

High Point Enterprise

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Teachers get tips on getting laughs

By Sean Olson, STAFF WRITER August 07, 2002

Education is serious business, but Guilford County teachers were learning to laugh a little on Tuesday.

About 20 Guilford County teachers attended a six-hour seminar on using comedy in the classroom.

Arizona comedian and "comedy coach" Tim Davis came to Greensboro's Valleybrook Technical Center to help teachers laugh up their day-to-day work in the classroom.

"I was told it was a session on humor in the classroom and discipline with humor," said Griffin Middle School teacher Madeline Reed. "I do some of that anyway, so I was interested in coming. Plus, it just seemed like a great way to start the school year."

"And dealing with the class clown," added Sylvia Beck, a special education teacher. "We all have one of those."

As a comedy coach, Davis helps comedians tweak their acts and has worked with professional show business entities such as The Comedy Channel, "The Late Show with David Letterman" and "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno."

Teachers and comedians are a lot alike, Davis said. Both are forced to win over an audience to accomplish a sometimes arduous task: laughter or learning. Both feel the pressure of public speaking. And both feel the impact of an audience turned bad.

"For example, take hecklers," Davis said. "Hecklers and disruptive students have a lot of similarities."

Both want attention, Davis said, and both can be used to your advantage.

"Top comedians love hecklers because then they have someone to talk to, they can use hecklers in their act."

Just as comedians use hecklers in their act, Davis said, teachers can use a disruptive students' outburst as a way to teach.

In addition to performance techniques like timing, pausing and improvisation, Davis instructs teachers to let go of their mistakes and teach to different types of learners.

The nearly six-hour session is free for Guilford County middle and high school teachers. A second seminar will be given today at Millis Regional Health Center in High Point.

Both seminars are funded by the High Point Community Foundation and Dustin's GreenHouse Fund.

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