

INDEPENDENT  
THINKING  
ON ...

# LAUGHTER

*Dave Keeling*



USING HUMOUR AS A TOOL TO ENGAGE  
AND MOTIVATE ALL LEARNERS

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

# FOREWORD

Since establishing Independent Thinking in 1994, we have worked hard to share with educators around the world our belief that there is always another way. The Independent Thinking On ... series of books is an extension of that work, giving a space for great educators to use their words and share great practice across a number of critical and relevant areas of education.

*Independent Thinking on Laughter* is the very embodiment of the phrase we have used for quite some time: that education is far too important to be taken seriously. While ‘having a laugh’ might seem like the last thing children should – or teachers could – be doing in our classrooms currently, the evidence for cracking a smile is compelling. Whether it’s developing better relationships, improving behaviour, raising academic achievement or creating a school where everyone’s health and well-being is that bit better, laughter is the silver bullet you are looking for. The neuroscience backs this up, as does the experience of simply being in a classroom in which everyone is genuinely enjoying themselves.

And when it comes to ensuring that everyone in the room is enjoying themselves, there are few better at achieving this than stand-up comic and Independent Thinking Associate Dave Keeling. Drawing on many years’ experience of standing in front of – and quickly winning over – a hostile crowd, whether that’s a hall full of Year 10s or a hen party on a night out, Dave shows teachers everywhere the tricks of the trade that will ensure that you bring energy, enjoyment and laughter to each and every lesson in a way that will benefit everyone.

We are constantly raising the stakes for young people in the education system and piling on the pressure for them to succeed. Going to school is a serious business these days, but – as Dave Keeling proves in this entertaining book – that doesn't mean to say that learning is no laughing matter.

After all, smile and the world smiles with you, \*\*\* and you \*\*\* alone.<sup>1</sup>

IAN GILBERT  
BRIGHTON

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1 Insert your own joke here.

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# FIRST THOUGHTS

*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 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's more than one way to cook an egg (as my B in GCSE home economics proudly signifies), and I am not in the least suggesting these ideas are the only way to get 'em rolling in the aisles. But like a chicken and an egg, or an egg and a chicken (I never know which comes first), 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!).

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. 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 grease on your funny bone, plaster an intrigued smile across your face and imagine everyone around you is

## FIRST THOUGHTS

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

PART 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.'<sup>1</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> J. Vorhaus, *The Comic Toolbox: How to Be Funny Even if You're Not* (Beverly Hills, CA: Silman-James Press, 1994), pp. 9, 11.

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 the walrus, goo goo g'joob.

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 *Blazing Saddles*, 'Go do that voodoo that you do so well.'<sup>2</sup>

*'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

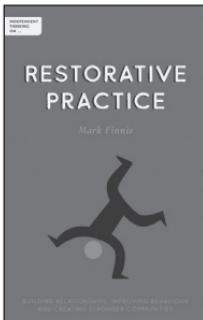
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2 If you haven't seen the film *Blazing Saddles* then you should; it is very, very funny.

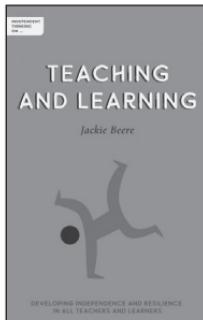
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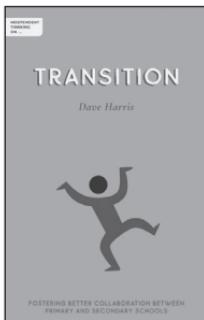
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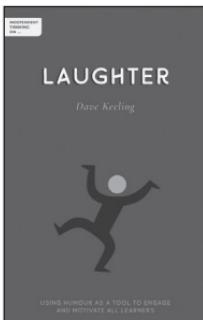
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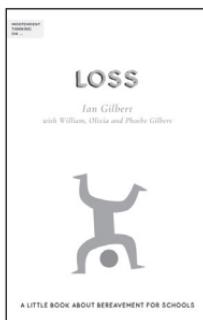
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Independent Thinking. An education company.

Taking people's brains for a walk since 1994.

We use our words.

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# IF YOU'VE EVER THOUGHT EDUCATION IS FAR TOO IMPORTANT TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY, THEN THIS IS THE BOOK FOR YOU.

Written by 'stand-up educationalist' and Independent Thinking Associate Dave Keeling, this book is an uplifting manifesto on the power of humour and laughter to improve teaching and learning in every classroom.

Combining his trademark wit and wisdom with the latest research on the myriad ways laughter can boost learning, Dave draws on his experience of bringing the best out of even the most difficult young people to offer a veritable smorgasbord of activities for use with all learners.

Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to take these ideas and adapt, explore and generally mess about with them to your heart's content.

**AN INSPIRING READ FOR ALL TEACHERS AND EDUCATORS.**

*Independent Thinking on Laughter* will help you develop ways to bring energy, silliness and creativity to all learners. So open up your mind and step into these pages with all your childlike delight.

STEPHANIE DAVIES, FOUNDER AND CEO, LAUGHOLGY

Blends an analysis of different forms of comedy into a handy DIY guide.

PROFESSOR MARION WYNNE-DAVIES, SCHOOL OF ENGLISH AND LANGUAGES, UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

Dave Keeling has been a professional actor and 'stand-up educationalist' for more than two decades. Whether it's leading a workshop with challenging teenagers, speaking to a hall-full of equally reluctant teachers or delivering a keynote for school leaders looking for the cure to recalcitrance, Dave never fails to leave delegates happy, moved, less stressed and feeling a great deal more motivated by the job in front of them.

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