

# **Influences of Humor on Creative Design: A Comparison of Students' Learning Experience Between China and Denmark**

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# Cross-Cultural Issues

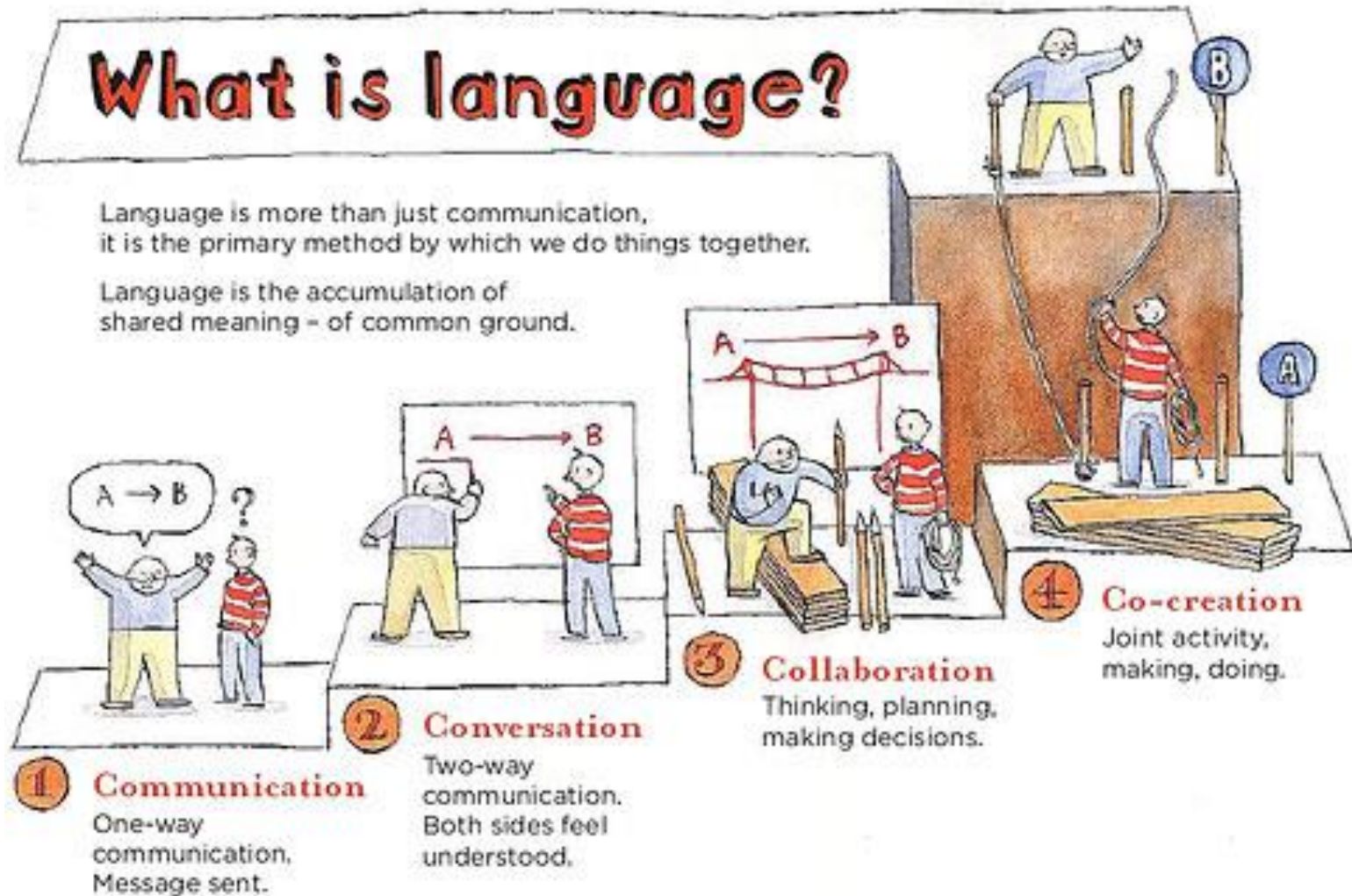


# Developing Cross-Cultural Ability

## What is language?

Language is more than just communication,  
it is the primary method by which we do things together.

