
THE LITTLE BOOK OF LAUGHTER

Using humour as a tool to engage and motivate all learners



Dave Keeling
Edited by Ian Gilbert



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For my wife, Kate, who laughs with me every day.

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To anyone who has ever sniggered, giggled, howled or cried with laughter as a result of something I have said or done. It's all your fault – I wouldn't do it if you didn't laugh. You are the very reason that, as a youngster, I never listened to my mum whenever she said 'Stop showing off'. Please keep egging me on.

And finally, I would like to thank everyone and anyone who has, over the period of my life, done or said anything that has made me laugh my head off! You have all made me very, very happy.

:)

Cheers
Dave Keeling



Intro

Something which has never occurred since time immemorial; a young woman did not fart in her husband's lap.

Now this Sumerian one-liner dating back to 1900 BC might not be the best gag ever but it is the oldest. Or at least the oldest on record. Cavemen probably had their own version in a *Blazing Saddles* meets *One Million Years BC* sort of way. Laughter, relationships and bodily functions are clearly a part of what makes us human and they certainly form a core part of classroom life, as anyone with a large bottom set will tell you (pun intended).

This little book of mirth seeks to take you on a brief but enlightening journey into exactly what laughter is and what part the use of humour can play in enhancing and galvanising the learning experience for all concerned.

Like Ant and Dec, there are two parts to this book: the first is short, witty and sets the scene; the second is a little bit shorter and funnier. In the first section, I have included all the information and handy hints I could muster from my tour of the world of humour and comedy, ideas that I believe will steadfastly aid and assist teachers in their bid to bring a little more light relief to the classroom. Along the way, I will

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strive to demystify the art and science of laughter and explore how to seek out and create moments where laughter can occur to make things in the classroom better all round.

The second section consists of a veritable smorgasbord of exercises and activities for use with learners in your classroom – activities proven to create humour, generate laughter, enhance learning and make you look great. Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to take these ideas and exercises and adopt, adapt, enjoy, explore and generally mess about with them to your heart's content.

Of course, there are many ways to skin a cat (as my first Cub Scouts badge proudly signifies), and I am not in the least suggesting these ideas are the only way to get 'em rolling in the classroom aisles. But, like an old man with a cat, a potato peeler and a bit of time on his hands, they're a start.

It is also worth mentioning that all the ideas, thoughts, feelings, activities, hints and suggestions in this book have come together through years of plugging away in front of audiences of students, parents, teachers, businesses and the general public. Audiences as big as a thousand and as little as three. Audiences that have ranged the full gamut from warm, welcoming, funny, excited, inspiring and up for it (you'd be surprised) to cold, hostile, indifferent, arrogant, disaffected and downright angry. As one man wrote on his feedback sheet: 'Dave Keeling has the sort of face I would never tire of slapping' (there are easier ways to flirt!).

Intro

My hope is that this book will, in some small way, give you permission to have as much fun as possible in your classroom and will, en route, inform, empower and entertain in equal measure. After all, having a laugh should be in your job description because, let's face it, if you don't love what you do, why should the kids? And let me reassure you too. Some people believe that you are either funny or you are not. I disagree, at least with the second part of that sentence. Later on in this book, I'll give away some of the secrets that comedians use to create laughter. But, for now, take heart from the fact that everyone can be funny and use humour to enhance the way they work. Trust me, I'm ginger!

So, sit back on your whoopee cushion of learning, rub Vaseline on your funny bone, plaster an intrigued smile across your face and imagine everyone around you is naked, as I endeavour to explain what this funny business is all about.

My act is very educational. I heard a man leaving the other night saying, 'Well, that taught me a lesson.'

Ken Dodd #:-)

Section I

The World of Humour and Comedy

Education:

A technique employed to open minds so that they may go
from cocksure ignorance to thoughtful uncertainty.



Chapter 1

Funny Business is a Risky Business

Don't worry, don't be afraid, because this is just a ride.

Bill Hicks

Just before we crack on, a quick word of warning. This may only be a little book but taking on board the ideas and the philosophies within it will demand some big risks. Yet, as John Vorhaus states in his opus, *The Comic Toolbox*: 'What we don't always have is the will to risk and the will to risk is really the will to fail. Behind all bogus thinking is the biggest bogus thought of all: If I fail I die' (1994: 9, 11).

So, there you have it. No one was harmed in the making of this book and no one will be harmed while reading it. You will not die as a result of implementing the ideas contained herein and all will be well. Cross my heart and hope to die (me, not you). All I ask is that in order to get the black-and-white pages of this book up and running, you allow yourself to indulge in the art of play.

Never trust a man who, when left alone in a room with a tea cosy, doesn't try it on.

Billy Connolly (:~)

Play is at the heart of human development. It shapes our thinking, relationships, imagination and emotional regulation. Play is a practical endeavour and is born out of an inherent need for exploration. Play signals, such as eye contact, touch, laughter and smiling, are the basis of our very first communicative interactions with the world. Laughter and humour are a major factor in social play and help to forge friendships and create a sense of equality. Learning should therefore be a collaborative enterprise, a mutual exchange of knowledge, thoughts and ideas. Not a 'them and us' but simply a single, happy 'us'. All in it together, learning well and having a laugh as we go.

