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Summary

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Summary

This book examines the phenomenon of school humour. The early chapters introduce key social theories of humour (incongruity theory, superiority theory, psychoanalytic theory and arousal theory), emphasise the social nature of humour and summarise the findings on humour in schools.

The core of the book consists of an empirical research which was realised via narrative analysis of texts written by lower secondary school pupils and their teachers. The data collection comprises 137 texts written by pupils and 41 texts written by teachers on the topic of "A humorous experience which I had in school." The texts are analysed with the methods of thematic analysis and structural narrative analysis.

Individual chapters introduce different types of pupils' humour: (1) humour directed at teachers, no matter whether they are intentionally or unintentionally comical; (2) humour of the pupils' group which they use to amuse themselves without the presence of adults; (3) festive humour which is associated with particular feasts or trips outside of the ordinary school environment. The book also contains a comparative chapter which details how teachers perceive humour.

Our structural narrative analysis has shown a set of typical plots, which are used to organise narratives, and a set of typical results in which the narratives culminate. While the analysis of plots reveals the offensive nature of the school humour (as at the core of most plots is an attack at schools), the analysis of results indicates that school humour can also harmonise.

This paradoxical result is interpreted in the final chapter in which we claim that the institution of school has specific features that generate a specific type of humour. Mostly, these are related to the experience of boredom and the existence of power relationships that support the dominance of adults over pupils. Humour allows pupils to attack the institution of school and enjoy the process by venting aggressive impulses. However, due to the ambivalent nature of humour, the attack is at all times fictitious and confirms the power relationships. Hence, we claim that humour channels tension and helps to maintain school as we know it.