Language is the accumulation of  
shared meaning - of common ground.



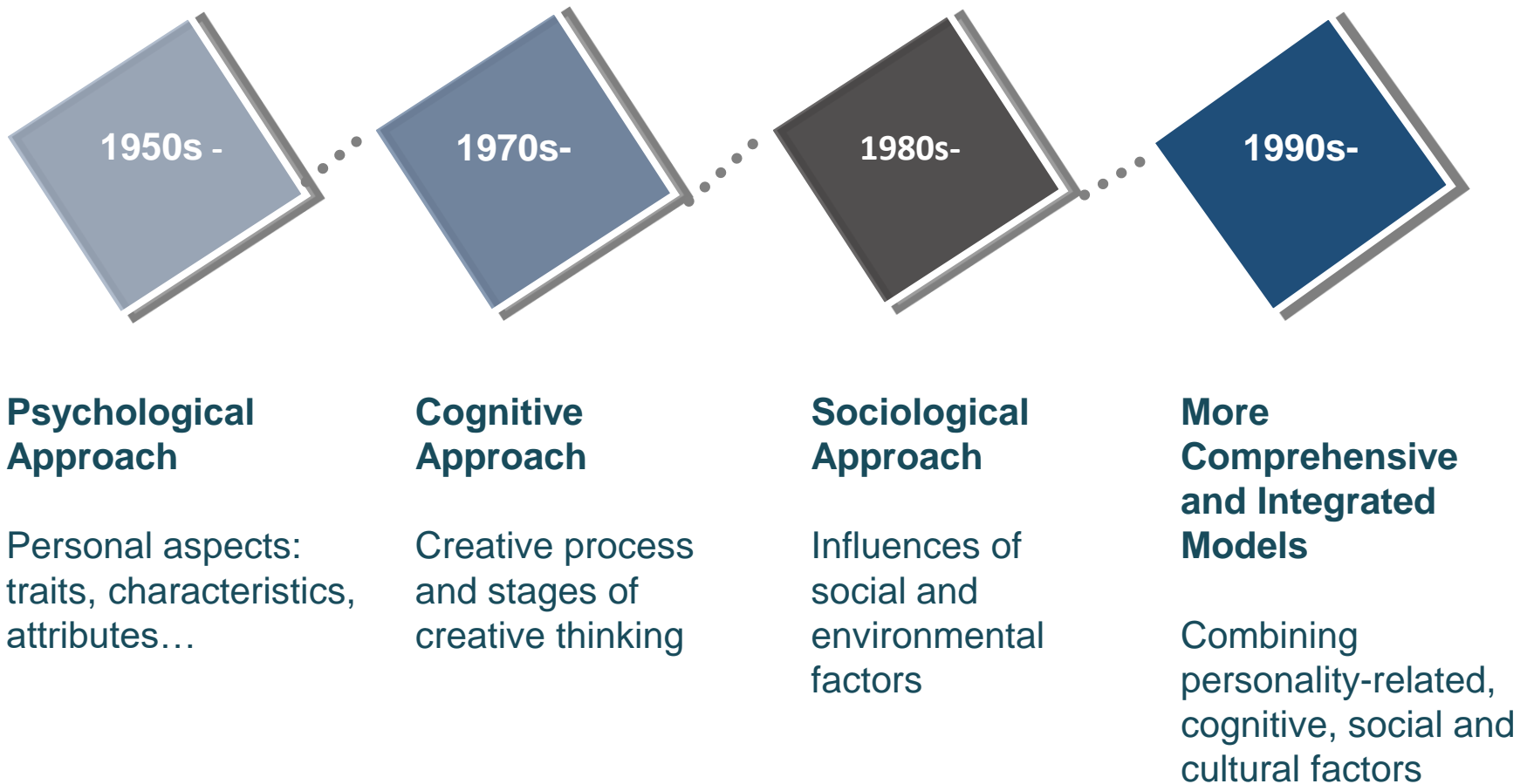


# Understanding of Creativity: Definition

**Generation of New and Useful Ideas**



# Understanding of Creativity: A Historical Line



## **Psychological Approach**

Personal aspects: traits, characteristics, attributes...

