Grant R305F100007
Study Years: 2010-2015

Title: Developmental trends in situational irony comprehension
Authors: Briner, S. W., Burkett, C., & Goldman, S. R.
Citation: Briner, S. W., Burkett, C., & Goldman, S. R. **(**in preparation for submission). Developmental trends in situational irony comprehension.
Strand: Basic Studies

Purpose
The purpose of this study was to investigate how adolescents and adults reason about ironic situations. Common Core guidelines suggest that teaching irony is an essential part of English Language Arts education, and so learning more about how adolescents understand irony is critical to developing skilled readers.

Research Context or Methodology
Setting and Participants: For this study, we recruited 118 adolescents from public schools in the Chicago metropolitan area. Our adolescents ranged from 13-14 years old, and all were proficient in English such that they had been speaking English for at least 10 years. We also recruited 103 adults from a large urban university in the Chicago metropolitan area. Our adults ranged in age between 18-24 years, and as with our adolescent population, all were proficient speakers of English.

Research Design, Data Collection, and Analysis: Materials for our research design consisted of 4 ironic and 4 unironic comic strips. A panel of experts in the English Language arts reviewed these comics and confirmed the presence or absence of irony. These experts also confirmed that the ironic and unironic comics were equivalent in terms of humor and how easy they would be for our adolescents to comprehend.

Participants in both age groups read each of the comics, and rated each one for humor on a scale of 1 (not very humorous at all) to 5 (extremely humorous). Participants also explained why they thought each comic was funny or not funny. Results were analyzed by comparing the humor ratings for the ironic and unironic comics between the adolescents and adults, and by comparing the proportion of adolescents versus adults who appealed to irony when explaining the humor of the ironic and unironic comics.

General Statement of Findings
An analysis of the ratings showed no differences in terms of how the adolescents and adults rated the humor of the unironic comics. Importantly, however, adults rated the ironic comics as significantly funnier than did the adolescents. Further, an analysis of the explanations suggested that adults made more appeals to situational irony when explaining the humor of the ironic comics than did adolescents. Adolescents, on the other hand, made more appeals to situational irony when explaining the humor of the unironic comics.

Implications
These results suggests that adults are more sensitive to irony than adolescents, and that adolescents may lack precision in their definitions of irony, as they were more likely to appeal to irony to explain situations that were not ironic. The implication of these findings is that English Language Arts teachers may wish to focus on precisely defining ironic situations in order to help students better understand the concept.

Acknowledgements
This research was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education Grant "Reading for Understanding Across Grades 6 through 12: Evidence-Based Argumentation for Disciplinary Learning" (Grant R305F100007). The authors' views and opinions do not represent those of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.