Simply answer 'yes' to the following statements and I'll let you carry on reading this book, safe in the knowledge that the universe, or at the very least your classroom, will be a better place as a result.

I am funny.

I am a risk taker.

I am open to all ideas.

I am what I am.

I am a Walrus goo goo g'joob.

Funny Business is a Risky Business

Clearly, embracing risk isn't without its, er, risks and, like anything in life, it is worth remembering these four golden nuggets of wisdom when attempting something new:

- 1:) What do you want? If you know what you want you are much more likely to get it.
- 2:) Think of the positives. There must always be something in it for you. Remind yourself why you are doing what you are doing and what those benefits will look like.
- 3:) Recognise the obstacles. Be as sure as you can about what may get in the way to prevent you from moving forward. If you have an idea of what you might face you'll be better prepared to navigate a way around it. Even if it's a blank map with 'Here be monsters' on it, it's better than nothing (unless you have a sat nav, in which case you'll most probably end up lying in a ditch hearing the haunting, and repetitive refrain of 'You've reached your destination').
- 4:) Have the confidence to find out. Mr Micawber, in *David Copperfield*, says 'Procrastination is the thief of time', and it will also take all your money and your energy and leave you with nothing but the corduroy jacket you stand up in, unless you actually act upon what you have taken the effort and expense to read in this book. So, in the words of Hedley Lamarr in

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Blazing Saddles, 'Go do that voodoo that you do so well.'¹

'Confidence is half the battle', they say. I shouldn't imagine that's official military advice ... 'Sorry, the guns have jammed and we've lost all our armour, but we still have positive body language; that ought to see us through some desert combat.'

Miles Jupp

¹ If you haven't seen the film *Blazing Saddles* then you should; it is very, very funny.



Chapter 2

What is a Sense of Humour and How to Define It

*Men will confess to treason, murder, arson, false teeth, or a wig.
How many of them will own up to a lack of humour?*

Frank Colby More

It has been argued that a sense of humour is, perhaps, the most important quality any person can possess. Let's face it, would you admit to not having one? But what exactly is it and how do you define it?

Well, starting with the obvious, as most humour does, the *Collins Concise Dictionary* suggests humour is 'the quality of being fun' and 'a state of mind'. (I tried looking in *Webster's American English Dictionary* but they couldn't even spell it properly.) A less obvious place to look for a definition is the seventeenth century, but this is where we find the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes referring to humour in the delightful phrase, a 'sudden Glory'. In other words, he was describing that moment when a funny connection is made between things or people and explodes into a little ejaculation of joy (stop it!), or as one epigram goes: 'Laughter is an

orgasm triggered by the intercourse of sense and nonsense.’
(This book is starting to sound more like *Fifty Shades of Wahey!*)

Have a think about the last ‘sudden Glory’ you enjoyed (behave) and the effect that it had on you and those around you. Where do your lesson plans, your curriculum or your whole-school ethos make space for such sudden glories?

Humour and laughter are indeed bedfellows but they are, in fact, very different beings. Like Morecambe and Wise. So, while humour is something we can learn, hence this book, is laughter the same? The short answer is ‘no’. Although, that said, the long answer is also ‘no’.

Humour is a way of seeing the world, a way of processing information, a philosophy, an attitude, a lifestyle choice, a gift and a burden all at the same time. With a sense of humour, no matter what happens, you will always see the funny side. Useful at funerals. The trouble is, with a sense of humour, you always see the funny side. Dangerous at funerals. That said, once we know what humour really is, it opens up a whole world of possibility when it comes to engaging with others in a learning context. Although humour is very much an inner process, it is something that can be projected to others through visual cues, verbal communication, body language and other everyday means.

Comedians use humour as a way to communicate their worldview to an audience in a fun and entertaining way. When this is done with great skill, confidence, verbal dexter-

What is a Sense of Humour and How to Define It

ity and wit, we, the audience, get the benefit of the comedian's humour, sharing with them, albeit briefly, the manner in which they see the world, looking at life through the lens of someone with a keen sense of the ridiculous in the serious. And, on a good day, we show our appreciation by not throwing things and, on a very good day, through the shared medium of laughter.

I know I've got a degree. Why does that mean I have to spend my life with intellectuals? I've got a lifesaving certificate but I don't spend my evenings diving for a rubber brick with my pyjamas on.

Victoria Wood :-)-{B

So, it is clear that humour is an internal, cognitive processing tool, whereas laughter is the outer manifestation of the mirth, amusement and joy we are experiencing, the pay-off for the humour, the involuntary communicative act that lets someone know they have succeeded in their quest for funny, even if that was involuntary in a 'man slips on banana skin' way (I'm still waiting to witness this event).