## **Cognitive Approach**

Creative process and stages of creative thinking

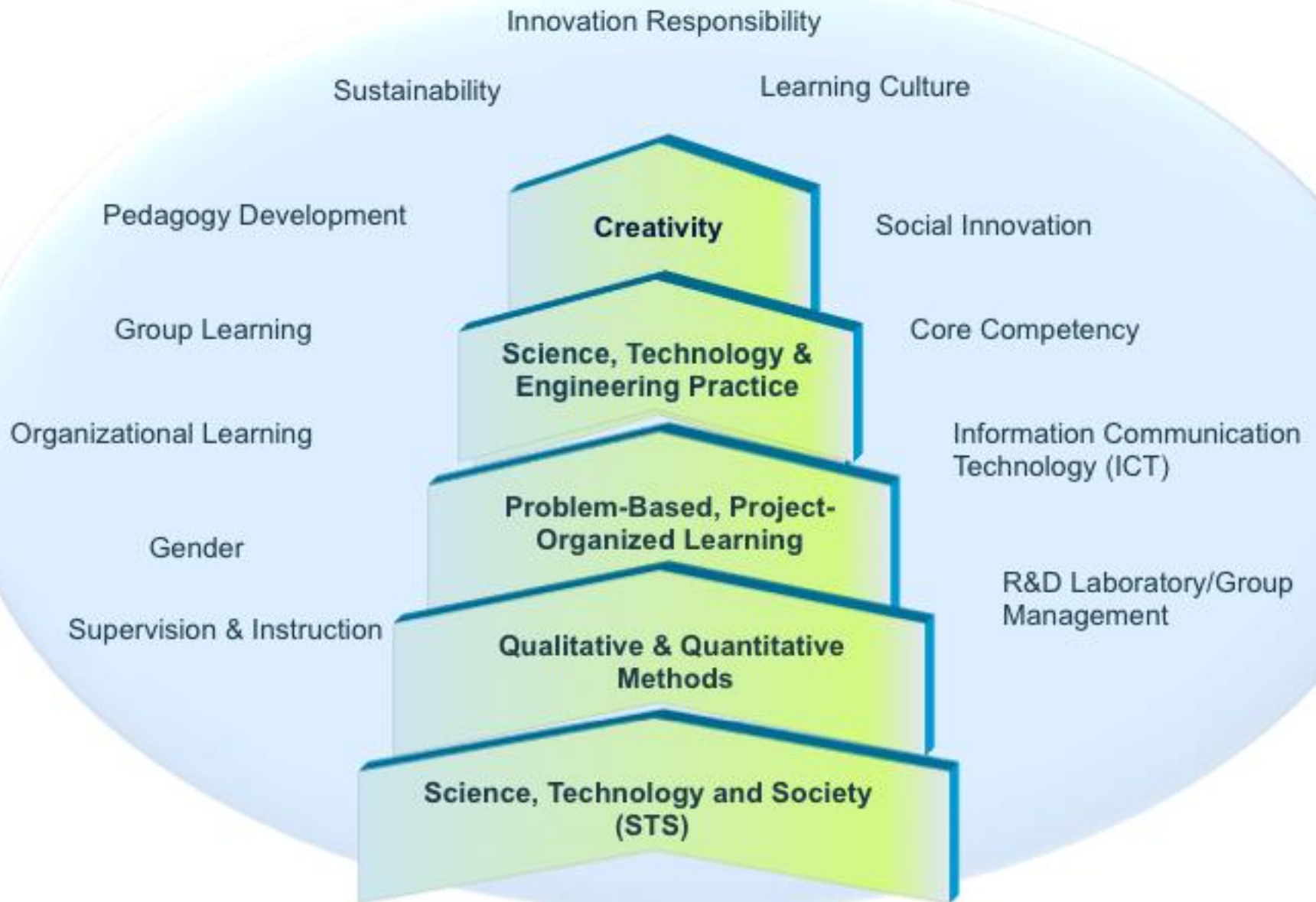
## **Sociological Approach**

Influences of social and environmental factors

## **More Comprehensive and Integrated Models**

Combining personality-related, cognitive, social and cultural factors

# Research Areas and Focuses





# A Research Project

(FKK, 11.2013-10.2016)



