child-like affirmation. (And, by the way, affirmations are a great way to create self-fulfilling prophecies).

- **Hand by knees - stretch** Stretch hands from knees to above the head. Then exhale with laughter.

- **One-meter laugh** Extend hand from chest to the side one way (about 1 meter), then the other – as you laugh.

- **Visa card bill laugh.** Hold hands together representing a bill. Look at it an laugh. Show it to others who laugh at it. Laugh at theirs.

- **Milk shake laugh.** (or “cocktail shaker laugh”). Imagine two big containers for making milkshakes. Pour from one to another (right hand in big pouring gesture to the other hand. Then back. The sound is like “Eyyyyyyyyy” with rising intonation. They pour into your mouth as you laugh.

- or throw it behind your head.

- Or throw it on someone else.

- **Cell phone laugh** Use a mobile phone. Pretend you are hearing something hysterical. Laugh uncontrollable. (Dr. Kataria says he uses this in airports when he is on the road and can’t be in a laughter group. You can laugh in public without it being “too” weird.)

- **Motor boat laugh** The image is starting a motor with a rope pull (motor boats, lawn mowers, etc.). Do the gestures for pulling the rope. The first 2-3 pulls, laugh imitating the sound of trying to start is but it doesn’t file. The last time it does. (full laughter).

- **Tell a secret laugh** The leader pulls in everyone close together, as if to tell a great secret. The secret is something obvious (It’s Sunday. This is Tokyo). Other laugh as if surprised at the joke of saying the obvious.



- **“Why are you laughing” laugh** Imagine someone comes up and asks why you are laughing. Shrug your shoulders and make an “I don’t know” gesture as you laugh.
- **Subway laugh** Squeeze together is if you are on a crowded subway car and everyone is laughing uncontrollably.
 - variation: on that same subway, someone farts.
- **Namaste (Indian greeting) laugh** instead of saying a greeting.
 - variations:
 - bow
 - handshake
 - do all 3 in a row.
- **Angry laugh** Wag your finger as if you were angry while you laugh.
- **Electric shock** Start to shake hands, but pretend you are getting a static electricity shock when your hands touch. (Note – Electric shock is like static electricity, not like a Taser. – but I just thought of a new one. A “tickle taser” or “laughter laser) – you don’t actually touch the other people but pretend that the “tickle taser” works from about 10 or 15 cm away.
- **Gradiated laugh** Start low (volume), let it build to loud – like a crescendo.

There are more ideas at Dr. Kataria’s website and in his book, *Laugh for no reason*.

Marc’s thoughts on this – the first time I did laughter exercises with students, I worried that they would feel too self-conscious (or this would just be too weird). This was not a problem.

- I previewed it with some of the scientific facts about laughter (download the poster from <http://ELTandhappiness.com>). That way the students knew there was a real reason.
- I started this on a test day. The students obviously understood why it was useful to be in a good mood and to lower stress when they are taking a test.
- Laughter is *so* contagious that even students who might otherwise be “shy” get involved.
- If the teacher is willing to do something, students are almost always will to try it.

Enjoy.