It is important to observe, too, that while humour is something one person can do on their own at night if there's nothing on the goggle box, laughter is a process by which we can satisfy our desire to connect with others and express how we are feeling. Humour is social self-esteem. It is an intrinsic

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part of the human condition. Coming up with a joke while out with friends is socially permitted. Laughing at it so hard that you pee yourself, less so.

In their study of laughter, gelotologists¹ Matthew Gervais and David Sloan Wilson state that laughter in primates first evolved from play panting some seven million years ago. It wasn't until between two and four million years ago that we developed the capacity to control our 'facial motor systems' and utilise them to communicate our feelings towards others and manage social situations: 'Humans can now voluntarily access the laughter program and utilize it for their own ends, including smoothing conversational interaction, appeasing others, inducing favourable stances in them, or downright laughing at people that are not liked' (Gervais and Wilson, 2005: 418).

So, there you have it. We probably laughed at farty jokes before we evolved the language to talk about mothers-in-law.²

I saw six men punching and kicking my mother-in-law. My neighbour said, 'Aren't you going to help?' I said, 'No, six should be enough.'

Les Dawson :-)))

1 From the Greek *gelotos* meaning laughter - not the Italian *gelato* meaning ice cream.

2 Other in-laws are also available for ridicule.

What is a Sense of Humour and How to Define It

And while I am on the subject of gasbagging, here are the top eight reasons as to why humour is essential as a communication tool in learning:

- 1:) Keeps students' attention.
- 2:) Emphasises key points so they stand out, allowing for better retention.
- 3:) Can make facts and data easier to digest.
- 4:) Can help regain control more effectively after a disturbance.
- 5:) Can relax an audience, creating a better sense of unity.
- 6:) Keeps relationships exciting, fresh, sparky, fun and healthy.
- 7:) Enriches daily interactions.
- 8:) Can be used as a tool to build resilience. Laughing about setbacks helps us to take them in our stride, distance ourselves from them personally and bounce back from disappointment much quicker.

Comedy is a group activity, a verbal orgy.

Chris Rock B-)

For humour to elicit laughter, you, the individual, have to be in a good mood (c'mon, it won't kill you) and this mood needs to permeate to those around you. They need to feel this energy coming from you in order to establish the right environment for humour and laughter to take place. Your attitude will set the tone that others can follow. So, knowing what puts you in 'good humour' to start with is a great advantage to setting you on the road to creating a classroom that is playful, fun and full of innovative learning.

So, how does one go about achieving good humour?

1:) **How you view the world.**

Whether you are a glass half-empty sort of person (i.e. negative) or a 'you can't polish a turd but you can roll it in glitter' type of person (i.e. always looking for the positive).³

2:) **How you feel.**

The frame of mind you are in is heavily influenced by what is happening in your personal/professional life, what you are doing at any given time and how you deal with it.

3:) **How you choose to act and respond to the world around you.**

There is an area of the brain called the supplementary motor which can associate movement with positive

3 Or, as Oscar Wilde so succinctly put it, 'Some people create happiness wherever they go, others whenever they go.'

What is a Sense of Humour and How to Define It

feelings. This means that even the suggestion of a particular movement can bring about the feeling of well-being.

When the mouth is open for laughter, you can pop in some food for thought.

Anonymous

This is where it gets interesting and where you can think about changing your mood and creating good humour, for you and others. A simple example of this is that when we feel happy we start to smile, but if we smile we also start to feel happy.

Try it now. Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, just stop, and smile.

Feel different? Good.

It is imperative that you are aware of the behaviours you display when you're in 'good humour'. The more familiar you are with these, the easier it will be to repeat these behaviours and recreate your good mood at will. This, in turn, will impact on the mood of the people around you in a positive way. In order to help you recognise what Stephanie Davies,

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demonstrates why having a laugh should be in your job description and shows you the benefits that humour can bring to the learning environment.

Benefits such as creating openness, bravery, teamwork, imagination and creativity and, most of all, improving relationships between students and teachers.

Includes:

- :) A brief history of laughter
- :) Techniques linked to encouraging and improving learning
 - :) Exercises to encourage laughter
 - :) and The Rules of Funny
- :) as well as a whole load of comical comments, quotes and, of course, gags.

“Dave Keeling takes the old saying ‘Make ’em laugh, make ’em think’ and transforms it into a clear, informative and enjoyable guide that shows teachers of all age ranges how to use humour in education. The Little Book of Laughter combines analysis of different forms of comedy with a handy DIY guide, as well as providing a series of ‘seriously funny’ jokes that will make both teachers and pupils laugh aloud.”

Professor Marion Wynne-Davies, School of English and Languages,
University of Surrey

“As the pressure on and accountability of schools and teachers continues to increase, this book represents a much needed reality check on what schools, childhood and growing up are all about.”

Dean Goddard, Deputy Head Teacher, St Martin’s School, Brentwood, Essex

6’ 2” and ginger, **Dave Keeling** is an author and professional actor and has been a ‘stand-up’ (or kinaesthetic and passionate) educationalist for over 10 years, working with teachers, pupils and parents the length and breadth of the country.

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