## Fostering Creativity in Higher Education: A Comparative Study on Pedagogical Strategies of Learning by Projects between Denmark and China

Project:

Zhou, Chunfang (Project Manager)

The Faculty of Humanities  
Department of Learning and Philosophy

### DESCRIPTION

This project is primarily concerned with how different pedagogical strategies foster creativity in higher education by examining two different contexts, one in China and one in Denmark. This will contribute to rethinking the theory on how pedagogical environments shape students' creativity so they can cross disciplinary boundaries and attain knowledge and skills suitable to work in different real problem-solving contexts. This will involve an examination of two cases in the field of engineering and science education as empirical data resource: Problem-Based Learning (PBL) at Aalborg University (AAU), Denmark and Project-Organized Groups (POG), China. A comparative study will be conducted within the framework of social-cultural theories.

Although some studies have been conducted focusing on creativity in learning contexts, little attention has been paid to how creativity may help to attain new knowledge by crossing disciplinary boundaries in learning processes and how specific pedagogical environments influence such a process. Thus, the first purpose of this project will be to address this gap by investigating both theory and empirical data that links creativity, knowledge production, learning processes and the influences of pedagogical environment. The rich empirical evidence collected from POG in China and PBL in Denmark will be shown and the framework of social-cultural theories will be developed for data analysis towards this purpose.

The second purpose is to strengthen fostering creativity by project strategies in higher education. Creativity is the ability to produce novel and useful work and it helps learners to shape new knowledge and come up with imaginative solutions, so higher education teaching needs to provide for such learning opportunities. Especially in the fields of engineering and science, the engineers and scientists need creativity to respond to challenges in their fields by combining different and interdisciplinary knowledge while focusing systemic constructs and outcomes. Traditional single discipline-based and individual learning-based education systems are failing to adequately prepare students with creativity. While diverse project-based strategies that provide group learning contexts for knowledge assemblies may be fostering creativity.

The third purpose is to provide empirical evidence on the specialized body of "engineering and science knowledge" is combined with both hard knowledge and soft skills. This can avoid misunderstanding that soft skills are only accessories in engineering and science education. The social-cultural perspective suggests that all learning is situated and learning is shaped by the interaction between learners and their learning environment. The knowledge engineers and scientists bring to bear in their work includes knowing how to perform tasks, knowing facts, and knowing when and how to bring appropriate skills and facts to bear on a particular problem. Thus, soft skills such as communication and leadership are inseparable from pure engineering and science knowledge.

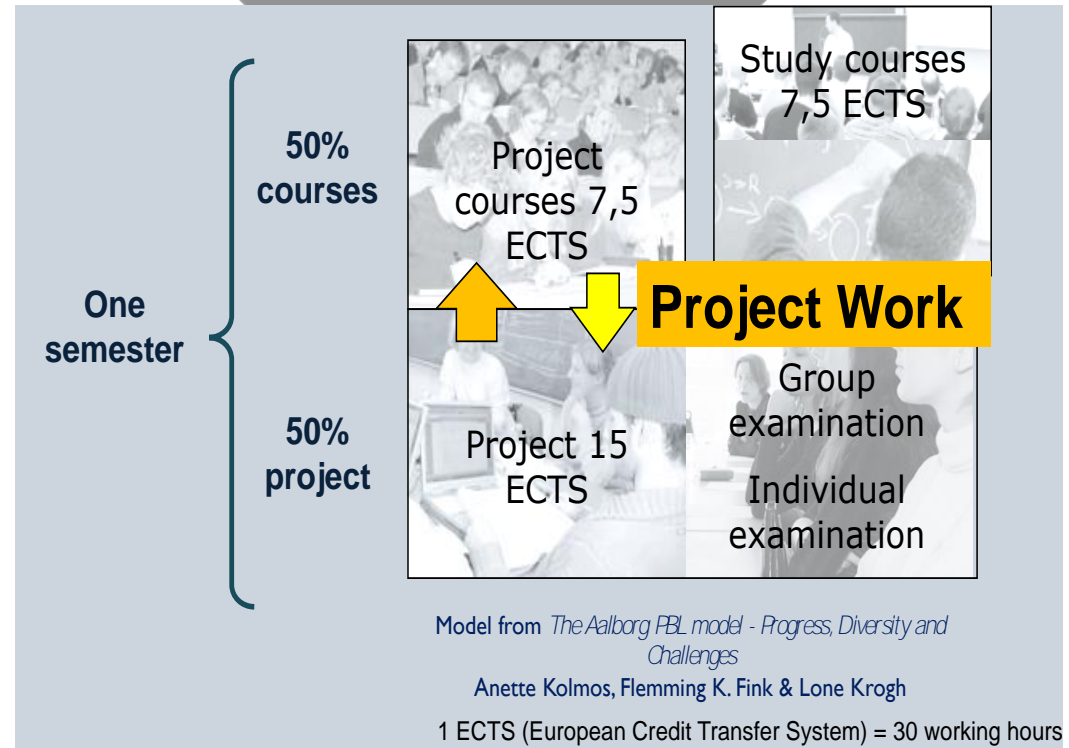
Qualitative methods such as interviews and observations will be used for data collection of students'

# Research Context

## Project-Organized Groups

- Students projects supported by government or companies
- Supervisors and students from different levels and diverse backgrounds
- High rate of personnel turnover: new recruits & graduates leave
- Triple roles of supervisor: Professors, Group Leaders, & Experts
- University Labs

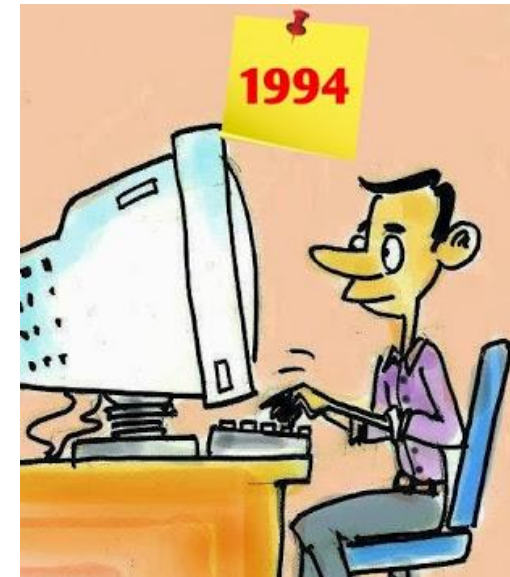
## PBL Environment at AAU, Denmark





# Starting Points

- 1) Creativity as developing new and useful ideas
- 2) Design as a Creative Activity
- 3) Creativity as Shaping New Knowledge in Learning Process  
Creativity and Learning go hand in hand
- 4) Humor as a format of creativity,  
Humor as an Element of Creative Climate
- 5) but both Creativity and Humor is Culture-related...



# Research Questions

- 1) How do the design students perceive influences of humour on their creative design in the project group learning contexts in China and Denmark?
- 2) What are similarities and differences of design students' perceptions of humour between China and Denmark?

## Empirical Work

**N=13, Engineering Design, Master Northeastern University, China C1 – C13**

**N=13, Industrial Design, Master Aalborg University, Denmark D1-D13**

### Interview Guideline:

- In your project work experience, which kind of environment that can stimulate positive emotion for developing new ideas?
- Is there anyone who is very humorous working with you together?
- What is humour? Can you provide a personal definition?
- In your daily life, how did you learn humour?
- Do you like the humorous people? Why or why not?
- Do you think yourself as a humorous person? If you are, in which occasion and by which way that you are humorous?
- Do you think in the study of design, are there any needs of humour?
- How do you think relationship between humour, emotion and creativity and learning?

# Similarities

## 1) Group Facilitates Humour

- Students think the open and flexible group facilitates individual creativity and such context also gives birth to humour.

*“I think it is good inspiration [of the positive emotion], because we four have similar backgrounds [of industry design] and we are working on different parts in the project, but we know the differences (between diverse parts) and the working processes. Some times we had some new ideas to combine all people’s work.” (Interviewee D6)*

## 2) Humor Requires Freedom

- Both Danish and Chinese students expressed their humour cases happen in free situations such as in a supervisor meeting, group discussion, during breaks, and even on the way to library or canteen, etc.

**3) Responses to a humour are different from person to person, as people have different recognition of the fun.**

## 4) Healthy Humour is Necessary

- Students addressed “healthy” humour meaning humour should be harmless to others and be positive to their emotion and group atmosphere.

# Similarities

## 5) Balance is Required

- There should be a balance between serious work and inflexible atmosphere - if humour brings too much leisure to the group work, it will waste group time that destroys the group working plans.

## 6) Humour are useful facilitation strategy in dealing with challenges

- Supervisors like to express their humour when they share their experience in dealing with learning challenges they met in their young age with students together.

*“He [the supervisor] played the jokes with us saying when he just started to learn design, he did like a dancer but danced with the feet chains. This inspired us to think freely, to be open to express a designer’s ideas in the product.” (Interviewee C5)*

## 7) Humour as a Designing Style expressing social responsibility

- Humour, thus, in the minds of design students, is not only a “communication tool” or “personality” but also a “social creative path towards well-being”

*“If a product is humorous, it brings not only fun but also reflection of some topics that leave a deep impression to the audience. So humour could be a power stimulating others to rethink the meaning behind the product itself. This [to design a humorous product] is much more than to design a point of laugh. ” (Interviewee C7)*



# Differences

## Definition Perspective: Personality (Denmark) V.S. Language (China)

Danish students think the strong humour sense is an immediate ability of catching a creative idea or looking at one thing from a different way with a result of making amusement.

*“Someone makes something very funny but meanwhile it delivers positive meaning. He [a Danish humour person] is very creative in finding something that the others do not pay attention or he is very imaginative in thinking some problems differently from the others” (Interviewee D13).*

Chinese students think if one person is humorous, it is mainly due to his/her excellent ability of verbal skills and creative use of the meaning of Chinese language in the ongoing conversation contexts.

*“It [Chinese humour] is a personal ability of using the language in expressing a special meaning in the immediate communication or telling jokes stimulating laughs. So most of the humorous persons are good at Chinese language.” (Interviewee C10).*

## A Broader Scope (Denmark) V.S. A Narrower Sense of ‘Verbal Humour’ (China)

# Differences

Why Humour:

Let others better know oneself  
(Denmark)

V.S.

Why Humour:

Keep the “harmonious” relationship with  
others (China)

*“It [humour] makes me to be closer with others and at the same time let my group to like me and to know me well. When the others laugh, I also feel very happy. As we know, humour also means a conversation.” (Interviewee D4)*

*“Personally I always give enough respect to the others. Sometime I gave the critical comments to others’ ideas but seldom used a joke. The group harmony requires us to give more provocative suggestions than fewer disagreements to others. ” (Interviewee C5)*

Cultural Influences on Individuals’ Behaviour in Group Context:

Individualism (Denmark) V.S. Collectivism (China)

# Teaching Creative Design By Appropriate Humor

- Firstly, from a cross-cultural perspective, humour is more precisely defined as being both cultural-general and cultural-specific than **the point of ‘humour is cultural-dependent’**.
- Secondly, humour is an emergent phenomenon, adds more positive value to creative process and creative climate. Accordingly, this requires in the learning environment, the teaching strategy **should focus on learning process rather than on outcome assessment**.
- Finally, for design students, humour is regarded as rather one element integrating into design products than the personal trait, a communication tool, and a way of enjoying amusement. **This calls humour for going to be a part of learning culture in design education**.

*As teachers,*

- *how to better understand students’ “language of humour” (locally and internationally)? And*
- *how to integrate humour into a foundation of building a creative learning community where the young designers are stimulated by positive emotion in collaborative learning process, share creative ideas with peers freely, and develop creative products?*

**Calling for more research efforts on the links of design, creativity, learning and humour between cultures in the future.**

**Thank You Very Much!**